

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	8
CHAPTER ONE: DIMINISHING RETURNS	35
CHAPTER TWO: BEHOLD MY WORKS	76
CHAPTER THREE: MISSING INFORMATION	99
CHAPTER FOUR: SEPARATE DYNAMISMS	136
CHAPTER FIVE: REVOLVING IT ALL	178
CHAPTER SIX: MEMORY AS REMEDY, STIMULANT AND SEDATIVE	215
CONCLUSION	231
WORKS BY SAMUEL BECKETT INCLUDING A LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND BECKETT EDITIONS	240
OTHER WORKS CITED	243

INTRODUCTION

The functioning of memory fascinated Samuel Beckett throughout his long life. From his early monograph on Proust to the final dramaticules, his acute observation of the interplay of recollection and discourse provided Beckett with rich resources for experiment and dramatisation. His grasp of the operation of memory was multilayered and profound, refined through a lifetime of personal experience, study and observation. Despite this, when Beckett's treatment of memory is considered by scholars, his reaction in 1930 to Proust's epic *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1919) is generally privileged over his other writing (Corman, 1977; Zurbrugg, 1988). Although the monograph is undoubtedly important in establishing his attitude towards the indeterminacy of memory and the depredations of time, these youthful impressions hardly approximate the sophisticated perception that he achieved later on. It is the contention of this study that Beckett displays his mastery of the understanding of memory processing and its influence on discourse most strikingly in his crafting of 'yesterday's deformities' — the time-damaged characters created for his imaginative world. It is particularly in his plays that Beckett projects his perceptions with most telling effect, as the range of memory-impaired characters and different types of recall is so much more complex and extensive.

Although it is not feasible to tease out all the strands that come together to inform Beckett's comprehension of memory, it is apparent that they are many and various. In the incremental development of his perception of memory's processes, the years that Beckett spent in London from 1933 to 1935 were particularly fertile. In numerous letters, which were subsequently housed (unpublished) in the Trinity College Archives, Dublin, Beckett confided in his friend, Thomas MacGreevy, recounting his experiences of psychotherapy with Dr Wilfred Ruprecht Bion. During these disquieting sessions with Bion, Beckett dredged up painful memories in an effort to alleviate his besetting depression and psychosomatic symptoms. He therefore had first-hand experience of the limitations of induced memory and the pain that its expression — and repression — could bring.

Not content with first-hand experience only, he read as widely as he could from the psychological writings of his day. At first he surveyed the field in Robert S. Woodworth's *Contemporary*

Schools of Psychology, before proceeding to make more detailed forays into the work of Sigmund Freud via Ernest Jones, Alfred Adler, Carl Gustav Jung,¹ Karin Stephens, Otto Rank and Wilhelm Stekel. James Knowlson, in his impressive authorised biography, *Damned to Fame*, explains that it is evident from Beckett's copious notes that he gained considerable insight into the leading theories then in circulation (Knowlson, 1996: 177). These included the working of memory — of both normal and abnormal varieties.

In addition, Beckett accompanied his friend, the Senior House Physician, Dr Geoffrey Thompson, on his rounds at the Bethlem Royal Hospital, where the doctor enabled him to identify patients afflicted with a variety of dementias and psychological ailments (TCD, 81). Beckett's powers of observation and recall were acute: years later he would devise clinically accurate cerebral and behavioural patterns for some of the characters that he invented. To avoid creating mere textbook case-studies, which he loathed, Beckett covered his literary tracks ingeniously. Not only did he refrain from identifying the afflictions suffered by many of his 'gallery of moribunds' (*MO*, 137), but he also conceived of most of his characters as unique personalities. (There are exceptions in the last plays, where the wraith-like, supplicating beings are more ectoplasm than flesh.) Being reluctant to indulge in explication, Beckett instinctively avoided the obvious and overdetermined, favouring a more ambiguous approach to his work. This was evident when Beckett, interviewed by Tom Driver in 1961, insisted: 'But where we have both dark and light we have also the inexplicable. The key word in my plays is "perhaps"' (in Driver, 1961: 23).

Though his knowledge of abnormal states was profound, Beckett's grasp of 'normal' memory functioning was no less astute. Formal research into the self-narrative of the autobiographical memory had not begun in the 1930s, but Beckett's dramatisation of elderly people constructing their life reviews at the end of their days, particularly in *Endgame*, reveals a sophisticated grasp that is remarkably at one with current autobiographical memory theory, especially that explored by Martin Conway's research. By informing the lives of the characters he created with the vagaries of fictive, faulty or repressed memory, Beckett riddles their discourse with an indeterminacy rare even in drama's suggestive code.

Unreliable though he considered memory to be, Beckett did not view it as a palimpsest, with more recent inscriptions effacing earlier or more remote impressions (*P*, 13). In his own life, recognising that some of his earliest experiences were the most vivid, he allowed scope and sway to the multiple influences that had affected him, but never without a touch of scepticism (Dearlove, 1982: 575). Nor was he overly reverent in his approach towards other sources. Before embarking on his Proustian studies, in an undated letter to his friend Tom MacGreevy in 1930 he impishly announced: ‘Am looking forward to pulling the balls of the critical and poetical Proustian Cock’ (TCD, 4). He refers in the same letter, but in another vein, to his continued reading of Schopenhauer’s pessimistic philosophy,² having told MacGreevy in July that

I am reading Schopenhauer [. . .] But I am not reading philosophy, nor caring whether he is right or wrong or a good or worthless metaphysician. An intellectual justification of unhappiness — the greatest that has ever been attempted — is worth the examination of one who is interested in Leopardi and Proust rather than in Carducci and Barrès.

(TCD, 3)

In reading Proust’s great epic *A la recherche du temps perdu* through a Schopenhauerian prism, Beckett focused primarily on those areas which accorded with his own sense of ‘an intellectual justification of unhappiness’. Years later, however, he admitted to John Pilling that in the writing of his monograph ‘Perhaps I overstated Proust’s pessimism a little’ (Pilling, 1976a: 22). Cid Corman, in his book *Word for Word: Essays on the Arts of Language*, and Nicholas Zurbrugg, writing on *Beckett and Proust*, would certainly agree. Corman observes that Beckett ‘often uses Proust as his own mouthpiece’ to affirm ‘his deepest negative convictions’ (Corman, 1977: 102,109), while Zurbrugg criticises the monograph when he complains:

[T]his eccentric essay repeatedly offers an extremely heretical account of what one might think of as the Proustian ‘faith’, interweaving breathtakingly perceptive analyses of those few Proustian ideas with which Beckett concurred, with seductively deceptive exegeses of those many Proustian ideas with which he begged to differ.

(Zurbrugg, 1988: 101)

While it would be an oversimplification to claim Beckett as a spokesman for Proust, it is fair to assume that by identifying with Proust’s ideas in his idiosyncratic way, Beckett’s 1930 monograph could be said to reflect his own point of view at the time.

Because all memory is time-bound, Beckett promises that from the first paragraph of his monograph on Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* he will chart the work's 'inner chronology' by examining that 'double-headed monster of damnation and salvation — Time' (*P*, 11). In retrospect, this can be seen to be prophetic, for it is a concern that will absorb him in his lifelong pursuit of the impact of memory on the psyche. In sombre key Beckett intones Proust's 'monster of damnation':

There is no escape from the hours and the days. Neither from tomorrow nor from yesterday. There is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, or been deformed by us [. . .] Yesterday is not a milestone that has been passed, but a daystone on the beaten track of the years, and irremediably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous. We are not merely more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday [. . .] Such as it was, it has been assimilated to the only world that has reality and significance, the world of our own latent consciousness, and its cosmography has suffered a dislocation.

(*P*, 13)

This key passage of the monograph stresses the conviction that whether consciously accessible or not, memories of yesterday shape the psyche to fashion today's discourse. The tenet applies not only to Proust's populous world, but to Beckett's lonelier universe and the world at large as well. One of the concerns of this study is to establish that painful memories, whether expressed or repressed, will 'deform' the 'yesterdays' of the protagonists of Beckett's dramatic world, and that the ameliorative power of memory will rarely operate to remedy their situations. Prominent Beckett scholar, Ruby Cohn, speaking of the 'implied uncertainty principle' of this 'early nugget', comments that 'Beckett hews to his main line of argument about the transformation of the personality under the onslaught of time' (Cohn, 2001: 18).

In contrast with Beckett's respect for those memories which cluster in the 'latent consciousness' to influence and compel, he denigrates the workaday memory as having 'no value as an instrument of evocation [. . .] as far removed from the real as the myth of our imagination or the caricature furnished by direct perception' (*P*, 14). He develops his theme as he proceeds. 'There is no great difference,' he asserts, 'between the memory of a dream and the memory of reality' (*P*, 33) because 'voluntary memory', a 'life all in length, a sequence of dislocations and adjustments' (*P*, 67) has been substantively amended.

The inadequacy of ‘voluntary memory’ (or that which can be consciously evoked) is one of the monograph’s key concepts. This type of memory is referred to contemptuously as a medium of distortion because it falsifies what it attempts to recover. As it is filtered through current perception and idiosyncratic understanding, voluntary memory is regarded primarily as a fictive construct, ‘dislocated and adjusted’ to accommodate present habits of thought. Memory loss, therefore, is no great calamity, because invention intervenes immediately. As Beckett explains, ‘absence of mind is fortunately compatible with the active presence of our organs of articulation’ (P, 31). In other words, what the memory fails to access, the imagination will liberally supply. The present study seeks to indicate the enactment of these views in the plays where Beckett explores the imaginative component of induced memory.

It is not only in acts of retrieval that the voluntary memory is believed to be compromised, but also in the initial encoding of the memory trace. According to the monograph, impressions of people and recorded events are distorted in the first place for, as Beckett explains, the ‘observer infects the observed with his own mobility’ (P, 17). When this involves human relationships, ‘we are faced by the problem of an object whose mobility is not merely a function of the subject’s, but independent and personal’ (P, 17). Individual perceptions are therefore guilty of distorting accurate representations, making subsequent communication problematic.

Much of the fruitless discourse in Beckett’s plays reflects this conviction. In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir, capable wordsmith though he is, sounds hollow as he attempts to connect with his ‘dwindling’ companion of fifty years, Estragon. Almost all of their attempted conversation amounts to no more than overlearned exercises in futility, as if to underscore the monograph’s dictum that ‘memory and habit are attributes of the Time cancer’ (P, 18). As a consequence, the companions are often unable to synchronise their attempts at communication, for time has taken a heavy toll on the accuracy of Estragon’s recollections and the subsequent appropriateness of his responses.

If the willed recall of ‘voluntary’ memory is deprecated, the ‘involuntary’, or unbidden variety, is another matter altogether. In his monograph, Beckett eulogises Proust’s display of involuntary memory’s epiphanic powers by describing its ‘delicious deflagration’ (P, 33). Throughout his epic,

Proust sets precise conditions for its operation. While the memory is being encoded, he requires that the mind be passive and inattentive, so that the powers of selection and supplementary imagination, which inevitably invite distortion, remain quiescent. The impression stored, in Beckett's words, would be 'at once particular and spontaneous, [. . .] neither forced by any intelligence nor attenuated by any pusillanimity, but whose double and mysterious furrow had been carved, as by a thunderbolt' (*P*, 43). These memories come uninvited, for if they are even once revisited by voluntary memory they lose their 'crystallised' clarity. As an 'unruly magician' (*P*, 33), 'involuntary' memory beckons the past, but only by serendipitous accident.

One might dismiss these observations as overly fanciful, were it not for their occurrence in memory theory of today. Martin A. Conway, who is notable for having done pioneering work on the 'truth' content of autobiographical memory, explains rather more prosaically than Beckett that the unusual 'involuntary' memory can be triggered when

specific clues such as smells, a chance comment, or some aspect of the environment, might lead to the direct access of a memory — bypassing the hierarchical structure — and leading to the experience of spontaneous, surprising, and unexplained recall of a 'forgotten' event.

(Conway, 1990: 128)

Despite Beckett's enthusiastic description of involuntary memory, it is significant that no character in his plays seems to experience such an epiphany, not even Nell in *Endgame* whose 'yesterdays', though ecstatic, hint at rehearsal. With rehearsal comes repetition, accompanied by a contaminating regression of origin and accuracy. Beckett appears to be too suspicious of the treachery of memory to afford his characters such relief. This leads Kristin Morrison to conclude that Beckett's people 'are unredeemed Proustians [. . .] The dazzling riches of the gifts of involuntary memory are never available to Beckett's characters' (Morrison, 1983: 9,12). Given the playwright's pessimistic view of memory, it is perhaps not surprising that these 'transcendental bursts of radiance' (Bloom, 1989: 200) are no part of Beckett's cosmos. He is aware of the magical qualities of the Proustian involuntary memory, but resists their inclusion in his work.

When it came to applying another aspect of Proust's credo — this time to himself — that 'the only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent' (*P*, 48),

Beckett initially shied away from allowing the darker reaches of his memory to inspire and generate his work. In 1946, however, he experienced a revelation which he subsequently attributed to his character, Krapp, in an early draft of *Krapp's Last Tape*:

Suddenly I saw the whole thing. The turning point at last. What I saw then was that the [. . .] dark I have been fighting off all this time is, in reality, my most [. . .] unshatterable association till my dying day of story and night with the light of understanding.

(in Bair, 1978: 351)

In revisiting this 'turning point', Beckett explained to his biographer, Knowlson, 'I realized that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding' (in Knowlson, 1996: 352). Knowlson elaborates:

He would draw henceforth on his own inner world for his subjects: outside reality would be refracted through the filter of his own imagination; inner desires and needs would be allowed a much greater freedom of expression; [. . .] In future his work would focus on poverty, failure, exile and loss; as he put it, on man as a 'non-knower' and as a 'non-can-er' [i.e. someone who cannot].

(Knowlson, 1996: 352-53)

The fecund 'dark' that he had 'been fighting off' was rooted in his memory and imagination, and after this resolve Beckett would deliberately commit himself to activating their powers. Mere knowledge would be secondary in his creative quest. His characters, too, would be committed to the same introspective journey, bordering at times on a nightmare of 'joyless dawns, poisoned by the tortures of memory and isolation' (*P*, 53).

In his article on 'Beckett and the Psychoanalyst', Didier Anzieu goes so far as to assert the overtly biographical view that Beckett's 'work was to be marked by the interminable, obstinately repeated effort, not so much to master [his] trauma retroactively, as to provide it with representable figures and to diminish the emotional intensity at work by putting images in its place' (Anzieu, 1994-95: 26). By contrast, in the writing of Beckett's authorised biography, Knowlson studiously avoids making overt comparisons between remembered events in Beckett's life and the characters he creates. Beckett himself adopts a very circumspect attitude toward author psychology.³ It is apparent from his 'skeptical' attitude towards memory that Beckett appears to have supported the contention of his monograph on Proust that 'voluntary memory' (that which has been

deliberately evoked) is a 'sequence of dislocations and adjustments' (P, 67). With Proust, he felt that memory was simply not to be trusted.

On the other hand, Beckett's attitude to subconscious repositories of memory is entirely more respectful. The depressing influence of the unassimilated past on 'latent consciousness' (P, 13) is something that Beckett knew intimately. He had lived with its depredations, had encountered distressed people, and had read comprehensively from the major psychological writings of his day (Knowlson, 1996: 177). During that period of his life when he was living in London, suffering from acute depression and undergoing psychotherapy with Ruprecht Bion three times a week, he confided in his friend Tom MacGreevy that 'I feel beyond description worthless, sordid and incapacitated' (TCD, 70).

The experience of his memory yielding skewed sensations is reflected in the same letter when he admits: 'I get terribly tired of all the psychic evidence, wonder what it has to do with the psyche as I experience that old bastard [. . .] On Monday I go for the 133rd time' (TCD, 70). His next letter reveals both despair and the sardonic humour with which he sustained himself: 'I see no prospect of the analysis coming to an end. But I realize how lost I would be bereft of my incapacitation. When will the old subconscious renounce?' (TCD, 71). This strong sensation of toxic material lurking in the subconscious might have influenced Beckett's creation of the repressed characters in the plays *Embers*, *Eh Joe*, *Not I* and *Footfalls*. Though one is never able to claim a direct relationship between experience and creation, Beckett might well have reflected some of his own pain, both in the shaping of his characters and the furnishing of an experiential matrix for his exploration of psychology.

While maintaining his strong reservations about reductive approaches to the human psyche, Beckett studied the major works on psychology available in the 1930s. Knowlson comments in his biography that, in addition to the overview provided by Woodworth's *Contemporary Schools of Psychology*, Beckett

also read the lengthy, somewhat indigestible Freudian *Papers on Psychoanalysis* by Ernest Jones (whom he called 'Erogenous Jones') on which he took twenty pages of single-spaced, type-written notes, and books by Alfred Adler, Otto Rank,

Karin Stephens, Wilhelm Stekel and a commentary of Freud (whom he called 'Freudchen'), entitled 'Treatment of the Neuroses'. Beckett's notes, discovered in a trunk in the cellar after his death, reveal the depth of his interest and the intensity of his personal involvement. [He typed out] the characteristics of anxiety neurosis and hysteria as described by Freud.

(Knowlson, 1996: 178)

To the French psychologist, Pierre Janet, whom he encountered in Woodworth, Beckett probably owes his startling insight into the hysterical behaviour displayed by May in *Footfalls*. Woodworth explains that while Janet was studying for a degree, he set up various experiments in 'hypnotic somnambulism' (Woodworth, 1964: 353). He established that hysterical patients were able to remember experiences under hypnosis, experiences of which they seemed unaware in their more conscious states. Janet's work on obsessive-compulsive behaviour was also of particular interest to Beckett, who possibly allowed the French psychologist's perceptions to impact on his creation of the protagonists of *Embers*, *Cascando*, *Eh Joe*, *Not I*, *That Time*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby*.

Although Janet's research finds its strongest echo in *Footfalls*, it was Freud's insights that impressed Beckett the most. The playwright's entire *oeuvre* seems to support the Freudian position that emotional attitudes towards memory are more important than the memories themselves (in Woodworth, 1964: 258). Time and again in his drama, but especially in *Endgame* and *Embers*, the playwright enacts the damaging potential present in 'serious unresolved conflict dating from childhood' (Woodworth, 1964: 357), in the 'deformed yesterdays' which have the power to induce regressive behaviour. This Beckett could vouch for in his own experience. He explained to Tom MacGreevy in March 1935 that, when he sought help for his debilitating psychosomatic symptoms, it

was with a specific fear & a specific complaint that I went to Geoffrey [Thompson], then to Bion, to learn that 'the specific fear & complaint' was the least important symptom of a diseased condition [. . .] which I could not remember in my 'pre-history', a bubble on the puddle; and that the fatuous torments which I had treasured as denoting the superior man were all part of the same pathology.

(TCD, 73)

Whether caused by unresolved problems from a pre-verbal period, early childhood angst or even the trauma of birth, the exact cause of Beckett's psychological difficulties proved elusive, and, in the discourse of the period, even harder to release or 'abreact'.⁴

This type of psychotherapeutic healing was specifically addressed when Ernest Jones drafted his detailed defence of Freudian methodology in 1929, entitled *What is Psychoanalysis?* In it, Jones confronts the crucial issue of the repression of memories which Freud found so damaging to mental health, declaring that ‘the inner resistance against full self-knowledge is one of the most important of Freud’s discoveries’ (Jones, 1949: 11). Beckett appears to acknowledge this insight in the creation of characters such as Mouth in *Not I* and Amy in *Footfalls*, who stubbornly resist self-knowledge. They delve only so far as their pain threshold permits them. When the resultant angst becomes overwhelming, they back-track to a more comfortable level like the protagonist of *That Time*, fabulate to explore the problem more obliquely, like Henry in *Embers* or Hamm in *Endgame*, or indulge in repetitive physical activity to assuage their pain like the women of *Footfalls* and *Rockaby*.

Another psychological investigation which intrigued Beckett was Otto Rank’s *The Trauma of Birth*, first published in 1929. Rank accorded the angst of birth as much importance as Freud had in claiming that ‘we are led to recognise in the birth trauma the ultimate biological basis of the psychical’ (Rank, 1993: xxiii). In combining his belief in the trauma of birth with theories of repression and amnesia then current, Rank reasoned that: ‘One can only advance the supposition that the primal repression of the birth trauma may be considered as the cause of memory in general — that is of the partial capacity for remembering (Rank, 1993: 8). This theory of the repression of birth memories in a series of willed amnesias certainly finds an echo in Beckett’s dramatisation of the traumatised character of *A Piece of Monologue*. Portentously, the play begins with the dirge-like pronouncement, ‘Birth was the death of him’ (*APM*, 425), before embarking on a further litany of woe.

Other descriptions of neurotic tendencies were encountered by Beckett in a book by Karin Stephens, first published in 1933, and provocatively called *The Wish to Fall Ill: A Study of Psychoanalysis and Medicine*. In it, she stresses the Freudian precept that many neurotics are extremely loath to confront and overcome their neuroses, preferring to hide them or hang on to them for grim death. Wilhelm Stekel, too, in his 1923 study on *Psychoanalysis and Suggestion Theory*, agrees with Stephens in asserting that ‘the neurotic lacks the will to get well’ (Stekel, 1923: 6).

In spite of its inclusion in Woodworth's overview, there is little perceptible trace of Adler's theory of the inferiority complex and its compensatory rituals in Beckett's plays, apart from those possibly employed by Hamm in *Endgame* and Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot*. What does seem to have impressed Beckett, however, was Adler's long disquisition on the feelings of inferiority suffered by children, where he argued that 'the longer and more definitely the child feels his insecurity, the more he suffers either from physical or marked mental weakness' (Adler, 1925: 14). Of importance, too, is his insistence that 'worry and torment are never absent in the compulsive neurotic' (Adler, 1925: 197). Beckett's 'worried and tormented' grown-up children of *Not I* and *That Time* display these debilitating features to a marked degree in the treadmills of their memories.

Without devaluing the perceptions that arose from Beckett's intuitive discernment, this cursory survey of his familiarity with the leading psychological theories current in the 1930s suggests a further knowledge base available to him as he crafted his conceptually complex plays. And although inspiration is generally conceived of as ephemeral, nebulous and difficult to trace to its elusive source, in this instance the creative surge which Beckett exhibits in his dramatic creations could be said to be partially animated by the specific psychological theories which he had studied.

Central to his focus among these psychological theories is a pivotal interest in the repression of memory, that 'heavy and dangerous' stratum of 'latent consciousness' (*P*, 13) which is capable of inducing amnesia and undermining the coherence of the self. A past that cannot be recollected in tranquillity cannot constitute an integrated self-narrative. Instead, with its trauma-charged memories, repressive amnesias and disjointed fragments, it will persist as a series of disconnected moments like those of *That Time*, or collapse into the anarchic blur and buzz of the *Not I* mindscape. Although I shall not be referring extensively to the work of Jacques Lacan, it is interesting to note that in his article on 'The Mirror Stage', he comments on the paradox that 'the amnesia of repression is one of the most lively forms of memory' (Lacan, 1977: 52), an observation which Beckett both intuited and reflected in his work.

These gaps in recall, added to the natural deterioration of memory traces, allow for imaginative reconstruction to occur, creating memories with a higher level of emotional consistency than

veridicality. Conway insists that these memories ‘are never true in the sense that they are literal representations of events [but] may represent the personal memory of an event at the expense of accuracy’ (Conway, 1990: 9).

Conway goes on to argue that because memories are partly based on what actually happened, and partly on a subsequent integration of events, errors of ‘fact’ are bound to occur (Conway, 1990: 11). Furthermore, in the art of reconstruction, where memories are selected, rearranged and given different weight, the current version of the self may overhaul the past to make it congruent with the present, becoming part memory, part imaginative construct. Being mercurial, memory replicates in attempting to duplicate. But even though reconfigured, it is actual experience which provides the bedrock of recollection. Conway shows that because memory gives one a sense of how one featured in the past it supplies a sense of self, creating a personal context in which past and present feature, as well as expectations for the future (Conway, 1990: 103). That Beckett was fully aware of the accretions of memory is borne out by his ‘Notes for *Murphy*’ contained in the ‘Whoroscope’ Manuscript (MS 3000) in the Archives housed at Reading. After arguing that all consciousness is self-consciousness, he concludes: ‘In coming to know itself by thinking about itself, mind is adding to itself and so making the self of which it knows’(MS 3000).

Not all aspects of memory are susceptible to supplementary overlay, however, nor is memory the monolithic entity that earlier investigators assumed it to be. In his paper of 1985, entitled ‘How many memory systems are there?’, E. Tulving proposed that memory could take three different forms: ‘semantic’, ‘episodic’ and ‘procedural’ (in Conway, 1990: 3). He defines *procedural* memories as those linked to automatic behaviour, such as riding a bicycle or converting visual signs to sound. This offers some explanation as to why severely impaired amnesiacs surprisingly retain the ability to follow well-rehearsed procedures. (In *Waiting for Godot*, for instance, Estragon’s vaudeville ‘turns’ approximate Tulving’s proposition.) Tulving holds that *semantic* memories, on the other hand, comprise words and information, whereas *episodic* memories recall events which have a temporal and a spatial component. These distinctions, though a little crude, are useful. They help to explain that even when memory is strikingly dysfunctional, procedural routine and the phatic scripts of semantic retrieval are still in place, though the episodic memory may be virtually defunct. Beckett’s construction of Lucky’s peculiar diatribe might be understood

in Tulving's terms, for his 'think' appears to consist of overlearned shards of knowledge lodged in his 'semantic' memory, with his 'episodic' facility having long since deserted him.

It would be impossible, however, to argue for an absolute separation of memory's functions, as any number of different strands cluster about each memory. Even a relatively simple memory is part of a highly complicated construction of 'multiple access routes' (Conway, 1990: 186). In normal memory functioning, the different aspects of memory cooperate seamlessly. Obviously, if a trace has degraded, distorted fragments will be recalled, which will impact significantly on 'the narrative structure of the self-system' (Conway, 1990: 154) and on any attendant discourse reliant on that particular memory. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, for instance, we are given the distinct feeling that if Krapp did not have access to earlier tapes he would have forgotten most of his life. Some events, and even words, appear to exist for him only on tape, having apparently disappeared from his working memory literally without trace.

In the autobiographical memories of the elderly, which Beckett constructs with such insightful sensitivity, the capacity for recall, particularly of childhood and adolescent memories, increases and changes. These reminiscences then play an active and integrative role in the construction of a coherent self-narrative during the course of a retrospective life-review. Fitzgerald notes in his chapter on 'Self-narrative and the Elderly' the 'desirability of a stable, unchanging self-narrative' among older people, and comments on 'the perceived redundancy of new stories once the self-narrative is established' (in Conway et al., eds, 1992: 104). This partly explains why old people are prone to repeating their much rehearsed repertoire with relish, while failing to respond appropriately to verbal contributions made by others. In Beckett's amusing adaptation of *The Old Tune*, geriatrics Gorman and Cream react angrily when their cherished 'facts' are challenged by each other. In *Endgame*, too, Nell and Nagg relish their moments of recollection while paying little attention to each other's contribution. They take refuge in their revisited memories of earlier, happier times. It has become habitual with them, and, despite the horror of their present deprivation, they derive comfort from their accustomed routes of recall.

It is apparent, therefore, that in the compilation of the autobiographical memory, the meaning which specific memories have for individuals can affect them profoundly, either by their presence,

or sometimes, more significantly, by their absence. It is this field of memory dysfunction that most intrigued Beckett. Indeed, Knowlson claims that 'Beckett never lost his long-standing curiosity about medical matters. Anything abnormal, unusual or macabre fascinated him' (Knowlson, 1996: 668).

Most influential of all, perhaps, were the visits to the Bethlem Royal Hospital between February and October, 1935, in the company of his friend, Dr Thompson. In the writing of *Murphy*, Beckett proves that he could identify many of the specific symptoms of psychiatric and mental illnesses in his descriptions of the 'Magdalen Mental Mercyseat':

Melancholics, motionless and brooding, holding their heads or bellies according to type. Paranoids, feverishly covering sheets of paper with complaints against their treatment or verbatim reports of their inner voices. A hebephrenic playing the piano intently. A hypomaniac teaching slosh to a Korsakow's syndrome. An emaciated schizoid, petrified in a toppling attitude as though condemned to an eternal *tableau vivant*, his left hand rhetorically extended holding a cigarette half smoked and out, his right, quivering and rigid, pointing upward.

(M, 96)

With Beckett's abiding interest in human diminution, it is not surprising that he conceived of many of his characters in the process of irremediable decay: amnesia, dementia, senility and the repressed or obsessive memories of the neurotic all claim his notice and depiction. Indeed, brain damage, whether organic or psychogenic, features prominently as a determining factor in the behaviour of many of the people who appear in his novels and plays. Yet he seldom pinpoints their particular problems. This might be because, as Steven J. Rosen argues in *Samuel Beckett and the Pessimistic Tradition*, 'the aesthetic attitude his works so carefully stimulate, even specifically recommend, is violated by neat and final solutions to what Beckett poses as insoluble problems' (Rosen, 1976: 6). In *Murphy*, the eponymous hero recoils from the pat solutions applied in the mental hospital. To him, the patients amount to more than their problems. He registers his loathing of the 'textbook attitude towards them, the complacent scientific conceptualisation that made contact with outer reality the index of mental well-being' (M, 101). And though Beckett accurately depicts specific symptoms in many of his characters, his attitude demands of his audiences and his scholars that they be accepted as more than an inventory of their ills.

In his incisive study of *Principles of Abnormal Psychology*, Harry Munsinger's description of brain disorder is reminiscent of a number of observable traits in the psychologically and mentally disturbed victims whom Beckett has created:

The symptoms of organic brain disorder include impairment of recent memory, gross loss of intellectual functioning, perceptual deficiencies, and disorientation of person, place, or time. Other signs include impairment of speech production or comprehension and neurological symptoms such as seizure, uncoordinated action, and convulsions. The victim's emotions may also be either shallow or changeable.

(Munsinger, 1983: 439-40)

Even a cursory reading of Beckett's literary output demonstrates Munsinger's claim that memory disturbance is by far the most frequent symptom of organic brain disorder, with impairment of judgment and understanding following in its wake. Afflicted individuals are unable to evaluate the consequences of their actions and have difficulty in regulating their behaviour. With these symptoms in mind, Adam Piette, writing on 'Beckett: Early Neuropsychology and Memory Loss: Beckett's Reading of Clarapède, Janet and Korsakoff', vividly describes much of Beckett's work as 'elegies for broken voices, broken minds' (Piette, 1993: 41). In creating a context for Beckett's work on memory disorders he writes:

Beckett was finding his way towards a working-together of literary and neuropsychological concerns, not in any easy Freudian and Jungian perspective, or with an eye towards a geriatric metalanguage, but reading case studies *as stories* that help define relations between story-telling as such and terrifying failures in ordinary memory-work. I will not be trying to diagnose the particular mental disorders of Beckett's characters — but showing the way Beckett creates a composite madness out of many different kinds of case-study stories.

(Piette, 1993: 41)

Despite his disclaimer, Piette goes on to discuss the two precise pathologies that afflict the eponymous hero, Watt, and the protagonist of *Footfalls*. Beckett, no less precise, is acutely aware, possessed of a splendid memory and ready reserves of specific information. With this well-stocked arsenal at his disposal, it would be unlikely that he would fabricate a 'composite madness'. I would argue for the opposite: that Beckett delineated characters with clinically identifiable pathologies, but without the accompanying glib labelling that would have invited their prompt dismissal by readers and theatre-goers. Many of Beckett's people suffer from amnesia,

not in any generalised form, but of a type compatible with the specific malady which afflicts them, but which Beckett has declined to name.

When I spoke to Dr Anna McMullan of the Trinity College Drama Department on 25 June, 1996, she voiced her misgivings about assigning labels to characters. ‘There are certain dangers in going that route’, she said. ‘It is all too easy to label and dismiss and that is not Beckett’s way. He always inclines to the uncertain rather than the obvious, to people on the margins — between sanity and insanity, presence and absence.’⁵ I take her point, agreeing that while Beckett characterises certain recognisable psychological disorders with astonishing accuracy, he never tethers his characters to their grid. What emerges from his delineation is their abiding claim to compassion and humanity. In Beckett’s portrayal of specific problems (and they are undeniably there, even if they are not labelled *per se*) the reader’s and audience’s sympathies need not be alienated but can be substantially enlarged. Bearing in mind Beckett’s compassionate attitude, it is possible to identify specific symptoms without being dismissive.

In the chapters that follow I shall explore the accurately crafted mental and psychological problems of the characters that Beckett has delineated. In so doing, I shall be wary of portraying them as mere case studies, undeserving of common humanity. Instead, their disabilities will be seen to exacerbate their existence, not question their right to have one.

Beckett is known to have undertaken considerable research in abnormal psychological and medical conditions (Knowlson, 1996: 668) Yet, when it comes to making connections between the author’s proven reading and the discourse of some of the maimed characters he configures in his texts, there is a reluctance to earth the one in the other. Rubin Rabinovitz, for instance, in his article on ‘Beckett and Psychology’, makes the highly debatable point that ‘Schopenhauer’s emphasis on introspection is also important for Beckett, and this marks the point where he abandons psychology [. . .] If Beckett borrows a good deal from psychology, he also makes it clear that he is ready to abandon it when it is no longer useful’ (Rabinovitz, 1989: 71,2). Instead of abandoning psychology, as Rabinovitz claims, Beckett appears for the rest of his life to have included it in the eclectic weave of his conceptual background. But as his writing career

developed, he became far more committed to submerging his sources than he had been when he wrote his first novel, *Murphy*, so that his psychological underpinning became far less intrusive.

In his invention of memory-impaired characters, Beckett's interest in 'the poverty of language as a medium of communication' (Pilling, 1976b: 69) never flags, particularly in the theatre where 'impermanence dogs the spoken word even more dramatically than the written' (Pilling, 1976b: 68). In addition, Beckett continually foregrounds the reality that memory, with its 'psychic imprints' (Krell, 1990: 181), is essential to both the functioning and the distortion of language.

Language is the precondition for the development of self-awareness. Lacan phrases this vividly in his Seminar on 'The Mirror Stage', when he declares that 'man speaks, then, but it is because the symbol has made him man' (Lacan, 1977: 65). It therefore follows that if depleted memory depletes the symbol, and with it the self, it necessarily influences the discourse of the affected practitioner. When we come to scrutinise the dialogue of the characters in the world of Beckett's plays, therefore, it seems appropriate to go beyond literary exegesis to utilise the lively insights gained in conversational interchange by practitioners of discourse analysis. As the latter is an eclectic discipline, definitions of discourse vary markedly from scholar to scholar. Some take up a circumscribed position, while others use the term as a linguistic holdall. For my purposes, the most satisfactory approach is to be found in Norman Fairclough's study, *Language and Power*. He asserts that 'I shall use the term discourse to refer to the whole process of social interaction of which text is just a part. Text analysis is correspondingly only a part of discourse analysis, which also includes analysis of productive and interpretive processes' (Fairclough, 1989: 24). Fairclough's broad reading of the term is sufficiently comprehensive to allow for 'discourse' to be used in the sense of speech, both social and self-communing, as well as literary text.

In their linguistic usage and perception, the characters in Beckett's plays struggle to emerge through the limitations of language. This reflects their author's profound frustration with a recalcitrant medium. Maddy Rooney, for instance, whose world of 'clotted syntax' (Alvarez, 1974: 126) has become a 'lingering dissolution' is 'struggling with a dead language' in *All That Fall* (ATF, 175, 194). She conceives of herself and her overblown words as 'a big pale blur' (ATF, 183). Despite her Hibernian linguistic virtuosity, and probably even because of it, she feels that

language distorts reality. Its wayward signification fails to configure her experience. Hugh Kenner points out the paradox that in Beckett's attempts to 'rupture language with language, [his] literature of the unword, however, is always attained through words, through immaculately used language' (in Gontarski, ed., 1986: 5).⁶ Ruby Cohn talks of 'Beckett's impressive verbal range — colloquial, austere, formal, interrogative, plangent, vituperative, imaged, abstract' (Cohn, 2001: 180). But no matter how wide his range and 'immaculate' his usage, it is the words themselves that are seen to be wanting.

Nonetheless, Beckett's people talk on, despite their frustrations. We observe in the plays that they communicate for many reasons, including 'self-expression, self-enhancement, phatic communion, abhorrence of a conversational vacuum or simply because they are expected to' (Grimshaw, 1989: 9). They attempt to affect their listeners through their choice of language and intonational colouring; they observe conversational sequencing conventions and engage in social and emotional management. In addition, Beckett's characters often speak to induce the presence of the observing other, if only to convince themselves that they exist. Even if the other has only the potential existence of a Godot, it is important that he be made aware of the importunate demands of his devotees. When the boy questions, 'What am I to ask Mr Godot, sir?' Vladimir responds: 'Tell him . . . [*He hesitates*] . . . Tell him you saw me and that . . . [*He hesitates*] . . . That you saw me You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me!' (*WFG*, 86).

But when human intercourse fails entirely, Beckett's characters wander in the skull-rooms of their minds, or among the shades. And when, at last, these spectral resources are mute, they face the kind of terror experienced by Henry in *Embers*, frantically blowing on the ashen coals of memory to sustain faint glimmers of life. Of course, most of the speech of Beckett's characters avoids such desperation. Much of it falls within normal parameters and makes use of conventional strategies. It is in this area that investigations into conversational discourse as a structured activity have provided trenchant insights. In a study of *Conversational Routine: Explorations in Standardized Communication Situations and Prepatterned Speech*, Florian Coulmas claims that conversation as a structured activity 'goes beyond the internal structure of decontextualized sentences'

(Coulmas, ed., 1981: 1) to focus on its interactive nature. In what Coulmas calls a ‘repertoire of performative idiom’, we find, among others, the following speech acts:

Framer, marker, starter, meta-statement, conclusion, acquiescence, greeting, reply-greeting, summons, reply-summons, inquiry, proposal, return, loop, prompt, observation, information, concurrence, confirmation, qualification, rejection, termination, reception, reaction, reformulation, endorsement, protest, directive, comment and engagement.

(Francis and Hunston in Coulthard, ed., 1992: 128-33)

This ‘Polonius’ list is by no means exhaustive; it does not claim to be. It could be augmented by a good thesaurus or by any able practitioner in the field. It does, however, include several organisational and sequential considerations which could be overlooked by a more traditional approach. Terms like ‘framer’, ‘marker’ and ‘loop’ point to conversational breaks, shifts and detours, as well as to the interstices between them. With their aid, we can place the desultory conversation of *Waiting for Godot* within the ‘frame’ of waiting; the ‘markers’ in *Endgame* serve to signal new strategic moves as Hamm and Clov confront each other; and the ‘loops’ of *Not I* — ‘what? . . . who? . . . no! . . . she! . . .’ (*NI*, 377) — are seen to short-circuit eruptions of prolix panic as agonising memories burst into consciousness.

Andrew Ellis and Geoffrey Beattie, writing on *The Psychology of Language and Communication* (1986), view conversation as cooperative interaction in which participants agree on a topic, take turns developing it and contribute coherently to its discussion. They have identified principles of turn-taking and turn-yielding. These control signals are all expertly handled in Beckett’s plays. In *Rough for Radio I* we experience a practised talker at work in the female well-wisher, with her reliable memory and inventory of conversational ‘gambits’ at the ready (Keller in Agar, ed., 1994: 96). Despite her skill, she is stymied in her efforts to advance the conversation by the male protagonist’s uncooperative obduracy. He refuses to accommodate her desire to establish a probing ‘frame’, to elicit the information that her curiosity craves.

Tannen explains that this useful concept of ‘framing’ was first introduced by Gregory Bateson in *A Theory of Play and Fantasy* in 1954. In a later paper, Bateson reasons that, ‘no communicative move, verbal or nonverbal, could be understood without reference to a metacommunicative message or metamessage, about what is going on — that is, what frame of interpretation applies

to the move' (in Tannen, ed., 1993 a: 3). According to this theory, a sequence of events is absorbed into a known frame. This refers to a participant's sense of what is happening, derived from a sophisticated appreciation of audience and circumstances. Part of the problem of Beckett's memory-impaired characters like Lucky or Mouth lies in their total inability to perceive what frame is operant in any given circumstances, so that they are completely unable to engage in normal conversational practice.

Even more interesting are occasions when frames are set aside. These arise when 'some other speech act might be pushing against the surface trying to get out' (Agar, ed., 1994: 204). Such 'cracks' in conversation are evident in Dan Rooney's peculiar discourse of denial in *All That Fall*. Because of his possible guilt, he is utterly determined to avoid mentioning the death of the child on the railway tracks, and sets aside the frame of 'what happened' whenever it arises. Less unusual constraints on speech occur more commonly as a result of tact. Flo, Ru and Vi, of *Come and Go*, 'frame' their discourse with the enjoinder 'Let us not speak' (CAG, 354), consequently placing a taboo on a frank discussion of their illness. Because all of these characters are in full possession of their mental faculties, they are able to negotiate the discursive avoidance tactics that Beckett has devised for them.

Embargoes placed on discourse call for more conversational creativity than the overlearned, automatic responses of phatic exchange used by many of Beckett's characters. John Laver, in his paper on 'Linguistic Routines and Politeness in Greeting and Parting', makes the rather startling assertion that 'the chief function of much of the routine linguistic material of everyday conversation is a ceremonial ritual function' (in Coulmas, ed., 1981: 289). Laver believes that phatic communion defuses the potential hostility of silence and helps the conversational 'action' get under way in comfort. Politeness rituals are helpful in that they give conversational participants breathing space. Phatic language is not assembled fresh for each occasion, but is pressed into service as ready-made, clichéd pre-packages. Without this linguistic standby, Winnie, of *Happy Days*, and Estragon, of *Waiting for Godot*, would have little to say. These conventional or habitual responses persist in the discourse of the mentally or psychologically disturbed long after others are lost.

Phatic modes of speech also proliferate when coherence is wanting. They are stored fillers, readily available, a boon to the intellectually impaired. Beckett uses them brilliantly both to reveal and to mask the mental disabilities of many of his *dramatis personae*. Conversational coherence, on the other hand, is much more taxing and quite beyond the capability of some of Beckett's more cerebrally damaged characters. As Coulthard and Brazil point out, the problem of simultaneously voicing sounds, developing structures, recalling prior text, engaging with people, and referring relevantly to the world is intricate (in Coulthard, ed., 1992: 62).

Of equal complexity is linguistic evidence of power relations, with hierarchy and dominance featuring in all social systems. Beckett is acutely aware of this as he examines the 'othering' process of objectification in his play, *Catastrophe*, dedicated to human rights' champion, Vaclav Havel. In *Endgame*, too, he dramatises the instability that ensues when a subordinate resists domination. Fairclough, in *Language and Power*, interrogates the type of language which functions as the major locus of ideology in institutional practices, and which is often taken for granted in legitimising power relations (Fairclough, 1989: 12). When ideology is firmly in place, more coercive measures become extraneous; when ideology is contested, they become the norm.

Fairclough is particularly perceptive in his examination of the impact of formal language usage. He might well be describing Pozzo (who is initially polite and in possession of a functioning memory) when he delineates the situation in which formal language is used. Fairclough views such a situation as

characterised by an exceptional orientation to and marking of position, status, and 'face'; power and social distance are overt, and consequently there is a strong tendency towards politeness. Politeness is based upon recognition of differences of power, degrees of social difference, and so forth, and oriented to reproducing them without change [. . .] There is also a heightened self-consciousness.

(Fairclough, 1989: 66)

In these instances, powerful participants control and constrain the contributions of the less powerful. Pozzo's eruption into the lives of the respectful Vladimir and Estragon demonstrates that formal language can be viewed as a site of empowerment and intimidation. It also supports Fairclough's contention that the concept of 'free speech' is an amazingly powerful myth, given the multiple constraints in operation in society (Fairclough, 1989: 63). Conditioned by class

memory, which dictates the discourse of deference (Fairclough, 1989: 46), Vladimir and Estragon initially forfeit their freedom of expression and allow themselves to be co-opted into the script of the bombastic ‘landowner’.

The exercise of power may also be determined by knowing ‘who holds the floor’ in a conversation. This does not necessarily coincide with who is taking a turn to speak. The powerless Lucky, for instance, is coerced into speaking at Pozzo’s behest. But by his distracting reactions to Lucky’s discourse Pozzo still holds the floor — or ‘the official what’s going on’ (Edelsky in Tannen, ed., 1993 a: 209). He arrogates to himself the right to be noticed at all times: he is in control.

Whatever the reason for discourse, conversational strategies remain rooted in cognitive processes. Tannen concludes:

People approach the world not as naive, blank-state receptacles who take in stimuli as they exist in some independent and objective way, but rather as experienced and sophisticated veterans of perception who have stored their prior experienced as an ‘organized mass’ and who see events and objects in the world in relation to each other and in relation to their prior experience. [. . .] [This] organized knowledge then takes the form of expectations about the world, and in the vast majority of cases, the world, being a systematic place, confirms their expectations, saving the individual the trouble of figuring things out anew all the time.

(in Tannen, ed., 1993 a: 20)

It follows on this assessment that if access to the ‘organized mass’ of memory is wanting, perception and communication suffer accordingly, particularly in the demanding interchange of casual conversation. As this has only a ‘minimally predictable discoursal schema’ (Ventola, in Benson and Greaves, eds, 1988: 74), the degree of codal complexity and range of variables confounds the cerebrally impaired, who lack the memory and cognitive structures to feed knowledge representation and comprehension. In Beckett’s plays they fall back on the uncreative platitudes of an Estragon or a Krapp, or the overlearned mantra of Mouth’s attempts at solace: ‘God is love . . . tender mercies . . . new every morning. . .’ (*NI*, 383). A low level of informational content, semantic emptiness and ideational repetition of their discourse marks the domain of the memory-impaired, where ‘the system of semantic values which forms the bulk of

knowledge and competence acquired and maintained throughout an individual life, starts to be less tightly cohesive' (Marcie et al. in Hillert, ed., 1994: 124).

It is this type of evidence of cerebral disturbance revealed through discourse that Beckett has observed so accurately and dramatised so effectively in his portraits of 'yesterday's deformities'. Echoing the cadences of Beckett's monograph on Proust, Alexander Schlutz concludes that 'Time is the main protagonist of Samuel Beckett's work. The characters of his plays and prose texts are voices, scattered in time, which try to construct an identity through the recollection of their past experience' (Schlutz, 2000: 1). In their individual *recherche du temps perdu* they are dogged by the inadequacy of recollection and the inability of language to record their lives, which skews their appraisal of both present and past. Beckett reveals, through the beings that he creates for the stage, a profound understanding of the relationships that inhere between memory and discourse as he pursues his intricate dramatic craft.

It seems fitting at this stage to offer an overview of the contents of each chapter, indicating how the varying protagonists demonstrate, through their access to memory, and facility with discourse, the trials they endure as they attempt to communicate. My approach has been pragmatic throughout: I have allowed the texts under discussion to suggest the application of appropriate memory, psychological, medical and discourse theory.

The first chapter will deal with vagaries of recall by contrasting the normality of Vladimir's memory with the erratic performance of Estragon's compromised faculty in *Waiting for Godot*. Evidence of the operation of their semantic, episodic and procedural memories will be cited to demonstrate Beckett's accuracy in his delineation of Estragon's malady and the subtlety with which he integrates his hollowed-out discourse into normal conversational interplay. The erosion in the communication of the companions will be shown to be contingent not only on their stagnant reality and the laboured discourse of their boredom, but also on Estragon's rapidly diminishing powers.

The second chapter will continue with the same play, but will explore the extreme memory dysfunction exhibited by Lucky and his sadistic master, Pozzo. Through their resultant incoherent

discourse, Beckett will be shown to have fashioned a vehicle to accommodate the ‘chaos’ that coincides with their eruption onto the stage and the ‘mess’ that their musings invite. Where Pozzo’s conversation initially operates in the area of performative self-enhancement, dragooning his acquaintances into deference, Lucky’s diatribe furnishes living proof that man ‘wastes and pines’ (*WFG*, 39: 11538). By exhibiting the waning powers of his tragic ‘knook’, Beckett demonstrates that ‘what is terrible is to have thought’ (*WFG*, 57: 1829). A careful tracing of the ways in which their diseased memories have not only fragmented their discourse but also ruined their lives will justify the inclusion of the hapless Lucky and Pozzo among ‘yesterday’s deformities’.

In the third chapter, which focuses on *Endgame*, primary attention will be given to the operation of the autobiographical memory, which can be a fragile and compromised faculty. Since this aspect of memory is largely reconstructive, if vital pieces of information are missing the self-narrative will be shown to lack coherence, if not validity. Thus Clov, who suffers racking doubts as to his identity, reflects sadly in *Endgame* that his was always ‘the life to come’ (*E*, 26: 898). Clov is not alone in his plight. As the other characters play out their ‘endgames’ in their skull-like shelter, whatever emerges from their autobiographical memories will be shown to constitute their final sense of self. In *Endgame*, Beckett has intimated that the continuum of memory is a major factor in the construction of the self. Through an examination of the interaction of Hamm, Clov, Nell and Nagg it will become apparent that their acts of retrieval, however fictionalised, make up the core of their intertextured identity.

Chapter Four will interrogate the assertion made by Beckett in the Proust monograph that communication between people is so fundamentally flawed that they operate as ‘separate and imminent dynamisms related by no system of synchronisation’ (*P*, 17). The role that incompatible memories play in this state of alienation will be probed in the plays *The Old Tune*, *Words and Music*, *Rough for Theatre I*, *Rough for Theatre II*, *All that Fall*, *Play*, *Rough for Radio I*, *Rough for Radio II*, *Catastrophe*, *What Where*, *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *A Piece of Monologue*. In the first three plays I shall examine discourse that has been undermined by faulty recall or the conditioned responses of entrenched habit. In *Play*, *Rough for Theatre II* and *All that Fall*, the role that self-centredness plays in the distortion of information-reception and subsequent memory

encoding will be discussed. Scrutiny of *Rough for Radio II* will reveal diametrically opposed intuitive and sensual memories at work in the characters of Fox and The Animator. Their communication fails to connect as each attempt is mediated through singularly idiosyncratic perception. On another tack, the language of deliberate mystification will be evaluated in both *Rough for Radio I* and *All that Fall*, where troubled memories mark off zones which have become taboo. In *Rough for Radio II*, *Catastrophe* and *What Where*, I shall explore the complete reification of victims as a result of premeditated, memory-fuelled cruelty. Finally, the last section of the chapter will evaluate another type of incoherence as the protagonists of *Krapp's Last Tape* and *A Piece of Monologue* deliberately renounce earlier versions of their scorned selves. In all of these plays, we detect that a failure to connect is an overriding thematic concern.

The fifth chapter will feature Beckett's pitiful voices, forced to revisit traumatic sites of memory in endless circuits of 'revolving it all' (*F*, 400). In his plays *Embers*, *Cascando*, *Eh Joe*, *That Time*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* Beckett deals most plangently with memory as the 'penny farthing hell' (*EJ*, 362) of the obsessive-compulsive mind. Characters plagued with these incontinent memories are unable to formulate a coherent sense of self, as they are afflicted not only by recurrent guilt-ridden memories that intrude on their consciousness, but by repression as well. Key areas of consciousness are off-limits to them. Their mainly monologic language is shown to offer little release from their embattled states, as it further intensifies their entrapment. In examining the topic of 'revolving it all', I shall show that Beckett's study of Freud, Jones, Janet, Adler, Jung, Rank, Stephens and Stekel influenced his creation of characters who have discernible maladies, but who yet retain a pitiful and tragic humanity.

Finally, as painful memories 'deform' most of Beckett's characters, it is hardly surprising that the positive aspects of memory are little explored in his plays. However, the playwright does feature, on occasion, glimpses of the more optimistic aspects of memory, and these examples of 'remedy, stimulant and sedative' (*P*, 35) will be investigated in Chapter Six by examining *Happy Days*, *Come and Go*, *Ghost Trio*, . . . *but the clouds* . . . , *Ohio Impromptu* and *Nacht und Träume*. Memory is utilised to 'remedy' current circumstances by the characters in all these plays, but is seen to provide only temporary relief. In *Ghost Trio*, . . . *but the clouds* . . . , *Ohio Impromptu* and *Nacht und Träume*, memory is beseeched to evoke the sense of the absent loved one, but its

‘remedial’ effects are so ephemeral that they operate as fool’s gold. The comforting rite of reminiscence is seen to evaporate so swiftly that it immediately prompts the next supplication. As ‘stimulant’, memory will be evaluated in the play *Happy Days*, where Winnie achieves a forced vivacity through her determined onslaught on nostalgia. But it is the sedative powers of memory that are seen to be invoked most often by the characters in the plays. Flo, Ru and Vi seek the soothing sensation that nostalgia can provide in *Come and Go*, while the characters of all six plays seek some sort of respite, however brief, from their depressing circumstances. It will be seen that although memory can provide transient relief, it is the real or imagined presence of the other that is ultimately able to remedy, stimulate and sedate.

In this full-length investigation of memory in the plays of Samuel Beckett⁷ except for *Eleutheria*,⁸ it will be shown how the playwright explores the diverse functioning of memory and its consequent impact on discourse. This affords him striking opportunities for experimentation in dramaturgy and characterisation. With abiding compassion, and a complex awareness of human delinquency, Beckett creates theatrical beings who amount to far more than freakish inventories of symptoms. Many of his characters suffer unendurable privations, mostly beyond their control. It is one of the intentions of this study to show that an identification of the nature of their disabilities, far from being dismissive, is more likely to invite sympathy, as it enhances understanding of their dogged attempts to endure in a world increasingly lacking in certainty.

ENDNOTES

- 1 In *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett* we are informed that: ‘A definitive moment came when SB and Bion attended the third of Jung’s five lectures at the Tavistock Clinic (1935). Jung showed a diagram he had used earlier, which became for SB a virtual archetype of the mind’ (Ackerley and Gontarski eds, 2004: 290).
- 2 In the supplement to *the World as Will, Representation and Idea*, Schopenhauer paints an entirely pessimistic view of life. He sees it ‘by no means as a gift for enjoyment, but as a task, a drudgery to be informed; and in accordance with this we see, in great and small, universal need, ceaseless cares, constant pressure, endless strife, compulsory activity [. . .] But the ultimate aim of it all, what is it? To sustain ephemeral and tormented individuals through a short span of time [. . .] The will to live appears to us from this point of view, if taken objectively, as a fool, or subjectively, as a delusion’ (Schopenhauer, 1909: unpaginated supplement).
- 3 Rubin Rabinovitz also propounds this point of view in his article on ‘Beckett and Psychology’. He says: ‘Some of the psychological critics also speculate about Beckett’s psyche, implying that the author shares some of the symptoms he attributes to his characters. Given Beckett’s well-known reticence about his personal life, the possibility that he is inadvertently including autobiographical revelations becomes remote’ (67). If we consider the complex alchemy of the creative process, therefore, it would be reductive to claim a one-on-one relationship between Beckett’s life and art.

- 4 'Abreaction' was the term popularised by Josef Breuer 'to describe the release of a blocked emotional charge through consciousness and movement' (in Woodward, 1964: 256).
- 5 The interview with Dr Anna McMullan took place on Tuesday, 25 June, 1996 in Dublin.
- 6 Hugh Kenner enlarges on the paradox of Beckett's linguistic fastidiousness by declaring that 'Beckett's sensibility is profoundly conservative, and nowhere is he more traditional than in his regard for the integrity of the printed word, the scrupulousness of its phrasing, the accuracy of its proof-reading, the exemplary adequacy of the translation' (Kenner, 1973: 17).
- 7 Sabine Kozdon's German doctoral thesis of 2002, translated as *Memory in Samuel Beckett's Plays: A Psychological Approach*, focuses mainly on *Eleutheria*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, *Killap Tape*, *Play*, *Not I* and *That Time*, although she does refer briefly to some of the other plays. For discussion of her point of view, please refer to the conclusion.
- 8 I have not included *Eleutheria* in my investigation, as the play was neither published nor produced during Beckett's lifetime. Ackerley and Gontarski point out in *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*: 'SB to the end wished the play withheld' (Ackerley and Gontarski, 2004: 166).

CHAPTER ONE

DIMINISHING RETURNS

Two old men in the middle of nowhere. As the play opens there is no specific evidence, visual or aural, to suggest where they are or where they have come from. Until they are joined by others, they have nothing to do; the resources of their minds constitute their only diversion. And ours. They seem to be at their wits' end when Estragon concludes 'Nothing to be done' (*WFG*, 9: 8) and Vladimir reluctantly concurs with him. Without further evidence, it might be tempting to look upon them as Beckett's existential Tweedledum and Tweedledee, especially as in Beckett's own productions they wore 'ill-fitting and mismatched halves of each other's coats and trousers' (McMillan and Knowlson, eds, 1993: 87).¹ Nonetheless, the cerebral difference between them is apparent from the start. Estragon, for whatever reason, lacks the mental energies that his friend, Vladimir, demonstrates with such vivacity.

It is the precise nature of this disparity in intellectual functioning, memory and discourse that I shall evaluate in this chapter. Vladimir, I contend, maintains lively cerebral activity, give or take the odd lapse in recall common to his age.² Estragon, on the other hand, appears to suffer from intermittent but severe amnesia, where only part of the brain has been affected, and the rest sustains routine performance. Although this unevenness is puzzling, Beckett remained largely noncommittal throughout critical speculation. A recondite figure, he politely declined to explain *Godot* in full in order to 'unravel my tangle' (*U*, 289). He made a small concession to Colin Duckworth, however, in the clue that 'if you want to find the origins of *Godot* look at *Murphy*' (in Cooke, ed., 1985: 14). *Murphy*, of all Beckett's works, identifies mental disorders explicitly, and it is perhaps in the focus on cerebral dysfunction that the 'unravelling' can begin.³

In order to compare the memory capacity of the two men, I shall evaluate their semantic, episodic and procedural performance from the evidence supplied by the text, commenting on the effect that their respective functioning has on the discursive strategies they select. This will serve to

demonstrate that the stale emptiness of much of their communication and the voided impasse of the rest can be attributed to a more invidious cause than boredom alone.

In this regard the opening gambit of the play is significant. After trying to haul off his boots in exactly the same way twice, Estragon gives up in disgust, resigning himself to the fact that there is nothing he can do. His more inventive companion characteristically views the issue more creatively: 'I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying, Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't tried everything. And I resumed the struggle' (9, 9-11).⁴ Although evidence of their differing mental capacities is sparse at this stage, their behaviour adumbrates a pattern that will continue throughout the play. Vladimir has an explorative mind which spawns possibilities and struggles against defeat; Estragon is frequently stuck on a repetitive treadmill. After his initial contribution, Vladimir continues to take the initiative in the conversation. In the ensuing interchange, he assumes both monologic function and probe, which is unusual in a casual conversation between equals, where different roles are generally assigned to participants. It appears at this point of the play that he is either insensitively dominating, or else that Estragon's inadequacies or bad temper have invited some form of compensatory patterning in their discourse. In Sir Peter Hall's 1997 *Godot* production, forty-two years after he had premiered the play in London, this particular pattern in the relationship between Vladimir and Estragon was apparent from the start. Alan Howard, whose performance as Vladimir I found perceptive, explained to Jasper Rees of *The Independent*: 'In a way, Vladimir is the ideas man. He's the one who's trying to organise, operate or manipulate. He tends to be the initiator, suggesting what should happen next' (Rees, 1997, MS 4437). And as the play unfolds, the resources of their memories are seen to differ even more markedly.

Tennessee Williams claims in *The Glass Menagerie* to have written 'a memory play' (Williams, 1980: 235). Beckett, always at pains to avoid labels and explication, makes no such claim for *Waiting for Godot*, though he might justifiably have done so. In it he contrasts the differing memory capacities of Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky. He elaborates on the essential theme of Lucky's tirade that 'man . . . wastes and pines' (39, 1158), that he is known to 'shrink and dwindle' (39, 1165) and his skull 'to shrink and waste' (40, 1185). 'Time', contends Bloom, 'is

the adversary in *Waiting for Godot*' (Bloom, ed. 1987: 7) in 'one of the most time-conscious plays ever written' (Cohn in Bloom, ed. 1987: 49).

