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Writing and the Rights of Reality

Usurpation and Potentiality in Derrida, Plato,
Nietzsche, and Beckett

Keith R. P. Lodge

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the award of the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy at The University of Durham**

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ABSTRACT

TITLE: WRITING AND THE RIGHTS OF REALITY: USURPATION AND POTENTIALITY IN
 DERRIDA, PLATO, NIETZSCHE AND BECKETT.
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The thesis critically evaluates Jacques Derrida's conferral of the rights of reality on writing, focussing on his theory of an *archē*-text in light of the speculative nature of this theory. The theory is initially considered in the context of Derrida's elucidation of the usurpatory status of writing within the Platonic and Nietzschean texts. This consideration reveals an admission of writing's usurpatory status by both writers while at the same time demonstrating their awareness of the intrinsically speculative nature of this view, the significance of writing lying in its ability to exteriorise the radically indeterminate status of consciousness in relation to reality rather than its ability to displace consciousness or reality. The analyses, therefore, not only bring the Derridean hypothesis of a repressive or phonocentric metaphysical *epistēmē* into question but also exhibit the historical and philosophical role of *potentiality* in relation to writing, writing's ultimate significance lying in its capacity to exteriorise our existence as a *mode of potentiality*. Accordingly, in the second half of the thesis the Derridean theory of writing is countered with a specifically Aristotelian theory of the text as it is exhibited in the prose of Samuel Beckett, an author whose significance lies in his close alignment with Derridean theory within contemporary criticism. It is demonstrated that this identification has obviated an awareness of the significance of potentiality within the Beckettian text, his work consequently being appraised in the previously neglected context of Aristotelian metaphysics.

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Declaration

The work in this research project has not previously been submitted to any examining body in this form.

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INTRODUCTION

WRITING AND THE RIGHTS OF REALITY

1

REALISM, IDEALISM AND THE EXTERIORITY OF THE TEXT

If one looks up the word ‘real’ in the Oxford English Dictionary, one will find not only the word’s definition (“Actually existing or present as a state or quality of things; having a foundation in fact; actually occurring or happening”) but also a citation from a letter to a 1966 issue of The Listener: “The Vice Chancellor of Lancaster University strongly believes ‘that the university must keep contact with the real world outside’. May I take this opportunity to ask (a) what is real about the real world? (b) why is it always outside?” Philosophically, these two questions are intertwined, one question providing the answer to the other. The traditional answer to the question of what makes the ‘real world’ *real* is that it *is* outside, this ‘real world’ not being contingent upon our experience of it. Reality, in spite of Berkeley’s arguments, does not *require* our presence, a fact which seems so obvious from a common sense standpoint that many philosophers can scarcely bring themselves to question it:

I regard the basic claim of external realism – that there exists a real world that is totally and absolutely independent of all our representations, all of our thoughts, feelings, opinions, language, discourse, texts, and so on – as so obvious, and indeed as such an essential condition of rationality, and even of intelligibility, that I am somewhat embarrassed to raise the question and to discuss the various challenges to this view. Why would anyone in his right mind wish to attack external realism? (Searle 14)

Historically, however, this is not so much a matter of *attacking* external realism as an inability to *verify* external reality, this being, for Kant, the scandal of philosophy itself. As Barry Stroud succinctly puts it: “If we treat outer objects as things in themselves, it is quite

impossible to understand how we could arrive at a knowledge of their reality outside us, since we have to rely merely on the representation that is in us" (171). If, therefore, it is its ability to exist independently of our awareness of it that makes the 'real world' *real*, then how can we affirm this reality apart from our awareness of it? Even if this external reality does exist, how can we establish that our apparent experience of it corresponds to its actuality? It is these essential questions, and their unanswerable nature, which form the basis of both the epistemological sceptic's case against realism and the idealism that arises from this line of reasoning. The argument is not so much that external reality does not exist (one can no more affirm its non-existence than one can affirm its existence) but, rather, that it cannot exist *for us*: in pragmatic terms both of these approaches amount to the same thing, for as Berkeley argues, if material reality exists independently of us then we can never know it, and if it does not, then nothing is changed¹.

Yet if the realist cannot surmount these seemingly incontrovertible objections, and is destined to accept idealism on some level, then this is not to say that the idealist altogether eludes the clutch of realism. Let us turn to the second question, for it is this question which leads us towards the contemporary theoretical outlook on this matter, and ultimately to the question of *writing*: "(b) why is it [reality] always outside?" The question not only raises the issue of why reality is necessarily 'outside' but also the converse of this question; why do we assume that representation is '*in us*'? It is this supposition that draws the boundary between an external universe of 'things in themselves' (external reality) and an internal universe of meaning (the mind and its representations). Yet what is this '*us*', this *self* that divides the world in two? Is not this self another ostensible point of reference that (following Berkeley) actually has no being apart from our consciousness of it? Evidently, if we cannot affirm "what is real about the real world" by virtue of our inability to affirm that it exists independently of discernment, then we can apply precisely the same stricture to this 'self'.

The idealist contention that reality is a mental construction, a representation which is ‘in us’, therefore, presupposes another reality, an enclosing self which exists independently of our consciousness of it. To declare that this ‘self’ *is* consciousness, that it is some form of transcendental ego, merely begs the question, for consciousness itself is other to our concept of consciousness, the referent of a signifier. It is clear, therefore, that the idealist stricture on reality puts the notion of consciousness itself in question, consciousness being merely another reality that purportedly exists independently of its representation. Does not, therefore, the idealist’s scepticism towards the idea of a mind-independent reality oblige him/her to be sceptical of *any* ‘reality’ which escapes ideality, including the reality of the mind, of our very self? As J. Hillis Miller asserts: “Nihilism is the nothing of consciousness when consciousness becomes the foundation of everything” (3). In order to evade nihilism idealism inevitably remains implicated in some form of transcendental realism, a necessity which Nietzsche identifies:

... the external world is the work of our organs? But then our body, as part of this external world, would be the work of our organs! But then our organs themselves would be – the work of our organs! It seems to me that this is a complete *reductio ad absurdum*, assuming that the concept of a *causa sui* is something fundamentally absurd. Consequently the external world is not the work of our organs -? (Beyond Good and Evil 212-13)

Idealism is thus intertwined with the external realism that it challenges: in order to offset one version of external reality, it invariably presupposes another version, whether this reality be the self, the mind, Berkeley’s God or Descartes’ evil demon. External reality, it would appear, is a theorem which is as unavoidable as our inability to existentially affirm this reality. As John Searle points out:

... it is wrong to represent external realism as the view that there are material objects in space and time, or that mountains and molecules, and so on, exist. Suppose there were no mountains and molecules, and no material objects in space and time. Then those would be facts about how the world is and thus

would presuppose external realism. That is, the negation of this or that claim about the real world presupposes that there is a way that things are, independently of our claims. (31)

Yet if idealism can never shake off the spectre of realism, it must be recalled that realism can never shake off the spectre of idealism; whatever external reality one presupposes it nevertheless remains a supposition. While reality *may* exist “independently of our claims” (as Searle asserts) it is equally true that it has no existence *for us* “independently of our claims”. Taking these two views together, it would seem that external reality can only ever be a potentiality, albeit an inescapable potentiality.

The reason why this historical *aporia* is summarised here is because it is this dilemma which informs contemporary critical theory, most specifically the post-structuralist or deconstructive theory which attempts to *pass through* this apparently inescapable metaphysical opposition. It is post-structuralism which reveals that “debates like this are essentially misconceived; that the whole long history of baffled encounters between ‘idealist’ and ‘realist’ positions has served to dissimulate their deeper collusion in the same metaphysical enterprise” (Norris 149). That the original questions that elicit our summary should have been posed in 1966 is prescient, even if it is coincidental. It was in 1966 that Jacques Derrida gave his ground-breaking address to a conference entitled “The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man” held at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, an address that has been called “a historic moment in the traffic of ideas between Europe and America” and “the moment at which ‘post-structuralism’ as a movement begins” (Lodge 107). It is in this address², given before such luminaries as Lucien Goldmann, Tzvetan Todorov, Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan, that Derrida implicitly poses the same questions as the correspondent to The Listener, albeit in a more sophisticated manner. In this address Derrida outlines the nature of an “event” or a “rupture” (351) in the structure of the metaphysical thought that has been identified, the structure of opposition between ‘inside’

and ‘outside’ which underpins a metaphysical *epistēmē* that is “as old as Western science and Western philosophy” (351). For Derrida, this *logocentric* tradition encompasses both realism and idealism since both are obliged to centre themselves on an external or self-present reality, whether this reality be the thing-in-itself, an essence or an origin, self-identity or unmediated consciousness. As Derrida puts it, the “matrix” of the history of metaphysics is

. . . the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence – *eidōs*, *archē*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *alētheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth. (353)

One can begin to gain some insight into this “rupture” if one follows the logical trajectory of the sceptical argument that has previously been outlined, rejecting *any* mind independent reality which exists apart from representation, a category which (as has been indicated) incorporates not only the material universe, but also the self and even the mind itself. What is left? What we have is an infinite field of representation which has no original referent, no exteriority or origin which can regulate this field in the way that (for example) concepts such as the ‘self’, the ‘mind’ or ‘consciousness’ limit representation for the idealist: as Derrida puts it, the “function” of the centre within the metaphysical *epistēmē* “was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure . . . but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of the structure” (352). Such a ‘play’ would not be caught up in the metaphysical opposition between realism and idealism, an ‘outer’ and an ‘inner’ world. Question “(b) why is it [reality] always outside?” and its converse, ‘why is representation always inside?’ become redundant for where, in the absence of any ‘outer’ world, would one draw the boundary between the ‘ideal’ and the ‘real’? How can one justifiably speak of an ‘inner’ world if there is no ‘outer’ world against which it can be defined as such or, as Christopher Ricks puts it, “if all is fictive,

against what does the fictive define itself?" (146). Alain Robbe-Grillet, writing in 1958, foreshadows this post-structuralist approach and eloquently captures this transgression between outside and inside, albeit in romantic rather than purely linguistic terms:

. . . the mountain may bring me for the first time the feeling of majesty. . . . This feeling would then develop within me and, proliferating, engender others: magnificence, prestige, heroism, nobility, pride. . . . It would be the same for each emotion, and in these ceaseless interchanges, multiplied to infinity, I would never again be able to find the true origin of anything. Was majesty first inside me, or outside me? The very question would lose all meaning. Nothing would be left between my self and the world but a sublime community of feelings. . . . These affective elements will come to be regarded as the profound reality of the material universe, the only reality, supposedly, worthy of my attention. ("Nature, Humanism, Tragedy" 368)

Similarly, in the absence of any demonstrable 'outer' world the limits of the 'inner' world give way, *not* to an all-inclusive ideality but to a play of representational supplements which in their infinitude, violate the distinction between idealism and realism, inner and outer, the origin *and* its representational supplement. As Derrida stresses, such distinctions conform

. . . to the logic of identity and to the principle of classical ontology (the outside is outside, being is, etc) but not to the logic of supplementarity, which would have it that the outside is inside, that the other and the lack come to add themselves as a plus that replaces a minus, that what adds itself to something takes the place of the default in the thing, that the default, as the outside of the inside, should already be within the inside, etc. (Grammatology 215)

As Robbe-Grillet's "affective elements . . . come to be regarded as the profound reality of the material universe", the "lack" of any external reality adds itself as "as a plus that replaces a minus", Derrida's "rupture" constituting the "historical usurpation and theoretical oddity that install[s] the image within the rights of reality" (Grammatology 37). Reality is no longer 'outside' for it "fall[s] into the exteriority of meaning" (Grammatology 13), a transgression which is also acknowledged by Michel Foucault in "What is an Author?" (1969): "Referring

only to itself, but without being restricted to the confines of its interiority, writing is identified with its own unfolded exteriority” (“What is an Author” 141).

As Foucault’s remark indicates, it is a contemporary recognition of the historical role of writing, and of its philosophical import, which occasions this rethinking of “the structurality of the structure” (“Structure, Sign and Play” 353) this being “the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse” (“Structure, Sign and Play” 354). It is the modern advent of writing that unveils the epistemological possibility of the all-encompassing field of play in question, the incessantly transgressive *archē*-text³ that breaches the metaphysical opposition. Before going on to detail why such an exteriority should be specifically identified with writing, however, it is already evident that the theoretical valorisation of writing could be characterised in terms of its negation of potentiality. The reason why the historical debate between realism and idealism has historically sustained itself is precisely because both of these positions *are* potentially valid. Historically, two possibilities are presented and neither can be ruled out or affirmed, hence the alleged historical ‘collusion’ between realists and idealists within the metaphysical *epistēmē*. The effect of introducing *writing* into the realist/idealist equation is to negate one possibility in favour of the other or, at the very least, to render one possibility (that of external reality) a philosophical luxury, there being no need for this extra-textual guarantor. Derrida may reject the accusations of idealism that are regularly levelled against his theories but there can be little doubt that his notion of a writing which is not limited by any pre-textual exteriority has an idealist lineage. The theoretical introduction of writing constitutes the means through which idealism transcends its own boundaries to such an extent that the ideal can take on the characteristics of the real, there being no externality which can contest the text’s *rights* to reality. One historical potentiality is wholly

resolved in favour of the other, the rejection of any form of external, independent, reality allowing idealism to reach its logical, textual, conclusion.

The purpose of this project is to consider this installation of the text within the “rights of reality” in the context of three theories of writing that have both influenced Derrida and have been interpreted in terms of his theory of the *archē*-text. In light of the subject, the question which faces us has two interrelated facets: it must be asked whether the text can legitimately lay claim to the rights with which Derrida would honour it and whether the text truly evades the contesting *potentiality* which is non-textual reality. Since this is a question of writing in general, rather than of particular writers and their prejudices, it is necessary that these questions be considered in relation to a spectrum of theories. At one extreme there is Plato, he who could justifiably be deemed the father of logocentrism in the Derridean view; for Derrida, it is the Platonic discussion of writing in the *Phaedrus* which constitutes the inaugural moment in the historical repression of writing. At the other extreme there is Samuel Beckett, a writer who Derrida considers to be so closely aligned with deconstructive approach that he cannot be deconstructed⁴, a prevalent attitude that has deeply affected Beckett studies in general. Bridging these two is the intermediate figure of Nietzsche, whose pertinence stems from his contradictory nature⁵. On one hand, his egoistic valorisation of writing and his attempts to overturn metaphysical categories render him an influential precursor to the deconstructive approach and writing’s historic installation within the ‘rights of reality’; on the other hand, however, Nietzsche insists on the essentially biologic nature of his theories, an insistence which would seem to entail the necessity of an acceptance of the pre-textual reality of the body and, consequently, of the empirical reality in which this body is concerned. Constantly allowing for the *possibility* that textuality may bear no relationship to an extra-textual guarantor, this assessment will nonetheless investigate the manner in which these authors interpret the relationship between writing and reality within their texts,

and also the manner in which the texts themselves relate to reality. The question is, of course, whether these two factors adequately reflect each other, a failure by the author to fully account for the written status of his own work constituting, for Derrida, an instance of the historical repression of writing. Accordingly, we must address the associated issue of whether these texts retain the possibility of an extra-textual reality as a result of their conscious or unconscious implication in this repressive tradition or as a result of a genuine philosophical inability to elude the question of reality even *via* recourse to writing. Derrida's characterisation of the metaphysical *epistēmē* and its attitudes to writing are thus brought into question (and we should note on this point that this characterisation *presupposes* the validity of Derrida's theory of writing). It is this issue that constitutes a distinction between the Derridean conception of textuality and a conception in which the text, rather, exists as a *mode of potentiality*. In this relation I will propose that the historical/ philosophical significance of writing does not lie in its ability to be installed within the "rights of reality" but in its ability to disclose that *consciousness* has never been installed within these rights; in other words writing exteriorises the fact that we *exist* as a mode of potentiality. All of our analyses, therefore, will contemplate the neglected role of potentiality in relation to writing, whether this is the potentiality that is exteriorised (Plato) or utilised (Nietzsche). This will ultimately demand an assessment of writing in its neglected Aristotelian context, Aristotle's theory of potentiality being the most historically influential. Ironically, it is the 'proto-deconstructionist' Samuel Beckett who offers the most overt modern example of an Aristotelian conception of textuality. Consequently, the examination of Plato and Nietzsche will constitute a critique of the Derridean view, of its failure to fully *account* for the status of writing in these texts, while our examination of Beckett will constitute an overt exemplification of the Aristotelian alternative to this view. Before turning to these issues,

however, we must return to our examination of Derrida's theories, for we must know what is at stake in these deliberations.

2

THE GROUNDS OF DECONSTRUCTION

Let us turn to the question of why the Derridean play of signification should explicitly be identified with writing. This question can only be answered by identifying both the historical value of writing, its place in the metaphysical tradition that has been outlined, and its philosophical role in modern critical theory. It is in the interplay of these two factors that the profound significance of writing is exposed and, as we shall see, it is in this interplay that the problematic nature of Derridean theory becomes evident. Before tracing this interplay, however, it must be recognised that to speak of the historical 'origins' of Derrida's exteriorising "rupture" is, in one sense, a nonsense, it being implicit in the theory of the *archē*-text that this text has *always already* been an "unfolded exteriority". Derrida discloses this fact in his 1966 address: in speaking of the "event" at issue, he subsequently feels bound to add the proviso, ". . . if this loaded word did not entail a meaning which it is precisely the function of structural – or structuralist – thought to reduce or suspect" ("Structure, Sign and Play" 351)⁶. Such a "precaution" ("Structure, Sign and Play" 351) constitutes Derrida's admission that everything has always already been discourse, the "rupture" which is writing being that which, "although it has always been at work, has always been neutralized or reduced . . . by a process of giving" the metaphysical structure "a center or of referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin" ("Structure, Sign and Play" 352). To refuse to accept that the *archē*-text has always been a pre-condition of any 'originary' reality is to acquiesce to a repressive tradition in which "[t]he historical usurpation and theoretical oddity that install the

image within the rights of reality are determined as the *forgetting* of a simple origin. . . . Forgetfulness because it is a mediation and the departure of the logos from itself. Without writing, the latter would remain within itself" (Grammatology 36-37). Yet obviously, one cannot forget that which has never been remembered in the first place, the usurpation under discussion being a purely "historical usurpation" rather than a philosophical event: "Writing did not 'enter' philosophy, it was already there" (A Taste for the Secret 8). There has never been any 'originary' presence that has not been logically preceded by representation, by *archē*-writing: "There is an originary violence of writing because language is first . . . writing. "Usurpation" has always already begun" (Grammatology 37).

Nonetheless, if we bear this proviso in mind, one can trace the evolution of this contemporary acknowledgment of writing's philosophical import, its extension from a supplementary mode of communication to an all-encompassing text which precedes and presents 'reality'. The most obvious point of derivation is Ferdinand de Saussure's A Course in General Linguistics with its insistence on the arbitrariness (i.e. the non-natural character) of the sign, and its recognition that language consists only of differences with no positive terms. It is this Saussurean awareness that eventually leads (*via* Russian Formalism and the Prague Linguistic Circle) to the French Structuralism of the 1950s and 1960s with its privileging of the linguistic system. The most noteworthy individual in this respect is Claude Lévi-Strauss, Derrida's 1966 address unambiguously taking its theoretical impetus from Lévi-Strauss' structural ethnography. Lévi-Strauss' structuralism is the product of his exploration of the Saussurean tenets of arbitrariness and difference, an exploration which culminates in his acknowledgment that empirical manifestations of cultural phenomena, like linguistic utterances, can only be significant in the context of the system of differential relations which constitute them, that which Lévi-Strauss, following Saussure, designates *la langue* in distinction to *la parole* (the individual utterance). Within structuralism, it is the

failure to appreciate the significance of the differential relations between phenomena in distinction to the specificity of the phenomena themselves that leads to a privileging of consciousness and the intentional object rather than the system that is the true source of this significance. The phenomenological philosophy of the period, or the existential philosophy that finds its momentum in Husserlian phenomenology, is most frequently charged with disregarding the philosophical consequences of language. The dominant figure in this respect is undoubtedly Jean-Paul Sartre whose Husserlian re-reading of Heidegger suggests that man has no being other to his consciousness in the world, thus implying that consciousness is absolutely continuous with its intentional object, language being transparent in our relation with the world. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Jacques Derrida's abandoned doctoral thesis should be entitled "The Ideality of the Literary Object in Husserl" (commenced 1957), this early study of Husserl being overtaken by the linguistic revolution which is structuralism⁷, ultimately leading to Derrida's deconstruction of Husserlian thought in his Speech and Phenomena (1967). It is this revolution which also displaces the early influence of Sartre on Derrida, Derrida subsequently expressing his inability to understand how someone as influential as Sartre could be wrong on so many issues (Norris¹²). Yet, whatever the faults of phenomenology and existential humanism there can be no doubt that it provided the theoretical drive towards a salvaging of Saussurean linguistics, and language itself, from the philosophical obscurity to which it had been assigned in contemporary thought. As Michel Foucault emphasises in conversation with Gérard Raulet:

. . . everything which took place in the sixties arose from a dissatisfaction with the phenomenological theory of the subject, and involved different escapades, subterfuges, break-throughs, according to whether we use a negative or a positive term, in the direction of linguistics, psychoanalysis or Nietzsche. ("Structuralism and Post-structuralism" 199)

Clearly, however, post-structuralism is not merely an extension of the structuralist endeavour to challenge this phenomenological privileging of consciousness; as the theoretical expansion of writing suggests, it is also a *critique* of structuralism. As Derrida indicates in his 1966 speech, the theoretical value of structuralism lies in its appreciation that the arbitrary nature of the sign renders any ontological distinction between the ‘cultural’ and the ‘natural’ problematic (“Structure, Sign and Play” 359), this being the means through which Lévi-Strauss facilitates the application of linguistic structures to supposedly “natural” phenomena. It is at this point that the contemporary “rupture” begins to intersect with the “rupture” which has always been at work within the metaphysical epoch for it is plainly a short step from Lévi-Strauss’ position to the recognition that there is no ‘natural’ hierarchy between speech and writing, a step that Derrida subsequently takes in his most influential work, Of Grammatology (1967). For Derrida, this elision of the hierarchical relationship between speech and writing is the key fact which structuralism fails to unearth from Saussurean linguistics. Structuralism thus demonstrates its continuing attachment to a logocentric tradition which, from Plato on, has repressed writing and its effects in favour of the living presence of speech, violating the very principles of ‘arbitrariness’ and ‘difference’ to which Saussurean linguistics points and even Saussure himself does not escape this accusation as Of Grammatology (*passim*) demonstrates. Derrida does not specifically mention writing in his 1966 lecture but he nonetheless utilises Lévi-Strauss’ recognition of the purely methodological, rather than ontological, value of the natural/ cultural distinction as a means of presaging his deconstruction of phonocentrism, revealing “two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play”:

The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned towards the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics

or of ontotheology – in other words, throughout his entire history – has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play. (“Structure, Sign and Play” 369-70)

Derrida thus prefigures the divergence between the metaphysical *epistēmē* and a contemporaneity that acknowledges the philosophical significance of writing, Of Grammatology being a manifestation of this contemporary recognition. It is this work which unquestionably reveals both the necessity of writing in this attempt to pass beyond man and humanism and the necessity of Derrida’s own work in deconstructing the historical repression of writing:

By a slow movement whose necessity is hardly perceptible, everything that for at least some twenty centuries tended toward and finally succeeded in being gathered under the name of language is beginning to let itself be transferred to, or at least summarized under, the name of writing. By a hardly perceptible necessity, it seems as though the concept of writing – no longer indicating a particular, derivative, auxiliary form of language in general (whether understood as communication, relation, expression, signification, constitution of meaning or thought, etc), no longer designating the exterior surface, the insubstantial double of a major signifier, *the signifier of a signifier* – is beginning to go beyond the extension of language. In all senses of the word, writing *comprehends* language. (Grammatology 7)

The theoretical expansion of writing can thus be seen as the ultimate culmination of Saussure’s recognition that language consists of only differences with no positive terms, a fact which obviates the distinction between speech and writing since neither articulates a pre-existing meaning. Difference, or *archē*-writing, is, and has always been, the very condition of meaningful being rather than its reflection.

We are thus dealing with two definitions of writing and two advents of writing. Firstly, we have the historical advent of writing, the production of words on the page, the empirical script that represents or reminds one of an originary speech, the *effect* of the cause that is the author. Secondly, we have the contemporary, philosophical, advent of writing in its far-reaching sense, the epistemological opening up of the field of representation under

discussion, this being an *archē*-writing which usurps and has always already usurped the originary position of 'reality'. The Aristotelian definition of writing as "*the signifier of a signifier*", that which merely symbolises spoken words (*De Interpretation* I.i.), is superseded by a definition in which writing acquires the characteristics of the Kantian *a priori*, now 'denoting' the very condition of knowledge itself. In other words writing is no longer the effect of a pre-existing, external reality but a prerequisite of 'reality'. Fundamentally, this reversal reflects the usurpation of reality within the process of consciousness, thus placing the notion selfhood in crisis. While representation is, hypothetically, the effect of a causal reality (whether defined in terms of an external referent or the body), a *supplement* to the origin, it is nonetheless apparent that such representation logically precedes any awareness of this 'exteriority'. A reversal occurs, there being no 'reality' *for us* in the absence of the representation which makes this 'reality' possible, representation being that which permits it to be determined as a presence. Indeed, from this standpoint, there is no originary 'us', no self and no enclosing consciousness, in the absence of the representation that logically precedes and makes these concepts possible. In this relation one should note the syntax of Descartes' famous pronouncement that "I think therefore I am" ("*cogito ergo sum*")⁸, the identification of the first term as 'thought' rather than signification presupposing the very existence which is subsequently established in the predicate. The question that Descartes' claim raises, therefore, is whether thought demonstrates the existence of the self or whether thought (or more appropriately, *signification*) produces the 'existence' of this self. This difference is most frequently articulated in contemporary discourse in the distinction between selfhood and subjectivity: ". . . language knows a 'subject', not a 'person', and this subject, empty outside the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together', suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it" (Barthes "The Death of the Author" 145). Within post-structuralism the subject is not a precondition of meaning but an effect of the

meaning that necessarily precedes it. Moreover, if this origin must differ from itself in signifying itself (i.e. becoming self-aware by positing itself in language) then this self-differentiation has *now* always already occurred; no matter how far one traces signification, all that one will find is more signification, more supplements to an eternally absent origin. This is precisely why Derrida reformulates difference as *différance*, a neologism that combines the senses of ‘to differ’ and ‘to defer’. It is *différance* that sustains and logically precedes “this play of representation” in which “the point of origin becomes ungraspable. There are things like reflecting pools, and images, an infinite reference from one to the other, but no longer a source, a spring. There is no longer a simple origin” (*Grammatology* 36). It is in light of this infinite play, this “game [*jeu*] that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits” (Foucault “What is an Author?” 141) that Foucault declares that we must return to the question of the subject

. . . not in order to re-establish the theme of an originating subject, but to grasp the subject’s points of insertion, modes of functioning, and system of dependencies. . . . In short, it is a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analysing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse. (“What is an Author?” 158)

The ‘effect’ thus arrogates the position of the ‘cause’, representation or writing being “the origin of the origin” (*Grammatology* 61). In other words the ‘origin’ (however it is formulated) is never the origin but another supplement to the representation that precedes it, a supplement to what is always *already* a supplement. Any originary or causal reality is the product of this textual play of signification, a reversal that Barthes famously applies to the notion of authorship:

The Author is thought to nourish the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child. In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing. . . . For him . . . the hand, cut off from any

voice . . . traces a field without origin – or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language that ceaselessly calls into question all origins (“The Death of the Author” 146)

To put it simply, the originary Author does not exist apart from the writing which defines him as such, a writing which always necessarily precedes this ‘origin’ in the same way that representation always precedes any ‘originary’ notion of self-hood or, for that manner, any notion of an ‘exterior’ or ‘causal’ reality.

That such a “field without origin” should be designated writing therefore, is a manifestation of the fact that writing has historically been seen as a mere supplement to speech and the self-presence that is its cognate. Within writing’s second advent this supplement historically usurps the originary position of speech, and is philosophically revealed to have always usurped this origin. In acknowledging that the supplement is a necessary pre-condition to any ‘origin’ one recognises that the difference between speech and writing, origin and representation, has always already inhabited the voice, rupturing the self-identity or self-presence of this transcendental signified⁹. This *archē*-writing is always already in place as the pre-condition of the ‘originary’ voice, being the difference “that takes place *before* and *within* speech” (*Grammatology* 315) or the “[s]upplement of (at) the [o]rigin” (*Grammatology* 313).

For Derrida, therefore, the magnification of the philosophical significance of writing is bound to the historical definition of writing as a mere supplement to speech, that which ‘stands in’ for the living presence of the speaker or the author. It is only as a supplement to this *logos* that writing accrues its philosophical significance for it is in this role that writing exteriorises the profound significance of difference within the constitution of meaning, this being the *a priori* which logically precedes any determination of being as presence. Derrida, therefore, cannot simply jettison the metaphysical tradition for it is precisely this tradition which allocates writing its strategic value as a supplement, a status which allows the

contemporary theorist access to the boundless realm of the *archē*-text *via* writing. The “historical usurpation” of reality by a writing that has, philosophically, always already usurped reality, reveals that writing has a methodological rather than an ontological significance. This historically strategic value is reflected in the value that Derrida would also assign to the *archē*-trace, this being

. . . the possibility of the spoken word, then of the “*graphie*” in the narrow sense, the birthplace of “usurpation,” denounced from Plato to Saussure, this trace is the opening of the first exteriority in general, the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside . . .
(Grammatology 70)

One can get some idea of the strategic role of this “concept” that “destroys its name” (Grammatology 61) if one contemplates Derrida’s declaration that ““Usurpation” has always already begun” (Grammatology 37). Such a declaration, of course, logically entails that there has never been a usurpation or an origin *to* usurp, a fact which naturally prompts the question as to why Derrida should employ the concept of ‘usurpation’ at all. Likewise, why use the implicitly logocentric term ‘supplement’ if there is no origin to which writing *is* a supplement? For Derrida, it is only through this strategically posited usurpation (and, therefore, a strategically posited origin) that the critic can gain theoretical access to the play of textuality. For example, if we *assume* that a pre-semantic origin differs from, and supplements, itself in signifying itself, then subsequently this origin has never existed in the absence of the difference which logically precedes its determination, its installation within the ‘*rights* of reality’, just as there has never been a reality which has not been preceded by the ‘supplement’ which is *archē*-writing. The “central presence . . . has never been itself, has always already been exiled from itself into its own substitute. The substitute does not substitute itself for anything which has somehow existed before it” (“Structure, Sign and Play” 353). Regardless of how far one traces the origin, all that one will exhume is a writing,

a pre-ontological difference which is, or has been, always already in place. The originary instance of usurpation that we *assumed*, therefore, has never occurred: “The trace is the erasure of selfhood, of one’s own presence, and is constituted by the threat or anguish of its irremediable disappearance, of the disappearance of its disappearance” (“Freud and the Scene of Writing” 289). The strategic hypothesis of a usurpation thus permits Derrida to demonstrate that this usurpation logically entails its own erasure, leaving only the transgressive *archē*-text which has been exteriorised in this process, that which takes, and has always taken, the place of the origin: “. . . the value of the transcendental arche [archie] must make its necessity felt before letting itself be erased. The concept of the arche-trace must comply with that necessity and that erasure” (*Grammatology* 61)¹⁰. Correspondingly, writing’s purely historical status as a supplement to speech lends it strategic value as that which theoretically exposes the *archē*-text: this text, of course, has always already supplanted any originary reality thus *negating* writing’s supplementary status¹¹. As Derrida strategically utilises the usurpation in order that he can exteriorise textuality, he strategically hijacks the implicitly logocentric term ‘supplement’ as a weapon against logocentrism, disclosing the supplement at the origin. The inevitability of delineating the Derridean field of play in terms of writing, therefore, is a *historical* inevitability rather than a philosophical inevitability, this destiny being a consequence of writing’s traditional definition as a supplement.

3

USURPING THE TEXT

Since the publication of *Of Grammatology* and the post-structuralist ‘invasion’ of discourse there can be few, if any, areas of modern thought which have remained untouched by this question of writing, the effects of the historical “‘event’” or “‘rupture’” under

consideration being felt (albeit to varying degrees) in almost every form of intellectual enquiry. As Richard Rorty asserts in acknowledging the ubiquity of this transformation: “In the last century there were philosophers who argued that nothing exists but ideas. In our century there are people who write as if there were nothing but texts” (139)¹². Rorty’s allusion to Derrida’s much disputed declaration that “[t]here is nothing outside of the text [there is no outside text; *il n’y a pas de hors-texte*]” (Grammatology 158) is indicative of Jacques Derrida’s central role in any current discussion of writing, a discussion which tends to be divided along the lines of an Anglo-American analytical or empirical tradition which remains obstinately rooted in the age of metaphysics and a French theory which is recurrently seen as being obfuscatory or philosophically suspect¹³. As Edith Kurzweil maintains: “Structuralism could not become popular in America in the way that it did in France. . . . For the pursuit of knowledge, in France and America, proceeds from different traditions: we are empirical, the French are philosophical . . .” (243). Within this debate Derrida’s theories have a greater import because they not only influence contemporary philosophical attitudes towards writing but also demand a re-evaluation of the history of philosophy itself. It is Derrida who most vehemently insists that the exigent question of writing, of difference, has been neglected in the metaphysical *epistēmē*, which is why the second advent of writing, the contemporary ‘invasion’ of discourse, is necessarily revisionist in nature. However, one must be cautious with the word ‘revisionist’ here for it is evidently not the case that ‘writing’ in the wider, quasi-transcendental, sense is a product of deconstruction, that which is subsequently applied to the history of philosophy. This second advent is, rather, the discovery that any historical positing of a grounding presence or reality has already, necessarily, presupposed a system of differences that allows and contests this positing. Of Grammatology is a product of this consciousness, being a work which demonstrates that writing and its profound effects have been repressed in favour of the logocentric belief in a

self-present reality which ontologically precedes, grounds, authorises or/and limits the play of signification, a belief which (as we have seen) informs idealism as well as realism¹⁴:

The epoch of the logos . . . debases writing considered as the mediation of mediation and as a fall into the exteriority of meaning. To this epoch belongs the difference between signified and signifier, or at least the strange separation of their “parallelism,” and the exteriority, however extenuated of one to the other. (*Grammatology* 13)

If writing now “invade[s] the universal problematic” then this invasion is restricted to contemporary critical theory, for it is an appreciation that the historical, metaphysical system has always already been ‘invaded’ by the writing that it represses which characterises this coming to awareness. A reassessment of historical instances of this repression thus becomes essential, an archaeology that brings to light the manner in which the texts that form the basis of the history of metaphysics in some sense deconstruct (or have already deconstructed) themselves. This is why Derrida’s deconstructive project has consisted of an assiduous re-reading of these grounding texts, excavating and unravelling any attempt to logocentrically subordinate the play of textuality to an external reality, an attempt which unfailingly presupposes the very writing that it endeavours to repress, the *archē*-writing or the *archē*-text that makes this ‘reality’ possible.

Evidently then, there is a certain inevitability in Derrida’s construal of the metaphysical *epistēmē* as that which represses writing. Such a construal is an obligatory product of Derrida’s absolute faith in his theory of the text for it is *only* in wholly accepting the issue of writing as being that which exteriorises the ‘usurping’ play of textuality that the metaphysical *epistēmē* can be delineated in such terms. The transgressive nature of writing, the discovery that there has never been any self-present reality beyond the text, is, after all, the very reason why writing has *been* historically repressed. Derrida thus overturns the continuity of the historical/ philosophical process of knowledge, it not being the case that

he deductively scrutinises the legitimacy of his own arguments in light of his predecessor's work, but that he necessarily presupposes the legitimacy of his view of writing in examining these preceding arguments. This is the reason why Derrida can declare, in his famous deconstruction of Rousseau's prioritising of speech over writing, that "[i]n a certain way, I am . . . within Rousseau's text" (Grammatology 160). The textuality that Derrida charts is, so he argues, already innate to the works that he reads, buried beneath and disturbing the surface meaning of these works and their metaphysical assumptions, marginalised even as those margins dispute the priority of that which defines them as peripheral:

My principal interests have tended towards the great canon of philosophy – Plato, Kant, Hegel, Husserl; but, at the same time, towards the so-called 'minor' loci of their texts, neglected problematics, or footnotes – things that can irritate the system and at the same time account for the subterranean region in which the system constitutes itself by repressing what makes it possible, which is not systematic. (A Taste for the Secret 5)

As a result, Derrida's readings are always empathetic with what is actually going on in the text in spite of the manifest differences between the explicit import of the texts under consideration and his theory of writing. Text and reading always coincide since the former cannot escape the *writing* on which the latter is based. As Seán Burke realises, this places the theorist in an exceptional position in relation to the conventional practice:

What distinguishes Derridean revisionism from any other . . . is that this proximity is not necessarily the outcome of a continuity between Derrida's 'ideas' (if indeed there are such things), and those of the authors he reads, but that it arises rather from a unique approach to the act of philosophising. If Derrida is to be remembered as a great philosopher, it will be as the individual in whom – for the first time – the philosopher becomes exclusively a reader-critic. All philosophy begins with the reading of philosophy, most philosophers take the work of another philosopher and begin their careers with a critique of that work even if it is not explicitly proffered in this form. Yet, with Derrida, the task of philosophy is an interminable rereading in the closest possible manner, a constant working into the already-written. Unlike the philosophers he deconstructs, Derrida never elects to reach that stage when his texts discuss problematics on their own terms, but rather must formulate, interrogate, deconstruct those problematics through other

eyes, hear their resonances with another ear. . . . Indeed, Derrida has himself said that his work is ‘entirely consumed in the reading of other texts’, and the word ‘consumed’ should be given its full emphasis here, for no other philosopher, or critic even, has ever buried his work so deeply in the resources, conceptuality, and language of the texts he reads. . . . the Derridean text is always at risk of disappearance into the world of the other. (Death and Return of the Author 167-68)

Yet is it really the case that the Derridean text is “at risk of disappearance into the world of the other”? Is it not rather the case that the “other”, the text under discussion, like external reality itself, is at risk of disappearance into to the world of Derrida, the world of an infinite *writing*? To identify these two worlds is not an overstatement; Derrida’s readings are, after all, supplements to the texts in question, a supplement and a writing that supposedly inhabits the original text and has always inhabited these texts. In recognising this habitation, and in allowing himself to be consumed in these texts, Derrida’s readings imply a superlatively objective status, a reading that is not effected by the theorist’s own prejudices or desires, or by any critical intention. Derrida, it would seem, does not *appear* in his own writings, these commentaries relying on the resources, concepts and language of the texts in question. As Christopher Norris asserts in relation to Derrida’s *Glas*, the text

. . . can nowhere be reduced to some privileged voice, some self-present source of meaning and truth. It is pointless to ask who is speaking in any given passage of this text, whether Hegel, Genet, Derrida *ipse* or some other ghostly intertextual ‘presence’. For there is no last word, no metalanguage or voice of authorial control that would ultimately serve to adjudicate the matter. (64)

Yet what status does this assign Derrida’s text (if one can continue to speak of such a thing)? If there is no “voice of authorial control” to “adjudicate the matter”, then doesn’t this *make* this text, this reading, the “last word” on the matter? Likewise, if this reading is not metalinguistic, being a reading which is intrinsic to the text under discussion, is not this an indication that this reading is unconditionally identifiable with the text read, thus precluding

any attempt to challenge this interpretation? If it is pointless to ask who is speaking in the text, then *how does* one attempt to interrogate Derrida's reading, an interrogation that necessarily implies a discrepancy between the text read and the reading, between (for example) the Hegelian text and the Derridean text? In refusing to ask who is speaking here, we elide both Derrida and Hegel into the oblique, neutral space which is writing, for it is writing which speaks here, an incontestable writing which 'Derrida's' text represents, the *archē*-writing which inhabits all texts and, indeed, the very fabric of 'reality' itself.

In the wider philosophical context, Derrida's usurpation of authorial intention finds its analogy in this textual usurpation of metaphysical reality. It is in wholly accepting that writing possesses the philosophical value that Derrida assigns to it that one's view of the history of philosophy undergoes conversion, the conventional view that a failure to reconcile realism and idealism is the result of a genuine philosophical *aporia* being outstripped by a view in which both are the consequence of a failure to submit to the play of textuality. It is as though the answers to the questions that philosophers have always posed on this issue have been available since the historical advent of writing, it being a refusal to pose the question of writing which explains why these answers have not been forthcoming. Such a lack is also allied to the philosophical unwillingness or failure to relinquish the existentially comforting notion of a transcendental reality (whatever form it may take), again necessitating a repression of writing. It is these two factors which reflect the dual obligation of Derrida's theory of writing, these obligations being the means through which the deconstructive approach to textuality justifies itself. Firstly, Derrida's theory must promote writing as that offers access to the boundless play of signification, this being the means through which Derrida passes through the metaphysical opposition. Secondly, and consequently, Derrida's theory must contest any transcendental reality that imposes a limit on this text since the re-imposition of this externality would demote the deconstructive approach to a form of

idealism. In other words there can be no acceptance of the repressive nature of the metaphysical *epistēmē* unless one completely accepts both the philosophical value that is allocated to writing and the claim that the play of textuality is not dependent on an extra- or pre- textual reality. Derrida's work continually exhibits these obligations: in discussing the notion of matter, for instance, he asserts that he has not often used this word because "this concept has been too often reinvested with "logocentric" values, values associated with those of thing, reality, presence in general . . ." (Positions 64). He goes on to demonstrate that such a refusal is a manifestation of his unqualified assurance in his theory of the text:

. . . the signifier "matter" appears to me problematical only at the moment when its reinscription cannot avoid making of it a new fundamental principle which, by means of a theoretical regression, would be reconstituted into a "transcendental signified." . . . It then becomes an ultimate referent, according to the classical logic implied by the value of the referent, or it becomes an "objective reality" absolutely "anterior" to any work of the mark, the semantic content of a form of presence which guarantees the movement of the text from the outside. (Positions 65)

It is these obligations which constitute the space between the critic and his object of study, it being an obvious yet not insignificant fact that the writers who have been subject to Derridean deconstruction, unlike Derrida himself, are under no obligation to unquestioningly accept the validity of his theories, the very validity which *defines* these texts as repressive. The obligation to evade the transcendental guarantor that is material reality, for example, may apply to the deconstructive critic and yet the writers who have been subject to this deconstructive criticism are not subject to this obligation. The onus is on Derrida here and not on the texts that he studies. One could, of course, argue that it is writing, and not Derrida, which enforces these demands, as would be suggested by the anonymous status of the Derrida which (for example) is "within Rousseau's text" (Grammatology 160): yet aside from the fact that this argument entails that Derrida has an unquestionable access to the truth of writing (and indeed to the truth of the *being* which is impossible to differentiate from

writing), this position passes over the fact that his theory of writing *is* a theory, a hypothesis, a possibility. Derrida himself concedes this in stressing that these theories are not meant to be assertions that we are “imprisoned in language” but are meant, rather, “[t]o distance . . . the habitual structure of reference, to challenge or complicate our common assumptions about it”, a distancing which “does not amount to saying that there is *nothing* beyond language” (Kearney 124). A great deal hangs on the question of the speculative nature of Derrida’s work for, as has been shown, his construal of the metaphysical *epistēmē* in terms of its repression of writing is predicated on the philosophical value that he assigns to writing, on the fact that his description of writing and its theoretical consequences coincide with the actuality of its operations and effects, an identity which is never seriously in question for Derrida. To reduce this theory to a mere speculation, therefore, is to simultaneously reduce his characterisation of the metaphysical *epistēmē* to a speculation. This opens up the possibility that instances of ‘repression’ are actually manifestations of the fact that philosophers, and philosophy *itself*, are not under the same obligations as the deconstructive critic, their fidelity being to an undiscovered *truth* (even if this is the ‘truth’ that there *is* no truth) rather than to a contestation of logocentrism *via* recourse to the question of writing. Clearly, in presupposing the validity of the Derridean theory of writing there is always a risk of unwarranted revision, a risk that this theory does not in fact mirror the nature of the metaphysical epoch, undoing its repression of writing, but, rather, imposes the repression onto the history of philosophy, this being the means through which the deconstructive approach justifies itself. If to accept the legitimacy of Derrida’s theory is to presuppose a metaphysical epoch in which writing has been debased then one may easily remain blind to points of genuine resistance to this theory within this epoch. Worse still, such points of resistance may be dismissed as mere instances of repression when they actually represent a

genuine inability to accept the text and its 'rights to reality', it not being the case that the question of writing is not posed but that it *is* posed only for it to be found unanswerable.

What characterises all of the writers who will be discussed in this project is an awareness of this radically indeterminate nature of the text, the irresolvable nature of the problem that writing exteriorises. Plato, for example, renders Derrida's characterisation of the metaphysical *epistēmē* problematic at its very inception by accepting the transgressive view of textuality *as a possibility*; indeed, the *Phaedrus* can be seen as a self-conscious and performative exteriorisation of this possibility. This, however, is not to say that Plato unequivocally accepts the text's 'rights to reality', it rather being the case that these rights can never be ratified. Moreover, in the historical context of a society based on an unquestioned oral or mythological tradition, Plato's refusal of these rights cannot be validly seen as the product of a phonocentric prejudice against writing; on the contrary, this refusal is the product of his desire to refute any attempted *reduction* of writing to a 'reality', to the monologic status of oral poetry or myth. Such a reduction, if it could be ratified, would constitute the closure of the imaginative space which writing opens up in exteriorising the fact that consciousness itself has never been installed within these rights. This denial of human potentiality clearly manifests itself in Derrida's failure to account for the redemptive nature of the Nietzschean text, for as Nietzsche recognises, the retention of this space of potentiality, the "old *gap* in human knowledge" (On the Genealogy of Morals 556), simultaneously demands a retention of the *logos* *as* a potentiality. In Nietzsche's case it is the body that constitutes this potentiality, that which defers any final installation of the text within the 'rights of reality' until the point of death, that which defines *life itself* as a mode of potentiality, of self-overcoming. Both of these writers, in spite of their apparent differences, *accept* the speculative nature of the value that Derrida assigns to writing and thus accept that textuality is inhabited by two irresolvable and inescapable possibilities. Consequently,

Derrida's attempt to resolve one textual possibility in favour of the other, while ignoring the philosophical *consequences* of the speculative nature of his theory of writing, leads to a premature installation of the text within the 'rights of reality'. This is nowhere more apparent than in the case of Beckett, who offers the most overt example of the dangers of an uncritical acceptance of the validity of Derridean theory in contemporary literary studies, his writings often being seen as wholly concurring with the deconstructive contention that writing has ontological primacy over reality, this being an effect of the auto-deconstructive nature of these texts. Nevertheless, it is Beckettian textuality which most overtly reveals the impossibility of escaping the speculative nature of this position, this position being constantly contested, *not* as a result of the author's implication in a metaphysical tradition or as the result of any polemical desire on the part of the writer to establish an extra-textual 'reality', but as a result of the fact that a specifically material reality continually *haunts* the text in the same manner that writing, for Derrida, haunts 'reality'. It is not *Beckett* that contests the ontological primacy of writing over reality, resisting the final deconstruction that would install the text within the 'rights of reality', but the Beckettian *text*, and it does so in spite of the author's (or his textual proxies) wishes. This is why Beckett constitutes such an important figure in any examination of the textual 'usurpation' of reality, for if deconstruction cannot confront the questions that a figure as amenable as Beckett raises in relation to writing's 'rights to reality' (this not being a question of a metaphysical bias, but of writing *itself*) then we must re-examine the anti-metaphysical prejudices on which the Derridean notion of textuality rests. Most notably, we must examine the possibility that the *logos* has not been seen as the solution to the irresolvable question of reality, but rather, has been acknowledged as the very cause of the problem itself.