Beckett's treatment of time is highly original as he contrasts Vladimir's mostly reliable memory with the frequent dysfunctional lapses of Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky. He is daring in his delineation, if not in his claims, characterising Estragon as a mid-term victim of Alzheimer's disease, and Pozzo and Lucky as suffering from specific forms of cerebral malfunction. None of these is specified in the play. Besides Beckett's horror of the explicit, the possibility would exist that audiences could react less sympathetically to the characters if they were felt to be demented 'case histories'. Dismissiveness is not a trait that Beckett either exhibits or fosters in his view of embattled humanity, where he 'sees man in severe decline, but does so with infinite compassion and objectivity, through a brilliant mastery of stage techniques and images' (Harmon, ed., 1998: xiv). I would suggest that technique and image are not the only skills at work here, but also a careful attention to detail in portraying pathologies so clinically accurate that they are medically and psychologically recognisable. Beckett's art is always 'an art of exactitude; precise measurements, precise timing, precise word orders' (Jackson, 1991: 321). I would submit, therefore, that given their exact delineation, Vladimir and Estragon amount to appreciably more than 'two feckless bums on the road' (Pullen, 1987: 291) whose friendship 'is situated somewhere between fatigue and ennui' (*P*, 45). Vladimir's memory is largely reliable; Estragon's is not.

Among the critics who have commented on the memory problems apparent in the play, Jacques Guicharnaud's undifferentiated response is typical. He describes Vladimir and Estragon as *both* suffering from 'an uprootedness accompanied by partial amnesia, and perhaps even explained by it. Yet the fact that they only dimly recall their pasts does not mean that they have none. Their former lives are suggested in illuminating flashes' (in Bloom, ed., 1985: 107).

David H. Hesla also conflates the two friends in saying: 'Mercifully, Didi and Gogo are largely spared the burden of the past, for their memories are so defective that little of earlier time remains to them. . . . their existence is extemporaneous' (Hesla, 1971: 133). Michael Robinson differentiates between them, but concludes expansively: 'Estragon is closer to timelessness than Vladimir' (Robinson, 1969: 251). Martin Esslin, however, in *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 'spots

the difference' when he says: 'Vladimir remembers past events, Estragon tends to forget them as soon as they have happened' (Esslin, 1963: 27). Knowlson, too, accurately reflects on varying degrees of 'dwindling intellectual endowment in the play' (McMillan and Knowlson, eds, 1993: 106). Alvarez is perhaps the most specific when he observes that Estragon 'behaves more or less as though brain-damaged [. . .] he can remember nothing for two minutes together and can refer back no further than to the last phrase uttered' (Alvarez, 1974: 81). A more quirky spin is placed on Estragon's problems by Alice and Kenneth Hamilton when they conclude that, despite his deficiencies, 'in Beckettian terms he is not an ape conditioned by habit'. They then erroneously conclude that 'he is blessed with the power of involuntary memory, the ability to retain specific impressions' (Hamilton, 1976: 161).⁵

But for the most part, the consensus among critics is that in this play of interminable waiting, what Beckett calls 'a game to stay alive' (in McMillan and Knowlson, eds, 1993: 106), Vladimir fares far better than Estragon, a position which Beckett endorses. In a letter to his American director, Alan Schneider, in December of 1955, Beckett says that Vladimir is the 'spirit of the play' (in Harmon, ed., 1998: 6). He continues by saying: 'Estragon is inert and Vladimir restless. The latter should be always on the fidget, the former tending back to his state of rest. One should hear Vladimir's feet'. One certainly hears Vladimir's tongue. Judged by any standard, Vladimir is highly articulate, though even he is occasionally plagued by the 'tip-of-tongue' hesitations which afflict all older people from time to time. Speaking of the Macon country, for instance, he is insistent that he and Estragon were there, though he cannot recall the precise details:

But we were there together, I could swear to it! Picking grapes for a man called . . . (*He snaps his fingers*) . . . can't think of the name of the man, at a place called . . . (*snaps his fingers*). . . can't think of the name of the place, do you not remember?

(55, 1738-41)

He also finds that he cannot complete a quotation that he used to know. When he attempts to quote Proverbs 33: 12 he stumbles: 'Hope deferred maketh the something sick, who said that?' (10, 54-55). Estragon, of course, is no help at all. On one occasion, when Vladimir tries to remember what on earth it was that he had been thinking about, he gives evidence of a sound memory at work as he backtracks down an associative route to recover what he wanted to say:

VLADIMIR: (*Paces midstage, fidgeting.*) Wait . . . we embraced . . . we were happy . . . happy . . . what do we do now that we're happy . . . go on waiting . . . waiting . . . let me think . . . it's coming . . . go on waiting . . . now that we're happy. . . let me see . . . ah! The tree!

(*Points and moves towards the tree.*)

(58, 1874-77)

These are the *only* three occasions in the course of the play when Vladimir's memory is unreliable. He thus features far less as 'yesterday's deformity' than the others, though he is not untouched by time. Physically, he suffers from an acute prostate problem; mentally, he has the odd lapse of recall typical of his age but, more significantly, emotionally he is haunted by memories of Estragon's stimulating society during less cerebrally straitened times. Vladimir is intensely irritated by his companion's erratic conversational inability to 'return the ball, . . . once in a way' (12, 116-7), especially since at other times, particularly when cursing, Estragon gives the impression of being as bright and inventive as his friend. Vladimir makes no secret of the fact that he is easily bored. But when he hails Pozzo as their saviour from tedium, he soon finds that the exhibitionist's verbiage grates on his refined sensibilities. Yet in spite of Vladimir's repertoire of pratfalls, calisthenics, tramp acts, vaudeville patter, formulaic exchange, boot routine, songs and cross-talk to offset his endemic ennui and disgust, he needs diversion so badly that he delays Pozzo repeatedly, pathetically begging him, 'Don't go yet' (80, 2705). And when attempts at communication prove less than satisfactory, he refuses to give up.

As the play continues we observe Vladimir's increasing dependency on his more emotionally self-reliant friend. Fifty years of Estragon's company has bred in Didi a strong desire to 'partner', to such an extent that Estragon's frequent snoozes constitute a threat and a deprivation. On those occasions he experiences a 'quantum of wantum' (*M*, 36). Beckett has said in the Proust monograph that

If love [. . .] is a function of man's sadness, friendship is a function of his cowardice [. . .] the attempt to communicate where no communication is possible is merely a simian vulgarity, or horribly comic like the madness that holds a conversation with the furniture.

(*P*, 63)

Vladimir's need for the reassurance of conversation, however desultory and unfulfilling, is so strong that Estragon is forced to pay lip-service to a spurious acknowledgment of his reciprocal dependency on his friend. 'We are happy', he says obediently, following on with 'What do we do now, now that we are happy?' (53, 1685-86).

The answer is inevitable: 'Wait for Godot'. Somehow, Vladimir has been seduced into believing that an outside agency, a *deus ex machina*, will deliver him from a situation of stasis which he finds increasingly taxing. His hope, instead of sustaining him, 'is like an addictive drug that intensifies suffering instead of alleviating it' (Rabinovitz, 1995: 214). And his diminishing belief in this redemption by 'Godot' exacerbates his plight. Jerry Aline Flieger argues imaginatively that

Godot is, then, less a character than a mode of the play; as the third — the Symbolic Other, the oedipal Father, the unconscious, the audience — he conditions space, his exteriority adding a witnessed dimension to the play as well as movement, which he stymies, and time, which he suspends.

(Flieger, 1991: 211)

With the 'suspension of time' Vladimir's obliging memory sometimes beguiles his boredom, but at other times, unstimulated and undermined by Estragon's short-term memory deficiencies, he feels the horror of his arid existence. 'What is terrible is to *have* thought' (57, 1829), he mourns. His self-indictment seems harsh in the light of his intellectual liveliness, but understandable given his depressing circumstances and the fact that their discourse is hollowed out by meaninglessness. Vladimir's dogged trawling through the past 'is reduced to a salvaging, to a use of memory for sheer distraction's sake' (Brinkley, 1988: 359). It is this which erodes Vladimir's confidence rather, than any diminishment of his mental powers. And 'Habit', as we are told by Beckett in *Proust*, 'is the Goddess of Dullness' (*P*, 33), sparing its practitioners the full impact of the agony of existence. In a particularly banal conversation about carrots and radishes, Vladimir admits grimly that: 'This is becoming really insignificant' (62, 1996). His perfunctory reaction to Estragon's rationalisation is anything but convincing:

ESTRAGON: We don't manage too badly, eh Didi, between the two of us?

VLADIMIR: Yes yes. Come on, we'll try the left first. [. . .]

ESTRAGON: We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?

VLADIMIR: Yes yes, we're magicians. But let us persevere in what we have resolved, before we forget.

(62, 2017-20)

Habit has eroded their language. Much of this has to do with the endless recycling of their experiences, as well as the depredations of time. If Vladimir and Estragon have accompanied each other for fifty years, as they assert (49, 1537), and Estragon contemplated a honeymoon before they came together, they must be in their seventies. If this is so (though one can never be sure of anything in this play) Vladimir's range of recall is extensive, and unlike the other characters in the play he is enabled to feel 'present to himself' (Olney, 1993: 862). Clearly, or maybe not so clearly, given widespread critical response, Beckett has been at pains to create in Vladimir a foil for the memory-challenged Estragon.

How does one undertake the difficult task of evaluating a working memory in a literary text? After all, the memory on display is not amenable to conventional testing procedures. One would therefore have to focus on its demonstrable semantic, episodic and procedural prowess (with considerations of short-term and long-term tenacity taken into account) to add to a more general impression.

Following that route, it seems apparent that Vladimir's *semantic* memory is in good working order; he has crisp recall for the most part. His grasp of detail is sound, as his memories appear to have been efficiently encoded, reliably stored, and can usually be readily accessed. By no stretch of the imagination could he be dubbed ignorant, despite his deprived circumstances. He displays a familiarity with history in his awareness of the period in which the Eiffel Tower was constructed (10, 35); of geography in his knowledge of the different areas of France, including the Macon country (55, 1731) and the Pyrenees (74, 2481); of the Bible in his grasp of the crucifixion as relayed by the four evangelists (12, 113) and of the life of Christ (49, 15110); of medicine in his identification of Lucky's goitre (25, 615) and of basic botany in his tentative identification of the willow tree (13, 161). Admittedly, this is all rudimentary, but it comes readily to hand. He is also possessed of curiosity, that trait that so often accompanies mental agility, and is able to generate imaginative and wide-ranging questions, especially to the boy or boys whom 'Godot' sends (47, 1446-80). With Estragon, too, he acts as a constant probe to force some sort

of response that will sustain him. Vladimir's conversation is enriched by intertextual reference which Estragon either does not know or has forgotten. What is significant, though, is that he expects Estragon to be able to pick up Shakespearean references (16, 280), which suggests that he probably could have done so at an earlier stage. Vladimir's conversation usually demands more of Estragon than Gogo is able to supply, which indicates either a lack of perception on Vladimir's part, or a relatively recent deterioration on Estragon's.

Apart from his recall of content and isolated items of knowledge, it is perhaps in the range of his vocabulary and the variety of his speech acts that Vladimir displays his semantic memory to greatest advantage. Vladimir is a wordsmith, a supple practitioner of discourse. He finds the selection of appropriate expression a matter of ease. He loathes a conversational vacuum, to such an extent that he finds Estragon's dozy periods of non-communication a great hardship. In the Beckett Festival of September, 1999, at the Barbican Theatre in London, Vladimir was played by an Irishman, Barry McGovern, who lent convincing resonance to Vladimir's constant interchange of blarney. After fifty years Estragon has wearied of his companion's insistent conversational demands, especially as his own resources diminish markedly throughout the play. He admonishes Vladimir: 'In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent'. Vladimir's reply is still positive at this stage of the play: 'You're right, we're inexhaustible' (55, 1756-58). The pair are clearly not inexhaustible; in fact they are frequently stymied, in spite of the rich tonal variety of much of their dialogue. Their language, after all, is contingent on their stagnant reality. In this regard Wolfgang Iser points out:

Although the characters are constantly speaking to one another, their dramatic language lacks those factors that Ingarden described as expression, communication, and reciprocal influence [. . .] If they continue to speak in spite of this, it is to convince themselves that they are alive.

(Iser, 1966: 253, 255)

Vladimir, in particular, craves 'expression, communication, and reciprocal influence'. He lives by the word. But sometimes the 'wordy-gurdy' (*U*, 367) simply refuses to oblige. Painful periods of silence intrude into the play's verbal patterning. 'Silence,' says Beckett, 'is pouring into this play like water into a sinking ship' (in McMillan and Knowlson, eds, 1993: xiv). Significantly, this is not 'a silence as plenum beyond language, but as linguistic failure' (Wolosky in Budick and Iser,

eds, 1989: 183). The long silences do not qualify as pregnant pauses, but as communicative breakdown. Yet Vladimir, though bored to tears, is ostensibly equipped to communicate adequately, so the impasse is probably to be found in Estragon's reception of his conversation or in the nature of communication itself. I shall endeavour to indicate throughout this chapter that both options can be supported by an attentive reading of the play.

In an investigation of Vladimir's linguistic perception at a superficial level it appears that the only lexical problem he experiences is with Pozzo's use of the idiosyncratic 'knook' (31,858), an expression which has mystified audiences throughout the play's history. In the conventional exchange of casual conversation where he is never at a loss for words, whatever they signify, Vladimir tries consciously to hone his language to make it more accurate. It is almost as though, realising the inadequacy of interchange, he must strive for ever more precise expression.

His facility in spawning alternatives seems almost effortless, constituting the basis for one of the pair's most frequent 'games' (20, 25, 55, 69). The most famous of these interchanges showcases Vladimir's creative powers in comparison with the dull thud of Estragon's embattled repetition:

ESTRAGON: All the dead voices.
VLADIMIR: They make a noise like wings.
ESTRAGON: Like leaves.
VLADIMIR: Like sand.
ESTRAGON: Like leaves.
(*Silence.*)
VLADIMIR: They all speak at once.
ESTRAGON: Each one to itself.
VLADIMIR: Rather they whisper.
ESTRAGON: They rustle.
VLADIMIR: They murmur.
ESTRAGON: They rustle.
...
VLADIMIR: They make a noise like feathers.
ESTRAGON: Like leaves.
VLADIMIR: Like ashes.
ESTRAGON: Like leaves.
(*Long silence.*)
VLADIMIR: Say something!
ESTRAGON: I'm seeking.
(*Long silence.*)

VLADIMIR: (*In anguish*) Say anything at all!

(55-56, 1763-92)

For one who relishes words as much as Vladimir does, an inability to attempt precise expression constitutes privation, whatever his audience and whatever the limitations of language itself. He has little patience with Estragon's verbal impasses, affording him a lower footing by calling him 'imbecile' early on in the play (12, 1219). Beckett critic, Hugh Kenner, is rather more charitable, believing that 'Estragon's simple trope is, thanks to his sheer stubbornness, in each case the last word' (Kenner, 1973: 34). But to Vladimir, his friend's condition is not so easily attributed to stubbornness. It is disconcerting. Estragon continues to respond coherently to the conversational codes that have entertained the friends for over fifty years, albeit with an increasing semantic and ideational thinness that Vladimir only sometimes registers. Moreover, Vladimir can provide a ready resource of forgotten detail when Estragon's memory fails him, which misleads him further. But Estragon's gross lapses of memory — of place, person, event, name and intertext — distress Vladimir from time to time, especially as he is unable to attribute them to a distinct cause, to a recognisable mental condition or disease. Lacking precise medical and psychological knowledge, he is unable to make the specific connections required to contextualise Estragon's deficiencies, especially as his condition appears to be so erratic. In fact, it is due to the unevenness and unpredictability of the early stages of Alzheimer's disease that Beckett manages to cover his tracks, sustaining the 'perhaps' element that he factors into his work. Estragon's ability to recall is by no means predictable. When it comes to an exchange of insults, for instance, Estragon proves that he is the master. Long practice has honed his skill, making it less susceptible to corrosion. But though Vladimir is finally vanquished by his rebarbative friend in a colourful fusillade, his repertoire of curses is predictably extensive:

VLADIMIR: Ceremonious ape!

ESTRAGON: Punctilious pig!

...

VLADIMIR: Moron!

ESTRAGON: Vermin!

VLADIMIR: Abortion!

ESTRAGON: Morpion!

VLADIMIR: Sewer-rat!

ESTRAGON: Curate!

VLADIMIR: Cretin!

ESTRAGON: (*With finality*) Critic!

(68, 2250-65)

Not only can Vladimir control the tone that he desires; he is adept, too, at regulating rhythm. This is particularly apparent in the climax and diminuendo of his greeting: 'Now? . . . (*Joyous*) There you are again . . . (*Indifferent*) There we are again . . . (*Gloomy*) There I am again' (53, 1652-53). His joy at seeing his friend is almost immediately cancelled by the reality of their unsatisfactory relationship and the even gloomier alternative of facing life on his own. 'The future, as always,' says Gerry Dukes, 'is a deferred catastrophe' (Dukes, 1999: 10),⁶ with Vladimir's attempted communication rebounding on himself.

In spite of the unsatisfactory nature of much of their interchange, Vladimir's control of the vocabulary that he selects continues as carefully as ever. In a piece of rhetoric reminiscent of Pozzo's overblown utterance, Vladimir engages in a self-enhancing life-review. Though Pozzo's pleas for help fall on deaf ears for a long time, they are suddenly invested with significance as Vladimir launches forth: ' "To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears! But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is in us." (*Pause. They pose.*)' (73, 2412-16).

Both pose and verbal afflatus are reminiscent of Pozzo's more obnoxious self-portraiture. Vladimir pontificates as though he has osmotically absorbed the showman's pompous rhetoric. His syntax is convoluted, his vocabulary elevated, and he includes such public-speaking flourishes as rhetorical questions to garnish his formal discourse. But unlike Pozzo, Vladimir has control of the elevated register he has selected, with the exception of the anticlimactic 'Or for night to fall' (73, 2432). Rousingly, absurdly, he 'rallies his troops':

VLADIMIR: Let us make the most of it before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us! What do you say?

(ESTRAGON *pulls free and, tired, sits, says nothing.*)

It is true that when with folded arms we weigh the pros and cons we are no less a credit to our species. The tiger bounds to the help of his congeners without the least reflection, or else he slinks away into the depths of the thickets. But that is not the question. What are we doing here, *that* is the question. And we

are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come — [. . .]

Or for night to fall. (*Pause.*) We have kept our appointment, and that's an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?

ESTRAGON: Billions.

(73, 2420-35)

By responding mockingly to the self-vaunting question, Estragon deflates Vladimir's smug flourish. The orator is thrown for a moment, but, having built up a head of steam, continues, using high-flown language like 'constrain', 'beguile', 'foundering' and 'abyssal depths'. He concludes with a patronising question reminiscent of the lecture hall: 'You follow my reasoning?' (73, 2445). Estragon, impressed, is inspired by Vladimir's reason until he is tempted, bathetically, by Pozzo's offer of hard cash. Sylvia Paine's generalised comment seems to have particular bearing on Vladimir's self-congratulatory speech when she says:

Beckett will not let us exalt man so easily. Man remains stuck in the mud, dust, or shit, and no glorification of his feelings can extract him. Man has compassion for the human condition because he feels sorry for himself within it; universal suffering is self-referential.

(Paine, 1981: 46)

On the other hand, Vladimir's second 'soliloquy', in which he speculates on his state of consciousness and the veracity of his memory, seems that much more sincere. It is a tentative, plangent speech, its language less high-flown, its rhythms less hectic and the burden of its meaning invested in the Schopenhauerian motif that 'birth was the death of him' (*APM*, 421). This theme is to recur in *Not I*, *Rough for Radio I* and *A Piece of Monologue*. The indeterminacy of their situation, Estragon's wavering wits and Pozzo's dissolving persona have all contributed to Vladimir's loss of confidence in the validity of his discernment. With no objective means of verifying his perceptions, he questions himself, his existence and the nature of life in the most haunting and poignant speech of the play. In a 'Proustian attempt to get beyond the habitual' (Butler in Butler and Davis, eds, 1990: 70), Vladimir is fully in command of the register he has chosen, this time simpler, yet more profound. He asks:

Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be?

(ESTRAGON, *having struggled with his boots in vain, is dozing off again.*
VLADIMIR *stares at him.*)

He'll know nothing. He'll tell me about the blows he received and I'll give him a carrot. (*Pause*) Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. (*He listens.*) But habit is a great deadener.

(82, 2758-68)

Vladimir, bereft of answers, faces the same dilemma as the speaker who asks in Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale'

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music; — Do I wake or sleep?

(Keats, 1973: 348)

and has come to doubt the truth content of his experience. No longer able to claim the reassurance of predictability in people he has known for a long time, he turns an inquisitorial spotlight onto himself. Like many other characters in Beckett's plays, Vladimir struggles towards Bishop Berkeley's realisation that the unobserved life, lacking corroboration, also lacks validity (in Honderich, ed., 1995: 91). If events cannot be verified empirically, can they be said to be real? He has finally come to the numbing realisation that Estragon cannot be relied upon to support or refute anything. Vladimir has tested his friend repeatedly, hoping against hope that Gogo's memory will function sufficiently to confirm his recollection of their miasmal days. But all he encounters is disease-ridden decay as they grow old, ungracefully, together. Beckett's aesthetic is rooted in failure; he despairs over the impotence of memory and language to clarify, boost or salvage.

In a seminal interview with Tom F. Driver entitled 'Beckett by the Madeleine', Beckett comments on the confusion that intrudes into every aspect of life. He says:

The confusion is not my invention. We cannot listen to a conversation for five minutes without being acutely aware of the confusion. It is all around us and our only chance now is to let it in. The only chance of renovation is to open our eyes and see the mess. It is not a mess you can make sense of.

(in Driver, 1961: 22)

He believes that for art to respond to this imperative it must forge a 'new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos [. . .] To find a new form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now' (in Driver, 1961: 23). Highly formalised though *Waiting for Godot* is in its pattern of 'doubling, mirroring and reversing' (Friedman, 1989: 268), the play makes a concerted attempt to 'accommodate the mess'. It foregrounds the 'confusion' that inevitably subverts the stolid surface of discourse to reveal the chaos below; it examines the poverty of language and futility of communication contingent on the act of waiting. We are reminded of the original French title of the play, *En Attendant Godot*, which means 'While Waiting for Godot', with the accent on process rather than progress. In this waiting game, 'Habit', or habituated response, plays a major role. While engaging in his second dialogue with Godot's messenger, for instance, Vladimir can recall the exact content and cadences of his previous interchange. He uses this recollection as a probe to prompt the boy as he retraces his discursive circuit (82-83, 2774-2790). His memory for exact recall is also evident in his use of the Latin quotation from St Thomas Aquinas: *Memoria praeteritorum bonorum*.⁷ Once again Vladimir's discourse indicates a superior education where memory traces persist decades later. But once again his erudition aids him not one whit in his attempts to connect with Estragon in a mutually satisfying way.

Inevitably, much of his conversation consists in the more prosaic greeting and parting rituals of phatic expression. He sometimes gingers this speech fodder with an element of play which transforms it into elaborate politeness rituals, such as: 'Your worship wishes to assert his prerogatives?' (18, 355). In tabulating the range of his speech acts, one becomes fully aware of the extent of Vladimir's conversational versatility. In addition to the examples already discussed, he can be seen to ask probing questions, use hyperbole (10, 33), aphorism (11, 72-3), conjecture with extrapolation (16, 278-81), metaphor (18, 353), imaginative projection (19, 380-82), deprecation (25, 609), accusation with substantiation (32, 872), persuasion (41, 1213), command (42, 1257), discriminating overview (44, 1341), precise instruction (48, 1485-87), remonstrance

(49, 1508-9), logical alternative (50, 1562), revelation (53, 1647-48), platitude (53, 1667-68) and metacommunicative message (62, 1996). This list is by no means exhaustive, but it serves to indicate Vladimir's easy mastery of varied discourse strategies and his facility in their use. His semantic memory is clearly in good working order in his 'obstinate endeavour to erect a structure of words and ideas, actions and habit', a structure arching 'over the void' (Robinson, 1969: 245).

Vladimir's semantic memory is sound, but, if anything, his *episodic* memory is even better, as his perception and recall of the 'shape' and content of extended sense units is clearly defined and recalled. Vladimir has a clear sense of 'gestalt'. This reveals itself in both obvious and unusual ways. When Pozzo asks rather enigmatically, 'How do you find me'? (36, 1015), it is Vladimir who is the first to realize that the 'frame' of 'performance' is being used, and responds: 'Oh very good, very very good' (36, 1018). In this instance it is his episodic memory which supplies a sense of proper context essential for appropriate response. This is equally apparent when he perceives the small boy's apprehension at coming close to them after Pozzo and Lucky have left. Unlike Estragon, who bullies the child, Vladimir understands the circumstances and is soothing and propitiatory in his response.

His grasp of the passing of time is much more sophisticated than that of Estragon, who is predominantly shackled to the present:

VLADIMIR: That passed the time.
ESTRAGON: It would have passed in any case.
VLADIMIR: Yes but not so rapidly.

(44, 1329-31)

This strong sense also includes his ability to predict. Using his former experience as indicative, Vladimir is convinced that a tree cannot possibly sprout leaves in a single night. The following conversation reveals the strength of his episodic memory in comparison with his friend's fragmentary recall:

ESTRAGON: The tree?
VLADIMIR: Do you not remember?
ESTRAGON: I'm tired.
VLADIMIR: Look at it.

ESTRAGON: (*Looks quickly, then turns back.*) I see nothing.
 VLADIMIR: But yesterday evening it was all pale and bare like a skeleton.
 And now it's covered with leaves.
 ESTRAGON: Leaves?
 VLADIMIR: In a single night.
 ESTRAGON: It must be the spring.
 VLADIMIR: But in a single night!
 ESTRAGON: I tell you we weren't here yesterday. Another of your
 nightmares.

(59,1879-91)

It is the episodic memory, with its temporal and spatial dimensions, that enables the individual to make comparisons. If the past dissipates as quickly as it passes, as it does in Estragon's case, it cannot provide a means to evaluate the present. Thus Vladimir and Estragon have strikingly different reactions to Pozzo and Lucky's eruptions into their lives:

VLADIMIR: How they've changed!
 ESTRAGON: Who?
 VLADIMIR: Those two.
 ESTRAGON: That's the idea, let's make a little conversation.
 VLADIMIR: Haven't they?
 ESTRAGON: What?
 VLADIMIR: Changed.
 ESTRAGON: Very likely. They all change. Only we can't.
 VLADIMIR: Likely! It's certain. Didn't you see them?
 ESTRAGON: I suppose I did. But I don't know them.
 VLADIMIR: Yes you do know them.

(44, 1341-51)

Because Vladimir's short-term memory is equalled by his long-term recall, the past seems to extend like an accessible hinterland, adding resonance to his current activities. Descriptions of the friends' earlier shenanigans once again include the comparative element as he reminisces: 'Hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower, among the first. We were presentable in those days. Now it's too late. They wouldn't even let us up' (10, 35-37).

In the same way as he refuses to entertain a recital of Gogo's vivid nightmares, he balks at remembering Estragon's actual suicide attempt, though it is evident from the dialogue that he remembers the event clearly:

ESTRAGON: Do you remember the day I threw myself into the Rhône?
 VLADIMIR: We were grape-harvesting.
 ESTRAGON: You fished me out.
 VLADIMIR: That's all dead and buried.
 ESTRAGON: My clothes dried in the sun.
 VLADIMIR: There's no good harking back on that.

(49, 1538-43)

Nor is there any good in reminiscing about the Macon country and comparing it with their present locality, since Estragon has no recollection of ever having been there or having noticed its distinctive red soil. As Vladimir gropes his way towards Estragon's sensory starvation and voided reality, he observes: 'Ah no, Gogo, the truth is there are things escape you that don't escape me, you must feel it yourself' (53, 1667-68). Iser points out that, for Estragon, 'experience ceases to be a guide and cannot even serve to connect identical situations' (Iser, 1966: 252). Little wonder, then, that Vladimir, utterly perplexed, concludes near the end of the play: 'I don't know what to think anymore' (82, 2755), since no one he encounters can corroborate his memories.

The one area of recollection where he and Estragon are equally proficient is *procedural*. They have their dance steps, their physical jerks (69) and routines, all the vaudeville rituals they have built up for their amusement over the years. These they are still able to enjoy, as this area of memory continues intact in both of them. It interests me that John Bayley, in his attempts to care for his wife, Iris Murdoch, in the late stages of Alzheimer's disease, noted 'the continuity of joking' with some relief:

Humour seems to survive anything. A burst of laughter, snatches of doggerel, song, teasing nonsense rituals once lovingly exchanged, awake an abruptly happy response, and a sudden beaming smile that must resemble those moments in the past between explorers and savages, when some sort of clowning pantomime on the part of the former seems often to have evoked instant comprehension and amusement [. . .] Only a joke survives, the last thing that finds its way into consciousness when the brain is atrophied.

(Bayley, 1998: 56,58,59)

If one needed confirmation that Beckett's observations of the course of Alzheimer's disease were strikingly accurate, Bayley's description would bear this out. Beckett has Vladimir attempt these ploys to offset the vacancy in his companion, and often he is successful. All things considered,

Vladimir's role in the play is singular. As a reasonable man with a well-preserved memory, he is the benchmark against whom the other three elderly characters are gauged. Though mentally fit, cerebrally 'undeformed' by his 'yesterdays', it is his circumstances that are pitiable. He suffers, as all care-givers of Alzheimer's patients do, from observing at first hand the ravages of an irreversible disease which day by day reduces his conversational options as surely as it does those of his friend's. Despite Vladimir's mental agility and his sound semantic, episodic and procedural memories, he realises with increasing desperation that he is doomed. Furthermore, there is nothing he can do about it, as the locus of his 'deformity' is sited in Estragon's deteriorating mind.

When Alois Alzheimer, in 1906, first identified the disease that bears his name, he discovered an accumulation of filamentary material which he called 'neurofibrillary tangles', occurring in greatest numbers in the hippocampus (Parkin, 1987: 132). Subsequently, these tangles have been proven to be filled with a protein called 'tau' (Nash, 2000: 54). They are mostly accompanied by what Alzheimer called 'senile plaques', caused by beta amyloid proteins which strangle the brain cells essential to memory functioning. Alzheimer's research identified the dementia he had studied as a medical condition resulting from a diseased state, 'rather than the normal manifestation of the brain's aging' (Schwartz, 1990: xix). The clinical and pathological features reported by Alzheimer have become the standard characteristics of the disease, 'a terminal condition which leads inexorably to a state of total cognitive debilitation and death' (Gray and Sala in Morris, ed., 1996: 23). Since the brain has little capacity to regenerate its nerve terminals, the progression of the dementia is irreversible, depriving its victims first of their memory, then their intelligence, and finally their identity.

As it worsens, Alzheimer's disease is associated primarily with the 'reduced ability to encode information into long-term memory and anchor it to the pre-existing pool of memories' (Gray and Sala in Morris, ed., 1996: 419). There is also an increasing poverty in the detail of the memories that can be recalled. The episodic memory is initially affected; therefore 'the defective learning of entities and events that have a unique temporal and spatial placement in the individual's autobiography is the hallmark of the condition' (Schwartz, 1990: 93).⁸ Early signs also include confusion, lack of concentration and delusions of persecution, accompanied by some awareness of failing powers (Munsinger, 1983: 460-61). All of these symptoms are displayed by Estragon.

A person in the early stages of the disease can maintain a semblance of normality for some time by resorting to banality and small talk to mask insidious cerebral deterioration. But with ‘the impoverishment of available communicative tools’ a victim’s language becomes increasingly formulaic and rehearsed as creativity and spontaneity erode, because ‘the reduction of the available lexical stock is correlated to the severity of the dementia’ (Marcie et al. in Hillert, ed., 1994: 113). This leads inevitably to semantically empty discourse, with sentences that are simple and short, as Estragon’s are throughout most of the play. Emery reports that ‘vocabulary becomes impoverished, speech concretized and circumlocutory, with confrontation-naming progressively impaired in Alzheimer’s syndrome’ (Emery in Morris, ed., 1996: 174). Pauses, too, dog the discourse of Alzheimer’s victims because of their difficulties in word-finding and verbalisation. The total period of the disease ‘can vary from a few months to as much as ten years’ (Reeves and Wedding, 1994: 49).

In their book, *Caring for the Alzheimer Patient: A Practical Guide*, Dippel and Hutton enumerate the probable symptoms of those in different stages of the malady. In the early to middle stages (which Estragon seems to experience in the play) they characterise sufferers as experiencing minor difficulties with speech or word-finding; being unable to recall names of acquaintances; being incapable of recalling entire events without prompting; frequently asking the same question over and over; suffering from nocturnal confusion or confusion upon waking; getting lost when walking in the neighbourhood; being unable to recognize the faces of recent acquaintances; suffering from growing apathy, increased rigidity, despondency and angry outbursts; showing a lack of regard for the feelings of others; demonstrating quarrelsome, irritable and restless behaviour; and being prey to nightmares, disturbed sleep and increased wakefulness (Dippel and Hutton, 1988: 21-23).⁹ Though Beckett never identifies Estragon’s specific malaise *per se*, the accuracy of his portrayal of early to mid-term Alzheimer’s disease reveals precise knowledge, understanding and observation on his part. The quirky unevenness of Estragon’s memory (a typical symptom of the disease) mystifies Vladimir and serves to mask the seriousness of Gogo’s predicament while it protects him from audiences who would dismiss him as merely demented. With all his problems, Estragon is fully characterised as Estragon: grumpy, quirky and infuriatingly lovable. He amounts to infinitely more than diagnosis and prognosis, however accurately depicted.

Despite Beckett's interest in abnormality, it is highly probable that he would have called any attempt to define 'normality' as presumptuous. Many of the characters whom he brings to life in his novels and plays would qualify as so abnormal that in the everyday scheme of things they would be placed beyond the pale. But in Beckett's inclusive world there is no pale, only a shadow line where everyone congregates. Little wonder that Vladimir says firmly of Estragon and himself, 'We are men' (75, 2507), and that Estragon declares that Pozzo, who is clearly abnormal, is 'all humanity' (76, 2562). Thus Estragon's gathering darkness does not deprive him of his claim to consideration in the eyes of his friend, or of compassion from audiences and readers. He is recognisably human. His mind might be increasingly clouded, contributing to the 'chaos' and the 'mess', but he can still hold his own at times.

This being so, the expression of a coherent philosophy still forms part of his character. Because he is far more cynical than his sanguine friend he has developed an outlook to match. He views birth as a cause for regret, enquiring of Vladimir in Schopenhauerian vein whether one should repent having been born (11, 81). The only aphorism that he delivers in the course of the play is mood-congruent with his negativity: 'We are all born mad. Some remain so' (73, 2446-47).¹⁰ This is highly ironic in the light of his impending dementia. Vladimir, of course, does not agree.

The philosophy that informs his responses is grounded in logic, which persists despite other depredations. After torturing Vladimir with his uncertainty about Godot, Estragon concludes firmly: 'If he came yesterday and we weren't here you may be sure he won't come again today' (14, 208-09). He approaches suicide in the same matter-of-fact way. When Vladimir does not grasp the practical problems involved, Estragon responds testily: 'use your intelligence, can't you?' (16, 293). And when Vladimir remains at a loss, Estragon spells out the solution with impeccable logic: 'Gogo light — bough not break — Gogo dead. Didi heavy — bough break — Didi alone' (17, 298-99).

Common sense notwithstanding, much of the chop logic of the play emanates from Estragon's seemingly arbitrary memory. There is a pattern to Gogo's forgetfulness, but not one that would immediately be apparent to a theatre-goer unacquainted with the play. On reflection, however, an audience might realise that Gogo's long-term memory is much more stable than his short-term

capacity, even though the former is partly eroded and the latter is strengthened from time to time by the ‘recency effect’.

He is able to recall, for instance, the intricacies of the joke about the brothel involving the fair, dark or red-haired prostitute (15, 244-46). This has obviously been repeated *ad nauseum* down the years and Vladimir cannot bear to hear it again. Its survival in Estragon’s memory is ensured by its being overlearned and transferred to the less threatened semantic memory. With this type of preferential encoding, partial amnesiacs, like Estragon, are often able to repeat poems, songs, jingles and jokes when their access to other items has long since failed them. Details about Christ’s living conditions (49, 1507-12) are probably located there, as are the connections between blindness and prophecy which Estragon surprisingly recalls. Upon encountering Pozzo in much reduced circumstances, Vladimir enquires:

VLADIMIR: Do you not recognise us?

POZZO: I am blind.

(*Silence.*)

VLADIMIR: Blind!

ESTRAGON: Perhaps he can see into the future.

(78, 2601-05)

Tiresias, though unnamed, has left a trace in Estragon’s murky memory. Another literary echo is to be found in the Romantic formula for inspiration, ‘We should turn resolutely toward Nature’ (58, 1844). Once again, there is no name to accompany the incomplete cerebral circuit, only a stray impulse of cultural awareness. But proper names, though rare, do occur from time to time. They include the Holy Land and the Dead Sea (11, 92-93), Christ (49, 1507), Cain and Abel (76, 2556-60), the Rhone (49, 1538) and the Pyrenees (74, 2480). The place names which Estragon can still remember have a highly affective charge as they are associated with intense desire. The Dead Sea was to have been his honeymoon haven (typical Beckettian humour this); the Rhone, the site of longed-for oblivion and the Pyrenees the picturesque backdrop for escape. The fact that these names have persisted shows their importance in Estragon’s self-narrative.

For the time being, at least, these recollections are lodged in Estragon’s long-term memory, creating a semblance of normality in his ability to respond. It is his short-term memory that is

deplorable, operating as it does only on the recency effect. To misrepresent Matthew Arnold, ‘the light gleams and is gone’ (in Allott, ed., 1979: 254).¹¹ Thus, when Vladimir orders Estragon to give Lucky his hat, Estragon responds feelingly, ‘Me! After what he did to me! Never!’ (38, 1099), and when Vladimir seizes Lucky’s ‘thinking’ hat to shut him up, Estragon exults, ‘Avenged!’ (40, 1197). The recency effect has come into play here, where

our sensory systems are ‘wired’ to permit us to maintain a sensory impression — an impression that represents the encountered stimuli with faithful integrity — for a brief period after the cessation of direct receptor contact with an environmental event.

(Spear, 1978: 152)

By the next morning, however, the memory has degraded to the trace: ‘I remember a lunatic who kicked the shins off me. Then he played the fool’ (54, 1712-13). All specific detail has disappeared.

The one occasion when Estragon surprisingly remembers that he is waiting for Godot is in response to a recognisable pattern. Pozzo asks, ‘What is he waiting for?’ (78, 2637), Vladimir echoes, ‘What are you waiting for?’ (78, 2638) and Estragon unexpectedly replies, ‘I’m waiting for Godot’ (78, 2639). It might be that the familiar rhythm prompts the desired answer or, more simply, that the inconsistency of the disease has produced the kind of anomaly that Beckett uses to avoid being over-explicit.

When it comes to Estragon’s *procedural* memory, Beckett’s depiction is in line with his clinically accurate configuration of Estragon’s weaknesses and strengths. Research has shown that the perceptuo-motor skills that sustain the procedural memory remain unaffected throughout the early and middle stages of Alzheimer’s disease and that, surprisingly, Alzheimer patients are capable of learning new procedures up to an advanced stage of the dementia (Schwartz, 1990: 94). Beckett could not have had access to contemporary research, but his exposure to the condition and his brilliant recall have compensated to a remarkable degree. The persistence of Estragon’s procedural capabilities is to be observed primarily in his ability to learn new dance steps and the adroitness with which he handles the hat routine. It is clear from this that Estragon is able to

sustain a procedure with dexterity, since the stage directions specify that ‘the whole exchange is rapid and uninterrupted’ (65, 2136-37).

Estragon’s discourse is often ‘rapid and uninterrupted’ too. Although he is morose and monosyllabic to begin with, his dialogue consisting of typical amnesic simple-sentence responses, we are alerted to wider possibilities when he claims to have been a poet (11, 97). There is little evidence to support his claim at this stage, but it soon becomes apparent that Estragon is skilled in the discourse of negation. Because his depression makes him irritable, he is predisposed to rudeness and scorn. ‘People are bloody ignorant apes,’ he declares with gusto (12, 139). Irony, too, is a constant part of his repertoire. When Vladimir bores him past endurance, he remarks, ‘I find this really most extraordinarily interesting’ (12, 118), and when the landscape disgusts him he uses travelogue discourse to disparage it. ‘Charming spot’(13, 147) he sneers, ‘Inspiring prospects’ (12, 150). Later in the play he expands on the theme: ‘When you think of the beauty of the way. (*Pause.*) And the goodness of the wayfarers’ (15, 235-36). His sour sentiments are expressed in the striking metaphors, ‘Everything oozes’ (54, 1696) and ‘It’s never the same pus from one second to the next’ (54, 1698). Even more intense is the bitter accusation, ‘I’ve puked my puke of a life away here, I tell you! Here!’ (55, 1735). Strangely, even his loss of locality has been commented on most approvingly. Burkman admiringly observes: ‘Estragon’s inability to recognize their place of meeting is again a measure of his progress; he has already given up scenery as a mere cover-up of the void that he has experienced as the essential reality’ (Burkman,1986: 40). Medical science posits a very different explanation, with Schwartz explaining that the inability to recognise topographic locations is ‘an important aspect of the retrieval defect at episodic level’ (Schwartz, 1990: 94).

What Estragon never ‘gives up’ is his malicious pleasure in subversion. He undermines Vladimir’s confidence in what day of the week it is by devising a battery of questions to shake his friend. The effect on Vladimir is manifest as he looks ‘wildly about him, as though the date were inscribed in the landscape’ (14, 204-05). Because Vladimir craves precision, he finds the blurring of temporal relations unbearable, and Estragon, manipulative by nature, plays it to the hilt.

Above all, Estragon is the master of the rude rejoinder. Let Vladimir preen himself to keep his spirits up and he will meet with inevitable deflation through Estragon's cutting comment. Vladimir sets himself up for such mockery when he parades in Lucky's hat:

VLADIMIR: No, but how do I look in it?

(He turns his head coquettishly to and fro, minces like a mannequin.)

ESTRAGON: Hideous.

(65, 2140-42)

Bathos aside, no repertoire of rudeness is complete without its arsenal of insults. Here, Gogo is predictably impressive. Since cruelty, both verbal and physical, features in Estragon's character, one is not surprised by his venomous reaction to Vladimir's 'It's that bastard Pozzo at it again' (76, 2525). The fact that Pozzo is blind and unable to get up unassisted does not deter Estragon from sadistically demanding: 'Make him stop it. Kick him in the crotch' (76, 2526).

But his conversation is not all negative. At the other end of the scale he reveals a flair for the niceties of phatic ritual which he ridicules amusingly:

ESTRAGON: Here we go. *(Goes to Pozzo raising his hat and wipes seat of stool with it.)* Be seated, sir, I beg of you.

POZZO: No, no, I wouldn't think of it. *(Pause. Aside)* Ask me again.

ESTRAGON: Come come, take a seat, I beseech you, you'll get pneumonia.

POZZO: You really think so?

ESTRAGON: Why it's absolutely certain.

(34, 961-66)

He indulges in a similarly elaborate farewell ritual with Pozzo (43, 1279-88) and a conciliatory one with Vladimir (68, 2244-48). Estragon's social skills seem surprisingly durable, given his condition, but Beckett is accurate, as usual. John Bayley lends support to his observation. In speaking of his wife as an Alzheimer's victim, he comments on the unevenness of the pathology, reporting that Iris's social reflexes were still very much in evidence. This is because

The relative preservation of old skills can be deceptive. For example, communication skills tend to be preserved. A verbally fluent person can continue to produce grammatically correct sentences using a large vocabulary despite a moderately advanced dementia. It is only when one looks for the meaning in the

communication, and compares it with the quality the affected person was previously capable of achieving, that the disability becomes evident.
(Heston and White, 1983: 8)

Estragon's vocabulary is extensive. Though he generally prefers plain words, from time to time he indulges in sophistication. 'Dreadful privation' (11, 85), 'assert his prerogatives' (18, 355), 'puffing like a grampus' (29, 753) and his adaptation of Shelley's poem 'To the Moon', 'Pale for weariness of climbing heaven and gazing on the likes of us' (48, 1499, 1501) give evidence of his skill as a wordsmith. At times, like Krapp, he relishes words as he surrenders himself to the sound of them. 'Calm', he says voluptuously (15, 238), and 'He's a scream. He's lost his dudeen' (33, 912), he rhymes.

As previously mentioned, Estragon has obviously been skilled, too, at the word-game that the pair have often played to pass the time. Though it is a fairly taxing cerebral exercise in which they are to engage at intervals throughout the play, this early one is particularly notable for Estragon's success. Unlike his later efforts, this game does not stall because he cannot continue with the parade of alternatives that Vladimir seems to spawn so effortlessly. At this stage of *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon more than holds his own:

ESTRAGON: Ah yes! (*He raises what remains of the carrot by the stub of the leaf.*)
Funny, the more you eat the worse it gets.
[. . .]
VLADIMIR: Question of temperament.
ESTRAGON: Of character.
VLADIMIR: Nothing you can do about it.
ESTRAGON: No use struggling.
VLADIMIR: One is what one is.
ESTRAGON: No use wriggling.
VLADIMIR: The essential doesn't change.
ESTRAGON: Nothing to be done . . .
(20, 428-41)

Here Beckett gives us a glimpse of what used to be the customary currency of their conversation, revealing Vladimir and Estragon as being perfectly matched for once. At this stage of the play Estragon's condition accords with Parkin's description of selective amnesia:

Preservation of language and general intellectual function suggest an intact *semantic* memory, and the ability to make use of previously acquired skills indicates that *procedural* memory is also unaffected. By contrast, the almost complete failure to recall or recognize novel information and the difficulty in remembering past personal events suggests a selective failure of *episodic* memory.
(Parkin, 1987: 90, my emphasis)

In further examples of syncopated exchange, however, Estragon is shown struggling to meet the demands of the game as his semantic memory falters. Cummings and Benson explain:

the pattern of linguistic changes occurring during the course of Alzheimer's disease demonstrates that the loss of language is not a *global* deterioration and does not affect all aspects simultaneously. Progressive changes occur in a predictable sequence, and the language characteristic of the patient depends on the stages of the disease. The earliest abnormalities are emptiness of spontaneous speech and poor word-list generation [. . .] Throughout the process the semantic and pragmatic aspects of language are progressively impaired, whereas the syntactic and phonologic components are relatively spared.
(Cummings and Benson, 1983: 41, my emphasis)

In the beginning of the play there is little striking evidence of Estragon's erratic mental state, though in comparison with Vladimir he appears to be grumpy and monosyllabic, far less expansive than his good-natured friend. He does seem strangely vague about the beating he has reportedly endured (9, 26), but then he is elderly, has just woken up, and might well have had a nightmare. For the time being there is little to disconcert an audience, as Estragon is able to respond appropriately to his friend's comments and enquiries. To all intents and purposes he appears to be normal.

Nonetheless, Estragon's attitude to his nightly beatings is peculiar. He carries no physical evidence of their having taken place, can recall no details and does not seem to be traumatised when he gives his morning's report. Yet his paranoia is so entrenched that, despite the absence of evidence, he fervently believes that the beatings have occurred. Vladimir humours the delusion; more, one suspects, in an attempt to make conversation than actively to support his misguided friend:

VLADIMIR: (*Hurt, coldly*) May one inquire where His Highness spent the night?
 ESTRAGON: In a ditch.
 VLADIMIR: (*Admiringly*) A ditch! Where?
 ESTRAGON: (*Without gesture*) Over there.
 VLADIMIR: And they didn't beat you?
 ESTRAGON: Beat me? Certainly they beat me.
 VLADIMIR: The same lot as usual?
 ESTRAGON: The same? I don't know.

(9, 19-26)

This scene is played within minutes of the rising of the curtain. Beckett loses no time in delineating Estragon's condition with clinical accuracy, though this is not obvious at the start. The early stages of Alzheimer's disease, when the spatial-temporal dimension of the episodic memory is affected and the short-term memory flickers intermittently, are often accompanied by free-floating anxiety, paranoia and a depression caused by waning powers (Reeves and Wedding, 1994: 15). Beckett draws his characters, as always, with considerable subtlety. Estragon's mental disabilities do not proclaim themselves stridently throughout the play, largely because 'language skills seem to deteriorate less rapidly than other aspects of memory' (Parkin, 1987: 127). Estragon himself seems mostly unaware of his deteriorating state, while Vladimir registers it only intermittently, so well endowed is he with compensatory imaginative flair. Beckett cleverly covers his tracks by interspersing scenes depicting Estragon's amnesia with evidence of his still functioning powers. His amnesia does not constitute a random decomposition of the memory system, but a selective decay which attacks some aspects of the memory while leaving others unimpaired. He is not an obvious 'case history'.

In the second act these symptoms are, however, even more pronounced. Estragon is visibly upset 'after his beating' and rejects Vladimir's overtures of emotional support. He displays the typical Alzheimer's behavioural symptoms of 'anxiety, depression, hallucination, delusions, agitation and sleep disturbance' (Civil et al. in Whitehouse, ed., 1993: 174). In trying to suggest a sensible solution to Estragon's fancied victimisation, Vladimir shows it up for the illusory construct that it is. Strangely, he seems to approach his friend's distressing 'encounter' with less ambivalence than he did the time before, perhaps because his limited insight into Estragon's condition is growing, perhaps to redouble his attempts to draw out the conversation. The alternative would be for Vladimir to disbelieve Estragon entirely, in which case he would have to conclude that his

friend is utterly deranged. Vladimir is prepared to go so far as to use the term 'imbecile' colloquially, but he cannot yet make the mental leap to credit him with the dementia that some of his behaviour denotes. Nonetheless, with his full claim to sentient manhood having diminished, Estragon is accorded a lower footing in the relationship.

His geography is not reliable either. When he sneers 'Charming spot' (13, 147) and 'Inspiring prospects' (13, 150), it is quite obvious that he has no sense of place. Not only does he not remember Godot's possible advent unless reminded, but he also has no recall of the appointed venue. Where temporal and spatial matters are concerned, Estragon lives in an eternal present, subject to shock and surprise. Though the 'recency factor' lingers long enough to allow him to explore their plight despairingly, the reason for their stasis does not persist. Even with the emotional intensity he expresses on being reminded of their appointment, his short-term memory does not establish a durable trace. When he urges Vladimir, 'Let's go', his friend replies:

VLADIMIR: We can't.
ESTRAGON: Why not?
VLADIMIR: We're waiting for Godot.
ESTRAGON: (*Despairingly*) Ah yes! (*Pause*) You're sure it was here?
VLADIMIR: What?
ESTRAGON: That we were to wait.

(13, 151-56)

Vladimir's attempts to jog his memory are ineffectual, as the following morning Estragon is completely ignorant of their whereabouts. When he ignores Vladimir's initial comments, Didi loops back in the conversation:

VLADIMIR: [. . .] I was saying that things have changed here since yesterday.
ESTRAGON: Everything oozes.
VLADIMIR: Look at the tree.
ESTRAGON: It's never the same pus from one second to the next.
VLADIMIR: The tree, look at the tree.
 (*ESTRAGON looks at the tree, then goes towards it and is joined by*
 VLADIMIR in front of it.)
ESTRAGON: Was it not there yesterday?

VLADIMIR: Yes, of course it was there. Do you not remember? We all but hanged ourselves from it. (*Considers.*) Yes that's right, all —, but —, hanged —, ourselves from it. But you wouldn't. Do you not remember?

ESTRAGON: You dreamt it.

VLADIMIR: Is it possible that you've forgotten already?

ESTRAGON: That's the way I am. Either I forget immediately or I never forget.

(54, 1694-1708)

If anything points up Gogo's memory deficiencies, it is his utter failure to register that the tree has changed dramatically overnight. In accordance with Edgar Rubin's psychological theory of figure and ground, with which Beckett was acquainted, 'the figure is a compact part of the total visual field. . . while the ground appears like formless space' (in Woodworth, 1964: 37). For Estragon, the 'figure' has disappeared into the 'ground'. When he admits, 'I see nothing', Vladimir counters: 'But yesterday evening it was all pale and bare like a skeleton. And now it's covered with leaves'. It is interesting to note that the revised text includes 'like a skeleton' as an addition. Estragon's memory, too, is skeletal in comparison with what it was, a corpse in the charnel house of his decaying life with Vladimir. I feel that to hail the leaves of the tree as signifying some sort of regenerative force is mistaken, since this does not recognise that Vladimir and Estragon are excluded from its bounty. The miraculous leaves seem to create the same impression as Eliot's introduction to 'The Burial of the Dead' in *The Waste Land*:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

(Eliot, 1936: 63)

For Estragon and Vladimir the leaves are a cheat, their existence presaging nothing but certain deterioration. Estragon reacts to his embarrassment by throwing sand in his cross-examiner's eyes. Ironically, he accuses his friend of dreaming, since he himself is perfectly capable of citing dream as gospel. This time Vladimir refuses to be sucked into the quicksands of his companion's erratic recall and insists that Estragon stop projecting and face the truth of memory's unreliability. Given Gogo's lack of insight in the first part of the play, the fact that he admits to having an erratic memory shows that he has grown in self-knowledge. His answer is a surprisingly accurate

reflection of his current condition, in which his short-term memory is incapable of encoding, storing or recalling events, while his long-term memory, though partly eroded, has considerable holdings which he can still access. No wonder Vladimir is alternately mystified and infuriated. When Estragon typically denies any knowledge of the red soil where they had worked, adding that 'I didn't notice anything, I tell you!' (55, 1744), Didi sighs deeply and acknowledges: 'You're a hard man to get on with, Gogo' (55, 1746-47). Vladimir's loss is inestimable. A lifetime's shared experience is being systematically voided by his companion's irreversible disease. And because Didi is largely uncomprehending, he sees only its ravages, as his friend veers in puzzling sequence between intelligence and imbecility. The act of waiting imposes its own psychic strain, but when sustaining conversation reaches impasse again and again, the situation becomes almost unbearable. Estragon proffers the excuse of tiredness before admitting: 'I see nothing' (59, 1884). But this time Vladimir has solid proof of locality in the shape of Estragon's boots¹² and, disregarding the excuse of tiredness, he interrogates his companion relentlessly:

VLADIMIR: And where were we yesterday evening according to you?
 ESTRAGON: How do I know? In another compartment. (*Gestures towards the audience.*) There's no lack of void.
 (59, 1892-94)

[. . .]
 VLADIMIR: (*Starts to approach* ESTRAGON.) You don't remember any fact, any circumstance?
 ESTRAGON: (*Weary*) Don't torment me, Didi.
 (59, 1904-06)

Here Beckett reveals Estragon's exact cerebral situation while brilliantly obscuring his tactics. The 'compartments' of Gogo's mind have become more and more disparate as links between them decay, and there is 'no lack of void' where the neurofibrillary tangles and plaques have taken their toll. Unconsciously self-reflexive, Estragon has inadvertently encoded his disease in *the* sentence in the play that has most invited an existentialist interpretation.¹³ He is more explicit when he admits later in the conversation, 'I'm not a historian' (58, 1873), and confesses pathetically, 'I don't know why I don't know!' (60, 1941). Vladimir's frustration goads him to harass Estragon to an unbearable degree, causing Gogo to take refuge in his two customary escape routes: 'I'm tired!' and 'Let's go' (61, 1968-70). He is denied relief, as usual, by Vladimir's firm pronouncement: 'We're waiting for Godot' (61, 1973). This is one of ten reminders in the course

of the play.¹⁴ They are Beckett's most insistent pointers to Estragon's brain disease. To be reminded a couple of times is normal at any age, but this is simply excessive. After all, their waiting for Godot constitutes their *raison d'être*, and for Estragon constantly to forget what they are about denotes a serious diminishment of his mental functioning. 'Alzheimer's', reflects Bayley, 'is in fact like an insidious fog, barely noticeable until everything around has disappeared. After that it is no longer possible to believe that a world outside fog exists' (Bayley, 1998: 234).

Memory, even at best, is considered by Beckett to be an inauthentic means of constituting identity. In the Proust monograph it mostly features as a fictive cheat. This opinion is borne out by Alexander Schlutz in his paper on 'Lost in Time — the Failure of Literary Memory in the Work of Samuel Beckett'. In his view,

What it helps to construct is the *fiction* of a stable and well-defined agent, facilitating self-definition as well as the relationship to others while safely covering the void which threatens in the interstices of a process characterized by constant change.

(Schlutz, 2000: 2, my emphasis)

With failing powers, Estragon finds it harder and harder to sustain the fiction. Godot, who is pivotal to their lives, has hardly impacted on Estragon's consciousness. The fact that Vladimir has been so convinced by Godot's promises that he has allowed his life to be utterly stalled indicates that their conversation must have been riveting. Yet Estragon cannot remember a word of it. He covers up as creatively as he can:

ESTRAGON: What exactly did we ask him for?
VLADIMIR: Were you not there?
ESTRAGON: I can't have been listening.
VLADIMIR: Oh . . . nothing very definite.
[. . .]
ESTRAGON: A kind of prayer.
VLADIMIR: Precisely.
ESTRAGON: A vague supplication.
VLADIMIR: Exactly.
ESTRAGON: And what did he reply?
VLADIMIR: That he'd see.

(17, 318-29)

With no memory of the conversation and Vladimir non-committal, Estragon is forced to dig deeper:

ESTRAGON: We've lost our rights?

VLADIMIR: (*Distinctly*) We got rid of them.

(*Silence. They remain motionless, arms dangling, heads sunk, sagging at the knees.*)

ESTRAGON: (*Feebly*) We're not tied? (*Pause.*) We're not —

(18, 359-62)

Estragon evinces such a horror of entrapment throughout the play that his body language is reminiscent of the puppets in Eliot's *The Hollow Men*. In performance, Estragon is generally hopeless and defeated at this point. Yet we know that within a few minutes he will have no recollection of this disturbing interchange and will, again and again, have to face up to the seemingly arbitrary embargoes placed on his life. To be forced to spend his time endlessly making conversation with an intelligent and gregarious man constantly in need of intellectual stimulus and emotional reassurance must be a hellish occupation for an Alzheimer's victim; to have one's hapless shortcomings continually reproved must verge on the unendurable. Disoriented, confused, exhausted and depressed, Estragon presents a pitiable spectacle of incapacity. To return to Proust, Estragon truly is 'present at his own absence' (P, 27).

If he were not constantly reminded, one might almost understand Estragon's forgetting the shadowy Godot, so vague is he in his undertakings; but to forget Pozzo of the loud voice and grand manner is abnormal. Pozzo bursts into his dull life with volcanic force, yet Estragon cannot remember having seen him before, nor will he remember having seen him afterwards. Pozzo and Lucky might very well have been chimeras for all the lasting impression they make, though Pozzo employs the full range of his histrionic repertoire to play the potentate:

ESTRAGON: (*Timidly to Pozzo*) You're not Mr Godot, sir?

POZZO: (*Terrifying voice*) I am Pozzo!

(*He drops the rope and advances, driving them back and apart. Silence.*)

Does that name mean nothing to you?

(*Silence.*)

I say does that name mean nothing to you?

(21, 477-82)

Vladimir, who remembers Pozzo and Lucky clearly, comments later on how the pair have changed. When Estragon demonstrates that he has no recollection of having met them, Vladimir accuses him of forgetting everything (44, 1354). Vladimir acknowledges the general problem with Estragon's defective memory, but cannot pinpoint the precise form that the amnesia will take. Thus his global dismissal, 'You forget everything', is inaccurate and misleading. Similarly, John Bayley reports that when he was driven to despair, he turned on Iris and was 'Cold too, and deadly. "You're mad. You're dotty. You don't know anything, remember anything, care about anything"' (Bayley, 1998: 270). Estragon is able to remember a great deal, provided the data is lodged in the long-term memory, or, over-learned, has been stored in the semantic rather than the episodic 'compartment'. Vladimir, at the end of his imaginative tether, and longing for interaction, tries to accommodate Gogo by treating him, inappropriately, like a child. He suggests that they 'play' at Pozzo and Lucky, but Estragon, who lacks the capacity of a normal child, is able to enact only what he encountered before the disease took hold. When he announces yet again that he is going, Vladimir tries to detain him:

VLADIMIR: Will you not play?

ESTRAGON: Play at what?

VLADIMIR: We could play at Pozzo and Lucky.

ESTRAGON: Never heard of it.

(66, 2150-53)

Estragon's blankness is risible, but his rising panic is even more perceptible. His confusion continues until the end of the play. When either Godot or Pozzo are brought to mind by Vladimir's cues, it is apparent that the fragmentary existence they occupy in the 'recency effect' of Estragon's mind is that of a composite figure. There are no definitive boundaries between the two, only a threatening blur (71, 72, 81).

If Estragon forgets Godot repeatedly, we can hardly marvel that he does not remember having seen his servant. The Boy approaches gingerly, and it is obvious from Estragon's behaviour that he has no conception of the import of the messenger's coming. Devoid of recall, Estragon lacks the context that accompanies it, with the expectations and dashed hopes that the Boy's presence should arouse. It is only when the Boy mentions Mr Godot that Estragon connects the two and responds appropriately: 'What kept you so late?' (45, 1388). At the end of the play when the Boy

(or his brother) visits for the second time, Estragon is asleep, but had he been awake, he would doubtless have been equally nonplussed.

A rather more amusing incident occurs towards the end of the play. With Vladimir's frustration and despair mounting at Estragon's inability to 'return the ball', Estragon tries to initiate a new gambit. Vladimir believes that in conversation 'It's the start that's difficult' (56, 1801), but Estragon, who finds elaboration more of a problem, disagrees. This is because 'Language stands second only to memory as the cognitive domain most frequently impaired in AD' (Cronin, Corkin and Rosen in Whitehouse, ed. 1993: 193). With their last conversational 'canter' having stalled and the pressure of silence mounting, he invites Vladimir to observe a cloud, quite literally out of the blue:

ESTRAGON: [. . .] Look at the little cloud.

VLADIMIR: (*Raising his eyes*) Where?

ESTRAGON: There. (*Pointing heavenward with his index finger*). In the zenith.

VLADIMIR: Well? (*Pause*) What is there so wonderful about it?

(*Silence*)

ESTRAGON: Let's pass on now to something else, do you mind?

(77, 2564-69)

This rather embarrassing conversational impasse throws two passages from Shakespearean plays into stark relief. Somewhere, in the back of his mind, in a shard of memory, Estragon must have had a faint glimmering that one could make conversational play out of the unfixed shape of a cloud. Like Antony, for instance, in conversation with Eros in *Antony and Cleopatra*, imaginatively citing clouds as 'black vesper's pageants' and musing:

Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish;

A vapour sometime like a bear or lion,

A tower'd citadel, a pendent rock,

A forked mountain, or blue promontory

With trees upon't that nod unto the world

And mock our eyes with air.

(Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, IV. xiv. 3-8)

Estragon's eyes, unmocked 'with air', remain fixated on cloud as cloud, and neither his memory nor his imagination can furnish any comparisons at all. In this he is unlike Hamlet, who finds it all too easy. In a famous passage, he parades his 'antic disposition' to bait Polonius:

HAMLET: Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?
POLONIUS: By th' mass, and 'tis like a camel indeed.
HAMLET: Methinks it is like a weasel.
POLONIUS: It is back'd like a weasel.
HAMLET: Or like a whale?
POLONIUS: Very like a whale.

(Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III. iii. 366-72)

Both passages are innovative and inventive, but poor Estragon lacks the resources to expand on the theme. The ability to make connections of this kind has eroded with the advance of the malady, and Estragon finds it hard to believe that he and Vladimir ever thought at all. Estragon has lost sight of who Vladimir was and continues to be, forgetting Didi's imaginative repertoire, reflective suppleness and questing disposition. The 'poet' Estragon, trading wit and wordplay with his friend, is 'other, no longer what [he was] before the calamity of yesterday. . . [His] cosmography has suffered a dislocation' (*P*, 13). His inability to rely on the mental exuberance and alertness he once possessed has altered Estragon irremediably.

As with most aphasics, Alzheimer's disease drives Estragon in on himself as his world shrinks around him. His increasing self-centredness is a trial to Vladimir, who complains angrily: 'No one ever suffers but you. I don't count' (10, 46-47). At the end of Act One, Vladimir, feeling a desperate need for validation through recognition, is still sufficiently altruistic to include Estragon in his bid. He says to the Boy: 'Tell him . . . tell him you saw us You did see us, didn't you?' (48, 1485-87).

By the end of the play, however, with Estragon's failing to meet his needs, Vladimir's ebbing sense of self asserts itself to insist that the Boy recognise him solely. When the Boy asks what he is to tell Mr Godot, Vladimir discounts Estragon entirely:

VLADIMIR: Tell him . . . (*He hesitates*) . . . tell him you saw me and that (*he hesitates*) . . . that you saw me. (*With sudden violence*) You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me!

(83, 2819-21)

With Estragon unable to register Vladimir's full humanity, with Pozzo and Lucky incapable of remembering ever having met him, and the Boy seemingly ignorant of any previous encounter, Vladimir is desperate for some acknowledgment of his being. In his dialogue with the Boy, he asserts his existence in the Berkeleyan way, seeming to claim that '*esse percipi*' (in Honderich, ed., 1995: 91) or, 'I am because I am perceived'. In so doing he strikes out against invisibility by issuing a series of imperatives to shore up his dissolving sense of self. He demands scrutiny. With his shared yesterdays shredded, his incrementally solitary present drives him frantic.

In an earlier conversation with Gogo, he forecasts his plight. When Estragon asks, 'Tell me what to do' (67, 2219) Vladimir can only respond: 'There is nothing to do' (67, 2220). Nothing could improve their situation, and difficult though it is to imagine, their lives together can only diminish. If language models the world for its users, the world that Estragon inhabits has become shrunken and defamiliarised since he first explored the resources encoded in his memory. With these having fragmented, his discourse has necessarily been eroded. Though capable of sporadic eloquence, Estragon more habitually responds in grunts, as though the content of his speech has been leached by a dense mist. Nothing is new; everything has been said before. Habit turns the barrel-organ of stale syllables in 'simian' attempts at communication (*P*, 63). For the most part, Estragon responds as briefly as possible to Vladimir's attempts to draw him out until, feeling the strain of his friend's unrelenting demands, he begs for silence (14, 211-12). Knowlson observes that this forms part of the 'rhythm of starting and stopping that is basic to the play' (McMillan and Knowlson, eds, 1993: 103).

Though sensitive and responsive to Pozzo's gambits at times, Estragon is remarkably hostile to Godot's messenger. His churlishness verges on violence (45, 1384) and he makes no attempt whatsoever to accommodate the age or emotional state of the child. In the Walter Asmus production at the Beckett Festival in 1999, this was particularly striking, as the Boy, played by Dan Colley, appeared like an angel. Apart from the fact that Estragon is generally lacking in

tenderness, he probably associates the Boy with his own despairing trapped state, as well as possible unpleasant encounters with small boys in the past. Whatever the reason, Estragon's language fails to respond appropriately to the situation. Not even he understands why:

VLADIMIR [. . .] What's the matter with you?
ESTRAGON: I'm unhappy.
VLADIMIR: Not really! Since when?
ESTRAGON: I'd forgotten.
VLADIMIR: Extraordinary the tricks that memory plays!

(46, 1418-22)

His comment, 'I'm tired breathing' (70, 2297), is an admission of the intense strain of his disintegrating life. Estragon urges Vladimir yet again:

ESTRAGON: [. . .] Let's go.
VLADIMIR: We can't.
ESTRAGON: Why not?
VLADIMIR: We're waiting for Godot.
ESTRAGON: Ah yes!
 (Pause.)
 (Despairingly) What'll we do, what'll we do!
VLADIMIR: There's nothing we can do.
ESTRAGON: But I can't go on like this!

(61, 1970-78)

Vladimir, who has survived his own nadir of despair, responds grimly: 'That's what you think' (85, 2885). By way of 'comfort' he offers the panacea of suicide or the receding hope of their salvation by Godot. He eventually consents to their leaving, while remaining rooted to the spot.

The last tragi-comic scene is played against Estragon's unawareness that his trousers have fallen down. Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld, writing on *Beckett in the Theatre*, describe 'one important instance when the performance deviated from the effect he wanted'. Beckett wrote immediately to the director, Roger Blin, about Estragon's dropped trousers:

One thing troubles me, the pants of Estragon. I naturally asked Suzanne if they fell well, and she told me that he keeps them half on. He mustn't. He absolutely mustn't. It doesn't suit the circumstances. *He really doesn't have the mind for*

that, then. He doesn't even realize that they've fallen [. . .] The spirit of the play, to the extent to which it has one, is that nothing is more grotesque than the tragic.
(in McMillan and Fehsenfeld, 1989: 79, my emphasis.)

This is Beckett's most blatant acknowledgement of Estragon's mental deterioration, vindicating the audience's sense that Gogo is becoming tragically worse. The stand-up comic tableau of human misery anticipates Nell's assertion in *Endgame* that 'nothing is funnier than unhappiness' (11, 333). Absurdity and poignancy are not incompatible, as we observe Estragon's increasing dementia pitted against Vladimir's dissolving sense of self, and realise that there is only worse to come. In life's 'continual reconstitution of knowledge and self' (White, 1984: 58), Estragon can no longer find his way, or the words that would lead him to do so. By confronting the 'chaos' that lies just beneath the surface, Beckett has examined the fragility of language in highly original ways. In his concentration on memory and its fragmentation, Beckett has also evoked many of

the ways in which we constitute selves and communities in language and how the character we give ourselves can be maintained or lost; the ways in which words acquire and lose their special meanings; the ways in which one person can act with words to recognize or deny, to diminish or enhance, another.

(White, 1984: 19)

In addition, he has shown that between the poverty of language and the vagaries of memory the possibility of effective communication is remote. Perhaps this is why Edward Albee, who admires Beckett, says of *Waiting for Godot*: 'It's repetitive without augmentation. I just don't find it as rich as some of the other plays' (in Oppenheim, ed., 1994: 90). I believe that this is Beckett's intention. He has daringly fashioned a play of diminishing returns around one alert and three amnesic characters while they wait out a succession of slithering moments. Little wonder that a howl of protest greeted *Godot* at its first staging in London. Yet the voices of theatre critics Harold Hobson and Kenneth Tynan sounded a contrary note in 1955. Hobson hedged his bets in predicting: 'at the worst you will discover a curiosity, a four-leaved clover, a black tulip; at the best, something that will securely lodge in a corner of your mind for as long as you live' (in Cooke, ed., 1985: 15).¹⁵ Tynan thoughtfully reflects that

It summoned the music hall and the parable to present a view of life which banished the sentimentality of the music-hall and the parable's fulsome uplift. It

forced me to re-examine the rules which have hitherto governed the drama; and, having done so, to pronounce them not elastic enough.

(in Cooke, ed., 1985: 15)¹⁶

In retrospect, Corliss reflected that ‘it was just the jolt of negative energy that a somnolent postwar theater needed’ (Corliss, 1996: 53). The relative open-endedness of the play has given rise to a number of interpretations for the theatre, few of which have foregrounded Estragon’s memory difficulties. An exception is the 2001 Lara Foot Newton production of *Waiting for Godot* at the Grahamstown Festival in South Africa, where Adrienne Sichel reports on Seputla Sebogodi as ‘a jocular Vladimir’ who contrasted with ‘Lionel Newton’s *loskop* of an Estragon’ (Sichel, 2001: 6). Since a *loskop* is a colloquial Afrikaans term for a scatterbrain, Estragon’s performance had drawn attention to this aspect of his characterisation. When I spoke to the director on 7 May, 2002, she confirmed that the emphasis was ‘not heavy’, but that it ‘was there’. In her production she deliberately attempted to show up ‘Estragon’s memory loss as forming part of his frustration’. Interestingly, she added that ‘Vladimir, if anything, was even more perturbed, as he asked one question after another to establish their exact circumstances to prove to himself he wasn’t losing it!’

Quite the best Estragon I have seen is the Gate Theatre’s Johnny Murphy, who extended the emotional range of Gogo’s characterisation in his superb performance at the Barbican Theatre in 1999. In one particularly memorable sequence I saw his drollery give way to nervousness and then bewilderment as his fading memory let him down. His face registered vacuity when his eyes glazed over, but he outfaced the moment with bravado and studied dignity as he said, ‘I’m tired’, looking for all the world like a lovable but infuriating hamster. In this performance I came to understand why Barry McGovern’s chipper Vladimir persisted against the infuriation of Estragon’s quirky grouchiness. Though their communication is increasingly hollowed out by habit, memory loss and the inadequacy of language, they try to uphold some semblance of friendship to sustain them in the encroaching dark. In describing this relationship, ‘Beckett’s effort’, says Rabinovitz, ‘has been to create a language of precise imprecision: a form of communication that, while itself as accurate as possible, acknowledges the limitations of language and introduces ambiguities where an excess of precision might be misleading’ (Rabinovitz, 1995: 221-22).

Beckett, with uncanny ‘precision’, has chosen to depict Estragon as an early to mid-term Alzheimer’s victim. In doing so, he has purposefully entered a zone of fluctuation where ‘ambiguities’ proliferate as misleading variables abound. Vladimir’s non-comprehension reflects the audience’s own reception, and with the arrival of the memory-impaired Lucky and Pozzo on the scene confusion is worse confounded. In their distinctively different ways, all four characters are demonstrably ‘victims of [the] predominating condition and circumstance — Time’ (*P*, 12). None has escaped his yesterdays.

ENDNOTES

- 1 This tradition has continued beyond Beckett’s lifetime. Michael Billington, in his 1999 review on the Gate Theatre’s ‘Good Godot!’ points out that ‘Beckett’s play is a dramatic diptych: everything in it is perfectly balanced by something else. For a start, you notice that Vladimir and Estragon, as in the Berlin production, share one tattered black suit between them; in the first half Didi wears the jacket and Gogo the trousers, and after the interval they have swapped over.’ [It is all, he feels,] ‘very much as his nibs would have wished it’ (Billington, 1991: 4).
- 2 Parkin asserts that ‘normal ageing is associated with a consistent pattern of memory impairment. STS [short term memory] appears to function normally, but both the episodic and semantic components of LTS [long term memory] undergo some deterioration. This cannot be explained in terms of an encoding deficit, but seems to be a contextual deficit due to some loss in processing capacity. Dementia [on the other hand] produces a profound loss of memory’ (Parkin, 1987: 131).
- 3 *Murphy*, completed in 1936, was written while Beckett was undergoing psychotherapy in London. It has many scenes set in a mental asylum where pathologies are specifically labelled (e.g. melancholia, paranoia, hebephrenia, hypomania, Korsakoff’s alcoholic syndrome and schizophrenia). It also reflects Beckett’s despair at the capacity of words to communicate meaning, describing Celia, the heroine, as being ‘spattered with words that went dead as soon as they sounded; each word obliterated, before it had time to make sense, by the one that came next’ (*M*, 27).
- 4 In this chapter and in Chapter 2, I have cited both page and line references from the 1993 revised text found in McMillan and Knowlson, eds. *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Volume 1: *Waiting for Godot*.
- 5 Although Beckett extolls the delights of involuntary memory in his monograph on Proust, it is a mark of his pessimism that none of his characters is afforded this relief. Krapp and Nell (*Endgame*) might appear to experience involuntary memory, but this is an illusion. Krapp’s vivid memories have been frequently re-played electronically, while Nell’s rhapsodies feature as much-rehearsed elements of her self-narrative.
- 6 Gerry Dukes wrote superb programme notes on the plays performed by the Gate Theatre at the Barbican Theatre in London, September, 1999.
- 7 The phrase is taken from St Thomas Aquinas’s description of the torments of the damned in the *Summa Theologica Secunda* and means ‘the memory of past happiness’. The explanation is found in McMillan and Knowlson, eds., 1993: 167.
- 8 Parkin explains that AD, like the amnesic syndrome, is primarily a deficit in episodic memory. He describes how Schachter (1983) chose the unlikely setting of a golf course to confirm this view. He played a round with an AD patient and reports that the man had considerable difficulty in remembering where he had just hit the ball (especially if he teed off) but had no difficulty in defining a wide range of golfing terms (Parkin, 1987: 133).

- 9 As early as 1974, Stern and Morgan ‘present data suggesting the importance of sleep for maintaining the critical systems in the brain involving serotonin and catecholamines, on which much of neural transmission is dependent [. . .] Protein synthesis has been suggested as the critical step in the formation of a permanent memory’ (in Spear, 1978: 83).
- 10 This is a variation on Olivia’s aphorism in her letter to Malvolio: ‘Some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon ’em’ (Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, II. v. 132-33).
- 11 The quotation is taken from ‘Dover Beach’.
- 12 Dippel and Hutton explain that ‘the Alzheimer patient experiences reduced ability to determine size, color and shape constancies. The inability to maintain constancies of perception can be very confusing’ (Dippel and Hutton, eds, 1988: 47).
- 13 Esslin, in his seminal study, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, developed this term to refer to the work of a number of dramatists. He included among them Genet, Ionesco, Beckett and Pinter. Breaking with conventional dramaturgy, the dramatists, both in form and ‘event’, appeared to foreground the meaninglessness of existence.
- 14 These occur on pages 13, 17, 22, 44 , 53 , 56, 61, 64, 73, 84.
- 15 Harold Hobson wrote his influential review for the London *Sunday Times* of 7 August, 1955. It is included in Cooke’s *Beckett on File*, (1985: 15).
- 16 Kenneth Tynan wrote his seminal review for *The Observer*. It was printed on 7 August, 1955 and is included in Cooke’s *Beckett on File*, (1985: 15). This, together with the review cited in footnote 15, prompted the London intelligentsia to flock to the play.

CHAPTER TWO

BEHOLD MY WORKS

Although it has been contended that ‘Pozzo and Lucky are simply Didi and Gogo writ large’ (Friedman, 1989: 277), it would seem that a different dynamic is at work in their delineation. They are created with broader brush strokes, more garishly, more shockingly. In comparison with the tedium of the tramps’ self-enforced stasis, Pozzo erupts on to the scene like a ringmaster. His theatrical entry is presaged by the crack of the whip and anticipated by Estragon and Vladimir’s being ‘huddled together, shoulders hunched, cringing away from the menace’ (21, 447). Lucky precedes him in this theatre of cruelty, a chafing rope around his suppurating neck and laden, like a beast of burden, with a heavy bag, a folding stool, a picnic basket and a greatcoat (21, 452-54). In the Gate Theatre production for the Barbican in 1999, Alan Stanford made a startling grand entrance, arriving as though on horseback.

What to make of the pair? By any standards they are clearly extraordinary. But by what margin? In this chapter I hope to demonstrate that Pozzo, to quote Beckett, is ‘hypomaniac’ (in Harmon, ed., 1998: 6), with decayed memory and discourse to match, and that Lucky is deranged, a probable victim of a long-term neurological disease. His infamous ‘think’ is a parody of disquisition. Given the pair’s inability to engage in the unpredictable course of spontaneous conversation, and the disparity in their power relations, the landlord and his ‘knook’s’ attempts at communication are farcical from first to last. Through their decayed speech Beckett has fashioned a vehicle to accommodate the ‘chaos’ that intensifies with their stage appearance, and the ‘mess’ that their actions invite.

Without a single word having been said, it is immediately apparent that Pozzo, in his tyrannical treatment of his menial, is one of ‘yesterday’s deformities’. His discourse of imperatives underscores the visual impression he has made as he roars ‘On’, ‘Faster’, and ‘Back’ (21, 455-58). In a flurry of histrionics he announces himself bombastically, roaring:

POZZO: *(Terrifying voice)* I am Pozzo!
 (He drops the rope and advances, driving them back and apart. Silence.)
 Does that name mean nothing to you?
 (Silence.)
 I say does that name mean nothing to you?
(21, 478-82)

In a letter to Alan Schneider, who was directing a Greenwich Village production in 1971, Beckett insisted that Pozzo ‘shatter the space of the play’ (in Harmon, ed., 1998: 251). From then on, in acts of solipsistic portraiture, Pozzo claims superior footing, with the others speaking only at his behest. A self-proclaimed member of the landed gentry, he uses his assumed position to extend his patronage to Vladimir and Estragon, desperate as he is for an audience to boost his pretensions. He vaunts his personal, social and economic ‘power’, so that his orotund discourse operates as a site of performative self-enhancement, depriving others of dignity. In spite of the fact that he despises Vladimir and Estragon, and that his obsession with status absolves him from admitting them as equals, he still makes time to engage them in conversation. Walter Asmus, the assistant director for the German productions, explains how he was primed by Beckett to interpret the part:

Pozzo is a character who has to overcompensate. That’s why he overdoes things [. . .] and this overcompensation has to do with a deep insecurity within him. Those were things Beckett said, psychological terms that he used: that Pozzo was a weak character who has to overcompensate [. . .] He didn’t want a flood of these things, though he knows precisely everything about the psychology.
(in Kalb, 1989: 175)¹

This is typical Beckettian practice. The playwright is acquainted with every detail of the character’s psychological profile, but does not want it to be over-explicit in performance, to be reduced to case-study freakishness. It appears that Walter Asmus was still bearing Beckett’s advice in mind when he directed *Waiting for Godot* for the 1999 Beckett Festival in London. Perceptively, Michael Billington comments in his review that

Alan Stanford’s magnificent Pozzo is all fake landlord grandeur disguising inner uncertainty: you notice that under his flowing cape and white cricket boots he lacks shirt and socks. But when Stanford also rolls a word like ‘effulgence’ round his actor-managerial lips before nervously checking how it went down with his

audience, you feel this is the kind of bombastic Anglo-Irish showman down on his uppers that Beckett must have met in his Foxrock youth.

(Billington, 1999: 4)

The interpretation of the part seems to have persisted, since Roger Blin, who was the first to direct the work of Samuel Beckett, holds a similar view. 'Pozzo', he says, 'is the saddest of them all [. . .] He has only vocal power. He has no real power' (in Oppenheim, 1994: 304).

It is congruent with his self-absorption that Pozzo does not remember having met the friends before, though Vladimir, whose memory is generally reliable, is certain that he has encountered Pozzo and Lucky (44, 1341). Although Pozzo admits to having a defective memory (36, 1026), his self-centredness is so consummate that no chance acquaintance is likely to make any impact on his psyche. In this 'drama of non-communication' (Robinson, 1969: 231), Beckett explores, through Pozzo, a memory made flaccid with narcissism. When Estragon explains defensively that 'We're not from these parts, sir' (22, 496), Pozzo responds with feigned magnanimity: 'You are human beings none the less. As far as one can see. Of the same species as myself. . . . Of the same species as Pozzo! Made in God's image!' (22, 497-99).

To Pozzo the idea is risible. He does not know that Beckett's dispossessed are 'always smarter than their clothes' (Pullen, 1987: 293). Vladimir ventures an explanation, but Pozzo interrupts rudely, demanding peremptorily: 'Who is Godot?' (22, 501).² His abusive nature can be detected in the management of his discourse. Insisting on holding the floor at all times, he cuts across Vladimir's explanation, denying him an opportunity at turn-taking. If Vladimir loses face it is of no consequence to Pozzo, who steamrollers the conversation to obliterate opposition. No boundaries are acknowledged. Even the public road is appropriated as part of his land. 'Here? On my land?' (22, 514) he asks loftily. The effect of this intimidation is considerable, as Vladimir and Estragon grovel and apologise, 'We didn't intend any harm' (22, 517) and 'We meant well' (22, 518). Pozzo browbeats the wayfarers to such an extent that they are dragooned into supporting his world-view. When confronted with a self-appointed arch-grandee of the class struggle, Vladimir and Estragon are initially outmanoeuvred, collapsing into servility. To further consolidate his power base, Pozzo issues commands to Lucky, including the dehumanising 'Up, Hog!' (23, 525), while attempting to blandish Vladimir and Estragon:

POZZO: [. . .](*To VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON, affably*) Gentlemen, I am happy to have met you. (*Drops the rope. Before their incredulous expression.*) Yes, yes, sincerely happy [. . .] Yes, gentlemen, I cannot go for long without the society of my likes (*He puts on his monocle and looks at the two likes*) even when the likeness is an imperfect one [. . .] That is why, with your permission, I propose to dally with you a moment, before I venture any further.

(23-24, 533-572)

Just in case they wondered at their good fortune, Pozzo holds forth monologically, employing phatic ritual with barely concealed rudeness. Lucky he dismisses as sub-human, but with Vladimir and Estragon he intends to ‘dally’, even though he lacks any real interest in them. Dallying is a frivolous pastime, a pleasant time-waster, not to be taken seriously. As ephemeral extensions of his huge ego, his acquaintances are not to be taken seriously either; he has not even bothered to find out their names. They exist only as audience, as echo chamber. Real communication is not his intention; imposing himself on others is. He callously eats his unshared lunch in front of them until Estragon, driven by needs more powerful than dignity, grovels for the bones which Lucky refuses.

By now thoroughly disgusted, Vladimir and Estragon no longer feel obliged to co-author Pozzo’s script and they regain their composure sufficiently to protest at Pozzo’s treatment of Lucky and to ask why Lucky hangs on to his bags (28, 728). Estragon’s question about Lucky’s tenacious grip makes Pozzo nervous, probably because he is unused to the vagaries of informal conversation. To regain power he makes an oratorical event of his response as he holds forth, forcing Vladimir and Estragon to witness his histrionic abilities:

POZZO: Good. Is everybody ready? Is everybody looking at me? (*He looks at LUCKY.*) Will you look at me, pig! [. . .] Good [. . .] I am ready. Is everybody listening? Is everybody ready? [. . .] Hog! [. . .] I don’t like talking in a vacuum. Good. Let me see. [. . .]

ESTRAGON: I’m going.

POZZO: What was it exactly you wanted to know?

VLADIMIR: Why he —

POZZO: (*Angrily*) Don't interrupt me! (*Pause. Calmer.*) If we all speak at once we'll never get anywhere. (*Pause.*) What was I saying? (*Pause. Louder.*) What was I saying?

(29, 761-75)

Crazed with the compulsion to star, Pozzo's verbal posturing rivals that of the Red Queen in *Alice in Wonderland*. For Pozzo to make these outrageous demands shows that he has been deformed by a class-obsessed society that has pandered to his abuse of power and his strategies for self-enhancement. Nor is sanity his forte. In fact, Beckett wrote to Alan Schneider, his American producer, in December 1955 to tell him that the only way in which Pozzo could be dramatically effective was if he were 'played mad':

[O]ne or two things occur to me that may help your actions [. . .] One has to do with Pozzo. He is a hypomaniac and the only way to play him is to play him mad. The difficulty always experienced by actors with this role [. . .] results I think from their efforts to clarify it and to give it a unity and a continuity which it simply cannot receive. In other words they try to establish it from without. The result at the best is lifelessness and dulness. Pozzo's sudden changes of tone, mood, behaviour, etc., may I suppose be related to what is going on about him, but their source is in the dark of his own inner upheavals and confusions. The temptation is to minimize an irresponsibility and discontinuity which should on the contrary be stressed [. . .] Played in any other way Pozzo is just dead, artificial and tedious.

(in Harmon, ed., 1998: 6)

It is a measure of his trust in Schneider's discretion that Beckett allowed himself to be so atypically explicit. Normally, he refused to be drawn on matters of interpretation. Beckett had, of course, mentioned hypomania before, but in another context. In *Murphy*, Beckett describes the hypomanic character in the 'Magdalen Mental Mercyseat' as 'an epitome of all the self-made plutolaters who ever triumphed over empty pockets and clean hands' (*M*, 96). In his worship of wealth and false projection of a tycoon persona, Pozzo clearly approximates the type. Yet Beckett's explanation of Pozzo's malady was for privileged reception only, not for general consumption. The stigma that Pozzo's madness would invite was avoided by Beckett's declining to identify his condition in the text. Like Vladimir and Estragon, the audience is left to draw its own conclusions.

With little awareness or sense of occasion, Pozzo has been priming himself to deliver a speech for some time. Having already used inflated language to stress his superiority in ‘mollify’ (30, 788), ‘indefatigable’ (30, 798), ‘Atlas, son of Japetos’ (30, 801) and ‘forsaken’ (30, 823), he now launches forth in a showpiece of sentimental twaddle. His logic is so precarious that the last sentence blasts his argument to pieces. Despite Vladimir’s turning on Pozzo angrily, protesting that Estragon is bleeding, Pozzo holds forth regardless, rationalising the while:³

POZZO: It’s a good sign.
(Pause. Vladimir drifts away upstage, eyes to the sky, back to the audience.)
 He’s stopped crying. *(To ESTRAGON)* You have replaced him as it were. *(Lyrically)* The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops. The same is true of the laugh. *(He laughs.)* Let us not then speak ill of our generation, it is not any unhappier than its predecessors. *(Pause.)* Let us not speak well of it either. *(Pause.)* Let us not speak of it at all. *(Pause. Judiciously)* It is true the population has increased.

(31, 840-49)

Sixty years of lessons in rhetoric have refined his skills in ‘portraiture’ to present ‘artful poses’ of himself to the world. Here we have Pozzo the Philosopher; vintage, soft-centre Pozzo, thrilling to the cadences of his own saccharine rhythms. For once his sentimentality has subsumed his cruelty as he speaks proudly of ‘My Lucky’ (31, 853), the ‘knook’ who supposedly elevated his mind to ‘Beauty, grace, truth of the first water’ (31, 357). But with the emotional lability common to his state, he is soon reduced to sobs of self-pity as he accuses Lucky of killing him. That over, he speedily reverts to his former composure when he apologises: ‘Gentlemen, I don’t know what came over me. Forgive me. Forget all I said. *(More and more his old self.)* I don’t remember exactly what it was, but you may be sure there wasn’t a grain of truth in it’ (32, 895-97).

Even if one makes allowances for eccentricity, Pozzo’s behaviour is distinctly peculiar. In writing of the symptoms of hypomania (with which Beckett associates Pozzo), Carlson and Goodwin describe it in three stages:

In the initial stage there is heightened psychomotor activity with increased initiation and rate of speech and physical activity. Euphoria and irritability lead to expansiveness, grandiosity, and overconfidence. Increased sexual activity,

abundant talking and writing, and racing thoughts occur. In the second stage, psychomotor activity and rate of speech increases. Flight of ideas and delusional thinking occur and cognition becomes more disorganized. In the third stage, the activity increases further and may become bizarre.

(Carlson and Goodwin in Cummings and Benson, eds., 1983: 244)

As a result of his condition Pozzo has an insane ability to spin skeins of words with virtually no content, ‘peddling a delusion of presence’ (Kreuter, 1986: 37). Accordingly, his mind is under siege as he continually reinvents himself with little recollection of how he featured before. We are reminded of Beckett’s monograph on Proust, where he confronts the instability of the persona in showing, as Hugh Culik would describe it, that ‘the language-using self is treated as a series of states characterized by momentary perspectives. It appears and disappears with speech [. . .] Present time and this self prove nearly identical’ (Culik, 1993: 139). Pozzo’s disquisition on the sky is a case in point. His verbal aria is remarkable for its shifts in tone and rhetoric, as the orator, whose memory is crumbling, is unable to match his discourse to his intentions. He is therefore incapable of retaining the rhapsodic register he desires without collapsing into banality. Nonetheless, he oozes self-satisfaction as he occupies his favourite position, centre-stage, mouthing overblown platitudes, decorated with pretentious ‘knook-like’ flourishes like ‘qua’ and ‘effulgence’:

POZZO: What is there so extraordinary about it? Qua sky? It is pale and luminous like any sky at this time of the day (*pause*) at this time of the year. (*Pause.*) In these latitudes. (*Pause.*) When the weather is fine. (*Lyrical*) An hour ago (*prosaic*) roughly (*lyrical*) after having poured forth ever since (*he hesitates, prosaic*) say ten o’clock in the morning (*lyrical*) tirelessly torrents of red and white light it begins to lose its effulgence, to grow pale (*gesture of the two hands lapsing by stages*) pale, ever a little paler, a little paler until (*dramatic pause, ample gesture of the two hands flung wide apart*) pppfff! finished! it comes to rest. But — (*hand raised in admonition*) — but behind the veil of gentleness and peace night is charging (*vibrantly*) and will burst upon us (*snaps his fingers*) pop! like that! (*his inspiration leaves him*) just when we least expect it. (*Silence. Gloomily*) That’s how it is on this bitch of an earth.

(35, 995-1006)

This 'rhapsody' is probably one of Pozzo's party pieces, authored and learned by heart. His taste is execrable to start with, but what is more telling is the halting jerk of his delivery as though he can no longer rely on his decaying memory. At such moments he extemporises ineptly, descending into the commonplace, with 'say ten o'clock in the morning', and the banal, with 'pppfff! finished!' (35,1002) and 'pop! like that !' (35,1002). Florid and expansive though he intends his style to be, there are stylistic blunders which chart the erosions of his mind. Pozzo acknowledges his lessening powers when he admits 'You see my memory is defective' (36, 1026). This excludes him from taking part in casual conversation with its far more taxing demands. He simply lacks the resources. Having allowed his 'grandiosity to dissolve the connection between language and the world', his discourse has decayed into 'platitudes and cliché' (White, 1984: 115). It is not only grandiosity that is to blame. Decayed memory and dementia are also taking their toll.

One wonders how much more fanciful Pozzo's speech might have been if it had originally been written in English instead of the French which Beckett employed to discipline his work. The Irish actor, Jack McGowran, asked the author why he wrote novels in French. Beckett's answer could serve as well for his plays as his fiction: 'He said he was afraid of our heritage, so fond of rhetorical phrases and flowery sentences. If he would write in French, then translate it, he would write three words instead of 12 words. It was the discipline' (in Gussow, ed., 1996: 26). Discipline notwithstanding, his expression

marked a striking departure from the formal language, both eloquent and resonant, which was dominant in French theatre at that time. The play retains the impersonal aspects of French fiction — characters with no past, no future, and very little present; no concern for the realities of life such as occupation, abode, relationships; and deliberate unconcern for the subject matter of ordinary discourse.

(in Weintraub, 1982: 64)

In consciously avoiding the flowery rhetoric of Hibernian English and the eloquent resonance of formal French, Beckett was able to evolve a language both desultory and purposeless — the hollowed discourse of marking time. For Pozzo, who is incapable of interaction, this translates into his reliance on his dissolving repertoire. And when this is exhausted he calls upon Lucky to entertain Vladimir and Estragon by dancing and 'thinking'. Lucky's dancing fails to impress, so he is ordered to 'think' by a master whose mission in life is to exact tribute from everyone he

encounters. Although Lucky is ostensibly the centre of attraction, Pozzo continues to be in charge of proceedings, contriving to hold the floor through a variety of attention-seeking reactions. He is at first dejected and disgusted, then, as his 'sufferings' increase, he groans in a more and more agitated way as Lucky's despair surfaces through the veil of sentimentality favoured by Pozzo in 'heaven so blue still and calm so calm'. The murderous feelings that he harbours towards Lucky are projected on to his menial's luckless hat as he tries to snuff out the 'thoughts' of his former mentor before manhandling him cruelly. In this he bears out Freud's 'thanatos' instinct which Beckett had encountered in his reading of Woodworth. Although this is the 'death instinct', it

manifests itself for the most part not as a desire to die but as a desire to kill. Turned outward it is the urge to destroy, injure, conquer. It is the hostility motive, the aggressive tendency, which certainly manifests itself abundantly.

(in Woodworth, 1964: 277)

Pozzo's mood swings yet again as he sobs over his lost watch, sentimentally claiming 'Twas my granpa gave it to me! (42, 1247). He cannot resist brand-name-dropping in his crude attempt to impress Vladimir and Estragon: 'I must have left it at the manor, on the Steinway' (42, 1271). Beckett's art has located communicative anarchy in the incoherence of his characters and their inability to make viable contact with each other. Pozzo, who has run the gamut of human emotion in his 'recitations', has overstayed his welcome, and Vladimir and Estragon, now thoroughly disabused, are glad to see him go. Ironically, they need him less than he needs them.

When we next encounter Pozzo it is in very reduced circumstances, as he experiences the incremental dispossession of Beckett's people. He is much diminished: uncomprehending, blind and feeble. His drive to power, however, continues unabated in his enervated 'on'. The change that we observe in Pozzo accords with the Beckett-endorsed Proustian doctrine that 'personal identity is not a matter of stable, fixed, one-to-one correspondences, but a confused and occasionally volatile chaos brought about by oscillations in the relationship between the inner self and the outer world' (Pilling, 1976 (a): 15). This is certainly true of Pozzo. When asked about his surprising blindness, Pozzo explains that 'I woke up one day as blind as Fortune. (*Pause.*) Sometimes I wonder if I'm not still asleep' (78, 2616-17). There is a level of sincerity in his discourse that was not apparent in his previous gasconade. His traumatic sensory deprivation leads him to the questioning of a reality that cannot be empirically verified. Vladimir reacts in

much the same way when the resources of Estragon's memory are no longer available to him. But when Vladimir, serving as a foil to Pozzo as he has to Estragon, pedantically insists that Pozzo pinpoint the exact moment when he lost his sight, Pozzo reacts like the amnesic Estragon, responding wildly, 'Don't question me. The blind have no notion of time. The things of time are hidden from them too' (78, 2621-22). Later on he gives evidence of complete temporal disorientation in his furious response to Vladimir's further probing:

POZZO: Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (*Calmer*). They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. (*He jerks the rope.*) On!

(81, 2720-26)

This famous passage is more usually discussed in the wider context of the betrayal of life's chimeral promises. Richard Coe even goes so far as to characterise it as 'the whole of Beckett's anguish at the condition of man-in-time' (Coe, 1964: 91). It also applies, more specifically, to the state of Pozzo's memory. Considered in this light, what emerges is that Pozzo's temporal perception seems to be utterly blurred in the flux that has become his life. Any fitful promise of 'light' has been snuffed out in the actual and psychological darkness that has overtaken him. His pessimistic image of death eternally brooding over life is pure Schopenhauer, as is the will to live that still propels him onwards. He also exemplifies the Proustian period of transition, that 'perilous zone [. . .] dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being' (P, 19).

Interestingly, Pozzo's metamemory is in better working order than Estragon's, as he is able to admit: 'I don't remember having met anyone yesterday. But tomorrow I won't remember having met anyone today. So don't count on me to enlighten you' (79, 2674-75). He appears to be in a 'fugue' state, suffering some form of post-traumatic stress in that he is 'egocentric, immature, and suggestible' (Munsinger, 1983: 199). As a victim of hysterical memory loss he is confused, disoriented, and completely forgetful of the circumstances in which he became blind. Parkin

describes it as ‘the sudden onset of wandering with clouding of consciousness and a more or less complete amnesia for the event’ (Parkin, 1987: 155). Pozzo is ‘not merely more weary because of yesterday’, he is ‘other’ (*P*, 3). From his behaviour it seems apparent that he has entered into phase three of hypomanic dementia which is characterised as follows:

Hallucinations and idiosyncratic delusions are present, and the mood is dysphoric. Disorientation in time and place may occur in this stage. Language is normal in mania, though the rate of speech production is increased, and there is a disturbance of normal conversational progression and a tendency to repeat selected words and phrases.

(Carlson and Goodwin in Cummings and Benson, eds, 1983: 244)

Although Pozzo’s sense of personal identity has also been eroded, with only glimpses of the swaggering mogul of the first act recurring now and then, the core of his character remains intact. Even in his reduced state his cruelty is unaffected, and he continues to treat Lucky viciously.

When Lucky makes his first appearance in the play it is apparent before he can even speak that he is a victim of his ‘yesterdays’. As a recipient of unrelenting abuse he is cowed, though not so utterly abject as never to retaliate. In fact, Roger Blin maintains that ‘Lucky represents a kind of wicked senility. He is the most evil. He’s a kind of scapegoat, who’s taking revenge’ (in Oppenheim, ed., 1994: 313). In his role of the abused-turned-abuser he attacks Estragon, and it is evident from Pozzo’s attitude that this is one of Lucky’s many unpredictable assaults on the unwary. But Pozzo’s tyranny is not Lucky’s only problem. His emotional withdrawal, facial rigidity, stiff gait and compulsive clutching at his baggage indicate a disorder that goes beyond his existential malaise. It is clear, too, when he starts to speak, that his cerebral processes have been badly affected by some degenerative disorder. What is less clear is what the specific nature of that condition might be. Beckett, as usual, avoids the over-explicit both in his dramatic depiction and in subsequent discussions of the character he has created. It has usually been left to the director, or even to the actor, as the final arbiter of meaning, to make theatrical sense of Lucky’s strange symptoms.

Jean Martin, the first actor ever to play Lucky, recalls the genesis of his interpretation during a conference held in Ireland in 1991, nearly forty years after his performance as Lucky in the Theatre de Babylone in Paris in 1953:

As for Lucky, neither Sam nor Roger Blin had a fixed view on the character nor on how he was to be played. I had, therefore, to propose something. Sam and Roger said, 'Give us your ideas and we will say Yes or No.' I was hesitant. The character is on stage for much of the time but has nothing to say although many things are happening in front of him. Although he is on stage, the focus must not be on him, but he must have something to do. I wanted to find a logical and reasonable reason for my physical appearance (on stage) and the incoherent speech of my character. I asked a doctor friend of mine to tell me of any illness which produced symptoms including slurred words and shaking movements but without affecting the thought process. I therefore studied 'Parkinson's disease' and adopted a personality who trembled nervously and had difficulties with his speech. Obviously (like the disease) the additions progress day by day. I was always adding a new detail until finally everything gelled. I would stand, unsteadily, on the ball of my left foot while my left knee and my arm trembled. I kept the trembling accentuated, more or less, all the time my fellow actors were on stage. When I had to speak I adopted a slow drawl. I would start jerkily and then speed up, getting quicker and quicker until I reached the end. Sam and Roger were not entirely convinced by my interpretation but had no objections.

(in Wilmer, ed., 1992: 28)

Martin goes on to describe the reaction of a couple of bystanders who observed his performance during rehearsal:

The presence of the servant, trembling, talkative, humiliated and battered, provoked a negative reaction, with cries of laughter and disgust. We had to break the rehearsal at this point. But this incident convinced Sam and Blin that we were on the right track and Sam told me to change nothing.

(in Wilmer, ed., 1992: 29)

It is interesting to compare Martin's 1991 recollection with his earlier version of the same event. This is recorded in Bair's biography, based on an interview that she conducted with the actor on 12 May, 1976. She explains:

Blin turned to his good friend, Jean Martin, who took the part only because he was between engagements and did not expect *Godot* to last long enough to interfere with his next commitment. Beckett took Martin aside and demonstrated how he wanted Lucky to be played, complete with stammering and stuttering. Martin went to a physician friend and described the movements Beckett wanted. The doctor immediately told Martin that someone who spoke and acted as Lucky did would probably be a victim of Parkinson's disease. That evening in the theater Martin told Beckett, who said 'yes, of course'. He mentioned briefly that his mother had had Parkinson's, but quickly moved on to another subject.

(Bair, 1978: 697)

The playwright would have delighted in the situation. It is a typically Beckettian conundrum which asks the recurrent question: 'But in all that what truth will there be?' (*WFG*, 82: 2762). The first possibility is that Bair was mistaken, so that Martin welcomed the opportunity of setting the record straight at the Dublin conference. The second possibility is perhaps more likely. Maybe in 1991, as an older man, Martin simply did not recall the circumstances as clearly as he had before. His might be a case of life imitating art, or, in this particular case, memory- theory.

In Martin Conway's studies of autobiographical memory he argues that even in vivid 'flashbulb' memories the original focus of the memory recedes into the background as the self assumes a centre-stage role, more appropriate to the self-absorbed memories of the elderly (Conway, 1990: 63). If we consider the two quotations from that point of view, it would seem that Beckett's role in delineating that character could have receded as Martin assumed more and more responsibility for the interpretation of the part.

What is important, though, is that common to both 'memories', however imperfect or incomplete, is Beckett's endorsement of Martin's interpretation. If the playwright had felt it to be mistaken he would have disallowed it from the start. Although Beckett did not insist upon a 'Parkinson's' portrayal from then on, he nonetheless approved of the initial interpretation as a dramatic possibility. Indeed, Martin must have been a very fine actor for his portrayal to have escaped caricature, though Cohn, on seeing *Godot* for the first time at the Theatre du Babylone in Paris, remembers: 'Lucky's monologue was so terrible to watch, with Martin in spastic tics that I thought *that* was the reason I could make no sense of it (in Bloom, ed. 1987: 42). She is not alone in her reaction. Peter Lennon corroborates her impression:

Jean Martin in his original role of Lucky performs in such a storm of tics, twitchings, and convulsions and makes the character so physically horrifying that the calculated effects of his frantic, semicoherent speech is somewhat obscured — I am sure decidedly so for someone who had not read the text .
(in Lennon, 1961: 7)

Interestingly, Sir Peter Hall, in his 1997 production of *Godot*, revived the Jean Martin characterisation. I agree with The *Telegraph* theatre critic, Charles Spencer, who described Glen

Hicks's performance as 'a *tour de force* of panting, dribbling, spitting servitude' (Spencer, 1997: MS 4437).

It would seem that Beckett's refusal to overdetermine the role catered for his dislike of the explicit while protecting the future portrayal of Lucky against ham acting. As a general principle he did not insist that his own interpretation be recreated in subsequent performances. This aspect of Beckett's directorial policy is discussed by Knowlson in his capacity as general editor of the *Theatrical Notebooks*, at the very beginning of his introduction to the series:

Nothing can ever truly be said to be definitive in the theatre. A play or a role is constantly open to reinterpretation. A different directorial approach, different actors and actresses, a different stage space and the end result must inevitably differ. And Samuel Beckett's own productions illustrated this just as clearly as do anyone else's. It is a misconception to think that he believed he or anyone else could 'fix' his plays. He stressed that other productions would have a different 'music' from his own and he accepted different configurations of the stage set. On the very few occasions when he objected to certain directorial proposals it was because he felt that fundamental changes were being made that radically altered his plays.

(in McMillan and Knowlson, eds, 1993: v)

The fact that Beckett did not object to Martin's theatrical portrayal of Lucky as a victim of Parkinson's disease gives it greater credibility as an interpretative possibility. The playwright was undoubtedly acquainted with its debilitating course, having observed its depredations at first hand in his mother's case. It would seem acceptable, therefore, to consider Lucky's condition within this framework, while remembering that he exists primarily as a tragic and poignant figure, rather than a diseased object-lesson. It is interesting, too, that Martin should use the phrase 'without affecting the thought process' as part of his perception of the malady. In their book, *Dementia: A Clinical Approach*, Cummings and Benson point out that early studies of Parkinson's disease seldom acknowledged particular problems with memory (Cummings and Benson, eds, 1983: 90). It has been left to the last two decades to fill in the gaps. In his original 1817 essay,

James Parkinson provided an accurate description of the movement disorder ('involuntary tremulous motion') as well as the associated disorder of posture, stance and gait ('a propensity to bend the trunk forward, and pass from a walking to a running pace'). Parkinson also claimed that the senses and intellect were

unaffected; ample evidence now exists, however, documenting the frequent occurrence of both cognitive impairment and mood disorder in PD.

(Whitehouse, ed., 1993: 183)

Whitehouse goes on to explain that tests done by Pirozzolo and his colleagues in 1982 demonstrated that more than ninety per cent of Parkinson's disease sufferers were shown to have some cognitive impairment. They also cite later epidemiological surveys conducted by Mayeux, Stern and Rosenstein which suggest that between ten and forty per cent of patients have dementia which is characterised by 'slowed mentation, apathy and depression' (Whitehouse, ed., 1993: 184). Sheila Scott notes in the later stages of the disease that 'words are scarcely now intelligible'; in another case, she alludes to the 'impediment of speech' and says that speech is 'very much interrupted', adding that 'a similar affectation of the speech, when the tongue thus outruns the mind, is termed volubility' (Scott et al. eds, 1995: 9).

Narinder Kapur, writing on memory disorders, also tackles the possibility of 'idiopathic degeneration in the basal ganglia and in the substantia nigra' (Kapur, 1988: 128) as a result of Parkinson's disease. He cites case studies done by Tweedy, Langer and McDowell in 1982 recording 'impaired performance on a range of verbal memory tasks, ranging from free recall, cued recall, recognition memory and short-term memory' (in Kapur, 1988: 128). Kapur concludes:

It is possible, therefore, that tests which require a greater degree of 'cognitive effort' and active attention (variables, which, it is worth noting, may be particularly affected by any depression present in a sample of patients with Parkinson's disease) are more likely to yield evidence of memory impairment in Parkinson's disease.

(Kapur, 1988: 129)

Even from a cursory survey of Lucky's speech and behaviour, it is evident that, in addition to other symptoms, he is deeply depressed and is therefore a candidate for the type of memory impairment mentioned above. His 'think', too, could rate as a 'test' requiring a great degree of 'cognitive effort'. If we take into account Lucky's age, his depression, severe malnutrition and the fact that he is unlikely to be medicated for any problem that he has, including his enlarged goitre, it is little wonder that he experiences difficulty in formulating his thoughts or remembering

items of information that he once knew. Knowlson is of the opinion that 'Lucky's bulging eyes and goitre are the signs of a thyroid imbalance which make him into a sagging narcolept' (McMillan and Knowlson, eds, 1993: 47). If we add to these disabilities the probable existence of Parkinson's disease, his problems with memory increase exponentially. We become aware, as he speaks, that any clarity and incisiveness he might once have possessed have sunk in a tide of aphasia: of hesitations, fillers, substitutions, repetitions, circumlocutions and tangents.⁴

As is often the case with Beckett, he portrays in Lucky 'the body as the mind's curse' demonstrating 'the numerous physical sufferings his characters endure but [making] the characters strangely unmoved by their own pain or mutilation' (Paine, 1981: 12-13). The brilliant Lucky that I saw at the 1999 Gate Theatre Beckett Festival had no sign of the Parkinson's disease that Martin had made his trademark. Yet he was clearly abnormal. With small steps taken on small feet and bent double, Stephen Brennan looked more like a victim of osteoporosis than anything else, literally and figuratively at the end of his tether. For his speech he painfully pulled himself up to his full height in an exhibition of pride at what he had once been. His speech was slow and elocuted to begin with, so that the audience could see where Pozzo had picked up his oratorical style. In a big voice, with cadences of a fundamentalist preacher, he proceeded to lose the thread of concentration, his speech becoming as rapid as automatic gun-fire, frantic and frothing until he subsided in a fit of words. The audience, visibly moved, clapped for a long time.

In Lucky's garbled tirade there is no attempt whatsoever to engage his audience, or to influence them through intonational colouring, though his intention would seem to persuade them to his own cynical point of view. Although he starts off relatively coherently in his presentation of a theological argument, it soon becomes apparent that he finds its cerebral demands impossible to maintain. Links between items in his semantic memory become increasingly fewer and weaker with each attempt to build a properly substantiated case. And because he is ambitious enough to attempt a formal academic register, the extent of his failure is more marked. It is far less demanding for a theatre-goer to register Lucky's inability to sustain formal discourse than it is to perceive Estragon's lack of skill in navigating the unpredictable course of casual conversation. It is almost immediately apparent that Lucky is incapable of sustaining intelligible thought. Living proof of the fact that man 'wastes and pines' (39, 1155), he is a physical and mental wreck,

expelling the flotsam of his memory as he lurches through its fragments. Vladimir's observation that 'Thinking is not the worst . . . What is terrible is to have thought' (57, 1821, 1829) is true of Lucky's poignant performance. Predictably, critics have been trying to come to terms with the cause of Lucky's difficulties for years. Coe hazards a guess when he describes

Lucky's great monologue in *Godot* that, from the psychiatrist's point of view, is the most untreated, unexpurgated version of the outpourings of any contemporary intellectual adolescent in the first crisis of drug addiction or of plain schizophrenia.
(in Beja et al., eds, 1983: 50)

Esslin, too, is on the same tack in his description of Lucky's 'wild, schizophrenic "word salad"' (Esslin, 1962: 34).

Throughout Lucky's speech we discern a valiant attempt at structural coherence struggling to contain the forces of disintegration. The end-product is 'a play of signifiers, differentiating themselves into a kind of spinning mobile of language, pulled around by vectors of reference that never find anything to refer to' (Albright, 1997: 362). Nonetheless, Lucky has made an attempt to divide his speech into four gambits: the first describes an impersonal and callous God, the second asserts that man 'wastes and pines', the third mourns an inhospitable earth and the last attempts to draw the threads of the speech together by claiming that man diminishes in a world that does not nurture him. Beckett himself outlines the structure in his Schiller Notebook, which Knowlson includes in the *Theatrical Notebooks*, Volume 1:

From the opening through 'Better than nothing' to 'but not so fast' the subject is identified as being an 'Indifferent heaven'. From 'and considering what is more' through 'wastes and pines' to 'and the facts are there' the subject is 'Dwindling man'. From 'And considering' to 'I resume' the subject is 'Earth abode of stones'. The tirade then ends with a 'cadenza' that reiterates its themes and produces what Beckett describes as the 'last straw' of 'Tears' and the eight repetitions of 'the skull'.

(McMillan and Knowlson, eds, 1993: 132)

This is the putative structure, but the effect in delivery is chaotic. If coherence in speech is developed through 'a kind of mental principle which guarantees the correct filling in of linguistic gaps in order to achieve comprehension', and cohesion is found in 'a formal relationship between

elements of text' (Blass, 1990: 17,16), Lucky has achieved neither. His words seem to dance to their own frenetic tune, whirling like demented dervishes. Language is a recalcitrant medium at the best of times, but when it is manipulated by a crazed practitioner it parodies any claims it has to meaning-making. This is further mangled by the speech difficulties typical of Parkinson's disease, 'including hypophonia, dysarthria, stuttering, echolalia and palilalia [. . .] reduced verbal fluency, [. . .] abnormalities in syntax, semantics, and comprehension (Civil et al. in Whitehouse, ed., 1993: 91).

Dispensing with an introduction, Lucky plunges into his overlearned harangue, part of his decomposing repertoire as an 'intellectual'. It is evident from his elevated vocabulary that he was once a man of some erudition; not every tongue can spout 'apathia', 'athambia' and 'aphasia'. As an overlearned 'chunk' of information, this pre-packaged incantation is still lodged intact in his semantic memory. Lucky in his 'knook' heyday must have supplied Pozzo with the pretentious language that his bombastic nature craves. What remains of it is ludicrously displaced.

In a parody of 'philosophical disquisition' (Morrison, 1983: 13), Lucky cites as authorities the fabricated names of Puncher and Wattman (providing clout and illumination?), Testew and Cunard (more balls?), Fartov and Belcher (gas and hot air?) and Steinway and Peterman (their labours lost, a stony silence?). Fictive constructs all. Beckett explained in the Berlin rehearsals that they were based on 'multilingual wordplay', having 'no reference at all to real people' (McMillan and Knowlson, eds, 1993: 133 n.1139). By the time Lucky spouts 'Acacademy of Anthropopopometry of Essy-in-Possy' he is gargling. Under normal circumstances, expert opinion is produced to supply substantiation and academic underpinning. Research is usually cited to bolster views, add weight and authenticate opinion. But Lucky cuts the ground from under his fictitious authorities by asserting that they 'establish beyond all doubt', though their 'labours' are 'unfinished' or 'lost'. He implodes his argument as he attempts to advance it.⁵ The inclusion of 'Feckham, Peckham, Fulham and Clapham' demonstrates that rhythmic fodder takes precedence over the dictates of sense and the powers of selection. And the repetition of the haunting, mellifluous 'Connemara' owes more to its aural beauty than its gelid qualities.

Lucky uses many rhetorical discourse organisers, but none of them effectively. His ‘frame’, ‘Given the existence of a personal God’ (39, 1139-40), is immediately undermined by the impersonal litany: ‘divine apathia, divine athambia, divine aphasia’. A god who is incapable of feeling, lacks interest and has lost the ability to express speech cannot qualify as a god who is personally involved in his creation. Lucky backtracks on ‘for reasons unknown’ and uses a forward planner in ‘but time will tell’. As the one sense unit cancels out the other, he again makes nonsense of what he has previously said. His compulsive repetition of ‘for reasons unknown but time will tell’ serves no emphatic purpose, but merely indicates the ‘stuck record’ of his mind. He strives against this in much the same way as a stutterer strives against his impediment. There is also a similar propensity to repattern words that he has already used, like an intricate form of counterpoint.

The beginning of the second part of his ‘tirade’ is denoted by a marker, ‘considering what is more’ (39, 148), but it also signals the cumulative effect of the multiplying verbiage. Verbiage, too, submerges the climax of his speech:

that as a result of the public works of Puncher and Wattman it is established beyond all doubt that in view of the labours of Fartov and Belcher left unfinished for reasons unknown of Testew and Cunard left unfinished it is established what many deny that man in Possy of Testew and Cunard that man in Essy that man in short in brief in spite of the strides of alimentation and defection *wastes and pines* [. . .]

(39, 1153-58, my emphasis)

Lawrence Graver notes that

When Beckett directed *Godot* at the Schiller Theater in 1975, he surprisingly announced to the actors on the first day that rehearsals would begin with Lucky’s speech, for it was here, he said, that the ‘threads and themes’ of the play ‘are being gathered together’.

(Graver, 1989: 49)

Ironically, the effect of Lucky’s speech is centrifugal, as ideas, rather than converging, seem to disperse along conflicting lines of force. In an effective speech with clear, taut lines, examples are supplied to model central concepts. Here they proliferate of their own accord, as Lucky exhibits the associative mind run amok. The ‘practice of sports’, for instance, could have been suggested by a few well chosen samples, but Lucky, once begun, cannot inhibit his repetitive tic. He thus

includes ‘tennis, football, running, cycling, swimming, flying, floating, riding, gliding, conating, [sic] camogie, skating, tennis’ (39, 1161-62).

This becomes even more apparent when he strives to let go of single, alliterative words: ‘that in the light the light the light of the labours lost’ (40, 1176). His hedge, ‘but not so fast’, is an admonition to the skeins of words that loop recursively, defiantly, out of control, never to reach closure. The links between proliferating tautologies and repetitions are illogical, and it becomes increasingly obvious that Lucky, despite glimmers of erstwhile erudition, is demented. Many orators fabricate statistics to order, but Lucky’s are simply ludicrous:

I resume Fulham Clapham in a word the dead loss per caput since the death of Bishop Berkeley being to the tune of one inch four ounce per caput approximately by and large more or less to the nearest decimal good measure round figures stark naked in the stockinged feet in Connemara [. . .]

(40, 1169-73)

Knowlson points out that Bishop Berkeley was an eighteenth century idealist philosopher whose God ‘maintains the world in existence by perceiving it’ (McMillan and Knowlson, eds, 1993: 135: n.1170). Knowlson also explains that this connects with the theme of witness and being witnessed that runs through *Waiting for Godot*. Despite this, Bishop Berkeley’s connection with ‘stark naked in the stockinged feet in Connemara’ is tenuous in the extreme. A number of logical links would have to be made to embed the venerable bishop within an intelligible Irish matrix, but these are quite beyond Lucky’s capacity.

With mounting incoherence, Lucky’s delivery becomes louder and more frenetic as he reels between tropes, lamenting a bleak and desolate world. The prolix words seem to be generated by syntactical patterning rather than structure. In this free-wheeling stream of consciousness Lucky loses all semblance of sense, though he daubs an impressionistic canvas of dark, cold and despair. In the ‘cadenza’ he recalls the ‘*momento mori*’ practitioners who contemplate the skull which ‘shrink [s]’ and ‘waste [s]’. His final attempt to reach closure by connecting the threads of his discourse collapses in a babble of incoherence:

I resume the skull to shrink and waste and concurrently simultaneously what is more for reasons unknown in spite of the tennis on on the beard the flames the tears the stones so blue so calm alas alas on on the skull the skull the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the labours abandoned left unfinished graver still abode of stones in a word I resume alas alas abandoned unfinished the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the skull alas the stones Cunard (*final vociferations*) tennis . . . the stones . . . so calm . . . Cunard . . . unfinished.
(40, 1185-93)

Coe concludes that Lucky's 'neuraesthetic rationalism tails off into an incoherent Jeremiad of hopelessness' (Coe, 1964: 1). Mercifully, when Vladimir seizes Lucky's hat, he finally dries up. As he has been 'talking through it', all this time he is finally brought to silence by Beckett's visual joke.

Lucky's incoherence has been shown up by the ambitiousness of his rhetoric. His introduction remains dangling, his 'expert witnesses' do not exist, he fails to develop an argument or maintain a clear line of thought and is utterly unable to draw the threads of his discourse together. Although he has some remaining sense of the shape he strives for, he is unable to discipline his words to that purpose. The residual memory of how it is done is so fragmentary that the associative generation of words supplies a compensatory tyranny.

In this sense, Lucky's speech approximates radical deconstructive practice. With the vertical relationship between signifier and signified severed by a dementia far in excess of normal language-slippage, the horizontal system of the relationship between his words is laid bare. Increasingly, Lucky's signifiers refer only to one another, with one phrasal string generating the next. As meaning becomes dislocated along a horizontal line of force, it contributes to the indeterminacy of the individual signifiers, especially as these are repeated for the sake of their familiarity and not their pretensions to sense. Lucky's speech is self-reflexive, as it does not mirror an external reality but circles, adrift, around a dislocated locus. What finally emerges is a fragmented sense of desolation in which 'traces' of lost meaning fitfully make their 'presence' felt through a more enduring absence. Lucky's words dissipate rather than contain meaning.

Alvin Epstein, who acted in the New York premiere of *Waiting for Godot*, said of Lucky, whom he observed: 'his mind is full of remnants. His head is a trash heap of broken shards of everything

that he invented, and everything that he understood. So every single phrase, every little bit of it, is meaningful to him. His desperate effort is to try to create order out of it, but he can't' (in Kalb, 1989: 187).