CHAPTER 1

THE QUESTION OF WRITING: PLATO, MYTH, AND THE ENCHANTMENTS OF REALITY

1

THE DIALOGIC TEXT

The historical usurpation and the theoretical oddity that install the image within the rights of reality are determined as the *forgetting* of a simple origin. . . . The violence of forgetting. Writing, a mnemotechnic means, supplanting good memory, spontaneous memory, signifies forgetfulness. It is exactly what Plato said in the *Phaedrus*, comparing writing to speech as *hypomnesis* to *mnémè*, the auxiliary aide-mémoire to the living memory. Forgetfulness because it is a mediation and the departure of the logos from itself. Without writing, the latter would remain within itself. Writing is the dissimulation of the natural, primary, and immediate presence of sense to the soul within the logos. Its violence befalls the soul as unconsciousness. Deconstructing this tradition will not therefore consist of reversing it, of making writing innocent. Rather of showing why the violence of writing does not *befall* an innocent language. There is an originary violence of writing because language is first . . . writing. "Usurpation" has always already begun. (*Grammatology* 36-37)

Derrida thus links Plato to the self-erasing usurpation which is the *archē*-trace, writing constituting that which has always already deconstructed the distinction between the remembrance of the *logos* and the production of the *logos*. As Derrida subsequently recognises in "Plato's Pharmacy"¹, it is the *Phaedrus*² which inaugurates the history of logocentrism, it being "'Platonism," which sets up the whole of Western Metaphysics in its conceptuality" ("Plato's Pharmacy" 76). It is this work which constitutes an initial recognition that writing's ability to [re]produce its origin without the necessity *of* this origin places the essentiality which is the *logos* in jeopardy, thus demanding the repression of writing which will subsequently characterise Western metaphysics. Yet, as Derrida recognises, it is also the *Phaedrus* which reveals how this repression admits writing into the space which Plato would attempt to reserve for the living voice of the philosopher, thus

demonstrating that the usurpation of the origin and the installation of the text within the “rights of reality” have always already occurred. The “affirmation of the being-outside of the outside” which is writing (that which is, as the *Phaedrus* asserts, “external” (275a)) leads to the rupture that is “its injurious intrusion into the inside” (“Plato’s Pharmacy” 158), or rather to the exteriorising movement of the *archē*-trace which reveals that this rupture has always been at work.

Derrida’s interrogation of the Platonic voice centres around the myth of Theuth and Thamus, as articulated within the *Phaedrus* by Socrates. Theuth, the Egyptian god of “number and calculation, geometry and astronomy, as well as the games of checkers and dice, and, above all else, writing” (274c-d), approaches Thamus, the king of the gods, in order to display his inventions with a view to their adoption by mankind as a whole, an adoption which evidently requires the assent of this paternal figure. In regards to writing Theuth asserts: “O King, here is something that, once learned, will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memory; I have discovered a potion (*pharmakon*) for memory and for wisdom” (274e). The word *pharmakon* is that from which Derrida’s interrogation takes its trajectory, a polyseme which can mean, amongst other things, both *remedy* and *poison*. Thamus’ rejection of writing on the basis that it represents *hupomnēsis*, mere repetition without knowledge or “the appearance of wisdom” rather than its “reality” (275a), translates Theuth’s designation of *pharmakon* as remedy to that of poison. Yet this translation is, of course, ironic when one considers that writing *has* been adopted by mankind, the myth itself being a mere *hupomnēme*, a repetition without knowledge:

One should note . . . that what writing will later be accused of – repeating without knowing – here defines the very approach that leads to the statement and determination of its status. One thus begins by repeating without knowing – through the myth – the definition of writing, which is to repeat without knowing. (“Plato’s Pharmacy” 74-75)

As Socrates implicitly admits in enacting Thamus through mythology, this repressive origin has never existed apart from the *pharmakon* that he seeks to repress, the figure of Thamus being a *hupomnēmic* effect of writing, of mythology. Thamus, therefore, has always already been poisoned, there being no such origin in the absence of the usurping representation, the *hupomnēme*, which logically precedes this origin: this repressive origin succumbs to the Lethean properties of the *pharmakon* in the very act of being identified. Accordingly, Theuth, in the act of presenting writing to the paternal figure of the king, is revealed to be the son who has always already usurped the place of the father; he is the origin of the origin, the pharmaceutical *writing* at/of the origin that allows the mythological figure of ‘uncontaminated’ orality to exist.

Mythology and writing thus coincide for both imply the absence of the origin even as both are the means through which this ‘origin’ continues to ‘exist’ as a signifier. Socrates, in merely *identifying* writing as a historical ‘presence’, acknowledges it as that which has erased Thamus’ authoritative presence, simultaneously acknowledging that Thamus is a myth that inherently admits of this erasure, mythology being the only means through which Socrates can reconstitute this supposedly self-present figure. Analogously, Plato utilises writing in order to reconstitute the authoritative figure of Socrates, he who also represses writing. In this light, Socrates himself, like Thamus, is revealed to have succumbed to the *pharmakon* through his act of repression, being another mythological representation of uncontaminated orality which relies on writing for its very ‘existence’. Plato’s utilisation of the notion of “writing in the soul” as a metaphor for the self-presence of the voice, is therefore deeply ironic, for, like writing as a mythologisation of the origin, it signifies Socrates’ implication in the pharmaceutical text, the constant repetition without knowledge, the *hupomnēsis* which defines the self-present origin as an empty signifier, the myth which is the written subject:

SOCRATES: Now tell me, can we discern another kind of discourse, a legitimate brother of this one? Can we say how it comes about, and how it is by nature better and more capable?

PHAEDRUS: Which one is that? How do you think it comes about?

SOCRATES: It is a discourse that is written down, with knowledge, in the soul of the listener; it can defend itself, and it knows for whom it should speak and for whom it should remain silent.

PHAEDRUS: You mean the living, breathing discourse of the man who knows, of which the written one can be fairly called an image.

SOCRATES: Absolutely right. (276a-b)

It is the identification of writing with the mere image of knowledge rather than with knowledge itself that renders Plato's metaphor for the soul more than a metaphor. This 'metaphor' represents and embodies (two terms that can no longer be distinguished) the articulation of the self through, or rather, as writing. It signifies that knowledge and the self, like Thamus, can only exist through the writing that facilitates both, the usurping supplement which is a pre-condition of any 'origin'.

At very the advent of writing as a significant force in Western history then, the self-erasing rupture that is the archē-trace exteriorises the eternal absence at the origin, the usurpation of Thamus necessarily admitting of its own mythological status. This rupture consequently overflows its bounds, usurping the logocentric notions of "[f]orgetfulness", "living memory" or the "natural, primary, and immediate presence of sense to the soul" and replacing them with a *hupomnēmic* play of signification, a 'memory' without an origin, a myth without source. Plato, therefore, must take on the authoritative role of the father, of the law ('*logos*' designating the law as well as speech) that re-imposes itself in light of this transgression thus reinstating the *logos* through a repression of writing. It is this which makes Plato such a significant figure in the history of metaphysics, for at the 'originary' point of repression he exteriorises writing's usurpatory status, its status as a pre-condition of this

repressive *logos*. Plato may assume the authoritative role of the father and yet it is writing which allows him to do so, writing *mediating* this assumption just as myth mediates Thamus' repression of *hupomnēsis*, just as our awareness of the repression of writing in the *Phaedrus* is mediated by the written text that we hold in our hands. The Platonic intention is undercut at every point, there being no escape from writing. As Derrida asks in indicating the self-deconstructing nature of Plato's authority:

What law governs this "contradiction," this opposition to itself of what is said against writing, of a dictum that pronounces itself against itself as soon as it finds its way into writing, as soon as it writes down its self identity and carries away what is proper to it against this ground of writing? ("Plato's Pharmacy" 158)

It is in the *Phaedrus* that the logocentric tradition is initiated even as it is the *Phaedrus* which reveals that this tradition, and the *logos* itself, can only exist by virtue of the very writing that it represses:

. . . what seems to inaugurate itself in Western literature with Plato will not fail to re-edit itself at least in Rousseau, and then in Saussure. In these three cases, in these three "eras" of the repetition of Platonism, which gave us a new thread to follow and other knots to recognize in the history of *philosophia* or the *epistēmē*, the exclusion and the devaluation of writing must somehow, in their very affirmation, come to terms with:

1. a generalised sort of writing and, along with it,
2. a "contradiction": the written proposal of logocentrism; the simultaneous affirmation of the being-outside of the outside and of its injurious intrusion into the inside:
3. the construction of a "literary" work. Before Saussure's *Anagrams*, there were Rousseau's; and Plato's work, outside and independent of its logocentric "content," which is then only one of its inscribed "functions," can be read in its anagrammatical texture.

Thus it is that the "linguistics" elaborated by Plato, Rousseau, and Saussure must both put writing out of the question and yet nevertheless borrow from it, for fundamental reasons, all its demonstrative and theoretical resources. ("Plato's Pharmacy" 158-59)

Yet if the logocentric tradition continually borrows its resources from writing then it is equally clear that writing borrows from the logocentric tradition. It is, after all, Plato's attempt to enforce the law which allocates writing its philosophical value as that which continually *resists* the law, thus exteriorising its full significance. Similarly, it is Thamus' attempt to repress the *hupomnēme* which is writing which assigns the *hupomnēmic* status of the myth of Thamus its theoretical significance. There is, therefore, a question of whether writing *facilitates* the Platonic assumption of logocentric authority or whether this assumption facilitates the opening up of the field of writing, for few could doubt that the *Phaedrus*, as a "written proposal of logocentrism", constitutes an *irresistible* attraction for the deconstructive critic. Is not a "the written proposal of logocentrism" a little *too* obvious a contradiction for a writer as sophisticated as Plato to overlook? The questions mount up. How could Plato exteriorise this significance *without* performing the repression which allows it to be exteriorised? Does not the necessity of this repression merely foreshadow the necessity of Derrida logocentrically positing the origin and its usurpation in the form of the *archē*-trace, that which opens up the economy of the text? Derrida's criticism of Platonic logocentrism, and his charge that the *Phaedrus* is the inaugural text in "*the greatest totality* . . . within which are produced, without ever posing the radical question of writing, all the Western methods of analysis, explication, reading, or interpretation" (*Grammatology* 46) is based on the assumption that Plato was unaware of the ironies of the *Phaedrus*, the points of contradiction which allow, or alternatively, *invite* a dialogic intervention in the text and the consequent exteriorisation of this text's auto-deconstructive nature. In actuality, such a reading is contrary the whole spirit of the *Phaedrus*, it not being the case that the construction of this work exists "outside and independent of its logocentric "content"" but that this content wilfully interacts with the performativity of its written constitution. As will become apparent, writing, for Plato, does not constitute the factor that incessantly contests

logocentrism but rather, is that which facilitates logocentrism. The *logos* or the origin in question is, ultimately, material reality, this being the *potentiality* that is incessantly revealed by writing, a potentiality which writing can neither affirm nor deny.

2

WRITING AND ORALITY

In order to fully appreciate the implications of Plato's view of writing it is necessary to appreciate that the Platonic dialogue occurs at a historical point when the traditional role of the oral poet was being replaced by writing. This also has implications for the Platonic conception of mythology for as Luc Brisson has demonstrated in his extensive contextual analysis of Plato's use of the term *muthos*, the term is synonymous with the notion of an oral literature within the Platonic *oeuvre*³. In a pre-literate society the oral poet acts as the medium through which not only history but *paideia* itself is transmitted, the encyclopaedic memory of the poet acting as a means of preserving the social heritage. As Eric Havelock asserts, for the Hellene

[t]his over-all body of experience (we shall avoid the word 'knowledge') is incorporated in a rhythmic narrative or set of narratives which he memorises and which is subject to recall in his memory. Such is poetic tradition, essentially something he accepts uncritically, or else it fails to survive in his living memory. Its acceptance and retention are made psychologically possible by a mechanism of self-surrender to the poetic performance, and of self-identification with the situations and the stories related in the performance. Only when the spell is fully effective can his mnemonic powers be fully mobilised. His receptivity to the tradition has thus, from the standpoint of inner psychology, a degree of automatism which however is counterbalanced by a direct and unfettered capacity for action, in accordance with the paradigms he has absorbed. (198-99)

As this quotation suggests, the oral tradition acted as an essential means of socialisation, a means which could only be questioned at the expense of endangering the continuity of Greek culture itself and, therefore, the cohesive society which was founded on this culture. In such a society, epistemological resources are almost indistinguishable from the social memory itself, and these resources are dedicated almost exclusively to the maintenance of the body of knowledge which constitutes the social archive. This maintenance however is continually predicated on the relevance of this knowledge to the current social context, a factor that prevents knowledge from remaining in a state of suspension as elements of it are modified or discarded, a process that constitutes the process of mythologisation. As Havelock asserts: “The living memory preserves what is necessary for present life. It slowly discards what has become wholly irrelevant. Yet it prefers to remodel rather than discard. New information and new experience are continually grafted on to inherited models” (122). It is this process which constitutes the point at which orality and writing converge, for the oral poet, who acts as the voice of a past which is always present by virtue of this mythology, must, nevertheless, maintain the unquestionable authority of *paideia*, and the most convenient method of doing so is to render himself absent from his own voice. He thus enacts his recitation as the product of divine inspiration, as indicated by a traditional supplication to the muse such as in Homer’s Iliad: “Rage – Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus’ son Achilles . . .” (1.1). As Socrates puts it in speaking of Homer in the *Ion*⁴, the poet has

[a] divine power that moves you, as a “Magnetic” stone moves iron rings. . . . This stone not only pulls those rings, if they’re iron, it also puts power *in* the rings, so that they in turn can do just what the stone does – pull other rings – so that there’s sometimes a very long chain of iron pieces and rings hanging from one another. And the power in all of them depends on this stone. In the same way, the Muse makes some people inspired herself, and then through those who are inspired a chain of other enthusiasts is suspended. You know, none of the epic poets, if they’re good, are masters of their subject; they are inspired, possessed, and that is how they utter all those beautiful poems. (533d-534a)

The oral poet, in abdicating responsibility over his own words, thus reinforces the authority of his voice, allowing that voice to harmonise with social practice. This voice is, therefore, monologic both in the sense that it is removed from the vagaries of human interaction, and in the sense that it has no ‘present’ speaker; it remains the supremely impersonal voice of mythology itself, a voice which cannot, therefore, be interrogated or disrupted. In this respect poetic form is all important, for the rhythmic articulation of meaning not only acts as an important mnemonic device for the poet, but it also gives his poetry its hypnotic power, its power to seduce an audience. This audience passively acquiesces to an ecstatic loss of self which both reinforces the impression that this poetry divinely inspired, and prevents any interrogation of the social heritage, by erasing the space between present and past, voice and audience. This past, the social heritage, is, therefore, not so much a body of knowledge which can be interrogated, but an experience which is communally and unquestionably *lived* through *hupomnēsis*, enacting myth as a presence which masks its status as the historical outcome of a constantly changing social context, its status as repetition without knowledge.

As Timothy Clark asserts:

Memory is not primarily an individual faculty in this context, but a function of a communal transformation. . . . Memory does not call to mind an image of the past. It names a general transformation that carries poet and auditor to another, co-temporal aspect of reality, the realm of myth, legend, fame – not so much the past as the realm of all meaning *per se*, of all that perdures in the space where language of cultural self-definition continually speaks itself. (42)

Oral poetry may be the space of cultural self-definition but it cannot be seen to be the space of cultural re-definition, an awareness that would reveal its *hupomnēmic* status and erode its socialising effects. It is, therefore, the hypnotic power of poetic form, the repetitive rhythm that leads to a loss of self, thus inducing the “co-temporal aspect of reality”, that gives the experienced heritage its divine authority.

The effect of the introduction of writing, however, is to remove the encumbrance of maintaining and authorising this heritage. This heritage is no longer sustained by its embodiment in society, or the psyche which is educated into this tradition, but in writing itself. Writing, therefore, is the medium that divorces the subject from the mythologised history that had previously shaped his awareness of the world, initiating, in Havelock's terms, the separation of "the knower from the known" (197-214 *passim*), the subject of knowledge from the object of knowledge. This object can then be analysed and questioned rather than merely lived, as knowledge becomes a dialogue rather than a seductive monologue which masks its status as process. It is on this point that the Plato's *Phaedrus* would appear to resist Havelock's theory, writing for Plato constituting a continuance of the oral tradition in many respects. Socrates suggests that writing *replicates* the unquestionable authority of the oral poet's voice, comparing writing to "the offsprings of painting" which

. . . stand there as if they were alive, but if anyone asks them anything, they remain most solemnly silent. The same is true of written words. You'd think they were speaking as if they had some understanding, but if you question any thing that has been said because you want to learn more, it continues to signify just that same thing forever. (275d-e)

Evidently writing, like oral poetry, constantly enacts an ever-present or co-temporal experience, there being no dialogue with writing and thus no means of contesting the authority of the 'past' that it presents. The repetitious nature of this textual past is enacted in or as the *Phaedrus* itself: the originary repression of writing by Thamus is being *repeated* by Socrates in the very act of articulating the myth and this repression is being performed by the Platonic text even as we articulate this text in the reading situation. Such repression of course, is undercut by its own written status. Yet it must be noted that the reader cannot be overtly conscious of this written status *at the moment of articulation*. Any overt cognisance of one's sensible experience of this text is, at this point, usurped by the purely intelligible

content of the narrative with which one is concerned. As this suggests, we also ecstatically abdicate any overt awareness of ourselves in favour of the presence of the originary 'voice' of Thamus, the text usurping any present sense of selfhood: ". . . it will introduce forgetfulness into the soul of those who learn it . . . they will put their trust in writing, which is external and depends on signs that belong to others, instead of trying to remember from the inside, completely on their own" (275b). What is in question in this remark is not writing or meaning *itself*, the usurpatory nature of this 'written' 'voice' indicating a breach between the "external" and the "inside" which reveals that there has never been a dividing between the two or an originary 'self' *to forget*⁵. What is in question rather is the particular meaning in question, the meaningful content which is remembered "from the inside" in that it corresponds with one's own apparent experience of the world, with one's *own* history rather than with that of "others". This history (e.g. one's experiential knowledge that writing has not been repressed, that it historically exists) is also usurped by the 'voice' that we experience at the moment of reading the *Phaedrus*, this corresponding to the very repression (e.g. by Thamus) that is occurring in the content *of* this 'voice'. The reader, in the very act of articulating the written myth of Thamus, thus unconsciously assumes the status of Thamus, repressing any awareness that this usurpation *has* occurred in reading the text and being transported to a past in which the voice has not yet been usurped⁶. One can thus see the myth of Thamus as being a mythological reflection of the reader's position at the moment of reading, their failure to recognise the *hypomnēmic* status of the text at this point being reflected in the myth's failure to acknowledge that Theuth has usurped Thamus. This silence, moreover, is merely indicative of Thamus' authoritative currency as a mythological *presence*, a currency which allows him to erase, to repress, writing as a historical reality and, more importantly, as a *present* historical reality.

The text thus represses its own written presence in precisely the same manner that the oral poet represses his own 'presence' as a means of lending authority to the voice of a mythological past. Yet, as has been suggested, the 'absence' of the poet from his inspired voice, that which would appear to transmit eternal truths, is a mere apperency since this voice alters as the present social context requires. This ability to alter in order to fit in with the current social context *is* the process of mythologisation, and it is notable that this process ceases on the introduction of writing, as modern textual versions of Homeric myth testify. As Luc Brisson puts it in his examination of Platonic myth:

Plato's testimony on myth is . . . balanced on a razor's edge. At the turning point between two civilizations, one founded on orality and the other on writing, Plato in fact describes the twilight of myths. In other words, Plato describes that moment when, in ancient Greece in general and at Athens in particular, memory changes; if not in its nature, then at least in its means of functioning. A memory shared by all the members of a community is now opposed by a memory which is the privilege of a more limited number of people: those for whom the use of writing is a matter of everyday habit. A memory condemned to transforming what it repeats is challenged by a mnemonic activity which consists in storing and faithfully reproducing a specific passage. A memory for which all repetition is equal to a re-creation is confronted with a memory for which the past – objectified by writing – constitutes a given fact. (38-39)

As Socrates' assertion that writing "continues to signify just that same thing forever" suggests, one cannot apply the processive nature of mythology to writing. The apparent incontestability of the poet's voice is transformed into a genuine incontestability of the written text that objectifies the past. Writing thus accounts for "the transition from *muthos* to *logos*, from "oral tradition" to "critical historiography""(xxiii)⁷, *logos* here designating "a discourse which must be based solely on reason, that is, without any recourse to experience. . . a discourse which claims to attain certitude and universality" (Brisson 11)⁸. Moreover, the absence that lies at the heart of writing is a *genuine* absence rather than the feigned absence of the oral poet, he who is in dialogue with the present social context and is always

potentially open to dialogic interrogation by his audience. As Plato overtly acknowledges, this potentiality does not exist in the case of the text, it being the genuine absence which allows the text to incessantly repeat itself: writing articulates an unchanging myth of the origin, the unchanging myth of Thamus being replicated by Socrates, Plato, and by the reader in the act of reading. More accurately however a reversal occurs, for while the content of this myth (the characters involved) change, its form and its function (the repression of writing) remains the same, unlike oral mythology in which the characters remain the same even as the form and function alters to suit the present social context. Similarly, where writing transports the reader to the past which bears no relation to the present context (e.g. a realm in which the usurpation of the origin by writing has yet to occur), the past to which the poet's audience is transported is always covertly subject to the demands of the present, the poet *actually* transporting the past into a present social context.

It is in recognising these similarities and dissimilarities between the role of writing in the *Phaedrus* and the role of myth in the oral tradition that we begin to appreciate the true nature of the *pharmakon* for Plato, a nature that becomes apparent in Socrates' discussion of the myth of Orithuia. When Phaedrus, Socrates' partner in the dialogue, asks "isn't it from somewhere near this stretch of the Ilisus that people say Boreas carried Orithuia away?" (229b), and goes on to question Socrates' views with regards to the veracity of the myth (229c), Socrates asserts that he *could* reject it as the more rationalistic citizens do, adding an explanation of the myth in the rationalistic style; yet he ultimately asserts that he accepts "what is generally believed" (230a) since he believes that it is more urgent to know oneself before investigating such matters. Derrida, while recognising that this is not the absolute rejection of myths, but the "not bothering *with* them, in order to free *oneself* for the relation with oneself and the pursuit of self knowledge" ("Plato's Pharmacy" 68) nevertheless interprets it as a "send-off of myths" ("Plato's Pharmacy" 72), the repression of

the mythologeme which is writing, a repression which cannot be its negation, since it inevitably admits writing in the act of repression. For Derrida this is indicated by the fact that Orithuia is playing with *Pharmaceia* when she is blown, by Boreas, into the abyss, an enactment of the Lethean properties of a writing that erases the self-presence of 'living' discourse: "Through her games, Pharmacia has dragged down to death a virginal purity and an unpenetrated interior" ("Plato's Pharmacy" 70). Derrida, however, fails to note the precise nature of the games which are involved here, for Socrates does not give myth *itself* the "send-off", as is suggested his acceptance of what is "generally believed", and his subsequent utilisation of the myth of Thamus. Socrates accepts mythology in the same way that the audience would unquestioningly accept it if it were articulated by the monologic poet, saying, in relation to these myths, that he looks "not into them" (230a). Socrates, therefore, specifically rejects any *dialogue* with mythology, any attempt at a *rational* explanation of its origins. It is this *question* of the truth which lies behind myth, the question of the origin, which, for Socrates, constitutes the *pharmakon*. The single reference to *Pharmaceia* in the *Phaedrus* occurs in Socrates' rational explanation of the myth and it is these explanations of myth, not myth itself, which constitute the game in question:

Now, Phaedrus, such explanations are amusing enough, but they are a job for a man I cannot envy at all. He'd have to be far too ingenious and work too hard – mainly because after that he will have to go on and give a rational account of the form [*eidōs*] of the Hippocentaurs, and then of the chimera; and a whole flood of Gorgons and Pegasuses and other monsters, in large numbers and absurd forms, will overwhelm him. Anyone who does not believe in them, who wants to explain them away and make them plausible by means of some sort of rough ingenuity, will need a great deal of time. (229d-e)

The phrase "a great deal of time" is, perhaps, an understatement, as Plato recognises, for in giving a rational account of these origins one is attempting to formalise the *absence* which lies at the heart of all myths rather than accepting the present relevance of the myth, its truth

value rather than its underlying *truth*. In other words, one is attempting to existentially enact the very absence which defines mythology *as* mythology, an enactment which would be the erasure of mythology into facticity. Yet absence, by its very nature, is the space of de-contextualisation which permits everything, being that which underlies every mythologeme, every signifier: it is therefore *every* signifier which must be explained, a process which is infinite by virtue of the infinite potentiality of absence itself. This process, moreover, ultimately reduces every signifier to insignificance since every signifier, no matter what its particular form or its truth value, will ultimately be a formal repetition of the absence from which it is derived, just as the 'absent' figure of Thamus is repeated in the substitutional figures of Socrates, of Plato, of the reader. One could compare all of these figures to Orithuia, for all are swept away in this repetition, forgetting themselves as they are usurped by the timeless origin which is insistently reconstituted by the text. They are rendered, even in their own presence, a repetition without knowledge, their awareness of themselves, of the present, being subsumed into the space of the absent or mythological origin. Socrates thus demonstrates the pharmaceutical nature of the question of the truth of origin *via* the myth of Thamus, he who reduces all of these figures to the repetitive trace of an origin which has either never existed or, indifferently, which no longer exists (this being the pharmaceutical question of which we are speaking). As Socrates says in introducing the myth, in *administering* this pharmakon to Phaedrus: "I can tell you what I've heard the ancients said, though they alone know the truth. However, if we could discover that ourselves, would we still care about the speculations of other people?" (274c). In contrast, Socrates, in answering Phaedrus' inquiry about the truth of the myth of Orithuia (229c), refuses to succumb to the *pharmakon* which is being administered *to him*: he asserts that it is pointless to look into this question (229e-230a), giving the question of the origin, not mythology itself, the "send-off" ("Plato's Pharmacy" 72).

In drawing his parallels between mythology and writing, Socrates points to the futility of entering into a rational dialogue with a discourse which has a genuine absence at the origin as opposed to the merely apparent absence through which the oral poet maintains the authority of his voice. In entering into this dialogue one subordinates any distinct mythological content, and thus the truth value of the myth, to the ever-present form which is myth *itself*. This view can be compared to Derrida's deconstructive approach to textuality, that which subjugates the apparent intention of the text to that text's written status, it not being a question of what the text *says*, its content, but of what the text *does*, its form. As Socrates puts it in admonishing Phaedrus for his doubts about the veracity of the myth of Thamus, one should "listen to an oak or even a stone, so long as it was telling the truth, while it seems to make a difference to you, Phaedrus, who is speaking and where he comes from. Why, though, don't you just consider whether what he says is right or wrong?" (275b-c). As this remark implies, Socrates no more gives writing the "send-off" than he gives mythology the "send-off", for one cannot deny *hupomnēsis*. It is, rather, the question of the origin of writing which is being repressed here, the question of its mythological or *hupomnēmic* status rather than this status itself. This mythological or *hupomnēmic* status (a status which, let us not forget, is *defined* in relation to the question of the origin) is inconsequential for Socrates, the form being subordinate to the content of the myth (the truth value of which *is not* dependent on the origin). The fact that Thamus' repressive criticisms of writing are mythological or that the *Phaedrus*' criticisms of writing are *written* criticisms does not invalidate or negate the value of these criticisms, and neither does the fact that the origin of these criticisms has never verifiably existed: indeed, we have seen that Plato *uses* the mythological or written form as a means of demonstrating the incessant repetition of the empty formality of this 'absent' origin, thus exhibiting that these criticisms *are* valid. It is in refusing to address the insignificant question of the origin (or in addressing it only so that he

can demonstrate this insignificance) that Plato most sharply differs from Derrida, he whose whole *oeuvre* is centred around the question of the validity of the *logos*. In light of this awareness it is unsurprising that Derrida should choose this particular Platonic text as being the most amenable to deconstructive analysis, this being a text which performatively and knowingly reveals the consequences of delving into the question of the origin, that which is, as the *Phaedrus* reveals, *inseparable* from the question of writing.

Plato, however, clearly has a different view of the performance in question from that of Derrida, even as he is fully aware of the ironies on which Derrida rests his case. Indeed, one can read the *Phaedrus* as a self-consciously performative embodiment of precisely the view of writing that Derrida outlines, a pharmaceutical temptation which leads to a demonstration of dangers of this path, just as Socrates presents Phaedrus the pharmaceutical temptation which is the myth of Thamus. As the *Phaedrus* reveals, it is in shifting the question of mythology away from its contextual truth to the question of the origin that the interrogator transforms to myth an incontestable repetition of the origin: within the *Phaedrus*, every figure (including the reader) is capable of assuming this status, and Thamus (however he is presented) thus remains in place in spite of, or because of, his absence, incessantly re-enacting the repression of writing and its historical presence, right up to, and including, the moment of reading. For Plato, therefore, the *pharmakon*'s Lethean properties lie not in its power to dissolve any origin in a process of dissemination, but in its power to petrify the past as a mythological or written form, this petrification being the destruction of the 'living voice', that which is subject to dialogic intervention in the same way that the present social context dialogically intervenes the mythology of oral poetry. Orithuia's game with Pharmaceia, it should be noted, ends in the stasis of death, the *end* of play, but *only* in Socrates' rationalistic explanation of the origin: in the myth, a myth that Socrates accepts as a *hupomnēme* that is subject to the demands of the present, Orithuia lives on as the wife of Boreas⁹.

UNDOING THE VOICE: PLATONIC PSYCHO-ANALYSIS.

Freud, in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”¹⁰ demonstrates an acute awareness of the erotic attractions of the thanatological factuality, the possibilities for self-authorisation, which Thamus represents in the *Phaedrus*. This factuality, like Thamus’ repression of writing, is sustained by constantly reducing the self to formal repetition of an absent past, unconsciously repeating, in the very act of repression, that which it seeks to repress. Freud summarises this position in terms of the analysand who continually repeats the unconscious pain of the breach between self and origin, child and mother, in an attempt to master, through repetition and constant repression, this externally imposed incursion, thus retaining the immanent and homeostatic self-presence of the origin. As Freud asserts, recalling Plato’s acceptance of the *hupomnēmic* status of myth, the analysand “is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past” (228). In the analytic situation, the opposition between repeating and remembering amounts to an opposition between performance and recognition, in the same manner that Thamus covertly performs his written status in the act of repressing writing without apparently recognising this fact. Similarly, the analysand constantly attempts to reduce present externality, that which represents the fact that the oedipal breach *has* occurred, to a replication of their original pre-oedipal state. In the analytic situation this repression of the present in favour of the past occurs through the process of transference, the attempted narcissistic reduction of the disruptive reality principle, as represented by the analyst, to a replication of the self, or, analogously, of the absent mother who cannot be differentiated from this pre-oedipal self, she who represents the

symbiosis self and externality. It is the role of the analyst to reveal the current impositions of reality and thus the repressed pain of the breach. Yet his intervention, of course, represents yet another reproduction of the oedipal breach which must be repressed:

These reproductions, which emerge with such unwished for exactitude . . . are invariably acted out in the sphere of transference, of the patients relation to the physician. When things have reached this stage, it may be said that the earlier neurosis has now been replaced by a fresh, 'transference neurosis'. . . . The physician as a rule cannot spare his patient this phase of the treatment. He must get him to re-experience some portion of his forgotten life, but must see to it, on the other hand, that the patient retains some degree of aloofness, which will enable him, in spite of everything, to recognise that what appears to be reality is in fact only a reflection of a forgotten past. (228)

As the final sentence suggests, the mythological writing, the formal repetition through which the present is unconsciously petrified as past, can easily become a timeless factuality, an immanently present reality which must be recognised as a *hupomnēme*. The acting out of the past in the transference neurosis is in itself evidence of the presence of this repetitive factuality, another repetition of the pre-oedipal status which erases or, rather, represses any awareness of the present, of its own status *as* the past, and of the fact that the oedipal breach has already occurred. This breach is never consciously *remembered* as past by virtue of the fact that it never escapes its own status as an inescapable presence, being the performance which, like writing, constantly represses that which it is repeating. Similarly, the genuine differences between the analysand and the analyst can be overcome, in transference, by virtue of the fact that the disruptive reality that the analyst represents can be repressed, subsumed into the immanent presence of the pre-oedipal self, thus becoming indistinguishable from the 'absence' which is the oedipal breach itself. It is this desired 'absence' which manifests itself as the analysand's, ultimately autoerotic, attraction for the analyst, being a desire to erase oneself *into* the analyst or, indifferently, to erase the disruptive analyst into the pre-oedipal situation: such eroticism is, therefore, a denial of the

reality principle, being the analysand's means of retaining their homeostatic authority over reality. Paradoxically, however, in surrendering to this erotic attraction the analysand abdicates control over their own behaviour, becoming 'absent' from themselves in order that they can retain their absolute self-presence. This surrendering of the self to one's unconscious desires means that the role of the intelligible ego is simply to rationalise this process in order that the appearance of self-presence can be maintained. The true nature of the situation remains repressed and meaning, the analysand's words, become an empty performance which, no matter how they are formulated, will always ultimately signify the 'absent' origin, the pre-oedipal situation, which the analysand seeks to retain. The pre-oedipal origin, therefore, is that which is constantly re-performed in this rationalisation, being performed *as* this empty rationality. That this rationality is a product of the demands of one's own repressive behaviour, that which the ego can no longer control, is, ironically, the very means through which one's control over the self is confirmed, since the nature of one's rationalisation will always absolutely replicate this behaviour, giving the illusion of absolute authority over the self without revealing the true nature of this self surrender. Such an awareness would, in itself, represent a disruptive breach, a negation of one's authority.

Socrates' interaction with Phaedrus, in the *Phaedrus*, clearly foreshadows this view of the psycho-analytic situation. As with the analyst, the repression of writing, of the present, and the *hupomnēmic* status of the past, is precisely that which Socrates wishes to reveal to Phaedrus *via* the myth of Thamus. That Socrates leaves it to *Phaedrus* to realise the irony of the myth in question, the fact that Thamus is only present through the myth which denotes his erasure by the historical presence of writing, merely accentuates the fact that Socrates himself is ironically using the self-authorising nature of this repression in the very act of formulating the myth. As Socrates asserts in introducing the myth: "I can tell you what I've heard the ancients said, though they alone know the truth. However, if we could discover that

ourselves, would we still care about the speculations of other people?" (274c). In repressing the "truth" [*alêthes*] of the past he allows himself to utilise its absence, inventing the 'myth' and bringing Thamus into being as a *present* 'truth' which, in turn, erases the reality of writing's historical existence and thus the usurpation of the origin. Yet, unlike Thamus, who represses his own implication in the immanence of writing in order to authorise his monadic form, Socrates enacts the myth as a transparency which *obviously* ignores the presence of writing. As far as Socrates is concerned this myth retains its truth *value*, Thamus' criticisms of writing being valid, yet it is obviously false in terms of its form or its function, the repression of writing which the myth implies clearly having never occurred. Socrates thus invites Phaedrus' dialogic intervention, an intervention that will reveal this overt repression of the disruptive *presence* of writing, the unrecognised disjunction between the content of the myth and the *hupomnēmic* form of the myth itself. Such an intervention would undo Thamus' status as a mythological voice, erasing its petrified form and enacting its content (the criticisms) as a living truth that is open to cross-examination. Socrates, in performing Thamus' repression of writing, is prompting the undoing of this performative repression, seducing Phaedrus into a dialogue which will undo the relevance of the factual or originary form of the mythological argument that its truth value (rather than its empirical or originary *truth*) can be revealed. Socrates thus reflects the manner in which the psychoanalyst *induces* the process of transference in the analysand in order to disrupt it. As Freud asserts in relation to the repressive process of transference, the analyst must get the patient to "re-experience some portion of his forgotten life" (228), the oedipal breach or, in this case, the breach between Thamus' self-present voice and writing which has self-evidently breached this voice. This breach, however, is *always* being repeated in the process of continually repressing the disruptive present. The performance, therefore, must be repeated with an appreciation of its true, contemporary relevance or, synonymously, its irrelevance to the

present¹¹, in order that the analysand can undeniably relive this past in its present context *as* past. Socrates attempts to induce this appreciation by dialogically prompting Phaedrus to invoke the contemporary existence of writing, thus revealing the present irrelevance of Thamus and his repression (though not the irrelevance of his criticisms which *retain* their truth value). A recognition of the *actuality* of the performance, in contrast to the mere rational explication, is that which prompts a “sense of conviction of the correctness of the construction that has been communicated to him” (228) since it not only concretely reveals the irrelevance of this performance but simultaneously does so by revealing the relevance of the contemporary itself, that which is constantly repressed. If the patient can recognise that “what appears to be reality is . . . only a reflection of a forgotten past. . . . the patient’s sense of conviction is won, together with the therapeutic success that is dependent on it” (228).

The nature of the conviction in question here becomes evident when one reflects that the repression of the historical presence of writing by Thamus is also the repression of the *present* relevance, the truth *value* if not the *truth*, of his mythological voice. The truth value of Thamus’ criticisms becomes irrelevant since their only purpose is to facilitate his repression of writing, that which allows him to retain his immanent facticity. This negation of the truth value of the voice’s content, its reduction to a mere rationalisation of the repression that is being performed, leaves only the empty form *of* the performance itself, a performance which is incessantly and indistinguishably repeated by Thamus, by Socrates, by Plato, and by the reader in reading the *Phaedrus*. In this respect it is notable that the word *hupomnēsis* is only used twice in the *Phaedrus*, once when Thamus *represses* writing on this basis, and once when Socrates *accepts* writing *as hupomnēsis*. Socrates’ acceptance does not alter the truth value of Thamus’ criticisms of writing, merely highlighting the manner in which Thamus is instrumentally using this truth for his own ends, as a means of repressing writing that he can authorise himself as the static form. Valid content becomes indistinguishable

from invalid content by virtue of the fact that its only purpose is to act as the inert material which sustains the authorising replication of empty form. Indeed, one could say that this sophistic lack of conviction in one's own words distinguishes the *rational* from the *truth* itself even when both refer to the same content, it being this inability to distinguish between the two (e.g. to discern whether Thamus' criticisms are sincere or merely instrumental) which means that the performance itself must be disrupted rather than the content. It is through this disruption that the true nature of this content can be recognised, and can be dialogically assessed on its own terms, rather than in terms of its instrumentalised form, its performative function. Indeed it is this recognition that opens content to interrogation, the possibility which constitutes the true status *of* content. It is for this reason that Freud asserts that the analysand's conviction in the true, *hupomnēmic* status of the past can only be won through this performative disruption, allowing a recognition rather than a mere rationalised repetition of the *hupomnēmic* truth as a temporal presence.

It is this fact that explains the self-contradictory nature of the Platonic text: since Plato is writing Socrates' voice, this *performance* is the only means through which the *written* Socrates can undo the repression of writing, if Plato is not to succumb to the self-contradiction. It *is* the self contradiction, the fact that a written Socrates is criticising writing, which unveils Socrates' status *as* writing, prompting the reader to fracture the narrative's facticity and recognise its true, *hupomnēmic*, status. As in the case of Thamus, the content of the written Socratic discourse could give way to the lack of conviction which would replace the truth value of this content with the timeless rationality of Socrates' textualised 'voice', this rational content being absolutely substitutional so long as it serves the instrumental status *of* this repressive and seemingly self-present 'voice'. It is for this reason that the absence of Socrates must be acknowledged so that the content can be judged on its own terms, in terms of present truth value rather than in terms of its 'true' origins (written or otherwise): it is the

written status of the 'repressive' voice which constitutes this acknowledgement. Jasper P. Neel, in reflecting the Derridean view of the *Phaedrus*, inadvertently recalls the repression of writing by Thamus as a means of self-authorisation:

In order to attack writing and sophistry, Plato becomes a writer and a sophist. This is disingenuous. . . . He has set out to define thought for humanity, and his strategy is more than disingenuousness; it is vicious, for he uses rhetoric and writing to define and then occupy the moral high ground, and then he tries to destroy the means he has used so that no one else can use that means again, not in 367 B.C., not ever. What Platonism offers in *Phaedrus* is not dialectic. What Platonism offers in *Phaedrus* is a continuous repetition of Platonism. (23)

What Neel fails to appreciate is that the disingenuousness of the written voice, that which represses writing in order to retain its repetitive authority, is also the very reason that Plato criticises writing. If Plato did not succumb to this disingenuity in the *Phaedrus*, he would be disproving the very point that he is making about writing and, ironically, would then be disingenuous. It is only *through* the disingenuity which is the performance of writing that Plato can reveal the truth value of his own writing, a revelation which occurs in the blatant contradiction which is the *Phaedrus*. Ironically, when Neel asserts that this work does not offer dialectic but a continuous repetition of Platonism, he is himself entering into the very dialogue which this contradiction provokes and permits, removing the "moral high ground" of the authoritative Platonic voice, a self-authorisation which is *facilitated* by writing, and revealing its true status as the empty repetition which *is* writing: again, this is the very point that Plato is making. That the authorising lack of conviction which Neel perceives in the *content* of Plato's text should be derived from the written *form* of this text, reveals that it is content's lack of conviction in its own form which, paradoxically, *gives* the content of the text its conviction. Indeed that writing is then perceived as writing rather than as an immanent authorial voice means that, in the absence of anything other than the text, this

conviction in its own *lack* of conviction is the only truth to which this written content can refer, being the only factor which remains continually relevant to the text's present status.

Neel's inability to appreciate the functional nature of the Platonic disingenuity, and his consequent reduction of Plato to the same immanent status as Thamus, is replicated by Phaedrus' reaction to the myth. When Phaedrus recognises that the historical erasure of writing can only be explained if this myth is disingenuous invention, he admits the myth's status as a presence, chiding Socrates for being "very good at making up stories from Egypt or wherever else you want!" (275b). Nevertheless, unlike Neel, he fails to succumb to the self-contradiction that Socrates dangles before him, or to undo the myth's self-authorising repression of writing: he thus resists the reality principle, refusing to disrupt the repressive performance of transference that Socrates has induced, thus reducing Socrates' voice to the same monadic status as that of Thamus'. This fact, in itself, indicates how this repression permits the absolute conflation of Socrates and Thamus, author and myth, into the homeostatic presence which is permitted by the dead form *of* myth. Socrates, therefore, admonishes Phaedrus' identification of the myth with its author, asserting that the Priests of Dodona, and indeed, "(e)veryone who lived at that time" were willing "to listen to an oak or even a stone, so long as it was telling the truth, while it seems to make a difference to you, Phaedrus, who is speaking and where he comes from. Why, though, don't you just consider whether what he says is right or wrong?" (275b-c). That it is *speech* which is identified with this author merely demonstrates that this identification is facilitated by the reduction of writing to absence, reconstituting the voice as that of an immanent Author-God rather than that of an 'absent' poet who remains differentiated from the divinity that he enacts. Plato's identification of the author with a "stone", moreover, is just one instance in which a failure to disrupt the process of transference which writing initiates leads to a reduction of the self to the empty formality of matter, as we shall now see.

THE MATERIAL PAST AND THE ERÖTIC SCRIPT.

That Plato regards the materiality of writing to be the basis of the speech writer's authority is evident from very beginning of the *Phaedrus*. When Socrates encounters Phaedrus walking outside the city walls, Phaedrus explains that he has spent the morning listening to Lysias reciting a speech in which he exhorts a young man to favour the man who does not love him rather than the one who does. Yet when Socrates asks him to recite the speech, Phaedrus resists, claiming that it would be impossible for him to recite from memory a speech that Lysias had "took such time and trouble to compose" (228a), asserting, nevertheless, that he will gladly give him a "careful summary of its general sense" (228d). Socrates, however, reveals his awareness that Phaedrus is concealing the actual manuscript of the speech beneath his cloak, asserting that the whole point of Phaedrus' sojourn is to find a private place in which the speech can be memorised. Derrida correctly interprets this concealment as the repression of writing, a repression which reconfirms one's implication in writing. It is precisely this repression which draws Socrates from the city:

Only the *logoi en biblois*, only words that are deferred, reserved, enveloped, rolled up, words that force one to wait for them in the form and under cover of a solid object, letting themselves be desired for the space of a walk, only hidden letters can thus get Socrates moving. If a speech could be purely present, unveiled, naked, offered up in person in its truth, without the detours of a signifier foreign to it, if at the limit an undeferred *logos* were possible, it would not seduce anyone. ("Plato's Pharmacy" 71)

What Derrida fails to mention, however, is that Socrates' desire for writing, and his movement from the city, are not the reflexive actions of a figure caught up in the text, for Socrates is well aware of the erotic attractions of the *pharmakon*, an attraction which is undercut by his ironic patronisation of Phaedrus:

. . . you, I think, have found a potion [*pharmakon*] to charm me into leaving. For just as people lead hungry animals forward by shaking branches of fruit before them, you can lead me all over Attica or any where else you like simply by waving in front of me the leaves of a book containing a speech. (230d-e)

What attracts Socrates is not Phaedrus, but the book that he attempts to conceal, a repression that Socrates recognises as an attempt to repress writing in order to covertly authorise the monologic voice *through* writing. Socrates plays along with, rather than acquiesces to, Phaedrus' power to seduce, a power which is facilitated by his possession of the script: he artfully evades Phaedrus' exhortation to Socrates to "[l]ead the way" (227b) so that Phaedrus can retain his role as the leader (229b), the seductive and "most marvellous guide" (230c), a guide who wishes to conceal the script because he sees this as an opportunity to practise his "speechmaking" (228e) on Socrates, who is thereby relegated to his "training partner" (228e). The words, therefore, are not "under cover of a solid object", as Derrida asserts, for the solid object is under cover of Phaedrus' spoken words, as it always is in the act of reading. Phaedrus' concealment of the scroll is not seen, by Socrates, as a mere attempt to repress writing, but as an attempt to repress writing so that Phaedrus can appropriate the role of the scroll's author, or, more accurately, appropriate his *authority*, an attempt which can only succeed if both writing, and the original author, are reduced to an absence which cannot contest this authoritative voice. It is precisely the undisrupted vocal articulation, the immanent authority of the voice, which is confirmed by this repression of writing, a voice which cannot be interrogated by virtue of its speaker's absence, whether that speaker is defined as Lysias or Phaedrus. Phaedrus is the speaker who is erased from his own speech, a process which analogous to the oral poet erasing himself in order to maintain the unquestionable authority of his words, the unquestionable authority of originary voice.