If Lucky were regarded only as one of Pozzo's Ozymandian 'works', his abject, craven state could be understood. If he were further viewed as a victim of time's attrition, he could be judged sympathetically as suffering most grievously. But if he were also seen to be afflicted with a cruelly debilitating disease, the full extent of his pitiable state would become apparent. Perhaps the onlookers would have tempered their 'cries of laughter and disgust' at Jean Martin's pioneering performance if they had realised the complexity of Lucky's adversity. In the rupture of his attempted communication and his eventual silence Lucky shows that his diseased memory has fragmented his discourse as it has deformed his life. More than any of the others in the play, he is a victim of his yesterdays.

Although 'no single explanatory principle can illuminate a text once and for all, untie all its knots and straighten all its threads' (Fischer, 1985: 58), in this seminal play we experience man as a being 'who attempts to block the pain of change with Habit, who tries to recapture lost time with his often powerless memory' (Silverman, 1989: 3). As audience, we have seen memory attempting to reconcile past and present 'in distorted images' that present 'a sequence of dislocations and adjustments' (*P*, 67). We have heard its efforts to ward off boredom and hold suffering at bay. And throughout the play we have seen it fail. Because memory is unable to sustain anaesthetising control or to energise discourse, in *Waiting for Godot* suffering erupts to claim its full toll.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Beckett had encountered Adler's discussion of the inferiority complex in *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology*, as well as in Woodworth's overview. Walter Asmus attested to Beckett's erudition when he noted that 'he knows precisely everything about the psychology'.
- 2 Robinson believes that 'Pozzo, in fact, is a temporal substitute for Godot: he is the man who has taken it upon himself to act as if the answers are known, who lives exclusively in terms of power, and whose existence is circumscribed by time' (Robinson, 1969: 255).
- 3 His ideas are reminiscent of Neary's cynicism in *Murphy* when he says: 'The symptom known as life is too diffuse to admit of palliation. For every symptom that is eased, another is made worse' (*M*, 112).
- 4 Barnard goes so far as to assert: 'this speech shows many of the technical characteristics of schizophrenic speech disorders, such as the frequent repetition of phrases quite out of context [. . .] thought not

reproduced by the precise word but [. . .] conveyed approximately by a number of closely related words [. . .] By the end of his speech Lucky is raving' (Barnard, 1970: 96).

- 5 Cohn believes that Lucky's speech 'displays Western Civilisation as shards of religion, philosophy, science, art, sport and modern industry [. . .] Named with devastating irony, Lucky is modern man with his contradictory unfinished fragments' (Cohn, 1973: 136).

CHAPTER THREE

MISSING INFORMATION

Tenacious though some of its reserves may be, in other ways the memory can be a fragile and compromised faculty. It is threatened not only by disease and the natural depredations of wear and tear that we observe in *Waiting for Godot*, but also by ‘countless stress fractures’ (Pilling, 1976 b: 78): by trauma, repression and occasionally by missing information. This is particularly true of autobiographical memory, for if vital pieces of knowledge are absent, the self-narrative cannot cohere. Thus Clov, who suffers racking doubt as to his identity, reflects sadly in *Endgame* that his was always ‘the life to come’ (26, 898).¹ He has never known whether Hamm is his biological father or not, and this, among other factors, has blighted his life. No valid sense of self has evolved from the obsessive rituals he has created to compensate for his ‘extinguished’ existence. Instead, hopelessly reified and emotionally deformed, he waits for it to be over. As the play opens, he tonelessly chants, ‘Finished, it’s finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished’ (3, 24-25).²

Like Watt, Clov ‘resists the simplified notion that a sum of memories (or stories) will add up to a history, a life’, for ‘memories are not historical but fictive: selected, reordered, reemphasized versions of past incidents’ (Kenner in Gontarski, ed., 1986: 9). The synthetic component of memory is vital to its functioning, for where details are unavailable, the imagination shores up the sense of self. In this chapter I shall investigate the function of memory as crucial to the evolvment of identity. Through the interaction of Hamm, Clov, Nell and Nagg it will appear that their reclamation of the past, however fragmentary, will ground their complex identities.

Beckett’s perceptions about autobiographical memory are remarkably at one with contemporary theory. By demonstrating that memory distorts the past as traces erode or are suppressed, Beckett dramatises the concept, particularly in *Endgame*, that ‘event memory is initially highly reproductive but becomes increasingly reconstructive with lengthening retention interval’ (Thompson et al., 1996: 204). This crucial belief that memory is partly reproduced and partly reconstructed not only features in Beckett’s writing, but is also central to the findings of memory theorists such as Baddeley, Schachter and Reviere (in Williams and Banyard, eds, 1999: 7).

In his monograph on Proust, Beckett pre-empts current attitudes towards autobiographical memory by stating that ‘the past must be continually renewed, the letter of safe-conduct brought up to date. The creation of the world did not take place once and for all time, but takes place every day’ (*P*, 19). Beckett emphasises the role of the imagination in filling out memories that have faded or are too painful to be recalled in their entirety. ‘Reality’, he notes, ‘whether approached imaginatively or empirically, remains a surface, hermetic. Imagination, applied — *a priori* — to what is absent, is exercised in vacuo and cannot tolerate the limits of the real’ (*P*, 74). These creative ‘errors’, far from violating the meaning of what has been recalled, frequently enhance it, as ‘autobiographical memories may be accurate without being literal and may represent the personal meaning of an event at the expense of accuracy’ (Conway, 1990: 9). Insertions, therefore, are generally congruent with actual memories.

In his delineation of memory in *Endgame*, Beckett focuses insightfully on ‘the narrative structure of the self-system’ (Conway, 1990: 154), as Hamm, Clov, Nell and Nagg try to complete their life-reviews. Secluded in their refuge from some unspecified catastrophe, ‘in the bunker world of *Endgame*’ (Wheatley, 1994: 141), they are aware of imminent death.³ Enigmatically, ‘something is taking its course’ (9, 247). Not even the possibility of a Godot exists to bail them out. As they play out their ‘endgames’ in their skull-like shelter, whatever emerges from their autobiographical memories constitutes their final sense of self. On one level it is hardly surprising that it is Nell who utters the most memorable line in the play: ‘Nothing is funnier than unhappiness’ (11, 333).⁴ Emotionally, she can afford to. She is able to indulge in *schadenfreude* because she is equipped to elude current misery. Like Winnie in *Happy Days*, her attempt to heft squalour into amusement transforms her cynicism into mordant humour.⁵ It appears as if Nell’s memory possesses a fail-safe escape from present horror in evocations of ecstatic ‘yesterdays’ spent as a young woman on Lake Como. These memories have only to be invoked for Nell to be filled with such rapture that current circumstances dissolve. She forgets that she is freezing, confined to a dustbin filled with wet, chafing sea sand, and, that like Mahood in his jar, she has no ‘shanks’. Despite current discomfort, her sensual past enables her to cherish thoughts of intimacy with her husband.

When she first appears in her lace cap at the rim of the dustbin, she asks Nagg incongruously: ‘What is it my pet? (*Pause.*) Time for love?’ (9, 259). This has obviously been a constant in their

long relationship. When they cannot kiss, Nell makes a brief protest, though she is unwilling to bring her husband relief by scratching his back. Being very close to death, she is loath to be distracted from the rapturous sensation that the word 'yesterday' has induced in her. This time-zone bears no resemblance to what happened the day before, but has everything to do with remembered sensations of sexual ecstasy and aesthetic delight experienced one April afternoon in her youth. Nell's memories of Lake Como are so immediate that they suggest the intensity of the 'delicious conflagration' of Proustian involuntary memory but, as they have obviously been rehearsed, they are not of the same order. The epiphanic sensation that would have accompanied true involuntary recall has long been engorged by habit. Nevertheless, her evocation is almost incantatory: 'It was deep, deep. And you could see down to the bottom. So white. So clean' (13, 380-81). She remains under the spell of her vivid memory while Nagg tells his 'suit' joke for the umpteenth time. In thrall as she is to her own recollection, she cannot oblige him with her laughter, but murmurs inappropriately: 'You could see down to the bottom' (13, 406). Her last words are, 'So white' (14, 414) and 'Desert' (14, 417) before she dies. In the final word she utters, Beckett characteristically imports a darker ambiguity to shadow the contrived comforts of her ecstatic nostalgia. The monotone which the playwright insisted on in his own productions of *Endgame* is deliberately enlivened by Nell's elegiac rapture. Beckett notes in the Berlin Diary that 'Coloration is only for their memories: i.e. Once! (line 11, 311) Ah yesterday! (line 12, 353), and Engaged!' (line 12, 374) (in Gontarski, 1992: 53).

Nell's autobiographical memory is typical in many ways as it approaches life's end. She has no interest in the stories of others as, devoutly self-involved, she indulges in the transformative power of her own narrative. In doing so, she seems curiously unaware of Hamm, almost as though she has blocked him out, until she criticises Nagg for laughing at their son so derisively. It is perhaps a measure of her self-absorption that she is usually able to discount her offensive progeny so effectively. It was not Nell, after all, but Nagg whom a desperate Hamm called in the night when he was a small boy.

Revealing details notwithstanding, it has to some extent become critical practice to discredit the search for behavioural mimesis and psychological realism in Beckett's plays. In their appraisal of 'The Blue Angel *Beckett on Film* Project', for instance, Everett Frost and Anna McMullan speak

favourably of performers who ‘de-psychologize the performance’ (in Oppenheim, ed., 2003: 230). This has a particular reference to *Endgame*, which is arguably the most abstract of the whole oeuvre, ‘a dizzying game of blind man’s bluff’ (Flieger, 1991: 232). Beckett refers to it as the ‘favourite of my plays’ (in Gontarski, ed., 1992: xv), and to Alan Schneider in 1956 as ‘[r]ather difficult and elliptic, mostly depending on the power of the text to claw, more inhuman than *Godot*’ (in Harmon, ed., 1998: 11). Hesla, commenting on its ‘missing information’, states:

Endgame is a difficult text to understand because the author appears to have suppressed evidence which it is important to have. He has obfuscated the causal relationships which support the plot, and he has tucked into the interstices of its structure data which we should very much like to have in the open.

(Hesla, 1971: 150)

Dealing as it does with memory, performance, and the construct of the largely fictive self through the elusive medium of language, the play makes it difficult to estimate where ‘truth’ ends and ‘fantasy’ begins.⁶ Theodor Adorno maintains that this is because ‘the interpretive word . . . cannot recuperate Beckett, while his dramaturgy — precisely by virtue of its limitation to exploded facticity — twitches beyond it, pointing toward interpretation in its essence as riddle’ (in Bloom, ed., 1988: 12). For all its enigma, what *is* assured is the one behavioural impulse which reliably induces negative emotional patterning in the responses of the three generations present on stage. A deliberate denial of the needs of others still operates as a constant factor in all four of the characters’ practice. ‘Beckett,’ observes Bell, ‘documents the relentless persistence with which patterns of abuse are repeated across successive generations’ (Bell, 1992: 72). We have observed it in Nell, but perhaps its most unexpected example is associated with Nagg’s craving for Turkish delight. Unlike his wife, who usually ignores her son, Nagg remains intensely aware of Hamm. As a father, he is querulously demanding and confrontational, his relationship with his child deplorable. After expressing a yearning for the delicacy, a desire that Hamm cannot satisfy, Nagg is obscurely reminded of other yearnings, and gloats over his son vindictively: ‘Whom did you call when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened, in the dark? Your mother? No. Me. We let you cry. Then we moved you out of earshot, so that we might sleep in peace’ (29, 1012-14). This no doubt contributes to Hamm’s judgment of his father as ‘accursed progenitor’ (7, 156), ‘accursed fornicator’ (7, 172) and ‘scoundrel’ (26, 903). Nagg certainly does not attempt to conceal his dislike of his progeny. When Hamm asks ‘Why did you engender me?’ (26, 903) Nagg replies that ‘I didn’t know . . . That it would be you’ (6, 904). Little wonder that the spurned child within

Hamm wistfully recalls: 'I was never there Absent, always. It all happened without me. I don't know what's happened' (38, 1327-28). His intense childhood loneliness and consequent need for company is captured in the poignant image of the 'solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together, and whisper together in the dark' (36, 1255-57).⁸ Gaye Bell, writing on *The World of Childhood Terror and Loss in the Plays of Samuel Beckett*, observes that:

childhood is more often than not a terrifying and painful stage of life, characterized by profound experience of sadness, loss, betrayal, rage, impotence, loneliness, and isolation [. . .] Beckett's plays expose instances of parental tyranny and brutality and give expression to the pain and anguish children suffer at the hands of those on whom they are dependent.

(Bell, 1992: 7)

The resentment that Nagg feels towards his son has been a constant factor in his life. It inhabits the present, where he has had to listen to Hamm's fable yet again:

NAGG: I was asleep, as happy as a king, and you woke me up to have me listen to you. It wasn't indispensable. You didn't really need to have me listen to you. Besides, I didn't listen to you. (*Pause.*) I hope the day will come when you'll really need to have me listen to you, and need to hear my voice, any voice. (*Pause.*) Yes, I hope I'll live till then, to hear you calling me like when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened in the dark, and I was your only hope.

(29-30, 1014-20)

The inference is that he would ignore Hamm yet again. He simply would not listen. Significantly, these words of repudiation are the last he speaks before silence and possibly death overtake him. Before that, though, Nagg unsuccessfully attempts to silence the litany of loss that constitutes his self-narrative by repeating a joke he has been telling for a lifetime. Even though his audience is unwilling to listen, he launches into his story of foiled expectations with histrionic flourishes reminiscent of his son's. Despite his attempted theatricality, his failing performative powers depress him as they are unable to compensate for a present in which he is hungry, uncomfortable and plaintive. Because the autobiographical memory is mood-congruent, his negative state throws up negative memories, especially those of the accident in which he lost his legs. Nor is his misery relieved by his gabbling stab at the Lord's Prayer. Together with his son he believes that 'the

bastard doesn't exist' (29, 1002). Despite their supplications, the ultimate Father responds to neither of them.

Nagg and Nell's few memories converge in images of shared sensuality and disaster, but within these memories there is considerable divergence of focus. 'One of their fondest memories', says Cavell, 'seems to be the time their tandem bicycle crashed and they lost their legs'. He adds that 'their past, their pain, has become their entertainment, their pastime' (Cavell in Bloom, ed., 1988: 61). But where Nell dwells on individual reflections of place and personal sensation, Nagg's recollection serves to coerce Nell into his script. He insists that she endorse his solipsistic recall of how she reacted to his verbal gambits.

In their son, Hamm, we see both thrusts in operation. He revels in sensual recollection while contriving to stage-manage responses to order. His will is persistently coercive. Nor does his disbelief in God impact in any way on his intense 'will to live', his 'reluctance to die, this long and desperate and daily resistance before the perpetual exfoliation of personality' (*P*, 25). Almost more than any other character in Beckett's plays, Hamm reflects Schopenhauer's views, especially in his will to live and his horror at new life coming into the world. Though his circumstances are dire, his life-force is tenacious. Intellectually he acknowledges that 'it's time it ended, in the refuge too' (4, 47-48), but emotionally he clings to life, saying: 'And yet I hesitate, I hesitate . . . to end. Yes, there it is, it's time it ended and yet I hesitate to — end' (4, 47-48). Indulgent though he may be towards his own continued existence, he denies other life-forms the right to live. The abuse that he suffered as a child is imprinted in his abusive psyche. Fleas, crablice and even small boys are wished a speedy extermination in case they perpetuate life, while his parents, whom he curses for having engendered him, are vengefully willed to die. His sentiments not only have the weight of Schopenhauer's philosophical thrust behind them,⁷ but the acrid resentment of the wilfully disregarded child. Rosen, writing on the pessimistic tradition, maintains that 'Beckett's art is nothing if not a repository of unconventional attitudes: infantile, narcissistic, nonproductive, spiteful, futile, dangerous unhappiness' (Rosen, 1976: 7). Intimidating though he may be, Hamm is a victim of callous neglect.

Though hard to credit, his ‘accursed progenitors’ (156) are better equipped to escape their distressing circumstances than their afflicted son.⁹ Blind, paralysed and in physical pain, Hamm reaches the end of his days by congratulating himself that there can be no misery greater than his, even though it is abundantly clear to the audience that Clov is the most miserable member of the quartet. He is not even accorded autonomous status in a symbiotic relationship in which ‘Clov is sight and motion to Hamm while Hamm is home and sustenance to Clov’ (Dukes, 1999: 14). At best Clov is a factotum, at worst an extension of Hamm’s colonising ego. But Hamm, like the protagonist of *Eh Joe*, has memories of aesthetic delight which he is able to access in dreams and reveries. He has not always been blind for, like his mother, he has inspiring visions of water: he remembers the ocean with its gulls, waves and currents. He can still visualise the herring fleet which the madman painter-engraver (if he existed) could not see. He longs to escape his deadly stasis on a raft (19, 628) that would transport him to an anywhere away from the refuge, acknowledging at the same time that even though their shelter is ‘hell’, away from it lies ‘the other hell’ (15, 466). With visions of ‘light, of sun and forests and of green hills’ (21, 708-09) he longs for images of beauty to distract him. Accustomed to being in control, he even tries to design his dreams, ‘If I could sleep I might make love. I’d go into the woods. My eyes would see . . . The sky, the earth. I’d run, run, they wouldn’t catch me. (*Pause.*) Nature.’ (22, 323-25). In the strange connection between erotic activity ‘in the woods’ and running away to avoid being caught, Hamm recalls the seductive pleasures of his lovemaking, whatever form it has taken.

Hamm’s reminiscences have a highly imaginative overlay, not unexpected in a blind man. His memories of the green hills are embellished by ecstatic visions of Flora, Pomona and Ceres (21, 709). In similar vein, memories of losing his sight and motion that have no factual, medical underpinning thrust their way through the tropes that shape his own personal mythology of alienation and meaninglessness. Characteristically, he projects his infinite sense of loss on to his scapegoat, Clov, whose sight and motion he resents. Hamm prophesies:

HAMM: One day you’ll be blind, like me. You’ll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever, like me . . . Infinite emptiness will be all round you, all the resurrected dead of all the ages wouldn’t fill it, and there you’ll be like a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe. (*Pause.*) Yes, one day you’ll know what it is.

(20, 653-65)

This is no factually based memory of deprivation, but a polished, self-dramatising recital of loss. Hamm, a devout solipsist, has honed his life-narrative to a tale of rhythmic threnody which chimes with his opening lament. He is consciously rhetorical as he enacts his suffering. As victim, he might feature as a minuscule speck or piece of grit, but his setting is grandiose — ‘the void’, ‘infinite emptiness’ and ‘the steppe’. Nor is he able to leave it at that, but, Nagg-like, must visit his suffering on his ‘son’. In doing so, Beckett brilliantly demonstrates how the autobiographical memory is neither inert nor rigid but accommodates itself imaginatively to both past and present.

When Hamm removes his fascinated focus from himself, apart from the ‘creatures’, ‘paupers’ and ‘brats’ who comprise his world, there are a few people whom he individually identifies in remembrance, the ‘madman’, the ‘old doctor’ and ‘Mother Pegg’. His recollection of the madman is particularly interesting, as it is summoned by Clov’s unrelenting nihilism in typifying ‘yesterday’ as ‘that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day’ (24, 803). Clov blames Hamm entirely for his attitude. Stung into response, Hamm counters Clov’s attack with his story of the madman, probably a bespoke fantasy pressed into service. In any event, Hamm is uncharacteristically evasive, so that one might suspect that the story had been assembled for the occasion. Once again, we encounter ‘missing information’. He says:

HAMM: I once knew a madman who thought the end of the world had come. He was a painter — and engraver. I had a great fondness for him. I used to go and see him, in the asylum. I’d take him by the hand and drag him to the window. Look! There! All that rising corn! And there! Look! The sails of the herring fleet! All that loveliness! (*Pause.*) He’d snatch away his hand and go back into his corner. Appalled. All he had seen was ashes. (*Pause.*) Forgotten. (*Pause.*) It appears the case is . . . was not so . . . so unusual.

(24, 807-14)

Capable of exhilarated aesthetic response himself, Hamm is repulsed by the deadly reductiveness of Clov’s ‘bloody awful’ days. He retaliates by supplying a parable that has a nervy, provisional quality to its dashes and commas, but which allows Clov to select his own application. Although the Van Gogh-like madman of the story encounters Hamm’s customary coercive discourse, the attempt to ‘fix’ the story on Clov is strangely tentative. Hamm is hesitant in suggesting ‘the case is . . . was not so . . . so unusual’. Bearing in mind that with all its doubts and dislocations, his

‘present self inhabited that memory’ (Byatt, 2002: 94), Hamm cannot be sure if the story really applies to Clov, for if it does Hamm will have to interrogate the fundamentals of his present circumstances. Can he trust Clov? What if vital information is missing? In his blind immobility Hamm relies on Clov’s perceptions to construct reality for him. And if Clov, like the engraver, has misconstrued everything through nihilism, what then?

Given his uncertainty, Hamm is faced with three possibilities. So is the audience. The first is that Clov’s memory is accurate, that things are exactly as he reports them in a post-holocaust world in which ‘something is taking its course’. This is perhaps the least disturbing option, and the one to which Hamm has become accustomed. The second is that Clov has been so ‘extinguished’ that, like the real or fabricated madman, he is capable of perceiving only an ‘extinguished’ world. His memory and perceptions have been so poisoned by their reservoirs of joyless days that he is unable to register anything but negative, doom-ridden images of decay and dissolution. This worries Hamm sufficiently to initiate some circumspect probing. He reacts to his lack of knowledge by applying his memory of the madman to the riddle of divergent perception, to the gospel-according-to-Clov. If Hamm’s hunch is true, then Clov’s apocalyptic vision would stem from the same source as the madman’s — the pessimistic selectiveness of the delusional mind.

The third option is even more problematic. Although Hamm skirts it from time to time, he never fully articulates it. Clov is fond of saying, rather portentously, that ‘something is taking its course’. The possibility exists that it is *he* who is ‘taking his course’. As the ‘king’s’ last opponent in *Endgame*’s chess tournament, Clov, as ‘knight’, is bound by the rules of the game to block his opponent’s conquest. The servant, therefore, might be engaged in an elaborate series of ‘moves’ to resist the master’s hegemony once and for all.¹⁰ Since Hamm has only Clov’s word for it that they are living in what Robinson describes as ‘the lingering dissolution of a world at zero’ (Robinson, 1969: 242), Clov has him at his mercy. He takes this opportunity to report on phenomena that he has not observed at all. Because he systematically deceives Hamm over small details, he could quite possibly, out of revenge and desperation, have conceived of a totalising strategy to trounce the embattled ‘king’. The vision he projects accords with his own negative mind-set sufficiently to avoid outright suspicion on Hamm’s part, though Clov feels constrained to say at one stage: ‘You don’t believe me? You think I’m inventing?’ (40, 1409). Hamm does

not reply. If the world were other than his servant reported and Clov finally laid claim to freedom by leaving, he would have defeated Hamm in an elaborately devised strategy. This does not happen, however, as the final tableau of Clov framed against the doorway burdened by his stalled 'life to come' suggests stalemate rather than checkmate. When Beckett directed his own production in Berlin in 1967 he explained to the actor Ernst Schröder that Hamm

is a king in this chess game lost from the start. From the start he knows he is making loud senseless moves. That he will make no progress at all with the gaff. Now at last he makes a few senseless moves as only a bad player would. A good one would have given up long ago. He is only trying to delay the inevitable end. Each of his gestures is one of the last useless moves which put off the end. He's a bad player.

(in Cohn, 1973: 152)

Interestingly, Gussow reviews a 1980 Joseph Chaikin New York production in which Clov seems to favour the 'third option' in his interpretation of the part. Describing him as 'a cousin to Chaplin', he reports that 'Behind his master's back, he is often imitative and gently derisive. This Clov has more personality than is often the case. Mr. Gross is a wily servant, a scamp in the guise of a simpleton' (Gussow, 1996: 153). Because this is a polysemic Beckettian world which rests, owing to missing information, on incomplete circuits of suggestion, all three options remain tantalisingly unresolved. And although we as the audience are as blind as Hamm to the final outcome, we are no less aware of the possibilities of multiple perception, multiple option, through missing information and the vagaries of memory.

Apart from the 'madman' who might, or might not, have been pressed into imaginative service for the occasion, Hamm recalls the 'old doctor' and 'Mother Pegg'. Both probably tried to meet his needs in one way or another in the past. Pegg he recalls with a reminiscent leer: 'She was bonny once, like a flower of the field', says Hamm, 'and a great one for the men!' (23, 778-79). Yet she, too, was denied help when she needed it. It is Clov who recalls the circumstances most bitterly:

CLOV: *(Harshly)* When old Mother Pegg asked you for oil for her lamp
 and you told her to get out to hell, you knew what was
 happening then, no?

(Pause.)

 You know what she died of, Mother Pegg? Of darkness.

HAMM: (*Feebly*) I hadn't any.
CLOV: (*As before*) Yes, you had.

(38, 1344-49)

Hamm changes the conversation, but later reflects: 'Of darkness! And me? Did anyone ever have pity on me?' (39, 1385). His lifelong grudge against his parents has caused him to characterise himself as a victim, as 'yesterday's deformity', who owes nothing to anyone, not even to those who have helped him. In his resultant self-dramatisation, he fancies himself a domestic Dracula. 'Last night', he says to Clov, portentously, 'I saw inside my breast. There was a big sore' (18, 581-82). Clov is singularly unimpressed, and reacts derisively: 'Pah! You saw your heart ' (18, 583). Unfazed, Hamm compounds the macabre by going one further: 'No, it was living' (18, 584). He has refined his callousness to the acknowledged and vaunted cruelty which he visits on Clov when he denies him the information which is his birthright.

This is particularly striking in the 'chronicles' where Hamm avenges his upbringing in dramatised reactions of shocking hard-heartedness. In the surreal account of his acquisition of a small boy as son and serf, Hamm takes sadistic relish in his obduracy. Contained within the fable are emotional memories still having current purchase, since they reflect the power-play of the family dynamic. Morrison believes that Hamm's story provides 'one of the best examples of extended narrative as an essential part of drama'. She contends:

The whole point of *Endgame* lies in the interrelationship between this chronicle, this value-laden record of past events, and the words and actions which make up the dramatic present of the play. The play ends when the narrative ends [. . .] Hamm's chronicle does not serve as mere distraction; it betrays his deepest fear and need, as his final brief reference to it reveals in the important last minutes of the play.

(Morrison, 1983: 27, 28, 33)¹¹

Hamm's imaginative chronicle resonates plangently because, like Henry's in *Embers*, it mines the real. Ricks, who admires Beckett's respect for 'piteous bodily weakness, and [. . .] the strength to contemplate it', deprecates 'one of the present fashions in academic literary circles: the flaccid assurance that everything is fictive and verbal, and that the real has finally been shown the door' (Ricks, 1993: 15). In spite of *Endgame's* fictive overlay and verbal embellishment, the real is palpable. Hamm's story has surreal rhetorical flourishes, but it has not severed its experiential

moorings. He is forced to approach his subject obliquely, for to tell his ungarnished life-story would be to reveal Clov's origins. For years Hamm has tortured his servant with hints of paternity: even in his last days he is not prepared to divulge the facts. He would rather thwart Clov to the end. Besides, the chronicles deal with sensitive issues which Hamm can approach less painfully through fable. As is typical of the autobiographical memory, he recalls the themes, and embellishes them creatively. When he crafts his fictive narrative of self-legitimation, Hamm strives to portray himself as a heartless mogul, despite his final capitulation. In Clov he confronts an abject being who has been diminished by his 'benefactor's' overbearing combination of wealth, status, presence and callousness. The 'facts' of Hamm's narrative might be garbled and overblown, but the image of self that emerges from them is consistent with his assumed role throughout the play. Even the extremes reached by the weather are likely to chart some emotional excess encountered in the acquisition of his 'son'. With great dramatic effect, Hamm reconstructs his riddling 'chronicle':

HAMM: The man came crawling towards me, on his belly. Pale, wonderfully pale and thin, he seemed on the point of [. . .] Well, what is it *you* want? . . . well, what ill wind blows you my way? — He raised his face to me, black with mingled dirt and tears. (*Pause. Normal tone.*) That should do it. (*Narrative tone.*) No, no, don't look at me, don't look at me. He dropped his eyes and mumbled something, apologies I presume [. . .] Come on now, what is the object of this invasion? [. . .] It's my little one, he said. Tsstss, a little one, that's bad. My little boy, he said, as if the sex mattered. Where did he come from? He named the hole. A good half-day, on horse. [. . .] And you expect me to believe you have left your little one back there, all alone, and alive into the bargain.? Come now! [. . .] Well to make it short it finally transpired that what he wanted from me was . . . bread for his brat. Bread? But I have no bread, it doesn't agree with me. Good. Then perhaps a little corn? [. . .] (*Violently*) Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that! [. . .] Gradually I cooled down, sufficiently at least to ask him how long he had taken on the way. Three whole days. Good. In what condition he had left the child. Deep in sleep. (*Forcibly*) But deep in what sleep, deep in what sleep already? (*Pause.*) Well to make it short I finally offered to take him into my service. He had touched a chord [. . .] In the end he asked me would I consent to take in the child as well — if he were still alive. (*Pause.*) It was the moment I was waiting for. (*Pause.*) [. . .] I can see him still, down on his knees, his hands flat on the

ground, glaring at me with his mad eyes, in defiance of my wishes.

(27-28, 922-75)

Hamm evinces a surprising level of discomfort at the power of his dramatised recollections, with his reiterated cry of 'No, no, don't look at me, don't look at me', sounding a discordant note among the self-vaunting strains of the rest of his monologue. His imaginative capacity, coupled with what seems like obscure though intrusive guilt, makes it harder for him to sustain uniform pitilessness. He does, after all, comply with the beggar's request, even though his cultivated churlishness belies his acquiescence. But, as he cannot bear to be thought weak, he maintains an odd disjunction between a tendency to empathise and an overriding resolve to play the iron man. Underlying his puffery is an undercurrent of apology. It is little wonder that Hamm cannot perfect the 'chronicle' to his satisfaction. Despite his attempt at establishing an identity continuum, there are unresolved conflicts in his psyche which buck his smooth narration. Yet, unlike the protagonists of *Footfalls*, *Rockaby* and *Not I*, he does identify himself with his garbled tale. Hamm's deprived childhood has left him malevolently disposed towards children: his first impulse is to wish them dead, his second to punish and thwart them, yet in the chronicle he claims that he was sufficiently moved by pity to take the child in.

When he comes to recount the father's tale in the chronicle, Hamm only rarely allows him his own voice. Otherwise every proffered explanation is mediated through Hamm's self-regarding consciousness, through question and hyperbole. Yet, despite heavy-handed authorial intervention, Hamm is seen to suppress pity with some difficulty. At the core of his psyche there seems to be an unresolved tension between the imaginative capacity that enlarges his sympathies and the vengeful drive that inhibits them. Despite years of callous practice he has not been entirely able to smother the 'heart' beating in his head. There are areas of pain that Hamm evades, strategies of compensation he feels compelled to adopt. 'As son,' says Morrison incisively, 'Hamm was mistreated and abandoned, and as father, he has mistreated and failed his own creation. His chronicle is an attempt to offset the pain of these two basic related experiences' (Morrison, 1983: 35).

It is when Hamm is begged to take the child in that he gathers himself to full stature, strutting like a czar. This is his supreme moment, perhaps the climax of his whole emotional life. His fantasised memory creates a kind of epiphany. The beggar's prostration and Hamm's triumph are the high points of the story, for after climactically describing the imposition of his formidable will, Hamm soon loses interest and resumes his normal tone.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Hamm's dramatised narrative is that he calls it an 'audition'. Not only does this draw attention to his status as an actor performing largely fictive material in a highly theatrical play, but it also raises the interesting possibility of whether he qualifies for the part, and if so, what part he aspires to. From his monologue it would appear that no less than the lead role would satisfy Hamm's aspirations, with the other characters shrunk to the 'bit parts' of Beckett's visual joke. Alice and Kenneth Hamilton see him as 'the player-king whose kingdom has contracted (like that of Shakespeare's Richard II) to "the hollow crown" where "death keeps his court"' (Hamilton, 1976: 166). Believing death to be approaching, Hamm concludes his encoded self-narrative at the end of the play with these mystifying words: 'Moments for nothing, now as always, time was never and time is over, reckoning closed and story ended' (42, 1485-86). Any possibility of a stable meaning to resolve his chronicle has been radically undermined. There will be no revelation:

HAMM: *(Pause. Narrative tone:)* [He asked] if he could have his child with him . . . *(Pause.)* It was the moment I was waiting for. *(Pause.)* You don't want to abandon him? You want him to bloom while you are withering? Be there to solace your last million last moments? *(Pause.)* He doesn't realize, all he knows is hunger, and cold, and death to crown it all. But you! You ought to know what the earth is like, nowadays. Oh, I put him before his responsibilities. *(Pause. Normal tone:)* Well, there we are, there I am, that's enough.

(42, 1486-1493)

The 'chronicle' is patently not enough, neither for nurture-starved Hamm, nor for his protégé, Clov. In fact, 'this story,' says Morrison, 'has allowed Hamm to reveal his deep sense of not having been cared for . . . and his deep resentment that such care could ever exist for anyone else' (Morrison, 1983: 39). The chronicle ends abruptly without the disclosure that Clov needs in order to position himself in the unresolved story of his life. Whether Clov is the son of the supplicant,

of Hamm, or some other unspecified being is not revealed. With his origins obscure, Clov's memories are warped by missing information, by their lack of a defining context. Hamm has compounded his own parents' emotional neglect by denying Clov his birthright, his right to primary coherence. Beckett, who always claimed in public that he did not know whether Hamm is Clov's father, was uncharacteristically forthcoming in a letter to Schneider in 1957:

What more can I say about Hamm's story? Technically it is the most difficult thing in the play because of the number of vocal levels. Dramatically it may be regarded as evoking events leading up to Clov's arrival, alone presumably, the father having fallen by the way, and to the beginning of the particular horror to which this play is confined. It also allows Clov's 'perception' of boy at end to be interpreted as vision of himself as last lap to 'shelter' (which term use instead of 'refuge' throughout if you wish).

(in Harmon, ed., 1998: 22-23)

The 'sheltering' side of Hamm's 'paternity' is even more nauseating. In contrast to the callousness of his chronicle, Hamm wallows in sentimental, self-congratulatory mythology which Clov refuses to endorse. Ironically, the disingenuous 'memories' of the 'chronicle' are the most cruel of all, since Hamm never says outright 'I was your father'. Clov flounders in debilitating speculation to the last:

HAMM: It was I was a father to you.
CLOV: Yes. (*He looks at Hamm fixedly.*) You were that to me.
HAMM: My house a home for you.
CLOV: Yes. (*He looks about him.*) This was that for me.
HAMM: (*Proudly*) But for me, (*gesture towards himself*) no father. But for Hamm (*gesture towards surroundings*) no home.
(*Pause.*)
CLOV: I'll leave you.

(21, 696-703)

The vagaries of Hamm's past are processed through his skewed emotional and perceptive filter. Those self-vaunting memories that emerge are immediately imploded by Clov's deflationary rejection. They are revealed as sham in the light of the pitifully inadequate 'home' and 'father' that Hamm has supplied, worse by far than his own. Clov, who has sustained only minimal and dysfunctional life, rejects the invitation to filial gratitude out of hand. Even though Hamm's 'home' conflates with 'refuge' to denote some kind of rescue, Clov refuses to supply obligatory

gratitude. His repudiation, if nothing else, is unequivocal. But unfazed by Clov's rejection, Hamm continues in this pseudo-chummy vein as he attempts to complete his life-review:

HAMM: Do you remember, in the beginning, when you took me for a turn? You used to hold the chair too high. At every step you nearly tipped me out. (*With senile quaver*) Ah great fun, we had, the two of us, great fun! (*Gloomily*) And then we got into the way of it.

(33, 1137-39)

Clov, predictably, fails to respond. Given his resentment, he would probably have had more 'fun' tipping Hamm out and sniggering at his discomfiture.

Hamm's misplaced sentimentality also settles viscosely on his recollection of Clov's 'affection'. If we are to judge by Clov's reaction, however, the kisses were coerced and probably obscene. 'I won't kiss you anywhere' (35, 1216) and 'I won't touch you' (35, 1217), says Clov, dismissively. His revulsion probably stems from more than straightforward dislike of his 'benefactor'. Indeed, Clov's pointed rebuttal hints at sexual abuse. 'Normal' sex seems to disgust Hamm, possibly owing to its procreative potential and its power to exclude him. He sneers pruriently, 'Lick your neighbour as yourself' (35, 1237), 'When it wasn't bread they wanted it was crumpets!' (35, 1238) and 'Out of my sight and back to your petting parties' (35, 1239). But in spite of Clov's rejection, Hamm continues with his paternal schmaltz. In contemplating his end he says:

If I can hold my peace, and sit quiet, it will be all over with sound, and motion, all over and done with. (*Pause.*) I'll have called my father and I'll have called my . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . my son.

(36, 1247-50)

In the meantime Hamm's range of dominating speech acts make Pozzo of *Waiting for Godot* look like a rank amateur. In addition to questions and commands, which form the staple of his repertoire, he threatens, insults, curses and blackmails his way through the rapid, frequently monosyllabic dialogue. This discourse of intimidation, together with further varieties of gloating, prophesying, correction and pontification, mark his language as a tool of domination. Being blind and at Clov's mercy only intensifies his compensatory verbal posturing,¹² his attempts at intimidation continuing unabated until he believes Clov to have deserted him. Apart from the rare

occasions when Clov initiates new conversational gambits, Hamm holds the floor, stage-manages the turn-taking and testily imposes new topics. His refusal to give up his power base marks his discourse as a site of conflict in which the urge to enact the dominating self continues unabated. Though he knows that his futile attempts merely provide a temporising device, the remembered habits of a lifetime dictate his claim to a powerful subject position. His dialogue with Clov is not without wit and acrid rejoinder, however. Easthope describes it as ‘sharp, witty, paradoxical dialogue, often dependent on the interplay of verbal connection and logical nonsequitur, which is of a kind that has fascinated the Irish from Swift to Shaw’ (Easthope in Bloom, ed., 1988: 56). Hamm is a polished showman, with much of his discourse stretched precariously over memories skewed to dissipate their destructive potential.

Questions constitute the staple of his conversation. Although apparently innocuous, they are coercive in that they demand answers to specific inquiry. Many are of the ‘Have you done this, have you done that?’ variety, but some are even more demanding:

HAMM: Am I right in the centre?
 CLOV: I’ll measure it.
(He moves.)
 HAMM: More or less! More or less!
 CLOV: *(Thumps chair.)* There!
 HAMM: I’m more or less in the centre?
 CLOV: I’d say so.
 HAMM: You’d say so! Put me right in the centre!

(15, 480-87)

Hamm’s narcissistic desire to be centre stage pervades every area of his life, probably as a result of his having always felt ‘absent’. In the memories that form the continuum of his controlling identity Hamm has always overpowered Clov. But with the onset of blindness and paralysis he has grown distrustful of his servant and, being unable to check on his actions, is becoming increasingly fretful and demanding. His growing suspicion dictates the verbal route of repeated question and demand.

It dictates, too, a pattern of intimidation and belittlement. Clov has no sooner appeared in answer to Hamm’s whistle than he is grossly insulted by his master. ‘You pollute the air!’ (4, 52), Hamm complains. When Clov is tardy in carrying out orders, Hamm has no compunction in threatening

him with death. ‘I’ll give you nothing more to eat’ (5, 91), he warns. Though his menace is undercut by physical disablement, this does not restrain his choice of speech acts. His speech reveals a will to power that is still raging. Apart from controlling his servant’s responses, he even takes upon himself the right to initiate and authorise everyone’s movements. In a particularly callous interchange with Clov, Hamm says:

HAMM: How are your legs?
 CLOV: Bad.
 HAMM: But you can move.
 CLOV: Yes.
 HAMM: *(Violently)* Then move!

(6, 123-27)

In his discourse of self-aggrandisement, he trains the spotlight recursively upon himself. He repeatedly presumes to explain phenomena reported by Clov, thereby assuming expert status inappropriate to his circumstances.

This being a play by Beckett, Hamm is not averse to using pauses, gravid or otherwise. These signify his

hesitation to speak, the suspension of an idea, the expectation of an answer, an *invalid memory*, an expression of delight, a need to frame and underline the meaning of the words, a gradation, a change of tone, a rhythmic patterning [. . .] One possibility is that the silences reinforce the meaning of the words, allowing them to reverberate with the blank space of the pause.

(Brinzeu, in Buning and Oppenheim, eds, 1993: 230, my emphasis)

He is as much in control of his pauses as he is of his discourse. When Clov decides to leave Hamm at the end of the play, he humours his master by supplying the phatic responses appropriate to the occasion. Significantly, he initiates the self-dramatising gambit, while Hamm plays along. In so doing, he ‘mocks the conventions by which we try to say the right thing in the right context’ (Hayes in Docherty, ed., 1994: 108):

CLOV: This is what we call making an exit.
 HAMM: I’m obliged to you, Clov. For your services.
 CLOV: *(Turning)* Ah pardon, it’s I am obliged to you.

HAMM: It's we are obliged to each other.

(41, 1460-63)

In this stylised *pas de deux*, power is seen to pass from performer to performer, coming to rest between them. Stasis is finally achieved in a resolution of the power struggle that has characterised their exchange throughout the play. Flieger holds that 'the alternating power dynamic between Hamm and Clov is an indication of the final powerlessness of both players, the failure of a totalizing sadistic impulse of mastery' (Flieger, 1991: 228). Clov's memories are far too bleak to allow Hamm finally to prevail.

It has not always been so. Abused from the first moment he could remember, Clov, for most of his life, has been powerless against Hamm's sadism. As an emotional abuser, Hamm uses all of the techniques enumerated by James Gabarino in his article on 'The Elusive "Crime" of Emotional Abuse'. Hamm is guilty of 'put downs, labelling, unrealistic expectations, humiliation, scapegoating, name calling, excessive responsibility, seductive behaviors, fear inducing techniques, extreme inconsistency, ignoring, rejection and lying (in Finkelman, ed., 1995: 240). As a result, Clov's numbed sensibilities have engendered an autobiographical memory that has elided into a grey or even black blur, proceeding from an incoherent sense of self that is unable to support memory retention. This can be attributed to the 'one factor that significantly facilitates recall for self-events, [. . .] the self-schema, especially the organisational (and hence the retrieval) benefits conveyed by the self as a prime cause of these persistent self-memories' (Thompson et al., 1996: 208). Lacking an integral sense of self, Clov has very few of these. But, among the anaemic abstractions leached of detail that constitute his mind, one particularly vivid memory emerges, a painful re-enactment of thwarted aspiration, thwarted longing. Clov is able to recall his disappointment in detail. The 'family' pattern of need-denial endures into the 'third generation' as Clov accuses Hamm:

CLOV: When there were still bicycles I wept to have one. I crawled at your feet. You told me to get out to hell. Now there are none.

HAMM: And your rounds? When you inspected my paupers. Always on foot?

CLOV: Sometimes on horse.

(6, 143-46)

Horses are more expensive to maintain than bicycles, so money presumably wasn't the problem. Like his father before him, Hamm takes delight in 'deviant parenting' (Kavanagh in Finkelman, ed., 1995: 282), in cruelly thwarting the desires of a child, and the more abject Clov's grovelling, the more he is spurned. Since Hamm's favourite subject position for others is of supplication denied, he sadistically employs this technique to cow and diminish his 'son'. Not only does Clov's bicycle memory contain uncharacteristic factual detail which Hamm corroborates, but it also records the emotional impact made on Clov at the time of its encoding. As a component of the self-narrative it is securely fixed in place, a benchmark of psychological importance. Reflecting a personally important experience, the trace is typical of the 'normal' autobiographical memory in that it has 'high self-reference', is 'context specific', has been of 'long duration' and has 'sensory and perceptual attributes' (Conway, 1990: 14). It demonstrates that all Clov has ever been able to anticipate is the certainty of suffering. And Hamm has not changed. When he speaks of the dog to Clov, he insists that it adopt a particular pose. 'Leave him like that,' he orders, 'standing there imploring me' (23, 757). It is Hamm's choreography of choice.

A parallel memory to the 'bicycle' incident, equally accusatory in tone, is Clov's remembrance of Mother Pegg's treatment. Uncharacteristically, the memory is sharply etched, clearly visualised and interpreted. Like the story of the bicycle denied, it is a pivotal part of Clov's concept of Hamm, the heartless man who scorns the needs of others. From these two instances, it is evident that Clov is intellectually capable of sharp recollection, though he normally avoids it, probably on account of the pain it occasions. Unlike the 'bicycle' memory involving himself, the 'Mother Pegg' recollection lacks intense emotion, though it reminds Clov of his own experience. His tone is firm, accusatory and unafraid. At this stage of the play, without even realising it himself, Clov is gathering his psychic resources to leave his diminished abuser.

Apart from these two recollections, Clov's memory seems to have been seriously impaired by years of 'suffering too much'. Recent investigations into traumatic stress bear out what Beckett discovered in his reading of Janet's early work on dissociation, and Jones's Freud-derived work on neurotic amnesia. In their discussion,

Van der Volk and Fisler (1995) argue that traumatic stress overwhelms an individual's coping mechanisms, and that memories from these traumatic events

are encoded differently than ordinary events, by virtue of alterations in attentional focus from extreme emotional arousal. Van der Volk's model of trauma and memory is based on Janet's (1919/1925) pioneering work on dissociation. Janet initially described dissociation as a process in which a person faced with overwhelming emotions is unable to create a narrative memory for the event [. . .] Dissociation is increasingly being identified as a key defense mechanism employed by abused children. It is hypothesized that the use of this strategy becomes habitual at some point and that the dissociation leads to disturbances in both implicit and explicit memory functioning.

(Eisen et al., in Williams and Banyard, eds, 1999: 36)

Beckett had encountered Freud's theory that forgetting is purposive, an avoidance strategy to protect the fragile psyche. In this regard, Sharon Lewis is expansive, as she describes the state of 'complex post-traumatic stress' which Beckett appears to dramatise in Clov's reactions:

Where a child has been abused over a long period of time, often by a parent or other caregiver, or has been through a number of traumas, symptoms are more complex and long lasting. Children who experience repeated traumas may learn to become numb or to forget the trauma in order to protect themselves. [They] may also develop a sense of rage or a sense of extreme sadness [. . .] These ways of coping may then lead to disturbances in the child's sense of time, memory and concentration [. . .] In adulthood, survivors of complex trauma may remain isolated and withdrawn.

(Lewis, 1999: 16,18)

A comparison with Clov reveals startling similarities. But this is not all. A strong likelihood of past sexual abuse shadows the play, which would exacerbate Clov's feelings of 'detachment, estrangement, numbness, depression, worthlessness and guilt' so that 'everything becomes suffused with a feeling of unreality' (Fredrickson, 1992: 61).

This might provide an explanation for the enigmatic allusion to Clov's 'visions' (23, 761), which he claims are diminishing. These could be vivid dreams, intrusive thoughts, or flashbacks, which escape his repressed memory and manifest themselves as traces. In a letter to Schneider in 1957, Beckett explains that:

When Clov admits to having his visions less it means that his escape mechanism is breaking down. Dramatically this element allows his perception of life (boy) at the end and of course of the rat to be construed as hallucinations.

(in Harmon, ed., 1998: 22)

Certainly, ‘visions’ do not seem to be congruent with Clov’s usual mental processes, which are unimaginative and blurred, ‘fuzzy, unclear recollections or a series of holes in memory’ (Terr, 1994: 87). Early memories are particularly lacking, which is typical of the preverbal state. His recall does not go back far enough for clarity, so he is forced to clutch at straws in the family ‘chronicle’ to construct his history and identity. Without the information which he craves, Clov’s sense of his past is a dislocated unreality, sunk in a coded story. And although Hamm has the key to unlock the longed-for detail, he perversely refuses to satisfy Clov’s needs and, in so doing, denies Clov a foundation to his self-narrative:

HAMM: Do you remember when you came here?
 (*Clov halts.*)
 CLOV: No. Too small, you told me.
 HAMM: Do you remember your father?
 CLOV: (*Wearily*) Same answer. (*Pause.*) You’ve asked me these
 questions millions of times.
 HAMM: I love the old questions. (*With fervour*) Ah the old questions, the
 old answers, there’s nothing like them!

(21, 689-96)

Hamm’s glee in refusing to supply the answers constitutes a form of rarified torture. If Hamm is Clov’s father, then why is he so unnaturally sadistic? And if he is merely a surrogate, then why does Clov continue to endure life-long abuse?¹³ With these fundamental questions unresolved and gobbets of bait repeatedly cast at him, Clov has lacked the formative coherence to abandon his abuser. Years of conditioning have foreclosed on his will. Habits of compensatory compliance have settled on his unreal sense of unself. ‘The meaning carried by autobiographical memories can profoundly affect a person’, explains Conway, ‘either by *their absence* or by their irrepressible presence’(Conway, 1990: 169, my emphasis). But Beckett had realised this years earlier. In his monograph on Proust, he wrote: ‘Yesterday is not a milestone that has been passed, but a daystone on the beaten track of years, and irremediably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous’ (*P*, 13).

Psychic danger notwithstanding, and in spite of Hamm’s evasions and his own ‘mental slippages’ (Terr, 1994: 88), Clov persists in trying to piece his life-story together. When Hamm launches into part two of his ‘chronicle’, Clov is agog, identifying himself with the small boy from Kov. His suppositions invite more information, but Hamm’s response is chilling:

HAMM: I continue then. Before accepting with gratitude he asks if he may have his little boy with him.
 CLOV: What age?
 HAMM: Oh tiny.
 CLOV: He would have climbed the trees.
 HAMM: All the little odd jobs.
 CLOV: And then he would have grown up.
 HAMM: Very likely.

(32, 1095-1102)

If this reflects Clov's experience, he would have entered upon a treadmill of unremitting labour from the start. Yet he desperately urges Hamm to continue, in the forlorn hope that his master might, finally, supply the biographical detail that he needs to ground his identity:

CLOV: Keep going, can't you, keep going!
 HAMM: That's all. I stopped there.
 (*Pause.*)
 CLOV: Don't you see how it goes on?
 HAMM: More or less.
 CLOV: Will it not soon be the end?
 HAMM: I'm afraid it will.
 CLOV: Pah! You'll make up another.

(32, 1104-11)

Both men maintain the charade of fiction, but beneath it runs a strain of increasing urgency. Though conjectural, and at some remove, the conversation still offers moments of revelation. Clov's image of a carefree childhood, the right of any boy, is immediately countered by Hamm's grim reference to child labour. Though Hamm is thwarted in his wish to deny life to the child of the story, he is nonetheless successful in denying Clov the nurture due to a child, and an emotional life of any sustenance.

Hamm has earlier claimed that Clov is detained in the refuge because of the dialogue (30,1056). The playwright's witty rejoinder notwithstanding, we have proof of Hamm's assertion. He cruelly tantalizes Clov with ambiguous snippets, chimeras of memory both intriguing and frustrating. And Hamm has played this game of missing information hundreds of times, baiting Clov with all the old unanswered questions that his 'son' longs to have resolved. Little wonder that Clov describes himself as a 'smithereen' — a fragment of a fragment. If Clov derives his tenuous configuration from identification with the child of the narrative, his subsequent rejection of Hamm is entirely

intelligible. In Hamm's little 'artery', or art-from-the-heart narrative, plashing regressively from 'the fontanelles', we find the same pride in his callous denial of need that his father sustains to the end of his life. As a consequence, Clov forges his identity in reaction to Hamm's sadism and neglect. In the intriguing glimpses that we have of their autobiographical sufferings, it becomes increasingly apparent that both Hamm and Clov have been significantly shaped by their resistance to heartlessness, revealing themselves as 'yesterday's deformities' in the process.

Lacking any valid foundation, Clov sees his past as a blur of undifferentiated misery. There is no temporal ordering. Pilling comments that 'Clov, as a conditioned object, is doomed to the perception of unrelieved, tedious successiveness' (Pilling, 1976 (b): 80). Few landmark memories stand out to distinguish one day from another, as moment succeeds tormenting moment. When Hamm asks Clov what memory means to him, he responds bitterly:

CLOV: *(Violently)* That means that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day. I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent.

(24, 803-05)

Clov discredits the hopelessly inadequate attempt of the signifier to denote meaning. And like Maddy Rooney, in *All that Fall*, he feels that he is struggling to surface through a dead language not of his own making. Pilling believes him to be 'as utterly conditioned as the Unnamable, "made of others' words"' (Pilling, 1976 b: 80).¹⁴ Clov acknowledges that the words taught him by Hamm are not innocent, but skewed by his master's ideology. To use them is to be complicit in Hamm's construction of the world and, more pertinently, in his master's construction of his servant's identity. Clov feels that he is in bondage to the language of the Other. Like *The Tempest's* Caliban, he feels himself cursed by words' oppressive containment, more authentic if allowed to remain silent. But this is no part of the player-king's design. If Clov refuses to sustain an echoic function, Hamm will be eternally silenced in his mute 'refuge'. Each has produced the other, theatrically and existentially; their memories are inextricably bound to a language that fails them both.

Clov views time as a painful continuum in which arbitrary demarcation appears absurd. His experience is so raw that the restraining force of language is shown to be an agent of distortion,

a meaningless imposition on the toxic flux of his life. The ordering agents of Hamm's nomenclature are not Clov's, whose holding strategies consist in symmetrical spatial containment rather than in words. Seeking solace, he murmurs:

CLOV: I'll go now to my kitchen, ten feet by ten feet by ten feet, and wait for him to whistle me. (*Pause.*) — Nice dimensions, nice proportions. I'll lean on the table, and look at the wall, and wait for him to whistle me.

(3, 27-30)

Neurotically bound to the symmetry of his 'cell', Clov's poor imagination and impaired memory cannot conceive of life as other than Pavlovian response to conditioned stimulus. He has mind-forged his identity in terms of compliance. In the long crucifixion of his existence as joyless lackey, he has taken refuge in passivity, service and dogged Beckettian endurance. Defensively, Clov substitutes order for life. Long years of abuse have seen him retreat into a domain of sterile mechanism.

CLOV: I love order. It's my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust.

(30, 1037-38)

Gontarski explains this passage in *The Theatrical Notebooks*, Volume II, on *Endgame*:

Clov's sense of order is itself circular and emphasises the fundamental paradox to the second law of thermodynamics, entropy, according to which all systems, the universe included, are running down, moving towards greater and greater levels of disorder. The end result, however, is the perfectly equal distribution of energy, at which time motion stops and we have 'A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place.' That is, even according to the principles of contemporary physics, especially chaos theory, the points of maximum disorder and maximum order are identical.

(Gontarski, ed., 1992: 62)

The greater the disorder in Clov's life, the more he craves the perfect order of entropy which would exist if the entire universe had wound down. Crippled by a lifetime of debilitating repressed memories, he hankers after sanitising sterility, abstraction and stasis where he need not fear another's control. As things stand now, though, with Hamm's blindness and paralysis, Clov has gained more control over his life than he has ever had. He is now able to declare: 'I can't be punished any more' (3, 26-27). Physically, this is true. Though the full implications of this assertion take time to register, Clov claims greater autonomy as realisation gradually dawns. He

exhibits a ‘decreasing willingness to obey’ (Popovic, 1994: 38). Hamm, too, realises this truth as he couches the issue of Clov’s suffering in the past tense:

HAMM: I’ve made you suffer too much. (*Pause.*) Haven’t I?
CLOV: It’s not that.
HAMM: (*Shocked*) I haven’t made you suffer too much?
CLOV: Yes!
HAMM: Ah you gave me a fright. (*Pause. Coldly*) Forgive me. (*Pause. Louder*) I said, forgive me.
CLOV: I heard you.

(6, 111-17)

Hamm’s lack of compunction and the cold satisfaction he takes in Clov’s suffering make it impossible for Clov to forgive him after such a perfunctory bid for absolution. The servant’s life has been blighted to such an extent that when asked by his master: ‘Did you ever have an instant of happiness?’ Clov is forced to admit: ‘Not to my knowledge’ (32, 1129-30). Abuse, anxiety and depression have induced an amnesia for detail, since every moment is as miserable as any other. His blurred sensations, and the occasional visions that he reports, make him interrogate his mental state:

CLOV: Sometimes I wonder if I’m in my right mind. Then it passes over and I’m as lucid as before [. . .] Sometimes I wonder if I’m in my right senses. Then it passes off and I’m as intelligent as ever.
(37, 1305-07, 1312-13)

Understandably, he has periods of dissociation and forgetfulness. At times he, too, is ‘absent’. Lacking specific memories on which he can focus, he enters ‘fog-bound’ states, confused periods of bewilderment. Present catastrophe, of whatever form, does not eclipse a life that has been one long disaster. When Hamm asks Clov whether he has not had enough, Clov responds with unthinking affirmation:

CLOV: Yes! (*Pause.*) Of what?
HAMM: Of this . . . this . . . thing.
CLOV: I always had.

(5, 79-82)

His poisoned memories attach to the amorphous ‘thing’ as they fill him with loathing. Like his catchall explanation, ‘something is taking its course’, there is a typical absence of analysis, not even an educated guess as to its nature. The ‘thing’ is non-explicit and impersonal, processed as

indefinable. For Clov, life unfolds in hazy non-sequiturs and his task is to endure as he waits for the ‘corpsed’ world to end. For the most part he lives in the present, for to compound current misery with past horror would be untenable. When he grieves, ‘There are so many terrible things’ (821), Hamm, who is possibly relieved at the death of his parents, contradicts him: ‘No, no, there are not so many now’ (24, 822). With the ‘things’ on which Clov broods constituting the dangerous undertow to his memory, it is understandable that he is loath to dwell in the past. It is better to remain in the present. This, however, exacts a curious toll in terms of procedural inefficiency, which points to an unusual lack in the procedural aspect of his memory. Perceptively, Iser claims that

Although Clov’s movements are governed by a definite wish, the experience gained during the first attempt is not enough to enable him to perform the same action adequately when he tries again. Thus, experience ceases to be a guide and cannot even serve to connect identical situations.

(Iser, 1966: 252)

Although characteristically vague about his past, among the ‘terrible things’ he refers to is the possible sexual abuse which he endured. After refusing to kiss Hamm ‘anywhere’, Clov repulses further urging:

HAMM: *(Holding out his hand)* Give me your hand at least. *(Pause.)* Will you not give me your hand?

CLOV: I won’t touch you.
(Pause.)

HAMM: Give me the dog.

(35, 1217- 21)

Although no incident of sexual contact is actually cited, Clov’s complete aversion suggests that Hamm might have abused him in the past. And though Hamm’s demand for the dog seems relatively innocent, the carefully established association of the dog with aberrant sexuality makes Hamm’s order demeaning, as though Clov and the dog were interchangeable. After long years of conditioning, however, Clov eventually finds the strength first to defy Hamm, and then to strike his master with the surrogate dog that he has ‘whelped’. Clov has characterised himself as a dog from early on in the play, and at one stage when he introduces his master to the toy, he says to Hamm: ‘Your dogs are here’ (22, 724). Although unspecified, Hamm’s treatment of Clov is highly suspect.

Among the undefined ‘things’, ‘its’, ‘somethings’ and the sequence of ‘bloody awful’ yesterdays that constitute the ‘impossible heap’ of Clov’s life, his farewell speech presents more evidence of dislocation. Unending abuse has pushed him so ‘far’ beyond the experience of normality that he registers only insentient numbness towards life’s consolations. In his Berlin diary, Beckett refers to ‘the five dispensers of life’s consolation’ — ‘friendship’, ‘beauty’, ‘nature’, ‘science’ and ‘mercy’ (in Gontarski, ed., 1992: 69). To Clov they are no more than phatic incantation. Where Hamm, like Nell, is capable of rapture, Clov cannot rise above dulled occlusion. Characteristically, his comforters remain ‘they’, nameless and faceless as they formulate their glib remedies.¹⁵

CLOV: *(Fixed gaze, tonelessly towards auditorium)* They said to me,
That's love, yes yes, not a doubt, now you see how easy it is.
They said to me, That's friendship, yes yes, no question, you've
found it. They said to me, Here's the place, stop, raise your head
and look at all that beauty. That order! They said to me, Come
now you're not a brute beast, think upon these things and you'll
see how all becomes clear. And simple! They said to me, What
skilled attention they get, all these dying of their wounds.
(40-41, 1434-40)

‘They’ remain unspecified, their abstractions word-bound, but Clov’s memory of the mood of the homily is exact. He has captured the precise discourse of institutional heartiness and platitudinous assurance. Even the exasperation that underlines the urging in ‘you’re not a brute beast’ is pitch perfect. ‘They’ pride themselves on the attention given to those dying of psychic wounds, little realising that their presumptuous solutions can neither reach nor heal them. Love, friendship, mercy and beauty may cheer most people, but the chronically depressed register them in terms of lack, loss, or, at worst, irrelevance. Clov receives the orders as formulae for happiness that he can never attain. The ‘simplicity’ and ‘clarity’ of their cheerleading is risible in Clov’s vitiated circumstances, in the bruised betrayal of his life. As a result of the trauma of his upbringing he suffers from

‘blunted effect’ or ‘psychic numbing’: a reduction or loss of the ability to feel. This can include an inability or reduced ability to bond with other people, to experience joy, love, creativity, playfulness and/or spontaneity. [What is experienced] is exhaustion, negative attitudes and apathy.

(Colodzin, 1989: 3, 6)

In Clov's rejection of consolation, Beckett seems to underscore the views of

Sartre, Camus, Genet or Ionesco [who hold] that the traditional categories of ‘meaning’ — civilisation, history, religion, ethics, social progress, beauty, art, individual self-realisation — are valueless illusions. And yet the human mind cannot divest itself entirely of all belief in its own significance.

(Coe, 1964: 98)

The pessimism of the absurdists does not convince Coe. But Clov’s mindset is designed by Beckett to be even darker than theirs. Instead of disregarding vacuous consolations, Clov substitutes the ‘solution’ of the abused: to internalise the punishment. He reflects:

I say to myself — sometimes, Clov, you must learn to suffer better than that if you want them to weary of punishing you — one day. I say to myself — sometimes, Clov, you must be there better than that if you want them to let you go — one day.

(41, 1441- 44)

In this he reacts like a typical victim in believing that the fault is his. He feels that if he learns to suffer more intensely, if he makes himself truly culpable by experiencing guilt more fully, he will earn the right not to have to suffer any more. He assumes that the more abject he can become, the more likely it is that Hamm to stop the punishment. In this he reveals ‘their symbiotic relationship’ (Martin, 1990: 18), his complicity in the bullying he has endured and his skewed perception that further debasement is required. Bell, explaining the mindset of the child- abuse victim, says:

Often they remain incapable of recognizing the ‘otherness’ of those outside of themselves, the consequence of never having been able to effect a separation between themselves and their parents whose mistreatment or neglect has kept them bound to them in the futile belief that things might change.

(Bell, 1992: 63)

Beckett notes in his Berlin Diary that ‘the notion is that when one has given the tyrant his full account of suffering, he lets the victim go. Only when one has given life its full accounting can one leave it’ (in Gontarski, ed., 1992: 69). Clov clearly qualifies in this regard.

Clov’s resolve to go is immediately countered by: ‘But I feel too old, and too far, to form new habits’ (41, 1445-46). The numbness that has overtaken him is a typical consequence of his abused state. Long years of conditioning weigh him down so that he is too far removed from his autonomous self to exercise initiative. Ironically, the recommended ‘consolations’ have

foregrounded his decentred and alienated state. In this he finds a certain perverse relief as he concludes: 'Good, it'll never end, I'll never go' (41, 1445). It is a relief for him to subside into inertia, for, as Beckett observes in his monograph on Proust, 'Habit is the ballast that chains a dog to its vomit' (*P*, 19). Conditioned to seeking the perfect order of entropy, Clov struggles to muster the enormous psychic energies needed to reclaim himself and recentre his life. He strains to break free of his past.

But with Hamm physically powerless, the compulsion to obey loses its coercive force. Clov realises, along with the audience who have observed his growing rebellion, that 'one day, suddenly, it ends, it changes, I don't understand, it dies, or it's me, I don't understand that either' (41, 1445-47). Lacking perception, Clov continues to think in the blurred way that has dulled his memory. The third-person impersonal 'it' is held responsible this time. In Clov's unexamined life, the 'it' is as unrecognisable as the 'me' that he at last confronts. Although he is not used to the sharp focus that self-assessment entails, he recognises that he is experiencing a major shift of consciousness. He will be terrorised no longer.

Though unused to self-examination, he interrogates the simple boundaries that demarcate his activities: 'I ask the words that remain; sleeping, waking, morning, evening. They have nothing to say' (41, 1447-48). Mere habit cannot explain his change of mood, but his will to break free persists against his compulsion to obey. He recognises his imprisoned state when he says: 'I open the door of the cell and go' (41, 1448). Damaged by a lifetime of cruelty, he is demoralised and dispirited, recording that 'I am so bowed I only see my feet, if I open my eyes, and between my legs a little trail of black dust' (41, 1448-50). His lament is one of the most plaintive 'elegies for broken voices, broken minds' (Piette, 1993: 41) in Beckett's entire *oeuvre*.

With a trail composed of the indeterminate motes of dust that have failed to add up to a life, his memories are clogged with melancholia. There is a residual suggestion, too, that he is leaving a trail of gunpowder as he walks, incendiary, and dangerous to his selfhood. In confronting the 'impossible heap' of his autobiographical memory he admits, plangently, that 'the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit' (41, 1450-51). When he frames his finalised self-narrative, he uses the odd construction, 'I say to myself', as though communication between the 'I' and

‘myself’ has ruptured. Unlike the Unnamable, and Voice in *Not I*, he has sufficient coherence to use the first-person pronoun, even though he concludes sadly that the effulgence granted to those whose ‘light’ is not ‘dying’ has passed him by.

His outcome is bleak, but he experiences a flooding relief never felt before. Beckett notes in the Berlin Diary that when Clov says ‘I open the door of the cell and go’ (41, 1450), ‘the happiness starts with this line’ (in Gontarski, ed., 1992: 69). Confidently Clov asserts: ‘It’s easy going. When I drop I’ll weep for happiness’ (1451-52). In the first French performance of the play, Martin, who played Clov, recalled that ‘Sam said, “Please, please don’t cry. To die is a most happy thing. So don’t be laughing but never cry. Never cry”’ (in McMillan and Fehsenfeld, 1989: 173). But leaving, with all that it entails for the reinvention of Clov’s life, is not a foregone conclusion. In the ensuing stasis the audience is moved once again into the realm of ‘perhaps’, with the riddling, shifting nature of the endgame persisting to the final unresolved tableau.¹⁶

In the memory-bound discourse of resistance that Clov employs throughout the play, he systematically repulses all Hamm’s bids for sympathy. He avoids the traps of enforced intimacy in examining Hamm’s blind eyes; in fact, his churlish monosyllabic responses leave Hamm in no doubt that gratuitous pity will not be forthcoming from his servant’s enforced ministrations. Hamm’s anxious ‘You’re leaving me all the same’ (5, 105) is met with Clov’s admission, ‘I’m trying’ (5, 106), thereby initiating the long process of extrication that will culminate in his hovering at the threshold. In the course of the play, Clov travels a long way from ‘laying doggo’ (19, 618), where his servant’s spirit expresses itself ungrammatically. His litany of denial, for instance, with no bicycles, pap, sugar plums, rugs and eventually painkillers, gives him high satisfaction. Indeed, the flourish with which he announces that Hamm’s supply of painkillers has ended is one of the low points in *Endgame*’s theatre of cruelty. And if the entire holocaust scenario has been one vast hoax, Clov’s retaliatory strategy is seen to be even more vicious than his aside: ‘If I could kill him I’d die happy’ (16, 505). He evinces scorn throughout, his rudeness taking its most contemptuous form when Hamm wallows in self-pity.

Clov’s withering indictment of any claim Hamm might have to a common humanity would obliterate a more sensitive soul, but Hamm blunders on, revealing himself as the poor player of

Beckett's conception. Rejection follows crude rejection, culminating in Clov's repudiation: 'No, I shan't bury you' (23,776). As far as Clov is concerned, Hamm has excluded himself, not only from compassion, but from the more elementary claims of basic decency. But despite his angry aversion, Clov has not yet extricated himself from his compulsion to do Hamm's bidding. As he breaks free from the binding power of Hamm's commands, he significantly rejects the bondage of his discourse, entreating Hamm to let him be silent. While Clov continues to express himself through the signifiers of his oppressor, he will fetter himself to perpetual insignificance in their toils. His silence, therefore, will signal his putative autonomy. And with it, Hamm's rout. Through the discourse of resistance, Clov advances steadily towards that goal. When Clov reports the presence of the small boy outside the window, Hamm immediately assumes that the cycle of oppression can begin all over again, with the child playing Clov's understudy. His need for Clov as victim of his sadism, actor in his duologue, and opponent in his game of move and countermove is over; a replacement has arrived. New memories of abuse are about to be forged in a fresh victim. Clov is expendable.

A strong sense of unreality pervades Clov's discourse of departure. Hamm has decided to script the concluding scenes conventionally, with speeches of farewell, platitudinous sentiments and final exits duly performed. Clov tonelessly goes through the motions to begin with, but his speech becomes increasingly self-revelatory as he continues. His reiteration of the first-person singular is significant in Beckettian usage. Characters who are vitiated beyond redemption join the Unnamable in their inability to heave the psyche into the 'I's' containing margins. But in Clov's monologue of summation there is a sense that some part of the self, at least, has been salvaged. Nevertheless, Calder believes that 'the sense of loss, the grim acceptance of the inevitable, comes out magnificently in the closing pages of *Endgame*' (Calder, 1976: 107). Owing to Hamm's spiteful intransigence in withholding information, Clov will never experience the closure that sure knowledge would give him: ultimately he is forced to settle for less, his 'sense of loss' a constant in his life.

His last words are phatic, ritualistic, drained of the pain and anger that has charged his responses throughout the play. By using them, he distances himself sufficiently to refuse Hamm's last demands. Though he winces when Hamm calls, he does not comply with his master's last request.

Clov's silence announces his fledgling strength. It has been a long process. In the discourse of rebellion, Clov has made some 'moves' but more 'countermoves' in repelling Hamm's stranglehold. He has used rebuttal, indignation, scorn, protest, complaint and churlish blocking strategies. He has snapped, contradicted, criticised, gloated, accused and blamed. There has been rudeness, violent outburst and uncompromising renunciation. Through his defiant speech acts and finally through his hard-won silence, Clov has found the power to overcome memory's dead weight in obstructing Hamm's game. Like the hero of *Eleutheria* he is prepared to leave his 'family'. Until the next performance that is.¹⁷

Commenting on the final unresolved tableau, Gontarski concludes:

To Beckett's sensibility, the whole of *Endgame* has been driving to that final 'frozen posture', outside, beyond language, yet as tied to and dependent on it as Lucky to Pozzo, as light to dark, as music to rest, as being to nothing: Clov dressed to leave, yet hesitating; Hamm resigned to an inevitable end, yet resisting.
(Gontarski, 1992: ed., xxx-xxi)

The finely nuanced Antoni Libera Gate Theatre production of *Endgame* at the Barbican in 1999 started and ended with the 'frozen' tableau that Gontarski approves. Theatrically effective, it was also strangely haunting. When the dust cover was taken off Hamm, he glowered at Clov with a mouth turned down in utter discontent. Nagg, who resembled Hamm physically, had an equally down-turned mouth. Like the other 'Hamms' I have admired, Alan Stanford had a stentorian voice with stirring rhythms, particularly when he tormented Clov with his 'chronicle'. Barry McGovern, who played Clov, detonated his spiteful resentment through explosive consonants and twisted menace. In contrast, Pauline Flanagan played a Hibernian Nell with a radiant rhapsodic quality that contrasted with much of the stichomythic dialogue of the rest of the play. The part of Hamm is a gift for an actor, and many reviews over the years extol remarkable performances. Patrick Magee, in particular, seems to have made the part his own, 'conveying the terror and the courage marvellously' (Calder, 1976: 106). Michael Gambon, playing the part with cruel, vindictive glee for the Blue Angel *Beckett on Film* Project (Colgan and Mohoney, 2000) was somehow less menacing than anticipated. A Johannesburg Market Theatre production, directed by Foot Newton in 1997, served as a vehicle for a *tour de force* by its lead actor. Played by Lionel Newton, Hamm's vocal range and sheer histrionic mastery made the play 'claw' in a way that Beckett might well have approved.

Writing for *The New York Times* on 14 January, 1980, Gussow comments on the theatrical possibilities of the leading role:

Endgame demands a virtuoso performance, which is what it receives from Daniel Seltzer, the Hamm of Joseph Chaikin's authoritative production of the play, which opened last night at the Manhattan Theatre Club [. . .] As his name implies, Hamm is something of an actor. Mr Seltzer, clothed like a bedraggled monarch, acts up to suit the occasion. He flares from contemplation to bluster, making excessive drill-sergeant demands on his bonded servant. Mr Seltzer's Hamm is not simply magisterial, he is billy-goat gruff. For all his petulance, he communicates a sardonic self-awareness of the role that he is playing [. . .] His voice[. . .] has the timbre of a classic tragedian.

(Gussow, 1996: 151-52)

One of the first people to comment on the performance of *Endgame* in English was Beckett himself, who, in correspondence with MacGreevy on 3 July, 1957, remarked: 'I find it dreadful in English, all the sharpness gone, and the rhythms. If I was not bound by contract to the Royal Court Theatre I wouldn't allow it in English at all' (TCD). It has always taken an act of courage to direct *Endgame*, more especially to trust in the 'unaided theatrical power of ambiguous identity, time and place' (Kalb, 1989: 94). Alvin Epstein, director, confesses that at the end of the play the audience does not 'know what happens'. He adds: 'I'm now a firm believer in not answering questions that Beckett doesn't answer' (in Kalb, 1989: 191). These opinions would have reassured Beckett, who grew increasingly exasperated by demands that he unravel the play's mysteries. In a letter to Schneider at the end of 1957, he insisted:

But 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 recum nec sine te*,¹⁸ in such a place, and in such a world, that's all I can manage, more than I could.

(in Harmon, ed., 1998: 24)

In 1956, Beckett had described his play to Alan Schneider as 'rather difficult and elliptic', yet in 1957, stung by importunate critics, he vouches for *Endgame*'s 'extreme simplicity of dramatic situation and issue' and its 'fundamental sounds' (in Harmon, ed., 1998: 11, 24).

Ironically, both descriptions are true. As audience, we do not know what has triggered the necessity for the players to take refuge in the shelter, and can only guess at the final outcome of the endgame we have witnessed. But we do know the rules of the game. Hamm will withhold information to frustrate Clov's moves and Clov will (possibly) conceal information to block Hamm's. It is a game of strategic non-disclosure for players and audience. There is no resolution: there is not meant to be. The missing information remains resolutely undivulged.

At the same time, the playwright dramatises a 'simple' situation in which four people explore their memories as they confront imminent death. In *Endgame*, Beckett has shown that the continuum of memory is a major factor in the construction of self. Through the interaction of Hamm, Clov, Nell and Nagg it becomes apparent that their acts of retrieval, however fragmented and fictionalised, make up the core of their intertextured identity. And, especially in the case of Hamm and Clov, the 'fundamental sounds' that they make reveal their yearning for the nurture that was denied them, and resentment at the deforming scars they still bear.

ENDNOTES

- 1 In this chapter I have cited both page and line references from the 1992 revised text found in Gontarski, S.E. (ed.), *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Volume II, *Endgame*.
- 2 Commenting on the irony of the title, Lance St John Butler takes pleasure in pointing out that *Endgame* is the play that starts with the word 'finished' and ends with the word 'remain'. Referring to its 'elliptic' qualities, he feels that the play 'insists on its own last gasp but that it approaches that gasp in an infinitely deferred asymptotic curve' (Butler in Docherty, ed., 1994: 69). Perhaps the pain of this 'infinitely deferred' information, coupled with the cruelty of the players, gives the play its Beckettian ability to 'claw' (in Harmon, 1998: 11).
- 3 Beckett always insisted that the set be non-specific in *Endgame* to help create the 'elliptic' impression of the play. In her book on *Directing Beckett*, Oppenheim describes the 1984 JoAnne Akalaitis production dispute. The director had given the play an *explicit* urban context in which the set recreated a subway tunnel under a New York that had been devastated by nuclear war. When Beckett heard of it he objected vehemently because of its over-specific setting. Akalaitis, believing herself to have served the spirit of *Endgame* with integrity, was aghast. She said, 'I think the whole *Endgame* brouhaha came out of an unnatural reverence for Beckett that I think is strange. I feel it's academic. Bill Coco said to me, "The Beckett people like *Woyzeck*". I said, "Who are the Beckett people?" [. . .] It's a kind of mystery to me that these Beckett people rose from the ranks of academia to be the conscience of the Beckett aesthetic [. . .] It must be some strange club that meets in a gray room with no windows or something' (in Oppenheim, ed., 1994: 140).
- 4 Gussow observes that, 'In his notebooks, Beckett assiduously warns against stylisation and sentimentality. As he said during a production of *Endgame*: "I would like as much laughter as possible in this play. It is a playful piece"' (Gussow, 1996: 181). Although the horror of the situation tends to militate against laughter, Beckett nonetheless foregrounds Nell's words: 'Nothing is funnier than unhappiness' (11:333).
- 5 Herbert Blau, commenting on the humour of unhappiness, talks of 'the recursive enumeration of its almost diabolic resources of hilarious pain, so exquisitely painful that the laughter can't bear itself.

- (That's what Beckett calls the *risus purus*, the laugh laughing at the laugh.)' (in Oppenheim, ed., 1994: 65). Neither of them mentions the *schadenfreude* which could conceivably darken moments of morbidity.
- 6 Dukes, in his insightful programme notes for the 1999 Gate Theatre Beckett Festival at the Barbican, says that '*Endgame*, in its refusal to be explicit, offers its consternating action without comment or guidance. "Something is taking its course" but precisely what that something is remains mysterious and disquieting' (Dukes, 1999: 14). An enigma is found at the core of this mysterious play. The performance on which Dukes commented reflected the desired 'mysterious and disquieting' effect admirably.
- 7 Pilling contends that, before Beckett had encountered Freud, he had already discovered among other insights that 'bifurcation of personality stems from loneliness' (Pilling, 1976 b: 130). In reading Beckett's letters to his friend, MacGreevy, I was struck by the fact that the playwright's psychological research served to confirm what he already instinctually knew.
- 8 It is not only Hamm's attitude towards his parents that echoes Schopenhauer's sentiments, but, as Harold Bloom points out, 'Schopenhauer's dreadful Will to Live goes on ravaging in Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell as it must in any dramatic representation' (Bloom, ed., 1988: 8). Conditions in the refuge are so dire that if its inmates' survival instincts prevail Beckett would appear to give credence to Schopenhauer's pessimistic sentiments.
- 9 Christopher Ricks, commenting on Hamm's callous treatment of his parents, says: 'Ours is an age of intense geriatric tending, at one with a persistent medico-professional indignity visited upon the dying, and with a contempt for the uselessness of old age (the parents in the bins)' (Ricks, 1993: 14). Hamm's parents suffer the indignity and imputed uselessness of the aged without the 'intense geriatric tending' which Hamm resentfully withholds from them.
- 10 In support of this view, Butler, who contends that *Endgame* 'can be read as an extended metaphor about perception', points out that 'when Clov reports on the outside world he may or may not be imagining it' (Butler, 1984: 26).
- 11 Beckett has never denied that he uses Christian imagery freely in his plays, but Kristin Morrison imbues the 'chronicle' with a particularly Christian ethos. She points out that: 'The time is Christmas Eve (when life and light are born into the world), the boon sought is bread (the divine gift that sustains life), the child has been deep in sleep for three days (prototype of death and resurrection). The bare event itself has many counterparts in Biblical stories where a parent interceded on behalf of a dying child' (Morrison, 1983: 28). The passage has undeniable biblical resonance, but with his incomplete circuits of meaning and his insistence on 'perhaps' it is dubious whether Beckett would support such an explicit reading. Tom Driver, in his seminal article, 'Beckett by the Madeleine' enquired of Beckett what he thought 'about those who find a religious significance to his plays'. Beckett replied, 'Well, really there is none at all. I have no religious feeling.' Driver went on to ask 'whether the plays deal with the same facets of experience religion must also deal with?' to which Beckett replied, 'Yes, for they deal with distress' (in Driver, 1961: 24).
- 12 Adorno takes an extreme view of the dialogue of the play. He contends that 'in the state of its disintegration, language is polarized. On the one hand, it becomes basic English, or French, or German — single words, archaically ejected commands in the jargon of universal disregard, the intimacy of irreconcilable adversaries; on the other hand, it becomes the aggregate of its empty forms, of a grammar that has renounced all reference to its content and therefore also to its synthetic function' (in Bloom, ed., 1988: 30). What Adorno does not mention is that the discourse of the play is also invalidated by intentional deception, which further hollows its communicative capacity.
- 13 White, in his book *When Words Lose Their Meaning*, holds that 'Power is here seen as a human artifact, made partly by agreement, for the weak submit to the strong for their own gain, whether one speaks of cities or of men' (White, 1984: 84). The powerless Clov has had a 'home' and 'father' to gain, both travesties of what they should have been, but has been so enfeebled by his contact with abuse that he has found it well-nigh impossible to break free.
- 14 In discussing 'The intellectual and cultural background to Beckett', Pilling evaluates Mauthner's influence on Beckett's thinking. The philosopher's views seem to find striking expression in Clov's renunciation of language. Pilling explains, 'Only by transcending the limits of language (which Mauthner considers impossible) will we get to know things as they really are. And this can only be achieved by a critique of language, which Mauthner describes as "the heavenly stillness and gaiety of resignation and renunciation", a phrase reminiscent of Schopenhauer, but even more prophetic of Beckett.' (Pilling, 1976 b: 128)

- 15 Iser points out that these words 'are not the expression of Clov's own feelings. In this case the abstract is so detached from the concrete situation that speech and character begin to be cut off from one another' (Iser, 1966: 254). Although I feel that this passage offers an excellent example of Clov's fragmentation, I believe that the split between his words and his feelings occurs long before this.
- 16 Harold Hobson, whose theatre criticism was unusually sensitive to the playwright from the beginning, championed Beckett's right to craft a play as enigmatically as he pleased. In the London *Sunday Times* of 7 April 1957 he asserted that: 'Mr Beckett is a poet; and the business of a poet is not to clarify, but to suggest, to imply, to employ words with auras of association, with a reaching out towards a vision, a probing down into emotion, beyond the compass of explicit definition. And this is exactly what the so dangerously simple dialogue of *Fin de partie* does' (in Cooke, ed., 1985: 20).
- 17 Joseph Martin, commenting on the obvious theatricality of *Endgame*, says that Beckett 'uses a variety of metafictional devices to remind the audience that they are witnessing a play, a fiction disjoined from life, one that is not an imitation of reality but a complex refraction of it' (Martin: 1990: 19). This freedom from mimesis allowed Beckett to explore issues that more conventional dramaturgy would inhibit, such as the recurrence of fantasy in induced recall.
- 18 'neither with you nor without you'

CHAPTER FOUR

SEPARATE DYNAMISMS

John Donne famously contends that ‘No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main’.¹ Beckett’s world view could not be more different. From his 1931 monograph on *Proust* to the slow generation of *Stirrings Still* more than fifty years later, Beckett conceives of humankind as essentially isolated, believing in ‘that irremediable solitude to which every human being is condemned’ (*P*, 63). Convinced that alienation is the given of the human condition, he declares that ‘Man is the creature that cannot come forth from himself, who knows others only in himself, and who, if he asserts the contrary, lies’ (*P*, 66). He holds fast to these views throughout his life. In the final words of his last published work we hear the haunting lament of yet another lonely protagonist: ‘Time and grief and self so-called. Oh all to end’ (*SS*, 265). By then the other has receded to vanishing point, while the ‘so-called’ self has fragmented into slivers of remote possibility incapable of cohesion.

This failure to connect is a constant theme throughout the plays. From *Eleutheria*, which was neither produced nor published during the playwright’s lifetime, to his last play, *What Where*, Beckett foregrounds an impasse in communication which is central to his concept of human interaction. Writing the Proust monograph might have launched his views, but his fifty-year exploration of the theme of communicative inadequacy served to confirm his belief that the process of human interaction is intimately flawed. In 1931, while purporting to represent the views of the novelist, Marcel Proust, he forges his own grim credo:

There is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication. Even on the rare occasion when word and gesture happen to be valid expressions of personality, they lose their significance on their passage through the cataract of the personality that is opposed to them.

(*P*, 64)

This striking assertion tackles both the inadequacy of language as a communicative tool and the obstruction of reception. Writing on ‘The agency of the letter in the unconscious’, Lacan grimly observes that ‘we cling to the illusion that the signifier answers to the function of representing the

signified' (Lacan, 1977: 150). In many cases it fails in its attempt, in obscuring the meaning it purports to convey. When it comes to the listener, the supposedly receptive personality is more likely to act as a turbulent waterfall than a placid conduit, distorting even 'valid' transmission. And if 'cataract' is also suggestive of blindness or dim vision, communicative efforts between personalities would necessarily be fundamentally distorted. It is significant that in his personal copy of *Le Côtés de Guermants*, one of the volumes of Proust's epic, Beckett had noted in a marginal jotting that 'Personality = memory' (79).² One can therefore deduce from this important equation, when it is added to his observations on faulty communication, that Beckett discerns irreconcilable lacunae between personalities, between the words *and memories* of those who fail to connect with each other. Their life-experiences fail to mesh with one another. As a result, the resources for satisfactory contact are either absent or so distorted as to be useless. While declaring that language is mostly inadequate for viable transmission, Beckett maintains that comprehension, too, is almost invariably skewed by idiosyncratic perception. He explains:

The observer infects the observed with his own mobility. Moreover, when it is a case of human intercourse, we are faced by the problem of an object whose mobility is not merely a function of the subject's, but independent and personal: two separate and imminent dynamisms related by no system of synchronisation.
(*P*, 17)

Beckett believes the dynamics of personality to be unpredictable: that personality is imminent, in a state of becoming. The possibility of rapport between two equally mutable beings therefore seems remote. But perhaps realising that he has been overly harsh in his appraisal, he tempers his absolutism to serve less hopeless states: 'At the best, all that is realised in Time [. . .] , whether in Art or Life, can only be possessed successively, by a series of partial annexations – and never integrally and at once' (*P*, 17-18). This far from optimal state of 'partial annexation' is limited to a succession of incomplete encounters which fail to register the full range of communicative intent. Not only does language fall short of its objective, but Beckett believes that people themselves are in flux, often finding difficulty in relating to earlier versions of their own identity. With each passing day 'we are other', Beckett notes in the monograph, 'no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday' (*P*, 13).

In previous chapters we encountered Beckett's desertion of the 'well made play' (with its predictable communication, conflict and resolution) in order to explore the silences and

inadequacies of interrelationship in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*. The playwright does not stop there, but continues to interrogate the conditions under which interaction, both well-meaning and malign, fails. Jacques Derrida, in an interview with Derek Attridge, claims memorably that Beckett's texts 'make the limits of our language tremble' (Derrida, 1998: 60). In this chapter I shall seek to show how human interchange founders in a selection of Beckett's dramatic works. In *The Old Tune*, *Words and Music* and *Rough for Theatre I* I shall chart the 'partial annexations of the self' where some connection is effected after strenuous effort. In *Rough for Theatre II*, *All that Fall* and *Play*, a devout self-centredness will be observed that not only prevents people from listening to each other accurately, or even at all, but also distorts what they hear and remember, given the 'cataract' of the self. By contrast, *Rough for Radio II*, in its discourse of Fox and Animator, will be seen to furnish a highly original study of the negative poles of sensual and intuitive memories which repel each other like antagonistic fields of force. Meaningful interaction becomes increasingly unattainable as the play progresses. In *Rough for Radio I* and *All that Fall*, the discourse of deliberate obfuscation will be examined in the form of conversational taboos. Entering a darker zone, mental and physical cruelty prompted by subliminal memory will be probed in *Rough for Radio II*, *Catastrophe* and *What Where*. Connective failure of a different sort will be scrutinised in *Krapp's Last Tape* and *A Piece of Monologue*. These bleak plays foreground the renunciation and willed oblivion of earlier recorded versions of the self – one taped and the other photographed – as past and present fail to mesh. Throughout the chapter, the range and ingenuity of Beckett's investigation into communicative impasse will be explored.

Included in the collection entitled *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works* is a play which Beckett adapted from Robert Pinget's *La Manivelle* (1960) and called *The Old Tune*. When the French playwright was interviewed by Randolph Goodman in August 1967, Pinget explained that Beckett

offered to put my play into English. As he only translates his own material, I considered his offer a great kindness. Beckett wanted to set the scene of the play in Dublin and turn my Parisians into Irishmen; I gave him permission to do so. It is a model translation.

(in Goodman, ed., 1971: 550)

By transforming the French into Irish rhythmic prose, Beckett went beyond translation to make the play his own, although it is less elusive than the drama which constitutes his fully original

work. It is easy to see what attracted him to the text: two old men on the margins of society facing isolation and semantic memory loss, which disrupts communication. Even though the text, strictly speaking, is not wholly by Beckett, it resonates with the interest in ‘yesterday’s deformities’ which permeates all his work.

When *The Old Tune* had its American premiere on 23 March 1961, in the Royal Playhouse, New York, it was very badly received, apart from a review by Jerry Tallmer. In the *Village Voice* of 30 March 1961 he reported that

The daily critics have put it down and so I suppose it shall die, but ‘The Old Tune,’ by Robert Pinget in a translation-adaptation by Samuel Beckett – more Beckett than Pinget, I hazard – is a telling if slender piece of work. Death becomes it well: its subject matter is aging and death, desuetude and deliquescence. But also memory and fondness, loving and nostalgia – and the foolish-fondness of old men straining with weak memories, full of error, for the pictures and pleasures of the past.

(in Goodman, ed., 1971: 546)

In the play, two old men, Gorman and Cream, are delighted to encounter each other after many years. The themes of their memories converge: family life, a shared past, the dreadful present; but the recalled details vary to such an extent that they spend as much time in disputation as they do in shared recall:

GORMAN: Where were we? [*Pause.*] Ah yes the forces, you went in in 1900, 1900, 1902, am I right?
CREAM: 1903, 1903, and you 1906 was it?
GORMAN: 1906 yes at Chatham.
CREAM: The Gunners?
GORMAN: The Foot, the Foot.
CREAM: But the Foot wasn’t Chatham don’t you remember, there it was the Gunners, you must have been at Caterham, Caterham, the Foot.
GORMAN: Chatham, I tell you, isn’t it like yesterday, Morrison’s pub on the corner.
CREAM: Harrison’s. Harrison’s Oak Lounge, do you think I don’t know Chatham?

(*TOT*, 341)

Typical of the autobiographical memory in advanced age, the themes persist, but the details are suspect. No wonder that Cream complains that his daughter, 'Miss Bertha', who looks after him, considers him 'a doddering old drivelling dotard' (345). This does not faze him, however, as he asserts the accuracy of his memory against Gorman's counter-claims with considerable asperity. Each man extols his 'recollected' details with utter conviction. Supposedly shared memories become sites of conflict as the past both unites and divides them. Through their discourse of misrememberings, stutterings, fillers, *non sequiturs*, omissions, contentions and bursts of loquacity, they achieve only what Beckett would term 'a partial annexation' for, fundamentally, 'each human being is alone, shut within his own incompatible memories' (Goodman, ed., 1971: 544).

It is not only memory that can divide people from one another, but expression and formulation as well. In Beckett's radio play, *All that Fall*, the problems of language slippage, change and inadequacy are dramatised. Maddy Rooney, 'a lady in her seventies' (171) whom Cohn describes as 'a spirited descendant of the Wife of Bath' (Cohn, 2001: 233), is concerned that her semi-archaic language has suffered some form of dislocation with time. She has obviously been pondering her problem while alone, for almost the first thing she says to the first person she encounters is:

Do you find anything . . . bizarre about my way of speaking? [*Pause.*] I do not mean the voice. [*Pause.*] No, I mean the words. [*Pause. More to herself.*] I use none but the simplest words, I hope, and yet sometimes I find my way of speaking very . . . bizarre.

(ATF, 173)

Something 'bizarre' would stand out as freakish, so Maddy has obviously experienced a strong sense of being at odds with the people she engages in conversation. She feels as though their language has sailed on, while she, anachronistically, is anchored to the memory of her accustomed discourse. James Boyd White, writing on *When Words Lose Their Meaning*, explains that with time 'the terms of discourse shift and change, and both the language and the community constituted by it deteriorate into a kind of incoherence' (White, 1984: 59). Katharine Worth, who compares Beckett's characters with those of the playwright Synge, also makes an apt comment in this regard. She maintains that Beckett's characters are 'more continuously aware than Synge's people of how fluid their identity is and how precariously dependent on the words they use, on

frail and treacherous language that is liable to die on them at any minute' (Worth, ed. 1975: 5). Among Beckett's *dramatis personae*, Maddy is not alone in her discomfort: Krapp, too, is aware of language that has 'died' on him, that no longer communicates with any precision. In speaking of this phenomenon in 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis', Lacan cites Mallarmé, who 'compares that common use of language to the exchange of a coin whose obverse and reverse no longer bear any but effaced figures, and which people pass from hand to hand "in silence"' (Lacan, 1977: 43). For all the effect their words have on one another, they might as well have saved their breath.

Maddy's discourse of estrangement, though archaic in parts, is nonetheless colourful and idiosyncratic. Her description of the hinny's 'great moist cleg-tormented eyes' (173) is vivid, as is her verdict on experiencing life at home as 'a lingering dissolution' (175). Some of her rhetorical flourishes are distinctly biblical, as in her eccentric urging of Mr Tyler to 'halt for a moment and let this vile dust fall back upon the viler worms' (175). Both concept and phrasing reflect an earlier, more ardent religiosity. In spite of her claim to use only the simplest language, 'ramdam' (commotion) and 'importuned' escape her lips effortlessly. The 'dark' Miss Fitt finds this sufficiently remarkable to stop being 'distray' long enough to echo '[*In marvelling aside.*] Ramdam!' (185). Maddy's sensitivity to language enables her to register its more obvious inadequacies, if not its excesses. Her flamboyant taste for hyperbole is outraged when Mr Barrell, the Station Master, calls a possible accident 'a hitch' (187), following on with 'All traffic is retarded' (187). Maddy attributes this semantic stinginess to celibacy.

Dan Rooney, though customarily as dry as a bone, acknowledges that his own language can be outlandish at times. Nonetheless, he feels constrained to remark on his wife's canonical cadences after she intones 'I am agog, tell me all, then we shall press on and never pause, never pause, till we come safe to haven' (194). He reflects: 'Never pause . . . safe to haven . . . Do you know, Maddy, sometimes one would think you were struggling with a dead language' (194). Maddy, for once at one with her obnoxious husband, agrees fulsomely: 'Yes indeed, Dan, I know full well what you mean, I often have that feeling, it is unspeakably excruciating' (194). Unlike Dan, Maddy is garrulous, but with her conversation compromised by a moribund vocabulary which confounds more than it communicates, she is haunted by the recurring sensation that she no longer

exists. Caught in a double-bind, her morbidity is fed by sensations of semantic obsolescence. The more she strives for vivid communication with her unresponsive husband, the more she alienates him.

Maddy's disquiet at not being able to surface through a 'dead' language feeds her fantasies of disintegration and deliquescence. She longs to waste away slowly, incongruously 'drifting gently down into the higher life' (181). She wonders what is wrong with her that she is 'never tranquil, seething out of my dirty old pelt, out of my skull, oh to be in atoms, in atoms!' (177). Beckett told Billie Whitelaw, who interpreted the part on radio, that 'she is in a state of abortive explosiveness' (in Oppenheim, ed., 1994: 196). This becomes even more apparent when she considers herself ignored. To the boy Tommy she says abrasively: 'Don't mind me. Don't take any notice of me. I do not exist. The fact is well known' (177). As Cohn quips, 'she endures volubly' (in Ben-Zvi, ed., 1990: 165). Yet despite Maddy's garrulous attempts at conversation, she fails to make the contact that she craves. Her palpable desperation and incongruous words gain her no entrée to the minds or sympathies of others: she remains essentially isolated.

Either complete 'disintegration' or vital connection with others might remedy Maddy's feelings of estrangement and the feeling that 'she had never really been born'(196).³ So, to an extent, would a more current and less 'bizarre' vocabulary which would connect with the experience of those she encounters. She would seem less like a 'big pale' obsolescent 'blur' (184), someone out of a dim memory with bad acoustics.

Her laconic husband, Dan, is at cross purposes with his wife in his desire to *avoid* communication. Unlike his wife, he aspires to be a 'separate dynamism'. He is an objectionable man whose blindness holds no memories of kindnesses received, but is viewed by him as a merciful barrier against having to communicate with others. 'The loss of my sight was a great fillip', he observes with satisfaction. Maddy irritates him beyond endurance, and he retaliates by using strategies of repulsion against her. He insults her, is tactless, nagging and complaining, spitefully denying her need for affection and intimacy. His coldness and sarcasm mark him as cruel and unfeeling, as ice-cold as the hake he craves. Esslin points out that 'Always it is the man who rejects the love of woman, woman who yearns for the love of man: Maddy Rooney [. . .] childless Winnie [. . .] May

of *Footfalls* and the Mouth of *Not I* [. . .] the old lady in *Rockaby*' (in Ben-Zvi, ed., 1990: 62). When Maddy appeals to Dan to explain the delay on the train, the range of his diversionary tactics reveals a keen, if malign, intelligence.

His refusal prompts her to pepper him with questions: 'But you must know! You were on it! Was it at the terminus? Did you leave on time? Or was it on the line? [*Pause.*] Dan! [*Brokenly.*] Why won't you tell me?' (191). He distracts her by drawing her attention to jeering children, before asking her what is obviously preying on his mind: 'Did you ever wish to kill a child?' (191). Their discourse fractures around his attempted concealment. When he tries to divert his wife with his 'relation', less imaginative by far than Hamm's 'chronicle' in *Endgame*, he intones a hollowed-out inventory of minutiae, designed to bamboozle Maddy and throw her (figuratively) off track. His 'relation' shifts into 'composition' when the truth becomes even more submerged, and any knowledge of the cause of the train's delay is denied. At the end of his detail-clogged narrative he guiltily pleads: 'Say something. Maddy. Say you believe me' (195). Denial, obfuscation and diversion are ineffectual against Maddy's onslaught, so Dan desperately resorts to interruption and coercion to cover his tracks:

MRS ROONEY: Jerry! [JERRY *halts.*] Did you hear what the hitch was?
 [Pause.] Did you hear what kept the train so late?
 MR ROONEY: How would he have heard? Come on.
 MRS ROONEY: What was it, Jerry?
 JERRY: It was a —
 MR ROONEY: Leave the boy alone, he knows nothing! Come on!
 JERRY: It was a little child Ma'am.
 [MR ROONEY *groans.*]
 MRS ROONEY: What do you mean it was a little child?
 JERRY: It was a little child fell out of the carriage, Ma'am. [Pause.]
 Under the wheels, Ma'am.

(ATF, 199)

Maddy's dread, and the guilt that weighs heavily on Dan's memory, are entwined in an exchange where Dan's strategies of non-disclosure are invalidated. Jerry's communication is authentic, Dan's is not. 'In *All that Fall*', says Morrison in her chapter, 'Telling a True Tale', 'there are two kinds of deception at issue: the deliberate misleading of one character by another character and the blurring uncertainties of a character's attempts at self-deception' (Morrison, 1983: 73). It is

not only dead words that bedevil communication in *All that Fall*, but deliberate attempts at repulsion, and the suppression of information. Beckett, too, is evasive in not revealing all the details to his listeners,⁴ and though clues are abundant in the play, the radio audience is left pondering his provocative ‘perhaps’.⁵

The subject of words gone dead is explored more fully in the complex interchange between Joe and Bob, the barely personalised abstractions of *Words and Music*. Their master, Croak, who initiates their activities, is consumed with an emotion that he is unable to express, and calls upon Joe/Words and Bob/Music to capture his nostalgia. Like Maddy Rooney, Croak finds it ‘unspeakably excruciating’ when Joe/Words cannot venture beyond the formulaic patter of conditioned reflex as he ‘recites by rote a Cartesian disquisition on Sloth’ (Cohn, 2001: 269). Croak requires far more than the worn repertoire of Joe’s memory to express his vision and emotion. He requires arresting freshness, which Joe seems unable to supply. Speech on its own does not guarantee immediacy. In his writing on ‘That Dangerous Supplement’ in 1967, Derrida foregrounds ‘the mirage of [the] immediacy’ of speech, explaining that ‘we are dispossessed of the longed-for presence in the gesture of language by which we attempt to seize it’ (Derrida, 1998: 141). ‘Presence’ is nothing if not elusive. It is hardly surprising, then, that of the two ‘balms’ which Croak employs, Beckett features Bob/Music as the more sensitive, suggestive and compliant, though no study-bound reading of the play will do justice to this extra dimension.

From time to time Bob/Music comes up to expectation, but Joe/Words is far more recalcitrant, having to force himself to avoid the discourse grooves in his semantic memory that impede originality. Through Joe’s halting attempts at meaning-making, we are led to understand that a dogged memory, hidebound by habit, can actively inhibit communication. Instead of evoking the luminous ‘yesterdays’ which Croak requires, memory will merely deform them if it functions on automatic response. Worth, in her investigation of *Beckett the Shape Changer*, comments:

it is a real frustration that comes through when Croak groans over the meaningless abstractions offered up to him by Words: an arid pedantry has got ludicrously out of hand and could go on forever, one suspects, elaborating on any given theme, always shying away from anything personal and real.

(Worth, ed., 1975: 16)

Joe/Words misconstrues his topic by reciting ‘one-size-fits-all’ verbiage. Without attempting any new formulation, he rattles off his prepackaged inanities. Polonius could not have done better. Despite Bob/Music’s protest at the gross distortion of feeling, Joe/Words continues his rote-learned disquisition unabated. At one stage he sounds like a hissing, stuck record – ‘by this by this by this’ (287) — as he churns out words grown stale from overuse. His speech is full of platitudes and fillers, the kind of repetitive fodder that Lucky strings together when he is called upon to ‘think’. In his overlearned discourse, Joe/Words fails to satisfy Croak, who yearns for expression vivid enough to capture ‘the elusive face . . . on the stairs’ (287).

The sham of Joe/Words’s response to stimuli is revealed when he recycles his speech on ‘sloth’ to serve his response to ‘love’. Though marginally more suited to the topic (because love is a passion, where sloth is not) Joe/Words wanders in the realms of puffery when he insists that Croak ‘Arrive then and go now the manifest unanswerable –’ (288). This is a speech act of pure evasion, a response of ponderous opacity. Croak’s displeasure, coupled with Bob/Music’s sensitive ‘love and soul music’ (288), seems to induce in Joe/Words some kind of release from his ‘orotund’ stagnation when he engages with a theme that forces him to apply his mind.

His approach to ‘Age’ could not be more different from his previous glib efforts. He falters, stumbles and fumbles his way as he searches for some sort of approximation that will suggest his grim sense of loss, need and diminution. Hesitantly, he says that ‘age is . . . when . . . old age I mean . . . if that is what my Lord means . . . is when . . . if you’re a man . . . were a man . . . huddled . . . nodding. . . the ingle . . . waiting’ (289).

Obscure abstractions give way to basic nouns and verbs, smooth cadences to juddering phrases as he jolts his emotional memory and imagination. Later, aiming at more refinement than the simpler elements of language allow, Joe/Words attempts the musicality that Bob/Music so effortlessly produces by trying to sing his poem:

Age is when to a man
Huddled o’er the ingle
Shivering for the hag
To put the pan in the bed
And bring the toddy

She comes in the ashes
Who loved could not be won
Or won not loved
Or some other trouble
Comes in the ashes
Like in that old light
The face in the ashes
That old starlight
On the earth again.

(*WM*, 291)

Apart from the careless ‘Or some other trouble’, the language is more vital than the smooth cadences of recitation. Specifics replace slippery abstractions, the active replaces the passive voice. The contrast between the feeble old man and the ‘starlight’ vision of his unrequited love is startling. Maddy Rooney’s claim that she uses only the simplest of words could apply to Joe/Words’s poem, but with more validity. Giving the impression of struggling with raw material to forge a connection with Croak’s memory of the ‘face on the stairs’, Joe’s efforts are rewarded by Croak’s enraptured response: ‘[*Murmur.*] The face. [*Pause.*] The face. [*Pause.*] The face. [*Pause.*] The face’(291). ‘In the end’, says Alvarez, ‘the poem is finished, subtle, touching, precise, and incidentally, better than almost any of the poems Beckett has published on their own’ (Alvarez, 1974: 200).

Because the process has veered from automatic to clumsy and tentative, Joe/Words has achieved resonance in reaching Croak’s memory. The poet’s attempts to break free of the dead weight of habit have established that ‘partial annexation’ spoken of in the Proustian context. Unfortunately it does not last. Habit seduces the wordsmith again as he abandons utter simplicity for more ‘erudite’ expression – ‘recuperation’ and ‘incontestable’– and, as he loses his initial focus, he indulges his verbiage in ‘lineaments proper, matchless severally in their ordonnance’ (292). There is a pretentious falling away from the first sharp image to the moribund vagueness of ‘simply concentration more likely all things considered on some consummate inner process’, and to the false notes in ‘thus subsiding to their natural . . . aperture’. Habit makes him tone-deaf once again.

Later Joe realises that slippery words become redundant when feeling is at its most intense. His poem climaxes in the abjuration ‘no words no sense no need’ (291-93). Beckett has shown throughout the play that words that are tinted to opacity by automatic recall are the most lacking.

He is supported in his opinion by Daniel Albright, who declares that where ‘Music is swift, salient, focused, prehensile, [. . .] Words can only stumble along behind’ (Albright, 1997: 366). Ackerley and Gontarski concur in *The Grove Companion to Beckett* when they say that ‘Music, then, the least referential of the arts, wins the day. As SB acknowledged to Katherine Worth, “music always wins”’ (Ackerley and Gontarski, eds, 2004: 651).

As a radio play it must have been difficult for the audience to catch the subtle themes of *Words and Music* at one hearing. This play, which Cohn describes as ‘a composition about composition’ (Cohn, 2001: 168), is, I imagine, more successfully encountered in the study than over the airwaves. An irritated critic for *The Listener*, Mark Shuttleworth, responded on 22 November, 1962:

That old devil Beckett walked away with the honours, even though *Words and Music* (Third Programme, November 13) was one of the most perverse plays and one of the most inaudible productions that I have ever heard [. . .] You had to strain close to the set to find out what, if anything, was going on.

(MS 4109)

Perhaps the inaccessibility of the words made its point, after all.

Whereas *Words and Music* are enabled to find ‘partial annexation’ through the release from rote memory and the intervention of Croak, the deadbeat characters of *Rough for Theatre I* have no one to help them establish rapport. As two of Beckett’s most needy ‘deformities’, they seem to lack almost every benefit that makes life endurable: they are alone, disabled, deserted and poor. Nor has Beckett sanitised his deadbeats into sentimentality, for each is thoroughly unlikeable after our initial pity has subsided. ‘A’ lacks sight and ‘B’ mobility, yet despite the fact that they could help each other, they cannot overcome their Blakean ‘mind-forg’d manacles’ (in Plowman, ed., 1927: 31) sufficiently to achieve more than a fleeting ‘annexation’. Then the routine of repulsion sets in to initiate the rejection that has been their lifelong pattern. The blind man clings like a grotesque incubus, the cripple wards him off with increasing violence. Clinging and brutality have ruined their lives in the past; yet habit, that blind servant of memory’s conditioned reflex, dictates destructive behaviour patterns that rationality seems powerless to inhibit. After clumsy attempts, A and B fail to connect, each being left worse off than before. Like the letters themselves, there will always be a discernible space between them.

Dukes, in his programme notes to the 1999 Beckett Festival, writes succinctly of the hopelessness of the situation:

The possibility of them joining forces, of uniting sight and mobility in the interests of survival, is briefly entertained. Fellowship is even more briefly envisaged. The play ends with A, disoriented and separated from his means of livelihood, snatching B's pole from him. A vicious circle has been closed.

(Dukes, 1999: 29)

Insightful though these notes may be, they do not prepare the theatregoer for the impact of the play or the power of the performances.⁶ In the Barbican production of 1999, Phelim Drew as the blind street musician played the victim; he was forlorn, pathetic and engaging; though passionate and anguished at times. John Olohan as the cripple was rough and overbearing, with an anger that darkened to viciousness. As I saw him squat in an unlikely shabby chair on top of a battered pram, I felt that he could make a brilliant Magwitch to Drew's Pip, especially since they were foils for each other; the one refined, the other coarse. Their timing in this shocking two-hander was superlative and I watched the play with a gathering sense of dread. Beckett's misgivings about his *Fragments* seem unwarranted in the light of the riveting performance potential of the plays.⁷

In theatre it is obvious from the start that the pair communicate with others so seldom that the normal dynamic of patterned discourse does not flow with any ease. Each is fixated on current need, demanding that the other satisfy his requirements. B (the crippled bully) is more verbally skilled, with the rhetorical flourishes that often signal cruelty in the Beckettian *oeuvre* – Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot*, Hamm in *Endgame*, the Animator in *Rough for Radio II* and the Director in *Catastrophe* come readily to mind. Beckett does not feature the sorry pair as sweetness and light, but demonstrates that the instinct for survival can take brutal, alienating forms. Old memories of callous rejection invite suspicion and even paranoia into their behaviour.

While the blind man (A) keens in self-pitying entreaty, 'A penny for a poor old man, a penny for a poor old man', the cripple (B), who is marginally better off, has a wider-ranging response to circumstances:

B: Music! [*Pause.*] So it is not a dream. At last! Nor a vision, they are mute and I am mute before them. [*He advances, halts, looks into bowl. Without*

emotion.] Poor wretch. [*Pause.*] Now I may go back , the mystery is over. [*He pushes himself backwards, halts.*] Unless we join together, and live together, till death ensue. [*Pause.*] What would you say to that, Billy, may I call you Billy, like my son? [*Pause.*] Do you like company, Billy? [*Pause.*] Do you like tinned food, Billy?

(RTI, 227)

In this remarkably compressed speech, we learn a great deal about the cripple. His discourse is rusty and archaic and he appears to have some difficulty in differentiating between fantasy and reality. He spends so much time in silence that music and human encounter have become the stuff of dreams and visions. We learn that he is marginally capable of a sympathy that memory immediately channels into manipulation. In B's discourse of blandishment, he calls the blind man by his son's name, Billy, as he tempts him with the prospect of company and food. Sensual memories are deliberately awakened in 'Billy' in order to entice him into communicative 'annexation'.

Despite their initial rapport, it soon becomes obvious that the cripple, a violent and irascible man, will ruin relations as he cannot control his temper. Burdened by memories of everyone's having abandoned him in his past, he feels anxious when he thinks in terms of current social acceptability. Behind the words, 'Are you beginning to like me?'(230) lie memories of unpopularity and rejection. When he strikes the blind man, B sorrows: 'Now I've lost him. He was beginning to like me and I struck him. I'll never see him again. We'll never hear the human voice again'(230). 'I' becomes 'We', when, like Hamm, the only child, he multiplies his persona to compensate for his isolation. Despite being repeatedly repudiated, he still cannot control his tendency to rebarbative action. To compensate, he buoys himself up in quasi-theatrical vein, pontificating like Pozzo: 'I have seen man for the last time, I struck him and he succoured me'(231) In distancing himself protectively, B constructs A as a saintly representative of 'Man's' finer feelings. The cripple's solipsistic script serves his self-narrative's need for positive closure. In defeat he comforts himself that even in his worst moments he is acceptable and worthy of being 'succoured'. Though he has been 'deformed' by rejection to strike out without thinking, he still manages a glimmer of spurious self-respect. Enough, that is, to sustain life.

The blind man, too, seems unable to learn from his past, though parts of his memory seem far more precise than the cripple's. Though he suffers from sensory deprivation, he still remembers,

like Hamm, the sights that used to bring him pleasure. A sense of sequence is particularly important to him as he is exposed to the elements. 'How are the trees doing?'(228) and 'Is it day or night?'(228) go beyond ordinary curiosity to feed his instinct for survival, as his 'bodily' sequential memory appears to have deserted him. He claims that he was always 'crouched in the dark'(228). It is almost as if his disability has forced his memory to short-circuit more pleasant aspects of his past to quote his current dire circumstances as the story of his life. For Beckett the memory is consistently mood-congruent. Profoundly disoriented, the blind beggar's memory scrolls a parade of figments and fragments, of voices, footsteps, disembodied presences, and the traces of those who have abandoned him.

He longs to have night, day, trees and grass verbally recalled, and is shocked to discover that B, who can see, is not observant. As is usual in Beckett's world, each character evaluates the other from his own centre and in the light of his own needs. The blind man seeks the comfort of touch, as though tactile exploration could restore his memory banks. The shock of later being struck by the cripple is therefore intensified. At first B marvels – 'What hands you have'(231) – but later recoils when A is unable to restrain himself from groping to compensate for his visual loss. Though A is an unhappy man, he is not unhappy enough to die. His Schopenhauerian will to live goes ravening on despite circumstances that are among the worst of Beckett's world. He reminds us of Estragon when he whines about 'The same old moans and groans from the cradle to the grave' (230), and registers 'the same old stink everywhere' (231).

Undifferentiated though these memories might be, his recollection of Dora's callous taunting is sharply etched in pain. He can still hear her saying: 'You and your harp! You'd do better crawling on all fours with your father's medals pinned to your arse and a money box round your neck. You and your harp! Who do you think you are?' (233).

Until his outburst, A's responses have been terse and monosyllabic. This eruption of fluency is so unlike him that it seems as though he has recited Dora's cruel words constantly since she left him. He is also goaded by B's taunts, and when he suffers the final indignity of being poked in the back with the pole, he retaliates by seizing its end and wrenching it from the cripple's grasp. All the power rituals that have dogged B's life re-emerge to torment A as they enter into an agonistic bid

for power. It ends in utter helplessness for them both, and whatever hope there was for positive communication proves as evanescent as light.

Though the cripple and the blind man continue separately, with their mutual need for help unable to overcome their conditioned behaviour, the memories of desolation that they recall do not drive them to consider taking their own lives. Unlike the would-be suicide of *Rough for Theatre II* they resolve to carry on. They are desolate and even despairing at times, but they have not sunk into such a depression as to find life utterly meaningless.

Beckett was no stranger to depression in his own life, and in the protagonist of *Rough for Theatre II*, he dramatises some of the worst effects of the condition. In this dramaticule, Beckett explores with mordant wit the gulf that stretches between the despairing man, his friends and relations, and the evaluators who callously urge him to end his life. It is a study of how people view each other 'through a glass, darkly', of the blank incomprehension that lies at the core of much communication where self usurps centre stage, demanding always to recognise the 'me' in the 'you'. Lacan elaborates on this state in his discussion of speech and language in psychoanalysis: 'nowhere does it appear more clearly that man's desire finds its meaning in the desire of the other, not so much because the other holds the key to the object desired, as because the first object of desire is to be recognized by the other' (Lacan, 1977: 58). This solipsistic attitude hollows out discourse, reducing it to an exercise in self-referral where understanding and rapport is made impossible. The written word further distances the potential for connection. In this 'fragment', the reports of the victim's friends are so reductive that Dukes, in his programme notes, alleges that the play 'also indicts written language as inadequate to the task of codifying human experience in meaningful terms' (Dukes, 1999: 24).

In the codifying of experience in *Rough for Theatre II*, Beckett considers the crucial question of what constitutes the unendurable. He dramatises an implausible situation in which two apparently dispassionate assessors meet to judge whether a third man, Croker, present on stage but silent, should commit suicide or not. To enable them to reach a conclusion, they look at solicited documents of pertinent testimony from friends, relations and the man himself. Their callousness is staggering, especially since the person under review is within earshot. Like the victim in

Catastrophe, his silence is disempowering. Of the assessors, Bertrand (A) is a little more cautious in his opinion, but Morvan (B) advocates death from the start. He urges:

B: Let him jump.
A: When?
B: Now.
A: From where?
B: From here will do. Three to three and a half metres per floor, say twenty five in all.
[Pause.]
A: I could have sworn we were only on the sixth. [Pause.] He runs no risk?
B: He has only to land on his arse, the way he lived. The spine snaps and the tripes explode.

(*RTII*, 238)

Like secular inquisitors, the heartless pair attach no value to their victim's life; the written information they have received about him has kindled neither pity nor fellow-feeling. For them, the words remain dead on the page, and the silent, desperate man at the window has less claim to life than a dying songbird. From this assignment they will go on to 'Bury St Edmunds' with equanimity. In spite of the play's hilarious gallows-humour, which bears out Nell's maxim in *Endgame* that 'nothing is funnier than unhappiness'(333), one is nevertheless shocked by the horror of the circumstances. Among the flurry of papers and testimony, memories and discussion, no real sense of the man emerges. Instead, there is an irritable reaching for premature conclusion.

The inventory of reasons advanced for the suicide remains just that, a stark list devoid of imaginative life: 'Work, family, third fatherland, cunt, finances, art and nature, heart and conscience, health, housing conditions, God and man, so many disasters' (238), in short, what used to be referred to as 'the human condition'. What Morvan and Bertrand fail to perceive is the victim's particular perspective which would transform these commonplaces into the unendurable. Like many researchers, they have naive faith in the testimony they have gathered, with Morvan declaring: 'We have been to the best sources. All weighed and weighed again, checked and verified. Not a word here [*brandishing sheaf of papers*] that is not cast iron. Tied together like a cathedral' (238). Cathedrals are not only tied together with stone and mortar, but supposedly with faith as well. When the 'words' that are 'tied together' mock Morgan's faith by immediately

scattering on the floor, they prove that a selection of syllables can never constitute a life, no matter how 'cast iron' they may be.

The 'words', or memories of friends and relations, are scrutinised yet again. They are alike in their focus on self, which seems to obscure any attempt made to reach or experience the other. Mr Swell, friend and organist, who does not know what to say, submits some twaddle that he hopes will impress. Croker's wife, who is judicially separated from him, seems to have no understanding of the depressing effect on her husband of her 'five or six' miscarriages and a consequent embargo on sexual relations. Instead, she complains bitterly that he said 'not a word' about their 'happiness' (240). The fact that he might not have been happy at all does not even occur to her. This accords with Mr Peabody's recollection that Croker remembered only calamity, and the testimony of his mother who claims that her son had an 'inexhaustible reservoir of sorrow' which 'irrevocably dissolved' his joys 'as by a corrosive' (240). In case we are misled into thinking that here at last we will find maternal understanding, her assessment homes in on herself. 'In that he took after me' (240), she says with satisfaction, effectively shutting down the possibility of communication by viewing him as an extension of herself.

'Mr Moore, light comedian, c/o Widow Merryweather-Moore, All Saints on the Wash' (240) is even further steeped in self. He unashamedly uses Croker's misery to advance his theatrical career. 'To hear him talk about his life, after a glass or two, you would have thought he had never set foot outside hell. He had us in stitches. I worked it up into a skit that went down well' (240), he confides complacently. Moore views Croker through a comic lens, distorting him like a mirror at a funfair. Whatever grounds for trusting communication might once have existed have long since disappeared in betrayal.

Rather more sympathetic testimony is advanced by Mr Feckman, 'certified accountant and friend for better and for worse' (241). In his attempt to be absolutely accurate, his memory of Croker's torpor is unnuanced by comprehension. Feckman recounts an episode that happened outside the post office which indicates that he has no understanding of his friend's condition:

He was seated on one of these [bollards] [. . .] To all appearances down and out. He sat doubled in two, his hands on his knees, his legs astraddle, his head sunk [.

. . .] on drawing nearer I could see he was merely scrutinizing, between his feet, a lump of dogshit [. . .] I confess I had not the heart to bid him the time of day, I was overcome. I simply slipped into his pocket a lottery ticket I had no use for, while silently wishing him the best of luck. When two hours later I emerged from the Post Office, having cashed my order, he was at the same place and in the same attitude. I sometimes wonder if he is still alive.

(*RTII*, 241)

The friend is unaware that he is observing the classic immobilising symptoms of depression. But feeling excluded by Croker's intense absorption, and knowing that words would be worse than useless in his state, he symbolically relinquishes Croker to his fate by giving him another shot at life through a lottery ticket. It is a very long shot.

When Croker comes to present his own inventory of ailments and sorrows, it is evident that he has lost all perspective, as nothing is ranked or given priority. He, too, has no concept of the chronic condition that has overtaken him. His list also points up the negativity in the compilation of his self-narrative, showing how a pessimistic bias will discount the positive, concentrating only on the darker aspects of the psyche and its experience. This dramaticule explores the highly selective memory processes at work which evaluate the determining factors that constitute one's sense of being. Croker's mood-congruent memory is darkened by morbidity as he cites the following as grounds for suicide:

B: [*Reading*] '. . . sick headaches . . . eye trouble . . . irrational fear of vipers . . . ear trouble . . .' nothing for us there – 'fibroid tumours . . . pathological horror of songbirds . . . throat trouble . . . need of affection . . .' – we're coming to it – '. . . inner void. . . congenital timidity. . . nose trouble. . .' – ah! listen to this! – '. . . morbidly sensitive to the opinion of others . . .' [*Looks up.*] What did I tell you?