Yet if Phaedrus' attempts to appropriate the authority of Lysias' disembodied voice in hiding the scroll, specifically repressing the physicality of writing, then Socrates revokes the authority of this voice by undoing this repression. In doing so he reveals the isomorphic relationship between the purely intelligible presence of the author, Lysias, and the inert materiality of the writing, it being this inertness which acts as the absence that covertly sustains the author *as* a pure intelligibility: ". . . I'll never, as long as Lysias himself is present, allow you to practise your own speechmaking on me. Come on, then, show me" (228d-e). The 'presence' of Lysias, as embodied by the script, is, of course, simultaneously undercut by the fact that the script merely indicates the emphatic *absence* of Lysias, the absence which permits Phaedrus to conceal the manuscript in the first place, thus enacting himself as the medium of Lysias' purely intelligible voice. This is why Socrates parodically performs his own repression of the materiality of writing, ironically identifying the script as Lysias in the very act of revealing the text's material presence. Like Thamus, Lysias has covertly negated himself into, and enacts himself through, the text only in order that the written status of this text can subsequently be repressed, a repression which leaves only the factual authority of a voice which will be always be identifiable as the purely intelligible presence of Lysias himself. Yet it is the fact that this voice can only be purely intelligible by virtue of Lysias' absence which subsequently allows Phaedrus to appropriate this voice, an appropriation, however, which can only occur through Phaedrus' negation of his *own* intelligibility, the abdication of any responsibility for his own voice¹². It is this abdication, the continuing identification of the speech with the sensibly absent yet intelligibly present figure of Lysias which prevents any dialogic disruption of the authoritative voice, just as Socrates abdicates responsibility over his own words in attributing his criticisms of writing to the sensibly absent yet intelligibly present figure of Thamus (although Thamus' absence is of course feigned, Thamus actually being identifiable as Socrates himself). Phaedrus, therefore,

assumes the incontestable authority of the absent Lysias, absenting himself in order that he can assume this authority. Socrates' attribution of his own criticisms of writing to Thamus can be seen as a satirical reflection of this process, Socrates 'absenting' himself from his own voice *via* myth that he can lend authority to this voice *through* or *as* the purely intelligible figure of Thamus. In doing so Socrates is clearly parodying the role of the oral poet:

To give life to . . . imaginary beings and to summon the "beyond," the poet first produces a story which, through language, gives a picture of the beings who populate this other world. By totally identifying himself with these beings, the poet alienates his own identity. He places in his own mouth the speech which these beings should utter and the sounds which they should emit. He even physically becomes these beings and, with the help of masks, he takes on their attitudes and postures, postures which are expressed by music and given rhythm by dance. When summoning the beyond, the whole bodies of the poet and of his interpreters are mobilized in the theatre and sanctuary. (Brisson 8)

The humour of the dialogic situation in which the myth of Thamus is recited lies, of course, in the fact that beings who populate the "other world" in question are physically present, as they are present in the reading situation itself in the form of the book and the reader. Socrates and Phaedrus do not have to physically become these beings since they are already these beings, the difference between the mythological realm and the present situation being a mere apparenacy.

Nonetheless, it is evident that the authoritative or univocal status of the voice is constituted by the absence of one's sensibility of the author, that which renders Lysias a purely intelligible presence, and the absence of the intelligibility of the speaker, that which renders Phaedrus a purely sensible presence. One could say that the authority that Phaedrus attempts to appropriate in hiding the script, therefore, is constituted by the appropriation of a purely intelligible past by a purely sensible presence. In concealing the script Phaedrus is substituting *his* material presence for that of the script itself, and in doing so is reducing himself to precisely the same material status *as* that script, being the inert means through

which Lysias sustains his purely intelligible presence. Moreover, the immanent authority of the purely intelligible figure of Lysias is also constituted by this reduction to the inert materiality of the script; it is this materiality which denotes his absence, the means through which his intelligible presence remains incontestable. The unresponsive script, therefore, *incarnates* an absent past, being a placebo for the sensible presence of the author (hence Socrates' identification of the script *as* Lysias); the script physically constitutes the very absence which renders Lysias' purely intelligible voice irrefutable, erotically representing the material *possibility* of absolute self-authorisation. This is significant precisely because, for Plato, "mythical beings cannot be apprehended by any sense. In Plato's work, they fall under the jurisdiction of the soul. . . . these realities cannot be apprehended by any of the senses . . ." (Brisson 7-8). If Phaedrus moves into the space that this script represents in order to appropriate the timeless rationality of Lysias' voice, then it nevertheless remains apparent that this voice can never escape the vehicle of its transmission, of an audience's present, sensible awareness of its speaker. Indeed, this incontestable rationality and its ability to transform the means of transmission into the embodiment of an absent past, the space which *promises* self-authorisation, acts as the means of initiating the listener's erotic attraction to this present speaker no matter who he is: they desire to move into, and appropriate, the space in question, reducing themselves to this book/ this absent past that they can attain the incontestable self-presence, the pure intelligibility, that the voice promises. Such eroticism obviously bears comparison to the Freudian notion of *Thanatos*, the death drive. It is notable that Freud views the "compulsion to repeat" in the analytic situation, the attempt to retain or attain absolute self-authorisation by repeating or returning to the past, as a manifestation of this death drive, the instinctual "*urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things* which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces . . . the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life" (244). This urge,

for Freud, is also the basis of the *Erōs*, the “‘instinct towards perfection’” (250) which drives the sexual libido:

The . . . instinct never ceases to strive for complete satisfaction. . . . No substitutive or reactive formations and no sublimations will suffice to remove the . . . instinct’s persisting tension; and it is the difference in amount between the pleasure of satisfaction which is demanded and that which is actually achieved that provides the driving factor which will permit of no halting at any position attained, but in the poet’s words, ‘*ungebändigt immer vorwärts dringt*’ [‘presses ever forward unsubdued¹³’]. (249)

As will become evident, for Plato, it is the difference between the satisfaction that the written script or the mythological ‘voice’ *promises* and that which is actually *achieved* which sustains reading as a specifically erotic process in which the text is *never* finally installed within the ‘rights of reality’, this installation always being contested by the potentiality which is matter.

The nature of this eroticism becomes apparent in the scopophilic nature of Socrates’ feigned attraction to Phaedrus:

It’s a miracle, my friend; I’m in ecstasy. And it’s all your doing Phaedrus: I was looking at you while you were reading and it seemed to me the speech had made you radiant with delight; and since I believe you understand these matters better than I do, I followed your lead, and following you I shared in your Bacchic frenzy (234d)

This scopophilic attraction bears comparison to Socrates’ subsequent explanation of *erōs* in terms of the beloved acting as the vehicle through which the form of beauty reveals itself: “. . . we grasp it sparkling through the clearest of our senses. Vision, of course, is the sharpest of our bodily senses, although it does not see wisdom. It would awaken a terribly powerful love if an image of wisdom came through our sight as clearly as beauty does . . .” (250d). It is the *image* of wisdom, of the self-present rationality which the negation of Lysias/ Phaedrus into text facilitates, which is perceived in Phaedrus’ reading. Phaedrus has inserted his own material presence into this space of negation, offering himself as the vehicle through which

divine wisdom becomes apparent. The speaker thus attains the erotic status of the materiality of writing itself, the present materiality which masks itself with the purely intelligible past, with the textualised voice. Phaedrus thus reduces himself to the timeless rationality that this materiality embodies. In utilising this rationality then, the speaker can simultaneously present himself to the audience as the erotic opportunity of self-negation and self-authorisation, two factors which, as the myth of Thamus demonstrates, are wholly identifiable. The audience, like Phaedrus, can only succumb to this covertly erotic temptation, for, since they cannot interrogate the speaker's voice, they can only submit to it, erasing their *own* intelligibility into that of the usurping voice. The voice cannot reformulate itself in reaction to interrogation and so the audience must reformulate themselves in terms of this apparent rationality: ". . . whoever is persuaded by the myth surrenders his liberty, for he is led, without being fully aware of the fact, to modify his behaviour according to a system of inherited values which, by definition, is foreign to him" (Brisson 9). Even when the audience 'misinterprets' the textualised voice, this misinterpretation will not be corrected, and, as such, will be accepted as a valid interpretation, as a 'truth' which is inherent within the voice, rather than as product of the listener's reinterpretation. Such writing transmits, as Brisson puts it, "unfalsifiable information" (10) and is therefore aligned with myth and the oral tradition, there being no means of affirming or denying the veracity of that which is, or appears to be, articulated¹⁴. This, indeed, is the seductive means through which the voice retains its incontestable, immanent rationality, enacting the lack of conviction (it would, in this context, be more accurate to say the *absence* of conviction) which means that *any* interpretation will appear to be valid (unless a listener wilfully misinterprets), negating the relevance of any content by allowing any reader/ listener to assume that they have mastered this content:

When it has once been written down, every discourse rolls about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately those with understanding no less than those who have no business with it, and it doesn't know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not. And when it is faulted and attacked unfairly, it always needs its father's support; alone it can neither defend itself nor come to its own support. (276e)

As Thamus asserts, readers "will imagine that they have come to know much while for the most part they will know nothing" (275b), and the phrase "know nothing" is pertinent, for the universal appeal of the voice is derived the absence of conviction which *is* the material text or the self-authorising speaker. As in myth, any interpretation will be derived from the absolutely substitutional space *of* this absence, that which negates any differentiated content, any interpretation, into the constant restatement of the erotic appeal of matter, the empty form which *embodies* this authorising absence. This is also why this empty formality, as enacted in the performative nature of the speech, cannot be disrupted by the speaker's attempts to adapt its content into subjective terms, thus enacting his differentiated individuality. For example, Phaedrus' "careful summary" of the speech's "general sense . . . in the proper order" (228d), the means through which he wishes to practice his "speechmaking" (228e), would enact precisely the same paradigm. Any divergence from the text, a differentiation which could reinforce Phaedrus' status as 'author', would still be protected from interrogation by virtue of his abdication of responsibility, the abdication which would ascribe *any* interpretation to the absent Lysias. More importantly, this abdication would still enact Phaedrus as the erotic materiality which this content merely serves to mask, the true basis of his authority, enacting the lack of conviction which negates the present relevance of this differentiated content. *Only* this contemporary relevance could permit Phaedrus' speech to be differentiated from that of Lysias', rather than reduced to the homogeneity of a static past that the text embodies as the unchanging, intelligible, presence *of* Lysias. Any alteration in the vocal articulation of the text would simply restate an empty

form which, in light of its lack of content, remains indistinguishable from the empty form of the 'original' text.

That this erasure of the difference between writing and speech, text and myth, constitutes an erasure of time, and thus of the present, also becomes evident. Once the speech has been read and Phaedrus asks for Socrates' acclaim, Socrates ironically asks:

What? Must we praise the speech even on the ground that its author said what the situation demanded, and not instead simply on the ground that he has spoken in a clear and concise manner, with a precise turn of phrase? If we must, I will have to go along for your sake, since . . . that passed me by. I paid attention only to the speeches' style. . . . it seemed to me, Phaedrus . . . that he said the same things two or even three times, as if he really didn't have much to say about the subject, almost as if he just weren't very interested in it. In fact, he seemed to me to be showing off, trying to demonstrate that he could say the same thing in two different ways, and say it just as well both times. (234e-235a)

Socrates is feigning the role of the seduced here in order to reveal the manner in which the absolute repetition of empty or self-authorising form re-enacts itself in each reading, negating any difference between those readings. Socrates' exaggerated inability to apprehend the content of the speech serves to demonstrate the manner in which each reading will fail to meet the particular demands of the present situation, erasing the particularity of any reading, and will only meet the demands of the author's desire for authority (Lysias' "showing off"). That this is a desire which erotically infects every reading is demonstrated by Phaedrus' desire to say "the same thing in two different ways", to present *his* summary of Lysias' speech.

Yet if this implies that the difference between speaker and audience can be wholly overcome, that the audience, like Phaedrus, can always appropriate the role of the author, erotically consummating the negation of difference between the speaker and themselves, then it is precisely the sensible presence of the speaker which prevents this consummation. It is this presence which continually remains in place, signifying the difference between speaker

and audience, subject and object. The attainment of the intelligibility or self-presence that the text/ speaker promises and the negation of the contesting sensible presence of that text/ speaker are two sides of the same coin. In other words, the empirical presence of the speaker renders him a *hupomnēmic* enactment of intelligibility rather than an embodiment of this pure intelligibility. It is for this reason that the scopophilic eroticism of Socrates' attraction to the speaker is not a desire *for* the speaker, but a desire for the *erasure* of the speaker: more specifically, it is a desire for an erotic self-negation *into* the speaker, inserting *oneself* into this space of erotic sensibility. It is only through this insertion that the audience can erase the sensibility which constantly signifies the absence of any consummation between the self and the disembodied intelligibility of the voice. Again, this recalls the manner in which the lover is drawn to his beloved by the possibility of negating the difference between self and other, thus apprehending the pure intelligibility of the form of beauty which the beloved reflects but never wholly embodies. Similarly, it is the fact that pure intelligibility cannot be embodied by the speaker, by virtue of the audience's sensibility of that speaker, which prompts the uncovering of the script itself, in an attempt to attain the erotic *telos*, a *telos* which is not so much writing, as the possibility of erasing oneself *into* writing in order to achieve the incontestable absence which is indistinguishable from the absolute repetition of self-presence. As we have seen, the teleological end of Socrates' feigned attraction is not Phaedrus, or Phaedrus' reflection of the form of beauty (the *purely intelligible* form of beauty¹⁵), but the script itself, that which, like the oral poet, is masked by a purely intelligible past. This is why, in revealing the repressed script, Socrates is merely mimicking Phaedrus' own revelation of the script. In reference to Phaedrus' assertion that he is unable to recite Lysias' speech from memory, Socrates asserts:

Oh Phaedrus, if I don't know my Phaedrus I must be forgetting who I am myself – and neither is the case. I know very well that he did not hear Lysias' speech only once: he asked him to repeat it over and over again, and Lysias

was eager to oblige. But even that was not enough for him. In the end, he took the book himself and pored over the parts he liked best. He sat reading all morning long, and when he got tired, he went for a walk, having learned – I am quite sure – the whole speech by heart . . . (228a-b)

Socrates initially insinuates that, in erasing his knowledge of Phaedrus, he is forgetting himself, reflecting the audience's erotic desire to erase their knowledge of the speaker, his sensible presence, in order that they can appropriate his position, erasing *themselves* into this space in attaining the self-authorising intelligibility of the disembodied voice: “. . . if I don't know my Phaedrus I must be forgetting who I am myself . . .”. The voice thus represents the thetic space in which the difference between self and other does not apply. Despite the constant, disingenuous, identification of the voice as Lysias' voice, anybody can occupy this space. This process of erotically conforming to the incontestable voice and moving into this space is enacted in Phaedrus' constant requests for repetition (as opposed to entering into a dialogue), the means through which he initially wishes to learn “the whole speech by heart”, transforming the self into this atemporal rationality. However, in order to attain this rationality, thus consummating his erotic attraction to Lysias, Phaedrus must negate his sensible awareness of Lysias. It is in appropriating the script that Phaedrus can insert himself into the sensible space of Lysias, negating his sensibility *of* Lysias, to leave only the intelligibility of the voice. Yet the absolute attainment of this intelligibility is a mere apperency, for Phaedrus must subsequently erase his sensible awareness of the script itself, the presence which continually signifies that this consummation with the pure intelligibility of the past has not been attained. Again, this is suggestive of the manner in which the material script, as a sensible presence, comes to embody the possibility of the past, the possibility of supplanting this presence simultaneously being the erotic possibility of attaining the purely intelligible status of the origin, this being the absent/ present *pharmakon* which seduces the reader. Consequently, Phaedrus attempts to consummate his erotic

attraction to the script by negating the script, memorising the speech in precisely the same manner that he attempts to learn the “whole speech by heart” from Lysias. Phaedrus, as his concealment of the script from Socrates demonstrates, must negate any present sensibility of the text, repressing the specifically written status of the speech: he does so by finally attaining the status of the script itself, becoming the absence which allows the voice to remain an incontestable presence. In memorising the speech, he abdicates responsibility even for his own *thoughts*, completely forgetting himself in order that he can attain the pure intelligibility that the text promises and subsequently, erotically, enacting himself as the possibility of attaining this purely intelligibility to his audience.

Yet even if Phaedrus’ erasure of the script facilitates a consummation with this seductive object, the consummation with pure intelligibility is never finalised. Phaedrus’ ‘pre-oedipal’ status, the reduction of himself to the *absence* that lies behind the text in order that he can become the ‘full’ presence that *is* the textualised voice, remains subject to the disruptive demands of the present, demands that must be continually repressed. As the erotic desire to erase the subject’s sensibility of the text’s physical means of transmission suggests, a sensibility of the present *in itself* constitutes one of these disruptive demands. This is why Socrates initially attempts to shift Phaedrus’ attention away from the question of mythology, the pharmaceutical question of the origin, to the sensuous situation in which the two find themselves, this being a means of *reminding* Phaedrus of both the present and his *own* presence:

SOCRATES: By Hera this really is a beautiful resting place. . . . the whole place is filled with its fragrance. From under the plane tree the loveliest spring runs with very cool water – our feet can testify to that. . . . Feel the freshness of the air; how pretty and pleasant it is; how it echoes with the summery sweet song of the cicada’s chorus! The most exquisite thing of all, of course, is the grassy slope: it rises so gently that you can rest your head perfectly when you lie down on it. (230b-c)

Again, Socrates' actions foreshadow the role of the Freudian analyst. The Freudian analyst attempts to repress the present in the process of transference, maintaining his pre-oedipal status by erotically transforming the analyst to a replication of the self. Similarly, the speaker, even if he has memorised the speech and achieved the desired 'self-presence' that this entails, does not erase the *erōs* which leads him to this point. In order to maintain this 'self-presence' he continues to incessantly project his eroticism onto the audience in an attempt to reduce this audience to a replication of the self, or, analogously, to reduce the self to a replication of the audience. The erotic relationship between the two, therefore, is reciprocal, this being why Lysias is not only willing but "eager" to oblige Phaedrus' requests that he repeat the speech "over and over again" (228a). The speaker, however, must disguise or rationalise his erotic attraction to the audience, for this attraction, *in itself*, would performatively signify that he has not attained the pure intelligibility with which he seduces them. Like the oral poet this speaker must enact the immanent rationality of his words as an absolutely autonomous self-presence, a timeless truth that is not subject to the erotic demands of the audience, for as we have seen, it is this inertness, this incontestable nature, which seduces the audience in the first place. It is only through these means that the speaker can initiate the audience's erotic desire to lose themselves in the empty formality of the voice, transforming them into a mirror image of himself as their *erōs* comes to reflect his own. The repression or rationalisation of the poet's erotic relationship with his audience is parodied in Socrates' attempt to "make a different speech, even better than Lysias'" (235c), a speech that is itself a parody of Lysias' original speech. The disingenuity of Socrates' speech, however, is made manifest:

There once was a boy, a youth rather, and he was very beautiful, and had very many lovers. One of them was wily and had persuaded him that he was not in love, though he loved the lad no less than the others. And once in pressing his suit to him, he tried to persuade him that he ought to give his favors to a man

who did not love him rather than one who did. And this is what he said. . . .
(237b)

Like Lysias, the lover sophisticatedly enacts himself as an embodiment of disinterested rationality in order to disguise the irrational process of eroticism that he is attempting to initiate in his audience, criticising eroticism in the very act of performing eroticism. As in the case of Thamus, the dishonesty lies not in the speeches' content, for his criticisms of love could be perfectly valid: his dishonesty lies in his lack of conviction, the undisclosed, or unconscious motives, behind his rational words. It is these motives which render the contents of his words inconsequential, being mere instruments for seducing the audience with the erotic promise of negating themselves into the position of the poet. Yet the deceptive status of this rationality works in *both* directions, for it also masks the fact that the speaker is, himself, in love with his audience, the reason, of course, why he wishes to initiate their attraction, designating the audience an eroticised object. This is precisely why Socrates' scopophilic attraction to Phaedrus is reciprocal: ". . . running into a man who was sick with passion for hearing speeches, seeing him – just seeing him – he was filled with delight: he had found a partner for his frenzied dance . . ." (228b). Just as Socrates is in "ecstasy" at the sight of Phaedrus being "radiant with delight" as he reads, thus following his "lead" that he may share in his "Bacchic frenzy" (234d), Socrates conversely links the scopophilic attraction of Phaedrus to Socrates to the bacchanalia. It is notable, however, that the phrase "frenzied dance" (228b), is a translation of '*sunkorubantiōnta*' "dance of the Corybantes", an orgiastic ritual which was thought to cure the mental disorder which was inspired by the Corybants, reflecting the manner in which both audience *and* speaker are enticed to the irrational process of *erōs* with the eternal promise of rationality.

Socrates begins to reveal the consequences of this mutual and self-negating eroticism in his "different speech", ironically indicating its infinite nature and linking it to the

pharmaceutical question of writing and the origin. The speech is intended to act as a refutation of Phaedrus' assertion that Lysias "has omitted nothing worth mentioning about the subject" (235b), or, literally, has left "nothing remaining" (*paraleoipen*), as though Lysias has finally attained the pure intelligibility with which the audience is erotically, and covertly, enticed. Socrates asserts that if he accepts this view he will be refuted by "all the wise men and women of old who have spoken or written about this subject" (235b), and when Phaedrus asks who they are and where Socrates has heard a better speech, Socrates demurs:

I can't tell you offhand, but I'm sure I've heard better somewhere; perhaps it was the lovely Sappho or the wise Anacreon or even some writer of prose. So, what's my evidence? The fact, my dear friend, that my breast is full and I feel I can make a different speech, even better than Lysias'. Now I am well aware that none of these ideas can come from me – I know my own ignorance. The only other possibility, I think, is that I was filled, like an empty jar, by the words of other people streaming in through my ears, though I'm so stupid that I've even forgotten where I heard them. (235c-d)

As Phaedrus pretends that his "general summary" is a result of his inability to memorise Lysias' speech, thus enacting the summary as an incontestable presence which negates him into the empty form *of* this speech, Socrates becomes an "empty jar" (*angeiou*) the material form which, like Phaedrus, is filled with the voice of others, the vehicle through which the absent origin speaks. It is this abdication of responsibility in favour of an absent past which renders his materiality a signifier for the erotic possibility of self-negation, of thanatologically or erotically reducing oneself *to* the sensible absence/ pure intelligibility of this past: the word *angeiou* can also mean 'body' or 'coffin'. Socrates' speech thus reflects Phaedrus' erotic appropriation of Lysias' voice, or alternatively, the erotic appropriation of Phaedrus *by* this voice. As Socrates' inability to remember the original author reveals, the process of mythologisation which the name 'Lysias' now denotes has rendered Phaedrus indistinguishable from every other absent author, from every other speaker who has ever

erotically inserted themselves into this mythological space, that to which Socrates, Plato and the reader (for example) succumb. The attraction of this erotic possibility of self-negation/self-authorisation becomes apparent when one compares Socrates' attribution of the speech to forgotten authors with the invocation with which begins his speech, an invocation to what is, apparently, divinity:

Come to me, O you clear voiced Muses, whether you are called so because of the quality of your song or from the musical people of Liguria, "come, take up my burden" in telling the tale that this fine fellow forces upon me so that his companion may now seem to him even more clever than he did before: (237a-b)

As the ironic final words suggest, Socrates abdicates responsibility over his speech in order to authorise *himself* as an erotic embodiment of pure intelligibility, humorously revealing that 'his' cleverness is predicated on his erotic negation into the purely intelligible voice that speaks through him. He reflects this process in his comical desire to cover his face while he recites (237a) thus masking his sensible presence with the divine wisdom of an absent past. Yet the true nature of the Muses that Socrates invokes has already been made clear, being the undifferentiated voices of past authors who emit themselves through Socrates. This is linked to the "quality" of the Muses song, or, in the original, their *form*: "*eite di ôidês eidos ligeiai*". Socrates asserts that the Muses are called the *ligeiai*, the "clear voiced" *either* by virtue of the nature of their form (their *eidos*) *or* by virtue of that word's derivation from the musical Ligurians (*Liguôn*). This fanciful etymology thus equates the poetic form through which the oral poet seduces his audience with the static form of the past, the purely intelligible factuality, through which the writer seduces his audience. The role of the Muses in poetry and the role of the 'forgotten' authors in writing are, therefore, equated through the wholly contingent phonic relationship between the words *ligeiai* and *Liguôn*, the speeches' status as "unfalsifiable information" allowing him to substitute one origin for the other. Yet this

contingency not only emphasises the absolutely substitutional nature of the origin which speaks through Socrates, but also the absolutely substitutional nature of what is *said* in the speech. This speech is reduced to an irrelevant play of formal signifiers which have no other purpose than to instrumentally sustain the authority that the speaker has appropriated; it makes no difference *which* constitutes the origin for the erotic effect will be the same. Evidently, the past performs the same role in writing as the Muses perform in oral poetry, both negating the speaker that his authority can be reinforced. As Socrates suggests, this authority is ultimately derived from the absent and undifferentiated “wise men and women of old” (235b) who, like the Muses, are speaking through the “empty vessel” of Socrates. Socrates cannot remember which *particular* author inspires his words, revealing that the voice that enacts its timeless presence through him is the voice of an indifferent past, of every ‘author’ who has been erotically seduced by writing: “. . . perhaps it was lovely Sappho or the wise Anacreon or even some writer of prose” (235c). It is this formal enactment of the divine potentialities of absence, of the undifferentiated dead, through which the poet authorises his voice.

Nevertheless, as Socrates subsequently reveals, the true, present, inspiration for his speech is Phaedrus himself, he who comes to embody these dead ‘authors’, this past, in his recitation of Lysias’ speech, a past which can equally be embodied by the materiality of the script itself. This is why Socrates ironically equates Phaedrus with both the Muses and the inanimate landscape:

SOCRATES: There, Phaedrus my friend, don’t you think that I’m in the grip of something divine?

PHAEDRUS: This is certainly an unusual flow of words for you, Socrates.

SOCRATES: There’s something really divine about this place, so don’t be surprised if I’m quite taken by the Nymph’s madness as I go on with this speech. I’m on the edge of speaking in dithyrambs as it is.

PHAEDRUS: Very true!

SOCRATES: Yes, and you're the cause of it. (238d)

When, therefore, Socrates criticises Phaedrus for worrying about “who is speaking and where he comes from” (275b-c), comparing the author to a stone or a tree, he is linking the indifference of the absent past to the indifference which is inherent in materiality itself, a materiality which erotically *embodies* the thanatological possibility of reducing oneself *to* this indifferent status. Yet if the material status of the script embodies this absent past, presenting the erotic possibility of attaining pure intelligibility, then this intelligibility, like death, is only intelligible from the *outside*. Just as the past is only purely intelligible *as* the past, (i.e. from a *present* position which is other to the past), that which the text presents is only purely intelligible by virtue of one's otherness to the situation which is represented, it being this otherness, this *hupomnēmic* status, which *renders* it purely intelligible. Consequently, that which the text promises, the possibility which the materiality of the script embodies, can never be attained, there being no consummation with a pure intelligibility which only *exists* as a *hupomnēme*, a *reminder*. The possibility of this consummation only endures as long as eroticism itself endures, an eroticism which is, in the absence *of* any possible consummation, infinite.

The manner in which Phaedrus absents himself into the isolation of the countryside, erasing himself from the societal dialogue, the context, which testifies to his sensible presence, can be seen as an allegorical enactment of the thanatological attractions of absence. Nevertheless, while Phaedrus may have memorised the text in an attempt to *reduce* himself to this text, he cannot attain that which the text promises, which is why he absurdly continues to recite to the trees and landscape. This is an absolutely appropriate image for the infinite and futile process of eroticism to which writing, and the inseparable question of the origin, gives rise. The poet's attempts to covertly seduce the audience into becoming an absolute

reflection of himself, the constant attempt to *negate* the *hupomnēmic* or sensible awareness of this audience that he may maintain self-authorisation, ultimately gives way to a farcical attempt to negate the sensible altogether, to negate not only the societal context but the present *as a whole* in favour of a purely intelligible past. All that Phaedrus can do is continually repeat himself to this inert materiality in an attempt to maintain the incessantly *hupomnēmic* intelligibility that he has already attained: he is involved in an infinite process of trying to reduce this disruptive present to a pure intelligibility or, conversely, trying to reduce himself to the static materiality of the landscape, thus negating its disruptive, sensible presence. From an external point of view, of course, this erotic monologism has *already* reduced Phaedrus to the material status of writing, Phaedrus being a mere vehicle for the mythological voice: he has already achieved the absence which supposedly constitutes a consummation with the pure intelligibility, that with which writing entices him. However, that this intelligibility is *intrinsically hupomnēmic* means that he cannot be aware of this attainment, *hupomnēsis* remaining in place disingenuously *denying* any such 'consummation'. Phaedrus has *already* been reduced to the same status as the trees and the landscape that he inhabits, even as he continues his attempts to reduce himself to their objective status. Such an 'unconscious' status can *only* be apprehended from an external point of view, Phaedrus being continually implicated in the process of *erōs*, in the act of reading through which he forgets himself. Again, this points to the manner in which this erotic *telos* can only be intelligibly perceived *from* this external, *hupomnēmic* perspective, hence the infectious nature of this *pharmakon*. Socrates' pursuit of Phaedrus after he has left the city, and his feigned erotic attraction for him can be seen as an allegorical enactment of this thanatological substitutionality. As this feigned eroticism parodically demonstrates, to witness Phaedrus' recitation, and more importantly, the unconscious status of which Phaedrus himself is unaware, is to be *hupomnēmically*, or erotically, drawn to the

intelligibility of his speech or, indistinguishably, to his material, sensible, presence, that which one wishes to erotically erase and appropriate. This is the means through which one's *erōs* lives on *via* a substitutive and indifferent material origin even after one's death, this voice constantly, and unsuccessfully, attempting to negate its material means of transmission, attempting to attain an absence which has already been attained and is incessantly *being* attained. Similarly, the fact that Phaedrus consummates his relationship with Lysias by assuming his role, negating him in favour of the script, and then consummates his relationship to this script, memorising it and thus negating it in favour of the inanimate landscape, reveals the manner in which the speaker is caught up in this ultimately auto-erotic process, Phaedrus being unable to step out of this circularity and apprehend his own monolithic status.

Socrates parodies this process in the myth of the cicadas, those who have “died without even realising it” (259b-c). Socrates explains the efficacy of his own speech by attributing it to “the messengers of the Muses who are singing over our heads” who “may have inspired me with this gift” (262d), adding them to the inspirational indifferentiation of the Muses, the past authors, Phaedrus and the landscape. The cicadas had been human-beings before the Muses, and the songs they inspired, were created, whereupon they became so enraptured by these songs that they forgot to eat and drink:

... so they died without even realising it. It is from them that the race of the cicadas came into being; and as a gift from the Muses, they have no need of nourishment once they are born. Instead, they immediately burst into song, without food or drink, until it is time for them to die. After they die, they go to the muses and tell each one of them which mortals have honored her. (259b-c)

It is the entrancement of music which seduces the cicadas, the empty formality of the repetition which, from an external point of view, constantly signifies the attainment of materiality, the possibility of attaining a self-negatory consummation with pure intelligibility.

It is notable, in this respect that cicadas were thought to be autochthonous. As Aristophanes asserts in the famous Platonic discussion of *erōs* in the Symposium¹⁶, a discussion in which the erotic is explained in terms of the desire to negate the division between male and female and attain their original, asexual, status, lovers,

. . . would throw their arms about each other, weaving themselves together, wanting to grow together. In that condition they would die from hunger and general idleness. . . . Then, however, Zeus took pity on them, and came up with another plan: he moved their genitals around to the front! Before then, you see, they used to have their genitals outside, like their faces, and they cast seed and made children, not in one another, but in the ground, like cicadas. (191b-c)

The relevance of shifting the genitals is that it permits “interior reproduction, *by the man in the woman*” (191c), rather than through the external means of the ground, thus allowing a temporary attainment of the negation of difference. This negation, unlike the materiality of the speaker or the text, does not present itself, through the disembodied voice, as the only *embodiment* of pure intelligibility, that which leaves “nothing remaining” (235b). Moreover, this consummation does not occur through a utilisation of this disingenuous promise, and does not rely on this disingenuity in order to initiate the material *erōs*, for the material form of the lover is that which masks intelligibility, their beauty reflecting the *Form* of beauty, rather than presenting this intelligibility as that which masks material form: the lovers’ “cannot say what they want from one other. . . . like an oracle it (the lover’s soul) has a sense of what it wants, and like an oracle it hides behind a riddle” (192c-d). As Nicholas P. White asserts:

It is as though we might “see” the Forms, but only under circumstances in which, or through a medium because of which, it would be impossible to perceive them clearly, as though — to use a figure that Plato tends not to employ, but that conveys the idea — there were a mist between us and them which we had to penetrate in order to apprehend them. (91-92)

The negation of the particular, material, difference between lovers, therefore, does not present itself as the possibility of negating difference itself and attaining complete self-presence, or promise this negation to be the attainment of absolute intelligibility, the promise that writing cannot fulfil. The act of love thus retains the externality which is the condition of intelligibility, the condition of the non-attainment of pure intelligibility. As Socrates asserts, the lovers, “. . . when they have consummated . . . go on doing it for the rest of their lives, but sparingly, since they have not approved of what they are doing with their whole minds” (256c). This temporary, partial, nature of the negation of difference restores the reality principle, allowing the autochthones to “return to their jobs, and look after their other needs in life” (191c) rather than being repetitively, bound by the erotic desire to overcome the particular difference, the particular externality of an erotic object, and thus attain the complete negation of difference which is absence or synonymously the immanence that this particularity promises, but which is not *there*.

It is this non-attainment which prompts Phaedrus’ change in allegiance from Lysias, to the text, to the landscape, as he attempts to attain the immanence of matter itself, that which always remains *other* to intelligibility, yet is perceived *as* the possibility of complete intelligibility as a result of the erotic process that the textualised voice initiates. For, as the continuation of the cicada’s thanatological repetition, the incessant desire to die *after* they have died, demonstrates, the consummation with matter is negated *through* this consummation, erasing each person into the repetitive, undifferentiated, and infectious chirping of the living/dead cicadas. This is analogous to the autochthones’ repetitive attempts to mate with the ground, to negate, or negate oneself into, that which constantly signifies non-consummation, and that which must be erased in order to restore the originary, undifferentiated, self, the *telos* of an erotic process which always sustains its own possibility through negating itself at the moment of attainment. Again, from a disembodied viewpoint,

the negation of differentiation which matter embodies has already been achieved, for the thanatological cicadas absolutely reflect each other in their death. It is the awareness of externality *in itself* which continually signifies difference, and to succumb to the erotic attractions of this externality is to negate difference without being able to apprehend that negation. This gives rise to the circular, narcissistic nature of the relationship between the poet and audience, for each cicada reports to the muse only the mortals who have honoured their particular nature, those who honour Terpsichore through dance, who honour Erato through love, and so on. Yet that they do so through the songs that are *inspired* by the muses points to the fact that the emptiness of this form will inevitably allow the muses to hear only what they wish to hear, that which will reflect the externalised authority that they cannot subjectively attain. As Socrates asserts “a man who is ruled by desire and is a slave to pleasure will turn his boy into whatever is most pleasing to himself” (238e), and what is most pleasing to himself is of course, himself, or rather the erotic desire for the self-replication through which he constantly attempts to externally affirm his self-presence, to consummate himself. It is this reduction that Socrates ironically mocks in answering Phaedrus’ assertion that he will erect “a life-sized golden statue (*chrusên eikona*) at Delphi, not only of myself but also of you” (235e) if Socrates can improve on Lysias’ speech without repeating it: “You’re a real friend, Phaedrus, good as gold (*hôs alêthôs chrusous*) . . .” (235e). It is the desire to turn Socrates into another mimetic icon, a mere form, which reveals the authorial necessity of a mute witness who can only reflect this immanent authority, negating the difference between self and world, subject and object. As Socrates asserts, the “most ambitious politicians love speechwriting”, and usually begin the written speech with a list of their admirers; yet these admirers cannot be differentiated from the politician himself, just as the politician cannot be differentiated from his admirers, the reciprocal loss of self which is the mark of the poet: “Resolved,” the author often begins, “by the council” or “by the

people” or by both, and “So-and-so said” – meaning himself, the writer, with great solemnity and self-importance. . . . then, if it remains on the books, he is delighted and leaves the stage a poet” (258a-b). That the muses merely replicate themselves through the auto-erotic voice of the cicadas, reflects not only this auto-erotic annihilation, but also the absurdity of Phaedrus’ monologue, his authority over the trees and stones which absolutely reflect this empty formality, and yet remain erotic by virtue of his sensible awareness of them. Like the Muses, he is no more than another cicada amongst the mass, constantly repeating his own self-present status to an audience who merely repeat this self-presence back to him, and thus remind him that this presence is always beyond his self-awareness, always an externality. Socrates may assert that “landscapes and trees have nothing to teach me – only the people in the city can do that” (230d), but the people of the city, of course, can only teach by interrogating Socrates’ opinions, and it is, therefore, the eroticism which is initiated by the unquestionable nature of the textualised voice which negates the boundary between city and country, covertly reducing each member of society to the undifferentiated and silent formality of the stones and trees which inhabit this landscape. The individuality of each city-dweller is erased into a homogeneity of a society in which each member, like the living/ dead cicadas, can only infinitely repeat the empty formality into which they are seduced, actively repeating their own reflective passivity.

Nevertheless, this is not to assert that Plato rejects writing. As his discussion of myth demonstrates it is in concentrating on the question of writing *itself* rather than on what writing *says*, on the origins of myth rather than its truth *value*, that the imaginative space, the space of *potentiality*, that writing opens up is undone, as one succumbs to a futile eroticism in which one is incessantly trying to conform to, and attain, a reality which is a mere *hupomnēme*. This produces the kind of society which is enacted in the myth of the cicadas, a myth which reflects, to some degree, that of the pre-literate society, a society in which the

body of cultural knowledge necessarily remains unquestioned, and is, therefore, reflected in every consciousness. As Plato's identification of myth with the oral tradition suggests the danger of writing is *precisely* its installation within the 'rights of reality', that which would (if it *could* be attained) be the *reduction* of writing to precisely the kind of reality that was previously articulated in the form of myth and oral poetry. As his acceptance of writing as a *hupomnēme* suggests, the virtue of writing is not its ability to usurp consciousness, but its ability to exteriorise the fact that consciousness itself, the body of knowledge which is handed down, has *never* been installed within the 'rights of reality'. As the truth *value* of myth is subsequently open to dialogic interrogation, so is consciousness itself, the ambiguity of consciousness' relation to the past and reality being revealed. Both of these factors are reduced to irresolvable potentialities, revealing the ambiguity of consciousness itself, a consciousness which is now free from the demands of memory and a linguistically imposed 'reality'. This is precisely why Plato accepts the *hupomnēmic* status of writing, of myth, the past and reality: it is this *hupomnēmic* status which *facilitates* the *mnēme*, that which constitutes consciousness' ability to explore and actualise its own potentialities. Gerard Naddaf poses the question: "Did he [Plato] not see a written text as an *aide-mémoire* which would incite discussion with or without the presence of its author?" (xxii). The answer is affirmative, Plato opposing the monologic writing in precisely the same manner that he opposes the monologism of the oral poet. Rather than being a repression of writing then, the *Phaedrus* constitutes a recognition of the *value* of writing and an attempt to protect writing from precisely the reductive arguments that Derrida proposes. The *pharmaceutical* question of writing itself is, as Derrida's work demonstrates, inseparable from the wholly irresolvable question of the origin, of reality, of the past. To attempt to resolve these factors by finally installing the text within the 'rights of reality' is not only to negate or resolve these

potentialities, but is also to negate and resolve the potentiality which is writing or consciousness itself, an act of closure which, for Plato, constitutes a betrayal of writing.

CHAPTER 2

THE POTENTIAL BODY AND THE BODY'S POTENTIALITY: THE USURPATION OF NIETZSCHE

1

OTOBIOGRAPHIES AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ARCHÉ-TRACE

In a lecture delivered at the University of Montreal in 1979 (subsequently published as 'Otobiographies' in The Ear of the Other¹ (1985)) Jacques Derrida examines Nietzsche's Ecce Homo² in terms of autobiography. He takes his critical trajectory from the function of "an outwork, an *hors d'oeuvre*, an exergue or a flysheet" ("Otobiographies" 11) which separates the preface of the text from the text Ecce Homo itself:

On this perfect day, when everything is ripening and not only the grape turns brown, the eye of the sun just fell upon my life: I looked back, I looked forward, and never saw so many and such good things at once. It was not for nothing that I buried my forty-fourth year today; I had the *right* to bury it; whatever was life in it has been saved, is immortal. The first book of the Revaluation of All Values, the Songs of Zarathustra, the Twilight of the Idols, my attempt to philosophize with a hammer – all presents of this year, indeed of its last quarter! *How could I fail to be grateful to my whole life?* – and so I tell my life to myself. (677)

For Derrida, this exergue represents the inherently present space which is enacted in the act of autobiographical self-recitation, the borderline which separates the self-written from self-writing, a borderline which is constantly breached through this act and reconstituted in this act: indeed, it is this process which "*constitutes, gathers, adjoins, and holds the strange present of this auto-biographical *récit* in place*" ("Otobiographies" 13). This point not only enacts Nietzsche's empiricity, being the point at which the past is buried *via* the text, an acceptance of the death to which the author must succumb in order to *be* an author, for this is also the burial of death itself, the point at which this past is *about* to be redeemed in the

affirmative act of self-recitation, the point at which the past can come to textual fruition. Nietzsche “. . . buries his past forty-four years. But what he actually buries is death, and in burying death he has saved life – and immortality” (“Otobiographies” 12):

. . . the structure of the exergue on the borderline or of the borderline in the exergue will be reprinted wherever the question of life, of “my-life,” arises. Between a title or the preface on the one hand, and the book to come on the other, between the title *Ecce Homo* and *Ecce Homo* “itself,” the structure of the exergue situates the place from which life will be *recited* . . . (“Otobiographies” 14)

Yet what this “strange present” also reveals is the manner in which Nietzsche lives on his own *credit*, writing being the point of self-investment, that which enacts the *promise* of a life which cannot be finally consummated until one’s death: “I live on my own credit [I go along living on my own credit, the credit I establish and give myself: *Ich lebe auf meinen eigenen Kredit hin*]; it is perhaps a mere prejudice that I live [*vielleicht bloss ein Vorurteil dass ich lebe*]” (“Otobiographies” 8). As Derrida asserts in reference to this quotation: “This life will be verified only at the moment the bearer of the name, the one whom we, in our prejudice, call living, will have died” (“Otobiographies” 9). In a more expansive mode: “. . . since the “I” of this *récit* only constitutes itself through the credit of the eternal return, he does not exist. He does not sign prior to the *récit qua* eternal return. Until then, *until now*, that I am living may be a mere prejudice. It is the eternal return that signs or seals” (“Otobiographies” 13). Nietzsche’s act of self-writing, as he tells his life to *himself*, will always, ultimately, become that which is written, which is both buried and constantly about to be redeemed as this timeless point reasserts itself, preventing any pre-mortem consummation with the self *as written*. Recalling the manner in which the usurpation of Thamus by writing ensures his eternal recurrence as a timeless mythological presence, it is only at the point of death, the obliteration of Nietzsche’s empirical presence, that Nietzsche’s intrinsically *written* life fulfils the promise that he constantly makes to himself *via* the act of writing. It is at the point

of death that Nietzsche finally escapes himself that he can become himself, his *written* self, in a self-consummation which relies on the mediation of the *reader*:

He never knows in the present, with present knowledge or even in the present of *Ecce Homo*, whether anyone will ever honor the inordinate credit that he extends to himself in his name, but also necessarily in the name of another. . . . if the life that he lives and tells to himself (“autobiography,” they call it) cannot be his life in the first place except as the effect of a secret contract, a credit account which has been both opened and encrypted, an indebtedness, an alliance or annulus, then as long as the contract has not been honored – and it cannot be honored except by another, for example, by you – Nietzsche can write that his life is perhaps a mere prejudice, “es ist vielleicht bloss ein Vorturteil dass ich lebe.” (“Otobiographies” 9)

It is only the *reader* who can honour the credit that Nietzsche extends to himself, for Nietzsche will not live, and will not *have* lived, until the textual figure that he promises himself is brought into being through the act of reading, the ultimate point of redemption: “The time for me hasn’t come yet: some are born posthumously” (715).

The significance of the *exergue* is apparently, therefore, temporal, enacting death, the unstated nature of Nietzsche and of his past life, even as it foreshadows the consummation which is about to occur as we read the book, the transformation of an empirical Nietzsche into the figure which Nietzsche has promised himself, the past which is *about* to occur in what is now a process of eternal recurrence, eternal redemption: “I show you death that consummates – a spur and a promise to the survivors. He that consummates his life dies his death victoriously, surrounded by those who hope and promise” (*Zarathustra* 183–84). It is evident, therefore, that the reason that the reader occupies a privileged position in relation to Nietzsche himself, thus facilitating this consummation, is that they escape Nietzsche’s empiricity and the necessity of constantly translating this empiricity into the mythology that Nietzsche, in his own presence, can only promise himself. It is in the absence of this empiricity that Nietzsche finally coincides with himself, with the textual figure that he

prospectively posits: Nietzsche, once dead, once read, *has now become* the myth or the written self that he *will become* and *is becoming* during his life.

Nevertheless, that this is an *eternal* return is indicative of the manner in which this consummation can never be finalised, or rather, (as in the case of Thamus) can never be seen as final, for this transformation is re-enacted in every act of reading, and this is precisely why Nietzsche incorporates this inherently present point of recurrent recitation into the structure of *Ecce Homo*. He does so in order to reveal the manner in which this liminal point *refutes* any final incorporation into the text, for there is no possibility of this liminal space being transgressed without it being restated at the point that this ‘transgression’ is recognised or ‘finalised’. As Rodolphe Gasché asserts in acknowledging that one can never incorporate the border into that which it borders without erasing and implicitly re-stating its liminal status: “Heterogeneous to both the work and the life, this place of the “programming machine” engenders the text of which it is a part to the extent that it is a part larger than the whole” (42)³. This point, therefore, cannot be left behind once read, for it enacts the inherently present space from which the text is *being* read, the position that Nietzsche surrenders to the reader upon death. In this respect we should note that even within Nietzsche’s own life one can see this *récit* as enacting an act of self-reading as well as self-writing, for it is precisely in the difference between what is read and what is written, what is *buried* and what is *saved*, that Nietzsche facilitates his self-transformation. As he asserts in relation to *Human, All Too Human*: “. . . almost every sentence marks some victory – here I liberated myself from what in my nature did not belong to me” (739). Nevertheless, once Nietzsche, on death, has liberated himself from the empirical life which “did not belong to me’, the self-consummation that death facilitates has *now always already* occurred and it is also always on the threshold of *recurring* in the act of reading. No matter how far back one traces the Nietzschean text one will never find an empirical presence, for Nietzsche’s consummation

with the textual figure that he credits has, *now*, already occurred and has *always* already occurred. Each point of reading becomes the incessantly restated point of Nietzsche's posthumous birth, even as it is *now* the text rather than Nietzsche's 'life' which pre-dates this point. Yet the text also *post*-dates this point for it has not only supplanted the empirical past, but has always *already* supplanted it, being prospectively, as well as retrospectively in place. It is this factor which problematises any directional sense in reading, any distinction between the origin and the *telos*, for we are simultaneously and indistinguishably looking *backwards* or *forwards*: "... the eye of the sun just fell upon my life: I looked back, I looked forward, and never saw so many and such good things *at once*" (677 Emphasis mine.). As Derrida asserts this point "returns every day, always each day, with every turn of the annulus. Always before noon, after noon" ("Otobiographies" 14).

It is for this reason that this Janiform point, the exergue, both refutes and affirms its placement at the beginning of the text, for the text both precedes and antecedes this point. As the present point from which the past is about to be recited, this past implicitly precedes this point even as it is *about* to be redeemed. Conversely, this prospective text, as the redeemed past, is *already* in place, having already supplanted Nietzsche's empiricity: "It was not for nothing that I buried my forty-fourth year today; I had the *right* to bury it; whatever was life in it has been saved, is immortal" (677). The past *has* already been saved as the text even before we begin to read the text 'proper'. Unlike Nietzsche, however, the reader has no access to the empirical past which sustains his process of self-reading/ self-writing: it is for this reason that the text, and Nietzsche's consummation with or as this text is already in place, the reader being the only one who can verify the immortality that Nietzsche has already assumed on death, this contradiction between immortality and death being a mere apperency. As Derrida asserts: "What one calls life – the thing or object of biology and biography – does not stand face to face with something that would be its opposable ob-ject:

death, the thanatological or thanatographical” (“Otobiographies” 6). In the absence of the empirical Nietzsche it is only the reader who can take on the role of Zarathustra for as Nietzsche asserts in quoting this prospectively redemptive figure: “*To redeem those who lived in the past* and to turn every ‘it was’ into a ‘thus I willed it’ – that alone should I call redemption” (764-65). The commencement of the reading process thus becomes, forever, the point at which Nietzsche’s empirical life has *already* been buried by the text, the point at which “‘it was’” is already “‘thus I willed it’”, as well as the point at which this *textual* life is about to be redeemed (*re*-redeemed) as Nietzsche is reiterated as the textual figure that he (*now*) already *is* in a process of eternal return.

The exergue, therefore, is no more a preface than a postscript, enacting a point which both acknowledges the *archē*-writing which exists before the letter and also the transformation of Nietzsche’s empiricity into this *archē*-writing. As such, it refutes any attribution of temporal positionality within the text, being the dislocated present which is always situated at the beginning *and* the end, enacting the text which has *been* and is *still to come*, a constant commemoration of Nietzsche’s posthumous birth:

This page is in a certain way dated because it says “today” and today “my birthday,” the anniversary of my birth. The anniversary is the moment when the year turns back on itself, forms a ring or annulus with itself, annuls itself and begins anew. It is here my forty-fifth year . . . something like the midday of life. The noon of life, even midlife crisis, is commonly situated at about this age, at the shadowless midpoint of a great day. (“Otobiographies” 11-12)

As Derrida recognises, it is because of its recurrent nature that it becomes impossible to *date* the timeless moment when “the eye of the sun just fell upon my life” (677). This moment is always *now* whether one defines this moment in terms of the present of Nietzsche’s self-recitation, in terms of the moment of death at which life is verified⁴, or in terms of the moment of reading: “This difficulty crops up wherever one seeks to make a *determination*: in order to date an event, of course, but also in order to identify the beginning of a text, the

origin of life, or the first movement of a signature. These are all problems of the borderline” (“Otobiographies” 13).

It is, however, in recognising the relationship with the initiatory, “the beginning of a text, the origin of life, or the first movement of a signature”, that Derrida acknowledges the manner in which this borderline is ultimately a constant restatement of the border which separates signification from its origin, a border-line which cannot be dated since it is the timeless position which one always occupies in the eternal return. For if one considers the manner in which Nietzsche *buries* his own empiricity *via* the text, and the manner in which the text finally supplants this empiricity on death, it becomes apparent that the paradigm outlined is ultimately derived from the manner in which the relationship between effect and cause is reversed in the usurpatory movement into language. The ‘origin’ of textuality does not come into being until its ‘effect’, the text, brings it into being through a retrospective inference, and then only as a signifier. The origin can only ever be a supplementary effect of this text, a text which is, and *now* has always been, the origin of this ‘origin’: “From the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. We *think only in signs*. Which amounts to ruining the notion of the sign at the very moment when, as in Nietzsche, its exigency is recognized in the absoluteness of its right” (*Grammatology* 50). As the final sentence suggests, the notion of the sign itself comes into question as a result of this confusion of reality and signification, cause and effect, as evidenced by Nietzsche’s utilisation of the “absoluteness” of the sign’s “right” to be considered *as* reality rather than as a mere reflection of a pre-discursive reality. One can, therefore, compare this *a posteriori* production of the ‘origin’ to Nietzsche’s posthumous birth, the manner in which he only comes into being (*via* the reader) as an ‘effect’ his writings, an effect which finally supplants his empiricity, thus redeeming him as a figure which he can only *credit* within his life⁵. The ‘effect’ – Nietzsche’s writings and the textual figure that they enact - supplants the

‘empirical’ Nietzsche in precisely the same manner that the ‘effect’ – the text – becomes that which has now always *already* been in the place of the origin. In both cases, there has never been any other origin than writing, which is why the name, the signifier, supplants its bearer: “. . . if life returns, it will return to the name but not to the living, in the name of the living *as* the name of the dead” (“Otobiographies” 9). One should also note that any linguistic enactment of the origin is both *subsequent* to language even as it supplants that which is *prior* to language, the reason why *archē*-writing is both, prospectively, already in place and has, retrospectively, always been already in place. Indeed, it is in utilising the manner in which the empirical origin is transformed into *archē*-writing, the writing before (or after) the letter which is *now* indistinguishably origin and *telos*, that Nietzsche can *write* his *telos* and redeem or redefine the origin in doing so, the means through which “‘it was’” becomes “‘thus I willed it’”, and the means through which “. . . One Becomes What One Is”. It is this confusion of origin and *telos*, past and future, which problematises any attempt to date or identify the point at which the text begins: one enters into this point at the moment of self-awareness, the point at which one *enters* language and brings the self into linguistic being *via* this act, and this is a point which, once entered, is and has never been transcended, for one has *never* entered language and has *always* occupied this point, language having *now* (and it is *always* now) already been in place.

2

RECITING THE BODY’S ABSENCE

In light of the manner in which Derrida derives his interpretation of the Nietzschean *récit* from the initial movement into textuality, it would seem that the text *has* no beginning, and also that Nietzsche has no life beyond the text, for reference to Nietzsche’s ‘empirical’

life can be no more be justified than reference to a pre-discursive origin. Indeed, as in the case of the *archē*-trace, it is precisely *in* referring to it that one transforms it into that which has never *been*, as Nietzsche recognises in asserting that “it is perhaps a mere prejudice that I live” (673), and as Derrida recognises in questioning the notion of ‘the empirical’ itself:

I can no longer say what an empirical text is, or the empirical given of a text. . . . we think we know what a given text is – a text that we receive in the editorial form of an authenticated corpus, and so on. We also have a certain number of “empirical facts” about Nietzsche’s life. Although there may be any number of debates on this subject, any number of disagreements about the content of these givens, the presupposition is, nevertheless, that one knows what one means by Nietzsche’s “empirical” life. That is, one assumes that one knows what is at the organizing center of the debate. If one problematizes things as I tried to do yesterday, however, the opposition between, for example, the empirical and the non-empirical . . . is precisely what becomes problematic. I then no longer know what this experience is that grounds the value of the empirical. This is the case whether one is speaking of Nietzsche’s life or his corpus – his body, if you will . . . (“Roundtable on Autobiography” 44)

From this perspective, one can no more speak of an ‘empirical’ experience than one can speak of an experience which is prior to language without transforming this experience into a *linguistic* experience: “I can no longer *say* what an empirical text is . . .”. This is, indeed, the very means through which Nietzsche is posthumously born as a textual/ mythological figure, is transformed into the figure that he promises himself during his life through the self-credit which is his writings.

Yet within Nietzsche’s lifetime this *is* a process of self-credit, a self-investment which will not be repaid until Nietzsche’s posthumous birth as the textual figure which finally supplants his empiricity. If there has never *been* an empirical experience, as Derrida implies, then one is prompted to ask how the pre-mortem Nietzschean position is distinguishable from the post-mortem readerly position since his would seem to be a purely *textual* life in both cases. In other words, what privileges the reader as the medium through which Nietzsche can finally attain a self-consummation with the textual self, a self that

Nietzsche can only *credit* during his lifetime? As Derrida acknowledges, the point which prevents any grounding of the text in the empirical *transgresses* the pre-mortem and post-mortem positions:

. . . wherever the paradoxical problem of the border is posed, then the line that could separate an author's life from his work . . . or which, *within this life*, could separate an essentialness or transcendentality from an empirical fact, or, yet again, within his work, an empirical fact from something that is not empirical – this very line itself becomes unclear. (“Roundtable on Autobiography” 44-45 Emphasis mine)

It is in transgressing the difference between “empirical fact” and “essentialness or transcendentalty” that Derrida would appear to erase the distinction between what Nietzsche *is* during his empirical life and the mythological figure which he would seek to become *after* this life. While it is certainly true that Nietzsche also transgresses this distinction (as the subtitle to *Ecce Homo* indicates, he already *is* what he is *becoming*) he was also aware that this transgression could not be affirmed until his posthumous birth, for as Nietzsche asserts: “I am one thing, my writings are another matter . . .” (715). This is precisely why his life *is* a process of becoming, of *self-overcoming via* writing, and if this is the means through which ““it was”” eventually becomes ““thus I willed it”” then one is forced to ask what ““it was”” *was*. In other words, what is *buried* at the point of redemption? Indeed Nietzsche maintains the distinction between ““it was”” and ““thus I willed it”” when he asserts: “It was not for nothing that I buried my forty-fourth year today; I had the *right* to bury it; whatever was life in it has been saved, is immortal” (676).

In answering these questions it is important to recall the manner in which the Derridean paradigm outlined intersects with the question of the origin, for it would be simplistic to assume that the term ‘empirical’ here refers merely to the *reality* of Nietzsche’s life, to the historical actuality of his life as it was lived. The role of this empiricity is closely related to the role of the *body* in the Nietzschean schema, for it is clearly Nietzsche’s

biological *presence* which distinguishes Nietzsche's pre-mortem position from the post-mortem position of the reader, maintaining the distinction between what Nietzsche is and the figure that he promises himself. Derrida draws a parallel between Nietzsche's position and that of the reader in asserting that "I . . . no longer know what this experience is that grounds the value of the empirical. This is the case whether one is speaking of Nietzsche's life or his corpus – his body, if you will . . .". It is in this remark that the distinctions and the parallels between the Nietzschean and the readerly positions become evident, for it is clear that if the eternal return, from a readerly perspective, is facilitated by an inability to *say* what Nietzsche's 'empirical' life is, then analogously it is equally clear that the eternal return, from Nietzsche's perspective, is facilitated by his inability to *speak* the body: "Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, there stands a mighty ruler, an unknown sage – whose name is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body" (*Zarathustra* 146). The *body* is precisely the self which is annulled in the movement into language, and it is precisely this annulment, this inability to *say* what the body is without translating this origin into a signifier, a mask, which constitutes the drive behind Nietzsche's work and facilitates the process of self-overcoming. Zarathustra himself is a mythological enactment of, and a mask of, Nietzsche's body, in the same manner that the 'origin'/ the signifier that the text *originates* masks any *authentic* origin. Nietzsche/ the body utilises this inherently eliminative movement into language, the body's own inability to *say* what it is by virtue of the paradoxical fact that it has become 'self' aware, as a means of positing Zarathustra as a fiction of what the body/ the self *can* become (since *any* enactment of this origin is a mere signifier), and as a mythologisation of what the body always *already* is (since this signifier has *now* always already been in place no matter how far back one traces this process). It is, indeed, the body's inability to *speak* itself which sustains and constitutes the instinctive will-to-power of which Nietzsche's writings are a manifestation, defining philosophy and thought

itself: “. . . by far the greater part of conscious thinking must still be included among instinctive activities, and that goes even for philosophical thinking. . . . most of the conscious thinking of a philosopher is secretly guided and forced into certain channels by his instincts” (Beyond Good and Evil 201).

Yet while Nietzsche is still a bodily presence (and one should be wary of distinguishing Nietzsche from his body for the self “is your body”) it is evident that the inherent distinction between the body and the body’s signified or intelligible *awareness* of itself, the distinction between origin and *telos* that Nietzsche utilises in overcoming himself, remains in place. Moreover, that this distinction between body *speaking* and the body *spoken* is inescapable, being a precondition of self-awareness itself, is indicative of its equivalence to the inescapable breach which inhabits autobiographical writing, that between self-writing and self-written. As Seán Burke asserts:

Even given an ideal autobiographical scenario – that of the author who is engaged in a continual and self-reflexive autobiographical writing, a perennial diarist whose only concern is with the act of diarising – there would always be a hiatus, both spatio-temporal and ontological between he who writes, and what is written. This division is inescapable. (Death and Return of the Author 55)

The difference between the two, of course, is that the hiatus which separates the body from its self-signification is not spatio-temporal and ontological but purely epistemological, occurring as a result of body’s inability to intelligibly apprehend itself *even in its own presence*. It is precisely *because* this distinction is epistemological rather than ontological, *because* the body is inapprehensibly present, that the distinction between the body and its signification remains in place during Nietzsche’s lifetime: “Two markedly distinct subjectivities are in opposition: the one, transpersonal, extrawordly, normative and formal; the other intrawordly, biographical, a subject of desire, for want of a better word, a ‘material’ subject” (Burke Death and Return of the Author 113). This is why one can

interpret the incessant nature of the pre-mortem process of redemption which is Nietzsche's writing as "a continual and self-reflexive autobiographical writing" in Burke's sense, being a continual attempt by the body to apprehend its own presence and finally speak itself:

Verily, all being is hard to prove and hard to induce to speak. Tell me, my brothers, is not the strangest of all things proved most nearly? . . . this most honest being, the ego, speaks of the body and still wants the body, even when it poetizes and raves and flutters with broken wings. It learns to speak ever more honestly, this ego: and the more it learns, the more words and honors it finds for body and earth. (Zarathustra 144)

However, there can be no final affirmation of Zarathustra, and the body will not have finally spoken itself *as* Zarathustra, until this spatio-temporal and ontological hiatus is finally in place and the body has been supplanted by the text. This is precisely why the reader's position is privileged in relation to Nietzsche's own position: it only at the point of death that the body and the body's mythological enactment of itself can finally coincide and the body can be posthumously born *as* Zarathustra. It is the physical *absence* of Nietzsche which allows the reader to redeem Nietzsche as the textual figure that he promises himself, for it is this absence which breaches the pre-mortem symbiosis between self/ body and self-image, allowing this self-image to escape its origin and come into its own. However, one can see this as the point at which the potentiality which is the body is actualised *as* the text, rather than as the point at which the body is *supplanted* by the text. More accurately, it is this supplantation which *allows* the body to be reborn as the text, for it is its absence which facilitates the body's translation into its self-image, Nietzsche's (absent) reality being subsumed into the image which, *now*, *is* this reality, and, *now*, has always been this reality. One is reminded here of Zarathustra's assertion that one should "write with blood" (Zarathustra 152), writing, and Zarathustra himself, being the ultimate means through which the body is redeemed. As the man whom Zarathustra encounters in the parable "The Leech" asserts: "For the leech's sake I lay here beside this swamp like a fisherman, and my arm, which I had cast, had

already been bitten ten times when a still more beautiful leech bit, seeking my blood, Zarathustra himself" (Zarathustra 361-63).

When Nietzsche describes his writing as a process through which "one becomes what one is", adding that "[t]o become what one is, one must not have the faintest notion *what* one is" (710), it is apparent that what one *is* is the mystery which is the body and what one will *become* – Zarathustra (for example) – is also the body (what one *is*), or rather what the body will become at the point of physical death/ textual redemption. Zarathustra's pre-mortem existence as a mere *signifier*, a mask, in itself, testifies to the mysterious status of the body at this point, even as the body/ Nietzsche will be born *as* this signifier through the process of self-overcoming that this mysterious status *allows*. A corollary of this paradigm is that the textual enactment of his *telos*, of Zarathustra, can only *ever* be an illusory figure to Nietzsche himself (i.e. to Nietzsche as a physical presence), since it is only in the absence of the body that he, the *body*, is supplanted by, and transformed into, this figure. As Nietzsche asserts in reflecting this translation of the body into the reality of its self-image, of one potentiality into its other: "The true goal is veiled by a phantasm: and while we stretch out our hands for the latter, nature attains the former by means of our illusion" (The Birth of Tragedy 44).

Before going on to explore the manner in which this schema requires a reformulation of the Derridean view of textuality, it has already become apparent that, for Nietzsche, it is only at the point of *death* that the origin can be said to have been finally supplanted by the text, *not* at the point of the text's institution. The trace which inhabits Nietzsche's autobiographical *récit* at the *point* of writing is that of his body, his physical presence. If this were not the case, then the distinction between what Nietzsche *is* and what he *will become* on death would not be in place during Nietzsche's lifetime. Moreover, the process of self-overcoming *via* the specifically *written* text would not occur: it would not *have* to occur since the significance of writing (in the prosaic sense) would be occluded, Nietzsche not having to

rely on specifically *post-mortem* mediation of the reader for his redemption, or the fact that their position is privileged by his physical absence. As Catherine Pickstock recognises, it is the question of physical *presence* which problematises Derrida's elision of the distinction between speech and writing, and between origin and text:

. . . it could be argued that . . . Derrida . . . suppresses the link between language and physicality, for in aligning writing with parricide or the absence of the father, and orality with the metaphysics of presence, he subtly denies the fact that language of any kind requires a *bodily* presence⁶ . . . Derrida argues that language needs no speaker, since it is more fundamentally a trace of a speaker who was never present to begin with. . . Derrida's written model suggests no people at all, only a word which comes from nowhere, an autonomous word which conceals or violently eradicates its origins, and dictates to its "author," rendering him entirely passive before a disembodied and (spiritual?) power. (21-22)

In contrast, it is evident that, for Nietzsche, the significance of writing lies in the fact that, unlike speech, it does not require his immediate bodily presence. It is precisely his body's absence at the point of reading which allows the body/ the self to redeem itself: the body, the *self*, can determine what it will be at the point that its actuality is supplanted by the mythological figure that it prospectively posits. For a nineteenth-century writer such a positing can *only* occur through writing.

3

THE TRACE OF THE BODY

While it is evident that the body and its inapprehensible nature facilitates the *pre-mortem* process of becoming which is Nietzsche's life, it is equally evident that it is the presence of the body which prevents Nietzsche from finally becoming the self that he credits during his own lifetime, there being no installation of this figure within the 'rights of reality' in Nietzsche's own presence. This not only holds in place the distinction between what

Nietzsche *is* and what he will *become*, but also the distinction between Nietzsche and the privileged reader, and between speech and writing. This is not however, to imply that one can simplistically accept speech as an index of self-presence, for it is precisely Nietzsche's physical presence which prevents any identification of the self-as-signified *with* the self, Zarathustra remaining illusory until the point of death: the identification of the self-spoken with the self-speaking can only occur in absence of the latter, the point at which the 'speaker's' physicality is supplanted by, and redeemed as, the self-spoken, a process which *requires* the medium of writing. Yet if it is the immediate presence of the body which distinguishes the pre-mortem position of the author from the post-mortem position of the reader, then the trace which inhabits Nietzsche's self-*récit* cannot simply be a trace of the body's *absence*, it must betray the body's presence in some manner, even as it must do so without allowing that presence to be affirmed, for it is precisely this inability which facilitates the process of self-becoming. The process of self-becoming, it would seem, does not merely require that the body is inapprehensible, but that it is an inapprehensible *presence*, a *logos* which is denied in the process of signification but which implicitly re-asserts itself *via* this denial. In order to appreciate the manner in which this occurs it is necessary to appreciate the fundamental premise of the Nietzschean textuality as it has been outlined. As will become apparent, this premise will require further modifications of the relationship between textuality and empiricism, revealing that the trace which sustains textuality is the inalienable possibility which is matter.

If the distinction between Nietzsche and the textual figure Nietzsche becomes on death is held in place by his bodily presence, then it is apparent that this textual figure, Zarathustra, is always illusory to Nietzsche himself. This is why Zarathustra is a *prospective* rather than present reality, a redemptive figure who can only become Nietzsche's reality in Nietzsche's absence, and only to the privileged reader. Zarathustra, therefore, remains

illusory as a result of Nietzsche's physical presence, acting as an index of the body's inability to intelligibly apprehend itself *in* this presence except as an illusion, a mask. It is also evident, therefore, that body remains inapprehensible *because* of its overwhelming presence. Zarathustra remains illusory as a result of the fact that this signifier is implicated in the immanence of the body, meaning that the body has yet to differ from itself so that it can be apprehended in meaningful terms. In this light, it is evident that the elusive nature of the self is actually symptomatic of the body's inability to escape its own immanence that it can meaningfully present its totality, what it *is*, to itself. In other words, the body cannot transcend its own presence in order that it can be authentically present *to* itself.

What, indeed, does man know of himself! Can he even once perceive himself completely, laid out as if in an illuminated glass case? Does not nature keep much the most from him, even about his body, to spellbind and confine him in a proud, deceptive consciousness, far from the coils of the intestines, the quick current of the blood stream, and the involved tremors of the fibers? ("On Truth and Lie" 44)

This totalising viewpoint can only occur if the self occupies a position which is differentiated *from* itself. In other words, one must be present at one's own absence, achieving what the philosopher Thomas Nagel has designated a 'view from nowhere': this inherently hypothetical viewpoint is a product of our "ambition to get outside of ourselves" (6) and achieve "the perspective of a particular person inside the world with an objective view of that same world, the person and his viewpoint included" (3)⁷. As the quotation from Nietzsche implies, however, man is confined within a "deceptive consciousness" which is "far" from the body only by virtue of its inability to achieve this transcendental viewpoint. Again, the breach between the body and consciousness in this case is epistemological rather than ontological: the body cannot escape itself in order that it can bring itself into subjective being. In the inapprehensible presence of the body, consciousness thus remains "hanging in dreams, as it were, upon the back of a tiger" ("On Truth and Lie" 44).



It is the body's inherently *pre-mortem* inability to escape its own immanent, yet incessantly potential, presence which, for Nietzsche, sustains the creative process, a process which utilises the desire for self-transcendence, the desire to move beyond the self so that the self can be brought into subjective being. Nietzsche utilises this desire as a means of fashioning the self in the will to power, for the body desires "to create beyond itself. That is what it would do above all else, that is its fervent wish" (*Zarathustra* 147). Consciousness may be deceptive in the sense that the self involved in 'self' awareness is illusory in the body's own presence, yet the body can only "create beyond itself" by accepting this illusion as its reality in the certitude that it *will become* this redemptive reality. Nietzsche 'forgets' the body and wilfully deceives himself in accepting this textual figure *as* his reality, resolving one potentiality (the body, "it was") in favour of the other (the self one desires, "thus I willed it"). It is in doing so that this illusion will ultimately *become* his post-mortem, textual, reality:

"To every soul there belongs an another world; for every soul, every other soul is an afterworld. Precisely between what is most similar, illusion lies most beautifully; for the smallest cleft is the hardest to bridge.

"For me – how should there be any outside-myself? There is no outside. But all sounds make us forget this; how lovely it is that we forget. Have not names and sounds been given to things that man might find things refreshing? Speaking is a beautiful folly: with that man dances over all things. How lovely is all talking, and all the deception of sounds! With sounds our love dances on many-hued rainbows." (*Zarathustra* 329)

The "folly" or the "deception" of names and sounds is that they mask the body and their implication within it, thus *apparently* escaping its immanence and enacting the illusion of an "outside", an exteriority of meaning where one's words can exist independently of the body. As a result they also imply the possibility of an "afterworld" from which a transcendental apprehension of one's totality can be achieved, a meaningful apprehension of the self from a position which is *other* to the self. While writing, of course, does allow Nietzsche's words to

exist independently of his physical presence, thus allowing for an “afterworld”, it should be noted that both this “outside” and this “afterworld” are not possible for Nietzsche *himself*: Nietzsche can never apprehend his own words without those words being implicated in his own physicality, and he can never transcend this physicality in order that he can achieve a totalising ‘view from nowhere’⁸. However, Nietzsche can *posit* himself as occupying this transcendental position as a fictional figure such as Zarathustra, the deception through which he “dances over all things”, in order to become this figure. Nevertheless, while this fiction will ultimately become Nietzsche’s reality (or alternatively Nietzsche’s reality will become this fiction) *via* the mediation of the reader, to Nietzsche *himself* this textual figure will always be a deception. The signifier Zarathustra, for Nietzsche, can only ever be apprehended as it is implicated in his own inapprehensible physicality thus remaining a signifier, an illusion of the body rather than an enactment of what this body *has* become: “*For me* – how should there be any outside–myself?”. There is no “outside-myself” [*Ausser-mir*] for the body and Nietzsche cannot step outside *of* the immanence of his own physical presence, of his *self*, in order that he can adopt the transcendental position of the reader, a position which is, of course, transcendental only in relation to Nietzsche *himself*. This is why it is only “every *other* soul” which is an “afterworld” to Nietzsche, indicating the post-mortem role of the reader in translating this deception into a truth. Nevertheless, Nietzsche posits this self as a fiction which will become true in his absence, creating beyond himself, and wilfully *forgetting* that his words are implicated within the space of the body, that there is no “outside-myself”: “One must learn to look away from oneself in order to see much: this hardness is necessary to every climber of mountains” (*Zarathustra* 265). This forgetting of the body, of course, is invited by the deception which is signification itself, that which appears to lie beyond the self: “. . . all sounds make us forget this; how lovely it is that we forget”. It is in knowingly deceiving himself by accepting this illusion as a reality that

Nietzsche ensures that this illusion will become his reality through the post-mortem mediation of the reader. The reader, of course, can never apprehend Nietzsche's *actual* self, his body, only the self that this body posits, the textual self that this body, *now*, is and, *now*, has always been. This textual self is only distinguishable from Nietzsche's 'deception' by virtue of the fact that it is now true, having supplanted and redeemed Nietzsche's physical actuality. Between this deception and this truth lies the process of writing, of self-deception in the *name* of truth: "Precisely between what is most similar, illusion lies most beautifully; for the smallest cleft is the hardest to bridge".

One can see in this how the Nietzschean paradigm attenuates Derrida's formulation of textuality: the movement into signification is not the erasure of the body *via* its transformation into a signifier (one cannot erase that which has never been *apprehended* in the first place⁹) but is, rather, a failure *by* the body to apprehend itself within the space of its own unspeakable immanence, a failure, by this immanence, *to* differ from itself that it can come into being. The text remains implicated within the space of the body: ". . . body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body" (Zarathustra 146). In this respect one should note Nietzsche's frequent identification of the will to power as a desire to attain that which has *already* been inapprehensibly attained (e.g. the desire to "become" what one *already* is) reflecting the paradox whereby the body can only intelligibly apprehend its self-identical status, becoming what it already is *to* itself, if it transcends itself: indeed, it is this factor which constitutes the paradox of the Nietzschean text, revealing how the body asserts its inapprehensible presence. On one hand, the body's inability to apprehend itself implies that the body has been 'erased' in epistemological terms, lying beyond the limits of consciousness, recalling Catherine Pickstock's assertion that the Derridean text consists of "a word which comes from nowhere, an autonomous word which conceals or violently eradicates its origins"; the body has thus, *apparently*, been usurped in

the exteriorising movement into textuality or 'self' awareness (hence the deceptive status of "names and sounds"), and simultaneously transformed into a teleological object of desire. Yet, on the other hand, it is precisely the inability to attain this object, to *affirm* the body *via* this 'transcendence', which continually testifies to the body's *inability* to transcend or differ from itself, undoing the movement into textuality and subsuming the text into the immanence of the body, or rather revealing that the text has never transcended the body: "... I live in my own light; I drink back into myself the flames that break out of me" (*Zarathustra* 218). This object of desire, therefore, remains an object of desire *not* because it is absent but because of the ineffable nature of its absolute presence. The body may *speak* but it is unable to transcend itself that it may be *spoken* except, that is, as a fiction, a signifier which merely serves to mask the body *from* itself without disrupting or escaping its immanence: "'I," you say, and are proud of the word. But greater is that in which you do not wish to have faith – your body and its great reason: that does not say "I," but does "I"' (*Zarathustra* 146). It is the very fact that the self as signified is a *mask*, a fiction that is not identifiable *with* the body, which continually implies that this signifier remains implicated within the body's immanence. In these terms it is apparent that the difference between the origin and its image is actually the difference between the origin and that which the image *represents*, rather than the image *itself*: it is this mask (or these masks) which constitute consciousness or 'self' awareness, for as Nietzsche avers: "... consciousness *is* a surface" (710). This surface is both a constant sublimation of the mysterious depth which is the body, the body's constant *illusion* of itself and that which facilitates the process through which the body overcomes what it *is*, the means through which the body can define the figure that it *will* be in its absence: "The *body* is inspired; let us keep the "soul" out of it" (758).

In this context life itself is a constant repetition of the initial movement into language even as the constant 'erasure' of the origin which this movement involves is actually a

incessant reiteration of the origin's inability to transcend itself. It is precisely through the 'erasure' of the origin that this origin constantly re-asserts its inescapable, if inapprehensible, *presence*, constantly revealing that the body cannot establish its self-identity precisely *because* it is always absolutely self-identical¹⁰. It is this identity to which Nietzsche refers in delineating,

. . . a more primitive form of the world of affects in which everything still lies contained in a powerful unity before it undergoes ramifications and developments in the organic process . . . –as a kind of instinctive life in which all organic functions are still synthetically intertwined along with self-regulation, assimilation, nourishment, excretion, and metabolism – as a *pre-form* of life (Beyond Good and Evil 238).

The post-mortem nature of Nietzsche's birth, therefore, is not merely the outcome of an inability to transcend his 'empirical' life, but an outcome of the fact that he has never transcended the origin which is the body and has never been born even *within* this life. If the text has no beginning it is not because the beginning has been erased but because one has never transcended the beginning in order that one can validly assert that the text has *begun*. Every moment of Nietzsche's 'empirical' life is an attempt to escape this self-identity that self-identity may be affirmed, even as this escape would be the moment of death, reflecting the manner in which Nietzsche's identity will not be affirmed/redeemed *except* in his absence *via* the reader.

4

THE ORIGIN : . . . A FUTURE HIMSELF AND A BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE

What Nietzsche constantly buries (and redeems) *during* his life, therefore, is not merely the historical factuality of this life but his body, for this process, as initiated at the initial point of linguistic 'self' apprehension, is the means through which one's birth is

constantly deferred. The origin is erased *via* signification and is, like Zarathustra, *still to come*:

From this point of view even the *blunders* of life have their own meaning and value – the occasional side roads and wrong roads, the delays, “modesties,” seriousness wasted on tasks that are remote from *the* task. All this can express a great prudence, even the supreme prudence: where *nosce te ipsum* would be the recipe for ruin, forgetting oneself, *misunderstanding* oneself. . . . So many dangers that the instinct comes too soon to “understand itself” - (710)

The process of over-coming, therefore, is sustained by the body’s constant *credit* for itself, a credit which *requires* that the body does not “understand itself”. The body must remain the unverifiable object of its own belief, this simultaneously being a belief in the self that the body *can* become. As Nietzsche’s utilisation of Zarathustra demonstrates, Nietzsche was aware that any signification of what the body is, of its presence, is *no less* fictional than a prospective signification of what the body can become. In light of its unverifiable nature, the body *potentially* exists and it is through this status that the body fulfils its own potentiality in the process of self-becoming. The origin, therefore, is transformed into the *telos via* this postponement, in a process which facilitates the body’s self-transformation into the textual figure that it promises itself. The origin ceases to be past and becomes *future*: “-It was on these two walks that the whole of *Zarathustra I* occurred to me, and especially Zarathustra himself as a type: rather, he *overtook me*” (754).

In this light, the institution of language and ‘self’ awareness does not simply ‘erase’ the self but implicitly re-states it as the goal which is *yet* to be attained, in an apophatic process of deferment¹¹. This lack, the body’s inability to currently *attain* itself, is implicitly re-stated in *every* subsequent act of self-signification until the point of death. It is this constant process of signification, of deferment *through* signification, which renders the writing process the “bridge to the overman” (*Zarathustra* 147). “How lovely it is that there are words and sounds! Are not words and sounds rainbows and illusive bridges between

things which are eternally apart?" (Zarathustra 329). The text, during Nietzsche's life, is the "illusive" bridge which arcs what Nietzsche *is*, his physical and empirical actuality, the origin which has yet to exist by virtue of its immanent presence, until this "illusive" text is translated into his reality on death. The inapprehensible origin which is the body is not only *overcome* through the process of writing¹², for it is also carried *over* the "bridge to the highest hope, and a rainbow after long storms" (Zarathustra 211) through the deferment which is Nietzsche's textual self-recitation¹³. The body thus overcomes *itself into* the text, the process of 'self' signification being the body's deferment of what it is, until what it '*is*' is the *post-mortem* textual figure that it promises itself in signifying itself. Yet that this should be a bridge between "things which are eternally apart" reflects the manner in which the actuality of the body will never be apprehended *by* the body within this paradigm. Nietzsche as a physical *actuality* will never be reconciled with the textual figure that he will become, for it is only in his physical absence that he can finally become this figure. Similarly, it is the living Nietzsche's inability to intelligibly apprehend his own physical presence which facilitates his body's (*Nietzsche's*) instinctual process self-becoming *via* writing. In both cases the actuality of the body is elided, absent in the first case, and deferred in the second¹⁴. It is evident, therefore, that Nietzsche *himself* will never apprehend the body as either pre-discursive origin or post-mortem *telos*, the two points that this bridge which is his life, the *mode of potentiality* which is his life, spans, and this is merely another way of saying that the body will never intelligibly apprehend *itself* as a presence during or (of course) after its existence: "You are going your way to greatness: here nobody shall sneak after you. Your own foot has effaced the path behind you, and over it there is written: impossibility" (Zarathustra 265). The text, therefore, is the means through which the origin, the body, *overleaps* Nietzsche's reality (its *own* reality), a reality which is never apprehended: "There

are many ways of overcoming: see to that *yourself!* But only the jester thinks: “Man can also be *skipped over*”” (Zarathustra 311).

The “bridge to the overman” therefore is constituted by the *living* body’s linguistic inability to apprehend itself: the body’s signified awareness of itself ‘skips’ over the body’s actuality until this signifier, on death, *becomes* this actuality. As Nietzsche writes, Zarathustra “strides over the bridge as spirit” (Zarathustra 127). However, while Nietzsche will never become meaningfully aware actuality of the body, of the *origin*, it is nevertheless evident that its pre-mortem presence facilitates the process of self-overcoming during his life, being that which *is* overcome. The “bridge to the overman” is not *merely* the process of deferment which is textuality for at this pre-mortem stage the process of self-recitation is implicated in Nietzsche’s physical presence, remaining incomplete for this reason: the bridge is constituted by a process of deferment, of writing, which relies on the pre-mortem symbiosis between the body and its self-representation. The body, in its *presence*, is the inapprehensible ground, the *trace*, which underlies this process of deferment, until this ground is rendered absent on death and the body finally becomes its self-image. At this point the bridge ceases to *be* a “bridge to the highest hope” (Zarathustra 211), a *process* of self-recitation, and becomes “a rainbow after long storms” (Zarathustra 211), that which *has been* recited:

... the lover of knowledge is obtrusive with his eyes – how could he see more of all things than their foregrounds? But you, O Zarathustra, wanted to see the ground and background of all things; hence you must climb over yourself – upward, up until even your stars are *under* you! (Zarathustra 265)

It is the *eternally* mysterious status of this ground which allows the body to fulfil the promise that it makes to itself in signifying itself, ultimately becoming identifiable with the self-image that it prospectively textually posits, the means through which the body “reinterprets all that has been as a bridge to itself” (Zarathustra 314).

In this light Nietzsche's 'empirical' life cannot, therefore, be regarded *as* Nietzsche's life for Nietzsche has yet to exist, has yet to speak himself *into* existence. Indeed, the constant self-recitation which is Nietzsche's writings constitutes both a constant attempt by the body to speak itself in a biologicistic process of becoming (an attempt which simultaneously and incessantly postpones this utterance) and the translation of 'Nietzsche's' empirical life into a redemptive text which will only *become* identifiable with Nietzsche at the point of his posthumous birth, the point at which Nietzsche comes into being in order that this life *can be* redeemed; it is only at this point that the *body* coincides with, and is born as, the textual figure that it has promised itself in its will to power, finally escaping its own immanence that it can speak itself into being as the text. It is evident from this that an aesthetic *perception* is the means through which the body can fulfil its potential, this perception being the attribute of "a powerful soul which belongs to a high body, beautiful, triumphant, refreshing, around which everything becomes a mirror" (Zarathustra 302). Recalling his description of consciousness, in relation to the body's totality, as "hanging in dreams, as it were, upon the back of a tiger" ("On Truth and Lie" 44), Nietzsche (quoting Zarathustra) explains his experience of inspiration: it is

. . . as if the things themselves approached and offered themselves as metaphors [*als ob die Dinge selber herankämen und sich zum Gleichnisse anböten* – all of the things themselves approached and offered themselves to metaphors] ("Here all things come caressingly to your discourse and flatter you; for they want to ride on your back. On every metaphor you ride to every truth . . . Here the words and word-shrines of all being open up before you; here all being wishes to become word, all becoming wishes to learn from you how to speak"). (756-57)

It is the very translation of the material cause into an illusion, an effect, which allows the apparent to become this ultimate reality. One can see this as the translation of an inapprehensible, temporally present, material reality into a future reality, a *textual* reality, through the medium of the body, the body being, like the overman, "a future himself and a

bridge to the future” (Zarathustra 251). One should note that the quotation conforms to the schema already outlined, the manner in which the body can only apprehend itself as an illusion, a metaphor for itself, by virtue of its inability to escape its own immanence, until a post-mortem self-consummation occurs and this metaphor becomes the truth of the body. Indeed, Nietzsche’s assertion that “here all being wishes to become word, all becoming wishes to learn from you how to speak” is comparable to his delineation of the body’s attempt to speak *itself* in the process of becoming, for it is evident that being can only speak *through* the body: “. . . all being is hard to prove and hard to induce to speak. . . . this most honest being, the ego, speaks of the body and still wants the body . . . It learns to speak ever more honestly . . . and the more it learns, the more words . . . it finds for body and earth” (Zarathustra 144).

In this context, the reality of the body, of external causation, of the *present*, is *never* subjectively apprehended (except as an illusion) by virtue of the body’s immanence: as we have seen Nietzsche will never apprehend his own actuality, his own presence, except as a figure such as Zarathustra, a figure who is always illusory *in* Nietzsche’s own presence. Similarly, any material reality remains non-existent *to the subject* (which is *not* to say that it is non-existent) and in this light the *only* reality for the subject is the apparent, that which *will become* real and yet which, in the ‘absence’ of the body, appears to be a current reality. It is precisely the fact that we can only apprehend the world as it affects the body, the *effect* of causative reality being our only reality, which defines the apparent as *our* reality. As Nietzsche asserts “the great poet dips *only* from his own reality” (702):

First proposition. The reasons for which “this” world has been characterized as “apparent” are the very reasons which indicate its reality; any other kind of reality is absolutely indemonstrable. . . . The criteria which have been bestowed on the “true being” of things are the criteria of not-being, of *naught* . . . (Twilight of the Idols 484)

“Nought”, it should be recalled, is precisely what Nietzsche’s empiricity, his “true being” is to himself, for Nietzsche has yet to *come* into existence: “I live on my own credit; it is perhaps a mere prejudice that I live” (673).

It is precisely through an aesthetic perception that body redeems itself in transforming the world, its *experience* of the world, from “it was” into “thus I willed it”. Nietzsche’s life is not only constituted by the processive redemption of his body, for this is a processive redemption of this life *as it is implicated* within the body, a life which, like the body, will remain illusory until the *post-mortem* point of redemption. As Nietzsche states in distinguishing the waking and dreaming states:

. . . the former appeals to us as infinitely preferable . . . yet in relation to that mysterious ground of our being of which we are the phenomena, I should . . . maintain the very opposite estimate of the value of dreams. For the more clearly I perceive in nature those omnipotent art impulses, and in them an ardent longing for illusion, for redemption through illusion, the more I feel, myself impelled to the metaphysical assumption that the truly existent primal unity, eternally suffering and contradictory, also needs the rapturous vision, the pleasurable illusion, for its continuous redemption. And we, completely wrapped up in this illusion and composed of it, are compelled to consider this illusion as the truly nonexistent – i.e., as a perpetual becoming in time, space, and causality – in other words, as empirical reality. If, for the moment, we do not consider the question of our own “reality,” if we conceive of our empirical existence, and of that of the world in general, as a continuously manifested representation of the primal unity, we shall then have to look upon the dream as a *mere appearance of mere appearance*, hence as a still higher appeasement of the primordial desire for mere appearance. (The Birth of Tragedy 44-45)

It is important to appreciate the role of this self-deception in the Nietzschean schema, for it is precisely a failure to appreciate that this *is* a deception which frequently leads to misinterpretations of the Nietzschean view of textuality, specifically with regards to the relationship between appearance and reality. Alexander Nehemas, for example, argues that “Nietzsche believes that nothing is left over beyond the sum total of the features and characteristics associated with each object and that no person remains beyond the totality of

its experiences and actions” (155). This remark stands in stark contradiction to Nietzsche’s/ Zarathustra’s assertion that “[b]ehind your thought and feelings, my brother, there stands a mighty ruler, an unknown sage –whose name is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body” (Zarathustra 146). Yet in spite of this it *is* true that one can read Nietzsche as accepting the characteristically post-modern *dictum* that “a thing is the sum of its effects”. For example “. . . Heraclitus will remain eternally right with his assertion that being is an empty fiction. The “apparent” world is the only one: the “true” world is merely added by a lie” (Twilight of the Idols 481). What we see here is the self-deception under discussion, the wilful *forgetting* of appearances implication in the body’s immanence and an acceptance of that which is presently illusory (i.e. that which is illusory in one’s own *presence*) as a reality. As Nietzsche asserts “Only through forgetfulness can man ever achieve the illusion of possessing a “truth”. . . . If he does not wish to be satisfied with truth in the form of tautology – that is, with empty shells – then he will forever buy illusions for truths” (“On Truth and Lie” 45). In succumbing to the deception of signification by accepting that which is *apparently* real as the real, Nietzsche, therefore, is not rejecting material reality; if this were the case then he would also have to reject the material reality of the body, of the writing which allows him to be redeemed in his absence, and of the readers who facilitate this redemption. It is, rather, a recognition that this present reality will never exist for *us*: as Nietzsche immediately asks “What is a word? The image of a nerve stimulus in sounds. But to infer from the nerve stimulus, a cause outside us, that is already the result of a false and unjustified application of the principle of reason . . .” (“On Truth and Lie” 45). Signification, therefore, not only masks the body but also masks any underlying reality which exists apart from the body. ‘External’ reality, like the body’s signification of *itself*, can only exist to us as it is implicated in body’s immanence and it will, therefore, always be illusory in the body’s own presence, having yet to transcend and supplant the body so that it can be installed within the ‘rights of reality’.

Like the body's signified enactment of itself, the apparent cannot become a reality until the body is absent, remaining a *mere* apparency until this point, which is not to assert that the apparent has no external causation, or that there is no external reality. It is, however, to acknowledge that this reality cannot exist in terms of bodily experience even as it *causes* this experience: the reality of the apparent is not subordinate to this cause but to its effect, to the reality that it *will* become in the body's absence: ". . . this is what the will to truth should mean to you: that everything be changed into what is thinkable for man, visible for man, feelable by man. You should think through your own senses to their consequences" (Zarathustra 198).

In this respect one should note that the 'apparent world' of which Nietzsche speaks is, specifically, a product of the *senses* rather than the text: he asserts that philosophers,

. . . all believe, desperately even, in what has being. But since they never grasp it, they seek for reasons why it is kept from them. "There must be mere appearance, there must be some deception which prevents us from perceiving that which has being: where is the deceiver?"