(*RTII*, 242)

Although physical symptoms and psychological needs are jumbled capriciously, Morvan latches on to the last 'reason' as crucial to his case. At this point, Beckett plays a visual joke on him by having the lamp go out, owing ironically to a 'faulty connection'. The all-important 'inner void' is ignored, while Morvan, lost in a pedantic fog, goes in irritable search of a missing verb. He also ignores Croker's history of repeated running away from home, suggestive of intense childhood unhappiness. At this stage, Bertrand, too, has finally had enough and, bored stiff, adopts the same dismissive tone as Morvan had to start with: 'A black future, an unpardonable past – so far as he

can remember, inducements to linger on all equally preposterous and the best advice dead letter. Agreed?’ (246). They agree, with some heat, less light, and no compassion, that the victim should end it all and ‘jump’.

Croker’s silence appears to have cancelled him out, the written word of testimony remains powerless to save him, while his own memories and those of his loved ones lack the insight that could give him any hope. He is the embodiment of the grim Proustian maxim that ‘there is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication’ (*P*, 64). Despite his ‘need for affection’, the suspect affection of others is impotent to reach him. Inevitably, he is alone.

The characters of *Rough for Theatre II* attempt to communicate, but their discourse founders on the barricades of their incompatible memories, self-absorption and Croker’s paralysing depression. Neither Bertrand nor Morvan, who attempt to evaluate the memories of their respondents, approach their discussion with insight or pity. In *Rough for Radio II*, Beckett goes even further in his exploration of pitiless communicative impasse, exploring an extreme condition in which rapport is utterly impossible.

In both theatrical ‘fragments’, *Rough for Theatre II* and *Rough for Radio II*, Beckett evaluates the role of preconception as a block to understanding, in showing how stubbornly held notions and memories can blight interaction. Whether Fox, in *Rough for Radio II*, is an anthropomorphised man or a humanised animal, one thing is clear: he is an intuitive creature who lives by his senses. His interrogator, the Animator, is a sensualist who imposes his grossness on his victim. Neither fits into the other’s frame of reference. At times the Animator’s racy language smacks of mild sexual harassment. As he ogles the young stenographer, he says: ‘Oh how bewitching you look when you show your teeth! Ah were I but . . . thirty years younger’ (281). ‘Big bad wolf’ fantasies are projected on to his hapless assistant as his mind strokes memories of sexually more satisfying days. Billie Whitelaw, interviewed for the London *Radio Times* (10-16 April, 1976), confessed that ‘in “Rough for Radio”, I felt that the girl I play, the stenographer, starts out in uniform and ends with nothing on’ (MS 3081). The solipsistic Animator, ‘who knows others only in himself’ (*P*, 66), is incapable of retaining, accepting or contextualising evidence from

his trapped victim, and is determined to find in Fox a locus for his obsessive eroticism. Since this is impossible, he resorts first to torture and finally to fabrication to achieve his ends.

Beckett characterises the Animator rather more carefully than he does any of the other sketchy figures that people his ‘fragments’. He is an ex-book reviewer, or ‘critiiiiic!’ with pretensions to a grasp of Mauthnerian linguistic theory that leads him to discount promising leads in conversation to look for ‘the word’ or even ‘the meanest syllable’ (276). A muddled thinker with a self-confessed poor memory, he has little idea of what he is after, though his fond reference to Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey* is probably indicative. To the desperate Fox he says:

Of course we do not know, any more than you , what exactly it is we are after, what sign or set of words. But since you have failed so far to let it escape you, it is not by harking on the same old themes that you are likely to succeed, that would astonish me.

(RRII, 282)

In the Seminar referred to in *Écrits*, Lacan holds that ‘speech always subjectively includes its own reply’ (Lacan, 1977: 85). But Fox and the Animator are so ‘subjective’ that they fail to register the ‘reply’ that the other ardently desires. The Animator wants another story – a salacious one that will arouse him. Bored as he is by the repetitive quality of Fox’s desperate defence, he insists that Fox become a little more creative with the truth, demanding ‘More variety!’ (281). He suggests that Fox supply ‘Someone, perhaps, that is what is wanting, someone who once saw you . . . [Abating] . . . go by. I may be quite wrong, but try, at least, what do you stand to lose? [Beside himself.] Even though it is not true!’ (282).

The Animator wants Fox to embellish his narrative skills to cater for his own coarse tastes. Veracity does not count. When Fox mentions a woman called Maud who is lactating, the Animator drools, ‘The breast! One can almost see it!’ (283). With his memory’s supply of obligatory voyeuristic images, it temporarily escapes him that Maud has obviously been pregnant and might even have been ‘fecundated’ by Fox. When this is coyly suggested by the stenographer, he grows inordinately excited and insists that her transcript be amended to include a suggestion of Fox’s sexual engagement with Maud:

A: Don’t skip, miss, the text in its entirety if you please.
S: I skip nothing, sir. [Pause.] What have I skipped, sir?

- A: [Emphatically.] ‘. . . between two kisses . . .’ [Sarcastic.] That mere trifle! [Angry.] How can we ever hope to get anywhere if you suppress gems of that magnitude?
- S: But, sir, he never said anything of the kind.
- A: [Angry.] ‘. . . Maud would say, *between two kisses*, etc.’ Amend.
(RRII, 284)

Here at last is ‘testimony’ to which the Animator’s memory can relate, even if it is ‘amended’. The ‘kisses’ smack of his overheated sensual world, and as a result, ‘Tomorrow, who knows, we may be free’ (284). The animal’s possible freedom is not mentioned, but the Animator can escape the web of Fox’s ‘other’ words to inhabit the more raunchy and familiar world of his imaginings. Communication invites deliberate distortion when it is forced into a preconceived grid, while added coercion blasts any possibility of cogent connection.

In the figure of Fox, Beckett has conceptualised an existence beyond the Animator’s murky imaginings. Here is a creature who loves freedom above all else and frantically tries to regain his release. His defensive discourse takes three forms: a denial that he killed a mole, an evocation of his atavistic liberty and a description of successful escape. The Animator can connect with none of them and, bored to tears, admonishes the tortured creature:

Those everlasting wilds may have their charm, but there is nothing there for us, that would astonish me. [Snivel.] Those micaceous schists, if you knew the effect [Snivel.] they can have on one, in the long run. [Snivel.] And your fauna! Those fodient rodents! [Snivel.] You wouldn’t have a handkerchief, miss, you could lend me?

(RRII, 281-82)

The Animator’s sympathy is all for himself, as he reductively discounts Fox’s existence as being so alien that it cannot fit into any frame of reference that his memory has established. When attempts to be set free founder, Fox falls back on the collective unconscious, the ‘folk’ memory that authors his sense of identity and continuity:

Ah yes, that for sure, live I did, no denying, all stones all sides . . . – walls no further – (277) [. . .] That for sure, no further, and there gaze, all the way up, slow gaze, age upon age, up again, down again, little lichens of my own span, living dead in the stones.

(RRII, 279)

Fox had connected vitally with his own sort when he was free, his affinity extending even to the fossilised ‘living dead in the stones’. His lyrical evocation of the fullness of being expressed in ‘live I did’ is desiccated in the Animator’s scornful reception of ‘those micaceous schists’, and his longing for the days when he ran free is overlooked in a fatuous remark about his tendency to sibilance. The Animator is deaf to an existence so far removed from his own experience. In desperation, Fox tries another tack, focusing on a twin within him who ‘had never really been born’ (*ATF*, 196). Whatever meaning this has for Fox does not emerge, as the Animator is following the false scent of Maud in milk. Physical and mental torture continue unabated, and not even the heart-rending scream of ‘Let me out! Peter out in the stones!’ (281) prevails. Whether he eventually peters out in the stones or not, Fox continues separate and other, thwarting attempts to co-opt him into a life of sensual, rather than sensuous, discourse.

In a play as elusive as this one, there are naturally other interpretations. David Wade, somewhat mystified, tentatively hedges his bets when reviewing the first production for *The Times*, 17 April, 1976. He focuses on the creative process:

It could be seen as something of a joke, an exercise in self-mockery [. . .] a flow of Beckettian monologue, typically cryptic, which has the flavour of a parody. At one point the Animator insists on adding a phrase of his own – perhaps in an attempt to make the raw words more comprehensible; at another the prisoner starts and cannot be stopped [. . .] In short, the play sets out a situation – with or without the difficulties presented by Fox’s meaning – which must be familiar to writers of many different kinds; poets are likely to find it exceptionally recognizable.

(MS 3625)

Indeed, the fixation on the recognisable, in ‘the pangs of composition’ (Cohn, 2001: 275), is one of the distinguishable features of this seldom-discussed play. Both Fox and Animator prove unable to abandon familiar mindscapes to engage imaginatively with each other. As a result, they fail to find common ground in their discourse and remain oblivious of each other’s essence.

Another solipsistic impasse is strikingly realised in Beckett’s much-performed *Play*. Trapped like Mahood in his urn, the three characters, ‘like a sculpted triptych’ (Ackerley and Gontarski, eds, 2004: 445), are doomed to talk past one another in the after-life, their words imprisoned as much as they are. Because their interaction on earth had failed to connect, the wife’s Fox-like lament

that ‘all is falling, all fallen from the beginning, on empty air’ (341) holds true for the entire play. In death, as in life, the three still cannot ‘hear’ one another, but remain as metonymic separate dynamisms, tormented in a seemingly endless purgatorial state,⁸ where a spotlight interrogates their contorted memories.⁹ As Cohn remarks, ‘Provoked by the spotlight, the three characters first deliver a Narration of their earthly imbroglio and then a Meditation on their present situation, both frankly physical and fictionally metaphysical’ (in Beja et al., eds, 1983: 7). With their memories distorted to serve sensation and the metaphysics of being and knowing, they explore themselves and the ‘truth’ content of their experience with very little success. They remain as puzzled by circumstances and culpability as they were in the beginning. Beckett’s dramatisation of the ‘eternal’ triangle constitutes a grim joke at the expense of the genre,¹⁰ but in the *Blue Angel Beckett on Film* version the ‘triangular’ effect has been much diluted by serried rows ‘filled with other heads in urns stretching to infinity [. . .] a Gothic visual extravagance’ (Frost and McMullan in Ben-Zvi, ed., 2003: 233).

Play is not a fragment, having been extensively polished for production, yet Beckett has deliberately not given his characters names. In calling them W1 (the wife), W2 (the mistress) and M (the husband), he has them represent all people involved in similar relationships. Characteristically, their memories become acts of narrative reconstruction as they overlay their stories with self-justification. The intercut monologues reveal that each speaker is intensely self-involved, but none more so than the husband, an accomplished sexual athlete, who cannot understand why anyone should dispute his entitlement. Gerald McSorley played the Man in the production by the Gate Theatre in 1999. With his big, bland, smiling, self-satisfied face, and his burping and ‘pardons’ down to a fine art, he gained many laughs from the clichéd grossness that he brought to the part. The banality that passes for communication in much commercial theatre is convincingly shown by Beckett to impede understanding.

Not only does the man fail to understand anyone else’s point of view, but like the Animator of *Rough for Radio II*, he also muddies the waters of communication with lies and prevarication. His entrenched hypocrisy reduces conversation to serial platitudes and relationships to sham. The following interchange reflects a period when he was sexually involved with both women, though neither knew it at the time:

M: At home all heart to heart, new leaf and bygones bygones. I ran into your ex-doxy, she said one night, on the pillow, you're well out of that. Rather uncalled for I thought. I am indeed, sweetheart, I said, I am indeed. God what vermin women. Thanks to you, angel, I said.

(PL, 311)

He uses words as the false coin of a debased currency. For him they are 'just play', employed as decoys to cover up his tracks. And because he has no respect for language, he uses it as carelessly as he does his women. No surety attends his words; there is merely a spectrum of dubious possibilities. As a result he can never build a viable relationship on the shifting sands of his verbal and emotional betrayal. He is and will remain a separate dynamism. This is revealed in his attitude towards his suspicious wife, as he attempts to equivocate:

M: She was not convinced. I might have known. I smell her off you, she kept saying. There was no answer to this. So I took her in my arms and swore I could not live without her. I meant it, what is more. Yes, I'm sure I did. She did not repulse me.

(PL, 309)

The ardour suggested by 'I could not live without her' is imploded by self-justification and the enervated 'She did not repulse me'. His devaluation of language extends also to his relations with his mistress. Having been misled to believe that her lover's home life is wretched, W2 is also cynically manipulated through her lover's trivialising 'play'. After his panicky confession to his wife, and his wife's preening 'gloat' over her supposedly vanquished rival, he goes to 'comfort' the other woman:

M: When I saw her again she knew. She was looking [. . .] wretched [. . .] The problem was how to convince her that no . . . revival of intimacy was involved. I couldn't. I might have known. So I took her in my arms and said I could not go on living without her. I don't believe I could have.

(PL, 311)

In each instance when smarmy discourse blasts communication, body language substitutes for a currency that has no more value, even though the language of the body can be equally treacherous. Incidents in *Rough for Theatre I* and *Rough for Radio II* predate the fuller treatment

given to the body/word communicative split in *Play*. The cripple, the Animator and M all invalidate their discourse by speaking and acting at cross purposes.

M has not only harmed the two women by his counterfeit communication; he has also corrupted his own sensibilities through self-deception. In sentimentally picturing the two cheated women as friends after his cowardly disappearance, he reveals perceptions that are hopelessly warped, his 'yesterdays' having loosened his grip on reality.

W2, the mistress, has also turned reality upside down as she recalls with patronising pity: 'That poor creature who tried to seduce you, what ever became of her, do you suppose? – I can hear her. Poor thing' (314). Though rather more refined than the wife, she also scorns the physical attributes of her rival while alive, congratulating herself that 'Her photographs were kind to her. Seeing her now for the first time full length in the flesh I understood why he preferred me' (308). With words proving treacherous, the women are forced to evaluate themselves in physical terms. The mistress admits without rancour: 'with him no danger of the . . . spiritual thing' (309).

Again, action reveals feelings more accurately than words. When she believes that there is no hope of her lover's return, she does not cherish his belongings but makes 'a bundle of his things and burnt them. It was November and the bonfire was going. All night I smelt them smouldering' (311). Guy Fawkes is revisited, as W2 deals vicariously with her cheating man. She also projects her feelings of being used onto the importunate light-probe, admonishing it to 'Go away and start poking and pecking at someone else' (312). This is much stronger sexual resentment than her earlier complaint to her lover that she did not have 'much stomach for [his wife's] leavings' (310).

Much of the raw anger that the wife feels at her husband's betrayal is diverted to sexual jealousy, but of a different form from that expressed by the goading voice of *Eh Joe*. Dismissing her rival as 'a common tart' (310), she pours scorn on her physical appearance in a vitriolic displacement of her suffering: 'Pudding face, puffy, spots, blubber mouth, jowls, no neck, dugs you could – . . . Calves like a flunkey' (310). Her husband escapes her censure, while his 'doxy' is referred to as 'that slut'.

The wife's thoughts are perhaps most interesting when she projects the hurt caused by her husband on to his mistress. Her resentment is conveyed by images of theft and furtiveness – 'stealing' and 'creeping'. She conjectures: 'Perhaps she is sitting somewhere, by the open window, her hands folded in her lap, gazing down out over the olives – [. . .] then the sea, wondering what can be keeping him, growing cold. Shadow stealing over everything. Creeping. Yes' (315-6). Her memories – 'wondering what can be keeping him'— are interleaved with scenes from her imaginings which intensify her hurt: 'Before I could do anything he disappeared. That meant she had won. That slut! I couldn't credit it. I lay stricken for weeks. Then I drove over to her place. It was all bolted and barred. All grey with frozen dew' (311). And, like her rival, she also relocates her disgust with her husband to the light, which she orders to 'Get off me! Get off me!' (313).

Though these words are deflected, they reveal the wife's wounded feelings. The deceit that her husband dismissed as 'play' has distorted her reactions into imprecations that do not implicate him. Like the body's ability to suffer referred pain, her words throb with the intensity of an ache that she refuses to identify with her husband's betrayal. Self-deception has made her communication false. Severed from their source and re-rooted in resentment towards her rival, her accusations are skewed by a misguided attempt at protection of her husband. It seems strange that the man's duped womenfolk do not hate him, at least not overtly: they hate each other. Absorbed in their autobiographical memories, which filter experience through individual perceptions, both women offer similar themes with widely differing details. Each has been damaged, and is angry, resentful and self-justifying. As none of the three is able to face the past clearsightedly, they will never reach a rapprochement with each other. Distortions of memory will condemn each to an idiosyncratic, alienating vision, resulting in stasis.

Though the spotlight probes them all intensively and intrusively,¹¹ it cannot shock them into a realisation of their culpability. McMullan, writing of its function, rightly claims that:

Beckett's use of the shifting spotlight can therefore be seen as a parody of the association of light with the revelation or appearance of presence and the disclosure of truth. In *Play*, appearance, continually on the point of disappearance, reveals only its opaque if tenuous surface rather than any inner essence or truth.
(McMullan, 1993: 21)

None of them has communicated honestly. None expresses feelings openly. Even the least guilty party, the wife, is still consumed with a sexual jealousy and hatred that cannot find direct expression.¹² They grope blindly towards accountability. The wife says, significantly, 'Is it that I do not tell the truth, is that it, that some day, somehow I may tell the truth at last' (313), the mistress reflects 'Am I taboo, I wonder'? (313) and the husband, unsurprisingly, asks 'Am I hiding something?' (313). Glimmers of what happened surface briefly before being overtaken by bile or fantasy. Thus, lacking the means to engage in genuine communication with one another, they will remain 'potted so majestically' (Brater, 1977: 80), separate entities in their separate urns forever.

Though the characters in *Play* remain bedevilled by deception and self-deception, they have made attempts to communicate. By contrast, in the radio plays, *All that Fall* and *Rough for Radio I*, we encounter the blocked communication that results from deliberate strategies of non-disclosure. Dan Rooney of *All that Fall*, and 'He' of *Rough for Radio I*, deliberately withhold information from women agog to have it revealed to them. In her chapter on 'Rethinking Power and Solidarity in Gender and Dominance', Deborah Tannen alleges that men frequently 'use silence to exercise power over women' and that 'taciturnity itself can be an instrument of power' (in Tannen, ed., 1993 b: 177). This is used as a strategy by the character known as 'He' in the elusive fragment, *Rough for Radio I*, when he is badgered by an importunate do-gooder. Placed under inordinate stress, he seems to have been deserted by his wife or partner who appears to be having twins. The references to confinement, 'breech', and the hospital suggest that the birth is imminent and that an announcement will be made. His discourse varies between terse non-committal statements designed to block communication with his inquisitive female visitor, and hysterical outbursts when he phones the hospital for information. Sad memories invade the dramaticule – his wife or lover has left him and so has everyone else.

In his conversation with the intruding visitor he is frosty and formal, denying her request for greater physical comfort, along with her verbal invitation to greater warmth and intimacy. He denies that he had extended an invitation to her in the first place and behaves like an automaton when he repeats her phrases. Clearly, under pressure of his burdened mind, he is capable only of

cursory, phatic responses. Verbalisation and the exchange of commonplaces would seem to control his distress:

He: [Gloomily.] Madam.
She: Are you all right? [Pause.] You asked me to come.
He: I ask no one to come here.
She: You suffered me to come.
He: I meet my debts.
[Pause.]
She: I have come to listen.
He: When you please.
[Pause.]

(RRI, 267)

The elusive nature of this seldom-discussed play is intensified by the two knobs of the radio doubling as a sort of sonar which could allow the visitor to view the two babies who are presumably waiting to be born. This surreal element adds to the general confusion which starts with the man's blocking tactics of non-disclosure. The visitor is obviously concerned about his worried preoccupation: she comments on how troubled he looks and leaves him 'to his needs'. It is evident that her unspoken invitation for him to confide in her has been refused, and he has used the phatic discourse of social turn-taking to contain the floodgates of his agitation as he engineers her exit.

His emotional needs are far more urgent than can be contained within the parameters of his visitor's disquiet. Once she has gone, his urgent telephonic conversations force his words apart as though the pressure of his trepidation shreds his speech. His controlled single words have been replaced by cryptic phrases which fail to satisfy his (and by extension our) need to know. The contrast between the tentative nature of his visitor's enquiries and his insistent demands is palpable. She is concerned; he is beside himself. He cannot trust himself to confide in her, so their communication is distant and dysfunctional.

His final words, 'tomorrow noon', might indicate that he could visit his erstwhile partner, or his children, or even that twins might be delivered by Caesarean section at midday, with one of them in the breech position. Cryptic though the piece may be, what is clear is that his discourse is highly influenced by his emotion-saturated memory, frantic with the dread that everyone will leave him.

Escaping the civilised discourse of evasion that keeps him 'separate', he is empowered by the language of urgency to try for more valid communication with someone else.

Although 'he' objectifies his visitor to some extent by his refusal to confide in her, his responses are contained within acceptable social limits. The Director in *Catastrophe*, on the other hand, has such a corrupted will to power that he objectifies his victim without scruple. Conditioned as he is to brutal control, he anticipates no resistance from the pitiable man shivering on the plinth, but twists, humiliates and manoeuvres him at will. '*Catastrophe*', says McMullan, 'plays upon the audience's awareness of the body transformed into a sign, into material to be manipulated, disciplined, shaped' (McMullan, 1993: 28). The figure on stage is perceived as no more than a puppet, a pliable extension of the mogul's ego. That the controller resembles an Eastern European potentate with his 'fur coat and fur toque to match' (458) is no accident. *Catastrophe* was written to honour and encourage Vaclav Havel, at that time a Czech human-rights dissident, but later to become President of the Czech Republic. It was performed for the first time in French on 21 July 1982 during the International Theatre Festival in Avignon to celebrate Havel's resistance.

Like the suicidal figure of *Rough for Theatre II*, the man suffering public humiliation is silent throughout the encounter and spoken about as though he does not exist. And like Croker of the theatrical fragment, his silence appears to give consent to multiple indignities. His configuration as an image of total subservience and humiliation diminishes his humanity to vanishing point in the eyes of the Director, who reifies the mute individual before him into a symbol of the vanquished. In spite of obligatory expressions of pseudo-feeling, the Director believes that the only communication possible is that of physical force 'in the gulag of Beckett's play' (Brater, 1987: 144). When the assistant, awed by the power of the Director, timidly suggests 'a little . . . gag' (459), her employer reveals that he anticipates no resistance in the puppet figure whatsoever:

D: For God's sake! This craze for explication! Every i dotted to
 death! Little gag! For God's sake!
A: Sure he won't utter?
D: Not a squeak.

(CT, 459)

As the Director's mind is steeped in memories of coercive conquest, he can hardly remember an act of rebellion, and because he has foreclosed on the possibility of verbal communication, he does not anticipate opposition of any kind. He believes that there will be no communication, because his oppressive presence has made it impossible. But, as a 'valid expression of personality' (P, 66), the Protagonist physically asserts his will to overcome. Once again, when words prove impossible, bodily action compensates for communicative impasse. Drawing on images of autonomy embedded in his memory, the living sculpture lifts his head with authority, fixing the compromised audience with a stare. He outfaces them with brave defiance, proving that he is no cog in the system, but a proud separate dynamism, unbowed and unintimidated. There is a shift in Beckett's evaluation from the negative to the positive aspects of separateness as the victim refuses to be complicit in his own oppression. Against all odds, the human spirit has prevailed.

Rosette Lamont, reviewing the play for 'Other Stages' on 16 June, 1983, describes the last riveting moments:

As the applause dies down P raises his head very slowly, looking out. David Warrilow performs this single act of defiance with extraordinary deliberation and dignity [. . .] By this one gesture he conveys man's irreducible spirit, the triumph of the individual will over a tyrannical regime that could crush it only with its life. This is indeed a play written for every dissident today.

(MS 3495)

When *Catastrophe* was performed in the Beckett Festival at the Barbican Theatre on 15 September, 1999, the director, Robert O'Mahoney, interpreted the climax very differently. After Johnny Murphy lifted his head and glared with great dignity at the audience, his lips parted and stretched into an imitation of Edvard Munch's 'The Scream'. This nullified the impact of the ending, as the Protagonist was reduced to nothing more than an abject, silently screaming victim. Beckett undoubtedly had another aim in mind. He indicated to Gussow in conversation that 'It was not his intention to have the character make an appeal to the audience. Rather he is meant to cow onlookers into submission through the intensity of his gaze and of his stoicism. In other words, he is a triumphant martyr rather than a sacrificial victim' (Gussow, 1996: 159-60). His bodily defiance speaks the volumes that his silence debars. McMullan, in an interesting article on 'Virtual Subjects: Performance, Technology and the Body in Beckett's Late Theatre', explains that:

The play exposes the mediated encoding of the body as material, aesthetic or political sign, while suggesting that possibility of the body's resistance to the signifying economy inscribed upon it, as the protagonist raises his head and fixes his audience (fictional and real) with his gaze.

(McMullan, 2001: 169-70)

Though the objectified body in *Catastrophe* is 'materially, aesthetically and politically' manhandled, he is, unlike Fox, spared physical torture. In *What Where*, however, we witness the depersonalising and corruptive effects of serial torture on the last inhabitants of earth. In this *dans macabre*, Beckett paints a grim picture of dog eat dog where the body is 'locus for pain' (Bryden in Ben-Zvi, ed., 2003: 39) and life is brutish in the extreme. The dramaticule lacks the energising hope of *Catastrophe*, as character after character succumbs to the seductions of the abuse of power, to 'repetitive mindless torture' (Ackerley and Gontarski, eds, 2004: 642) which necessarily separates and divides them. As the play proceeds, each builds up memories of brutalising abuse. The percussive Bam, Bim, Bom and Bem and the unnamed fifth character (Bum?) are interchangeable automatons who do not demur when commanded to give one another 'the works'. In a series of terse questions and monosyllabic answers, each assumes the other's persona and when the validity of their response is doubted, physical torture follows. With the ultimate failure of words they forfeit their humanity in becoming clones of one another. Heartless and dispassionate, they lose the integrity that would make them accountable until, tortured themselves, they make a final bid by refusing to say 'it'. Through spring, autumn and winter, these ceremonies of cruelty persist unopposed in 'a Nietzschean eternal repetition of cycles of domination and submission' (McMullan, 1993: 37). The world ends with their whimpers and memories of their complicit betrayal, as Voice invites the audience to 'make sense who may' (414). His words hang in the air as reminders of wasted potential squandered by brute force, as 'the playwright's dramatic action is arrested in silence' (Brater, 1987: 159).

Apparently, the play has a different but no less interesting resonance when filmed for television. Brater contends that 'On screen Beckett more clearly establishes that this is a story about Bam remembering [. . .] Torture becomes more explicitly self-inflicted, a function of memory, remorse, and the relentless need to tell a story' (Brater, 1987: 162). A different medium, a different treadmill.

One of the most striking studies in ‘self-inflicted’ pain as a ‘function of memory’ occurs in *Krapp’s Last Tape*. This monologue for assorted Krapp-personae is an extraordinary gift to an actor.¹³ John Hurt, who performed the part at the Barbican Theatre in September, 1999, drew standing ovations from audiences in tears to match his own, while he cradled his tape recorder as though it were a woman’s breast. This was no happy birthday as, studied and sluggish, mouth turned down and blinking slowly, Hurt, almost zombie-like at times, went through the slow motions of his life. His deeply furrowed face and spiky hair were eerily reminiscent of Beckett’s own in this, his most autobiographical play.

In the series of monologues, Beckett features Krapp, a cynically disillusioned old man of sixty-nine, confronting earlier tape-recorded versions of himself. Ackerley and Gontarski observe in *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett* that ‘[t]he result is a palimpsest of personalities, a layering of character [. . .] Each sees the fool he was rather than the fool he is’ (Ackerley and Gontarski, eds, 2004: 303). As a result, his sardonic remarks are spiked with corrosive scorn for his former more pompous and idealistic selves, whom he clearly regards as ‘separate dynamisms’. The phrase used by Lacan in ‘The Mirror Stage’ is particularly apt in this regard when he speaks of one who experiences ‘discordance with his own reality’ (Lacan, 1977: 1). A lifetime of successive exfoliation has left Krapp so thin-skinned and denuded that all he longs for is to ‘be again’ (9), to be reconstituted in a simpler, pre-reflective state. In confronting his life, he recognises that his despised being ‘has never been anything more than his construct in the imaginary and that this construct disappoints’ (Lacan, 1977: 42). When Beckett wrote in the *Proust Monograph* that ‘The aspirations of yesterday were valid for yesterday’s ego, not for today’s’ (P,13), he could possibly have had the genesis of Krapp in mind. Like dry autumn leaves, Krapp’s aspirations have dispersed as his life has grown colder.

Wearing a ‘heavy silver watch and chain’ (8,9) to accentuate the passing of time, Krapp listens with varying levels of irritation to younger, magisterial versions of himself holding forth. Of his late twenties’ self, Krapp had this to say ten years later:

Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp. The voice! Jesus! And the aspirations! [*Brief laugh in which KRAPP joins.*] And the resolutions! [*Brief laugh in which KRAPP joins.*] To drink less, in particular. [*Brief laugh of KRAPP alone.*] [. . .] Plans for a less. . . [*hesitates*] engrossing sexual life [. . .] Flagging

pursuit of happiness [...] Sneers at what he calls his youth and thanks to God that it's over. [Pause.] False ring there. [Pause.] Shadows of the opus
[...] magnum.

(K, 5-6, 103-15)

The thirty-nine-year-old Krapp disowns his earlier self, asking: 'What remains of all that misery? A girl in a shabby green coat, on a railway-station platform? No?' (6). With ambition and resolution negated, 'punished by both emotional and literary failure' (Cohn, 2001: 240), what remains are the memories of lost love and a pair of incomparable eyes. His striving self is discarded in willed acts of attrition, but images of a girl in a shabby green coat persist. Knowlson, in his introduction to Volume III of *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett: Krapp's Last Tape* points out that:

[in] giving to Krapp the power of instant recall of his own past, Beckett created a stark confrontation between man's various selves in which decline, loss, failure, disillusionment and discontinuity are shown concretely. Moreover, in this way, the spectator has become the active agent, listening, observing, and able himself to assess the width of the chasm that separates Krapp from his former self and judge the strength of his obsession with a portion of his own past that he had earlier rejected as being unworthy of him.

(Knowlson, ed., 1992: xx)

In reviewing their lives, people generally filter past events through current perception, a necessarily reductive process. Krapp is an exception, in that his past comes to him through the tape recorder almost like Proust's 'involuntary memory', accompanied by sensual impression, attitude and emotional investment. In mourning the loss of love, the most vital aspect of his being, it is not unexpected that a desolate Krapp, on his sixty-ninth birthday, 'in his yearly word-letting' (Malkin, 1997: 29), should return to a thirty-year-old tape to play again and again 'the slow narcotic rhythms' (Coe, 1964: 105) of his last encounter with the lover he renounces for his art. Earlier on he has rapturously recorded his life-changing determination to find inspiration in the darkness of his being, but this 'vision' is given short shrift as he frantically rewinds to hear the lyrical description of his 'farewell to love' (4). The confident forces that have shaped his life in the production of his magnum opus, and his resolve to tap his dark inwardness, are summarily fast-forwarded to locate the recording of the last few loving moments of his happiness. With teeming mind, imaginative rapture, hope and future dreams destroyed, he mourns the memories of love renounced.

It is not unexpected that, in the last tape of his hovering half-life, Krapp should dismiss yet again his recorded earlier being as ‘that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that’(9). Although he comforts his depleted self in an act of bravado by declaring, ‘Thank God that’s all done with anyway’ (9), with wistful hindsight he is prepared to concede: ‘Ah, maybe he was right’ (9). There is a rueful admission that the younger Krapp might have held out more promise than the disillusioned older Krapp cares to acknowledge. In comparison with the ‘aspirations’ of his yesterdays, his memories are desolate – of ‘the sour cud and the iron stool’ (9), of the failure of his ‘magnum opus’, of a girl with whom he might have shared happiness on the Baltic. This romantic possibility is grotesquely juxtaposed with recollections of bathetic, half-impotent cavortings with an elderly bony whore. Krapp’s current recorded entry is devoid of resolve and aspiration, revealing only the ‘rag-and-bone shop of the heart’¹⁴, with its linguistic and personal diminishment. In an act of self-loathing, he scorns his former self, even as he derides the current version, charging himself to ‘Go on with this drivel in the morning’(9). He has nothing to record except the few ruinous memories that surface fragmentarily, his scorn for what he was, and depression at what he has become. In a letter written to his director friend, Schneider, in January 1960, Beckett explains that ‘Krapp has nothing to talk to but his dying self and nothing to talk to him but his dead one’ (in Harmon, ed. 1998: 59). Even more illuminating is Beckett’s explanation to the actor who played Krapp in the 1969 Schiller-Theater production. Knowlson elaborates: ‘Krapp cast several anxious glances over his left shoulder, in case death itself should be waiting for him in the surrounding darkness. Beckett explained to Martin Held in Berlin that “Old Nick’s there. Death is standing behind him and unconsciously he’s looking for it”’ (in Knowlson and Pilling, 1979: 82). As Krapp’s tapes register his misguided efforts to ‘deform’ his life in service to ‘the fire’ of his art, his recorded memories induce revulsion and disillusion. As each passing year chronicles an emotional diminution that debars him from ‘being again’ in the exuberant patterns of his youth, Krapp longs for his vitiated life to end.

But when he allows his mind to wander freely in the dark, the memories that come flooding in are simpler and more instinctual than any others he has recorded, unblemished by scorn, pomposity, or the need to create a Pozzo-like ‘artful pose’ (Smith in Tannen, ed., 1993 b: 148). Like many elderly people, he recalls his earliest days most vividly. These recollections seem to well up from

a more spontaneous source, surfacing from a childhood in which happiness was a very real possibility. He muses longingly: 'Be again in the dingle on a Christmas Eve, gathering holly, the red-berried. [*Pause.*] Be again on Croghan on a Sunday morning, with the bitch, stop and listen to the bells. [*Pause.*] And so on' (9). There is a precision in these sensory reflections that contrasts with the memory lapses of his earlier responses, when he has no recollection of the 'black ball'(4) , the 'memorable equinox' (4) or the meaning of the word 'viduity'(6), once part of his working vocabulary. As Cohn observes, 'His past is on tape, not in his head' (Cohn, 1973: 168). Vital details have vanished without trace from his current memory, and if it were not for his tape collection, he would have few reminders of the man he has once been. In fact, it is difficult to reconcile the coarse, forgetful Krapp drooling over his 'spooool' with the ardent visionary of his past. The earlier Krapp would never have permitted himself such inanities. Habit, however, has proved more tenacious than inspiration, when Krapp can be characterised most predictably by his self-absorption, weakness for bananas, constipation and addiction to alcohol.

The greatest irony of the play occurs when we hear the end of the reel that Krapp recorded at thirty-nine. He predicts: 'Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn't want them back' (10). The 'fire' that had inspired him to sacrifice his happiness on the altar of words and gnostic purity¹⁵ has been doused by alcohol and yearning, and the years that have followed have been shrivelled in all respects. At sixty-nine he uses language that is semantically, syntactically and conceptually impoverished, with none of the imaginative range that he formerly relished. Significantly, he does not curse his woefully diminished memory, but displaces his unease by lambasting the articulate aspirations and pretensions of his younger self. Where the tapes should jog his memory, enabling him to 'be again', they talk in vain about a stranger.

It is probably not only Krapp's active disassociation from earlier memories that weakens his recall, but also the possibility that he is suffering from Korsakoff's Alcoholic Syndrome. As referred to in my introduction, this was a condition known to Beckett and mentioned by name in *Murphy* (96). Adam Piette, writing on 'Beckett, Early Neuropsychology and Memory Loss', notes that:

Korsakoff's syndrome was analyzed by Carl Wernicke and S.S. Korsakoff in the 1880s [. . . An early] confusional stage was observed by Korsakoff to develop into a syndrome with powerful amnesic symptoms in long-term alcoholism, accompanied by intestinal obstruction.

(Piette, 1993: 42)

Piette goes on to include Krapp among Beckett's alcoholics, along with Mercier, Camier and the Unnamable.

Aware of a growing addiction to alcohol, by the age of twenty- nine the young Krapp has already decided to drink less, citing statistics to strengthen his resolve. 'Seventeen hundred hours, out of the preceding eight thousand odd, consumed on licensed premises alone. More than 20 per cent, say 40 per cent of his waking life' (5-6). Forty years on, his craving has not abated, to judge by his frequent cork-popping sorties. In earlier versions of the play, Beckett describes Krapp as having a white face and a purple nose, but he later tones down his protagonist's drunken appearance, possibly so that he does not dissipate the audience's sympathies through an over-explicit portrayal. Knowlson explains that

Beckett was extremely wary of overstressing the clownish elements in Krapp's physique, dress and behaviour. Even in the first production at the Royal Court Theatre, the 'purple nose' of the 'tippler', which is referred to in the printed text, was much toned down and later abandoned by Beckett.

(Knowlson, ed., 1992: xvi)

This was possibly because some members of the audience would have been able to write Krapp off as a drunkard who was undeserving of the sympathy that his plight as an alienated old man deserved.

In his focus on chronic alcohol consumption, Kapur explains in *Memory Disorders in Clinical Practice* that it can lead to marked memory loss and generalised cognitive defects, as well as a 'disorientation for time and also for place'. He mentions, too, that many patients tend to show the distinctive feature of lacking insight into their memory difficulties. More recent memories are more likely to be forgotten than remote memories, for 'memory loss shows a temporal gradient, with greater sparing of items from earlier years' (Kapur, 1988: 158). Krapp's gathering of the red-berried holly in the dingle could be an example of the 'relatively intact remote memory' (Whitehouse, ed., 1993: 328) that preceded his addiction to alcohol.

If we listen to the younger, strikingly more intelligent Krapp, it is immediately apparent from his record-keeping that he is a man of orderly habits, who is acutely aware of time – both its promises and ravages. In contrast, as a sloppy older man, he has little recollection of the earlier events that he recorded so punctiliously and in such detail. Crucial episodes of his life have disappeared irredeemably, and one has the distinct impression that, if it were not for the tapes, very little of his past would be available to him at all.

Piette explains that

in losing their memories in [a] radical way [. . .] Korsakoff patients are exiled outside the world of ordinary representations, i.e., a world mediated by memory, perception and language, into an imaginary world where representation strikes them as “some story heard long before, an instant in the life of another, ill-told, ill-heard, and more than half-forgotten” (*Watt*, 71). Personal memories are dependent on recognition and recognition is dependent on a working sense of self-ness, i.e., the capacity to recognize a memory as ‘mine’.

(Piette, 1993: 45)

In addition to memory loss, Krapp also repudiates his earlier ambitious identity. He therefore lacks the ongoing ‘self-ness’ that would lay claim to prior experience. In this ‘fragility of the self [. . .] dark in the damaged brain, memory become[s] story, self’s other voice’ (Piette, 1993: 45) as it separates from current identity. The splintering of Krapp’s psyche seems to fit this description uncannily well.

Rabinovitz, in his article on ‘Beckett and Psychology’, warns rather sternly that

For some of the psychological critics, a central argument is that events in Beckett’s works correspond to some psychological theory or syndrome of mental illness. But it is usually rather difficult to prove that Beckett is really concerned with providing descriptions of classical psychological disorders [. . .] Since Beckett is so often concerned with universal issues, suggestions that his works incorporate fictionalized case histories can greatly diminish their scope by explaining away whatever seems odd or puzzling in them. If one assumes that Beckett’s characters are demented, it easily follows that their words and actions need not be taken seriously. But Beckett is often satirizing what passes for normalcy and pointing out how ordinary life is filled with bizarre events that most people choose to ignore.

(Rabinovitz, 1989: 65,66)

To counter this argument, the point needs to be made once again that Beckett never simply reduces his characters to a list of their symptoms, though these are precisely delineated. His people are not candidates for rejection on account of their psychological or mental deficiencies, but need to be taken seriously, as they are deserving of greater compassion for their attempts to endure against the odds. That he humanises his suffering characters when he draws clinically accurate portrayals of various disorders is a measure of Beckett's brilliance: of his knowledge, acute powers of observation, and sometimes personal experience. Krapp, for instance, does not equal Korsakoff's Alcoholic Syndrome: he is also a pitiful old man who has blighted his life through misguided choices. In more enlightened times, mental illness cannot be summarily equated with losing the right to attention. Indeed, it demands more, as its victims battle their demons.

While Krapp replays aspects of his life, he yearns for the loving self that he cast aside in pursuit of ambition. The isolated man of *A Piece of Monologue* is even more attenuated. He has ruthlessly cut himself off from his past, 'exorcising' his 'so-called' loved ones by removing their photographs, tearing them up and scattering them. In so doing he becomes 'engaged in an ever-growing dispossession' of his 'being' (Lacan, 1977: 42):

[F]acing blank wall. Covered with pictures once. Pictures of . . . he all but said of loved ones [. . .] Down one after another. Gone. Torn to shreds and scattered [. . .] Ripped from the wall and torn to shreds one by one. Over the years [. . .] Less to die.

(*APM*, 426)

In seeking 'less to die', in deliberate acts of emotional desiccation, he attempts to abjure the memories of himself in relationship. As he destroys the photographs that reduce his once-loved mother and father to two grey voids, and himself to another, he tries to obliterate the memories that connect him with life and intimacy. Nothing remains but dim recollection and an anticipated funeral to mark the end of his slow death march from birth to oblivion. He exists in what Cohn calls a 'Beckettian utopia, straining towards absence – a world without features, questions, time, memory, body and shadow, charity, love, noise, or dust' (in Buning and Oppenheim, eds, 1993: 5). Like Krapp, he deliberately disassociates himself from memories of his former self, but, unlike Krapp, he has no technological access to them. Hovering as an Old Father Time in his shroud, he is 'waiting on the rip word' – 'begone' (429) – to avault his 'so-called loved ones' and

his ‘ghastly grinning’ self.¹⁶ Utterly alone, and terminally depressed, he is divested of everything except the memory of the funerals that delivered him to desolation, and the anticipation of the one that will free him from the husk of self. He cannot even use the ‘I’ word, as separation from his former self has created nothing but splintered jetsam, and with psychic coherence abandoned, he confronts the ‘fiasco’ that began with his traumatic birth. James E. Robinson, in his article, ‘Writing Toward Zero: Beckett at the Ending’, argues that ‘Memories emanate from a third-person consciousness, presumably the separated self of the speaker who, like the woman of *Not I*, is evidently not able to grasp the subject-self’ (Robinson, 1995: 220). In his separation from all that is life-affirming, the ghostly man appears as the incarnation of Hamm’s frightening prophecy: ‘Infinite emptiness will be all around you, all the resurrected dead of the ages wouldn’t fill it, and there you’ll be like a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe’ (*E*, 672-74).

Because the protagonist of *A Piece of Monologue* has progressively blanked himself out in acts of willed amnesia, it is difficult to bracket his feeble life-force with the word ‘dynamism’ in the Proustian sense. One can conceive of his separation from his former self, granted, but one would have to stretch the imagination to characterise him as a series of separate dynamisms. Separate ectoplasms perhaps, or shades, dissolving faintly into the void as he obliterates all traces of his past.

The issue of the essential isolation of the self was of absorbing interest to Beckett. In addition to his distrust of words, which he has shown to constitute ‘presence made of absence’ (Lacan, 1977: 65), he also doubted the receptive competence of most listeners. Added to these is his disbelief in the gestalt of the coherent self, when he maintains that ‘the individual is a succession of individuals; [. . .] the pact must be continually renewed, the letter of safe-conduct brought up to date’ (*P*, 19). When the pact is not renewed between past and present, or between people, there is a fragmentation into separate dynamisms that cannot cohere. And there, in the isolation zone of Beckett’s geography, Donne’s island becomes a no man’s land, subject only to ‘partial annexation’.

ENDNOTES

1. This quotation from the seventeenth devotion is to be found in Donne, 1990: 344.
2. This comment is made in the margin of p.79 of *Le Côtes de Guermants*. Beckett's copies of the different books of *A la recherche du temps perdu* are housed in the University of Reading Samuel Beckett Archive.
3. At Jung's third lecture, which Beckett attended at the Tavistock Centre in 1935, the psychologist spoke about 'the little girl who had never really been born and who by age ten had still not emerged from the archetypal dreams in which children's dawning consciousness is immersed' (Ackerly and Gontarski, eds, 2004: 290).
4. In her study of 'Beckett and Irish literature', Barbara Reich Gluck considers 'the Swiftian overtones in Beckett's prose'. She maintains that 'Along with Swift, Beckett feels a fundamental disgust for the physical. Sex is a grotesque act [. . .] Reproduction is an even greater horror, prolonging as it does the misery of human existence through yet another generation [. . .] In *All that Fall*, Mr Rooney confesses to the wish of "nip[ping] some young doom in the bud" and, indeed, might have pushed a child off the train he was riding' (Gluck, 1979: 165).
5. Beckett was insistent that *All that Fall* remain a radio play (although he did agree to selected readings later on). He admonished his US publisher, Barney Rosset, on 27 August, 1957, saying: 'It is no more theatre than *Endgame* is radio and to 'act' it is to kill it. Even the reduced visual dimension it will receive from the simplest and most static of readings [. . .] will be destructive of whatever quality it may have and which depends on the whole thing's *coming out of the dark* (in Oppenheim, ed., 1994: 191).
6. The 'fragment' has not been universally well received. Ross Wetzsteun, writing in *The New York Times* (19 March, 1985), was most dismissive. He wrote: 'Their relationship involves little more than the cripple bullying, nagging, and trying to suck up to the life of the beggar [. . .] Unfortunately, the playwright is Beckett himself, who seems in some of his later plays to have fallen too deeply under the spell of Samuel Beckett' (MS, Theatre Dossier).
7. Beckett continued dubious, with many misgivings about *Theatre I* and *II*. Included in Harmon's 1998 *No Author Better Served* are a series of letters on the subject. The playwright wrote to Schneider, his American Producer, from Tangier on 18 February, 1978, to say: 'Continue dubious about the two theatre *Fragments*. Certainly no hurry. As & when you please' (365). From Ussy in March, 1979, he continued: 'Let me brood a little longer on the 2 *Fragments*. They'll be yours in the end for sure' (376). In the January of the following year, he wrote from Paris: 'You know how dubious I am about the 2 *Fragments*. I gave very hesitating permission to Walter Asmus to direct them in German [. . .] For me they are abortions. But I suppose what is not? More or less' (383-84). Later on in the month he relented, suggesting to Schneider that 'you should first investigate them with your students in San Diego and embark on a professional production only if as a result you are fully satisfied they are worth it. Which as you know I greatly doubt' (385).
8. Beckett explains in *Dante. . . Bruno. Vico. . . Joyce* that 'Hell is the static lifelessness of unrelieved viciousness. Paradise the static lifelessness of unrelieved immaculation. Purgatory a flood of movement and vitality released by the conjunction of the two elements. There is a continual purgatorial process at work, in the sense that the vicious circle of humanity is being achieved [. . .] And no more than this; neither prize nor penalty; simply a series of stimulants to enable the kitten to catch its own tail' (22).
9. Alvarez, on the other hand, submits in his chapter on *Play* in *Beckett* that, in contrast with Beckett's hero, Belacqua, of *More Pricks than Kicks* who slothfully inhabits Purgatory, the characters in *Play* 'are in real hell; their sin is lust and hatred, not sloth, and their torments proportionally agonizing' (Alvarez, 1974: 107-108). Kenner, too, speaks of 'this undeviating hell' (Kenner, 1973: 157), as does Pilling, in saying that 'the situation is infernal' (Pilling, 1976 (b): 90). Since the concepts of both hell and purgatory were only of academic interest to Beckett, he probably felt no real need to draw the boundaries precisely.
10. A number of critics, among them, Fletcher (1967: 68); Robinson (1969: 295) and Alvarez (1974: 105), have compared this play with Sartre's claustrophobic *Huis Clos* in which three characters are doomed to torment each other to eternity.
11. Technically, the spotlight as probe can give problems, but theatrically it is a riveting device. When Beckett, on the 7 November 1962, wrote to Schneider about his latest offering, he said, 'So glad you like *PLAY*. It seems to me only difficult technically (how to work spots) [. . .] In fact I think by far the easiest play of mine you have had' (in Harmon, 1998: 131).
12. Knowlson, in his authorised biography, *Damned to Fame*, discusses Beckett's relationship with the 'other woman', Barbara Bray, and what possible influence this had on the creation of *Play*. He says that, 'We

- do not know how aware Suzanne was of his particularly close liaison with Barbara, although there are signs in his work, notably in *Play*, that this may well have been the case (480) [. . .] It is no accident that it was Barbara Bray herself who, reviewing the world premiere of *Play* in Ulm, emphasised the very human side of this domestic drama set in Purgatory, describing the three characters as “people in all their funny, disgraceful, pitiable fragility and all their touchingness, in spite of everything, of their efforts to love one another, and endure” (in Knowlson, 1996: 481).
13. In his introduction to Volume III of *The Theatrical Notebooks: Krapp's Last Tape*, James Knowlson explains that ‘Samuel Beckett wrote *Krapp's Last Tape* in the first two months of 1958 with a particular actor, Patrick Magee, in mind. It was the distinctly cracked, world-weary, ‘ruined’ quality of Magee’s voice, as well as its Irish rhythms and intonation, that appealed to Beckett who, for some time, referred to the play simply as the *Magee Monologue*’ (Knowlson, ed., 1992: xiii).
 14. The quotation is from ‘The Circus Animals’ Desertion’ (Yeats, 1962: 202).
 15. Light and darkness operate as constant motifs in the play, with ‘a specifically Manichaean interpretation’. According to Mani, the world was ‘a fusion of Spirit and Matter, Light and Darkness, Good and Evil’, and man was torn between ‘the forces of darkness and the forces of light [. . .] in order to achieve this separation, the true follower of Mani will lead the life of the ascetic – not fornicating or procreating, possessing nothing, eating no meat and drinking no wine’ (Knowlson, ed., 1992: xxi). In operating against his own nature, Krapp has been unable to effect the prescribed separation.
 16. Morrison has written an interesting article on this topic, entitled ‘The Rip Word in *A Piece of Monologue*’ (1982: 349). In it, she argues that ‘begone’ features as the ‘rip word’ in a play where death is a constant.

CHAPTER FIVE

REVOLVING IT ALL

‘What do I remember? What have I seen? What have I done? Who am I?’ Although these questions seem relatively simple to the unencumbered, their obsessive pursuit can drive the damaged mind to the brink of madness. Throughout his work, but especially in his later plays, Beckett indicates that the route to the self is indirect and problematic. There is no super-highway through memory that speeds towards defined identity, but only byways, detours and the inevitable cul de sacs. Ring roads are the worst, for they seduce the unwary mind-traveller into following their curves and cambers under the dictates of compulsive re-entry. Here victims are forced on to the treadmill of ‘revolving it all’ (*F*, 84: 277),¹ with little hope of disentangling anything whatsoever. Unbidden memories erupt to claim painful attention and, unresolved, recur again and again.

In his plays, *Embers*, *Cascando*, *Eh Joe*, *Not I*, *That Time*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby*, Beckett creates characters who revolve repetitively on the margins of their decentred selves. Their attempts to shape their identities from the jetsam of their autobiographical memories founder on the interplay of repression, pain and guilt that they experience. Consequently, their past persists as a series of discrete moments which continually intrude on their consciousness. Trapped in an incoherent narrative, where skewed memories intensify angst, these characters are among Beckett’s most pathetic examples of yesterday’s deformities.

Unlike most of Beckett’s other plays, where dialogue forms the staple of discourse, in these dramaticules the characters are so alienated from society that they mutter in monologue, as Mouth does in *Not I*, or, like the death-haunted victim of *Embers*, enter into ‘conversation’ with disembodied voices, shades, or other aspects of their disconnected beings. Predictably, language grants no relief as it further confounds their confusion. Pireddu’s opinion of Beckett’s *Fizzles* is remarkably appropriate to the plays under consideration:

Far from granting a stronger mastery of reality and of meaning in the narration, the dynamics of endless repetition that truncates the texts before they attain a logical conclusion or a potential revelation implies exactly an act of re-presentation deprived of presentation and of presence.

(Pireddu, 1992: 305)

Yet there is a pitiful reliance on language, despite its proven hollowness, to release its practitioners from compulsion. The Voice in *Cascando* begins his performative utterance by yearning: ‘if you could finish it . . . you could rest . . . sleep . . . not before’ (C, 298). This exhausted story-teller is not the only one who places his hopes on a lexical will o’ the wisp; the protagonists of all seven plays long for the release that words supposedly can bring. Instead, they re-enact the fate of the *Unnamable*, whose language inexorably becomes ‘the caul, cang and cenotaph of his experience; his head of reference, his portable pillory, his empty tomb’ (Kreuter, 1986: 37).

In these plays of ‘grievous voices’ (P, 27), where revisited trauma is a daily compulsion, Beckett examines instances of hysterical memory. The victims of *Embers*, *Cascando*, *Eh Joe*, *Not I*, *That Time*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* (which I shall group together as ‘hysterical plays’) are haunted by such pain that they can approach their memories only obliquely, if at all. In his dramatic treatment of their painful memories, Beckett retraces his earlier imprint in the Proust text where he says:

Yesterday is not a milestone that has been passed, but a daystone on the beaten track of the years, and irremediably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous. [. . .] Such as it was it has been assimilated to the only world that has reality and significance, the world of our own latent consciousness, and its cosmography has suffered a dislocation.

(P, 13)

David Farrell Krell, in his book, *Of Memory, Reminiscence and Writing*, couches the idea in less poetic terms: ‘The absolute past is retained in the trace; yet such absolutely mysterious retention does not yield up a recuperable present-past [. . .] the strange movement of the trace announces as well as recalls: *différance* differs and defers’ (Krell, 1990: 82). The depressing influence of a present-past that could not be satisfactorily recuperated is something that Beckett knew intimately. He had personal experience of it, had observed traumatised people closely, and had studied the major psychological theories current in the 1930s. When he was attending frequent

psychotherapy sessions with Dr Ruprecht Bion in London in 1935, his depression and poor self-worth exacerbated his suffering. In September of that year he wrote to his confidant, MacGreevy, that he ‘was down at Bedlam this day week & went round the wards for the first time, with scarcely any sense of horror, though I saw everything, from mild depression to profound dementia’ (TCD). Drawing on this personal experience, intuition, compassion and wide-ranging knowledge, he was able to create troubled characters without resorting to caricature. Even though many of his dramatic creations display clinically identifiable symptoms, they avoid formulaic construction by being dignified as men and women deserving of sympathy. As previously mentioned, they are not simply ‘fictionalized case histories’ (Rabinovitz, 1989: 6), but are configured as people who cannot summarily be dismissed. In conceiving of them, Beckett goes beyond text-book characterisation by transforming their distress into works of compelling artistry.

In his reading of Woodworth’s overview of *Contemporary Schools of Psychology*, among other sources, Beckett encountered William James’s broadly based 1892 definition of psychology as ‘the description and exploration of states of consciousness’. When the playwright added this theoretical knowledge to his theatrical skill, he could dramatise those states where he was able ‘to bring out clearly the fluid, streaming, personal nature of consciousness’ (in Woodworth, 1964: 25,26), in the ‘great, blooming, buzzing confusion’ (in Woodworth, 1964: 220) of human experience. This famous phrase actually finds its way into *Murphy*, when Neary speaks of the ability to focus on a ‘system of faces, against the big blooming buzzing confusion’ (6) of amorphous background. We hear, too, in the urgent voice of *Cascando*, the pressure of the ‘fluid, streaming and personal’, while the fervid mutter of Mouth’s free association in *Not I* echoes the ‘buzzing confusion’ of her chaotic memories.

Beckett was probably indebted to the French psychologist, Pierre Janet (1859-1947), for his conception of the hysterical behaviour shown by May in *Footfalls*. In his overview of Janet’s work, Woodworth pays particular attention to Janet’s description of ‘the hysterical paralysis of one arm’, which Beckett included as a detail in his delineation of the somnambulist, May, in *Footfalls*. Piette, in his article on ‘Beckett, Early Neuropsychology and Memory Loss’, comments on ‘the many analogues between Beckett’s *Footfalls* and Janet’s work with a hysterical patient called Irène’. He lists

the deep sleep, the sleep-walking, the hearing of the mother's voice [. . .] the terrifying extreme of Irène's fabulation, the drama of deadly re-enactment, of pathological memory possessing the body and mind of the traumatized hysteric, [. . .] returning again and again each night, like in a nightmare private theatre [. . .] – this terrible story of Janet's haunts Beckett's haunted stage.

(Piette, 1993: 46-47)

In the conception of his 'hysterical' dramaticules, characters have fallen prey to an intense compulsion which dictates their withdrawal from 'ordinary' life to brood endlessly on the past. Janet's research seems to be utilised in Beckett's exploration of the warped reality that attends his characters' narrowness of focus. In some cases, their obsessiveness has crowded out their human potential to such an extent that it has obliterated all ability to interact with anyone. The mute ineptitude which Mouth displays for most of her life is a striking example of this state.

Among the various influences on Beckett's thought, Freud's work held the greatest sway. His insistence that memories are less important than the way they are interpreted chimed with Beckett's own experience. In this light, it is interesting to note that some of the angst-filled memories created by Beckett for his characters seem relatively inoffensive, like the undefined 'anything. . . strange' (*F*, 279: 161) that wrecked May's life in *Footfalls*. Cohn feels that 'Beckett leaves the possible meaning in mystery, but he etches that meaning in a memorable phrase – "frozen by some shudder of the mind" –' (Cohn, 2001: 337). In this instance, the accompanying emotion is of such intensity that it charges the repressed memory with harmful toxic energies. In extreme cases such as these, Freud argues that a person would deliberately block his or her free flow of ideational recall

as if the patient were coming dangerously near to some memory or idea which is too painful or terrible or shameful to be faced – as if some emotional attitude were stirred which he is unwilling to recognize as his own – hatred, for example, toward someone near and dear to him, or unlimited selfishness.

(in Woodworth, 1964: 258-9)

Though critics have largely neglected the discussion of repression, examples of Beckett's awareness of its damaging power abound in his plays. A striking avoidance strategy can be located in Mouth's scream, and it is equally apparent in Henry's behaviour in *Embers*, where he is unable to face his worst fears and forces his mind to operate obliquely through confabulation. In their

neuroses, both characters turn away from important aspects of reality, having lost what Freud terms 'the function of the real' (in Woodworth, 1964: 266).

Freud also stresses that, as a result of these protective tactics, neurotics hang on to their phobias for dear life, despite their apparent pleading for a return to health. Beckett experienced this state himself, and confessed to MacGreevy on 14 February 1935 that 'I see no prospect of the analysis coming to an end. But I realize how lost I would be bereft of my incapacitation' (TCD). These cross-grained impulses are brilliantly charted in the Eros/life-wish and Thanatos/death-wish fracture of consciousness apparent in *Cascando*. What Freud terms 'repetition compulsion', clearly evident in *Cascando*, is also observable in Joe's destructive urge to shed his besotted women, when he assures them that 'the best is yet to come' in *Eh Joe* (362).

Another of Freud's theories which had an impact on Beckett because it reinforced his own experience was that the agony of birth induced a primal anxiety in human beings. Beckett not only claimed to have remembered his own painful birth, but also began *A Piece of Monologue* with 'Birth was the death of him' (APM, 425). He returned to the birth process repeatedly in Mouth's monologue in *Not I*, when the 'tiny little thing' is expelled 'before its time' through 'the godforsaken hole' (NI, 373) to endure a lifetime of suffering. The forlorn helplessness induced by this traumatic process lays the foundation for Mouth's lifelong anxiety.

Although Freudian theory looms large in the volume, Adler and Jung also feature in Woodworth's overview. One can detect little perceptible influence of Adler's theory of the inferiority complex and its compensatory rituals in Beckett's plays, apart from those possibly employed by Hamm in *Endgame* and Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot*. There is, however, an instance of the type of neurotic insomnia which Adler believed could ward off terrifying nightmares. The breathless voice of *Cascando* seeks to keep sleep at bay by spinning yarns that will elude the terrors of the unconscious. Jung's atavistic archetypes do not seem to have influenced Beckett,² but his drama foregrounds the Jungian tenet that individuation is a very slow process which, in some cases, never results in full self-actualisation. All of the time-bound protagonists of the 'hysterical' plays are far removed from the maturity that they would have desired.

After taking copious notes from Woodworth's volume, Beckett's interest in the psyche continued unabated. Fascinated by the psychology of the day, he took notes on many other texts as well, including books by Alfred Adler and by Otto Rank, Karin Stephens, Wilhelm Stekel and Ernest Jones (Knowlson, 1996: 178).

The first edition of Jones's *Papers on Psycho-Analysis* appeared in 1913, and was reprinted at regular intervals thereafter. In this volume, Beckett encountered a detailed study of a state that he knew all too well, the psychopathology of anxiety: [the] 'fear, dread, fright, panic, apprehensiveness [and] morbid anxiety' that constitute 'angst' (Jones, 1977: 294). All seven protagonists of the 'hysterical' plays display these emotions to a greater or lesser degree, with Mouth's reactions being the most severe.

Jones also discusses the anomaly, first encountered by Beckett in Woodworth, of 'the disproportion between the external stimulus and the response' (Jones, 1977: 295), which is reminiscent of the 'claustrophobic distress' and 'acute attacks of anxiety' that we witness in the plays. Beckett dramatises the observation that 'the neurotic can be extremely frightened when there is no external danger whatsoever' (Jones, 1977: 300). In *Not I*, despite Mouth's rather surprised avowal that she is no longer unhappy, we observe the infantilising symptoms of extreme anxiety which bear no relation to her current circumstances. Her fear, moreover, is tinged with such guilt that it bears out Jones's belief that 'Clinically observed fear, a neurosis in which fear is one of the symptoms, always has guilt behind it' (Jones, 1977: 304). Mouth's exaggerated reactions exemplify the point:

she was being punished . . . for her sins . . . a number of which then . . . further proof if proof were needed . . . flashed through her mind . . . one after another [. . .] thing she understood perfectly . . . that notion of punishment [. . .] brought up as she had been to believe . . . with the other waifs . . . in a merciful . . . [*Brief laugh.*] . . . God . . . [*Good laugh.*]

(*NI*, 377)

Though guilt is rather more prevalent in the neurosis of anxiety, hatred, too, occurs as 'a cover for, or a defence against, an underlying state of apprehensiveness' (Jones, 1977: 305). In *Eh Joe*,

the taunting internalised voice that drives Joe to paranoia feeds his self-loathing. His anxiety is deflected into hatred of himself for the callous actions he has performed.

Ernest Jones also allies himself with Freud in focusing on the importance of the trauma of birth, reflecting that 'we have come to realize how great must be the suffering and resentment experienced by the infant in being expelled from paradise and how strong is the perennial desire to return there' (Jones, 1977: 324). The woman in *Rockaby* who 'becomes' her own mother in seeking the embrace of the rocking chair womb-tomb, embodies what Jones calls 'the perennial desire to return there'. She finds life beyond the womb intolerable in its lonely alienation.

According to Freud and Jones, it is not only the process of birth that can initiate neurosis, but also unsolved problems dating from early childhood, the 'deformed yesterdays' which have the power to induce regressive behaviour in troubled adults. In *What is Psychoanalysis?* Jones maintains that: 'On the way in which the various unconscious conflicts are dealt with in early life the greater part of the later character will depend' (Jones, 1949: 38). If they are not dealt with, behaviour becomes regressive, as 'the emotional responses reanimate the older ones and revert to an older type' (Jones, 1977: 357). In *Embers*, Henry's incessant babbling stems from his life-long embattled relationship with his father. His unhappy childhood memories prompt him to recall his father's opinion of him: 'That was always the way, walk all over the mountains with you talking and talking and then suddenly mum and home in misery and not a word to a soul for a week' (*EM*, 256). The consequent judgment that Henry was 'a sulky little bastard, better off dead' (256) is consistent with the father's final verdict of his son as a 'washout' (256). As a result, Henry's compulsive talking persists throughout his life as he tries to block his pain. He is unable to resolve the conflict of his relationship with his father or the terrible consequences it might have held in store. That self-mastery which Jones extols as 'freedom for self-expression and freedom from internal compulsion' (Jones, 1977: 379) proves unattainable for the obsessive characters of these plays. It is impossible for them to resolve the serious conflicts that plague them from childhood.

Confronting the complex issue of repressed memory, Jones explains in *What is Psychoanalysis?* that 'the mind could in many respects be likened to a series of water-tight compartments' (Jones, 1949: 10). He elaborates on the subject by explaining that where communication is actively

prevented through resistance to self-knowledge, it is known as repression and that, according to Freud, ‘forgetting is really purposive, dictated by the motive to avoid some piece of self-knowledge’ (Jones, 1949: 58). Beckett seems to concur with these insights: the stubborn resistance to self-knowledge features as a constant in all these plays. The inability of his characters to penetrate to the core of their pain and understand their trauma exacerbates their agony. In *Embers*, Henry cannot, or will not, resolve the death of his father, and is therefore unable to find peace. The character in *Cascando* is also affected by unresolved problems as he is driven by conflicting impulses between the will to live and the death wish, both seemingly beyond his control. In *Eh Joe*, the protagonist is unable to connect his destructive attitude towards women with his apparently happy childhood, and spends the rest of his life in virulent self-loathing. Mouth is so damaged by a loveless childhood and the punitive creed of the orphanage that she is unable to shift her self-concept from the third-person ‘she’ to the first-person ‘I’ to find her bearings. The alienated boy of *That Time* continues isolated for all of his long and lonely life, as he has never probed what distressed him as a lad and threw him off-balance. The examination of repression is even more marked in *Footfalls*, where ‘Amy’ will not consciously acknowledge that she has had a traumatic experience, and is saddled with a deforming amnesia that will not surface. According to Alastair Macaulay, in his review for *The Financial Times*, ‘the enduring and unnamed trauma that haunts her makes the play among Beckett’s most brilliant psychological studies’ (Macaulay, 1999: vii). *Rockaby*, written with ‘a sombre elegance and a quiet dignity’ (Brater, 1987: 165), offers less insight into repression and denial, though the ‘frantic’ futility of the woman’s attempts to end her isolation before succumbing to her bizarre Thanatos-compulsion is striking. Although she tries to overcome the solitude which has blighted her existence, her attempts to make contact appear to be no more than a futile exercise which enables her to cling to her self-imposed isolation.

In emphasising that repression was one of Freud’s most important discoveries, Jones explains that

the repressed memories which were producing these morbid effects were always of a special kind: they were incompatible with the moral, social, or aesthetic standards of the main personality and were therefore unwelcome discoveries to the patient. This he took to be the explanation of why they had been ‘repressed’.

(Jones, 1949: 20)

Beckett's obsessive characters are unable to delve into the core of their pain. When they become too uncomfortable they fabulate (*Embers*), use avoidance strategies (*That Time*), or endlessly repeat physical actions to alleviate their pain (*Footfalls*, *Rockaby*). None takes refuge in sexual activity. The significant point that none of these characters has been able to sustain a satisfactory sexual relationship is wholly in accord with Freud's and Jones's belief that much observable conscious activity is 'dependent on repressed sexual impulses' (Jones, 1949: 128). In *That Time*, the inhibited, prissy lover of the middle years damns his relationship when sexual repression underscores emotional failure.

When it comes to Jones's chapter dealing with education, he stresses Freud's conviction that 'Love is as necessary for a child's mental development as food is for its bodily development' (Jones, 1949: 77). Beckett appears to have been sympathetic to this view in his portrayal of the cerebrally challenged Mouth of *Not I*. At the beginning of her diatribe, she seeks to introduce herself in an attempt to project an identity that has always eluded her. One of the first things she advances, as if in mitigation, is the fact that she has been denied love all her life. What she primarily recalls is a life pitifully lacking in this feeling – Freud's prerequisite for mental and emotional growth. She insists:

so no love . . . spared that . . . no love such as normally vented on the . . .
speechless infant. . . in the home . . . no . . . nor indeed for that matter any of any
kind . . . no love of any kind . . . at any subsequent stage . . . so typical affair.
(*NI*, 376)

Given Freud's negative views on religion, he would have considered the 'home' to have compounded the felony by bringing up the 'waifs' to believe 'in a merciful . . . [*Brief laugh.*] . . . God . . . [*Good laugh.*]' (*NI*, 377). Not only would he have considered this to be dishonest practice, but also debilitating to the mental development of the children. Jones stressed the Freudian standpoint that: 'One may lay down the proposition that the more moral a flavour is imported into the teaching the greater is the inhibiting effect on the child's future intelligence' (Jones, 1949: 75). Without the love, patience, honesty and moral freedom that Freud considered necessary to normal development, it is little wonder that Mouth was mentally and emotionally irrevocably damaged by her 'yesterdays'.

Beckett took copious notes on *What is Psychoanalysis?*— Jones's 1929 mediation of Freud's findings— but his eclectic and wide-ranging pursuit of psychology did not rest there. Among other studies, he also read Adler's *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology* of 1925, and although he dismissed Adler's emphasis on the inferiority complex as 'another one-track mind' in a letter written on the 8 February, 1935 (TCD), there are certain key theories which are echoed in his dramatic creations. Adler stresses the physical and psychological weakness suffered by children who are made to feel insecure for long periods. The 'children' of *Not I* and *That Time* display these debilitating features to a marked degree.

In Rank's *The Trauma of Birth* of 1929, Beckett encountered powerful descriptions of the desire for recovery from neurosis through the 'rebirth phantasy' (Rank, 1993: 3). These could be linked to the painful quest of the character in *Cascando*, to the conflicted motivation of the woman in *Rockaby* and, to some extent, to Maddy in *All That Fall*, who tells the story of the girl who 'had never really been born' (196). Rank reasoned that the repression of birth trauma was the predominant factor in forgetfulness. The assumption that memory would otherwise be immaculate is highly contestable, but the theory of the repression of birth memories in a series of willed amnesias certainly finds an echo in Beckett's dramatisation of his traumatised characters.

Rank makes large claims for his belief, describing the 'child's constant proneness to anxiety, which originates in the birth trauma and is transferable to almost anything' (Rank, 1993: 23). He also holds that 'the emotional disorder known as anxiety neurosis is caused by profound psychological trauma which occurs at birth' (Rank, 1993: 26). In developing his theory, he points out that birth trauma 'gives rise to compulsive acts' and in some cases 'the regressive tendency in the form of a wish not to be grown up' (Rank, 1993: 57,58). To a greater or lesser extent, all of the compulsive characters in the 'hysterical' plays are unwilling to come to terms with full adult status and its accompanying responsibilities.

Further analysis of neurosis was encountered by Beckett in *The Wish to Fall Ill: A Study of Psychoanalysis and Medicine* by Stephens. In emphasising that many neurotics refuse to give up their neuroses, she explains:

From the patient we meet with the strongest resistance, because, from the nature of the case, he is unconsciously afraid to admit the existence of these repressed impulses which his whole illness was designed to keep out of sight, and he often defends himself by non-comprehension.

(Stephens, 1933: 90)

Certainly, in the ‘hysterical’ plays, none of the characters makes a bid for psychological health by shedding debilitating neuroses. Instead, they endlessly ‘revolve it all’ in their over-taxed memories, without ever achieving mental health.

As well as advancing her primary thesis, Stephens bravely undertakes an evaluation of what constitutes abnormality. She explains that ‘I next took up the question of the difference between normal and abnormal people, and suggested that their difference lay in the power to correct fantasy by coming into contact with reality’ (Stephens, 1933: 54). The reality check advocated by Stephens holds little hope for the damaged characters of the seven plays, who are loath to give up their traumatic sites. Stekel, in his 1923 study on *Psychoanalysis and Suggestion Theory*, is also of the opinion that neurotics are loath to recover, explaining that ‘Every neurosis is the result of a mental conflict. Thoughts so unpleasant and painful, as to be unbearable to consciousness, are driven out of it, or rather [. . .] repressed’ (Stekel, 1923: 7).

This overview of Beckett’s knowledge of the most influential psychological theories of the day suggests the erudition on which he drew in order to craft his daring theatrical endeavours. In the ‘hysterical’ plays, it is possible to discern specific psychological theories at play, of which the most important is repression. Shards and traces persist in ‘images of petrified recollection’ (Wolosky in Budick and Iser eds, 1989: 203) like those of *That Time*, or collapse into the anarchic buzz and blur of the *Not I* mindscape. In her article on ‘Matters of Memory in *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Not I*’ Malkin states that

Mouth strains under the demands of both an involuntary confessional voice, and the voice of resistance, refusing to reveal or denying the memories being offered [. . .] This division into speaking voice and inner censor (repression) may suggest a territorialization of consciousness similar to the Freudian model.

(Malkin, 1977: 32)

In many ways, the threatening memories which Henry recalls and represses in *Embers* defy order. He 'conflates past and present, fact and fiction. He enlivens ghosts, [and] he punctures memories with older memories' (Cohn, 2001: 245). The energy which fuels his attempts at recall drives him obsessively to interrogate his past. How did his father die? Was he responsible for the old man's death? Is vital information missing or, more significantly, has he repressed it? Is the nightmarish 'mammoth' of his imagination a trope for his beleaguered mind? It is a creature of menacing retribution, a 'ten ton mammoth back from the dead' ready 'to tramp the world down' (*EM*, 254). Yet this beast of impending doom is incongruously domesticated by being tied up in the yard and trained to mark time. It is tethered to prevent the chaos it threatens. In it, Henry registers a monstrous force connected with his father in 'the coils of his memories' (Robinson, 1969: 287). It is so powerful that it will destroy him if it is not contained, so he 'marks time' compulsively, with a mind that drums insistently but is unable to move onwards.

Part of his repressive strategy consists in approaching his problems obliquely. Henry is too threatened to apply his mind systematically to the vexed question of his father's death, but approaches it indirectly through appeals to the presence of his dead father, staged 'conversations' with his ex-wife and, when he begins to approach the truth too closely, through fabulation. With 'the psychic drama inside Henry's head' (Oppenheim, 2000: 30), his is a flickering persona with intermittent supplements. Try as he may, 'with a solipsism as thorough-going as Murphy's' (Alvarez, 1974: 116), nothing resolves the enigma; nothing assuages his guilt. He is unable to create a narrative memory for the event. In his mind, his father has 'never properly' died.

What he knows for certain is that his father swam every evening, but failed to return home one night. He was presumed dead, though his body was never found, and the settlement of his estate subsequently delayed. What 'Ada', his ex-wife, tells Henry is that there had been a family row with a great deal of shouting. Henry had not slept in his bed the previous night, his sister threatened to throw herself off the cliff and his father stormed out. He was last seen, according to 'Ada', 'sitting on a rock looking out to sea'(262). When Henry implores her to carry on with her explanation she adds that when she went back to check on the old man, there was no sign of him. Since Henry had not witnessed these hearsay events, he could not be certain of their probity.

In ascribing them to ‘Ada’, he questions their veridicality. But in his longing for clarity, he pleads: ‘Keep on, keep on! [*Imploringly.*] Keep it going, Ada, every syllable is a second gained’ (262).

‘The second gained’ is typically ambivalent. It could mean that he has gained a second towards the ‘truth’ of what had happened, for, according to Worth, ‘everything appears to be, in Henry’s memory, waiting in limbo for that moment of full recall’(in Ben-Zvi, 1990: 238). Alternatively, and more probably, it could signify another second in which he could postpone explication. If he is as ignorant as he claims to be he has various options from which to choose. The first, which Henry appears to scorn, is that his father fled the country. The second is that, to get away from his dysfunctional family, he committed suicide by throwing himself onto the rocks below. The third is that the old man drowned, unobserved by anyone. Although all of these could induce the guilt that Henry manifests as he ‘revolves it all’, none is as terrifying as the alternatives he obliquely explores in the confusing fictive overlay of his ‘story’.³ The interaction between Bolton and Holloway in his story does not equal a one-on-one allegory that makes all plain – that is not Beckett’s way – but spins a deeply disturbing tale of need denied from the ‘runes of despair’ (Alvarez, 1974: 118). At times, Bolton is identified with the father-figure, at times with Henry himself. What transpires is that, in mutual extremis, neither man is able to help the other.⁴ If Henry had come across his drowning father he would not have saved him, nor would he have assisted at his suicide if requested.

In his article on ‘Memory and Trauma’, Daniel Siegel stresses, that in traumatic states, ‘memory is reconstructive. There may be an emotional gist or theme of a memory with only vague details accessible to conscious recollection’ (in Black et al., eds, 1997: 49). In these cases, there is a compulsion to fill in the gaps, with the shape of the story following the creator’s bias.

In Henry’s case, the creator’s bias is negative in the extreme. Distressing as the fourth and fifth options suggested by the story might be, the last option is the most dire. Throughout the dramaticule, he thinks of his father primarily in terms of death: ‘My Father,’ he says, ‘back from the dead, to be with me. [*Pause.*] As if he hadn’t died. [*Pause.*] No, simply back from the dead, to be with me, in this strange place’ (253). Bolton, whom he mostly associates with his father, is pictured ‘Before the fire with all the shutters . . . no, hangings, hangings, all the hangings drawn’

(254) which brings violent death to mind. If Henry had murdered his father after a fight, strangled him while swimming, the ‘ten ton mammoth’ of his yesterdays would, shod in steel, ‘stamp’ the memory into repressed quiescence. Yet it would still be there, subliminally exuding the energy of repression. Whatever actually occurred, Henry, with his mind incessantly brooding over his father’s death, finds it impossible to leave his ‘grave’. The indictment of the sea provides necessary punishment for his guilt-ridden psyche. Henry admits the connection in an aborted attempt at a throwaway line: ‘Some old grave I cannot tear myself away from?’(258). He is as obsessively bound to his father’s place of death as some inconsolable dogs are to their master’s graves.

Angela Moorjani, in her chapter on ‘Beckett and Psychoanalysis’, points out that

many commentators have bound Beckett’s writing to figurations of mourning and melancholy, especially in Freud [. . .], Klein [. . .] and Abraham and Torok [. . . .] For these psychoanalytic thinkers, phantasms of lost ones lived on buried in the mind, pinioned in an enclave of the ego, banished to a place of exile from a subject divided against itself. This memorial space encloses a lost one both living and dead, hated and loved, as mourning is unremittingly deferred.
(in Oppenheim, ed., 2004: 185)

As a ‘subject divided against itself’, Henry is in no position to come to terms with his father’s death. In her chapter on ‘Memory Research and Clinical Practice’, Mary Harvey explains why. She describes a situation which very closely approximates Henry’s, in observing that ‘Traumatic memory assumes control over daily life, so that life for the survivor becomes a barrage of disturbing associations, unbidden intrusions, and amnesic gaps that render these intrusions incomprehensible’ (in Williams and Banyard, eds, 1999: 26). Throughout the dramaticule, Henry is haunted by the ‘heavy and dangerous’ content of his ‘latent consciousness’(P, 13) and, with his attempts at repression proving fractured and feeble, the emotions associated with his psychic injury are as ‘lively’ and painful as ever. Eric Prince, in his article on ‘Rekindling *Embers*’, notes that ‘the text itself with its layered ambiguities and teasing detours seems to evade easy definition or the locus of any supposed center’ (in Ben-Zvi, 2003: 272). Inasmuch as I would support the first assertion, I would argue that the ‘centre’ of the play is located in Henry’s attitude towards his father’s undetermined death. It is what Lacan would call ‘that chapter[. . .] that is marked by a blank or occupied by a falsehood: it is the censored chapter’ (Lacan, 1977: 50).

Pitiful though Henry is, in *Not I* we encounter one of the playwright's most pathetic characters, 'at the extreme limit of Beckett's fragmented human residua' (Cohn in Ben-Zvi, ed., 1990: 167). Her breathlessly uncontrolled discourse is an amalgam of the 'disturbing associations, unbidden intrusions, and amnesic gaps' mentioned above. At seventy years of age, 'Mouth' appears to experience the normal urge to formulate a coherent autobiographical self-narrative, but what issues forth from her incontinent babble is a tale so fissured and bizarre that coherence is clearly beyond her crippled capacities. *The Sunday Times* theatre critic, J. W. Lambert, described his impressions vividly after attending a 1973 Royal Court performance featuring Billie Whitelaw: 'Shards and scraps swirl up, disappear, recur, like fragments of a torn-up letter in a whirlpool' (MS 1227). Three years later, Billie Whitelaw's performance was filmed, to widespread acclaim. Brater declared: 'not only was the effect on screen sensational – and it was nothing if not that – but it also rendered dramatically secure and accessible which had always proved elusive and problematic on the stage space in New York, London and Paris' (in Ben Zvi, ed., 2003: 189). In the theatre, it is difficult to see a small gabbling mouth, though this is clearly what Beckett intended. Film solves the visual problem, but only if the focus is on the mouth entirely. In comparison with Whitelaw's frenzied screen-filling orifice, Julianne Moore's full-face performance for the *Beckett on Film* Project seems notably diminished. This is probably because Mouth should enact 'a multiple dissolution of the boundaries of the (mostly absent) self' (Malkin, 1977: 37).

Despite the recursive loops of her tale, Mouth wills herself, in heroic Beckettian fashion, to keep going and move 'on'. What makes her task so difficult is that most of her life has been experienced as an undifferentiated blur, in which she sees herself, 'in flashes from all over' (*NI*, 380) as 'drifting around . . . day after day' (380), in her 'machine . . . so disconnected' that it 'never got the message' (378). Theatrically, this is underscored by the blackout of everything except her mouth,⁵ so that 'the absence of a face, body and psyche, which the metonymic mouth implies so strongly, creates a profoundly disturbing impression of irrevocable loss' (Bell, 1992: 167). Her brain appears to be 'flickering away on its own . . . quick grab and on . . . nothing there . . . on to the next . . . bad as the voice . . . worse . . . as little sense' (381). As a result of childhood trauma and a life completely devoid of love, Mouth appears to be suffering from some form of acute dissociation. Her lack of clarity about her past bears out what psychologist Lenore Terr claims in *Unchained Memories*: 'Dissociation makes for fuzzy, unclear recollections or a

series of holes in memory' (Terr, 1994: 87). Bell goes even further when she explains in her unpublished thesis on *the World of Childhood Terror and Loss* that 'The source of [Mouth's] terrible pain remains inaccessible to her, buried in the hidden depths of her unconscious from where it exerts a terrifying hold over her' (Bell, 1992: 184). The loving contact which allows a child to establish herself as a being separate from her context did not exist in the forbidding, puritanical 'home' in which she had been brought up. For her entire life she has suffered grievously from memories of guilt, 'sin' and the after-effects of punishment meted out to her. Probably even worse. Her belated attempts to force her memory to 'tell' are inhibited by an imagined beam-like probe which demands that she exist at the level of the numbing 'buzzing' in her head. This is a tinnitus-like sensation which has set in after what appears to have been a fit, when 'all went out' (376). The consequent release of banked-up emotion holds out some hope for greater relief if she can overcome her amnesia to 'tell' what happened to her in the past. Antoni Libera explains that, when he directed the play, he tried to make Mouth's account of herself sound like a confession:

'If you say it is you –' an invisible and inaudible interrogator seems to be telling the Woman-Mouth, 'If you admit this is about *you*, I will set you free. Otherwise I will keep interrogating you indefinitely. Well, is it you?'
 'No, she!'
 And so the testimony/confession goes on.

(in Oppenheim, ed., 1994: 14)

Like the protagonists of the trilogy, Mouth's greatest obstacle is her unwillingness to assume an identity. She will not even lay claim to her name: in fact she seems to identify herself with the site of her birth and possible abuse in '... godforsaken hole called ... called ... no matter' (376). When her belated drive to individuation suggests that she use the 'I' of her entitlement, she screams in terror, '... what?... who?... no! ... she! ...' (377). This 'Not-me' aspect of her psyche could be linked to Harry Stack Sullivan's 'interpersonal theory' which Beckett had encountered in Woodworth. After delineating the 'good-me' and 'bad-me' aspects of the psyche, Sullivan explains that 'a third personification, the 'not-me' appears to consist of infantile experiences that have been disassociated from the part of the self about which the individual can communicate without intolerable anxiety' (in Woodworth, 1964: 329).

‘Intolerable anxiety’ sets in every time she feels compelled to ‘tell’. She is not fully aware of *what* she should tell or confess, but seems possessed of a feeling that she would find relief if she were able to do so, and would then be empowered to ‘move on’. The feeling is strangely associated with a beam that plays on her and assumes the function of a probe. She complains that ‘all the time this ray or beam. . . just all part of the same wish to . . . torment . . . though actually in point of fact . . . not in the least . . . not a twinge . . . so far . . . ha! . . so far’ (378). It makes her uneasy with its ‘flickering on and off’ (381), and she anxiously determines to ‘keep an eye on that too . . . corner of the eye . . .’ (381). When next she speaks of it, it is ‘ferreting around . . . painless . . so far . . . ha! . . so far’ (381), and at the last mention ‘the beam . . . poking around . . . painless . . so far . . . ha! . . so far . . all that . . keep on . . not knowing what . . what she was’ (382). With the violating effect of ‘torment’, ‘ferreting’, ‘poking’ and the ‘pain’ suggested by ‘painless . . so far’, there is a distinct possibility that ‘Mouth’ had been sexually abused in the home. The likelihood also exists that the blame had been placed on her, and that she had consequently entered the realm of non-being, in ‘not knowing what she was’ (382). Certainly she feels that she is guilty and ‘meant to be suffering’ (377), but that ‘she’ll be purged’ (381), that she has ‘lived on and on . . guilty or not . . then forgiven’ (382). If this is true, she has repressed the memory of abuse, which nonetheless exercises its malign energies on her fractured psyche. In vain, she tries to ‘tell’ about her experience, but the memory refuses to surface against her panic. Although she cannot ‘stop the stream’, there is something ‘begging in the brain . . . begging the mouth to stop’ (380). Threatened by exposure, her repressed memories refuse to be dislodged in the dangerous act of ‘dragging up the past’(380).

When her attempts terrify her, she reaches an impasse, saying she ‘can’t go on’(381), and backtracks to the ‘safe haven’ of ‘God is love’(381) and the rest of the overlearned catechism in her semantic memory. It appears as though this is the mantra that she has used to drive her memories under. Before she invokes its talismanic force, she gropes wildly into the deep reaches of her past for the recollection that will set her free: ‘what she was trying . . no matter . . keep on . . hit on it in the end . . then back’ (383). Given the odds stacked against her, her courage is heroic, but one nevertheless senses that she will be ‘revolving it all’ without respite for as long as she lives.

Repression as a self-defence strategy is even more pronounced in *Footfalls*. Whereas Henry allows his mind to toy with some traumatic possibilities, albeit at an imaginative distance, ‘Amy’, the ‘not-I’ alternative of May, is in conscious denial of the episode that wrecked her life. ‘I saw nothing, heard nothing, of any kind. I was not there’ (*F*, 279: 169, 70), she says defiantly. This, despite her mother’s insistence that something strange happened in church and that

I heard you say Amen. [*Pause.*] How could you have responded if you were not there? [*Pause.*] How could you possibly have said Amen if, as you claim, you were not there? [*Pause.*] The love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all, now, and for evermore. Amen. [*Pause.*] I heard you distinctly.
(279: 171-75)

The first part of the Anglican Vespers benediction, ‘The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ’, has been significantly omitted, which might suggest that ‘Amy’s’ denial could be bound up with some aberrant experience of Christ-consciousness. But then, as Xerxes Mehta elegantly observes after directing *Footfalls*, the ‘inner narrative is expressly designed to frustrate the assertion of identity [. . .] nothing is assumable’ (in Oppenheim, ed., 1994: 179). Frank Marcus, theatre critic for *The Daily Telegraph*, goes even further when he candidly concludes: ‘I have read this play twice and seen it once, but its meaning remains impenetrable’ (MS 2461). He is supported by Brater, who remarks that: ‘We never know for sure; all information is fragmentary. Knowledge is nowhere categorical, everywhere conditional’ (Brater, 1977: 78).

This is probably because May herself fails to understand the source of her own trauma. Part of her fractured memory represses all recall of the ‘strange thing’ which traumatised her in the church, while another aspect of her mind endlessly ‘revolves it all’ as she paces to and fro, seeking to resolve in motion what she cannot abreact in thought. Her mind is fixated on the site of submerged trauma and she is unable to resolve it. Jones sheds light on her condition in his explanation that

The aim of repression [. . .] is nothing less than the obliterating of the offending repressed impulse against which it is directed [. . .] In the vast majority of cases it succeeds only partly, and the repressed impulse manages to find some sort of expression.

(Jones, 1949: 34)

This is true of *Footfalls*. Although May/‘Amy’ attempts outright denial, her efforts at repression prove futile. Instead, the memory which is repressed in the ‘Amy’-persona becomes dissociated and transferred. In so doing, it infantilises other aspects of her personality, interfering with May’s development, individuation, and inability to break the umbilical chord. In this regard, the psychologist Stephens explains that in the case of normal people fantasy can be corrected when it comes into contact with reality. In the abnormal, however,

This contact is lost when a part of the personality becomes dissociated. The dissociated part does not get corrected by experience and therefore fails to grow up. It remains as a delusional system in the otherwise reality adapted, that is, sane personality.

(Stephens, 1933: 54)

May, we observe, is sane enough to have been a dedicated nurse to her mother, solicitously tending to her every need. Whether her mother’s voice is that of an aged invalid or the disembodied communication of a ghost is not resolved by the play. It is more likely that the voice has become an internalised persona in May’s disrupted psyche. Certainly, while the persistent maternal voice dwells on May’s endless pacing and comments on her daughter’s trying to ‘tell how it was’(278: 122), May is mute. In the ‘sequel’, May takes up the story again, but at a distance, by referring to herself in the third person or casting herself as ‘Amy’, anagram of May. While describing her disturbing experience, there is a peculiar conflation of the ‘it’ which denotes the ‘strange thing’ that disturbed her, and the ‘she’ who can move through the locked doors of the darkened church at will, even though her mother alleges that she has not left the house since girlhood. In May’s case, it appears as if the attempted repression has made a vital part of her identity seem disembodied.

After uttering the emotionally charged word ‘vespers’, May distances herself even further from her story. Although the two characters she brings into play are unmistakably her mother and herself, they are now referred to as Mrs Winter ‘whom the reader will remember’(279: 151) (indeed, we have just met her in her mother-guise) and her daughter Amy. Writing on *Memory and Trauma*, Siegel explains how ‘Abrupt “state of mind shifts” may not make sense and may be attributed to different “selves” as a dissociative adaptation’ (in Black et al., 1997: 27). The Mrs Winter mother-self again tries to probe what had upset ‘Amy’ at Evensong, but is met with blank

denial. The dissociated part of 'Amy's' memory remains resolutely repressed, while the compulsive pacing, which serves as a kind of Janettian hypnotic somnambulism, continues unabated. It appears as though the damaged psyche has been so fractured by repression and dissociation that May/Amy is unable to achieve the coherence that would bring her peace. Instead, when she tries 'to tell how it was', her thwarted memories cannot heal her, but 'revolve' endlessly in the 'poor mind' of her decentred self.

In the Gate Theatre production of 10 September 1999, May, played by Susan Fitzgerald, seemed weary beyond motion, glazed and automatic, as she pushed herself to hear the slow clunk of her footfalls. The final impression was that she would never resolve 'it' all, as she denied 'its' very existence. Billie Whitelaw, who first portrayed the part in English, registered its elusiveness when she said that 'The play was a mixture of painting, music, dance and sculpture. It was a whole different art form. I felt that we were working with smoke, or weaving a sweater out of cobwebs' (Whitelaw, 1995: 145).

The May persona was partially able to repress her destructive recollection, but in *Eh Joe*, Beckett's first television play, we encounter the horrifying consequences of a mind unable to repress the guilty memories that constantly vex it. Night and day, Joe is plagued by accusing voices which, bitter and vindictive, rail against him as he endlessly 'revolves it all' on the rack of his mind. It is little wonder that his rejected lover calls his memory 'that penny-farthing hell you call your mind' (*EJ*, 362), for his thoughts wheel wildly down paths of torment. Despite having made concerted attempts to repress the guilty feelings that he suffers, he compulsively distills his memories into one aggrieved 'voice' after another. In so doing, 'he finds that hell is not only other people but himself' (Ackerley and Gontarski, eds, 2004: 163). His current 'voice' is particularly vicious. In claiming to have replaced Joe as a lover with someone 'Kinder. . . . Stronger More intelligent Better looking Cleaner Truthful. . . . Faithful. . . Sane (364), 'she' is accusing him of being unkind, weak, stupid, ugly, dirty, lying, unfaithful and mad. Not only does the voice shatter his self-esteem, but 'she' also berates his impotent efforts at repressing the worst of his memories, beginning with his father:

Started in on you one June night and went on for years. . . . On and off . . . Behind
the eyes That's how you were able to throttle him in the end Mental

thuggee. [. . .] Otherwise he'd be plaguing you yet Then your mother when her hour came 'Look up, Joe, look up, we're watching you' Weaker and weaker till you laid her too Such love he got God knows why Pitying love None to touch it And look at him now Throttling the dead in his head.

(363)

Though he did not use the words 'mental thuggee' at that time, Beckett has his narrator say in the story, 'The Expelled', written in 1946:

Memories are killing. So you must not think of certain things, or those that are dear to you, or rather you must think of them, for if you don't there is the danger of finding them, in your mind, little by little. That is to say, you must think of them for a while, a good while, every day several times a day, until they sink forever in the mud. That's an order.

(EX, 46-7)

Joe's unsinkable self-flagellating memories are guilt-ridden, so it is no coincidence that Beckett has made him a God-fearing man. The current voice in Joe's head taunts him with his religiosity: 'How's your Lord these days? . . . Still worth having? . . . Still lapping it up? . . . The passion of our Joe Wait till He starts talking to you'(364).

But, in the meantime, the ex-lover's grievances are cuttingly projected. 'Like Ada's in *Embers*', says Worth, 'it is a low, remote voice that seems to come half out of memory, half out of some indefinable sphere where memory and fiction merge' (in Ben-Zvi, ed., 1990: 241). Her voice is accusatory and venomous, still smarting from the dismissive way in which she was rejected. We can tell from the discourse that Joe scripts for her that he is a good wordsmith, skilled in character creation. He finds it appropriate to use his ex-lover's voice to construct the suicide of his most sensitive admirer, thus mediating his guilty imaginings through her vindictive scorn. What she recounts cannot be an actual memory, since no one witnessed the suicide, but is no less vivid for being an elaboration on the 'announcement in *The Independent* "On Mary's beads we plead her needs and in the Holy Mass"' (EJ, 365). As a Catholic, Joe is tortured by the likelihood that he drove his rejected lover to suicide, although, according to Kalb, 'Voice is not necessarily telling the truth about Joe's past' (Kalb, 1989: 105). As is usual with Beckett, several interpretations can be entertained simultaneously.

Unlike Henry's fabulation, which distances his mind from memories that he cannot face, Joe's theatrical reconstruction of his lover's suicide forces him to focus myopically on the imagined scene of death. The discourse he employs is a strange combination of surreal lyricism and belaboured brutal detail, as though pain and guilt oppose each other across the fracture lines of narrative. Pain creates the unreal setting of 'Unconscionable hour by now Moon going off the shore behind the hill Stands a bit looking at the beaten silver' (366). Joe's description accords with the ethereal quality of his lover, 'The green one The narrow one Always pale. . . . The pale eyes [. . . .] Spirit made light' (366). But he abandons his anaesthetising artistic sensibilities when guilt compels him to wallow in the sordid details of her death: 'Gets out the Gillette The make you recommended for her body hair [. . . .] Cut another long story short doesn't work either [. . . .] Clawing at the shingle now [. . . .] Finishes the tube' (366). As Cohn says, 'The detail of the three attempts is excruciating' (Cohn, 2001: 295).

Joe is tortured into 'revolving it all', even though 'it all' is an amalgam of the autobiographical memory and imagination – part fact and part construct. The level of his pain negates the accuser's assessment of his heart as 'dry rotten at last' (362); indeed, his acute suffering makes of him one of 'yesterday's deformities': forsaken, desolate and paranoid, with a 'brain tired squeezing' (364).

Beckett knows the price of memories suppressed. In a letter sent to MacGreevy on 6 April 1965, he writes sympathetically: 'I shake at the thought of the ordeal you have been through. At least you are through it. You mustn't give up. Putting down old memories is enough to make anyone crack' (TCD). In his creation of Joe, Beckett demonstrates the power of his assertion in fashioning a character so racked with pain that he appears on the point of 'cracking' as he attempts, unsuccessfully, to 'put down memories'.

Whereas Joe unsuccessfully seeks to suppress the memories that torture him, the lonely protagonist of *That Time* broods endlessly on variations of the same three memories without breaking through to the original site of his distress. Brater observes that 'What remains of the past is only the remnant of a threnody, the tattered shreds of what might once have been a coherent memory or a unified past' (Brater, 1987: 39). The old man's problems are familiar in the Beckettian world: he is isolated, finds it impossible to frame his identity in the first person, is

unable to form lasting relationships, has had difficulties with his sexuality and leads a fraught yet purposeless existence. His recollections, like those of Mouth's, 'gradually uncover a whole lifetime of solitude, desolation and distress' (Knowlson and Pilling, 1979: 207). At one stage, lacking clarity, he blames his problems on the trauma of his birth, but even then remains unsure of the genesis of his difficulties:

your life turning-point that was a great word with you before they dried up
altogether always having turning points and never but the one the first and last that
time curled up worm in slime when they lugged you out and wiped you off and
straightened you up never another after that never looked back after that was that
the time or was that another time.

(*TT*, 390)

His own birth suggests an early state in the evolution of humankind. What his mind returns to compulsively is 'that time' when he was about eleven or twelve and ran away from home to hide in the ruin which he identified as 'Foley's Folly'. Because he was a 'child learning to keep out loneliness with words' (Gontarski, 1980: 113), he peopled his world, like Hamm, with a whole cast of imaginary characters, 'making it up now one voice now another . . . and they all out on the roads looking for you'(390). It was this particular occasion, 'that time on the stone the child on the stone where none ever came'(392), which looms so large in the adult's memory that he makes a special pilgrimage to revisit the scene. He is thwarted in his attempts to get there, and evidently harbours considerable bitterness about the place where he grew up and the people he knew, determining to be 'out to hell out of there', with 'not a curse for the old scenes the old names the passers pausing to gape at you'(392). He comes closest to his repressed memory when he explains that he was

making yourself all up again for the millionth time forgetting it all where you were
and what for Foley's Folly and the lot the child's ruin you came to look was it still
there to hide in again till it was night and time to go till that time came.

(394)

Closer still, he asks: 'was there ever any other time but that time away to hell out of it all and never come back' (395). The inaccessibility of what had caused his childhood 'ruin' will continue to torment him as he reviews his sorry tale of blight and void, 'come and gone' (395).

Some of the most vivid Beckett theatre criticism has been written about this play. As the image of the disembodied head of the listener is very striking, it stimulates like response. Marilyn Stasio, writing for *The New York Times* on 22 March, 1985, says:

The man standing in such expressive stillness is Julian Beck, looking like a sculpted prop in the chiaroscuro wasteland of a room [. . .] when memory alone provides drama. Eyes closed, his exquisitely planed face in a nimbus of light, he speaks through his mind in a recorded monologue about another time and place.
(MS Theatre Dossier)

Not only was ‘the look’ admired, but the sound was equally celebrated. When Patrick Magee played the part at the Royal Court in 1976, B.A. Young of *The Financial Times* contended that: ‘Mr Magee has one of the most beautiful voices in the world, like the high register of a double bass that has learned to speak, and even apart from the poetry of the words, the sensuous beauty of the sound is remarkable’(MS 2468). Equally impressed, Frank Marcus of *The Sunday Telegraph* describes Magee’s voice as ‘floating around him like air made tangible’(MS 3468). Despite the rapturous response of many theatre critics, Cohn, however, confesses: ‘I remain unconvinced that it is of dramatic value’ (Cohn, 2001: 334). She is in good company, for Beckett himself had his doubts. Knowlson reports that: ‘Beckett was very much aware that *That Time* lay on the very edge of what was possible in the theatre’(Knowlson and Pilling, eds, 1979: 47).

Cascando, being a radio play, and lacking visual clues, is in some ways even more elusive. Whatever repressive problem exists is also approached obliquely and at a remove, with ‘diminishing volume and decreasing tempo’ (Kenner, 1973: 172). The character significantly called ‘Opener’ stage-manages an occasion where ‘Voice’ and ‘Music’ come together to ‘open’ up some obscure aspect of his past that has been veiled by years of obfuscation and denial. This is ‘accompanied by surges of non-verbal consciousness, the swell of emotion expressed in the music’ (Esslin, 1962: 57), as Opener empowers Voice to track the elusive memory down through the medium of story. Voice, however, is unable to resolve the indeterminacy of his brief to achieve resolution and release for his facilitator. Forensic energies become displaced in the frenzied quest, bearing out what Jones wrote in 1929 about the tracking of repression:

An outstanding characteristic of the unconscious is the extent to which the energy of the impulses composing it can be displaced along paths of association. The

result is that one idea can serve to carry the significance of another ‘associated’ one.

(Jones, 1949: 34)

From Opener to Voice to fabulation, the search for the key to understanding is displaced along Jonesian ‘paths of association’. This embarrasses Opener, who appears to be acutely sensitive to criticism of his cerebral quest, when he says:

they say, He opens nothing, he has
nothing to open, it’s in his head.
I don’t protest anymore, I don’t say anymore,
There is nothing in my head.

(C, 300)

When he further echoes the remarks of his critics by alleging: ‘That is not his life, he does not live on that’ (300), he seems to acknowledge the discrepancy between his apparent life and the banked up forces within it. This possibly explains his fear at the direction the story is taking when he confesses: ‘I’m afraid to open. But I must open. So I open’ (302). And, like Henry with his image of the tethered mammoth in *Embers*, Opener comes closest to revelation through a trope:

There was a time I asked myself, What is it.
There were times I answered, It’s the outing.
Two outings.
Then the return.
Where?
To the village.
To the inn.
Two outings, then at last the return, to the village, to the
inn, by the only road that leads there.
An image, like any other.

(303)

Mysterious though his poem is, he seems to know that there *is* a ‘road’ through memory that will take him to ‘safety’. In giving himself over to a narrative imperative in search of coherence, Voice makes up a story in which Woburn forsakes the path, avoiding ‘the only road that leads there’, to venture far out to sea on what appears to be a mission of no return. His motive, though escapist, is obscure. In fact, Woburn is an even more puzzling figure than Opener. Voice himself speculates about his imaginative construct, asking of Woburn: ‘what’s in his head . . . a hole

... a shelter ... a hollow ... in the dunes ... a cave ... vague memory ... in his head ... of a cave' (298). Like Murphy, he conceives of the mind as a geographical locality rather than a cerebral entity. In Woburn's memory, Voice locates something that is obscurely sheltering, but deliberately prevents his created being from seeking its comfort. Instead, it becomes increasingly apparent that, if sleep is the narrator's goal, he should kill Woburn off and have done with fabrication. Yet he cannot. He is obsessed with his urge to create. The tantalising peace that would enable Voice and, by extension, Opener, to rest when Woburn is 'down', is shattered when the old man continues with his odyssey and 'clings on' (304) to life at the story-teller's urging. Voice simply cannot force himself to bring his artifice to conclusion. He is torn between his powerful Schopenhauerian will-to-live and his seductive Freudian Thanatos-principle. And as the story has been deliberately engineered to avoid resolution, the ruthless 'mental thuggee' of *Eh Joe* is simply not an option in his creative coercion.

Thwarted and damaged though the protagonists of the 'hysterical plays' may be, they are still driven by the need to review their lives and form some sort of self-narrative on which they can hinge the sense of who they are. The consolidation of the autobiographical memory as a continuum seems to be crucial to the process of individuation, particularly as one nears death. In *Waiting for Godot*, for example, Vladimir and Estragon base their observations on their experience of the living to speculate wryly about the 'dead voices' that surround them:

VLADIMIR: What do they say?
 ESTRAGON: They talk about their lives.
 VLADIMIR: To have lived is not enough for them.
 ESTRAGON: They have to talk about it.
 (WFG, 56: 1777-80)

In Estragon's experience, life demands commentary to intensify its impact. Later in the play, he observes with satisfaction: 'We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?' (80-2017). This end result is by no means a given in Beckett's universe. At best, the status of the self is dubious and ephemeral; at worst, there is a total unwillingness on the part of the subject to assume and enact identity. Mouth of *Not I* panics every time she faces the prospect. Alexander Schlutz, writing on 'The Failure of Literary Memory in the Work of Samuel Beckett', explains Mouth's predicament and those of others in the Beckettian universe:

The 'I' first of all, far from being a Cartesian stronghold from which the world of one's thought might be organized, is quickly denounced not only as a mere pronoun but also as one that is singularly inapt to fulfill its supposed function: the linguistic representation of the subject [. . .] Identity and its expression thus become an inescapable linguistic problem, and memory, the prime means to establish a continuous identity where present can constantly be added to past experience, is necessarily affected by the same malady. If the pronoun 'I' is no longer accepted as an appropriate representation of the subject, the phrase 'I remember' can no longer be used as an assertion of his or her continuity in time.
(Schlutz, 2000: 1)

The characters in *Cascando*, *Not I* and *That Time* use the third-person pronoun because they lack the coherence to represent themselves by the (un)pronouncedly singular 'I'. Schlutz points out that if they cannot bring themselves to marshal their past behind the structuring 'I remember', it is likely to suffer the same dissipation as their diffuse identities.

Although considerations such as these make the past impenetrable, without some sort of global shape to provide an enabling structure for the autobiographical memory to function, an individual will be forced to remain fixated on specific episodes. Henry of *Embers*, Joe of *Eh Joe*, Mouth of *Not I*, the old man of *That Time* and May of *Footfalls* have little sense of the span of their years. When the past operates as threatening accuser, as it does in all of these plays, the accused are abandoned by the vanishing spectres of themselves, leaving nothing but fragments in their wake. Instead of Hamm's wistful longing to 'be again' as his *Endgame* nears conclusion, strategies of avoidance are used in the later plays to allow characters to suppress aspects of their being. With their intermittent, repetitive memories harbouring amnesia and willed repressions, they are unable to develop the satisfactory life-review that would sustain a tolerable old age. Instead, with *Macbeth*, they are forced to anticipate a scant existence as they face a future of diminishing returns:

My way of life
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf;
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have;

(*Macbeth*, V, iii, 22-26)

While personality disintegrates under introspection, since memory is unable to establish an organic sense of the past or a coherent sense of the present, the fractured self remains immanent, its boundaries porous or crumbling. Lacking emotional defences, the isolated protagonist experiences painful feelings of 'grief, sadness, loss, helplessness, anger or fear' (Lewis, 1999: 13) – the aftermath of what is currently termed 'post-traumatic stress disorder'. In this state, the person may veer between 're-experiencing the trauma, strong emotions about the trauma, and feeling numb and trying to block out the memories' (Lewis, 1999: 13). In chronic cases the person experiences 'anxiety, hallucinations, severe depression, paranoia, epileptic fits or convulsions' (Lewis, 1999: 20). Extreme as these reactions may appear to be, they are to be found in the 'hysterical' plays. *Cascando*'s narrator experiences unrelenting anxiety, Mouth claims to have had something resembling a fit; the voices that clamour in the heads of Henry in *Embers*, May in *Footfalls* and Joe in *Eh Joe* have the impact of aural hallucinations; the protagonists of *That Time* and *Rockaby* manifest symptoms of severe depression and, in addition, Joe exhibits paranoid tendencies in practising hypervigilance in his sealed room.

The most predictable of these reactions appears to be depression, with the tone of these plays shading from sad to sepulchral. Paine, in discussing the concept of loss in Beckett's writing, recognises that

Unfortunately for man's peace of mind, the senses do leave impressions that can later be falsified by memory as man seeks futilely to repeat or recover a sensuous experience or discern its significance – a significance which the aged speaker of *That Time*, for example, mistakenly believes to lie in the experience but which is actually allied with its loss.

(Paine, 1981: 13)

This leads, in her view, to 'a straining after what was, what might have been, what can never be again' (Paine, 1981: 13), while the victim remains 'stuck in the mud, dust or shit, and no glorification of his feelings can extract him' (Paine, 1981: 46). Persistent depressed moods block the ability of the memory to release the recall of pleasant encounters, so that even as the protagonist of *That Time* struggles to focus on his short experience of love, other more dispiriting memories displace his brief idyll.

With loneliness and depression the constants of existence, it is little wonder that memory, thrown entirely on its own resources, should people itself with ‘company’ of its own idiosyncratic form. In *Mouth’s* case, her ‘companion’, apart from the Auditor, takes the form of an inquisitorial beam to which she somehow feels accountable. She approaches the illuminated shaft with acute anxiety and a conditioned willingness to oblige, investing its threat with abusive qualities experienced in her past. In *Rockaby*, the indeterminate ‘Voice’ seems detached from the rocking woman by her constant use of the third-person ‘she’, yet she is at one with her in relaying her thoughts, feelings and intentions. Voice has become the woman’s own Berkeleyan observer, without whose surveillance any claim to existence would be invalidated. In this regard, Schneider comments that it is part of a lifelong quest, as Beckett is ‘searching for that “whom else” all his life. What’s outside. That’s the big thing of his life. Every work he’s ever written is to find the answer to “whom else?” There must be something outside’ (in Oppenheim, ed., 1994: 15). The despairing ‘Woman’ in this dramaticule has created a sympathetic recorder in the guise of ‘her own other’, as she retreats to the rocking chair for anaesthetising comfort. McMullan claims that ‘In both *Rockaby* and *Ohio Impromptu* the speaking of the text becomes a rite of passage which enacts a transformation – from loss to comfort, from life to death and from speech to silence’ (McMullan, 1993: 104).

In *That Time*, Voice multiplies into three aspects of the psyche, reflecting early, middle and recent memory, but has been drawn marginally closer to the protagonist by the use of the second- person ‘you’. We are informed by the stage directions that voices A, B and C are ‘his own coming to him from both sides and above’(388). Like *Footfalls*, the voices are emanations of the self, but more fractured and discrete.

In the little-performed radio drama, *Embers*,⁶ the voices of Ada, Addie, the music master and the riding instructor are individually characterised and seem aurally distinct from Henry himself. They are, however, an amalgam of memory and imaginative constructs which Henry uses to interrogate his past. Henry, who lives an unbearably solitary life, reflected in ‘All day all night nothing. . . . Not a sound’ (*EM*, 264), is first conscious of his father’s silent presence and then of the ‘low remote’ tones (257) of his ex-wife, Ada. Hers is a comforting domestic voice at first, reminiscent of family times and ties. She expresses concern about Henry’s obsessions and, since she gives

them credence, he shows his concern as well. She offers practical advice and urges him to seek help before worse overtakes him. Her persona seems eminently sensible, echoing the cool voice of reason that he probably remembers from their marriage and which he probably disregarded at the time as nagging. That he listens to her indicates his awareness of his problems; that he chooses to ignore her advice against his better judgment gives evidence of his compulsion. It is interesting to note that Beckett would never give permission for the play to be dramatised, as the enigmatic character of Ada would be revealed in the physical staging of the play.⁷ Her role would then become explicit, whether as a voice in Henry's head, a real full-bodied character, or a shade emanating from a shared past. Whoever she is, she perceives a problematic side of Henry which he acknowledges but chooses to explore more obliquely through the Bolton/Holloway confabulation.⁸ He welcomes the voices as they enact his memories and interrogate his present but most of all because they pass for company in the desperate loneliness of his life. Writing for *The Stage* on 25 June 1970, drama critic Richard Hooper stresses the ambiguous nature of this play:

We are surely faced here with one of Beckett's most delicate 'soulscapes' in which everything may appear subject to doubt except perhaps the existence of an individual consciousness, with its memories of a past life, its prospect of a bleak empty future and its experience of a haunting, yet apparently inescapable present.
(MS 2972)

Beckett himself felt that the play was perhaps too 'doubtful' for dramatic success. In a letter to Schneider dated 6 September 1959 he wrote: 'I was in Dublin for a week in July, then briefly in London on the way back, where I heard the tape of *Embers*. Good performance and production but doesn't come off. My fault, text too difficult' (in Harmon, ed., 1998: 56).⁹

In *Footfalls*, the status of the voices is even more obscure. It seems as though the restless woman's psyche has fissured into the four fragments of May, Mother, Amy, and Mrs Winter; each with a different perspective. May is the dutiful daughter, 'V' the vexed and perplexed mother, Mrs Winter the investigative observer and mother-substitute, and Amy the girl in denial of her trauma. Each persona holds an aspect of the truth, but the unlikelihood of their coherence dooms May to wheeling 'featly' forever. Recognition of her problem in one persona is countered by denial in another, and the tone, though gently probing, remains non-accusatory, soothing and sympathetic throughout.

Joe's 'voice' in *Eh Joe* could not be more different. Where Henry's 'people' appear to be individually characterised to project lives of their own, the voice of Joe's rejected lover seems scripted and dramatised to project the vitriolic abuse of his imagined deservings. Where Henry longs for interaction with his family and associates, if only in his head, Joe dreads the intrusion of the voice of his self-loathing – accusatory, rebarbative and exceptionally articulate. He distills self-recrimination through the persona of a bitter ex-lover whose charges against him constitute the worst pangs of his accusing memory. Because Joe's voices are relentless, he attempts to silence them by 'mental thuggee' (*EJ*, 363), which involves 'throttling the dead in his head' (363); first his father, then his mother, then 'others', and now his importunate ex-girlfriend. Her goading is a projection of Joe's own voice, since much of what she says could not possibly be known by her. Nor could Joe himself be fully aware of the exact consequences of his callousness. But in spite of the coruscating effect that 'her' words have on him, he strains after every syllable of her embittered indictment.

The voice that haunts Joe describes a suicide whose details must have been largely conjectural, since no one had witnessed it. It is Joe himself who imaginatively constructs a scenario consistent with the young girl's sensitive timidity, and then sharpens its impact by couching it in the acrid discourse of an earlier lover's hatred. It is an egregious tale, embellished to shock and embarrass its hearer, and to torture Joe for his hardness of heart. Although he cannot bear to think of what he has done, his masochistic alter ego forces him to submit to the rack of his embellished memory again and again.¹⁰

Unlike Henry's and May's voices, which are enabling in intention, Joe's unwanted eruption forecloses on his trauma in bitterly condemnatory terms. As he has cast himself as worthless, he has nothing to offer in mitigation, and his only strategy against self-flagellation is attempted silencing which offers no defence at all. With memory functioning as adversary, Joe is burdened with the dead weight of his yesterdays.

The attitude to their voices differs from character to character. Henry, May and the women in *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* encourage their 'visitors', though they feel as if they are evoking the dead. Joe regards his 'voice' as an unwelcome visitation, and although he masochistically entertains

'her' diatribe, he will eventually try to stifle it. Although the voices are internalised, they nonetheless give the delusion of the external presence that the 'unaccompanied self' craves. In her treatment of 'Self and No-Self' in 'Beckettian Man', Kreuter describes a similar process which she calls 'a regressive pattern' leading to 'the incorporation of otherness in solipsism. Like a screw, the ego twists inward towards the stasis of a fixed and shrunken reality' (Kreuter, 1986: 37). The beckoned 'otherness' is a cheat which intensifies narcissism as it confirms alienation.

Once again, Beckett, by carefully individualising the contexts in which his characters suffer, has avoided stereotypical response in showing that fraught personalities, prone to multiple voices, are not 'textbook' parodies, but deeply troubled beings whose voices take different forms according to differing compulsions within their psyches. From the internalised other of Joe's toxic memories to the 'own other' of Rockaby's protagonist, they are accepted or rejected as aspects of the self by their memory-challenged hosts. Beckett's work is a far cry from the crude Jekyll and Hyde variety, for he has created complex beings of poignant need and haunting humanity.

The characters in the 'hysterical' plays are all driven by forces beyond their control, yet their discourse is by no means monolingual. Despite the enormous emotional investment in their besetting problems, the characters vary in their levels of urgency and subsequent verbal coherence. At times they are able to formulate well-structured sentences, while at others jagged, disconnected phrases yield to single words. Henry, despite his compulsive talking, is able to control his syntax when he communes with himself and enters into 'conversation' with the absent Ada. He even quaintly observes the polite rituals of turn-taking conventions and adequate response to questions in his articulated imaginings. His usual 'cadence' is described by Paul Lawley as being 'slow but vertiginous' (in Gontarski, ed., 1993: 99). It is when he approaches his problem obliquely, yet paradoxically more closely, through the Bolton/ Holloway fabulation that his syntactical control deserts him and his speech fractures along the fissures of his angst, with 'staccato phrases, self-corrections, parallelisms, and repetitions' (Cohn, 2001: 247). Like Voice's tale of 'constant self-interruption' (Kalb in Pilling, ed., 1994: 133) in *Cascando*, the narrative has a provisional quality with its disconnected phrases and breathless urgency. As Kalb so eloquently observes of the radio plays:

the author transports the ephemeral products of his imagination by the most ephemeral means (electronic waves and sound impulses) and makes them oscillate in a sort of minimalist dance between presence and absence, between 'going on' (the obligation to express) and what professionals call, usually without Beckettian irony, 'dead air time'.

(in Pilling, ed., 1994: 134)

In a compulsion to 'go on', the self-referential journey towards abreaction becomes more stressful when the persona splits into Voice and Woburn in *Cascando*. Pilling maintains: 'Voice is aware that his own identity is bound up with his fiction ("I'm there . . . somewhere") and that it is his own quest to find himself' (Pilling, 1976 (b): 105). The same holds true for the Bolton/Holloway synecdoche. I therefore cannot agree with Rosemary Pountney, who writes in her chapter, 'Embers: An Interpretation', that 'by constantly escaping into storytelling Henry avoids definition as himself, denies his selfhood' (in Buning and Oppenheim, eds, 1993: 271). Paul Lawley's contention that 'Henry is losing his creative impersonality and is consequently moving inexorably into identity with his fictional creation, Bolton' (in Gontarski: ed., 1993: 107) seems closer to the mark. Henry's fabulation provides no escape from himself, as through his story he is forced to lay claim to his psyche in another guise.

In *Eh Joe*, the questions posed by his needling accuser are carefully crafted for the main part, despite the frequent pauses allowed for their gall to register. But when 'she' focuses on the rejected girl's suicide, the sentences shed their subjects and jab their way into consciousness with accentuated, pain-laden verbs. The short, abrupt phrases of this more agitated discourse have an unfinished quality as the story is surmised, its questions unanswered. To Schneider, Beckett wrote on 7 April, 1966: 'Voice should be whispered. A dead voice in his head. Minimum of colour. Attacking. Each sentence a knife going in, pause for withdrawal, then in again' (in Harmon, ed., 1998: 201).

The four 'personae' of *Footfalls* give the impression of long reflection as they formulate the polished prose of their discourse. In their ponderous, slow, rhythmic utterance they all sound the same, though M, in the sequel, distances herself from the 'I' that she had claimed earlier. It is only when the source of trauma is approached too nearly that the smooth syntax ruptures under mounting pressure. As 'Mrs Winter' enquires: 'Will you never have done? [*Pause.*] Will you never have done . . . revolving it all? [*Pause.*] It? [*Pause.*] It all. [*Pause.*] In your poor mind.

[*Pause.*] It all. [*Pause.*] It all' (*F*, 279: 178-80). This repetitive diminuendo would support Piette's view that it is a 'difficult music of memories struggling for tiny life within a formal system of echoes, traces of a remembering voice' (Piette, 1996: 198).

In *Rockaby*, a 'striking visual metaphor materializes before our eyes as we watch a poem come to (stage) life' (Brater, 1987: 169). As a poem, the discourse of *Rockaby* is even more polished than that of *Footfalls*. It operates as an incantatory attempt to empty the protagonist of discrete life so that she can become 'her own other' and embrace death. Its metronomic rhythms imitate the rocking motion of the chair; repetitive, hypnotic, and finally life-denying; the repetition of 'more' resonating with haunting addiction. Cohn observes that 'the synchrony of the rocking motion and the dimeter verse lines – one back-and-forth rock per line – plays against the recorded narrative' (Cohn, 2001: 360). To achieve this effect, Billie Whitelaw was encouraged by Beckett to 'think of it as a lullaby' which she interpreted as 'soft, monotonous, no colour, soothing, rhythmic [. . . a] drive toward death' (in Gussow, 1996: 88). Similarly, Joan O Hara's 1999 performance for the Gate Theatre Barbican series also projected a great world-weariness as she confronted the diminishing resources of her unwitnessed life.

The discursive control apparent in parts of these dramaticules is nowhere in evidence in *That Time* and *Not I*. In these 'driven' plays, where the 'I' is in crisis, with 'you' and 'she' operating as emphatic substitution, we encounter 'ineluctable narration compulsion [with] fragmented and ritualistic phrasal refrains' (Elam in Pilling, ed., 1994: 158,157). There is endless repetition and 'rewinding' as the protagonists engage and re-engage in the act of 'making yourself up all over again' (*TT*, 394). In his attempt to construct a coherent self-narrative from the three intrusively recurring memories of his life, the depressed old man of *That Time* cannot even lay claim to his own being, thereby alienating himself from his experiences by the use of the second-person pronoun, 'you'. Another lexical tic, the pervasive use of 'and', prevents him from prioritising events, so that no detail is privileged over another. In his continuous narrative of 'come and gone', he maintains a persistent, slow, repetitive mutter to keep out 'the void'. As his energies diminish, he gives an impression of unutterable weariness in his failure to make meaning of all the 'ands' that add up to his yesterdays.