"We have found him," they cry ecstatically; "it is the senses! . . . let us say No to all who have faith in the senses, to all the rest of mankind; They are all 'mob'. Let us be philosophers! Let us be mummies! . . . And above all, away with the body, this wretched *idée fixe*, disfigured by all the fallacies of logic, refuted, even impossible, although it is impudent enough to behave as if it were real!" (Twilight of the Idols 480)

It is the integral reality of the body which most clearly testifies to the existence of external reality even as this reality cannot be real *in terms of bodily experience*. As Nietzsche/ the body will never subjectively apprehend his/ its own reality, never being able to claim this reality as its *own* (a claim which Nietzsche consequently makes for Zarathustra, the body's fiction of itself), the actuality of the external world will never be *our* reality. Nevertheless, if the external world will never be real *from our perspective* one can no more rule out this reality than one can rule out the actuality of the body:

. . . others even say that the external world is the work of our organs? But then our body, as part of this external world, would be the work of our organs! But then our organs themselves would be – the work of our organs! It seems to me that this is a complete *reductio ad absurdum*, assuming that the concept of a *causa sui* is fundamentally absurd. Consequently, the external world is *not* the work of our organs - ? (Beyond Good and Evil 212 – 13)

In criticising the philosophical rejection of the senses and the body in favour of an unmediated reality which lies beyond these deceptions Nietzsche admits that there can be no other reality *for* the body beyond these deceptions. Nevertheless, whether the apparent is deceptive is a question of perspective, for it should be noted that the apparent is *only* a deception from the perspective of temporally present actuality of the body and the external world, neither of which are ever subjectively apprehended. From the subjective perspective which we are forced to adopt by virtue of the ‘absence’ of these factors, the apparent *is* installed within the ‘rights of reality’, this being *our* reality. The body cannot “look away” from itself to a present reality which is independent of the body, but it *can* accept these deceptions as its *own* reality in the full knowledge they will consequently be transformed from deceptions *into* reality, the future reality which, in the ‘absence’ of the body, is *already* apparent: “The now and the past on earth – alas my friends that is what I find most unendurable; and I should not know how to live If I were not also a seer of that which must come” (Zarathustra 250-51). It is in ‘forgetting’ a body which cannot, in any case, be verified that Nietzsche transcends his own mortality, his own presence, and *lives* in the future, this being the means through which he walks “among men as among the fragments of the future – that future which I envisage” (Zarathustra 251). Nietzsche describes this transcendental realm as the “undiscovered country” [*ein noch unentdecktes Land*]¹⁵ which lies “beyond all the lands and nooks of the ideal so far, a world so overich . . . that our curiosity as well as our craving to possess it has got beside itself” [*unser Besitzdurst ausser sich gerathen sind* – our possession-desire gets outside of itself]. He subsequently asks how, “[a]fter such vistas . . .

could we still be satisfied with *present-day man*? . . . Another ideal runs ahead of us, a strange, tempting dangerous ideal . . .”, an ideal in which signifies “danger, decay, debasement, or at least recreation, blindness, and temporary self-oblivion [*Selbstvergessen* – self-forgetting]. . . that will often appear *inhuman* . . .” (755).

Nevertheless, it is evident from this that Nietzsche cannot wholly forget “*present-day man*”, for it is only the present which defines the reality that he apprehends *via* the apparent as a *future* reality. In the same way that we must presuppose Nietzsche’s ‘empirical’ and physical existence if we are not to erase the distinction between what Nietzsche *is* during his own life and the redemptive figure that he *will* become after his death, Nietzsche must *presuppose* the reality of the inapprehensible present, of the body and external reality, in order that the reality that the apparent presents can be defined as a future reality. Moreover, this definition is necessary if Nietzsche is to redefine the apparent in terms of what he wishes his life to become rather than merely passively accepting his life as presented. He must sustain the difference between present and future, between and “‘it was’” and “‘thus I will it; thus shall I will it’” if his life is to be redeemed rather than repeated. In this respect it is notable that, for Nietzsche, the truth of the apparent is not the truth as presented by the *unredeemed* apparent. If this were the case Nietzsche would be a passive rather than redemptive medium in the passage from external cause to his textual self, being condemned to eternally relive “‘it was’”:

. . . the will itself is still a prisoner. Willing liberates; but what is it that puts even the liberator himself in fetters? ‘It was’ – that is the name of the will’s gnashing of teeth and most secret melancholy. Powerless against what has been done, he is an angry spectator of all that is past. The will cannot will backwards; and that he cannot break time and time’s covetousness . . .
(Zarathustra 251)

If “the stone *It was* cannot be moved” then “all punishments must be eternal” (Zarathustra 252), thus necessitating that the self “will backwards” from the future to the present, from

effect to cause. It is evident, therefore, that the 'effect' involved in any assertion that "a thing is the sum of its effects" is not the apparent as presented, that which is determined by external causality yet remains illusory by virtue of its implication in the immanent body: it is, rather, the apparent *as redeemed*, the future reality that the body/ self determines for itself in the will to power. The inapprehensible actuality of the body renders the present effect of causatory reality, the apparent as presented, illusory, thus allowing the body to utilise and redeem these illusions by determining its own effect, *creating* the reality that it will become on death, even as the body is, in subjective terms, *already* absent. The 'truth' of the apparent, therefore, is that of the apparent as redeemed rather than as presented, as self-determined rather than externally determined:

Any distinction between a "true" and an "apparent" world . . . is only a suggestion of decadence . . . That the artist esteems appearance higher than reality is no objection to this proposition. For "appearance" in this case means reality *once more*, only by way of selection, reinforcement, and correction. (Twilight of the Idols 484)

In asserting that the truth of the apparent is that of reality "*once more*", reality *as willed* rather than *as was*, Nietzsche reveals that he is utilising two realities and two perspectives. Firstly, the perspective of the present whereby the apparent is illusory by virtue of the body's presence, even as this illusion is determined by external reality. From this perspective these illusions have *yet* to become Nietzsche's reality, thus giving him the opportunity to redefine and redeem them in the will to power: "The will is a creator.' All 'it was' is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful accident – until the creative will says to it, 'But thus I willed it'" (Zarathustra 253). Secondly, we have reality "*once more*", the perspective of the future whereby Nietzsche accepts the apparent as presented (*as present*) as illusory in order that he can define his own truth and shape the reality that he will become. In light of the illusory nature of the apparent as it is presented, this future reality, which is rendered *inevitable* by his

present actions, is the only reality that he can subjectively apprehend, any conception of reality being subordinate to this redeemed 'truth'.

It is evident, therefore, that in denying any distinction between 'a "true" and an "apparent world"' Nietzsche is *specifically* referring to the apparent as redeemed. The apparent as presented, as externally rather than self-determined, is illusory, remaining illusory until it *has* been redeemed, this being the means through which one chooses one's *own* reality. What we see here is an inversion of perspectives whereby the life, or the self, that one *desires* becomes one's *only* reality, while that which is externally determined (empirical reality, one's unredeemed life, the apparent as presented, 'it was') is reduced to the status of an illusion *by virtue* of the reality of the body. The body can shape these illusions into its future reality in the will to power, or conversely, it can shape its own current conception of itself in terms of the future reality that it desires, *becoming* this reality in a process of "willing backwards". Again, this is not to deny external causation for it is the manner in which this causation is implicated in the actuality of the body, in its inapprehensible and immanent *presence*, which defines the unredeemed apparent as illusory, as that which has *yet* to become real, thus facilitating its redemptive transformation into its future reality. It is in accepting the reality of the body and the manner in which it transforms external causation into an illusion that Nietzsche facilitates the process of redemption, allowing the *future* reality that he chooses to gain functional primacy over any external causation, over any present reality, a reality that can never be real to us *because* of the reality of the body.

The inapprehensible reality of the body, and the manner in which it defines any present, external reality as an illusion, is, therefore, a perspective which is integral to the Nietzschean schema, revealing that Nietzsche does not deny external reality, but denies that it can be real in terms of bodily experience, a contention which paradoxically requires the

reality of the body. External reality may be real, but it can never be *our* reality *by virtue of the reality of the body*. In this light it is evident that present material reality is necessary for Nietzsche's *denial* of present material reality in favour of what this reality can become, in the same manner that the future cannot *be* the future except as defined *against* the present. Nietzsche, while inverting perspectives, nevertheless requires both, reality and our *only* reality, "it was" and "thus I will it: thus shall I will it".

It is the failure to appreciate this perspectivism, the reduction of the Nietzschean schema to the *single* perspective, which explains why Alexander Nehemas' attempt to explicate Nietzsche's contention that "a thing is the sum of its effects" as a denial of any material reality inevitably ends in an impasse:

But we now come face to face with a central problem involved in every presentation of Nietzsche's view of the will to power. The view asserts that things are nothing but their effects, that there are no objects or substances; yet it is stated in a language that seems to depend on there being just such entities in the world for its own possibility. As Arthur Danto has written, the will to power "is a difficult view to render wholly intelligible . . . because the terms for intelligibility for us are precisely those the theory cannot fit. To explain the theory in our language is to tolerate a fiction which one wishes to overthrow." (92 – 93)

As the phrase "stated in a language which seems to depend on there being just such entities . . ." suggests, Nehemas attempts to account for this 'problem' in linguistic terms, utilising Derrida's contention that language is inextricably linked to the history of metaphysics:

We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single deconstructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest. ("Structure, Sign and Play" 280-81)

Yet Nehemas' phrase reveals the problems involved here for Nietzsche's argument that a "thing is the sum of its effects" is "stated in a language which seems to depend on there *being* just such entities". The theoretical coherence of the Nietzschean schema is predicated on

these objects (most notably the body) possessing an *ontological* reality rather than a textual reality, a reality *apart* from linguistic concerns, the body being is the “great deliverer . . . the nameless one for whom only future songs will find names” (*Zarathustra* 336). As we have seen it precisely our *inability* to intelligibly apprehend this reality (most notably the actuality of the body) which allows Nietzsche to argue that, *from our perspective*, “a thing is the sum of its effects”, the effect in question not being the apparent, but the reality that we presently ensure the apparent *will* become. Nevertheless, it is in ruling out everything *but* this perspective that theorists reach the kind of impasse that Nehemas highlights, simultaneously rendering the perspective that they retain incoherent. Moreover, it is in rejecting any other perspective that they simultaneously reject the possibility of redemption, defining the truth of the apparent as that of the apparent as presented rather than as redeemed, failing to appreciate that the former must be illusory in order that it *can* be redeemed. This distinction between present and future can only be held in place by the reality of the body, the apparent’s bridge to its the future reality. It is this *potentiality* which postpones the moment when the apparent transcends the body’s immanence, deferring the text’s ‘rights to reality’ and defining the apparent as that which is *presently* illusory: This gives Nietzsche the opportunity to redeem and redefine these illusions in preparation for his future, for the point of post-mortem self-overcoming which, in Zarathustra’s words, “shall seal my perfection” (*Zarathustra* 275), the point at which his “past” will “burst its tombs; many a pain that had been buried alive awoke, having merely slept, hidden in burial shrouds [*Leichen-Gewänder* – corpse-clothes]” (*Zarathustra* 274). In short, it is only the *actual* presence of the body, and of a world which is implicated in the body’s immanence *via* the senses, which defines the unredeemed apparent as *presently* illusory, and the redeemed apparent as a *future* reality. Nietzsche *remembers* the apparent’s implication in the body’s presence in order that the present, “‘it was’”, can be defined as an illusion, and *forgets* the redeemed apparent’s implication in the body (which

cannot be intelligibly apprehended in any case) in order that the future that he desires can be *his* reality, that which he wills. It is this selectivity and this bifurcation of perspectives which explains the obvious contradiction between Nietzsche's/ Zarathustra's assertion that "One must learn to look away from oneself in order to see *much*" (Zarathustra 265) and his assertion that "For me – how should there be any outside–myself? There is no outside" (Zarathustra 329). Respectively, we have the subjective apprehension of one's post-mortem, transcendental future, and a recognition of the inapprehensible, yet present, immanence of the body.

Neither of the perspectives outlined rule each other out; on the contrary, both perspectives *complement* each other, for it is the utilisation of both which renders the Nietzschean schema coherent, belying Nehemas' assertion that this constitutes the 'central problem' involved in any presentation of the will to power. On the contrary, this is not a problem for Nietzsche, for it is precisely this bifurcation of perspectives which facilitates the body's process of self-overcoming. Similarly, Danto's assertion that the will to power can never be wholly intelligible because "[t]o explain the theory in our language is to tolerate a fiction which one wishes to overthrow"; it is precisely that external reality is a fiction *for us*, and is defined as such by our own physical reality, which allows Nietzsche to overthrow its ontological primacy in the will to power *via* an inversion of perspectives. Nietzsche's denial of any underlying reality is a manifestation of the body's will to power, as is his *acceptance* of this underlying reality where appropriate. He utilises both perspectives in the name of self-becoming. In On the Genealogy of Morals, for example, Nietzsche speaks of the ascetic ideal, recognising the value of its *downgrading* of "physicality to an illusion" (554), and thus of the inversion of perspectives whereby the present becomes illusory and the future becomes one's reality: within "the ascetic life, life counts as a bridge to that other mode of existence" (553). He does not see this as an outright denial of physical reality, however, also recognising

that this inversion, this “cruelty against reason . . . reaches its height when the ascetic self-contempt and self-mockery of reason declares: “*there* is a realm of truth and being, but reason is excluded from it!” (554). He immediately compares this to Kant’s “intelligible character” of things, which signifies “that things are so constituted that the intellect comprehends just enough of them to know that for the intellect they are – *utterly incomprehensible*” (555). He thus acknowledges a truth which escapes appearance, and one should contrast the incomprehensible nature of this truth with Zarathustra’s definition of the will to truth: “. . . this is what the will to truth should mean to you: that everything be changed into what is thinkable for man, visible for man, feelable by man. You should think through your own senses to their consequences” (*Zarathustra* 198). Nietzsche criticises the ascetic’s outright rejection of the senses, this being a failure to think through the senses to their consequences, a failure to accept the perspective whereby one sees the apparent, in conjunction with the physicality of the body, as facilitating a future reality which can be determined in the will to power: the ascetic looks “for error precisely where the instinct of life most unconditionally posits truth” (554). Nevertheless, he recognises that in reducing present reality *to* an illusion the ascetic inverts perspectives and facilitates the will to truth, to *one’s own* truth, a process which requires the selective utilisation of perspectives:

. . . precisely because we seek knowledge, let us not be ungrateful to such resolute reversals of accustomed perspectives and valuations . . . to see differently in this way for once, to *want* to see differently, is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect for its future “objectivity” – the latter understood not as “contemplation without interest” (which is a nonsensical absurdity), but as the ability to control one’s Pro and Con and to dispose of them so that one knows how to employ a *variety* of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge. (555)

He immediately goes on to account for the expedient nature of ascetic’s denial of the life instinct, their downgrading of physicality, the senses, the ego and of one’s reality, in favour of a redemptive future. He does so in terms of the body’s attempt to preserve itself, thus

revealing the perspectival and provisional nature of its self-denial. The body, *in its own presence*, denies this reality and accepts the future as a reality in order that it can egocentrically sustain itself and conquer death. The body expediently denies its own reality, *in the name of the body*:

It will be immediately obvious that such self-contradiction as the ascetic appears to represent, “life *against* life,” is physiologically considered and not merely psychologically, a simple absurdity. It can only be *apparent*; it must be a kind of provisional formulation, an interpretation and psychological misunderstanding of something whose real nature could not for a long time be understood or described *as it really was* – a mere word inserted into an old *gap* in human knowledge. Let us replace it with a brief formulation of the facts of the matter: *the ascetic ideal springs from the protective instinct of a degenerating life* which tries by all means to sustain itself and to fight for its existence; it indicates a partial physiological obstruction and exhaustion against which the deepest instincts of life, which have remained intact, continually struggle with new expedients and devices. The ascetic ideal is such an expedient; the case is therefore the opposite of what those who reverence this ideal believe: life wrestles in it and through it with death and *against* death; the ascetic ideal is an artifice for the *preservation* of life. (556)

What this retention of two perspectives reveals, then, is that its not the case that one enters into language and the origin is erased, or that there has never been an origin. As Nietzsche is clearly aware, that one can *begin* with the origin and *logically demonstrate* the means through which this linguistic non-existence can arise, *in itself*, implies the origin’s ontological possibility to precisely the same extent as it implies its linguistic impossibility. For Nietzsche, within his life, the origin remains inapprehensible not because it has been usurped, but because it has *yet* to be usurped, which is to say that the potentiality which is the body has *yet* to be actualised as the text, that which *will* constitute Nietzsche’s life:

I live on my own credit; it is perhaps a mere prejudice that I live.

I only need to speak with one of the “educated” who come to the Upper Engadine for the summer, and I am convinced that I do *not* live. (673)

The credit on which Nietzsche lives is not merely a *prospective* credit which will be repaid on death, as Nietzsche becomes the textual figure that he promises himself within life *via* the mediation of the reader. It is also, within this life, a *retrospective* or *immediate* credit for the potentiality which is his body, the origin which is he seeking to become and cannot become by virtue of the fact that it is what he already inapprehensibly *is*. The textual figure that he enacts *constitutes* this credit for the body, being the means through which this body will ultimately transcend itself and be redeemed as the text, a process which can only occur in the body's absence. Derrida reads the above quotation to imply that Nietzsche does not *presently* live as a result of the 'educated's' ignorance of his name ("Otobiographies" 9-10), thus enacting the role that the reader plays in honouring the contract that Nietzsche makes with himself *through* this text. Yet if Nietzsche requires this testimony in order that he may be posthumously born as this textual figure, it is equally true that Nietzsche is *presently* testifying to his own physicality *via* this textual figure, the mask through which he *credits* the ineffable presence of the body. Recalling his warning of the danger that "the instinct comes too soon to "understand itself"(710) he asserts that "[u]nder these circumstances I have a duty against which my habits, even more the pride of my instincts, revolt at bottom – namely, to say: *Hear me! For I am such and such a person. Above all, do not mistake me for someone else*" (673).

CHAPTER 3

...HELL, I'VE CONTRADICTED MYSELF, NO MATTER: BECKETT, ARISTOTLE, AND THE
HYLOMORPHIC TEXT

1

BECKETT AND POST-STRUCTURALISM

Few would argue against the assertion that Samuel Beckett is a key figure in the movement towards a post-structuralist notion of textuality in which the text is

... no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to some thing other than to itself, to other differential traces. Thus the text overruns all limits assigned to it ... all the limits, everything that was set up in opposition to writing (speech, life, the world, the real, history and what not ...). (Derrida "Living on – Border Lines" 257)

Richard Begam, for example, has spoken of a Beckett who,

... as early as the 1930s and 1940's ... had already anticipated, often in strikingly prescient ways, many of the defining themes and ideas of Barthes, Foucault and Derrida. Indeed, we might begin to understand Beckett as a kind of buried subtext or marginalium in French post-structuralism. (Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity 4)

Similarly, Lance St. John Butler and Robin J. Davis have described Beckett as "the poet of the post-structuralist age" and a "deconstructionist *avant la letter*" (x). Such beliefs are supported by, for example, Foucault's use of Beckett's The Unnamable and Texts for Nothing in his challenge to the historical model of authorship and his associated account of the text as that which refers "only to itself, but without being restricted to the confines of its interiority, writing is identified with its own unfolded exteriority. ... like a game [*jeu*] that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits" ("What is an Author?" 141).

It is notable that Foucault's remarks parallel Derrida's view, implying that the Author, like "speech, life, the world, the real, history and what not . . ." is nothing more than the unfolded exteriority of the text, any 'extra-textual reality' actually being the product of an infinite text which lacks the limits against which 'textual interiority' can be defined as such. The appositeness of this application of Derrida's view that "*There is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]" (*Grammatology* 158) to Beckett is reinforced by Derrida's assertions that he feels "very close; but also too close" to be able to "write, sign, countersign performatively texts which 'respond' to Beckett . . ." ("This Strange Institution" 60). Such a remark may seem unusual when we recall the Derridean contention that his theory of writing is implicit to the texts that he deconstructs¹ and thus that all texts are, to some degree, auto-deconstructive. Yet the remark, clearly, does not refer to closeness in this sense; it implies, rather, that Derrida feels "too close" by virtue of the fact that Beckett's texts are *self-consciously* auto-deconstructive, deconstructing themselves to such an extent that Derrida cannot "write, sign, countersign performatively texts which 'respond'" to them. This is why the novels of Samuel Beckett have not been subject to deconstructive analysis in the same manner as those of Plato and Nietzsche. Beckett's texts have never needed to be usurped by the supplement which is Derrida's reading since the notion of reality in these texts has apparently never resisted deconstruction. Yet is it true that this usurpation has not taken place? A consideration of this raises several related questions. How has this proximity between Derrida and Beckett come about? How has it affected contemporary interpretations of Beckettian textuality? Do these interpretations need to be attenuated with reference to the texts themselves? What is *at stake* here?

Beckett is, it would seem, a precursor of deconstruction rather than a viable subject for the kind of revisionist reading that Derrida practises. Nevertheless, taking their cue from these indicators of Beckett's prescience, recent critics have begun to read (or to re-read)

Beckett's prose in terms which reflect current critical attitudes², any metaphysical aspect to Beckettian textuality frequently being seen as a product of traditional or humanistic interpreters who lag behind the "new Beckett, thinkable only in the most recent critical terms" (Butler and Davis x). There can be little doubt that Beckett's texts invite such analysis, enacting as they do a world in which metaphysical comfort remains elusive, the possibility of any transcendental or underlying reality being erased in the very act of signification. For Beckett, it often seems that the act of becoming *conscious* of 'reality' (most notably of the self) is the very act which simultaneously places reality beyond consciousness, leaving the subject stranded within an infinite process of signification which continually defers that which it seeks in the very act of attempting to signify it. The self, for example, is erased in the very act self-presentation, rendered unspeakable in the act of being spoken: "Nowhere to be found. Nowhere to be sought. The unthinkable last of all. Unnamable. Last person. I. Quick leave him" (*Company* 19). From this point of view, reality, like Molloy's mother (*Molloy passim*), is that which is always left behind and yet to come, even as the infinite nature of signification continually transgresses such limits and reveals this pre- or extra-textual reality to be an illusion, a product of the interminable process of desire which is the text. Nevertheless, Derrida's assertion that he feels "too close" to Beckett to write about him not only points to this singular position of Beckett *a propos* post-structuralism but also to the dangers involved in this kind of post-structuralist reading. It is notable that of all the modernist authors who are cited as presaging the post-modern debate on the nature of reality, Beckett stands out as the figure who overtly transgresses any categorical distinction between modernity and post-modernity. As H. Porter Abbott asserts:

From early in the 1960's, Beckett has been a site of the modernist/postmodernist turf war . . . after a spate of early readings (often inflected by Beckett's connection with Joyce and Proust) casting him as a modernist or late modernist or, at times, the "Last Modernist," momentum has passed to the other side as the postmodernist categorizers have steadily gained the high

ground. Their advantage of armament has come from the fit between Beckett's writing and post-structuralist theory, a fit so snug that Beckett has provided, to use Herbert Blau's word, a "gloss" on deconstruction. (Beckett Writing Beckett 24-25)

Similarly, Stephen Barker has asserted that "... [o]ne's first reaction to reading Beckett is that he is not only the most obvious choice of an author to whose works one can apply post-structuralist strategies but that he is almost too good, programmed, it seems for a Derridean treatment" (200). One is reminded here of Beckett's own attempts to draw an interpretative analogy between Vico and Joyce, his assertion that "[t]he danger is in the neatness of identifications" ("Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce" 19) and his acknowledgment that

... such an exactitude of application would imply distortion in one of two directions. Must we wring the neck of a certain system in order to stuff it into a contemporary pigeon-hole, or modify the dimensions of that pigeon-hole for the satisfaction of the analogymongers? ("Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce" 19)

That such a choice is rarely mentioned in post-structuralist treatments of Beckett points to the very danger that he identifies, the error that Derrida invites in asserting that he is "too close" to Beckett. More clearly, Beckett's remarks elicit the question of whether it is more appropriate to apply critical theory *to* the text or whether critical theory should be derived *from* the text, a question which is frequently obviated in post-structuralist readings by the very snugness of the fit between Beckett and Derrida: it is this fit which forestalls the question of whether we are reading Beckett or Derrida in post-structuralist interpretation, the possibility being that we are reading Derrida rather *than* Beckett. Consequently, this fit also elides the question of why we should read Beckett in terms of post-structuralism, "wringing the neck of a certain system in order to stuff it into a contemporary pigeon-hole", rather than reading post-structuralism in terms of Beckett, modifying "the dimensions of that pigeon-hole", albeit not "for the satisfaction of the analogymongers" but in order to reveal the "danger ... in the neatness of identifications". This is the danger of finding what one *wishes*

to find, while remaining oblivious to the manner in which Beckett's work attenuates, or even contests post-structuralist notions of textuality.

A reading of Beckett which recognises this danger, therefore, would not be a retrogressive step which firmly places (or re-places) Beckett in the modernist camp, but a means of interrogating the deconstructionist theory which underpins post-modern thought, a recognition that any counter-assumptive theory needs to be wary of its own assumptions if it is not to run into a theoretical impasse in relation to the text. Conversely, an unreflective post-structuralist reading can draw Beckettian textuality into the impasse of which Christopher Norris speaks in questioning Derrida's claim that his theories do not amount to an assertion that "there is nothing beyond language . . . and other stupidities of that sort" (Kearney 124): ". . . the fact that Derrida has so often been read as saying just that – and not only by blinkered polemicists with very stubborn preconceptions – suggests that this whole debate has run into a familiar kind of epistemological dead-end" (Norris 144). Seán Burke also points to the nature of the assumptions which lead to this "deadlock between French theory and Anglo-American criticism" (Death and Return of the Author 18) in asserting that "it is the ideas of 'deaths', 'ends', 'closures', 'epistemological breaks', 'final ruptures', etc., that have often barred the way to meaningful and constructive debate in recent critical history" (18). That recent post-structuralist analyses of Beckett have been entitled Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity (Richard Begam) and Into the Breach³ (Thomas Trezise) is suggestive of the manner in which an unquestioning application of post-structuralist critical tenets to the Beckettian text lead to precisely the "deadlock" of which Burke speaks. Nevertheless, Burke's assertion is also suggestive of the manner in which a reading that highlights the irreducible nature of Beckettian textuality, its unwillingness to wholly conform to *either* position in this deadlock, can be undertaken. Such a reading requires an approach that is free from the pre-conceptions of accepted critical theory, from the assumption that

Beckett's work is "programmed" for a post-structuralist reading, and a willingness to extract theory *from* the Beckettian text thus recognising the manner in which this theory can attenuate accepted positions. In this we shall see that Beckett echoes both the Platonic attitude towards an equivocal writing which exteriorises the irresolvable *question* of the origin, and Nietzschean attitude towards an equivocal reality, that which exteriorises the *use* of writing. In doing so, it will become apparent that Beckett follows these figures in recognising that writing exteriorises the irresolvable and inescapable potentiality that is matter, a fact that will allow us to go beyond a critique of Derridean theory in order to propose a specifically Aristotelian theory of textuality. To begin with, however, it is evident that one needs to begin to open up the space between post-structuralism and Beckett and, in particular, between the figures of Derrida and Beckett, for as Daniel Katz recognises, if "it is undeniable that the theories, speculations, and approaches usually grouped together (for better or worse) under this aegis . . . have been an extremely powerful force in works on Beckett over the last several years", then this "particularly" applies to the "critical approaches usually associated with Jacques Derrida" (4).

An immediate difference which comes to one's attention in reading Derrida and Beckett is the fact that Derrida's texts not only complicate the notion of 'reality' but exhibit a desire to actively *contest* the possibility of any extra-systemic, validating presence beyond textuality: this, indeed, is a desire which is characteristic of the deconstructionist project in general, constituting the "phase of *overturning*" which Derrida links to the "*general strategy of deconstruction*" (Positions 41). In relation to the notion of matter, for example, Derrida asserts that if he has

. . . not very often used the word "matter," it is not . . . because of some idealist or spiritualist kind of reservation. It is that in the logic of the phase of overturning this concept has been to often reinvested with "logocentric" values, values associated with those of the thing, reality, presence in general, sensible presence, for example, substantial plenitude, content, referent, etc.

Realism or sensualism –“empiricism”- are modifications of logocentrism . . .
 (Positions 64-65)

This is not, however, to assert that Derrida or the deconstructionist project escape the transcendental assumptions that constitute logocentrism for these assumptions “aren’t faults, errors, sins or accidents that could be avoided. Across so many very necessary programs – language, grammar, culture in general – the recurrence of such “assumptions” is so structural that it couldn’t be a question of eliminating them” (“This Strange Institution” 49). The “phase of overturning” of which he speaks, therefore, is the subversive use of logocentric language as a means of undoing these structural assumptions, his strategic use of the *archē*-trace being the most obvious manifestation of this⁴. Derrida operates within the boundaries of an inescapably logocentric system in order to deconstruct the *logos* (or *logoi*) on which this system is founded: “There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is foreign to this history” (“Structure, Sign and Play” 110-11). In other words, deconstruction does not work in opposition to logocentrism, but *through* logocentrism in opposition to the *logos*, for it is clear from Derrida’s statements on matter that if he does not (indeed cannot) wholly refute logocentrism then he does wholly refute the extra-textual guarantor which is the *logos* itself, rejecting and contesting the existential validity of “the thing, reality, presence in general”.

The polemical nature of Derrida’s project, however, seems far more assured in regards to the *logos* than that of Beckett, whose protagonists do not need to *contest* the notion of extra-textual reality by virtue of the simple fact that this reality is never present to consciousness. In Beckett any signifier of this *logos* readily displays its inability to affirm reality, and as a result there is never any suggestion that Beckett or his characters *intend* to contest the *logos*, a contestation which inherently implies a conviction that there *is* no *logos*:

for Beckett, the evanescent nature of signification itself clearly renders this intention unnecessary. Yet in spite of this fact, this intention, as derived from Derrida, is all too frequently imported into post-structuralist readings. Frederik N. Smith, for example, asserts that in

. . . undermining the connection between language and reality, Beckett has deliberately run words aground, leaving them no longer usable as signs for meanings beyond themselves, but oddly free to express meaning by reference to other words. . . . language is accepted as relying not on external 'reality' for its significance but is understood rather as the source of its own meaning . . . (138)

The substance of Smith's assertion is undoubtedly valid and yet his assertion that Beckett has *deliberately* undermined the connection between language and reality masks the fact that this is not a situation that Beckett *creates*, a desired release into, or even an acceptance of, the textual free-play which relies "not on external reality for its significance but is understood as the source of its own meaning". This lack of a limiting externality is, rather, the very problem with which Beckett is presented *by* language. Beckett recognises that one cannot undermine the connection between language and reality if that connection has never been established in the first place and it is for this reason that the Beckettian text is no more a contestation of this connection than it is an attempt to establish it, a fact which is masked by the attribution of the deconstructive intention. In this context, the question of whether Beckett is *pro* or *contra* the metaphysical reduction becomes irrelevant, Beckett frequently acknowledging his inability to affirm or deny either position: the Beckettian character, above all, desires resolution and the nature of this resolution is inconsequential, taking the form of *either* a final acceptance of textual free-play or a final affirmation of pre-textual reality, neither of which are tenable. Malone, for example, asserts:

I never knew how to play. . . . I longed to, but I knew it was impossible. . . . That is why I gave up trying to play and took to myself for ever shapelessness and speechlessness, incurious wondering, darkness, long stumbling with

outstretched arms, hiding. Such is the earnestness from which . . . I have never been able to depart. (Malone 180-81).

Yet conversely Beckett's texts also demonstrate that this "speechlessness" cannot be maintained, which is why the enforced liberation from 'reality' is all too often that which the Beckettian character desires to *escape*, as demonstrated by the Unnamable's frantic desire to transcend the "wordy-gurdy" (Unnamable 403), to "stop, travel no more, seek no more, lie no more, speak no more . . . in a word lay your hands on yourself" (Unnamable 404). As early as 1937, Beckett writes to Axel Kaun that "language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it" (Disjecta 171), the difference between getting at "the things" and getting at "Nothingness" constantly being undermined in the Beckettian text by his knowledge that the ultimate apprehension of any such 'reality' requires the cessation of signification, of consciousness, thus negating the laying of "hands on yourself" in the very act of achieving it: "Dear incomprehension, its thanks to you I'll be myself, in the end. Nothing will remain of the lies they have glutted me with. And I'll be myself at last . . ." (Unnamable 327). As Beckett asserts in relation to the work of Masson: "The void he speaks of is perhaps simply the obliteration of an unbearable presence, unbearable because neither to be wooed nor to be stormed" ("Three Dialogues" 140).

The importation of Derridean intention into the Beckettian text, therefore, not only implies a *desire* to deny reality, but also an *ability* to deny reality, to unequivocally accept the illusory status of the *logos* in the same manner as Derrida. The necessity of such an acceptance becomes apparent when one recalls that it allows the exteriority of an infinite text to unfold, transgressing the boundary between inside and outside and, therefore, the distinction between signifier and referent, fiction and reality. It is this opening of the exteriority of meaning which constitutes the "[t]he historical usurpation and theoretical

oddity that install the image within the rights of reality . . .” (Grammatology 36-37), the ‘rights of reality’ being that to which textuality can lay claim in the absence of any extra-textual reality which can *contest* this entitlement. The very fact that Derrida sees this usurpation of any originating reality by the text as a means of eluding the classical opposition of reality and representation, thus deconstructing the binary opposition of transcendental realism and empirical idealism, both confirms the necessity of the *logos*’ absence and the manner in which this denial, in itself, can be seen as a kind of affirmation, a final escape from the *aporia* of Cartesian dualism. One of the few Beckett critics to interrogate the affirmatory nature of this post-structuralist view, questioning its unquestioned application to the Beckettian text, is Christopher Ricks, who recognises an *inability* to deny external reality without reasserting its *possibility* in the act of doing so, thus continually preventing any final installation of the image within the ‘rights of reality’:

One currently tempting lie is that there is no such thing as the real. Beckett takes care to resist this temptation . . . this easing of the mind and life. . . . There are for Beckett, as there are, contraries which gnaw. . . . But such contraries, of social reality or of individual being, contraries from which no human enterprise can escape unbesieged, are now held to have been ‘refused’, ‘put in question’, dissolved. . . . In such ‘discourse’, as it calls itself, we are in another world than that of Beckett’s greatness, his being an art which never is so complacent as to deny the existence of ‘the without’, ‘impregnable’ as it yet fertilely is. (147-51)

In contrast to readings that would seek to deny this fertile ‘without’, Ricks asserts that Beckett “finds it impossible, impossible in honesty, to discard not only the unnameable contrary to the real, but the real” (147). As the Unnamable asserts, all “affirmations and negations” are “invalidated as uttered” (Unnamable 293) and this includes the negation of the real and affirmation which would “install the image within the rights of reality”. As such, the logocentric aspect of the Beckettian text is not analogous to Derrida’s inability to wholly reject logocentrism (as opposed to Derrida’s clear rejection of the *logos* itself), an inability

that Derrida attributes to the historically pervasive nature of metaphysical thought. As with Nietzsche, Beckett remains a logocentric writer because, unlike Derrida, he is unable to finally refute the *logos itself*, this inability being a functional element within textuality rather than a product of the historical forces that shape our notion of signification. This implies, of course, that if any signifier of the *logos* displays its inability to affirm the *logos*' reality, then it simultaneously displays its inability to wholly *deny* this reality, reality remaining the authentic, tantalising, *possibility* that inhabits textuality. As the voice of Texts for Nothing laments: "ah if no were content to cut yes's throat and never cut its own" (133). Within the Beckettian text, therefore, there can be no affirmation (or negation) of *either* reality *or* textuality: "Such equal liars both. Real and – how ill say its contrary? The counter-poison" (Ill Seen Ill Said 82). Evidently, the Beckettian *pharmakon* is reality, the text being the "counter-poison". As the words "equal liars both" suggest, one can no more affirm the text as a reality than one can affirm reality itself, that which may be a "lie" but is, nevertheless, "the same lie lyingly denied" (Texts for Nothing 154) by the text. As in the Platonic text, it is the inescapable and undeniable *possibility* of reality that incessantly 'poisons' the text defining signification as a "lie" and preventing any final installation of "the image within the rights of reality". As the body holds in place the distinction between "'it was'" and "'thus I willed it'" (Ecce Homo 765) within Nietzsche's work, it is *only* as a possibility that reality can hold in place the aporetic or liminal position in which the Beckettian narrator so often finds himself, preventing the free-play of textuality from being conclusively accepted as a liberation even as it refutes any self-affirmation: the text remains, instead, akin to purgatory.

This, of course, raises the question of how this possibility manifests itself: how does this putative *logos* refute any final denial even as it refutes its affirmation? How does it leave its elusive yet ineradicable *trace* in the text? In order to answer this question it is necessary to examine the manner in which the theory which inhabits the text operates in conjunction with

that text's performativity. More specifically we shall examine the deictic nature of Beckettian textuality, revealing that it is his use of deixis which most clearly accounts for the manner in which his work intersects with post-structuralism even as it raises important questions about this post-structuralist thought. Ultimately we shall see it is this performativity which reveals the necessity of situating Beckett within a *hylomorphic* tradition, thus problematising many of the preconceptions that post-structuralist critics and theorists bring to the text.

2

PSEUDO-DEIXIS AND THE NON-TRANSCENDENTAL ASSUMPTION

Deixis is a term which is applied to any linguistic unit which is meaningful only in relation to its own utterance, a statement which is meaningful only in relation to the specific instance of its own performance, being an attempt refer to this instance (e.g. "I am now speaking"): it designates "all the words that situate and indicate the act of enunciation and are intelligible only in relation to it (*here, now, today, etc.*)" (Kristeva Language: The Unknown 334). As this suggests, the deictic statement is also meaningful only in relation to the person who is involved in this instance, the person who performs the act of enunciation, which is why Emile Benveniste argues that the most important example of deixis is the utterance 'I'. For Benveniste, it is this signifier which deictically establishes subjectivity, being that which "signifies 'the person who is uttering the present instance of the discourse containing *I*'" (218). Yet in uncovering the referent that defines the usage of 'I', Benveniste recognises this signifier's lack of *specificity* with regards to the identity of this person, the signifier only *specifically* identifying the present instance of discourse in which this impersonal figure is involved:

Could it . . . be said that *I* refers to a particular individual? . . . How could the same term refer indifferently to any individual whatsoever and still at the same time identify him in his individuality? . . . Then what does 'I' refer to? To something very peculiar which is exclusively linguistic: *I* refers to the act of individual discourse in which it is pronounced, and by this it designates the speaker. . . . The reality to which it refers is the reality of discourse. It is in the instance of discourse in which *I* designates the speaker that the speaker proclaims himself as the "subject." (218)

The influence of this formulation of deixis on post-structuralist views of subjectivity is manifest, implying as it does that the subject has no verifiable existence beyond the utterance or beyond discourse. Barthes' "The Death of the Author", for example, applies Benveniste's views on deixis and subjectivity to writing:

. . . linguistics has recently provided the destruction of the Author with a valuable analytical tool by showing that the whole of the enunciation is an empty process, functioning perfectly without there being any need for it to be filled with the person of the interlocutors. Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance saying *I*. . . . The fact is . . . that *writing* . . . designates exactly what linguists . . . call a performative, a rare verbal form . . . in which the enunciation has no other content (contains no other proposition) than the act by which it is uttered – something like the *I declare* of kings or the *I sing* of very ancient poets. ("The Death of the Author" 145-46)⁵

It is clear, however, that the physical act of utterance of which Barthes speaks cannot be wholly identifiable with the content of this utterance, the speech-act *as represented*. In referring to the act of utterance (or, in Benveniste's terms, the "reality of discourse"), the representation of this act necessarily differs from the act *itself*. Deixis thus establishes the difference between vehicle and tenor, speaker and spoken, the figure writing and the figure written, this being the primary scission in the linguistic function. Yet if deictic representation is only meaningful in relation to the reality of discourse from which it differs, then how can one be aware of this reality without articulating it as *another* representation? Any attempt to meaningfully apprehend this physical act, the referent of the deictic statement, will produce merely another element in discourse⁶, there, *now*, being nothing beyond discourse other than

more discourse: as Barthes asserts, a “disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins” (“The Death of the Author” 142).

A pertinent example of this deictic ‘disconnection’ between origin and voice, vehicle and tenor, occurs during the opening of The Unnamable: “I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that” (293). The narrator’s apprehension of the act of saying ‘I’ (and, therefore, of the pre-discursive figure who *says* ‘I’) is subsequent *to* the signifier ‘I’, a reflection of the fact that one cannot be aware of the self *speaking* until that self has already been *spoken*, self-consciousness being subsequent *to* language. Yet any conscious apprehension of the act of speaking (or of the speaker) can only occur *via* another deictic signifier that reflects on the physicality of an utterance which is already in place (“I, say I”). In other words the signifier ‘I’ is questioned in order to produce the signified hypothesis that this ‘I’ has been spoken, there, *now*, being nothing *more* than signified questions or hypotheses about the inapprehensible space of enunciation/ the enunciator. Clearly, once the self has been posited in language there is nothing beyond linguistic representation other than more representation. As the Unnamable consequently admits, the process of textuality can be seen as an eternally incomplete attempt to fill the “holes” which are left in discourse as a result of the deictic statement’s inability to apprehend its own physicality, holes which are filled with nothing more than discursive fictions or equivocal “hypotheses”. As the “master” asks in questioning his ‘own’ signifiers:

What have you done with your material? We have left it behind. But commanded to say whether yes or no they filled up the holes, have you filled up the holes yes or no, they will say yes and no, or some yes, others no both are defensible, both yes and no, for they filled up the holes, if you like, and if you don’t like they didn’t. . . . they fixed their lamps in the holes, their long lamps, to prevent them from closing of themselves (Unnamable 368).

As the ambiguity suggests, the hole that is left by the deictic erasure of materiality is “filled” by discourse in the manner that a hole is “filled” with light, being no less of a “hole” for this. It is this light (consciousness or ‘self’ consciousness) which keeps the “hole” that materiality once occupied *open*, consciousness or textuality only *existing* as a constant interrogation and reiteration of this space, a constant attempt fill the holes and achieve the self-identity which has been lost through the deictic articulation/ erasure of this pre-discursive self. Language, once unleashed, thus has its own inexorable logic: “One starts things moving without a thought of how to stop them. . . . The search for the means to but an end to things, an end to speech, is what enables the discourse to continue” (Unnamable 301).

A recognition of the importance of deixis in the establishment of subjectivity is, therefore, one way in which Beckett facilitates post-structuralist readings of his work, although Beckett’s texts could justifiably be designated *pseudo-deictic* since he recognises the intangible nature of the deictic statement’s ‘referent’, the ‘reality of discourse’. Beckett, therefore, goes beyond Benveniste and foreshadows post-structuralist thought in accepting that a deictic statement cannot ultimately refer to this reality - it can only *attempt* to do so through the constant process of textuality, any such ‘referent’ always being another supplement to discourse. In other words, discourse can never apprehend its own reality, can never be totalised.

Beckett thus accepts that any deictic representation of the “reality of discourse” *in itself* implies that this reality, like the Unnamable’s “material”, has been “left . . . behind”. Yet he is also aware that the reason why a deictic statement cannot refer to its own reality, leaving this reality “behind”, is because any such representation is continually implicated *within* this unnameable reality: “. . . I’m still in it, I left myself behind in it, I’m waiting for me there . . .” (The Unnamable 418). Ultimately, this is a reflection of the manner in which the totality of a deictic statement (tenor *and* vehicle) cannot be apprehended from a position

within this totality. Any attempt to do so merely produces a representation that may bear no mimetic relationship to the actuality that it *purports* to represent:

Gaber understood nothing about the messages he carried. Reflecting on them he arrived at the most extravagantly false conclusions. Yes, it was not enough for him to understand nothing about them, he had also to believe he understood everything about them. (Molloy 107)

Gaber's attempt to understand "everything about" his messages by "[r]eflecting" on their reality produces nothing more than an "extravagantly false" conclusion, a signifier which again fails to express the totality of tenor and vehicle, discourse and the unspeakable reality of discourse. In the 'absence' of this reality, however, Gaber *believes* that he understands "everything" since there is apparently nothing beyond discourse, hence the falsity of his totalised "conclusion"⁷. This conclusion, however, is not that of Moran who *begins* his attempt to refer to the reality of discourse (as represented by Molloy) on receipt of these messages in spite of his desire not to "submit to this paltry scrivening which is not my province . . ." (Molloy 132) or to "give way to literature" (Molloy 152): "What was I looking for exactly? It is hard to say. I was looking for what was wanting to make Gaber's statement complete" (Molloy 137). As well as noting that it is "hard to *say*" what Moran is looking for, one should note the typically Beckettian ambiguity of the words "what was wanting" since they clearly refer both to the lack of the reality of discourse (Molloy or that which is *wanted*) and to Moran's lack of a identifiable self (*Moran* is the figure who *wants* to make Gaber's statement complete). The remark, therefore, both implies that Moran and Molloy, tenor and vehicle, are ultimately one and the same person and that Moran's journey to find Molloy is an attempt to attain *himself*, to finally bring discursive reality in which he is deictically involved into linguistic being. Similarly, Moran's writing and his very existence coincide, for Moran is attempting to write "the inenarrable contraption I called my life" (Molloy 115), to

linguistically apprehend the reality of the vehicle in which he is involved, thus allowing this life (and himself) to finally be 'born':

Far from the world, its clamours, frenzies, bitterness and dingy light, I pass judgement on it and on those, like me, who are plunged in it beyond recall, and on him who has need of me to be delivered, who cannot deliver myself. . . . From their places masses move, stark as laws. Masses of what? One does not ask. There somewhere man is too, vast conglomerate of all of nature's kingdoms, as lonely and as bound. And in that block the prey is lodged and thinks himself being apart. (Molloy 111).

As Daniel Katz recognises, the deficiency which characterises Gaber's messages, Moran's writing and Moran's "life", is the deficiency which also characterises the deictic statement '*I*' itself:

. . . Beckett stresses the "I" as a mark – a mark which can never be saturated by the consciousness or intention it is meant to carry. One can always say "I," but how to invest it with the intention or meaning which makes it my "I" and not someone else's, how to ensure that "I" is said "seriously" and not as if enclosed between quotation marks? (22)

In Moran's words: "How little one is at one with oneself, good God" (Molloy 104).

It is nevertheless apparent that the subject which is established in Beckett's pseudo-deictic text is that which is *spoken* rather than the 'self' which is speaking or even the act of speech itself: neither of these factors can be incorporated into the very meaning that they articulate and neither can be finally established. Within the pseudo-deictic speech, the *act* of speaking or physicality of language *itself* is always cut off from that which is *spoken* since any meaningful apprehension of the former can only occur in the space of the latter. As the narrator of Texts for Nothing asserts, it is

. . . as if there were two things, some other thing besides this thing, what is it, this unnamable thing that I name and name and never wear out, and I call that words. It's because I haven't hit on the right ones, the killers, haven't yet heaved them up from that heart-burning glut of words, with what words shall I name my unnamable words? (125)

Language *itself* has no reality to the narrator beyond that which the language articulates, beyond the level of discourse. Analogously the *act* of speaking remains non-existent to the narrator, being equally unnamable: “. . . nothing doing without proper names” (Unnamable 340). Yet if the speaker cannot apprehend the speech act then he cannot apprehend himself as the *speaker*. Consequently, Beckett’s narrators frequently purport *not* to be speaking or even to be thinking, as is indicated by the narrator of Company who desires “by some successful act of intellection . . . to think to himself referring to himself, Since he cannot think he will give up trying” (Company 37). As this quotation suggests, the narrator cannot refer to himself (even *via* the third person) since any attempt apprehend the figure ‘thinking’ or thought *itself* is immediately translated into a signifier, the narrator having no *meaningful* being to himself, no *thought*, beyond this infinite chain of signification. Discourse thus usurps the origin which is consciousness itself; like Worm in The Unnamable, “[h]e has not yet been able to speak his mind” and cannot, therefore, validly assert that the mind exists in order that it can be identified with ‘thought’.