If the despairing old man of *That Time* gives the impression of waning energies, the seventy-year-old woman of *Not I* seems supercharged in her dizzying, headlong discourse. Beckett explained to Schneider that he ‘hears’ Mouth ‘breathless, urgent, feverish, rhythmic, panting along, without undue concern with intelligibility. Addressed less to the understanding than to the nerves of the audience which should in a sense *share her bewilderment*’ (in Harmon, ed., 1998: 283).¹¹ Denying the ‘I’ of her entitlement, she gabbles in disconnected phrases as she recounts dispersed ‘flashes from all over’ (*NI*, 380) and backtracks compulsively, amplifies, or chants her catechism of ‘God is love . . . tender mercies . . . new every morning’ (383) to control her panic.¹² An interesting observation is made by Alvarez when he identifies what he thinks are ‘the two words which will keep the anguish at bay: Not I’ (Alvarez, 1974: 136). The denial implicit in these same two words will never permit the memory to heal.

With great ingenuity, Beckett has shown memory to operate in the ‘hysterical’ plays as a destructive force in which ‘re-membling’ becomes an act of ‘dis-membling’ (Pireddu, 1992: 306). While trying to salvage their dissolving selves by ‘revolving it all’, the compulsive protagonists repeatedly try to go back to the beginning of their fraught experiences. In so doing, they force time into a series of ‘pseudo-presents’ (Krell, 1990: 94) which are ineluctably weighed down with the pain of yesterday’s detritus.

ENDNOTES

1. For *Footfalls* I have used the revised text that appears in *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Volume IV: The Shorter Plays*. Other texts are found in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works*.
2. Beckett’s attitude to Jung is strangely tinged with scorn. In his letter to MacGreevy of 8 October, 1935, he comments that ‘I dined one evening with Bion [. . .] & went on to hear Jung at the Institute of Psychological Medicine’. Describing Jung as a ‘methodical rhapsodic’, Beckett offers the opinion that he is ‘less than the dirt under Freud’s nails. I can’t imagine him curing a fly of neurosis & yet he is said to have cured cases of schizophrenia. If this is true he is the first to do it’. He was fascinated, however, by Jung’s story of the girl ‘who had never properly been born’ (TCD).
3. John Pilling, who feels that *Embers* ‘lacks a real centre’, nevertheless considers the Bolton/Holloway story to be ‘one of Beckett’s most interesting confrontations of the configuring mind of the artist with the atoms of aesthetic material that he tries to make sense of’ (Pilling, 1976 b: 98-99).
4. Morrison, writing on ‘Canter and Chronicles: The Use of Narrative in the Plays of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter’, argues that ‘Bolton is begging to be put out of his misery, to be given something more permanent than a standard pain-killing injection’ (Morrison, 1983: 90). Since this occurs immediately after Henry’s reflection on his father’s death, she comes to the conclusion that Henry has refused to help his father commit suicide. It is certainly an option.

5. Linda Ben-Zvi, in an arresting article entitled 'Through a Tube Starkly', alleges that 'on television Mouth in close-up resembles a vagina. A pulsating orifice attempting to give birth to the self, the image marks an elision of mouth and vagina, the female reduced to genital identification' (in Ben-Zvi, ed., 1990: 247).
6. In his article, 'Rekindling *Embers*', Eric Price records the surprising fact that 'there have been just two national broadcast productions of *Embers* in English in a span of more than forty years' (in Ben-Zvi, ed., 2003: 263).
7. Roger Blin, in an interview on 2 March, 1975, in Paris, said: 'Beckett absolutely didn't want me to try to do *Embers* for the theater because, when you listen, you don't know if Ada exists or not, whether she only exists in the imagination of the character Henry' (in Oppenheim, ed., 1994: 310). Marjorie Perloff expands this idea in her chapter on 'Acoustic Art in Samuel Beckett's *Embers*'. She contends that 'Radio [. . .] does not allow us to distinguish the living from the dead; their recorded voices, after all, occupy the same soundscape', and she surprisingly goes on to assert later in her chapter that 'all the characters – Ada, Addie, Henry's father, Bolton, Holloway, and Henry himself – are revenants, ghostly presences' (in Oppenheim, ed., 1999: 249, 265). If the play were visually enacted, many of the ambiguities that lie at its core would be laid bare.
8. Worth senses some form of repression in her chapter on 'The Space and the Sound in Beckett's Theatre' when she asks, rather hesitantly, whether 'that hesitation over the doctor's name [was] not a faltering of invention but a mental block set up against some traumatic memory?' (Worth, 1975: 20).
9. Critical reaction to *Cascando* has sometimes taken a similar course. Well known theatre critic, Michael Billington, writing for *The Times* on the 1 April 1970, candidly admits that 'Only *Cascando*, a radio work here played in total darkness leaves me almost completely baffled [. . .] for once in Beckett I find no concrete image I can readily grasp' (MS 1792).
10. Kalb, writing on the radio and television plays and *Film*, asserts that *Eh Joe* has never been a favourite of Beckett's critics, some of whom denounce it outright as melodramatic and obvious: the protagonist is a lecherous man haunted by guilt in the form of a torturous voice from his past (Kalb, 1989: 138).
11. Describing a performance of *Not I* as 'this terrifying and hysterical monologue', Lance St John Butler claims that 'I have not seen any stronger audience reactions than those experienced during and after a good performance of this play [. . .] the effect is of listening to pure human suffering' (in Docherty, ed., 1994: 74).
12. Billie Whitelaw, whose performance was declared 'miraculous' by Beckett, recounted her experience of preparing for the role to Gussow. She said: 'With *Not I* what happened for me was a terrible inner scream, like falling backward into hell. It was the scream I never made when my son was desperately ill' (in Gussow, 1996: 85).

CHAPTER SIX

MEMORY AS REMEDY, STIMULANT AND SEDATIVE

The characters in Beckett's plays are hardly renowned for their light-heartedness. Yet some of them are able to derive some relief from the resources of memory, however fleeting. Used as diversion or distraction, memory can contribute positively to 'the haze of our smug will to live, our pernicious and incurable optimism' (*P*, 15). Its 'clinical laboratory' stocks not only 'poison' but, according to the *Proust Monograph*, promotes 'remedy, stimulant and sedative' (*P*, 35) as well. Especially in the plays of 'supplication'—*Ohio Impromptu*, *Ghost Trio*, . . . *but the clouds* . . . and *Nacht und Traume*—with their 'gently dissolving images' (Bryden in Ben-Zvi, ed., 2003: 42), memory is entreated to exert its talismanic powers by conjuring a sense of the loved one. The 'remedial' effects of this relief are so ephemeral that they invite even greater longing. As 'stimulant', memory is hardly more effective. Its limitations are explored in the play, *Happy Days*, where Winnie forces a brittle gaiety in her attempts to stifle desperation and revive her 'old style'. Because 'remedy' and 'stimulant' provide no lasting relief, it is the 'sedative' powers of memory that are invoked most often in these plays. Flo, Ru and Vi summon the reserves of their nostalgia in an attempt to sedate a bleak present in *Come and Go*, while all the characters seek some sort of respite, however brief, from their depressing circumstances. It becomes increasingly apparent that although memory can provide fitful comfort, it is the real or imagined presence of the loving other that is ultimately able to assuage pain.

For many of the characters in Beckett's other plays this experience is unattainable. Inevitably in the Beckettian universe there are some who find that 'remedy, stimulant and sedative' is not for them. Clov, in *Endgame*, is possibly the most pitiful of these when he concludes plangently that 'the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit' (*END*, 41, 1450). Asked by Hamm whether he ever had 'an instant of happiness' he responds immediately: 'Not to my knowledge' (*END*, 32: 1130-31). He considers his life to have been one of unrelieved misery. Where the word 'yesterday' might induce a state of rhapsodic exhilaration in the dying Nell, to Clov it suggests nothing more than the black dust that has fastened on his entire existence. 'Yesterday' exists for him as 'that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day' (*END*, 24: 803-04). His

escape from Hamm might solicit some belated happiness, but whether he is able to take the opportunity remains doubtful.

Even more gloomy is the would-be-suicide of *Rough for Theatre II*. As the two callous assessors trawl through evidence of his cheerless life, they encounter the testimony of his self-dramatising mother, ‘woman of letters’, who declares:

Not a tear was known to fall in our family, and God knows they did in torrents, that was not caught up and piously preserved in that inexhaustible reservoir of sorrow, with the date, the hour and the occasion, and not a joy, fortunately they were few, that was not on the contrary irrevocably dissolved, as by a corrosive. In that he took after me.

(*RTII*, 240)

In case we are tempted to discount her perception of her son as self-regarding, there is always the testimony of his friends to back it up. They allege: ‘Of our national epos he remembered only the calamities’ and ‘To hear him talk about his life, after a glass or two, you would have thought he had never set foot outside hell’ (*RTII*, 240). His endemic depression has warped his ability to recall anything positive, so that suicide becomes a very real option, unusual among the players of the Beckettian *oeuvre*.

The droll treatment of misery in *Rough for Theatre II* offsets, to some extent, the desperation of the silent suicidal figure, but in *Eh Joe* we confront despair head-on. In the ‘penny farthing hell’ (*EJ*, 362) of the protagonist’s mind there is no relief from the overwhelming feelings of guilt that torture him daily. Skilled wordsmith that he is, he sharpens recrimination to vindictiveness in the imagined accusations of his former lover. His only defence against memory is to practise ‘mental thuggee’, ‘throttling the dead in his head’ until another aggrieved individual ‘starts in on’ him (*EJ*, 363). His attempts are futile, as voice succeeds voice in barbed denunciation. Blaming himself for the suicide of the ‘green one’ (*EJ*, 365), he harbours memories that consist solely of ‘poison’, with no possibility of ‘sedative’ as antidote. His religious conscience exacerbates his agony, so that there is no prospect of ‘spirit made light’ for him (*EJ*, 365).

Joe's bitter memories are lucid, coherent and ordered, unaccompanied by the panic that overtakes Mouth in *Not I* when her past is recycled in hectic, jagged flashbacks. Where Joe takes no satisfaction from having been loved in the past, Mouth cannot remember love at all. Unwanted, unloved and probably abused, she has endured her days as an unhappy mute interrupted by bursts of hysterical babbling. In the April of her seventieth year, after some sort of seizure, she suddenly finds herself free of the suffering that has dogged her all her days. Strengthened by this unaccustomed state, she compulsively tries to free herself from the stifling burden of her past by involuntarily mouthing a steady stream of jumbled self-narrative. But instinctively she feels that the free flow of memory could be dangerous to her psyche, as there is 'something begging in the brain . . . begging the mouth to stop' (*NI*, 380) while 'the brain [is] . . . raving away on its own . . . trying to make sense of it . . . or make it stop. . . or in the past . . . dragging up the past . . . flashes from all over' (*NI*, 380). Mouth's frenetic discourse cannot 'sedate' her, as it is a hazardous undertaking and her over-learned orphanage mantra of 'God is love . . . tender mercies . . . new every morning' (*NI*, 381-02) proves worse than useless. The growing conviction that some revelation from the past would make sense of her jumbled memories fails to dissolve the counter-compulsion of 'nothing she could tell. . . nothing she could think . . . nothing she –' (*NI*, 382). This negation paradoxically comes too close to the crucial memories she has suppressed, so she characteristically responds by denying her identity in screaming 'what? . . . who?. . . no!. . . she!'*(NI*, 382). Bryden, in her study of Beckett's women, notes the paradox that

Repeatedly during the play, the muttering, screaming voice teeters on the brink of owning her own life, of attributing its contents to an 'I', only to launch into a panic-stricken self-censorship. Yet the more she discards, the more she amasses.
(in Ben-Zvi, ed., 2003: 38)

Through 'not knowing what . . . what she was' (*NI*, 382), Mouth is incapable of using her memory to 'hit on it in the end' (*NI*, 383). Her crisis of identity blocks any remedy she might seek.

Whereas Mouth talks uncontrollably in an effort to sedate herself, May, in *Footfalls*, seeks in motion what she lacks in repose. She has not left her old home since childhood 'where she began. [*Pause.*] Where it began. [*Pause.*] It all began' (*F*, 401). The mysterious 'it' dangles tantalisingly, refusing to disclose its import. Equally puzzling is the mother's 'sequel' to this enigma. She describes how 'A little later, when she was quite forgotten, she began to – [*Pause.*] A little later,

when as though she had never been, it had never been, she began to walk [*Pause.*]' (F, 402). The person who has 'forgotten' May goes unspecified, but conception, birth and 'it' are again mysteriously juxtaposed, possibly to suggest that incest might have occurred. Whatever happened, both Mother and daughter are in denial, just as 'Amy'/May denies having been in church when something 'strange' occurred during 'Evensong'. And because the more threatening aspects of her memory are sealed off and inaccessible, May will never be able to 'remedy' her endless pacing and wheeling.

Unlike May, whose early childhood was free of trauma, the protagonist of *A Piece of Monologue* has never had a moment's respite. We are told twice that 'Birth was the death of him' (APM, 425) to accentuate the fact that birth trauma has blighted the life of the spectral figure we see dimly on stage. For the entire 'two and a half billion seconds' (APM, 426) of his existence he has waited 'on the rip word' (APM, 429), his own incantatory 'begone' (APM, 429), to depart the world. Lacking a rationale for his existence, and discomfited by memories of 'so-called loved ones', he finds his past 'scattered', 'shredded' and unable to sustain him in his act of 'dying on' (APM, 426). Portia's mercy, 'dropping gentle on the place beneath' (APM, 426) is not for him, death-haunted as he is, and consumed with loss.

The agonised souls discussed above are unable to find 'remedy, stimulant or sedative' from the archives of their memories. However, this litany of misery does not encompass everyone. Other Beckettian characters may suffer greatly in the plays, but are briefly able to lift their spirits when they remember periods of their lives when circumstances were less doleful. Vladimir and Estragon fill the act of waiting with all they can recall, while Winnie, denied mobility during her ironically titled *Happy Days*, forces herself to parade the resources of her memory from bell to bell.¹ Even though the insistent shrillness of her personal alarm circumscribes her life aurally, she does not experience time as an inexorable metronome, but as a flexible matrix, ballooning and constricting at will: her will.

In this, Winnie's situation is appreciably different from the forlorn characters of *Come and Go*, *Ghost Trio*, . . . *but the clouds* . . . , *Ohio Impromptu*, and *Nacht und Träume*. They crave the sedative that only memory can bring, while Winnie, though not averse to its palliative and even

anaesthetising properties, seeks stimulation and remedy as well. Sinking inexorably in the slow sands of time and disappointment, she cannot begin to contemplate her days without the energising resources of her articulated memory as company, which makes her unlike the desperately lonely characters who seek the ‘shades’ of their deceased loved-ones. Her ‘loved-one’ is very much alive. Winnie, after all, has Willie. He might lack ‘jizz’ (*HD*, 167) and conversation, but he is still an observing eye and an intermittently responding other. Though he frustrates her at almost every turn, he is nonetheless a familiar being – a presence – such as the more beseeching characters long for.

When Winnie, with tenacious buoyancy, embarks on yet another ‘heavenly’ day, she attempts to do it in the ‘old style’ (*HD*, 143) when she was at the height of her imagined powers – beautiful, alluring, and as classy as the heroine of a musical comedy. Her professions of joy are as patently inauthentic as her dutiful happiness, threadbare constructs of pious intent.² As a compulsive talker, she fashions a sense of her former self by sprinkling her formulaic observations with fragments of quotations that she used to know, fond recollections of the fading ‘classics’ that she calls upon to stimulate her mind.

Beckett identified the full quotations from which Winnie cites her fragments in a letter that he sent to Schneider on 25 August, 1961 (in Harmon, ed., 1998: 96-98). Of the thirteen allusions to the ‘classics’ that she makes, five are Shakespearean, two Miltonic, and the others come from Thomas Gray, Edward Fitzgerald, Robert Browning, John Keats, Charles Wolfe and Robert Herrick. Some are dire, such as: ‘O woe is me/ To have seen what I have seen, see what I see’ (*Hamlet*, *III. i.*) and ‘O fleeting joys Of Paradise, dear bought with lasting woe’ (*Paradise Lost*, *X*, 741-42), but others have a cheerleading quality as Winnie tries to rouse herself from encroaching panic. The livelier ‘Fear no more the heat o’ the sun’ (*Cymbeline IV. ii*) and ‘Laughing wild/ Amid severest woe’ from ‘On a Distant Prospect of Eton College’ have a more ‘stimulating’ than ‘sedative’ effect as rhythmic inhibitors of death and distress. When Winnie sighs, ‘One loses one’s classics’ (164), she acknowledges that with them go one of the coping mechanisms of her semantic memory, part of an intricate code of monologic strategies that she calls upon to sustain her through time. Her pathetic attempts to uphold genteel standards of behaviour and decorum in desperate circumstances are both heroic and ludicrous, especially since

Willie has simply given up. Billie Whitelaw, who acted the part of Winnie to critical acclaim, remarked in an interview with Linda Ben-Zvi that

Winnie is terribly brave, terribly courageous. She is marvellous; she hangs on and hopes things will be better. She is slipping down, slithering down, yet holding on by her eyelashes. She has the self-discipline to get on with her day [. . .] I can admire that spirit.

(in Ben-Zvi, ed., 1990: 7-8)³

That spirit was also observable in Rosaleen Linehan's performance of the part at the Almeida Theatre in 1996. Writing for *The Independent Tabloid* in November of that year, Paul Taylor remarks on how recognisable Linehan's interpretation was:

Looking like a cross between a Beverley Sister in the Fifties and an Irish Mother Superior, Ms Linehan's superbly suburban Winnie rabbits away, with a would-be gentility and many a borrowed air, to cover over the boredom and fear caused by being steadily ignored in favour of a newspaper. It's my grandmother all over again, even down to the way she tries to fool herself, simply by fussing around with the contents of her bag, that she's leading a busy and rewarding life.

(MS 4369)

Most revealing of all is the actress, Martha Fehsenfeld's, recollection of the advice Beckett gave her when she was coming to grips with the role:

Beckett suggested that I 'think of her as a bird with oil on her feathers' and this became the central image of the part for me – physical, external and very playable [. . .] This 'bird' characterization also determined my posture and voice quality, and both became infused with an energy that pulled me up, in contrast to the downward thrust of her immobility [. . .] I realized that Winnie is in all of us. She is whatever survival is.

(in Ben-Zvi, ed., 1990: 55-57)

Also included in Winnie's repertoire of survival is the recitation of a much rehearsed story. Winnie's fabulation, like that of Hamm's and Henry's, probably has crucial elements of childhood trauma embedded in it. Cohn notes that when the famous actress, Madeleine Renaud, premiered the French production, 'her story of Mildred was lisped in a child's voice' (in Ben-Zvi, ed., 2003: 289), indicating her regression to childishness.

In the story, which is recited only in the second act ‘when all else fails’ (*HD*, 163), Winnie describes the four- or five-year-old Mildred with histrionic fervour. Significantly, ‘Milly’ breaks taboos in her early morning adventure by disobediently descending ‘all alone the steep wooden stairs, backwards on all fours, though she had been forbidden to do so’ (*HD*, 163). Vulnerable and solitary, she proceeds to undress Dolly, ‘Scolding her . . . the while’ (*HD*, 163). At this juncture, a mouse terrifies Milly when it runs up her thigh, driving her to such hysterical excesses that ‘papa, mamma, Bibby and . . . old Annie’ (*HD*, 165) come running to rescue her. Melodramatically, Winnie announces that their arrival is ‘Too late. [*Pause.*] Too late’ (*HD*, 165). In *The World of Childhood Terror and Loss in the Plays of Samuel Beckett*, Bell argues cogently that Winnie’s expression of sexual terror ‘relies heavily on the disguised language and the logic of the unconscious – displacement, condensation, projection, symbolism, gender reversal, and over-determination’ (Bell, 1992: 145).

Given Beckett’s incomplete circuits of meaning, the ‘truth’ of this tale remains elusive, but it does suggest possible sexual abuse. Katherine Kelly, in confronting the issue, goes so far as to call it ‘an allegory of sexual violation’ (in Gontarski, ed., 1993: 123). If this interpretation is valid, it might explain Winnie’s inveterate sexual distaste and possible frigidity, as well as Willie’s brazen recourse to pornographic photographs and masturbation.⁴ The fact that the Milly story is a last resort does not necessarily suggest that Winnie is ‘sedated’ by it, but that its narration serves as a ‘stimulant’ to pass the time. It is no coincidence that the climax of the story is juxtaposed with Winnie’s recollection of the jarring Shower/Cooker encounter. Speaking as though she is not there (as people sometimes do in the presence of the disabled) the man coarsely questions Winnie’s validity as a woman if she is sexually unavailable. His dismissive enquiry threatens the core of her identity, possibly echoing her own self-doubt. She remembers the conversation in vivid detail, recalling his saying: ‘Why doesn’t he dig her out? [. . .] What good is she to him like that? – What good is he to her like that? [. . .] Dig her out, [. . .] dig her out, no sense in her like that –’ (*HD*, 157).

Both the ‘real’ story of Shower/Cooker, and the Milly fantasy explore the sexual issues that trouble Winnie, pointing to the likelihood of abuse, and the unavailability and probable frigidity that have undermined her libido. Winnie’s incarceration in an entropic system, of whatever nature,

could be the culmination of earlier intimate stresses. Since both stories upset her, Winnie has to cast her memory more widely for respite from her barren wasteland, and like the other characters in this chapter, she imaginatively reconfigures a more desirable past. In her youth spent perching on knees, ducking ‘almost ginger’ (*HD*, 143) moustaches and attending balls, Winnie had dreamt of romantic pursuit by the type of ardent gentlemen callers who feature in Amanda’s reverie in *The Glass Menagerie*. Recalling her glory days serves Winnie as a temporary diversion to pass the time.

Being true to her sanitised past also involves keeping up appearances in the ‘old style’ (*HD*, 143), when day and night were valid markers of time. In keeping herself ‘nice’ (*HD*, 156), Winnie obeys the rhythms of her bourgeois vanity – the cleaning and preening demanded of the ‘lovable’ (*HD*, 150). In serving the ‘deadening’ dictates of habit, she admits that: ‘There is so little one *can* do. [*Pause.*] One does it all. [*Pause.*] All one can’ (145). By so doing she attends to one of her ‘two lamps’ (*HD*, 153) – her body – which, like her memory, constitutes a time-processing strategy. Her awareness of bodily demands dominates when ‘words fail’, for with the garrulous Winnie ‘there are times when even they fail’ (*HD*, 147).

And when everything fails there is Brownie, ‘uppermost’ in the bag as an ominous presence. Though this solution does not frequently intrude on Winnie’s consciousness, the gun creates a sinister effect as it features in Willie’s ambivalent final moments. Her husband’s questionable attendance is essential to Winnie in spite of her attempts at stimulation, for she could never endure the isolation of the *Unnamable* or the bereft characters of the late plays. Michael Robinson contends that ‘She cannot conceive of a situation in which she, whose person is made of the words she speaks, could exist, if there were no one nearby to know she is speaking, and therefore to recognize her presence’ (Robinson, 1969: 293). Lacking an audience, she would force herself to ‘Gaze before me, with compressed lips’ (*HD*, 162).

The ‘words she speaks’ aptly characterise her person as ‘yesterday’s deformity’, for the phrases that reflect her current situation are as incomplete and attenuated as she is, while her recollections of more ‘mobile’ times are couched in coherent, flowing prose. Among her staccato collection of hyperbole, overlearned phrases, terse orders to self and spouse, fillers such as ‘ah well’,

qualifiers, platitudes and self-congratulatory homilies are reflections on memory that are as fitful and uneven as memory itself. Winnie's concern over slippage is paralleled by cross rhythms and discontinuous formulation as she becomes her own interlocutor:

that is what I find so wonderful, all comes back. [*Pause.*] All? [*Pause.*] No, not all. [*Smile.*] No, no. [*Smile off.*] Not quite. [*Pause.*] A part. [*Pause.*] Floats up, one fine day, out of the blue. [*Pause.*] That is what I find so wonderful.
(*HD*, 144)

Her discursive world is congruent with the physical world in which she exists: contradictory, interrupted, frustrated and uncomfortable. Cohn characterises her discourse as being replete with 'phrases where negation, interrogation, and repetition proliferate' (Cohn, 2001: 263). Nostalgic recall, on the other hand, generates a more fluent language, as she expresses her sentiments more coherently: 'Charlie Hunter! [*Pause*] I close my eyes – . . . and am sitting on his knees again, in the back garden at Borough Green, under the horse-beech. [. . .] Oh the happy memories' (*HD*, 142). She is both stimulated and sedated for a while, until the harsh reality of her existence intrudes once more.

Willie, of course, is not included in this romantic reverie. The routine of normal conversational turn-taking is denied Winnie, because Willie is an uncooperative partner, practising the politics of exclusion to lend his taciturnity greater power. Because their communicative goals are unshared, Winnie is placed in an untenable subject position in which she implores him to respond. When he eventually does, her flow of language increases so markedly that it might well explain his long silences. In the 'Blue Angel *Beckett on Film*' Project, Rosaleen Linehan became ecstatic at his slightest response, which demonstrated the intensity of Winnie's need, showing that 'the self cannot flourish without a culture and a community' (Rosen, 1976: 91). It would appear from Winnie's performative idiom that the culture of her 'community' is exhausted, and that she has to rely on her memories to provide herself with some stimulation in an effort to offset Willie's remoteness.

Winnie's garrulous patter could not be more different from the grave and genteel tones of the three women in *Come and Go*, which is a 'miniature dramatic piece of considerable formal beauty' (Knowlson and Pilling, 1979: 122). Beckett, in fact, said to Schneider:

I see *Come & Go* very formal. Strictly identical attitude & movements. The getting up, going, return, sitting, whispered confidence, shocked reaction (sole colour), finger to lips, etc. the same for all 3. Absent one not wholly invisible. Same toneless voices save for 'Oh!'s. Stiff, slow, puppet-like.

(in Harmon, ed., 1998: 417)

The stylised 'coming and going' of this *danse macabre* is not exclusive to Flo, Ru and Vi, who are paralleled in their 'moving somewhere but getting nowhere' (Zeifman in Beja et al., 1983: 141) by a number of other characters previously created by Beckett: in particular Malone, Camier and Clov. But in their acts of endurance, the three old women of *Come and Go* are better served by their memories than the men are. Grieved by the probable⁵ impending deaths of their friends,⁶ they seek the deep reaches of recollection for numbing 'sedative', with little chance of either stimulant or remedy. There is no remedy for their shared plight, but only the sisterly collusion and solace that reminiscent nostalgia can bring. Despite the slow, stiff movements of age, they invite the physical sensation of their far-off schooldays as they indulge the yearnings of their younger selves. Flo and Ru long to 'Just sit together as we used to, in the playground at Miss Wade's . . . On the log'. [. . .] Holding hands . . . that way. Dreaming of . . . love' (CAG, 208:23-41).

While they hold hands, Flo murmurs: 'I can feel the rings' (CAG,209:70). The memory of their romantic longing is palpable, but the stage directions in *The Complete Dramatic Works* read: 'No rings apparent'. (CAG,356). Their earlier aspirations might have been foiled by time but, as Knowlson notes: 'Their hands form, in fact, the pattern of an unbroken chain, an emblem that traditionally has been used to symbolize eternity' (Knowlson and Pilling, 1979: 122). Memory has temporarily transported them to their girlhood – an earlier, happier state which sedates them as they inhabit a far-off time rich in dreaming hopes that are never subsequently fulfilled.

Ethereal though the women of *Come and Go* might be, they are substantial personae in comparison with the wraith-like beings of the 'supplication' plays.⁷ And painful though the shock to their sensibilities has been, they have the comforting presence of each other to offset their sadness. They comprise a community, and are therefore not wholly reliant on memory to remedy or sedate. No such comfort is available in the later dramaticules, however, where night after night alienated beings implore their loved ones to make their presence felt. McMullan maintains that these plays present border zones between self and other, loss and comfort, even between life and death. They therefore represent a development in Beckett's

exploration of those areas which elude the dominant structures of symbolic representation, and of how to present such liminal spaces and provisional identities on stage.

(McMullan, 1993: 93)

Unlike Winnie, Flo, Ru and Vi, who force their memories to simulate an earlier, more optimistic state of being, the desperate old men of the later plays under discussion crave the remembered physical presence and sensation of the adored other to sedate their unrelenting longing. Their memories are bereft of comfort, apart from the recollection of the one for whom they grieve. According to *The New York Times* drama critic, Vincent Canby, they are ‘trying to get a purchase on lost lives [. . .] haunted by fragmented memories that only feed their sense of futility and isolation’. He goes on to say: ‘The revelation [is that] the more hermetic the piece, the more marooned the character, the more hypnotic the theatrical experience’ (MS 4362). Although they seek remedy in a self-induced semi-hypnotic state, their memories fail to deliver the lasting relief that company would provide.

In *Ghost Trio*, the spectral man seated on the pallet uses music to invite the consoling sensation of the other. But the familiar bars of Beethoven’s Fifth Piano Trio (*Die Geister Trio*) fail to secure a sense of presence, even though at one point he strains to hear his beloved’s footsteps. Instead, a mysterious small boy appears, who intimates, like his counterpart in *Waiting for Godot*, that relief is not at hand. Not that night. Disconsolate, the bereaved man demands that his memory force the materialisation that his soul requires. In his quest, familiar music and memory are employed as remedy, but unsuccessfully. Though the man longs to assuage his misery and appease his all-consuming yearning, he is unable to coerce his memory into obeying his most urgent imperatives. He almost seems to endorse what Beckett had written years before in the *Proust Monograph*, when he declared:

[M]usic is the Idea itself, unaware of the world of phenomena, existing ideally outside the universe [. . .] This essential quality of music is distorted by the listener who, being an impure subject, insists on giving a figure to that which is ideal and invisible.

(P, 92)

In another late play, . . . *but the clouds* . . . , the beseeching old man is more successful when he implores his absent lover to appear to him. Although he usually begs in vain, he continues,

because in exceptional circumstances she appears fleetingly; or makes a lingering appearance; or mouths the final inspirational lines of Yeats's 'The Tower': '... clouds ... but the clouds ... of the sky [...] but the clouds' (BC, 421). At best, she 'recites' even more fully: '... but the clouds of the sky ... when the horizon fades ... or a bird's sleepy cry ... among the deepening shades' (BC, 422). His intense 'begging of the mind' demands that his memory both recreate and project her apparition to offset the unbearable sensation of life without her. Interestingly, Brater argues that 'what he longs for is not his beloved but the image of his beloved, the evocative metaphor he has made of her. His is an exquisite despair. In his secret ceremony Beckett's male figure all but revels in it' (Brater in Ben-Zvi, ed., 2003: 193). Although many of Beckett's characters theatricalise their grief, they rarely lose their bearings so completely as to luxuriate in the experience. And because the old man of ... *but the clouds* ... realises that he cannot physically recall his beloved, he makes do with simulation.

Daniel Katz, in his essay 'Mirror Resembling Screens', makes an interesting case for the play as a study in the working of memory. He says that

Beckett's television play ... *but the clouds* ... with its overstated emphasis on personal history, loss, and finally, not simply intertextuality but actual recitation, is clearly in part an allegory of memory at work [...] A subjective, psychological act of concentration and memory is abandoned for a rhetoric of magical invocation and spectral appearance.

(Katz in Wulf, ed., 1995: 83,84)

In contrasting the brilliance of the visual image with the 'half-remembered lines that are laboriously reconstructed' (86) Katz claims that the image represents 'involuntary memory', while the 'painstaking reconstruction' of the poetic passage is effected by the voluntary memory. I would argue, however, that this distinction cannot be supported, since the Proustian 'involuntary memory' operates fortuitously, and not as a result of earnest application.

In performance, the visual image is much more striking than the accompanying text. Commenting on its impact as a television play, theatre critic of *The Guardian*, Michael Billington, writes of the 17 April, 1977 performance:

Again in ... *but the clouds* ... , Beckett reminded one how much television can dispense with and still be effective. Here there was simply a pool of light, a man

passing back and forth across it, a voice emerging from darkness and the image of a woman's face, blank and unseeing, with whom the man had once apparently sought contact. As in so much of Beckett's recent work, the effect was of someone surveying his past life and its innumerable lost possibilities.

(MS Theatre Dossier BTC1: BTC/GB/77/1)

The old man of . . . *but the clouds* . . . tries to 'obtain relief' (BC, 446) by urging his beloved to make her presence both visible and palpable. His fleeting joy holds no promise of enduring remedy. The Listener of *Ohio Impromptu* also makes a 'last attempt to obtain relief' (OI, 446). He immures himself in unaccustomed surroundings bearing no trace of his beloved, only to find that he has made a terrible mistake. Familiar surroundings could have soothed and 'sedated' him through their long association with his loved one, but unfamiliar surroundings accentuate his total sense of deprivation. In his bereaved state, everything conspires to remind him of what he has lost. Even the Seine as it surrounds the Isle of Swans offers an object lesson to his starved senses: 'At the tip he would always pause to dwell on the receding stream. How in joyous eddies its two arms conflowed and flowed united on. Then turn and his slow steps retrace' (OI, 446).

It is not as though he had not been warned. In a dream, his lover had cautioned that he would be inconsolable in unfamiliar surroundings. She entreated him to: 'Stay where we were so long together, my shade will comfort you' (OI, 446). Although he disregards her advice and suffers agonies in the unfamiliarity of his single room, she appears to relent by 'sending' a comforting presence who soothes his grief by reading in long smooth sentences through the night. The discourse is rhythmic and repetitive, given to elongation of the vowel sounds, in the productions I have seen. Johnny Murphy as The Reader, in the Beckett Festival of 1999, was particularly sad and haunting; discomfiting rather than soothing. In performance, the scene, with its circle of light in encroaching darkness, is reminiscent of a Rembrandt painting. The audience attends the final session of the reading – marking the last experience of a 'sad tale a last time told' (OI, 448). In his 'profounds of mind' (OI, 448), the Listener is able to recapture the sensation of his beloved through memory and the intensity of his need. Sedation yields to momentary 'remedy' in his therapeutic encounter with her vicarious 'shade'. The Reader becomes one with the Listener as he embraces his 'own other' in a spectral act of healing.⁸ Whether apparition, alter ego or an alternate aspect of his mind, the 'shade' locates the desired presence in a comforting rite of reminiscence. In this regard the actor David Warrilow recalls Beckett's advice to him when he

undertook the role: ‘Now, the most useful intention that Beckett gave me early on in the *Ohio Impromptu* experience was to treat it like a bedtime story and let it be soothing’ (in Kalb, 1989: 223). Though the sedation will not last to effect any sort of remedy, there is some solace in revisiting beloved memories.

In her evaluation of the role of memory in the play, Oppenheim argues that

Ohio Impromptu, perhaps the most Proustian of Beckett’s works, again posits discourse, written and read, as access to and means of sanctioning the past. This self-reflexive parody of the Book as vehicle of memory and purveyor of truth, however, is distinctly cathectic, an affective valorization of the word:

(Oppenheim, 2000: 144)

If it were not for the responsive bedrock of memory, however, the Book would achieve no resonance in its reading, no ‘valorization’ of its words. To achieve this effect, the vocabulary is carefully chosen to be ‘truthful’—precise, explanatory and evocative—in sentences whose overall effect is sonorous and comforting. Jeremy Irons, with his rich voice and empathetic presence, seems perfectly cast as Reader in ‘The Blue Angel *Beckett on Film* Project’, but to have him double as Listener, which no theatrical production could contrive, is highly questionable. In this regard, Beckett theatre-specialist, Anna McMullan, complains that the interpretation of *Ohio Impromptu* is ‘led once again by a psychologized approach to performance’, since ‘Jeremy Irons plays both parts and the “ghost” fades away at dawn’ (McMullan in Ben-Zvi, ed., 2003: 231). Like Jack Clayton’s *The Innocents*, a 1961 film adaptation of Henry James’s enigmatic *The Turn of the Screw*, enigmatic options are foreclosed when the medium allows a particular visual interpretation to be imposed on the viewer.

No such problem arises in *Nacht und Träume*, which has its old man find comfort by another route. In this teleplay without words, he seeks the blessings of the unconscious state, having found that brute consciousness is unbearable. To the incantatory accompaniment of the last few bars of Schubert’s *lied*, *Nacht und Träume*, the old man dreams that his beloved’s hand rests on his head to soothe and comfort him. In ritualistic and sacramental fashion, the blessed shade offers first a cup from which he drinks, and then gently wipes his brow with a cloth. Emotional memories of nurture, tenderness and compassion come together in healing acts of love. Then, as

though in benediction, loving hands are placed on the dreamer's head. This is memory at its most rhythmically sedative, providing a temporary 'remedy' from loneliness and loss. In its ability to lull pain, the dreamer's experience is unmatched by those of the supplicants who suffer the loss of the other.

Brater, in his book *Why Beckett*, discusses the play as a vehicle for television. After the audience hears the last seven bars of Schubert's *lied*, 'The rest is silence, where night and dreams take place. In this play movements on a small screen inscribe meanings that are signifiers without a designate. Like the music, the work offers evocation in place of argument' (Brater, 1989: 124). Signification might be less arbitrary than Brater maintains, but there is no gainsaying the effect that this compressed play has on audiences; it is strangely evocative, utterly moving.

By using memory as 'sedative', the men and women in the six plays have established patterns of revived habituation through register and recitation, ritual and routine, and familiar excerpts of music. In so doing, they have evoked sensations of a happier past to enlarge a diminished present. With memory as 'stimulant', they have called on youthful recollections and occasional poetic quotations to force an enhanced experience of time, and as 'remedy' they have consciously, or even unconsciously, sought the felt presence of the departed loved one. Though in many ways they suffer as 'yesterday's deformities', for nothing compensates lastingly for their bereavement or dread, their memories are sometimes able to afford them transient relief.

ENDNOTES

1. The taxing role of Winnie is considered to be one of the greatest theatrical parts ever written for a woman. Cohn maintains that 'actresses have viewed its challenge as a Hamletic summit' (Cohn, 2001: 265). One of them, Joan Plowright, recalls in her memoirs her acute disappointment at not being able to play the part because she was pregnant: 'When he sent the script to me I realized what a wonderful, funny and quite devastating play it was, and longed to be able to act the role of Winnie one day [. . .] I lost the chance to play one of the most extraordinary parts ever written for a woman' (Plowright, 2001: 103).
2. Theatre critic, Kenneth Tynan wrote in *The Observer* (4 November, 1962) that Beckett's new play was 'the starkest portrait he has yet drawn of the slow burial that begins with birth'. Tynan is supported by Steven J. Rosen, writing in 1976 on *Samuel Beckett and the Pessimistic Tradition*, who maintains that 'Winnie's thankfulness in ghastly adversity, her spate of inappropriate, unjustified consolations, makes *Happy Days* seem perhaps Beckett's bitterest work' (Rosen, 1976: 23). Two years earlier, Alvarez, writing on *Beckett*, pronounced it 'the most cheerful play Beckett has written and the least interesting' (Alvarez, 1974: 108). I join most critics in agreeing with the former opinions.

3. It is interesting to note that this is not Beckett's opinion, for he calls Winnie 'a mess', but 'an organized mess'; she is not 'stoic', he continued, she's just 'unaware' (in Brater, 1989: 102).
4. Morrison notes that 'at the end of Act 1 [. . .] Willie finally speaks to her, announcing the definition of "hog" to be "castrated male swine"; thus the one question he chooses to answer makes explicit yet another image of sexual impairment [. . .] Willie, too, is associated with sexual impairment' (Morrison, 1982: 48).
- 5 This evasive play sidesteps specifics for, as McMullan points out in her book, *Theatre on Trial*: 'during the writing or rewriting process, which included at least fifteen versions, the text was gradually stripped of almost all of its circumstantial detail' (McMullan, 1993: 85).
6. In an interesting article on 'The Femme Fatale on Beckett's Stage', Cohn argues provocatively that 'the women of his drama (as opposed to his fiction) are fatal because they live intimately with death – more intimately than his male characters' (in Ben-Zvi, ed., 1990: 162). This endorses Hersch Zeifman's view that 'the words they dare not speak aloud compose a threnody, whispered intimations of mortality' (in Beja et al., eds, 1983: 140).
7. In his review of *Come and Go* for *The Times Literary Supplement* of 29 January, 1993, Jim McCue amusingly remarks that 'To Beckett, for whom a voice in the dark was "company", three people on stage constitute a crowd scene' (MS 3979).
8. In talking about 'the refracted images of old men' Cohn observes that 'within the book-tale [. . .] the two men "grew to be as one" as the tale is repeatedly read, while on stage the two men diverge before our eyes' (in Beja et al., eds. 1983: 14).

CONCLUSION

When James Knowlson publicised the finding of Beckett's 'trunk in the cellar' in his comprehensive biography *Damned to Fame* (Knowlson, 1996: 178), I imagined that Beckett scholarship would react strongly to the discovery. Not only did Knowlson comment on Beckett's abiding interest in mental illness and abnormal states, but he also outlined the extent of Beckett's absorption in the psychology of the 1930s, which was apparent from the copious notes discovered in the suitcase. Woodworth, Freud, Jung, Adler, McDougall, Jones, Rank, Stephens and Stekel all feature among the authors whom Beckett had studied in depth. New areas of investigation were indicated for their relevance to Beckett's knowledge base, creative processes and abiding interest in the influence of psychology on memory.

In articles written since, however, there is little evidence that scholars have followed this important lead. Antonia Rodríguez Gago, writing on 'The Embodiment of Memory (and Forgetting) in Beckett's Late Women's Plays', begins auspiciously by saying that 'acts of memory (and forgetting) have been central elements in Beckett's work and have always been related to the creative workings of his imagination' (in Ben-Zvi, ed., 2003: 113). After surveying the customary *Proust* opinions, she turns to an interesting evaluation of physical stage language in *Not I*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby*. She also includes the works and teachings of the Spanish humanist and philosopher, Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540), who considers memory to be a quality of the soul. In so doing, she claims him as one of Beckett's cultural ancestors, 'though it is unlikely that Beckett ever read him directly', she admits (in Ben-Zvi, ed., 2003: 119). Skilfully weaving the different elements of her argument together, she concludes:

Following the cultural tradition which conceives memory as a dark space of the mind, in *Not I*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby*, as in all his later plays, Beckett transforms theatre space into a dark field to perform acts of memory, and of forgetting, the latter being an important part of the act of recalling and reminiscing.

(in Ben-Zvi, ed., 2003: 125)

However, the specific knowledge which Beckett acquired about the operation of memory and forgetting from his psychological studies is nowhere in evidence. While I do not wish to suggest

that Knowlson's lead is mandatory and coercive, it is nonetheless surprising that it has not been more widely investigated.

Gago's generalised approach also holds true for an article written by Julie Campbell entitled "There is no more . . .": Cultural Memory in *Endgame*'. Taking Lyotard's theory of the demise of the 'grand narrative' as structural principle, she presents

a reading of the play which proposes that Beckett has placed in an abstract and unreal setting, starkly and simply, the basic constituents of the grand narrative of power in the world: he who has has power; those who want have not. He who has power creates the world in his own image; the powerless collude.

(in Ben-Zvi, ed., 2003: 139)

In Beckett's evocation of the 'grand narrative', Campbell believes that the playwright creates circumstances in which 'cultural amnesia' occurs.

The authoritative 2004 *Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*, in a section devoted to 'memory', which it classifies as 'this impossible theme' (Ackerley and Gontarski, eds, 2004: 361), does not mention Beckett's studies in psychology either. The authors cite examples of 'unreliable memory, unreliable identity' at play in Beckett's work, as well as the 'shaping fictive power of memory'. This, they allege, is Samuel Beckett's 'later great theme' (Ackerley and Gontarski, eds, 2004: 364). Their observations are insightful and pertinent, though they do not attempt to examine specific reasons for memory distortion or failure. In developing their argument they maintain that 'characters are left with a profound sense of unreliable memory, of a process of fiction indistinguishable from the act of remembrance [. . .] The minimalist works record the struggle to remember as the mind threatens to fade'. Their incisive survey is concluded with an elegant observation: 'Memory is not the repetition of the past but the miming of the mind seeking to locate its being in the greater mystery of consciousness' (Ackerley and Gontarski, eds, 2004: 365-66).

This 'mystery of consciousness' might have overwhelmed Beckett's characters, but it is the contention of this study that it does not overwhelm Beckett. He demystifies the 'impossible theme' of the unreliability of memory and the fictive component of recollection with *specific*

knowledge and insight, illuminating the problematics of memory by embodying them in the characters and demi-characters that he creates. But he does not trumpet his knowledge from the theatrical rafters. He refuses to label, nor is he seduced by demands that he clarify his intentions. While Peter Hall was directing *Waiting for Godot* in August, 1955, Beckett wrote to MacGreevy about critical reaction to the play: 'I am so tired of the whole thing and the endless misunderstanding. Why people have to complicate a thing so simple I can't make out' (TCD). This reluctance to explicate persisted during his life, while he continued to draw on a wide and varied conceptual background with exhilarating intellectual daring. His eclectic approach is particularly evident in the plays, as he utilises autobiographical insights and rigorous performance criteria, as well as more conventional influences derived from literary, theological and philosophical works. Nor does he balk at research into abnormal medical gerontology, psychological investigation into the 'mystery of consciousness' and the subconscious, and evaluation of theories of amnesia. Meticulous consideration is also given to form and the adjustment of discourse to accommodate impaired cerebral states. If Beckett makes use of such divergent resources, scholarship should not be wary of following. None of these investigative zones should be off-limits to a Beckett scholar if the range and application of Beckett's erudition is to be fully grasped. In particular, to exclude the hard-won psychological and medical insights that he gained through study and observation is to risk being reductive. It is to undervalue Beckett's achievement.

In her 2002 thesis, entitled *Das Gedächtnis in Samuel Becketts Dramen* [*Memory in Samuel Beckett's Plays*], which she subtitles *A Psychological Approach*, Sabine Kozdon does not avoid studies in gerontology and psychology. Written in German and translated into English by the author and Theresa Petosa, the thesis examines eight of Beckett's plays which 'all stress distinct aspects of this theme'. She outlines her approach as follows:

Considering these differences in the treatment of memory, this study argues that Beckett's plays can be broadly grouped into three phases in which memory plays a distinct role: the early phase of his plays is mainly characterized by his protagonists' poor memory, the second phase by the characters' increasing reminiscing, and the protagonists of his last phase virtually live in the past.

(Kozdon, 2002: abstract)

She groups *Eleutheria*, *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* together as plays where poor memories are in evidence, arguing that ‘even though the memory of Beckett’s protagonists may sometimes be surprisingly poor, this deficit can be explained psychologically, without hurrying to label them as abnormal’ (Kozdon, 2002: 2.4). Dementia is rejected out of hand as an explanatory option. *Happy Days* and *Krapp’s Last Tape* are examined for evidence of reminiscence, while *Play*, *Not I* and *That Time* (grouped together as the ‘memory plays’) feature protagonists who live entirely in the past. Deficiencies in short-term memory are ascribed to age. Nonetheless, Kozdon is prepared to evaluate memory in more specific psychological detail than is usually the case.

When I embarked on this thesis, determined to follow any lead that would shed light on the ‘deforming’ effect of memory in the plays, I had little idea of where my curiosity might lead. From the outset, it seemed apparent that Beckett had unusual insight into the *precise* workings of memory and forgetting, an understanding which went beyond uninformed opinion. Research has confirmed my initial impression. Beckett’s subtle, yet psychologically and medically sound grasp of the subject derives from the multiplicity of sources that he was willing to investigate. Throughout this thesis, therefore, the choice of approach to each chapter has been determined by its usefulness in illuminating those aspects of memory and discourse which Beckett explored in his plays. *Waiting for Godot*, where ‘nothing is certain’, becomes more intelligible when the geriatric mental diseases which Beckett had observed and embodied in his characters are evaluated for application. Many critics have noticed that Estragon is more forgetful than Vladimir: Beckett’s comprehensive understanding of Alzheimer’s disease confirms their observation. Lucky and Pozzo are crafted with as much attention to detail as Estragon, detail derived from Beckett’s knowledge of other aberrant cerebral and psychological states. Vladimir’s normal forgetfulness camouflages the more obvious deficiencies of the other three protagonists. It is paradoxical that, by including *specific* symptoms of memory-loss in their characterisation, Beckett is able to incorporate the uncertainty principle that he aspires to in his writing — that element of unpredictability described in his interview with Tom Driver as ‘perhaps’. By so doing, Beckett ‘admits the chaos’ and ‘accommodates the mess’ in his quest for a ‘form’ that is appropriate to the ‘task of the artist now’ (Driver, 1961: 23).

At the end of his seminal interview with Beckett, Driver concludes that in ‘the plays, time does not go forward. We are always at the end, where events repeat themselves’ (Driver, 1961: 24). This is especially true of *Endgame*, where Beckett reveals his awareness of the operation of memory as it attempts to retrace past incidents. Although he had no access to particular studies on autobiographical memory and the fictive component of life-review, his own observations served him well in arriving at the same conclusions as contemporary memory theorists. Their findings that memory is not mechanical but constructive, calling upon the imaginative and affective capacities to craft a narrative from the shards of the past, is in accordance with Beckett’s own conception. When one connects current insights with Beckett’s own observations, the subtlety and depth of his nuanced approach to the operation of autobiographical memory in *Endgame* is enhanced.

Similarly, the knowledge that Beckett had been a victim of immobilising depression (TCD, 1933-35) enables the reader to evaluate Clov’s careful delineation. Martin Esslin, writing on *Endgame* in his influential study, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, is clearly impressed by Beckett’s accurate depiction. He notes that ‘we are [. . .] certainly confronted with a powerful expression of the sense of deadness, of leaden heaviness and hopelessness, that is experienced in states of deep depression’ (Esslin, 1962: 48). Of more interest, however, is his nervous disclaimer, in case people will think that he has gone too far:

This is not to say that Beckett gives a clinical description of psychopathological states. His creative intuition explores the elements of experience and shows to what extent all human beings carry the seeds of such depression and disintegration within the deeper layers of their personality.

(Esslin, 1962: 48)

The specific psychological knowledge and experience which enables Beckett to particularise is devalued when the playwright’s ‘universality’ is alleged. Esslin sanitises his initial authentic response by diverting it into less controversial channels. In some instances this trend has continued as Beckett’s brilliance in the ‘clinical [depiction] of psychological states’ is discounted with disdain. Paul Lawley, for instance, writing on ‘Embers: An Interpretation’, warns that ‘the psychologizing of characters is almost always a wrong move in the discussion of Beckett’s plays’ (in Gontarski, ed., 1993: 107). I have found the contrary to be true. By reading the psychological

works that Beckett studied in the thirties, one is freed from artificial embargoes placed on critical reception, and can pursue Beckett's informed insights. Complex studies of repression and evasion, such as those explored in the fifth chapter, probe the tangled intricacies of self-management and human interaction, while the focus on the discourse of repulsion, discussed in chapter four, compassionately foregrounds the painful isolation of the lonely and alienated beings of Beckett's world.

Because Beckett's drama offers such a comprehensive field of investigation into the cerebral and psychological depredations of memory, I have tended to focus almost exclusively on Beckett's plays. The novels, short stories and poems are also rich in the resonance of recollection, offering wonderful opportunities for further exploration by scholars interested in the field. By approaching the source of Beckett's characters' distress through the prism of his psychological knowledge of memory, in addition to insights offered in the *Proust* monograph, it is possible to explore what would otherwise be baffling behaviour. Director Herbert Blau's provocative view can then be as entertained as a possible option:

As regards the acting — and I have always felt this about Beckett's drama — the substance of it is realism in extremis. Which is to say that the realistic vision, its methodology, is taken about as far inside as it can go, interiorized so intensely that it seems to occur at the nerve ends.

(in Oppenheim, 1994: 53)

In the reception of his plays, Beckett also aimed at impact on 'the nerve ends' rather than undue reliance on the cerebral processes. The actress, Billie Whitelaw, concurs in believing that 'the words were just hooks on which to hang a particular state of mind'. She explains:

A lot of the work I did for Beckett [. . .] seemed to derive from *Not I* — consisting entirely of spoken thought, or of thoughts overheard — never presented in recognisable *dialogue*, but taking an audience into one's most private, unformed, semi-conscious, uncensored thoughts. It also seemed to me that Mouth was not going *out* to an audience; the audience had to be sucked into this rioting rambling hole [. . . Beckett] didn't want anything *presented* [. . .] He wanted to get to some unconscious centre.

(Whitelaw, 1995: 118,120)

Beckett himself underscored this response when he said of *Not I* to Schneider:

I hear it breathless, urgent, feverish, rhythmic, panting along, without due concern with intelligibility. Addressed less to the understanding than to the nerves of the audience which should in a sense *share her bewilderment*.

(in Harmon, ed., 1998: 283)

Although the psychological and mental states of Beckett's characters might become more comprehensible through an understanding of their memory-derived distress, this does not necessarily make them theatrically more intelligible. Beckett deliberately created many enigmatic and elusive plays which were designed to work on the emotions rather than the intellect, to 'bewilder' rather than to clarify. When *Not I* and *Play* are barely audible, or *Ghost Trio* and *A Piece of Monologue* barely visible, they are completely in accord with Beckett's intentions. In the crafting of his plays he often expunged specific detail to make them more vague, or altered the linear arrangement of presentation so that the form that he wanted would emerge more clearly. If this made his characters less dramatically accessible, it was part of his overall design. 'Make sense who may' (*WW*, 414: 199) seemed to typify his attitude to those who wanted clarity.

He made an exception for his directors, however. Some of his most revealing comments resulted from written responses to their enquiries. His instruction to Schneider that 'the only way to play [the hypomaniac Pozzo] is to play him mad' (in Harmon, 1998:6) is a case in point. These insights were *not* for public consumption, however, but were privileged information given in trust to realise the playwright's dramaturgical intentions. Beckett relied on the directors' integrity and discretion as they grappled with

the complex net of memoried states of being — the interplay of inner voices, the pluralisms of self-perception, the complexity of agency, of volition or its lack, the simultaneity of pasts and presents, the multiple modes of repetition and recall, of traces and patterns: which evoke a sense of our own trivial yet inevitable multiplicity, simultaneity, fragmentedness.

(Malkin, 1977: 26)

Particularly in the late plays, we are exposed to a frangible theatre of 'dispersal, plurality, and irreducible fragmentation' (Malkin, 1977: 26). Since many of Beckett's plays and dramaticules are expressly designed to intrigue and even to baffle, should all conjecture about these cryptic constructs be psychologically or medically resolved in the programme notes? Should a detailed synopsis attempt to solve difficulties of interpretation for the audience? My instinct dictates a

resolute no. The ‘forensic’ approach of the study seems hardly appropriate to the theatre, where one gathers multiple impressions on the wing. The audience’s surrender to light, darkness, half-light, speech and silence; to the tenuous dramaturgy fashioned from fragments, hardly accords with the pathological ‘labelling’ that Beckett deliberately avoids in his plays. He has crafted accurate behavioural patterns for his characters in accordance with his specialised knowledge, but has used these same patterns of conduct to admit ‘the confusion’ that bedevils human experience (Driver, 1961: 23).

Since ‘the confusion’ is an integral part of his dramatic design, the supply of reductive pat solutions would seem inappropriate to theatre goers seeking an authentic Beckettian experience. It would be ghastly to see bumbling caricatures of dementia substituting for Vladimir’s dignified assertion that ‘all mankind is us’ (*WFG*, 73: 2415): it would be risible to reduce tragic obsessive characters to inventories of compulsive psychological tics. In the late plays, too, it would be misguided to impose overdetermined psychological readings on performances that rely as much on enigmatic visual effects as they do on the text. S.E. Gontarski, in his foreword to the ‘shorter’ plays, stresses their performative significance:

From *Play* onwards, Beckett’s stage images would grow increasingly dehumanized, reified and metonymic, featuring dismembered or incorporeal creatures as Beckett’s became a theatre of body parts and spectres, a theatre striving for transparency rather than solidity, a theatre, finally, trying to undo itself.

(Gontarski, ed., 1999: xix)

Beckett’s work can be ‘undone’ in divergent ways, analytically as well as theatrically. I would maintain, therefore, that an eclectic approach to Beckett’s work would serve the scholar most comprehensively. Investigating Beckett’s grasp of memory contributes towards an understanding of the distress experienced by ‘yesterday’s deformities’: an examination of their discourse reveals the playwright’s brilliance in forcing recalcitrant words to unravel recollection. But these are strands among many. There are multiple ways of interpreting Beckett’s work, not all of them cerebral. What is intelligible in the study does not necessarily transfer in a direct fashion to the theatre. Poring over a text is not the same as attending a performance. I would argue, therefore, that Beckett scholars retain the informed position of those directors who were discreetly ‘in the

know', and that theatre-goers continue to be in thrall to the rhythms and difficult music of their own reception, as the players' footfalls tread the boards.

WORKS BY SAMUEL BECKETT

INCLUDING A LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Dates in brackets indicate first publication.

- APM *A Piece of Monologue*. (1979) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.
- ATF *All That Fall*. (1957) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.
- BC *... but the clouds ...* (1977) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.
- C *Cascando*. (1963) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.
- CT *Catastrophe*. (1984) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.
- CAG *Come and Go*. (1966) 1999 (revised text). S. E. Gontarski (ed.). *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett Volume IV. The Shorter Plays*. New York: Faber and Faber.
- D 'Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce' in *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*. 1929. Paris: Shakespeare and Co.
- EJ *Eh Joe*. (1967) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.
- EL *Eleuthéria*. (1947) 1995. (tr. Michael Brodsky). New York: Foxrock.
- EM *Embers*. (1959) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.
- END *Endgame*. (1958) 1992 (revised text). S. E. Gontarski (ed.). *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett Volume II. Endgame*. New York: Faber and Faber.
- EX *The Expelled*. (1946) 1995. S.E. Gontarski (ed.). *The Complete Short Prose*. New York: Grove Press.
- FIZ *Fizzles*. (1973-75) 1995. S.E. Gontarski (ed.). *The Complete Short Prose*. New York: Grove Press.
- F *Footfalls*. (1976) 1999 (revised text). S. E. Gontarski (ed.). *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett Volume IV. The Shorter Plays*. New York: Faber and Faber.
- GT *Ghost Trio*. (1976) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.

- HD *Happy Days*. (1961) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.
- K *Krapp's Last Tape*. (1958) 1992 (revised text). James Knowlson (ed.). *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett Volume III. Krapp's Last Tape*. London: Faber and Faber.
- MD *Malone Dies*. (1956) 1979. *The Beckett Trilogy*. London: Picador.
- MO *Molloy*. (1951) 1979. *The Beckett Trilogy*. London: Picador.
- M *Murphy*. (1938) 1973. London: Picador.
- NT *Nacht und Träume*. (1984) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.
- NI *Not I*. (1973) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.
- OI *Ohio Impromptu*. (1982) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.
- PL *Play*. (1964) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.
- P *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*. (Proust, 1931, with *Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*, 1965) 1987. London: Calder.
- R *Rockaby*. (1982) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.
- RRI *Rough for Radio I*. (1976) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.
- RRII *Rough for Radio II*. (1976) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.
- RTI *Rough for Theatre I*. (1976) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.
- RTII *Rough for Theatre II*. (1976) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.
- SS *Stirrings Still*. (1988) 1995. S. E. Gontarski (ed.). *The Complete Short Prose*. New York: Grove Press.
- TCD Beckett's handwritten correspondence with Tom MacGreevy is housed in the Archives of Trinity College, Dublin.
- TT *That Time*. (1975) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.
- TOT *The Old Tune*. (1960) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.

- U *The Unnamable*. (1958) 1979. *The Beckett Trilogy*. London: Picador.
- W *Watt*. (1953) 1970. New York: Grove Press.
- WFG *Waiting for Godot*. (1956) 1993 (revised text). Dougald McMillan and James Knowlson (eds). *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett Volume 1. Waiting for Godot*. London: Faber and Faber.
- WW *What Where*. (1984) 1999 (revised text). S. E. Gontarski (ed). *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett Volume IV. The Shorter Plays*. New York: Grove Press, Faber and Faber.
- WHO *Whoroscope*. 1930. Manuscript 3000, Reading Archives.
- WM *Words and Music*. (1962) 1986. *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber.

Beckett's handwritten correspondence with Tom MacGreevy is housed in the Archives of Trinity College, Dublin (TCD).

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- Where a considerably more recent edition of a text has been used, the original date of publication occurs in a bracket after the first date.

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