Yet while Beckett admits that only the tenor can be meaningfully apprehended within the pseudo-deictic text, never the vehicle, this is not to say that Beckett passively accepts that this vehicle is non-existent. It is true that the Beckettian narrator cannot not possess any existence *to himself* beyond the text and cannot identify discourse as the predicate of this prelinguistic thinker/ speaker but his narrator, nevertheless, often purports to be speaking from an unutterable position which is radically other to his own words, the position of the pre-discursive origin which has been *usurped by* and *ruled out* of the infinitude of discourse, the silent position *of* the vehicle:

Where would I go, if I could go, who would I be, if I could be, what would I say, if I had a voice, who says this, saying it’s me? . . . He tells his story every five minutes, saying its not his, there’s cleverness for you. . . .He has me say things saying it’s not me, there’s profundity for you . . . (Texts for Nothing 114-115).

Clearly, this putative figure 'behind' Beckett's words cannot be their intentional author, a self-identical figure who *thinks* and then expresses this thought in speech. As this quotation demonstrates, this figure has no means of meaningfully formulating his otherness to the voice *apart* from the voice itself, any such 'thought' instantaneously entering into the domain of the *spoken*, and thus of discourse. This figure, therefore, has no verifiable reality beyond the voice, although his and our use of the word 'voice' is pragmatic rather than accurate; one could equally argue that the narrator can only apprehend that which the voice articulates (the discourse) rather *than* the voice: ". . . what would I say, if I had a voice . . .". As the Unnamable asserts: "The fact is all this business about voices requires to be revised, corrected and then abandoned" (Unnamable 338). Returning to the quotation however, it is equally clear that this non-intentional figure cannot enter into that which he speaks/ thinks, being unable to linguistically apprehend himself *as* the speaker/ thinker in order that the spoken/ thought can be identified as a predicate of himself: ". . . who says this, saying it's me?". It *may* be the case that ". . . a voice speaks that can be none but mine, since there is none but me" (Texts for Nothing 146) but clearly, this cannot be verified since ". . . this being which is called me . . . is not one . . ." (147). In other words, the totality of speaker and spoken cannot be affirmed by virtue of the speaker's inability to deictically refer to his own reality *as* the speaker, thus allowing these words to be identified as his 'own'. The narrator has to "speak, with this voice which is not mine" even as it can, apparently, "only be mine, since there is no one but me" (Unnamable 309).

It is evident, therefore, that the unspeakable and non-intentional figure behind the Beckettian text can have no being to itself beyond that which language articulates and, consequently, can only be a purely *physical* vehicle for the tenor which is the thought/ the spoken. As a speaker, this figure is ". . . a mere ventriloquist's dummy, I feel nothing, say nothing, he holds me in his arms and moves my lips, all is dark, there is no one . . ." (Texts

for Nothing 133). The ‘he’ referred to here is the linguistic subject, the ‘I’ as spoken, for as we have seen this ‘dummy’ cannot *express* a pre-existent thought, having no thought or speech which escapes discourse. The “dummy”, rather, has speech *elicited from* it by the linguistic subject, meaningfully defining itself against the language that it hears (it being the one to whom the signifier ‘I’ implicitly says ‘you’), even as it is apparent that any such definition will be instantaneously sublimated into, or *spoken* as, another signifier (i.e. the signifier ‘you’). As this implies, the act of hearing/ the hearer can no more be brought into linguistic being within the text than the act of speaking/ the speaker, for this hearer can only identify himself as such within the space of a discourse which cannot be identified as a predicate of himself: “Let him not be named H. Let him be again as he was. The hearer. Unnamable. You” (Company 25). This figure who hears the ‘I’ and instantaneously speaks itself in relation to that which he hears thus *remains* an unconscious “dummy”, a purely physical vehicle, who does not enter into the text and has no ‘thought’ beyond the text:

. . . pah there are voices everywhere, one who speaks saying, without ceasing to speak, Who’s speaking?, and one who hears, mute, uncomprehending, far from all, and bodies everywhere, bent, fixed, where my prospects must be just as good, just as poor, as in this firstcomer. (Texts for Nothing 150)

In other words, “It’s the same old stranger as ever, for whom alone accusative I exist, in the pit of my inexistence, of his, of ours, there’s a simple answer” (Texts for Nothing 114). One can see this existent/ in-existent stranger (“accusative I exist, in the pit of my *inexistence*”) as occupying the position of the Peirce’s *interpretant*, for as Paul de Man recognises, “The interpretation of a sign is not, for Peirce, a meaning but another sign; it is a reading, not a decodage, and this reading has, in its turn, to be interpreted into another sign, and so on *ad infinitum*” (9). The interpretant becomes aware of itself in relation to a sign, instantaneously *signifies* this relationship, recognises itself in relation to this signifier, instantaneously *signifies* this relationship and so on, this being the means through which “one sign gives birth

to another" (9) in an incessant process of meiosis: ". . . I seek, like a caged beast born of caged beasts born of caged beasts born of caged beasts born of caged beasts born in a cage and dead in a cage . . ." (Unnamable 390). As this process of seeking implies, the interpretant *itself* never enters into this chain except as a signifier, a signifier which, moreover, can bear no verifiable mimetic relationship to the actuality of the interpretant since this actuality remains continually mysterious: "All these Murphys, Molloys and Malones do not fool me. They never suffered my pains, their pains are nothing, compared to mine, a mere tittle of mine, the tittle I thought I could put from me, in order to witness it" (Unnamable 305). It is for this reason that one constantly senses that the fictional characters that inhabit Beckett's texts are, ultimately, sublimations of the mysterious, unnameable figure which is 'Samuel Beckett', the mimetic form of each character being inconsequential and arbitrary as a result of this enigmatic status. As Malone asserts: "The forms are many in which the unchanging seeks relief from its formlessness" (Malone 181).

The pseudo-deictic nature of the Beckettian text thus becomes clear, the whole Beckettian text being a constant *attempt* to make a deictic statement, to complete the text by validly, finally referring to the reality of discourse, thus affirming the existence of the evanescent 'self' which unspeakably articulates the text: "I'll never get anywhere, but when did I? When I laboured, all day long and let me add, before I forget, part of the night, when I thought that with perseverance I'd get at me in the end?" (Texts for Nothing 123). The narrator cannot validly refer to the very reality in which he is involved, the term 'reality' incorporating both the physical performance of textuality and the physicality of the body through which this performance takes place: like Molloy, the text can only hasten "incessantly on, as if in despair, towards extremely close objectives" (Molloy 113). This reality, therefore, becomes that which the text is incessantly attempting to apprehend as the subject constantly attempts to linguistically give birth to the inapprehensible 'self' that lies

behind, and ineffably *constitutes* discourse even as each attempt to do so translates this self into another supplement in the infinite chain of signification. Yet the tenor, the discourse, is always implicated *within* the inapprehensible vehicle, consciousness being *part* of the inapprehensible body: Molloy may assert, “[h]ow little one is at one with oneself, good God” (Molloy 104) and yet it is also the case that, “in that block the prey is lodged and thinks himself being apart” (Molloy 111).

It is clear that the inapprehensible nature of the purely physical figure under discussion, the deictic text’s inability to finally identify or linguistically affirm this figure, renders it an assumption, a *potential* reality. Yet it is equally clear that the *unnameable* status of this figure is not to be taken as an affirmation that there is no such figure. As Moran asserts in allegorising this hypothetical space where names are inapplicable:

. . . it was only by transferring it to this atmosphere . . . that I could venture to consider the work I had on hand. For where Molloy could not be, nor Moran either for that matter, there Moran could bend over Molloy. And though this examination prove unprofitable . . . I should nevertheless have established a kind of connection, and one not necessarily false. For the falsity of the terms does not necessarily imply the falsity of the relation, so far as I know. (Molloy 112)

The deictic articulation of any extra-discursive self, or the articulation of the reality of this potential self’s *attempt* to ‘actualise’ itself through textuality, may render this reality inapprehensible (Moran and Molloy being mere fictions), there now being no identifiable vehicle beyond the tenor, *yet this is not to say that there is no such vehicle*. As in the case of Nietzsche, that this vehicle has never been installed within the ‘rights of reality’ does not refute the possibility that it is real. This assumption, however, frequently infects formulations of deixis. John Lechte, for example, asserts that:

. . . Benveniste’s approach moves us towards the realization that the true subject does not precede language, thus reducing the latter to an apparatus of representation: rather, it is constituted by language. . . . the subject of the

énonciation [the *enunciator*]. . . does not refer to a 'concrete', 'singular' reality outside language. Furthermore, the subject of the *énonciation* does not have a name because the discursive instance is a 'pronominal instance', that is, a place in the discursive chain occupied by the locution. (71-72)

Lechte is correct in implying that any attempt to refer to the figure who deictically says 'I', or the actual act of saying 'I', will transform this referent into a supplement to the text, the locution (or the locutor) being nothing more than another element in the "discursive chain". Yet even as Lechte asserts that the subject of the *énonciation* does not refer to a "concrete" reality beyond language (this figure being constituted *by* language) he simultaneously asserts that this subject "does not have a name". If this "true subject . . . does not precede language", having no existence beyond discourse, then who or what is this *unnameable* figure? Can we accept that the "true subject" of language is that which is constituted by language if the unnameable figure of the *enunciator* remains in place, even if it is only as a possibility? Can the text be installed within the 'rights of reality' if this possibility persists as a limit to the text? Clearly, the question that deixis raises is one of whether the enunciator and its cognates (the physical act of utterance, 'concrete' reality, "the reality of discourse" etc.) are non-existent or simply unnameable and this is more than a question of the applicability of post-structuralist theory to Beckett, for the ambiguity which informs Lechte's statement informs post-structuralist thought itself. Barthes, for example, may recognise that the deictic text's inability to refer to a "reality of discourse" places the notion of an intentional author in crisis, consequently asserting that discourse "has no origin other than language itself" ("The Death of the Author" 146), yet he nevertheless retains the distinction between the actual "scriptor" who physically writes and the supplement to writing which is the Author, the linguistic subject which is *produced by* the text: ". . . the hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a gesture of pure inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin – or which, at least, has no origin other than language itself" ("The Death of the Author" 146). Barthes may

assert that the text has no origin, yet he acknowledges that this is a consequence of an inability to *identify* or *name* the origin which has been under discussion, not a consequence of the fact that such physicality does not exist: "Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" ("The Death of the Author" 142). Nevertheless, as Derrida recognises, even this physicality can be seen as nothing more than an effect of writing. As he asserts in relation to Rousseau:

. . . in what one calls the real life of these existences "of flesh and bone," beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations . . . (*Grammatology* 142)

As in the case of a deictic statement, this physical reality can only meaningfully exist as a signifier or a supplement to the text, the 'scriptor' taking on the same status as the illusory 'Author', having always *already* been usurped by language.

Given remarks such as this it is unsurprising that one frequently encounters the application of what could be called the *non-transcendental assumption* in readings of Beckett's work, the belief that an inability to deictically *refer* to "flesh and bone" reality justifies the assumption that there is no such reality. It is equally unsurprising that this assumption is especially prevalent in readings which are written from a Derridean perspective. Leslie Hill, for example, claims that in Beckett's trilogy, "the body cannot claim any existence prior to the motions of language" (119), the body not being the

. . . dwelling-place of being or presence, but the body as a form of writing and a text. . . . a rhythm, a texture, a fabric of traces and . . . a discharge of affects. This body, like the fictional text it becomes, is not unchanging or static, but exists as a continual process of assertion and negation, affirmation and difference. (120)

One could assert that Hill is no more speaking of the *body* here than the Beckettian narrator can speak of the ineffable 'self' which lies behind discourse. Even if one ignores the question of whether one can plausibly *speak* of the body without accepting that the body is, by definition, a material presence (and not *necessarily* an "unchanging or static" material presence), it is clear that the body's inability to validly "*claim* any existence prior to the motions of language" does not rule out the possibility that the body *does* unspeakably exist in this manner, merely suggesting that this pre-linguistic body cannot be linguistically affirmed: ". . . . you could lie there for weeks and no one hear you, I often thought of that up in the mountains, no, that is a foolish thing to say, just went on, my body doing its best without me" (Texts for Nothing 164). As this remark suggests, the extra-discursive, physical, existence of the body remains an inalienable possibility in Beckett's texts. Indeed, as Daniel Katz recognises, Hill admits as much in his mereological claim that this "body" cannot be "represented as a whole. It is more easily performed or produced, spoken aloud or acted. . . . to read Beckett's novels becomes an exercise in breathing and punctuation" (120). Yet as Katz asserts in agreeing with Hill's contention that the body has no pre-linguistic being:

However, I would differ from Hill's equation of the textual body with some sort of "non-semantic" movement . . . an "exercise in breathing and punctuation" arising from the text's oral performance. This reappropriation of the textual "body" as *orality* and voice, therefore physical presence, is exactly what Beckett's sense of body, writing, and text as exteriority renders problematic. (204)

Beckett may indeed render the notion of the body's reality or physical presence "problematic" but this is not to argue that the body does not physically exist or that the *possibility* of its pre-linguistic existence has been removed and is inadmissible. In reading Beckett's work we may not be *conscious* of our physical or non-semantic articulation of the text, (being meaningfully conscious of the *tenor* rather than the *vehicle*, the meaningful text which is *spoken* rather than the physicality of speech/the speaker itself) but this is not to

assert that there is no “oral performance” of the text, even if this performance is *via* ‘the inner voice’ of consciousness. Such a reading owes more to Derrida and his desire to contest the notion of presence than it owes to Beckett, yet as even Derrida admits: “To distance oneself from the habitual structure of reference, to challenge or complicate our common assumptions about it, does not amount to saying that there is *nothing* beyond language” (Kearney 124). Clearly, there is an apparent contradiction between Derrida’s rejection of readings that suggest “that there is nothing beyond language . . . and other stupidities of that sort” (Kearney 124) and his assertion that there has never been any “real life . . . existences “of flesh and bone . . . there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations . . .” (*Grammatology* 159). Equally clearly, Hill’s and Katz’s interpretations of Beckett can be seen as a consequence of this confusion, their readings being a consequence of a refusal to admit the possibility of any reality which is not subservient to the text. Such misreadings of Beckett indicate deficiency in the post-structuralist enterprise which Derrida’s refutation implicitly acknowledges, for as Seán Burke argues, as “unjust as this idealist representation is, it does not take place on the basis of nothing, for Derrida is at his most ambiguous here, and all the important questions are left in suspension” (*Death and Return of the Author* 127). Nevertheless, in spite of these objections, it is not the case that the anti-essentialist position of Hill and Katz is necessarily wrong, and neither is it the case that Derrida’s thesis is wholly repudiated by the Beckettian text. Beckett’s work *facilitates* such interpretations, allowing them as an inalienable possibility. Yet all possibilities necessarily permit their correlates, as will become apparent in a *double* reading of a pseudo-deictic text.

COMPANY: A CHOICE OF DARKNESSES

A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine. (Company 5)

Who speaks here? One could plausibly argue that it is this question which *defines* Beckett's work, most clearly in his post-war novels, novels which shift from a broadly representational mode of discourse to a form of narrative which compulsively interrogates its own linguistic processes and its own origins. Indeed, it is this form of self-interrogation that appears to sustain language itself, the narrative only existing as a quest for deictic self-resolution, thus implying that an inability to affirm the self is congenital to the textual process. Put simply, we must ask how we can write the self when the erasure of this self appears to be a condition *of* writing. In the case of Beckett's 1977 text Company the question takes on added significance by virtue of the fact that the novel gravitates "more openly towards the genre of autobiography than anything before it" (Pilling Samuel Beckett 127), a view which is echoed by James Knowlson: "Company comes closer to autobiography than anything Beckett had written since Dream of Fair to Middling Women in 1931-2" (651). In spite of Knowlson's comparisons, it is difficult to escape a perception that Company is the only text to have been written with a specifically autobiographical intent: it consists of an overarching narrative in which a typically anonymous narrator lies alone in a darkened room overhearing a voice which he maintains is not his, even as this narrative is interspersed with impersonal reminiscences of episodes from Beckett's own life, all of which are autobiographically verifiable. Unlike other, early, novels which are known to be derived from Beckett's personal experience (More Kicks than Pricks and Dream of Fair to Middling Women) the autobiographical episodes in Company are *specifically* presented as memories

rather than merely utilising 'life' as the material for novelistic discourse. This is not, of course, to maintain that these two factors can be wholly extricated from one another; as the problem outlined suggests, any attempt to write the self is subject to the *aporia* of self-writing, that which inevitably blurs the line between autobiography and fiction, reality and invention. It is for this reason that autobiographical 'insets' within Company cannot be accepted as autobiography in the sense that they simply recount the facts of its author's life.

As James Knowlson remarks in recalling his discussions with Beckett on the subject of Company:

. . . it was clear throughout our discussion, not only that real-life incidents had been shaped and transformed to fit the fiction but that the skepticism that, as a young man, he had brought to his criticism of the role of memory in Proust (involuntary as well a voluntary) had been reinforced by the distance that separated him from his own past. Memory emerges here very much like invention. (652)

In order to appreciate the significance of the autobiographical nature of the novel, one must appreciate the significance of the narrative in which these autobiographical passages are 'inset'. As will become apparent, this narrative represents the two aspects of potentiality, the undecidable difference between a usurpation which is potential in that it *may* have already occurred, the usurpatory text having already been installed within the 'rights of reality', and a usurpation which is potential in that it *has yet* to verifiably occur, there being no ratification of the text's 'rights to reality' in the absence of this verification. This status, moreover, is performatively exteriorised in the reading process itself.

The *aporia* which defines Samuel Beckett's approach to the self in Company is set out at the very inception of the novel and, as so often in the work of Beckett, it is the tensions which inhabit the opening words which set in motion the novel's linguistic trajectory: "A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine" (5). The tension here is between the notion of "one in the dark" and the apparent externality of the voice, that which would seem to preclude any

possibility of there being such a unitary, self-identical subject. If the narrator is being spoken *to* there cannot be *one* in the dark, and this applies even if this “one” is speaking to itself. This unitary figure, therefore, is immediately reduced to a figment by the institution of a voice that is also the institution of the eponymous ‘company’. The fictional or imaginary status of the origin is, therefore, a requirement of the utterance itself, of the pronominal act: the positing of the ‘I’ by the pre-semantic origin institutes the ‘I/ you’ polarity whereby the posited ‘I’ implicitly says ‘you’ to the origin, which thus enters meaningful being by defining itself *against* this ‘I’. Yet as post-structuralist theorists recognise, the origin cannot enter into this awareness, being identifiable with neither the posited signifier ‘I’ nor the signifier ‘you’. The narrator is an effect of language rather than the origin, language being that which *produces* the self as an imaginary construct rather than being that which is *produced* by a pre-existing self. The text is, therefore, the origin of an imaginary ‘origin’ for as the narrator admits, he is the “[d]evised deviser devising it all for company” (37), only existing through the voice which necessarily precedes this existence. In this light one can read the opening sentence as implying that the voice that we experience in reading the text is the same voice that this “one” hears. In *both* cases it is the voice that brings this imaginary “one” into being, an effect which is emphasised by the exhortatory nature of the word “Imagine” this word being interchangeably directed at the reader *or* the mythical “one” who overhears this voice. Evidently, the supplementary writing through which we experience this purely imaginary ‘origin’ already inhabits the voice itself since this voice can no more claim to be identifiable with this present origin than we, the readers, can experience this pre-textual origin.

From this perspective, it is evident that writing reveals that the entry into signification paradoxically constitutes the point at which this entry is retrospectively erased. The exhortation “Imagine”, for example, occurs *after* the opening words, the reader having *already* ‘imagined’ the “voice” that comes to “one in the dark” by the time the exhortation is

made, this originary imperative having been already usurped by language: we *imagine* the 'one' and subsequently become aware of this act, the act being a supplement to a signifier which is necessarily already in place. There is, therefore, no point of origin: ". . . he must acknowledge the truth of what is said. But by far the greater part of what is said cannot be verified. As for example when he hears, You first saw the light on such and such a day" (5). The voice *coming* "to one in the dark" is imaginary because any entry into language is like entering a room only to turn and find that the door does not and has not existed; once language has been instituted, the signifier has always *been* in place. Ironically, it is this usurpation of the origin that obliges us to "Imagine" the source and the inception of the voice *again*, the original act, like the origin itself, having been absolutely obliterated from what is now the inescapable infinitude of language. Language becomes an inescapable process of attempting to apprehend that which is erased in the act of being named even as one can only do so (or *cannot* do so) *via* the name: "Is there anything to add to this esquisse? His unnamability. Even M must go. So W reminds himself of his creature as so far created. W? But W too is a creature. Figment" (37).

It is this process of negation and creation which constitutes the process of signification, a process which, therefore, ironically advances through this desire to regress, through its desire to capture the unitary, yet non-existent, origin/ *telos*: "Nowhere to be found. Nowhere to be sought. The unthinkable last of all. Unnamable. Last person. I. Quick leave him" (19). The origin is that which has differed from itself and is therefore the incessantly deferred "unthinkable last of all", the "Last person. I". This "Unnamable" origin is always "Nowhere to be found" by virtue of the fact that it is erased from denotation at the moment of denotation: "I. Quick leave him". On the surface these words seem to reflect the loss of the origin through the institution of the voice, the erasure of the unitary origin which is 'I': yet again, however, the attempt to speak of this institution is undercut by the linguistic

necessity that the originary 'I' is already a signifier, a signifier which, in its very presence, represents an acknowledgment that the "Unnamable" origin has always *already* been brought into meaningful being and has always already been erased. There is no institution, and no origin, by virtue of the fact that this institution has always already occurred no matter how far one traces this process. This is precisely the reason why the voice cannot be identified as a predicate of this narratorial origin.

In this light, the very *presence* of the signifier always represents an acknowledgement that the origin has disappeared, for "the pre-expressive object is impossible to the extent that it does not precede but rather is produced by signification" (Trezise 21). This indicates why Beckett refers to the process outlined as that of *imagination*, a factor which Beckett comes to identify with consciousness itself thus drawing a parallel between our imagining of the origin and his own: ". . . many crawls were necessary and the like number of prostrations before he could make up his imagination on this score" (43). Unlike the verb 'signify', the verb 'imagine' overtly implies the *aporia* of the "one in the dark", the fact that the actuality of this "one" is utterly erased by speech, thus being 'imagined' rather *than* signified. The origin cannot 'exist' unless it speaks, and it does not exist even when it has spoken: it is this which constitutes the difference between the two darknesses which recur in the novel, the "darkness visible" (15) or the "dark of light" (49) which is the instituted voice and, by implication, 'darkness invisible', 'the dark of darkness' which is this impossible origin. The verb "Imagine" denotes both a process of creation, of bringing something into existence *as* an image even as it simultaneously admits the non-existential status of that which is denoted in this act of creation, an admittance that the origin can *only* exist as a image: it thus encapsulates the manner in which the linguistic creation of the origin is a simultaneous admission that the origin no longer exists and has never existed, a *pure* fiction. In imagining the origin, therefore, we both create it and admit its absence, it being the act of speech, of

self-representation, which renders this admission necessary. The imaginary, like the Derridean *archē*-trace, is no more than an overt reflection of the manner in which the initiation of signification and self-awareness must always admit its own undoing, the disappearance of the origin even necessitating the disappearance *of* this disappearance, leaving in place an infinite text.

What is most significant in this respect is that Beckett's whole *novel* admits its imaginary status, and it does so *via* the purely imaginary figure of the narrator. We cannot help but sense that this is an audacious novel, for the text enacts itself as being spoken from the perspective of the excluded origin, the one who is *absolutely* erased from the voice at the moment of utterance. This origin cannot be signified in any sense, merely imagined: "Use of the second person marks the voice. That of the third that cankerous other. Could he speak to and of whom the voice speaks there would be a first. But he cannot. He shall not. You cannot. You shall not." (6). The irony here, of course, is that the *voice* of which the narrator speaks, that which he overhears and is absolutely other to him, is *this* voice, as is suggested by the fact that this voice is 'marked' by both of the pronouns which characterise the very voice that he hears. This voice cannot belong to the figure who purports to speak, a figure who cannot be spoken 'to' or 'of' within these lines. The narrator, if one can continue to speak of this figure, is a wholly *unspeakable* speaker whose existence cannot be indicated within the space of the text. The text, therefore, may present itself as enacting the viewpoint of the originary figure who is wholly expelled from meaning in the act of utterance, and yet the novel seems to hermetically seal itself against this narrator's his very possibility, even as we become 'aware' of him through the novel. Indeed, it is this coming to 'awareness' which simultaneously constitutes his negation.

One can, therefore, validly interpret Company in post-structuralist terms as evidence of the purely imaginary nature of the origin and the absolutely free play of textuality within a

usurping text. Carla Locatelli, for example, asserts that “Company produces a movement of signs rather than . . . a naming that would . . . articulate an ideal unified “I” (163) and, referring to the final lines of the novel, she does “not see Husserl’s “ego” or any transcendental connotation in the final word describing a subject “Alone”. However, a performance of the reduction on the “I” occurs throughout the entire work, and functions as a critique of the linguistic nature of the “I” (165). Locatelli is correct in maintaining that the word “Alone”, like the pronouns “he” and “you”, fails to constitute “a naming that would . . . articulate an ideal, unified “I”” since it is necessarily undercut by the second person:

And you as you always were.

Alone. (52)

Nevertheless, Locatelli is incorrect in maintaining that the inability to linguistically articulate the ‘I’ constitutes the “performance of the reduction on the “I””. The claim of the *signifier* “I” to be able to articulate the unified origin is certainly reduced for as we have seen it renders the origin imaginary in the very act of ‘signifying’ it. It can no more lay claim to this ability, therefore, than the equally impotent words “he”, “you” or “Alone”. Yet in her assertion that the ‘I’ is reduced, Locatelli conflates the signifier and that to which this signifier *attempts* to refer, implying that there is no “Husserlian ego”, no origin, by virtue of the *signifier*’s inability to enact it: to recall Beckett’s own words, the “form” may not be able to *accommodate* the “mess” but the “mess” is still “there and it must be allowed in” (Driver 219).

It is Beckett’s assertion which points to the simultaneity which inhabits Company, for (as so often in Beckett) the narrator’s words can read *double*, there being a choice of darkneses: “The test is company. Which of the two darks is better company” (21). The reading that we have performed is one possibility, a *viable* possibility; yet like all

possibilities it is necessarily inhabited by its correlate. Within this possibility the origin is erased from language to the extent that one cannot even assert that it *has* existed, yet, like Nietzsche, Beckett was aware that one's ability to *begin* with the origin and logically demonstrate the means through which this *linguistic* non-existence can arise implies the origin's ontological possibility to precisely the same extent as it implies its linguistic impossibility. Within the novel this possibility constantly restates itself in the mere apperency that is the speaker, a figure who, as we have seen, is a purely imaginary figure, he who is utterly erased from the text that he purportedly institutes. The narrative, however, *does* present itself from the perspective of this erased figure, the origin who *overhears* the voice, a presentation whereby the non-existent paradoxically purports to communicate directly to us without the mediation of speech or writing. Such a pretence, of course, is undercut by language itself, that which constitutes our very awareness of this figure: the narrator has no existence to us apart from the mediation of writing, just as the narrator has no existence to himself apart from the voice. Yet the important point is that this narrator has no existence even *with* this mediation, being a purely imaginary figure to both the reader and himself. There can be no knowledge of the actual origin at all and this is to say that one *cannot* use our apparent, linguistic, knowledge of this origin as a justification for saying that this origin has been usurped by signification or 'imagination'. How can we know that this origin has been usurped by representation if this origin has never been verifiably *represented*? In the absence of any origin to which the "voice" is a predicate, how can we verify that this "voice" has ever been *spoken* or, therefore, that the usurpation has occurred? In the absence of any origin one can no more verify the *reality* of discourse than one can verify the reality of the origin itself, which is precisely why the Beckettian text purports to be paradoxically speaking from a position beyond meaning: to do so does not merely highlight the imaginary nature of the origin, the fact that this unmediated origin is a pretence, for it

also alerts us to the uncomfortable possibility that this mediation itself, the usurping *voice*, is imaginary. "A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine" (5). Does the exhortation "Imagine" refer to the "one in the dark" or to the "voice" which would rupture the self-identity of this "one"? Similarly, in the final lines of the novel (" . . . And you as you always were./ Alone") the existence of the second person may undercut the word "Alone", yet it is equally true that the second person, the voice which speaks to this supposedly solitary figure, is undercut by the inescapable possibility that the narrator is "Alone". That this *is* a viable possibility is the conclusion that one must reach (and that the novel evidently, if equivocally, *does* reach) unless one can existentially validate the linguistic performance that purports to undercut this origin. One must affirm the voice, *proving* that this "one" has spoken and has been usurped by this voice, that which is no more provable than the origin. This origin has *potentially* spoken and our inability to verify this fact leaves open the *potentiality* that it has not. Locatelli, for example, is correct to deduce the purely linguistic nature of any pretence to a transcendental 'I' from this voice, arguing that its performative articulations of the voice highlight the imaginary nature of the origin; as has been suggested, the narrator acknowledges his own imaginary status as the "[d]eviser of the voice and of its hearer and of himself" (20). Yet if the narrator is imaginary by virtue of the fact that *he* is devised, then equally, the voice through which this imaginary status is revealed is *no less* devised, and one should be wary of interpreting the ambiguous word "devised" as being indicative of the fictional (i.e. nonexistential) status of the origin and the created (i.e. existential) status in its application to the voice, for this is a distinction that the text does not sustain. This undoing of the voice's pretence to verifiably *exist* is also revealed when the narrator asserts: "Could he speak to and of whom the voice speaks there would be a first" (6). The quotation performatively reveals that the "first" has never entered into linguistic being by undercutting the referential capabilities of the signifier "he", suggesting that "he" cannot be spoken "to or

of” even as it is this “he” who supposedly speaks, and is supposedly speaking. This “he” has never *verifiably* spoken by virtue of the fact that his “first”, the speaker, has never verifiably existed. That one cannot verify this initial act of speech, an act that *requires* an originary speaker, undoes the voice’s claim to exist in spite of its apparency. It is, after all, not merely the origin that cannot be deictically referred to, thus being brought into being, but the voice itself, that which remains *imaginary*. It is this imaginary status of the voice that constantly exteriorises the possibility that the origin has not spoken and has not, therefore, been usurped *by* the voice. As well as raising the possibility of the voice’s inability to speak “to or of” this “first” person, therefore, the sentence simultaneously raises the possibility that the “first” word has never been uttered: “Could he speak to and of whom the *voice* speaks . . .”. That “he” cannot speak “to or of” this first, even as the voice is *apparently* doing so, implies that this speech is not occurring; “the voice”, *this* voice, can no more enter meaningful or verifiable being than the originary ‘I’ from which it is, in this light, indistinguishable. It is the imaginary product of an imaginary narrator who devises “figments to temper his nothingness”: “Another devising it all for company. In the same dark as his creature or in another. Quick imagine. The same” (27). The origin’s inability to ever validly “think to himself referring to himself” (37) is just as applicable to the voice through which he *attempts* to refer to himself, a voice, therefore, which always collapses back into the silence, always beginning:

. . . from nought anew. Huddled thus you find yourself imagining you are not alone while knowing full well that nothing has occurred to make this possible. The process continues none the less lapped as it were in meaninglessness. You do not murmur in so many words, I know this is doomed to fail and yet persist. No. For the first personal and a fortiori pronoun had never any place in your vocabulary. But without a word you view yourself to this effect . . . (50)

The imaginary voice, therefore, is indistinguishable from this origin to the extent that neither can be existentially validated. If the origin is rendered *absolutely* other to the voice in

the act of inception, as suggested by the narrator's inability to identify the voice as a predicate of himself, then this voice remains a "cankorous other", an oxymoronic phrase which could *either* be said to express the manner in which the 'I' is linguistic outgrowth of the instituted voice, an imaginary construct, *or* the manner in which the voice itself is an imaginary outgrowth of the origin, the initial divorce between the inescapable origin and the voice having never occurred. The narrator, therefore, remains a nonentity who has never come into being by virtue of the fact that the voice has never left him, which is synonymous with an assertion that the voice has never left *itself* in order that it can bring itself into being. The text supports both readings, this being, for Beckett, the *irresolvable* status of language.

What this simultaneity points to is the paradox which inhabits self-identity, the possibility that the self-identical 'I' insistently remains other to itself because it never transcends itself in order that it can be meaningfully apprehended and brought into subjective being. The 'I', or, synonymously, the voice which is, from this perspective, indissociable from the origin, are paradoxically other to themselves because of their inability to *become* other to themselves and deictically affirm their own existence. In these terms, both are unspeakable and, therefore, non-existent within the space of their own constant self-coincidence. When the narrator asserts "I. Quick leave him", for example, he is not only suggesting that the signifier 'I' is always already in place and that "Quick leave him" is a retrospective summation of the instantaneous act of erasure, an explication of the 'I's' performative erasure of the origin. This is *also* an exhortation to transcend the 'I' in order that this 'I' can be apprehended and brought into meaningful being: "Quick leave him. Pause and again in panic to himself, Quick leave him" (37). The duality in progress is not only captured by the ambiguity of the third person (is this the origin speaking of the voice or the voice speaking of the origin?) but also by the indeterminate nature of this "panic" – does he panic in his *desire* to return to himself (the origin) after the erasing performance of language

or does he panic *because* he is returning to himself, to the 'I' which he never transcends that he can meaningfully apprehend himself? Whereas in the former the origin does not exist because this origin has *spoken*, in the latter the origin does not exist because it has *never* spoken, having *always* unspeakably coincided with his own physical immanence. From the latter perspective, the narrator is in a "flesh-locked sea of silence" ("Assumption" 5), "a prisoner, frantic with corporeality, rearing to get out and away" (*Texts for Nothing* 123), for if one considers 'mental activity' to be an ultimately *physical* activity (i.e. consciousness as an element *within* the inescapable immanence of the body), then from this inapprehensible objective perspective it could be asserted that the subject is on his "back in the dark and ha[s] no mental activity of any kind", this being a suspicion that the subject cannot escape: "Might not the hearer be improved? Made more companionable if not downright human. Mentally perhaps there is room for enlivenment. An attempt at reflection at least. At recall. At speech even . . . But physically? Must he lie inert to the end?" (22). Clearly, in recognising that the mental may not escape the orbit of the physical there is a movement from the possibility that the text has no beginning (that the origin is absent) to the possibility that the text has never truly begun (that the origin is immanent), the first possibility inevitably giving way to the second. Within the second possibility the point of differentiation between the origin and its representation, the point at which the origin is usurped, has never occurred, *not* in Derrida's sense that there has never been an origin for the infinite text *to* usurp, this point of usurpation being a myth, but in the sense that such a usurpation has always *yet* to occur. In Beckett's short story "The Calmative" (1946), the narrator, in spite of the fact that "what I tell this evening is passing this evening" is obliged to recognise that "[a]ll I say cancels out, I'll have said nothing". Consequently he is telling his story from a future perspective, from the hypothetical point at which the usurping differentiation between the origin and its

representations *has* occurred, this being a usurpation that has currently *yet* to occur just as it has yet to *verifiably* occur in Company. One should also note the Nietzschean influence here:

I'll tell my story in the past nonetheless, as though it were a myth, or an old fable, for this evening I need another age, that age to become another age in which I became what I was. . . . it's to me this evening something has to happen, to my body as in myth and metamorphosis, this old body to which nothing has ever happened, or so little, which never met with anything, loved anything, wished for anything, in its tarnished universe, except for the mirrors to shatter, the plane, the curved, the magnifying, the minifying, and to vanish in the havoc of its images. (62-63)

An awareness of the dual perspective that inhabits the Beckettian text also suggests the dual significance that writing has for Beckett. Firstly, it exteriorises the Derridean possibility, the fact that the origin is utterly erased from language by its representational supplement. Secondly, it exteriorises the corollary possibility of an origin that is unable to existentially verify the voice or the fact that this voice has usurped the origin, thus allowing this possibility to constantly reassert itself. In the former case writing is applied to consciousness, its significance lying in its exteriorisation of the absence of the origin within linguistic consciousness: in the latter, consciousness *subsumes* writing, its significance lying in its ability to performatively exteriorise consciousness' inability to *verify* that the origin has been usurped, even when this origin *has* clearly been usurped from a readerly point of view. In other words, writing constitutes a means of revealing that the usurpation of the origin can only *ever* be a hypothesis within consciousness. It is Company's inability to *account* for this usurpation which allows the "voice" within the novel to coincide with the reader's voice.

This coincidence, however, incorporates both possibilities under discussion. Beckett draws a direct parallel between the putative 'voice' which comes to (erases/ creates) the "one in the dark" and the inauguration of the reader's voice by implying that both are conditions of this 'one's' imaginary being. To designate this a parallel, however, is not quite correct, for there is no distinction between the voice of the narrator and that of the reader. If the "one in

the dark” who purports to speak is utterly erased by the voice to the extent that it has never even existed, as suggested by his inherently imaginary status, then the assumption that the voice to which the text refers is a *predicate* of this figure, a predicate of someone *other* than the reader, cannot be sustained. That the “one in the dark” becomes *purely* imaginary at the moment it begins to speak its own existence is precisely the means through which the narratorial voice is deprived of any grounding in an extra-textual reality and allowed to absolutely coincide with the reader’s voice. The text becomes unanchored from its grounding in the reality of the “one on his back in the dark” and directly coincides with the reader’s consciousness. This sense of immediacy pervades Beckettian textuality, language no longer mediating a preceding reality but, rather, seeming to constitute this ‘reality’ in the here and now. In reading Beckett we constantly sense that the text (or indistinguishably the subject) has not *been* written but is *being* written as we enter into a process of self-writing which transcends mimetic autobiography and the individual text in order to performatively enact its own constitution. It is for this reason that H. Porter Abbott has designated Beckett’s work a species of *autography* rather than autobiography, autography being “the larger field comprehending all self-writing” rather than merely “that most common narrative, the story of one’s life” (Beckett Writing Beckett 2). For Porter Abbott the species of autography into which Beckett falls (along with Wordsworth and Augustine) is that which declares itself as “something happening in the textual present, a prayer in action” (6), being “an autographical attempt to pull time up into itself” (14):

Beckett’s subset is writing governed not by narrative form or any species of tropological wholeness but by that unformed intensity of being in the present which at every point in the text seeks to approach itself. Writing under such governance, Beckett must. . . “undo” autobiography. Yet this undoing is not to the end of fictional creation but to the end of being Beckett, Beckett as it were *avant la letter*, Beckett before he is Beckett. (18)

Of course, a “prayer in action” necessarily occurs *now*, and the ‘being in the present’ to which Porter Abbott refers is the present point of reading, for it is only this point which *gives* being to the text (and one should note that this reader can be the general reader or Beckett himself). Similarly, when Porter Abbott describes this autography as “something happening in the textual present” then the phrase “textual present” does not refer to the present as it is represented *by* the text but to the *actual* present of the reading situation, the point at which this “something’ – the performance of the text - is “happening”. This present, apparently, cannot occur elsewhere for there is “[n]o that then to compare to this now” (Company 36): “There being nothing to show when it describes correctly his situation that the description is not for the benefit of another in the same situation” (36). As David Watson has asserted, Beckett’s later works are “probably most fruitfully read as allegories of their own verbal processes” (188). Nevertheless, what this ‘present’ voice constantly exteriorises is its inability to confirm its own usurpatory status, its own existence. The usurpation of this origin is undone, it not being the case that the past is pulled into the present of the reading situation but that the reader is *pulled into* the silent position of this origin, as this origin *continues* to re-assert itself as a *possibility* even in its factual absence in the reading situation. In this light, it is apparent that the significance of writing lies not only in its ability to exteriorise the absence of the origin within (or, for Derrida, which is) consciousness but also in its ability to exteriorise that there can be no factual absence of the origin within consciousness, this being a mere possibility which is always countered by the possibility *of* the origin. Analogously, therefore, the immediacy of the text is not *merely* a product of the lack of any origin but a product of an inability, within the text, to verify any usurpation of this origin, the text being, like consciousness itself, pulled in *both* directions.

THE POTENTIAL TEXT

. . . I'm a big talking ball, talking about things that do not exist, or that exist perhaps, impossible to know . . . (Unnamable 307)

“The key word in my plays is ‘perhaps’” says Beckett in conversation with Tom Driver (Driver 220), the corollary of which is, of course, ‘perhaps not’, for as Aristotle (“who knew everything” (Texts for Nothing 13)) asserts defining the potential: “to every potency there is a contrary potency in the same subject and with respect to the same thing (*tou autou kai kata to auto pasa dunamis adunamiai*)” (Agamben 183)⁸. That which is potential is defined as such by its opposing corollary, by the *other* potentiality which always inhabits it: “. . . anything which is capable of existing may not be in actuality. Thus, that which is capable of existing may or may not exist, and so the same thing is capable of existing and of not existing” (Agamben 16)⁹. It is this radical indeterminacy which fuels the movement of Beckettian textuality and which reveals its status as a mode of potentiality: the Beckettian narrator’s inability to affirm his own existence can never rule out the possibility of this existence, merely the possibility of referring to it, and it is this *potential* existence which is the source of his own *potentiality*, his *dunamis*. As Aristotle’s words suggest, it is in retaining the possibility of existence (or alternatively, in being unable to *refute* this possibility) that the narrator simultaneously opens himself to its corollary, to the possibility of *non-existence*, this being the well from which the Beckettian text frequently draws itself, “[f]or the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something” (Watt 74):

who may tell the tale
of the old man?
weigh absence in a scale?
mete want with a span?
The sum assess
of the world’s woes?

Nothingness
In words enclose? (Watt 247)

As Giorgio Agamben, in speaking of Aristotle, puts it,

. . . human beings, insofar as they know and produce, are those beings who, more than any other, exist in the mode of potentiality. Every human power is *adynamia*, impotentiality; every human potentiality is in relation to its own privation. This is the origin (and the abyss) of human power, which is so violent and limitless. . . . *human beings are the animals who are capable of their own impotentiality. The greatness of human potentiality is measured by the abyss of human impotentiality.* (182)

Yet if human beings exist in “a mode of potentiality”, sustaining themselves in relation to their “own privation”, then that of which the Beckettian narrator is deprived, that which is merely possible (i.e. his non-existence), remains defined as such by its corollary possibility, his potential (i.e. unverifiable) existence, that of which he is *equally* deprived. One could, therefore, equally define the mode of potentiality of which Agamben speaks *as* a mode of privation that is sustained in relation to this potential existence, and it is striking that the Beckettian narrator is *no less* deprived of existence than non-existence, which is why he often purports *not* to be speaking:

. . . there I am the absentee again, it's his turn again now, he who neither speaks nor listens, who has neither body nor soul . . . in the end I'll recognise it, the story of the silence that he never left . . . then it will be he, it will be I, it will be the place, the silence, the end, the beginning, the beginning again . . . (Unnamable 417)

Clearly, this figure not only seeks an exit from being but an exit from non-being, a breach of the silence as well as the silence, a beginning to speech as well as its cessation: he seeks *existence*. The inability of which Agamben speaks in asserting that “[e]very human power is *adynamia*, impotentiality” may equate, therefore, to the Beckettian narrator’s inability to “speak and yet say nothing, really nothing?” (Unnamable 305), nothingness being the privation in relation to which the text sustains itself, yet this is not *simply* an inability to

linguistically apprehend non-existence. One should not overlook that the quotation indicates an inability to “speak” as well as an inability to “say nothing, really nothing” suggesting that if human beings “*exist* in a mode of potentiality” (emphasis mine), then this mode of potentiality can, *itself*, be seen a privation of existence. In other words, the impotentiality which sustains the Beckettian text is an inability to say *something* as well as an inability to “say nothing”, the word ‘nothing’ frequently being utilised as a kind of ironic cipher for this ineffable ‘thing’: “Nothing ever troubles me . . . About myself I need know nothing” (Unnamable 295-96). Such is the *aporia* of being “unable to act, obliged to act” (“Three Dialogues” 145) which gives rise to “the madness of having to speak and not being able to” (Unnamable 326-27).

Clearly, such an *aporia* does not invalidate Agamben’s assertion that every human potentiality exists in relation to its own privation; it merely indicates that this is an undeniable *possibility* which, as such, is necessarily inhabited by another undeniable possibility. Human potentiality exists in relation to the potential existence of which it is *deprived* as well as in relation to a potential *privation of existence*. There are obviously two contradictory perspectives here and it is within this frame of contradiction that the Beckettian narrator ‘exists’, oscillating between both possibilities yet remaining unable resolve them through a meta-assertion:

. . . how proceed? By *aporia* pure and simple? Or by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later? Generally speaking. There must be other shifts. Otherwise it would be quite hopeless. But it is quite hopeless. (Unnamable 294)

The mode of potentiality which constitutes the Beckettian text, therefore, is not merely a mode of existence which is sustained in relation to the possibility of its privation: it is, simultaneously, a mode of privation which exists in relation to the possibility of existence. The Unnamable may exist in relation to his own privation since the “search for the means to

put an end to things, an end to speech, is what enables the discourse to continue” (Unnamable 302), yet it is clear that this discourse simultaneously exists as the search for a *beginning*: “Nothing then but me, of which I know nothing, except that I have never uttered” (Unnamable 306).

Clearly, the reason why the voice does not *yet* exist, and the narrator has always *yet* to speak is because he is unable to deictically affirm the existence of the voice in spite of its apparent immediacy:

. . . every time I say, I said this, or speak of a voice saying . . . Molloy, and then a fine phrase . . . I am merely complying with the convention that demands that you either lie or hold your peace. . . . In reality I said nothing at all, but I heard a murmur, something gone wrong with the silence . . . (Molloy 87–88)

As the Unnamable ironically asserts in relation to this voice: “Nothing has ever changed since I have been here” (Unnamable 296). Evidently, the voice, regardless of its immediacy, is no more verifiable than reality itself: this voice cannot deictically speak *itself* into existence for as Wittgenstein points out “we cannot express through language what expresses *itself* in language” (Tractatus 4.121)¹⁰: “. . . with what words shall I name my unnameable words?” (Texts for Nothing 125). Similarly, if the narrator of Company desires “by some successful act of intellection . . . to think of himself referring to himself” (37) then, as Agamben points out, “*a term cannot refer to something and, at the same time, refer to the fact that it refers to it*” (213). The ‘nothing’ that the Beckettian narrator seeks to speak, therefore, is not merely non-existence, but specifically the ‘nothing’ which *is* his speech, *his own* non-existence: “I have nothing to do, that is to say nothing in particular” (Unnamable 316). If “[*n*]othing is more real than nothing”¹¹ (Malone 193) then in seeking to “say nothing, really nothing” the narrator does not merely seek to silence the voice but to deictically refer to this silence. Like Nietzsche, the narrator seeks to finally *speak* the silence

that constitutes *him*, to finally, linguistically translate the ‘nothing’ that he *is* into *something*: “... it’s the same old road I’m trudging, up . . . towards one yet to be named . . .” (Texts for Nothing 144).

From this perspective, language is not merely a mode of potentiality which exists in relation to a privation, for it is *itself* this privation even as it is experienced, its existence being unverifiable. Evidently, one cannot affirm the existence of any mind independent reality (including the reality of the mind itself) by virtue of the fact that any such ‘reality’ must occur within the apparently infinite space of representation. In Beckett’s texts, an awareness of the reality of language itself necessitates a linguistic articulation of this reality, an articulation whose reality, in turn, must be linguistically articulated, *ad infinitum*. The reality of language is never affirmed in spite of the apparency of our experience of it. As such, language is *itself* merely potential, its existence remaining an irresolvable yet irrefutable *possibility*. This possible existence and the prospective possibility of its verification, of validly ‘naming the name’ and finally bringing this ‘nothing’ (this privation which *is* experienced) *into* linguistic existence, is always present to the narrator as the unnameable which is language itself:

. . . may not this screen which my eyes probe in vain, and see as denser air, in reality be the enclosure wall, as compact as lead? To elucidate this point I would need a stick or a pole. . . . I could also do, incidentally, with future and conditional participles. Then I should dart it, like a javelin, straight before me and know, by the sound made, whether that which hems me round, and blots out my world, is the old void or a plenum. (Unnamable 302)

In this context, one’s experience of language can be regarded the actuality of that which is possible but has *yet* to be actualised, or in the Aristotelian/ Joycean schema “an actuality of the possible as possible” (Ulysses 26)¹². This is one’s actual experience of a privation, of that which is continually deprived of any verifiable reality, language being, in St. Augustine’s words, “a being which is non-being”¹³ constituting “the long silent guffaw of the knowing

non-exister” (Texts for Nothing 150). As Agamben points out in relation to Aristotle’s assertion that “the mind [*nous*] is like a writing tablet on which nothing is actually written”¹⁴:

Nous is thus a potentiality that exists as such, and the metaphor of the writing tablet . . . expresses the way in which pure potentiality exists . . . the pure potentiality of thought is a potentiality that is capable of not thinking, that is capable of not passing into actuality. But this pure potentiality (the *rasum tabulae*) is itself intelligible; it can itself be thought. (215)

Such a discourse has *yet* to affirm its own existence, being deprived of this existence and continually ‘existing’ *as* this deprivation: “. . . all you have to do is say you said nothing and so say nothing again” (Texts for Nothing 124). Recalling Aristotle’s definition of the mind, this deprivation also informs the Beckettian narrator’s inability to write: “How, in such conditions, can I write, to consider only the manual aspect of that bitter folly? I don’t know. I could know. Not this time. It is I who write, who cannot raise my hand from my knee” (Unnamable 303). Yet in applying the Aristotelian definition to this quotation from Beckett, we must ask whether such a discourse sustains itself *via* the potential *to be* written (the possibility which *can* be actualised at some future point) or *via* the potential of affirming that it has *already* been written (the possibility of affirming the actuality which is *already* in place). Is the *tabula rasa* in question yet to be written *on* or is it yet to be *seen* to be written on, in the same manner that we must ignore the evidence in front of our eyes if we are to accept that the Beckettian narrator has *not* written, or in the same manner that the narrator himself must ignore the apparency of language if he is to accept that he is *not* speaking?

It is this ambiguity that lies at the heart of the debate over the Beckettian text’s relation to ‘reality’, this being the ambiguity of the word ‘potential’ itself. To simply assert that something is ‘potential’ (e.g. “I potentially exist”) is to fail to indicate whether one is referring to that which may *already* exist yet cannot be affirmed (e.g. “It is possible that I *do* exist”), or whether one is referring to that which does not *currently* exist but could come into

being (“It is possible that I *will* exist”). This ambiguity is inherent in our definition of the Beckettian text as a mode of potentiality, most specifically in our use of the word ‘possible’: if the language that the narrator experiences is “the actuality of that which is *possible* but has yet to be actualised” (“the actuality of the *possible* as possible”) then we must ask whether the central word ‘possible’ points to the present or to the future, whether the definition means that language *already* exists yet cannot be affirmed (i.e. that it is actual but has yet to become actual *to us*, the name having yet to be *named*) or whether language does not currently exist yet cannot be denied (i.e. that it is not yet actual but is already actual *to us*¹⁵): “I could also do, incidentally, with future and conditional participles” (Unnamable 302). In short, the ambiguity raises the question of whether reality has yet to be *affirmed* or whether it has yet to *be* at all, a dual possibility which the Beckettian narrator cannot resolve, as evidenced by his ability to (potentially) exist both *after* and *before* the beginning; he is apparently *already* speaking (i.e. it is possible that he *is* speaking) even as he has apparently *yet* to speak, (i.e. it is possible that he *will* speak):

Ah to know for sure, to know that this thing has no end . . . this farrago of silence and words, of silence that is not silence and barely murmured words. . . . to know its life still, a form of life. . . . Words, mine was never more than that, than this pell-mell babel of silence and words, my viewless form described as ended, or to come, or still in progress, depending on the words, the moments, Long may it last in that singular way. Apparitions . . . ghouls . . . do I as much as know what they are, of course I don’t . . . (Texts for Nothing 125)

It is his inability to “know what” these apparitions “are”, to affirm the existence of the language that he experiences (thus affirming that he is *already* speaking) which allows the voice to constantly give way to the silence in the wave-like movement of language. In being unable to affirm the very language that he experiences the speaker is inevitably returned to the ‘conclusion’ that he has *yet* to speak, only for the apparition of language, the “murmurs”

which inhabit this silence to give way, in turn, to the voice, the “conclusion” that he is already speaking:

. . . the words fail, the voice fails, so be it, I know that well, it will be the silence, full of murmurs, distant cries, the usual silence, spent listening, spent waiting, waiting for the voice, the cries abate, like all cries, that is to say they stop, the murmurs cease, they give up, the voice begins again, it begins trying again, quick now before there is none left, no voice left, nothing left but the core of murmurs, distant cries, quick now and try again . . . (Unnamable 417)

The Beckettian narrator thus constantly oscillates between the two possibilities that word ‘potential’ *allows*.

It is clear, therefore, that the ambiguity which inhabits our use of the word ‘potential’, our failure to specify whether it refers to a present (potential) existence or a future (potential) existence (implying that one does not *currently* exist) is more than a mere failure to be specific in one’s meaning. For Beckett, this ambiguity is rather a *functional* ambiguity which is intrinsic to textuality and the mode of potentiality which is human existence itself. Agamben is correct to assert that “. . . human beings . . . are those beings who, more than any other, exist in the mode of potentiality” (182) and yet this does not clarify the *sense* of potentiality at stake, the question of whether this ‘potentiality’ is sustained in relation to that which already exists but cannot be affirmed or to that which does not currently exist but could come into being. As the Beckettian text demonstrates, the mode of potentiality that constitutes human ‘existence’ is inhabited by both possibilities, the lack of clarification which characterises Agamben’s words being the very lack of affirmation (of either existence or non-existence) which *constitutes* the text as a mode of potentiality. The Beckettian narrator, in implying that the possibility that he has *yet* to write, asserts that “. . . I . . . cannot raise my hand from my knee” yet as the evidence of our eyes, and the very fact that we (the readers) are *aware* of this inability suggests, this possibility is necessarily inhabited by the undeniable (if irresolvable) possibility that he has already begun to write, a possibility

which always holds open the inescapable possibility of existence and of affirming this existence: "How . . . can I write . . . ? I don't know. I could know. Not this time. It is I who write, who cannot raise my hand from my knee" (Unnamable 303). Echoing Nietzsche, Beckett presents human existence as a mode of potentiality which is constantly torn between the possibility of what already *is* and the possibility of what has *yet* to be, between putative existence and putative non-existence:

Is it really he, can it possibly be he, then moving on in company along a road that is not mine and with every step takes me further from that other not mine either, or remaining alone where I am, between two parting dreams, knowing none, known of none . . . (Texts for Nothing 148).

5

CONTRARIETIES WHICH GNAW: BECKETT, ARISTOTLE AND HYLOMORPHISM

Beckett, of course, was not the first to recognise that the dual possibility inhabiting the word 'potential' is the fundamental *aporia* which characterises and constitutes human existence: such potentiality, for example, clearly inhabits Nietzschean thought and finds its derivation in the erotic, non-reductive, materialism which, for Plato, is exteriorised by writing, the desire to attain that which has (possibly) already been attained¹⁶. In identifying this dichotomy Beckett thus acknowledges a *hylomorphic* strain of thought within the Western tradition, it being Aristotle who is the historically acknowledged source of this tradition. Within this Aristotelian context the irresolvable yet inalienable *possibility* of material being informs and facilitates the mode of potentiality that is human existence, the former potentiality making the latter potentiality *possible*. In these terms the aporetic inability to affirm or deny material being is the seed from which actuality and self-

actualisation springs, the *potential* status of material reality being transformed into this reality's *potentiality*, the dynamic process of actualising itself and its latent capacities. In Richard Tarnas' terms, this Aristotelian conception of matter is:

. . . an indeterminate openness in things to structural and dynamic formation. Matter is the unqualified substrate of being, the possibility of form, that which form molds, impels, brings from potentiality to actuality . . . All of nature is in the process – is itself the process – of this conquest of matter by form. (58)

The key feature of matter, for Aristotle, and the reason for the traditional arguments over whether Aristotle accepted the existence of primal matter, is its lack of *thisness* (*tóδε τι*)¹⁷, the quality of being separable and definable, this lack being the reason why Aristotle rejected matter's status as a substance. Indeed, the Beckettian narrator's inability to affirm that he already exists by meaningfully translating himself and his own language into a definable '*this*', and his frequent reference to such unnameable factors as 'nothing', echoes Aristotle's inability to unequivocally apply the word 'being' to matter:

. . . matter becomes substance. For if this is not a substance, we are at a loss as to what else is a substance. If the others [form or predicates of matter] are taken off, nothing appears to remain . . . if length and width and depth are removed, we observe nothing left, unless there is something bounded by these; so matter alone must appear to be substance. . . . By "matter" I mean that which in itself is not stated as being the whatness of something, nor a quantity, nor any other senses of "being". . . . From what has been said, it follows that matter is a substance. But this is impossible; for to be separable and a *this* is thought to belong most of all to a substance. (Metaphysics 1029a 11-29)

Accordingly, Aristotle reserves the term 'substance' for the essence a phenomenon, essence being that which is included in any *per se* account of such a phenomenon, that which allows it to be determined as a presence (i.e. the definable and formal qualities which make a thing *what it is*, a *this*). It is clear, therefore, that Aristotle's equivocation about the 'being' of matter is actually an equivocation about the applicability of any formal concept of being to

matter, *form* rather than matter being the defining factor of actuality or substance. As Plotinus recognises in following the Aristotelian tradition¹⁸, matter is the substrate that receives form yet, in itself, lacks the form that allows for a *definable* existence, the ‘*thisness*’ which constitutes a substance:

The Matter in the Intellectual Realm is an Existent, for there is nothing previous to it except Beyond-Existence; but what precedes the Matter of this sphere is Existence; by its alienism in regard to the beauty and good of Existence, Matter is therefore a non-existent. (II.4.16)

One should note that in implying that only that which exists in the “intellectual realm” is “an Existent”, Plotinus concurs with Aristotle’s identification of substance and actuality as necessarily possessing the quality of ‘thisness’. Matter, therefore, has never been logocentrically determined as a presence and consequently has never been installed within the ‘rights of reality’: it is “not a thing of Real-being but belongs to some other Kind of existent” (II.4.14.). Clearly that matter has never been *determined* as a presence in order that it can be installed within the ‘rights of reality’ does not revoke the possibility that it is, in some unverifiable sense, real. In the same way that the Beckettian narrator frequently refers to the unnameable reality of his own language as ‘nothing’, Plotinus’ assertion that matter is “non-existent” *is not an assertion that there is no such thing as matter*: matter is “no name void of content; we know there is such a base, invisible and without bulk though it be” (II.4.12): “It [the soul] knows . . . a whole which includes two components; it has a clear knowledge or perception of the overlie (the Ideas) but only a dim awareness of the underlie, the shapeless which is not an Ideal-Principle” (II.4.10). In other words the “mess” of reality “invades our experience at every moment. It is there and it must be allowed in. . . . the form . . . exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates” (Driver 219). A more plausible source for this assertion, however, is St. Augustine, whose Confessions was not only strongly influenced by Plotinus and Aristotle but was also an abiding influence on

Beckett¹⁹. Writing in this Aristotelian tradition, St. Augustine refers to “unformed matter” as being “not absolute nothingness” but “a kind of formlessness without any definition” (XII.iii):

I found it easier to suppose something deprived of all form to be non-existent than to think something could stand between form and nothingness, neither endowed with form nor nothing, but formless and so almost nothing. . . . If one could speak of ‘a nothing something’ or ‘a being which is non-being’, that is what I would say. Nevertheless it must have had some kind of prior existence to be able to receive the visible and ordered forms. (XII.vi)

As has been suggested, it is this status as a “nothing something” which informs the Beckettian narrator’s relation to language, language being a thing which is apparently *there* (i.e. it is *something*) even as it cannot be appointed any formal meaning (i.e. it is *nothing* from this perspective)²⁰. As this status defines Beckettian language as a mode of potentiality, it also informs Aristotle’s belief that matter is potentiality: matter may exist yet this existence cannot be formally verified, transforming this existence into an irresolvable and undeniable possibility. This view most famously put forward in *De Anima*:

. . . substance is . . . spoken of in three ways, as form, as matter, and as the composite, and of these matter is the potentiality, form actuality, and since the composite is in this case the ensouled thing, it is not that the body is the actuality of the soul but that the soul is the actuality of some body. (II.ii).

When Aristotle asserts that “matter is the potentiality” here, he is clearly not suggesting that matter is form’s *telos* (or in Aristotle’s terms, the form’s “end cause” (*Physics* II.iii)), or that matter has *yet* to exist: indeed he asserts elsewhere that “the body, far from being one of the things said of a subject, stands by itself as subject and is matter” (*De Anima* II.i). In designating matter a “potentiality”, therefore, he is clearly implying the possibility that matter *already* exists even as this existence cannot be affirmed. In light of this inability, however, it would be correct to assert that matter *itself* has yet to enter into *formal* being or

actuality and when one reflects that such ‘thisness’ is, for Aristotle, the defining quality of actuality, one begins to appreciate the reason for matter’s status as a substrate and a potentiality: matter may subsist (i.e. it is *already* in place) but does not yet exist in any *substantial* sense (i.e. it remains a mere possibility), the criterion of substantiality being that which Aristotle applies to existence.

It is the fact that matter has always *yet* to exist in this substantial sense that also explains why formal actuality has substantial priority over potentiality/ matter in spite of the possibility of matter being already in place (a fact which, it should be noted, is reminiscent of the manner in which representation, for Derrida, has logical priority over ‘reality’). This, for example, is the reason why “the soul is the actuality of some body” rather than “the body” being “the actuality of the soul”; the soul is the form of the body and it is this form, rather than the body’s materiality, which is identifiable as the body’s actuality, the soul being, as Aristotle famously puts it, “the first actuality of a natural body with organs” (*De Anima* II. i)²¹. Similarly, formal *being* has substantial priority over *becoming* by virtue of the fact that it has already *attained* the status of a substance:

. . . things which are posterior in generation are prior in form or in substance; for example, an adult is prior to a child, and a man is prior to seed; for the former in each case already has the form, the latter does not. . . . generation is for the sake of an end; and the end is an *actuality*, and potentiality is viewed as being for the sake of this. . . . Further, matter exists potentially in view of the fact that it might come to possess a form; and when it exists *actually*, then it exists in a form. (*Metaphysics* 1050a.4-17)

Of course, when matter “exists as a form” and has become *actual*, it does not exist in this substantial sense at all, the form in question being something other *to* matter (i.e. a substance, an adult, a man). To recount: “to be separable and a *this* is thought to belong most of all to a substance” (*Metaphysics* 1029a 11-29). As Plotinus puts it: “. . . bodiliness is itself a phase of Reason principle and so is something different from Matter . . . bodiliness already

operative and so to speak made concrete would be body manifest and not Matter unelaborated.” (II.4.12). In other words, when matter “exists as a form” then matter *itself* has not been actualised; it *remains* the substrate to this form and *remains* merely potential. Nevertheless, the quotation from Aristotle points to the specifically *hylomorphic* nature of the Aristotelian paradigm and, more importantly, to the manner in such hylomorphism incorporates both senses of potentiality under discussion. In asserting that “matter exists potentially” here, Aristotle is not simply implying that matter has *yet* to become actual but is also implying the possibility that matter is *already* in place in the same manner that the “mess” of reality is, for Beckett, already “there” but has yet to “be allowed in”. Aristotle is certainly not, for example, suggesting that a child currently lacks material existence, but rather that this material status cannot be verified since it lacks the quality of *thisness*; such matter already exists even as it cannot be formally verified (i.e. it *does* potentially exist) and it exists “in view of the fact that it might come to possess a form” (i.e. in view of the fact that it can, potentially, *come into* existence as a substance, having yet to become actual). The process of becoming (the growth of the child, the germination of the seed) occurs “for the sake of an end”, this end being, on one hand, the possibility of matter *itself* finally coming into substantial being and, on the other hand, the possibility of matter becoming a substantial form (an adult, a man) which is *other* to matter. Aristotle can validly consider the latter to be *the* ‘end’ by virtue of the fact that it is the only one which can occur *in actuality*: the former is untenable since matter is always transformed into something other to matter as soon as it enters into formal being, the reason why matter has incessantly *yet* to exist in any substantial sense and the reason why form has substantial priority (and in a sense, temporal priority²²) over matter. Yet this does not alter the fact that the process of actualising this end (the form of the man/ the adult) only occurs as a result of the fact that matter becomes its own *dynamis*, this process occurring “for the sake of” the “end” which is matter itself. The process of

actualisation and actuality itself are, therefore, products of the *aporia* which is inherent to matter, of the relationship between a substrate which (possibly) already exists but which has incessantly *yet* to come into actuality, matter being both *origin* and *telos* or in Aristotle's terms material cause and end cause, with the proviso that any *actual* end cause will always be a substance which is other to matter. In other words actuality and actualisation can be seen as the product of matter's relationship to itself, in the same manner that Beckett's fictions are the product of an unidentified (or unidentifiable) narrator's attempts to linguistically actualise itself, sublimations of the mysterious figure which is Samuel Beckett. As Malone asserts in recognising Aristotle's contention that matter underlies change yet is not itself changed: "The forms are many in which the unchanging seeks relief from its formlessness" (Malone 198).

Nevertheless, it is clear that this hylomorphic paradigm does not merely present matter as a possibility but also as an *impossibility*. The potentiality which is matter may produce *actuality* and yet is impossible in that it can ever be actual itself, always being transformed into a substance which is other *to* matter in this act of actualisation: it is, therefore, both a potentiality (i.e. it is potentially already in place) and an impotentiality (i.e. it can never become actual). Yet it must be noted that the latter impossibility does not logically preclude the former possibility, it being the former, irresolvable yet inescapable, potentiality which inhabits and sustains the hylomorphic process²³. The impossibility of matter finally actualising itself as "matter unelaborated" (to recall Plotinus) does not revoke the possibility that matter is already in place or the possibility that this matter is *constantly* 'actualising' itself as substances which are other *to* matter. This ultimately impossible, incessantly incomplete, actualisation of matter is constantly *in process*. As Beckett's texts insistently reveal, it is the possibility of an 'unnameable' self being already in place which sustains the linguistic process in spite of the impossibility of naming or linguistically actualising this self. In other words, the impossibility of an endeavour may bar this

endeavour's completion but it is no bar to its execution: ". . . I can only speak of me, no, I can't speak of anything, and yet I speak, perhaps it's of him . . . who cannot hear, cannot speak . . . of whom I can't speak, of whom I must speak, that's all hypotheses . . ." (Unnamable 408). In the same way that the impossibility of finally actualising matter does not alter the possibility that matter is *already* in place or logically preclude the process of matter's actualisation, the impossibility of finally speaking the self here clearly fails to excuse the narrator from the inescapable obligation of *attempting* to linguistically actualise this unnameable self. This self remains in place as that which potentially *already* exists even as it is impossible to finally resolve this potentiality by appointing it the quality of 'thisness', this being the Unnamable's impossible obligation: "If only I were not obliged to manifest" (Unnamable 298).

Indeed, it is precisely the impossibility of finally actualising these factors which always leaves them in place *as potentialities*, thus sustaining the process of actualisation. For Beckett, it is the impossibility of affirming the self, or synonymously, of negating the *potentiality* which is the self *via* this (impossible) act of linguistic actualisation, which sustains the process of writing: ". . . it's the same old road I'm trudging . . . towards one yet to be named, so that he may leave me in peace, be in peace, be no more, never have been." (Texts for Nothing 144). Clearly affirmation and negation here are two sides of the same coin for the "[n]egation" of this potentiality is "*no more possible than affirmation*" (Juliet 165)²⁴; indeed, if one defines this self *as* a potentiality, then the negation of this potentiality is synonymous with the act of affirmation. It is precisely the impossibility of finally naming/negating the potential self which sustains this self *as* a potentiality, a potentiality which the narrator cannot escape that he may "be in peace". It is the unavoidable nature of this potentiality which explains why he is equally unable to avoid the obligation of *attempting* to name/negate this self in spite of the impossible nature of this task, in the same manner that

the impossible nature of actualising/ negating matter *as a potentiality*, does not negate the necessity of its hylomorphic movement: “I have to go on . . . I am up against a cliff wall yet I have to go forward. It’s impossible, isn’t it? All the same, you can go forward. Advance a few more miserable millimetres . . . ” (Juliet 141). As the Unnamable asserts in a remark which recalls the manner in which Aristotelian hylomorphism exists as an attempt to resolve the potentiality which is matter even as this is, simultaneously, an impossibility:

The only problem for me was how to continue, since I could not do otherwise, to the best of my declining powers, in the motion which had been imparted to me. This obligation, and the quasi-impossibility of fulfilling it, engrossed me in a purely mechanical way . . . so that my situation rather resembled that of an old broken-down cart- or bat-horse unable to receive the least information. . . . as to whether it is moving towards the stable or away from it, and not greatly caring either way. The question, among others, of how such things are possible had long since ceased to preoccupy me. (Unnamable 322)

That this movement is an “obligation” even as it is a “quasi-impossibility” reflects the “quasi-impossible” nature of matter, its status as that which is (possibly) already in place even as it is impossible to finally resolve/ negate this potentiality in an act of actualisation: matter, therefore, is an irresolvable and inescapable potentiality, an *impossible* potentiality. Similarly, the narrator is unable “to receive the least information. . . . as to whether it is moving towards the stable or away from it”, the hylomorphic movement being an eternally incomplete movement away from the *potentiality* which is matter towards the impossible *actuality* which is matter. As both Aristotle and Beckett admit, from one perspective, the process of self-actualisation, the change which occurs between these two points, is not a change at all, such change being a mere *apparency*:

I invented it all, in the hope it would console me, help me to go on, allow me to think of myself as somewhere on a road, moving, between a beginning and an end, gaining ground, losing ground, getting lost, but somehow in the long run making headway. All lies. (Unnamable 316)

The Beckettian narrator may not be able to existentially verify himself or his own language, this unnameable reality being rendered opaque in the very act of formal (i.e. meaningful) articulation, yet that this self 'actualisation' is always a *failure* to actualise the self (i.e. it is a fiction), leaves this unspeakable reality, this impossible *telos*, in place as the inescapable and irresolvable potentiality of the text. Indeed, we have already seen that the narrator cannot escape this unspeakable reality: in being unable to verify the actuality of his own language, he is necessarily returned to the 'conclusion' that he has *yet* to speak, this unchanging origin being the inescapable trace which 'poisons' the text, the unspeakable possibility to which he always returns.

Aristotle also recognises that the process of actualisation which takes place in the space between a substrate which (possibly) already exists but has *yet* to become actual, can, from one perspective, be seen as no change at all. In order to demonstrate this lack of change between origin and *telos*, Aristotle draws an analogy which equates matter with knowledge itself (i.e. latent or potential knowledge) and form with contemplation of this knowledge (i.e. the actualisation of such knowledge)²⁵. Aristotle asserts that this actualisation of the potential is, on one hand:

. . . a kind of destruction by the opposite, on the other rather a preservation of what is in potentiality by what is in actuality . . . for that which has knowledge becomes that which contemplates, and this is either not to change at all (for the progression that occurs is towards the thing itself and towards its actuality) or is another kind of change of state. And for this reason it is not right to say that that which understands, whenever it is understanding, is changing its state, any more than it would be right to say this of a builder whenever he is building. (*De Anima* II.5)

In one sense, the actualisation of the potential, the formal actualisation of matter as a substance, is "a kind of destruction by the opposite", the erasure of matter *via* the imposition of a form which is inherently other to matter. Yet on the other hand, that this "destruction" always represents a failure to actualise matter *itself* leaves matter in place as the potentiality

of this form, this being “a preservation of what is in potentiality by what is in actuality”. Giorgio Agamben argues this point in an important re-evaluation of Aristotle’s remark that “[a] thing is said to be potential if, when the act of which it is said to be potential is realized, there will be nothing impotential” (Agamben 183)²⁶:

Usually this sentence is interpreted as if Aristotle had wanted to say “What is possible (or potential) is that with respect to which nothing is impossible (or impotential). If there is no impossibility, then there is possibility.” Aristotle would then have uttered a banality or a tautology .

Let us instead seek to understand the text in all its difficulty. . . . What Aristotle . . . says is: *if a potentiality to not-be originally belongs to all potentiality, then there is truly potentiality only where the potentiality to not-be does not lag behind actuality but passes fully into it as such*. This does not mean that it disappears in actuality: on the contrary, it *preserves itself* as such in actuality. (183)

The actualisation of the potentiality which is matter does not negate this potentiality, for matter does not actualise itself *as matter* but as a substance which is other to matter. Matter, therefore, remains in place as that particular substance’s “*potentiality to not be*”, matter being the privation of this form and of its actuality. Formal actuality, therefore, always *preserves* its “*potentiality to not be*” a form or an actuality and this is, synonymously, to preserve the potentiality which is matter. Moreover, as the Beckettian narrator’s language always exists as a mode of potentiality by virtue of the fact that its existence has *yet* to be verified, this preservation of matter as a potentiality reciprocally defines any substance or actuality *itself* as a potentiality, actuality *existing* as the (quasi) possibility of matter’s actualisation: “. . . *there is truly potentiality only where the potentiality to not-be does not lag behind actuality but passes fully into it as such*”. The substance of a man, for example, may be actual *as a man*, but remains, potentially, matter (i.e. it is possible that he *is* already a material object – a body) and the potentiality *of* matter (i.e. a product of matter’s self-actualisation, of the possibility that matter *itself* will become a substance). Such actuality is, therefore, the potentiality of matter both in the sense that it assigns matter its status as a possibility which is

already in place, thus *opening up* material being to the possibility of self-actualisation, and also in the sense that it is that which matter is capable of becoming, a product of matter's self-actualisation or its *dunamis*.

In always being actualised as something that is other to matter *itself*, therefore, the potentiality that is matter *remains* potential in spite of this actualisation. This potentiality is the inescapable and unchanging *trace* that inhabits formal actuality, that which constantly reasserts its equivocal presence throughout the process of self-actualisation. Matter, for Aristotle, is the potentiality which always survives actualisation, a word which refers to the dynamic process which occurs between the two senses of the word potentiality, between the possibility of matter being *already* in place and the possibility of matter finally *coming* into substantial being. One can either see the potentiality in question as being the trace of that which is already *in place* or of that which has *yet* to become actual; both of these statements are applicable to matter, matter being, indistinguishably, origin and *telos*. In one sense, therefore, self-actualisation “is not [a] change at all (for the progression . . . occurs *is towards the thing itself and towards its actuality*)” (emphasis mine), matter being that which endures and underlies the process of actualisation that occurs between “the thing itself” (the origin or the material cause) and “its actuality” (the *telos* or the end cause), both of which are matter. Actuality, therefore, is a product of matter's relationship to itself, matter being the unchanging substrate or “underlying thing” (Physics I.6) which passes through change unchanged: in alluding to his own translation of the quotation from Aristotle²⁷, Giorgio Agamben clearly indicates the extent to which formal actuality can be seen as a product of matter's *self*-actualisation: “Contrary to the traditional idea of potentiality that is annulled in actuality, here we are confronted with a potentiality that conserves itself and saves itself in actuality. Here potentiality, so to speak, survives actuality and, in this way, *gives itself to itself*” (18).

IMMANENCE AND ABSENCE: BECKETT AND PRE-NATALITY

We are now in a position to fully explore the ramifications of this hylomorphic paradigm on post-structuralist interpretations of Beckett. How does the possibility of a pre-discursive reality manifest itself and how does this putative *logos* refute any final denial even as it refutes its affirmation? How does it leave its elusive yet ineradicable *trace* in the text? These are ultimately questions of the *origin* and the most effective means of answering them, therefore, is to examine the *pre-natal* nature of Beckettian textuality, revealing how this can be seen as a reflection of the Aristotelian paradigm that we have outlined.

Declarations of the subject's pre-natal status are common in Beckett's work, the most significant quotation in this respect being the fragment "never been properly born" from the 'addenda' of Watt (248), a remark that is derived from a lecture by Jung that Beckett attended in 1935²⁸. This is reflected in Beckett's 1956 radio play All That Fall (1956) when Mrs Rooney recollects "attending a lecture by one of these new mind doctors" (195):

MRS ROONEY: . . . I remember his telling us the story of a little girl, very strange and unhappy in her ways, and how he treated her unsuccessfully over a period of years and was finally obliged to give up the case. He could find nothing wrong with her, he said. The only thing wrong with her as far as he could see was that she was dying. And she did in fact die, shortly after he had washed his hands of her.

MR ROONEY: Well? What is there so wonderful about that?

MRS ROONEY: No, it was just something he said, and the way he said it, that have haunted me ever since.

MR ROONEY: You lie awake at night, tossing to and fro and brooding on it.

MRS ROONEY: On it and other...wretchedness. [*Pause.*] When he had done with the little girl he stood there motionless for some time, quite two minutes I should say, looking down at his table. Then he suddenly raised his head and exclaimed, as if he had a revelation. The trouble with her was she had never really been born! (195-96)

That Beckett continued to be 'haunted' by this remark is indicated in a 1968 conversation with Charles Juliet:

-I have always had the feeling that somebody inside me had been murdered. Murdered before I was born. I had to find that person and try to bring him back to life . . . I once went to a lecture given by Jung . . . He talked about one of his patients, a little girl . . . At the end, when the audience were filing out, Jung stood there in silence. And then he added, as if to himself, in amazement at a sudden discovery: 'In fact, she had never really been born.'

-I have always had the feeling that I had never been born either. (Juliet 138)

Beckett expands on the nature of this "feeling" in conversation with Lawrence E. Harvey (pub.1970)²⁹, when he states his "unconquerable intuition" that "life on the surface was 'existence by proxy. . . . that being is so unlike what one is standing up'", this being the intuition of "'a presence, embryonic, undeveloped, of a self that might have been but never got born, an *être manqué*'" (247).

As H. Porter Abbott asserts in relation to these remarks: "In the context of a whole range of current discourse on Beckett, but particularly discourse starting from a post-structuralist assumptions, Beckett's alleged words represent a problem that is usually ignored" (Beckett Writing Beckett 18). One of the assumptions to which Porter Abbott is referring is that the text has no pre-discursive origin, Beckett's remarks implying, in contrast, that he has never *escaped* this origin and has never been born: his concept of himself, therefore, has never been installed within the 'rights of reality', "life on the surface" being merely "existence by proxy". Clearly, this reflects the role of the Nietzschean body, the potentiality that continually defers any installation of the text within the 'rights of reality'

until the moment of death. As is the question of the body in Nietzsche, these remarks, and Beckett's allusions to pre-natal, are "usually ignored" because they problematise the post-structuralist assumption that the origin has (and has *always already*) been usurped by its supplementary representation in the act of 'actualising' itself *via* the differential act of self-representation. In contrast, the remarks suggest that this point of differentiation, the moment of birth at which the boundaries between outside and inside give way to this usurpatory text, has incessantly *yet* to occur. To recall Nietzsche: "The time for me hasn't come yet: some are born posthumously" (*Ecce Homo* 715).

This, however, is not to say that Beckettian textuality does not permit the *possibility* that this usurpatory moment of birth has always already occurred³⁰ just as the Beckettian narrator's frequent inability to verify the reality of his own voice does not mean that he has not spoken (although, as in *Company*, he obviously cannot deny this *possibility*). Beckett's belief in his own pre-natal status is an "*intuition*" rather than an established fact, a possibility that cannot be verified. The origin in which he remains implicated is, therefore, a potentiality. It is the potential status of the origin, and thus of Beckettian pre-natal, which permits its correlate, the absence of an origin and a usurpatory text which has been installed within the 'rights of reality', a fact which explains why Beckett's novels are so amenable to post-structuralist analysis. Nevertheless, for Beckett, this Derridean perspective *remains* a mere possibility, a hypothesis which is necessarily balanced with another, Aristotelian, possibility, the possibility that the text has *yet* to escape or usurp the origin and be 'born'. The recognition of the Beckettian text's status as a mode of potentiality, of the manner in which it is torn between these pre- and post- natal possibilities, indicates a failure by post-structuralist interpreters to recognise that their assumptions are, for Beckett, *always* assumptions, this being the reason why the hylomorphic nature of Beckettian textuality is "frequently ignored". This is not merely a failure to recognise the hypothetical nature of post-structuralist theory,

but a failure to recognise the manner in which this merely *potential* status is *functional* within textuality. In other words, the post-structuralist rejection of the origin leads to a *premature* recognition of the text's 'rights to reality'.

How, then, do Beckett's remarks complicate the post-structuralist argument on the issue of the origin? In spite of the fact that Beckett does not theoretically elaborate on his "unconquerable intuition" of "a self that might have been but never got born", one can, nevertheless, already trace the logical trajectory of such an elaboration on the basis of the remarks alone, before examining them in the context of his novels. What is immediately striking about Beckett's remarks is that they imply that he has been *conceived* but *not born*, which is to say that the origin has represented/ supplemented itself but that this 'supplement' has yet to escape its implication *in* the origin. Consequently, this implies that the origin has *yet* to be usurped by its 'supplement' and, conversely, that this 'supplement' has *yet* to be installed within the 'rights of reality'. Such an installation, the usurpatory moment of self-actualisation, is deferred by a limiting origin that remains in place. In other words, the origin's *conception* of itself, the self as signified, has never truly differed from the origin that it *can* usurp it, this textual figure having never been 'born': the 'supplement' is an "*être manqué*", a non-being or the *fiction* of the origin which incorporates it, just as any deictic signifier is a fiction of the actual speech act in which it remains implicated, or our self-conception is a fiction of the actual self which incorporates this conception. What, therefore, would be the status of this origin? Evidently, that this origin continues to enclose its supplemental "proxies" means that no signifier can mimetically *reflect* it, to recall Derrida's assertion that the "reflection, the image, the double, splits what it doubles": the origin can only 'reflect' *within* its inapprehensible totality rather than *reflecting* this totality, which is to say that it cannot 'reflect' at all, producing an arbitrary fiction of the origin rather *than* a representation. That this fictional "proxy" cannot verifiably *represent* the origin presents the

possibility that what it does represent is a failure *by* the origin to truly differ from itself that it *can* represent itself. The textual figure's failure to truly differ from the origin, therefore, would not only entail that the text has not been installed within the 'rights of reality' (this installation being deferred by the origin which remains in place), but also that the origin *itself* has never been installed within these rights, its existence having yet to be verified. This origin, like Aristotelian matter, has never become a 'this' having never actualised itself *via* the act of 'self-representation': representations of this origin are mere proxies which no more reflect the origin than Aristotelian substances reflect the substrate which is matter, or than Beckett's fictions represent the origin which is Samuel Beckett. Even to itself, therefore, the origin remains a mere *potentiality*, the failure to be born not merely representing a failure to give birth to the textual figure, the 'representation' which would usurp it, for it simultaneously represents a failure *by* the origin to give birth to or actualise itself *via* or, rather, *as* this textual figure. The origin has never reflected or actualised itself in representation in an act of self-usurpation that would install this signifier, and thus the origin itself, within the 'rights of reality'. The origin's installation within these rights, its actualisation as the text which usurps it, is constantly deferred, *not* by a text which differs from and usurps the origin, but because this usurpation, this birth or actualisation *of* the origin, has never occurred: it is constantly deferred by the origin itself, an origin which has never truly differed from itself, and incessantly remains in place as a potentiality.

This would suggest that Beckett refuses to conflate difference and deferment in the Derridean fashion, the deferment of Beckett's 'birth' being caused by a *lack* of difference, by a text which has never escaped its implication in the origin and an origin which has never escaped its own immanent, undifferentiated presence that this *potential* presence can become actual. Evidently, this argument suggests that the self-identical *logos* is not the solution to the *aporias* which characterise Beckettian textuality, but is, rather, the very cause of these

aporias, any Beckettian narrator being unable to verifiably coincide with himself because he always *unspeakably* coincides with himself. As Beckett asserts in relation to the work of Masson:

Here is an artist who seems literally skewered on the ferocious dilemma of expression. Yet he continues to wriggle. The void he speaks of is perhaps simply the obliteration of an unbearable presence, unbearable because neither to be wooed nor to be stormed. If this anguish of helplessness is never stated as such, on its own merits and for its own sake, though perhaps very occasionally admitted as spice to the 'exploit' it jeopardized, the reason is doubtless, among others, that it seems to contain in itself the impossibility of statement. Again an exquisitely logical attitude, in any case, it is hardly to be confused with the void. ("Three Dialogues" 140)

One should note that this dilemma "seems to contain *in itself* the impossibility of statement" in precisely the same manner that the origin *in itself* cannot verify its existence *via* a text which never escapes its "unbearable presence": "That should have been enough for him, to have found me absent, but it's not, he wants me there, with a form and a world, like him, in spite of him, me who am everything, like him who is nothing" (Texts for Nothing 114). Clearly, within this paradigm the text may appear to be disembodied yet this disembodied status is not necessarily symptomatic of the *absence* of an underlying 'self' (the most obvious candidate here being the body), any more than matter's lack of the quality of 'thisness' within the Aristotelian schema is symptomatic of matter's non-existence. This 'self' is, rather, the potentiality which has incessantly yet to become actual, a "nothing something . . . a being which is non-being" to recall St. Augustine's phrase (XII.vi). Nevertheless, while Aristotle accepts substance as actuality by virtue of the fact that matter *itself* can never be actual (bearing in mind that such actuality remains, potentially, matter), the perpetually potential status of the Beckettian origin does not allow him to accept the text as an actuality: the persistence of this potentiality, the "non-being" which is the origin, reciprocally defines signification as a "non-being", a potentiality which has yet to usurp the origin in order that it

can be installed within the 'rights of reality': "It's not true, yes, it's true, it's true and it's not true, there is silence and there is not silence, there is no one and there is someone, nothing prevents anything" (Texts for Nothing 154). Evidently, therefore, the apparently disembodied status of the text could be symptomatic of this potential self's immanence, of the signifier's inability to truly differ from the origin in which it is implicated that it can reflect this immanence and actualise this potentiality. To recall Molloy: "... in that block the prey is lodged and thinks himself being apart" (Molloy 111).

In this context it is clear that Beckett's 'pre-natal' remarks imply that his view of textuality is influenced by an Aristotelian or hylomorphic schema, and that it is this influence which is "usually ignored" in "discourse starting from a post-structuralist assumptions". Aristotle's contention that actuality is a product of matter's incessant and eternally incomplete movement of self-actualisation is reflected in the contention that textuality is a product of the origin's incessant attempts to actualise itself, to give birth to itself *via* textuality, or *as* the usurping text: "I am neither . . . Murphy, nor Watt, nor Mercier, nor - no, I can't even bring myself to name them . . . who told me I was they, who I must have tried to be, under duress, or through fear, or to avoid acknowledging me . . ." (Unnamable 328). The fictional rather than representative status of the origin's supplements echo Aristotle's contention that matter can never actualise itself *as* matter, but only as a substance which is formally other *to* matter. Beckett's fictions may not mimetically *represent* Beckett, being other to him in this sense, and yet it is very difficult to avoid the intuition that they are mere 'proxies' of this incessantly unspoken figure, a figure who possesses the same potential status as matter within the Aristotelian schema, having yet to be actualised/ born: "... one day I shall know . . . that I once was, and roughly who, and how to go on, and speak unaided, nicely, about number one and his pale imitations" (Texts for Nothing 142). Aristotle's contention that this "destruction by the opposite" is always "rather a preservation of what is

in potentiality by what is in actuality” is echoed by these “pale imitations” inability to verifiably reflect the origin, thus permitting the possibility that the text has never escaped the origin that it *can* reflect/ usurp it: “Words, he says he knows they are words. But how can he know, who has never heard anything else? True. Not to mention other things . . . to which the abundance of matter has unfortunately up to now prohibited the least allusion” (Unnamable 358). This abundant origin has always *yet* to be actualised *via* or *as* its ‘usurping’ representations, having never been translated into a ‘this’: “. . . it’s still the same old road I’m trudging, up yes and down no, towards one yet to be named . . .” (Texts for Nothing 144). Let us now apply this to the Beckett’s novels, in order to reveal how this potentiality asserts itself and how this paradigm continues to permit the post-structuralist *hypothesis*.

It has already been suggested that the incessant lack which characterises the Beckettian text stems from an inability to deictically refer to the ‘reality of discourse’, to ‘name’ the ‘name’: the text lacks the quality of ‘thisness’ since any reference to such a reality is merely another supplement in the play of representation, another ‘name’ which merely restates its own unnameability. Like the origin, the text has never been apprehended as a ‘this’, textuality *itself* being a potentiality which has yet to actualise itself. Clearly, therefore, *any* reality slips away in the very act of self-articulation, including, as we have seen in our discussion of deixis, the reality of the act of articulation itself. The self-identity of the enunciator, for example, would appear to be lost at the moment that this identity is ‘actualised’ *via* the signifier ‘I’, there, *now*, being no apparent origin other than the play of representation. This usurpation is most explicitly demonstrated in The Unnamable, the narrator being unable to manifest himself as anything other than a fiction, a supplement: “All these Murphy’s, Molloys and Malones do not fool me. They have made me waste my time, suffer for nothing, speak of them when, in order to stop speaking, I should have spoken of me and of me alone” (Unnamable 305). Like Derrida, Beckett recognises that there can be no

'origin' *for us* apart from signification, the Unnamable being unable to validly speak of any self-identical "me alone" for even the word "Unnamable" is a name, a signifier that ruptures self-identity, instituting the difference between origin and signifier in which the origin is usurped by the text. Self-identity is lost at the moment that this identity is articulated, there now being nothing more than supplements: "I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me" (Unnamable 293). Nevertheless, in articulating his inability to speak of "me alone", his inability to linguistically *actualise* this potentiality, the Unnamable is also articulating his inability to resolve and thus eliminate this potentiality. In the same manner that any formal actualisation of Aristotelian matter leaves this matter in place as a potentiality by virtue of this substance's formal 'otherness' *to* matter, the Unnamable's actualisation of himself as a fiction or a name which is formally 'other' to the origin constantly leaves the potentiality which is his unnameable reality in place. The narrator may not be able to *speak* of any self-identical "me alone", yet his inability to verify the reality of discourse means that this never negates the possibility that he *is* alone and has *never* spoken. In other words, he can no more existentially verify the reality of the text that supposedly usurps such a unitary origin, than he can verify the reality of the origin itself.

. . . there is no one here but me, no one wheels about me, no one comes towards me, no one has ever met anyone before my eyes, these creatures have never been, only I and this black void have ever been. . . . Nothing then but me, of which I know nothing, except that I have never uttered, and this black of which I know nothing either. . . . And Basil and his gang? Inexistent, invented to explain I forget what. (Unnamable 306)

One should note the typically ironic use of the phrase "no one" here, the "no one" in question *being* the Unnamable, the figure who cannot "know" himself *via* his fictions because these fictions are never truly 'other' to him that they can verifiably represent him. In reading The Unnamable we may recognise that the narrator cannot 'find himself' in language and yet we cannot fail to also sense that this is a narrator who cannot *escape* himself:

I greatly fear, since my speech can only be of me and here, that I am once more engaged in putting an end to both. Which would not matter, far from it, but for the obligation, once rid of them, to begin again, to start again from nowhere, from no one and from nothing and to win to me again, to me here again, by fresh ways to be sure, or by ancient ways, unrecognisable at each fresh faring. (Unnamable 304)

The explanation for this claustrophobic sense of selfhood lies in Beckett's knowledge of the ambiguity that inhabits the Derridean *archē*-trace, that which suggests that any usurpation of the origin logically entails that there has, *now*, never been an origin and, consequently, that there has never been any verifiable *usurpation* of this origin. If the narrator "put[s] an end to" "me and here" in articulating this identity, then this origin is inapprehensible both *before* and *after* this point. How, then, can he *know* that he has put an end to this origin, that the origin has *always already* occurred as opposed to having *not yet* occurred? The usurpation can never be affirmed for in the absence of any verifiable origin there can be no verifiable usurpation *of* the origin and, therefore, no verification of the text's rights to reality. Consequently, that this usurpation has *already* occurred cannot be affirmed, this being a mere possibility which always necessarily admits the correlate possibility that this usurpation has *yet* to occur, that the origin has never differed from itself. Put simply, the possibility that the text has no beginning always gives way to the possibility that the text has not begun: "I wonder if I couldn't sneak out by the fundament, one morning, with the French breakfast. No, I can't move, not yet. . . . One can be before the beginning, they have set their hearts on that" (Unnamable 355). The usurpation, the putative "end" to "me and here", therefore, is undone, the narrator always winning "to me again", returning to a potential origin which may not have been affirmed as a 'this', but which, nevertheless has yet to be verifiably usurped, hence the "obligation, once rid of them, to begin again"³¹: ". . . I'll be born and born, births for nothing, and come to night without having been" (Unnamable 404). The narrator is obliged "to start again from *nowhere*" and, as the phrase "births for nothing"

implies, he always return to this “nowhere” to this originary point which has yet to actualise itself in order that it can be eliminated as a potentiality. Every movement beyond the threshold undoes itself in erasing the origin and thus erasing any verifiable usurpation of this origin: this *potential* origin, the beginning which has never been verifiably transcended in order that it can be appointed the quality of ‘thisness’, is incessantly restated as the unspeakable trace which inhabits and subsumes the text: “. . . it speaks of a prison, I’ve no objection, vast enough for a whole people, for me alone, or waiting for me, I’ll go there now, I’ll try and go there now, I can’t stir, I’m there already, I must be there already . . .” (Unnamable 413).

Clearly, in order to escape this situation the narrator would have to encounter the origin, encounter *himself*, that the usurpation could be affirmed:

One starts speaking as if it were possible to stop at will. It is better so. The search for a means to put an end to things, an end to speech, is what enables the discourse to continue . . . In the frenzy of utterance the concern with truth. Hence the interest of a possible deliverance by means of encounter. (Unnamable 302)

This quotation would seem to suggest that there can be no return to the origin once this deictic articulation has taken place, echoing Roland Barthes’ assertion that

[s]peech is irreversible; that is its fatality, what has been said cannot be unsaid, *except by adding to it*: to correct, here is oddly enough, to continue. In speaking, I can never erase, annul; all I can do is say “I am erasing, annulling, correcting,” in short, speak some more. (The Rustle of Language 76)

Nevertheless, the Unnamable’s contradictory desire for an “end” and the desire for “deliverance” suggests that the Beckettian narrator is constantly caught in a double bind. On one hand he desires “an end to speech”, acknowledging an inability to finally undo the voice and *return* to the silence of the mythological origin which has apparently already been

usurped/ deferred by the act of self-articulation. On the other hand, he mentions a “possible deliverance”, acknowledging an inability to finally “utter me, in the same foul breath as my creatures” (Unnamable 302). The “deliverance” in question, therefore, is not merely a deliverance *from* language but a deliverance *through* language. The Unnameable desires to actualise himself *via* the text, this actualisation *requiring* the usurpatory moment of birth, a signifier which actually differs from and represents the origin in order that this origin can *be* finally supplanted by its representation. This textual figure would consequently be installed within the ‘rights of reality’, the ‘unnamable’ origin finally being ‘delivered’ *as* its supplement. As is the case of the relationship between the Nietzschean body and his textual supplement, Zarathustra, the Unnameable would not only be *usurped by* but also *actualised as* this fictional figure, that which would no longer be a fiction, an “*être manqué*” for it could now lay claim to the ‘rights to reality’. As the Unnamable’s recognition of a “possible deliverance” implies, however, such a point of usurpation/ deliverance cannot be affirmed: “I shall perhaps be delivered of Malone and the other . . . the day I see the two of them at one and the same time, that is to say in collision” (Unnamable 301). Evidently, the origin has never been verifiably represented by its fictional supplement, Malone, that the usurpation of the origin, the ‘deliverance’ of/ from this origin, can be substantiated:

. . . perhaps they have said me already, perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens on my story, that would surprise me, if it opens, it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don’t know, I’ll never know . . . (Unnamable 418)

This addition of the origin to its representation, the verification of the usurpation, would, of course, require an apprehension of the origin which is not mediated, an apprehension which is not *instantaneously* usurped *by* representation in being ‘added to’ its representation: “This infinitesimal lag, between arrival and departure, this trifling delay in evacuation is all I have

to worry about. The truth about me will boil forth at last . . . ” (Unnamable 352). As Alex Callinicos asserts:

. . . any attempt to halt the endless play of signifiers, above all by appealing to the concept of reference, must . . . involve postulating a “transcendental signified” which is somehow present to the consciousness without any discursive mediation. (74)

The question that Beckett is clearly posing here, therefore, is of how one can verify any usurpation of this fact when the *difference* between the origin and its representation has never been apprehended. How can one verify that the text has been installed within the ‘rights of reality’ in the absence of any verifiable origin and thus in the absence of any verifiable usurpation *of* this origin? In the absence of the origin, this usurpation is a mere potentiality which has incessantly *yet* to be verified. The narrator therefore cannot deny the correlate potentiality that ‘representation’ is actually a product of this putative origin’s *inability* to differ from itself that it can reflect itself: “I thought I was right in enlisting these sufferers of my pains. I was wrong. They never suffered my pains, their pains are nothing, compared to mine, a mere tittle of mine, the tittle *I thought* I could put from me, in order to witness it” (Unnamable 305 emphasis mine). Derrida’s argument that the usurpation has always already begun (or, synonymously, that there has never been a usurpation) always gives way to the correlate possibility that this usurpation has *yet* to occur, the possibility that the origin is still ineffably *in place*. The Unnamable cannot verify that his fictions have been installed within the ‘rights of reality’, that his act of textual self-usurpation has occurred that he can finally be ‘delivered’ *as* one of these fictions: “. . . Malone revolves, a stranger forever to my infirmities, one who is not as I can never not be” (Unnamable 302). Indeed, that his fictions have never verifiably reflected, or differed from, the origin means that the narrator has yet to be *conceived*:

I who am on my way, words bellying out my sails, am also that unthinkable ancestor of whom nothing can be said. But perhaps I shall speak of him some day, and of the impenetrable age when I was he, some day when they fall silent, convinced at last I shall never get born, having failed to be conceived. Yes, perhaps I shall speak of him, for an instant, like the echo that mocks, before being restored to him, the one they could not part me from. (Unnamable 356)

The Unnamable thus implies that one cannot unequivocally assert that the origin has been usurped unless one can unequivocally assert that the origin *itself* has been apprehended, this being the assumption that Derrida makes in declaring that “[w]hat can look at itself is not one: and the law of the addition of the origin to its representation, of the thing to its image, is that one plus one makes at least three” (Grammatology 36). The Unnamable does not share this assumption, being unable to prove that he has ever ‘looked’ at himself, consequently remaining unable to refute the possibility that he is *still* “one”. This differential self-reflection has incessantly *yet* to occur: “. . . mutilate, mutilate, and perhaps someday, fifteen generations hence, you’ll succeed in beginning to look like yourself. . . . It isn’t enough that I should know what I’m doing, I must also know what I’m looking like” (Unnamable 317). That the Unnamable’s fictions (his *mutilations*) do not verifiably reflect the origin implies the possibility that they have never differed from the origin in order that they *can* reflect it. Until the Unnamable can “*know*” what he is “looking like” the possibility of an encompassing origin remains in place, in precisely the same manner as the inability to formally actualise matter *itself* within the Aristotelian schema constantly leaves the potentiality which is matter in place. It is the Unnamable’s inability to finally appoint the quality of *thisness* to the origin which allows this origin to constantly reassert itself as the inalienable potentiality which underlies the text, the putative and unchanging *archē* which both sustains textuality and constantly undoes the usurpatory pretensions *of* textuality: the text’s rights to reality are constantly deferred:

. . . the admission that I am Mahood after all and these stories of a being whose identity he usurps, and whose voice he prevents from being heard, all lies from beginning to end? And what if Mahood were my master? I'll leave it at that, for the time being. (Unnamable 313)

The Unnamable's inability to affirm this hypothetical usurpation, to affirm that the fictional/supplementary figure Mahood³² has logical priority over the origin which *is* the Unnameable, means that he is incessantly unable to escape the possibility that this usurpation has never occurred in the sense that it has *yet* to occur:

Is he still usurping my name, the one they foisted on me, up there in their world, patiently, from season to season? No no, here I am in safety, amusing myself wondering who can have dealt me these insignificant wounds. (Unnamable 300)

This is why Beckett speaks of a self "*inside me*", a self which "*had been murdered. Murdered before I was born*". His "mutilations" are "insignificant wounds" since each self posited is undone by its inability to verifiably reflect the origin, always leaving in place the possibility that it is still implicated within this eternally putative origin, the possibility that the text has yet to be born: "It was he told me stories about me, lived in my stead, issued forth from me, came back to me, entered back into me . . ." (Unnamable 311). Similarly, any 'usurping' speech is incessantly undone by this possibility as it is revealed to have never breached the silence of this unverifiable yet inescapable origin: in attempting to "utter me, in the same foul breath as my creatures" (Unnamable 302), the Unnamable is attempting to tell "his story the story to be told . . . he's in his own story, unimaginable, unspeakable . . . the story of the silence that he never left" (Unnamable 417):

On the subject of me properly so called, I know what I mean, so far as I know I have received no information up to date. May one speak of a voice in these conditions? Probably not. . . . The fact is all this business about voices requires to be revised, corrected and then abandoned. (Unnamable 338)

If, for Derrida, it is the usurpation which installs “the image within the rights of reality” (*Grammatology* 37), this being a usurpation which has always already occurred, then clearly Beckett can only acknowledge this as a possibility; he simultaneously recognises that the ‘absence’ of this usurpation is equally suggestive of the possibility that the origin is still ineffably in place. Again we see the Beckettian text’s status as a mode of potentiality, being torn between an origin that may have already been usurped and an origin that has *yet* to be usurped. If the narrator cannot wholly refute the former possibility then equally, in the absence of any origin or any apparent usurpation, he finds it impossible to wholly refute the latter:

I shall begin to know something, just enough for it to turn out to be the same as always, the same which seems made for me and does not want me, which I seem to want and do not want, take your choice, which spews me out or swallows me up, I’ll never know . . . (*Unnamable* 304)

Unsurprisingly then, Aristotle’s assertion that the ‘actualisation’ of matter is, from one perspective, not a “change at all (for the progression that occurs is towards the thing itself and towards its actuality)” is reflected by the Beckettian text’s insistence that any enactment of the usurping play of textuality is constantly balanced by an enactment of unchanging *stasis*, this being a reflection of the fact that the origin’s attempts to actualise itself *via* textuality, its textual “progression . . . towards the thing itself and towards its actuality”, is incessantly revealed to be no change at all, a failure by the origin to escape its own immanence that this immanence can be appointed the quality of *thisness*:

. . . I’m all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their settling, no sky for their dispersing, coming together to say, fleeing one another to say, that I am they, all of them, those that merge, those that part, those that never meet, and nothing else, yes, something else, that I’m something quite different, a quite different thing, a wordless thing in an empty place, a hard shut dry cold black place, where nothing stirs, nothing speaks, and that I listen, and that I speak, like a caged beast born of cage beasts born

of caged beasts born of caged beasts born in a cage and dead in a cage, born and then dead, born in a cage and then dead in a cage . . . (Unnamable 390)

As Wolfgang Iser asserts in recognising the inescapable nature of this possibility: “Beckett’s works are a continual (though never completed) ‘exit’, and each stage of the exit is only the starting-point for more ‘exiting’” (258).

Nevertheless, it is clear that what is in question within this paradigm is not *whether* the origin has been usurped by the text (this being a possibility which, in the apparent absence of the origin, cannot be refuted), but whether this usurpation can be *verified*; it is not necessarily the case that the usurpatory text has not been installed within the rights of reality, but that these rights have yet to be *ratified*. The usurpatory liberation of the text from the origin *could* be a situation which has already been attained, yet in the absence of the origin, and thus in the absence of any apparent usurpation of this origin, this attainment could no more be affirmed than the pre-discursive origin itself, that which is *no less* of a possibility than the usurpation. Such a lack of awareness of the usurpation is exhibited by the narrator of Texts for Nothing: “Ah, says I, punctually, if only I could say, There’s a way out there, there’s a way out somewhere, then all would be said, it would be the first step on the long travelling road” (137). The narrator, apparently, *has* uttered the ‘password’ “[t]here’s a way out of here” thus implying that he has taken “the first step on the long travelling road”. Yet clearly this narrator can no more verify that he has taken this “first step” through which the text usurps the origin, than he can verify the possibility that he is still implicated *within* the origin: the origin always returns as an undeniable possibility, leading to the incessant pre-natalità which his subsequent remarks imply:

Would I know where I came from, no, I’d have a mother, I’d have had a mother, and what I came out of, with what pain, no, I’d have forgotten, what is it makes me say that, what is it makes me say this, whatever it is makes me say all, and it’s not certain, not certain the way a mother would be certain. . . . Yes, I’d have a mother, I’d have a tomb, I wouldn’t have come out of here,

one doesn't come out of here, here are my tomb and my mother, its all here this evening, I'm dead and getting born, without having ended, helpless to begin, that's my life. (Texts for Nothing 138)

Again we see a suggestion here that the text is the product of the origin's hylomorphic attempts to actualise itself, finally differing from itself that it can bring what it currently unspeakably *is* into being; the narrator desires to *escape* the beginning that he can verify that he has *begun*: "I'd have a mother, I'd *have had* a mother". Nevertheless, the narrator can never verify that he has escaped the origin because he usurps this origin in the *act* of escaping it, having never experienced this origin that its usurpation can be affirmed: ". . . I'd have had a mother, and what I came out of, with what pain, no, I'd have forgotten . . .". Clearly it is not merely the origin which is forgotten here but the usurpation of the origin, that which allows his mother to re-assert her potential presence. Similarly, the identification of womb with tomb is suggestive of the manner in which this escape can never be verified. The narrator is *always already* "dead and getting born" in that his conception of himself has already given way, and incessantly gives way, to the origin: he has been murdered before he has been born. Again, the image has never been verifiably subtracted from its origin that it can supplant it, or rather, if we *assume* that this supplantation has occurred then this supplantation would not be recalled: our assumption that this supplantation has occurred is *always* a mere assumption.

What Beckett's allusions to pre-natality reveal then, are two inescapable yet irresolvable possibilities, the possibility that the usurpation has already occurred and the possibility that the usurpation has *yet* to occur, the possibility that the text *has* escaped the origin and the possibility that it is still *implicated* within the origin. The former possibility always gives way to the latter:

. . . I invented it all, in the hope it would console me, help me to go on, allow me to think of myself as somewhere on a road, moving, between a beginning

and an end, gaining ground, losing ground, getting lost, but somehow in the long run making headway. All lies. (Unnamable 316)

This quotation could easily be seen as a *précis* of Molloy, a novel which traces a single arc in the wave-like movement of textuality. Molloy's narrative is the most explicit example of the 'lie' which is "life on the surface" or "existence by proxy", a 'lie' which culminates in Molloy's admission that his "unreal journey" (Molloy 17), the very narrative that we are experiencing, has never occurred, it being "in the end . . . the story of the silence that he never left" (Unnamable 417):

Every time I say, I said this, or, I said that . . . or find myself to attribute to others intelligible words, or hear my own uttering to others more or less articulate sounds, I am merely complying with the convention that demands you either lie or hold your peace . . . in reality I said nothing at all . . . (Molloy 87-88)

The reason why Molloy's narrative is a 'lie' is, again, because Molloy is unable to refute the possibility that he is still implicated within the origin. Molloy may not be able to find his mother yet he acknowledges that his mother's elusive nature may be a result of his inability to differentiate himself *from* his mother: like Beckett, and the Unnamable's fictions, Molloy has been *conceived* but never born:

My mother. I don't think too harshly of her. I know she did all she could not to have me, except of course the one thing, and if she never succeeded in getting me unstuck, it was that fate had me earmarked me for less compassionate sewers. (Molloy 19)

This implies that Molloy is this origin's 'conception' of itself in the sense that he is the origin's self-image, an image which does not reflect the origin by virtue of the fact that Molloy has yet to differ from his origin that he *can* reflect it. The origin, therefore, has yet to be usurped by its representation, remaining in place as a potentiality, and the word potential here is used in its dual sense, for Molloy's mother is both his origin (that which potentially

already exists) and also his *telos* (that which has *yet* become actual). In other words Molloy is trying to give birth to his mother as an actuality, or rather, this origin is trying to hylomorphically give birth to itself both *via* and *as* the textual figure of Molloy, Molloy's "whole body", to quote Moran, being "a vociferation" (Molloy 114): ". . . when I appeared to give up and to busy myself with something else, or with nothing at all any more, in reality I was hatching my plans and seeking the way to her house. This is taking a queer turn" (Molloy 87). Molloy, therefore, is not only the origin's 'conception' of itself in the sense that he is the origin's self-image, but also in the sense that he constitutes the means through which the origin attempts to inseminate *itself* in order that it can finally be born through the act of self-representation/ self-differentiation. His journey or his "queer turn" (Molloy 87) is the means through which the origin attempts to *conceive* itself *via* the textual figure of Molloy, his narrative being the origin's autoerotic attempt to bring itself into being: ". . . was such an encounter possible, I mean between me and a woman? Now men, I have rubbed up against a few men in my time, but women? . . . I don't mean my mother. I did more than rub up against her" (Molloy 56). The origin thus has intercourse with itself *via* a text which has never differed from the origin: as Molloy asserts, he will "have occasion" to describe his mother's room once this self-copulation is complete: ". . . later perhaps. When I seek refuge there, beat to the world, all shame drunk, my prick in my rectum, who knows. Good. Now that we know where we're going, let's go there" (Molloy 19). Yet even if this usurpation/ birth *does* occur or *has* occurred, this fact cannot be affirmed:

. . . I fail to see, never having left my region, what right I have to speak of its characteristics. No, I never escaped . . . On the other hand, if it is true that regions gradually merge into one another, and this remains to be proved, then I will have left my region many times, thinking I was still within it. But I preferred to abide by my simple feeling and its voice that said, Molloy, your region is vast, you have never left it and you never shall. (Molloy 65)

If the narrator can forget such an escape from the origin by virtue of the fact that any self-differentiation supplants and erases the origin, then, equally, the narrator is forgetting that he *has* escaped the origin. He is unable to recognise or verify that he has *already* “left” his “region”, in precisely the same manner that he cannot verify that he has ever escaped his mother. It is precisely his inability to *find* his mother which reconfirms the possibility that he has never *left* her, this lack of verification ultimately being the means through which the origin pharmaceutically ‘poisons’ Molloy as this incessantly potential reality, this immanence, reasserts itself *as* a possibility. Again, Molloy, the origin’s self-conception, is murdered before he is born, ultimately returning to the ‘conclusion’ which is his non-substantial origin, to the “mess”: “. . . doubtless she had poisoned my beer with some thing intended to mollify me, to mollify Molloy, with the result that I was nothing more than a lump of melting wax, so to speak” (Molloy 47). Again, the evanescence of language allows the possibility which is the origin to reassert itself, the free-play of textuality always being balanced and checked by this unverifiable yet irrefutable stasis of this origin, the potentiality to which the narrator inescapably returns:

. . . in me there have always been two fools, among others, one asking nothing better than to stay where he is and the other imagining that life might be slightly less horrible a little further on. . . . And these inseparable fools I indulged in turn about, that they might understand their foolishness. (Molloy 48)

Consequently, it is not merely the case that there has never been an origin (although, following Aristotle, we must recognise that this origin has never been, and has always *yet* to become actual), rather there has never been a verifiable usurpation of the origin. Molloy’s journey is undone, revealed to have *never* occurred as a result of the fact that he “had never succeeded in liquidating the matter of my mother” (Molloy 87), his mother being the silent origin that he has never left, that which has never *spoken* Molloy and which has never spoken

or actualised itself *as* Molloy: “And the cycle continues, joltingly, of flight and bivouac, in an Egypt without bound, without infant, without mother” (Molloy 66):

. . . everytime I say, I said this, or speak of a voice saying . . . Molloy, and then a fine phrase more or less clear and simple, or find myself compelled to attribute to others more or less articulate sounds, I am merely complying with the convention that demands you either lie or hold your peace. . . . In reality I said nothing at all, but I heard a murmur, something gone wrong with the silence. . . . sometimes there arose within me, confusedly, a kind of consciousness, which I express by saying, I said etc. . . . Or which I express without sinking to the level of oratio recta, but by means of other figures quite as deceitful, as for example, It seemed to me that, etc., or, I had the impression that, etc, for it seemed to me nothing at all, and I had no impression of any kind, but simply somewhere something had changed, so that I too had to change, or the world too had to change, in order for nothing to be changed. (Molloy 88)

Again, these final words reflect the Aristotelian contention that the ‘actualisation’ of matter is, from one perspective, not a “change at all (for the progression that occurs is towards the thing itself and towards its actuality)”. Molloy’s textual “progression” is the origin’s movement towards itself and towards its actuality even as, like matter, this origin never becomes actual, remaining the potentiality which is incessantly leaves its trace in actuality, the unchanging origin which undoes any usurpation. Consequently, Molloy is a mere *proxy*, “embryonic, undeveloped . . . a self that might have been but never got born, an *être manqué*”. He is only *other* to his mother in the same sense that any formal actualisation of matter is *other* to matter, this “destruction by the opposite” always being “rather a preservation of what is in potentiality by what is in actuality”. Moran subsequently implies that Molloy bears this trace of this immanence which innapprehensibly exists but which has never been actual:

Mother Molloy . . . was not completely foreign to me either, it seemed. But she was much less alive than her son, who God knows was far from being so. After all perhaps I knew nothing of mother Molloy . . . save in so far as such a son might bear, like a scurf of placenta, her stamp. . . . I shall say briefly what little I did know about him. . . . He had very little room. His time too was

limited. He hastened incessantly on, as if in despair, towards very close objectives. Now a prisoner, he hurled himself at I know not what narrow confines . . . (Molloy 113)

As this suggests, Molloy is not the supplement which has usurped the origin, but is, rather, “a prisoner, frantic with corporeality, rearing to get out and away” (Texts for Nothing 123), hastening “incessantly on . . . towards very close objectives” as he incessantly attempts to finally *escape* the putative origin in which he is inapprehensibly involved in order that this origin can be actualised, or rather as the origin attempts to escape itself *via* Molloy that it can finally actualise *itself*. However, each attempt to actualise the origin contains the seeds of its own undoing: “. . . it’s still the same old road I’m trudging up . . . towards one yet to be named, so that he may leave me in peace, be in peace, be no more, have never been” (Texts for Nothing 144).

Overall, what this suggests is that the usurpation of the origin by its supplement, for Beckett, is constantly in process and is never complete, or rather, even if it is complete, this fact cannot be affirmed, the origin continuing to assert its status as a possibility in spite of this usurpation. The very ‘absence’ of the origin incessantly implies the possibility of this origin’s immanence, the absence of a beginning incessantly implying an inability to pass beyond the beginning that this beginning can be affirmed. As Beckett asserts in relation to Molloy “– *I had to eliminate all the poisons. . .*” (Juliet 140); yet as he acknowledges in Ill Seen Ill Said the poison, the origin which has never been actual, cannot be erased precisely *because* it has never been actual, “- [n]egation” being “*no more possible than affirmation*” (Juliet 165):

Illumination then go again and on return no more trace. On earth’s face. Of what was never. And if by mishap some left then go again. For good again. So on. Till no more trace. On earth’s face. Instead of always the same place. Slaving away forever in the same place. At this and that trace. And what if the eye could not? No more tear itself away from the remains of trace. Of what was never. (Ill Seen Ill Said 96)

Clearly, therefore, the post-structuralist contention that there is not, nor has ever been, an origin to textuality is always premature, the *possibility* of the origin incessantly deferring any usurpatory ‘birth’ of textuality. Nevertheless, we must also emphasise that the origin, and thus the whole ‘pre-natal’ paradigm that we have outlined, *remains* a mere possibility. We should recall Beckett’s assertion that “[t]he key word in my plays is ‘perhaps’” (Driver 220) when he says that “the void. . . . is *perhaps* simply the obliteration of an unbearable presence, unbearable because neither to be wooed nor to be stormed” (“Three Dialogues 140) . This hylomorphic paradigm, however, remains an inescapable possibility even as it *permits* its correlate Derridean possibility. The important point, however, is that Beckett’s allusions to pre-natality reduce the Derridean hypothesis *to* a possibility, a potentiality which, in the apparent absence of any origin, cannot be affirmed or denied, all “affirmations and negations” being “invalidated as uttered” (Unnamable 294). This possibility, of course, remains inhabited by the possibility of the origin, a possibility that Beckett acknowledges in his allusions to pre-natality. Even though the Beckettian text *permits* a Derridean reading, therefore, one cannot assert that these texts conform to the post-structural tenet that the text has no origin or that textuality has been installed within the rights of reality. Such claims cannot be accepted as long as the possibility of the origin remains in place, this being the possibility which incessantly poisons the text, *preventing* its installation within the rights of reality: “Such the confusion between real and – how say its contrary? No matter. That old tandem. Such confusion between them once so twain. . . . No matter now. Such equal liars both. Real and – how ill say its contrary? The counter-poison” (Ill Seen Ill Said 82).

Again this radical indeterminacy can be seen as a reflection of Aristotelian theory, it also being the case that the Aristotelian conception of textuality facilitates Derridean theory. We must note that within Aristotle’s hylomorphic paradigm, matter is continually assigned the status of a potentiality, it being *implicit* in this that matter *may* or *may not* exist. This is

affirmed when we recollect that it is precisely matter's inability to possess the quality of 'thisness' which sustains the hylomorphic process of becoming: it is this lack of affirmation which sustains the hylomorphic movement, the actualisation of the potentiality which is matter. In this Aristotle *permits* a deconstructive reading, this lack of affirmation implicitly allowing for the possibility that this origin may not exist. Indeed, one can see Aristotle's acceptance of substantiality or 'thisness' as the criterion of actuality (and his concomitant suggestion that matter is not and can never be *actual*) as being analogous to the installation of textuality within the rights of reality. Aristotle thus accepts the possibility that there has never been a usurpation of the origin in the same way as Derrida, matter having never been installed within these rights, the material origin having never *been* actual. That this actuality is constantly deferred in the hylomorphic process of becoming is the very reason why matter incessantly *remains* a mere potentiality; this is why substance *can* be accepted as the criterion of actuality, being ontologically prior to matter in the same way that representation, for Derrida, is ontologically prior to reality. Yet if Aristotle accepts the *possibility* that there has never been a usurpation of the origin and implicitly acknowledges this in accepting substance's claim to the rights to reality, he does not do so because he believes that such an origin does not exist but because he is aware that this origin can never be actualised or existentially verified. The possibility of such a material origin is retained because, as Aristotle was aware, any recognition of the possibility that there has never been a usurpation of the origin in the Derridean sense (in the sense that this usurpation has *always already* occurred) always and equally implies the possibility that there has never been a usurpation in the sense that *the origin yet to be usurped*, this being a possibility which cannot be avoided: this, indeed, is the "preservation of what is in potentiality by what is in actuality", the retention of the material origin as a potentiality in the act of "destruction" by the imposition of form. Aristotle may concur with the Derridean installation of the text within the rights of

reality in accepting substantiality as the criterion of actuality, and yet this actuality remains a *mode of potentiality*, this actuality being the *process* of matter's self-actualisation: “. . . change is the actuality of that which exists potentially, in so far as it is potentially this actuality” (Physics III.i.57). That this actualisation of matter cannot *finally* occur does not negate the possibility that it *is* occurring in the same way that the Beckettian origin's inability to give birth to itself does not negate the possibility that this origin is incessantly *being* born: that it cannot finally occur explains why Aristotle can accept substantiality as actuality, while that it *is* occurring explains how he can simultaneously accept this actuality is a mode of potentiality, actuality being the potentiality *of* matter. This substantial mode of potentiality, therefore, is always inhabited by its correlate potentiality, that of the material origin in which remains implicated, a possibility that this 'text' cannot finally refute or resolve.

What Beckett's remarks and this hylomorphic view indicate, therefore, is that post-structuralist readings which unequivocally accept that there has been a usurpation of the origin, or refuse to admit the possibility of a pre-discursive origin, are *partial* readings, as is implied by H. Porter Abbott's assertion that allusions to pre-natality are “usually ignored”. They acknowledge only *one* possibility, and when there is only one possibility we have certainty, *affirmation*. Such certainty is implicit in Derrida's contention that the origin has always already been usurped, and that the text has been installed within the rights of reality. Yet in spite of this it is evident that the radical indeterminacy of the Beckettian text interrogates this contention: in permitting the *possibility* of the subject's pre-natal status, Beckett is implicitly asking the fundamental question of how we can *know* that the origin has always already been usurped in the absence *of* this usurpation. Is not this usurpation, and thus the text's entitlement to the rights to reality, as much of an assumption as the pre-discursive origin itself? A *non-transcendental* assumption? Does not the absence of any usurpation equally imply the possibility that the text has *yet* to be usurped, that the origin has yet to

become actual because it has *never* differed from itself? These questions, and these possibilities, are not merely epistemological for they are posed by the mode of potentiality which is textuality itself, having a functional effect in Beckettian textuality in the same manner that the ambiguity of matter has a functional effect in Aristotelian hylomorphism: “. . . all these questions I ask myself. It is not in the spirit of curiosity. I cannot be silent. About myself I need know nothing. Here all is clear. No, all is not clear. But the discourse must go on. So one invents obscurities. Rhetoric” (Unnamable 296). It is these questions which are “usually ignored” in post-structuralist readings of Beckett which fail to appreciate either the manner in which these questions *haunt* the Beckettian text or that Derrida’s theories are, as Beckettian textuality demonstrates, *theoretical*: “Questions, hypotheses, call them that.” (Unnamable 293).

7

INVENTING THE MESS: THE INFINITE BODY

The unwillingness of post-structuralist interpreters to acknowledge the pre-natal status of Beckettian textuality stems, no doubt, from the contradiction between an infinite process of textuality and the notion of the limit. The infinite, by definition it would seem, brooks no exterior limit. Indeed, Derrida frequently enacts *any* pre-discursive reality as a limit to the infinitude, thus implying that the infinitude and limits are mutually exclusive possibilities, hence his assertion that “. . . the text overruns all the limits assigned to it . . . all the limits, everything that was to be set up in opposition to writing (speech, life, the world, the real, history and what not . . .)” (“Living On - Border Lines” 257). Derrida defines factors such as “speech” and “the real” as limits to the infinitude of the text, and it is, therefore, *Derrida* who sets these extra-discursive factors “in opposition to writing”, only to

advocate one side of this opposition. Beckett, on the other hand, advocates *both* sides of this opposition, for while his texts constantly admit their own infinitude, he realises that this does not mean that the text is without limits. Molloy, for example, echoes Wittgenstein's assertion that the "metaphysical subject" is "the limit of the world – not a part of it" (*Tractatus* 5.641) in admitting infinitude while simultaneously acknowledging the possibility of a 'self' which escapes this infinitude: ". . . the resources of nature are infinite apparently. It was I who was not natural enough to enter into that order of things, and appreciate its niceties" (*Molloy* 44). Underlying this apparent contradiction is Beckett's knowledge that the physicality of the body itself can be seen as infinite, for while Molloy asserts that "the limits of my region were unknown to me" (*Molloy* 65) and that he abides "by my simple feeling and its voice that said, Molloy, your region is vast, you have never left it and you never shall" (*Molloy* 65), he nevertheless adds that "the confines of my room, of my bed, of my body, are as remote from me as were those of my region" (*Molloy* 66). In continuing to admit the possibility of the body (albeit an *unnameable* body), Beckett acknowledges the difference between *infinitude* and *limitlessness*. Beckett accepts the possibility that the text is not infinite in the sense that it has *no* limits but in that sense that it is infinitely *divisible*: "There it is then divided into five, the time that remains. Into five what? I don't know. Everything divides into itself, I suppose" (*Malone* 182). Such an infinite divisibility within the totalised space of the body allows for both an infinite text that apparently brooks no exterior limit and a physicality that escapes this text, a limit which is never apprehended. This is reading is supported by Beckett's 1949 remark that the history of art is a history of its attempts to escape a

. . . sense of failure, by means of more authentic, more ample, less exclusive relations between representer and representee, in a kind of tropism towards a light as to the nature of which the best opinions continue to vary, and with a kind of Pythagorean terror, as though the irrationality of pi were an offence against the deity, not to mention his creature. ("Three Dialogues" 145)

Beckett enacts the totality of the relation between the representer and the representee in terms of the irrational, infinite, number π ³³ (3.142857 *ad infinitum*) a number which may be infinite yet enacts an infinite process of division, being infinitely *entropic*. π is both a discrete or limited number (never, for example, reaching the limit 3.15) *and* an infinite number, constantly approaching yet never reaching this limit. This reflects the manner in which the enunciator/ representer constantly attempts to approach his own mysterious reality through the deictic text, yet never attains this limit by virtue of the infinite and entropic divisibility of the text, deixis *constituting* this infinite process of division/entropy. As Molloy ironically asserts in drawing an analogy between π and textuality: “. . . to know you are beyond knowing anything, that is when peace enters in, to the soul of the incurious seeker. It is then the true division begins, of twenty-two by seven . . . and the pages fill with the true ciphers at last” (Molloy 64)³⁴. The text infinitely disseminates itself by deictically supplementing itself in relation to the text’s unnameable limit, a putative totality which it infinitely *approaches*, this expansion simultaneously being perceived as an entropic process of *compression* in relation to this limit:

It’s of me now I must speak, even if I have to do it with their language. . . . having to speak . . . of things that don’t concern me . . . that I don’t believe, that they have crammed me full of to prevent me from saying who I am. . . . They’ve blown me up with their voices, like a balloon, and even as I collapse it’s them I hear. (Unnamable 326-27)

This relationship between the infinite and the limit clearly derives from the paradoxes of Zeno of Elea. As the number π must infinitely expand in order to denote infinite entropy, an infinite process of division, Zeno’s paradox enacts a limit that is *infinitely* approached, yet is never attained by virtue of this process of entropy or self-division. In approaching a given point an object must cover half the distance to that point, the half the distance left, then half of that distance, and so on *ad infinitum*. Watt, for example, is clearly speaking from the

position of this limit or 'given point' as he waits for the mysterious figure which approaches him at the station to finally reach him. The figure decreases in size in inverse ratio *to* this approach:

. . . in the ten minutes or half an hour that had elapsed, since he first became aware of this figure, striding along, on the crest of the road, towards the station, the figure had gained nothing in height, in breadth or in distinctness. Pressing forward all this time, with no abatement of its foundered precipitation, towards the station, it had made no more headway, than if it had been a millstone.

Watt was puzzling over this when the figure, without any interruption of its motions, grew fainter and fainter, and finally disappeared. (Watt 227)

This expansion/ compression in relation to a limit is recurrent in Beckett's work: Molloy, for example, foreshadows the Unnamable's expansion/ compression and his desire to push this process to its limit by carrying "this process of compression to the point of abandoning all other postulates than that of a deaf halfwit, hearing nothing of what he says and understanding even less" (Unnamable 394). Molloy desires

. . . to know . . . the laws of the mind perhaps, of my mind, that for example water rises in proportion as it drowns you and you would do better, at least no worse, to obliterate texts than to blacken margins, to fill the holes of words till all is blank and flat and the whole ghastly business looks like what it is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery. . . (Molloy 13)

Clearly, in this context, this physicality is not so much a limit that is *overcome* by the text as a limit which is never *reached* by the text in spite of its infinitude. For Beckett, the expansion of the text occurs within in a given space as discourse deictically supplements itself in relation to the material limits that it attempts to apprehend, "for it's the end gives the meaning to words" (Texts for Nothing 131). It is this space which contains and limits infinitude: "The longer he lives and so the smaller they grow, the reasoning being the fuller he fills the space and so on . . ." (All Strange Away 169).

Obviously, this raises the question of whether one can validly refer to such a limit *as* a 'limit': can one, for example refer to the number 3.15 as a *limit* to the infinitude of *pi*? To some extent this question remains academic, being a question of terminology which does not effect the validity of the Beckettian paradigm: the pertinent point is that such an infinitude is *discrete*, the narrator's inability to finally refute the inalienable *possibility* of such a 'limit' being the potentiality which constantly contests the hegemony of the text, its final installation within the 'rights of reality'. Conversely, one can ask whether *pi* (and, analogously, the general text) can validly be referred to as an 'infinitude' if one accepts that 3.15 *is* a limit or that this 'infinitude' *is* discrete. The possibility which is raised here is that textuality is infinite in the sense that *pi* is infinite, being infinite in the sense that it is *inexhaustible* rather than in the sense that it has an infinite *extension* which comprehends everything, a distinction which means that the infinite text can continually tolerate the possibility of an extra-discursive reality: "Elsewhere perhaps, by all means, elsewhere, what elsewhere can there be to this infinite here? I know, if my head could think I'd find a way out, in my head, like so many others, and out of worse than this, the world would be there again . . ." (Texts for Nothing 123). The Beckettian narrator, therefore, may be incessantly running, but as he frequently reveals, he is going nowhere, being trapped in this "infinite here": ". . . I have to speak. . . . nothing . . . can lessen what remains to say, I have the ocean to drink" (Unnamable 316). Evidently, in drawing the analogy between *pi* and textuality, Beckett reveals his refusal to infer that the text can be installed within the rights of reality on the basis of its infinitude, the infinitude in question relating to the text's *inexhaustible* yet *discrete* nature rather than to any hegemonic/ textual ability to 'usurp' reality: again reality remains in place as a potentiality.

In this light it is evident that the unverifiable space of the body is not merely the *telos* which the Beckettian text seeks to attain, the limit that the text incessantly approaches as it

attempts to actualise this body; it is also the conceptual space from which signification is constantly sublimated, the potentiality or the materiality which is constantly actualised as the substances which are Beckett's fictions. Beckett frequently acknowledges this in his use of the word 'invent', a word which implies both the production of a fiction (i.e. of the inventions which are Beckett's characters) and inhilation (to *in-vent*), the sublimation of this limiting reality into the discourse *as* a fiction, (i.e. the in-ventions which are fictions *of* the unnameable figure, 'Samuel Beckett'): "About myself I need know nothing. Here all is clear. No, all is not clear. But the discourse must go on. So one invents obscurities" (Unnamable 296). The word 'invent' is carefully poised between fiction and reality, the word "obscurities" referring either to the fictions of the self which are constantly *created* in the process of textuality, the signifiers with which the Unnamable is "crammed . . . full of to prevent me from saying who I am . . ." (Unnamable 327) *or* to the mysterious reality of the 'I' which underlies and is *obscured* by these fictions. It is the latter which the text constantly attempts to finally in-vent, to finally *draw into* the discourse in order that it can be linguistically affirmed, a process which leads only to another fiction, to an invention rather than an in-vention. Clearly, this process of invention bears comparison to the textual *credit* that Nietzsche assigns to the potentiality which is his body, that which produces the fiction of Zarathustra and constantly sustains the textual process of self-overcoming. One should also note the Aristotelian influence here, the manner in which any actualisation of this potentiality leaves this potentiality in place. One cannot "*invent* obscurities" for to invent is to bestow form and demythologise this obscurity: the obscurity remains in place in spite of the fact that it has been 'in-vented', a realisation which no doubt underlies Christopher Rick's assertion that Beckett is "never so complacent as to deny the existence of "'the without', 'impregnable' as it yet fertiley is" (151).

Nevertheless, in making these attempts this obscure reality *is* in-vented for each attempt produces fictions, sublimations of linguistically non-existent reality, in-vention being “the conjuring of something out of nothing” (Company 43). Malone, for example, acknowledges in his own “inventory” that this incessant desire to finish his writing and thus end textuality also constitutes a desire to finally *in-vent* this reality in which he is inapprehensibly (i.e. deictically) involved, allowing his text to validly refer to its own totality. He wishes to draw this reality into the discourse for it is only in doing so that he can apprehend and totalise his own existence, affirming the very life in which he is involved: “. . . gravely I struggled to be no more, to live, to invent, I know what I mean. . . . I say living without knowing what it is” (Malone 195). Similarly, one can appreciate the nature of ‘in-vention’ if one compares the assertion “. . . I invent nothing . . .” in Texts for Nothing with Watt’s assertion that “. . . the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something . . .” (Watt 74). As Watt asserts: “. . .to elicit something from nothing requires a certain skill . . .” (Watt 74). This ‘something’ which is elicited from nothing is always a meaningful signifier, a signifier which is not opposed to *non-existence* but to that which is meaningless, in-vention being a process of “foisting a meaning . . . where no meaning appeared . . .” (Watt 74). As Watt asserts in relation to the “incident of the galls” (Watt 73): “. . . a thing that was nothing had happened, with the utmost formal distinctness . . .” (Watt 73). In the same manner that Watt’s meaningful interpretations of this “nothing” are “in reality the same incident variously interpreted”, Beckett’s fictions are elicited from (or *in-vented* from) the conceptual space that is “Samuel Beckett”. As the narrator of Murphy asserts in referring to both Democritus’ famous assertion that “nothing is more real than nothing” and the Aristotelian “prime mover”, Murphy ultimately finds,

. . . the positive peace that comes when the somethings give way, or perhaps simply add up to the Nothing, that which in the guffaw of the Abderite naught is more real. Time did not cease . . . but the big wheel of rounds and pauses

did, as Murphy . . . continued to suck in, through all the posterns of his withered soul, the accidentless One-and-Only, conveniently called Nothing. (138)

The textual process, therefore, only sustains itself as a constant in-vention of the “Nothing”, or rather, the reality which is always ‘nothing’ by virtue of the fact that it cannot be named, or finally in-vented. Beckett constantly utilises the word ‘nothing’ as a means of ironically “referring” to this unnameable reality: the words “. . . I need nothing . . .” (Texts for Nothing 100), for example, do not simply imply that the narrator is content with his situation, they imply that “nothing” is that which has *yet* to be apprehended, the “obscurity” which has *yet* to be invented, and thus that this reality is only “nothing” by virtue of the fact that it has *yet* to be linguistically actualised. Similarly, the Unnamable’s desire to “say nothing” (Unnamable 378) is not necessarily a desire for silence, but a desire to *break* the silence, to deictically refer to the reality of his ‘own’ speech so that this speech act can be *said* to have actually occurred. He wishes to literally *say* this “nothing” so that he can finally come into being: “. . . I have to speak. No one compels me to. . . . Nothing can ever exempt me from it, there is nothing, nothing to discover, nothing to recover . . .” (The Unnamable 316).

In The Unnamable this notion of invention is applied to the reading process in order that the limits of the text, the space of potentiality or the “nothing” in which the text remains implicated, can be exteriorised. Beckett attempts to admit the “mess” of reality which “invades our experience at every moment” into the reading experience *via* the process of in-vention, for “[i]t is there and it must be allowed in. . . . To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now” (Driver 219)³⁵. The Unnamable’s world is produced by the constant process of in-venting his own ineffability, an operation which meiotically divides the *totality* of awareness and text into its constituent forms, as one fiction gives rise to another, breaking the total form of ‘reality’, into more and more meaningful elements.

It's of me now I must speak, even if I have to do it with their language... having to speak... of things that don't concern me . . . that I don't believe, that they have crammed me full of to prevent me from saying who I am . . . They've blown me up with their voices, like a balloon, and even as I collapse it's them I hear. (Unnamable 326-27)

Beckett applies this process of in-vention, of entropic expansion/ compression to every level of the text, although, within the reading situation, it is exhaustible in terms of language's capacity to accommodate these textual 'in-ventions'. The minimal division capable of generating meaning by differing from itself is that between letters, the 'next level' up, the *word*³⁶, being the minimal unit of meaning:

I'm all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their settling, no sky for their dispersing, coming together to say, fleeing one another to say, that I am they, all of them, those that merge, those that part, those that never meet, and nothing else . . . (Unnamable 390)

The maximum division, is that between the text and the reader. The text itself is the 'next lower' unit capable of generating meaning by differing from itself³⁷, our perception of the meaningless 'reality' of the text, differing from our meaningful interpretation of this text. As the Unnamable cannot deictically speak his totalised *self*, we cannot 'speak' the totality of the reading experience since we are deictically bound up in that experience: "But credit where credit is due, we made a balls of it between us, I with my signs and she with her reading of them. This story is no good, I'm beginning almost to believe it" (Unnamable 332). Within this space, meaning is steadily produced and condensed into the speaker's words through the process of in-vention, of expansion/ compression, until it begins to reach these limits of language, enacting the space "where language dies that permits such expressions" (Unnamable 337). The lower limit of meaning is the word, the word 'nothing', for example, being the most obvious victim of the over-determination of meaning which exteriorises the limits of this space. Through continual reiteration, the word accrues a more and more

meaning, a process which merely accentuates the falsity of the word itself, it being difficult not to read it as referring to a 'thing' rather than 'no-thing':

. . . that's right, reiterate, that helps you on, open on what, there is nothing else, only it, open on the void, open on the nothing . . . I see nothing, it's because there is nothing . . . but do I really see nothing, it's not the moment to tell a lie, but how can you not tell a lie . . . I say I see nothing, or I say it's all in my head . . . that came to nothing, I see nothing, either because of this or else on account of that. . . (Unnamable 414-415)

As the meaningful 'figure' of this word is emphasised through reiteration its 'ground' is simultaneously exteriorised: we become alert to the falsity if this word's meaningful status, reading the word 'nothing' for what it does *not* denote, the unnamable "howling behind my dissertation" (Unnamable 317):

This voice that speaks, knowing that it lies, indifferent to what it says, too old perhaps and too abased ever to succeed in saying the words that would be its last, knowing itself useless and its uselessness in vain, not listening to itself but to the silence that it breaks . . . (Unnamable 309)

The word *displays* rather than denotes, what it is not, at least to the limits of possibility: "And I speak of voices! After all, why not, so long as one knows it's untrue. But there are limits, it appears" (Unnamable 338).

Simultaneously, meaning expands into the whole text because of the exhaustive nature of its production. The text becomes so meaning laden that we begin, as readers, to discern its vacuousness. Meaning becomes more and more impenetrable, as more and more language is crammed into the work: "Carry if necessary this process of compression to the point of abandoning all other postulates than that of a deaf halfwit, hearing nothing of what he says and understanding even less" (Unnamable 394). As Alfred Alvarez has stated: "However inexhaustible a mother lode for quarrying academics the book may be, for the ordinary, even devoted reader, The Unnamable gets perilously close to being the Unreadable" (63). As the

text intensifies, it begins to disregard grammatical form in order to accommodate more and more meaning, more and more of the voice. Accordingly, the reader begins to 'skim' the text, "hearing nothing of what it says and understanding even less". As in the case of the word 'nothing', the overloading of language permits us to experience the 'space' in which the text is implicated, the 'other' which repudiates meaning while underpinning its existence. As John Calder asserts: "After the opening pages there are no paragraphs, and as the work approaches the end with increasing speed, there are no full stops, only commas indicate the swift intake of breath before pushing out the next phrase" (32). The text begins to reach its semantic limits thus exteriorising its 'key-word':

Perhaps I've missed the key-word to the whole business. I wouldn't have understood it, but I would have said it, that's all that's required . . .
(Unnamable 372)

I have no explanations to offer, none to demand, the comma will come where I'll drown for good, then the silence . . . (Unnamable 413)

Unlike the word, the comma is a signifier that presents its own meaninglessness, enacting the silence of a voice that is still implicated in an origin that is constantly in-vented. One cannot 'say' a grammatical mark, just as we cannot 'say' the nothing that we *are*:

. . . how can you think and speak at the same time, without a special gift, your thoughts wander, your words too, far apart, no, that's an exaggeration, apart, between them would be the place to be, where you suffer, rejoice, at being bereft of speech, bereft of thought, and feel nothing, hear nothing, know nothing, say nothing, are nothing, that would be a blessed place to be, where you are. (Unnamable 377-78)

Nonetheless, as readers, we can *see* this meaningless mark and that it bears no relation to the meaning *within* the text, except as a signifier of absence, that which is 'said' in between words. What this mark actually signifies is the space between words, the space from which meaning is sublimated:

I'm all these words . . . and nothing else, yes, something else, that I'm something quite different, a quite different thing, a wordless thing in an empty place, a hard shut dry cold black place, where nothing stirs, nothing speaks, and that I listen, and that I seek . . . (Unnamable 390)

Yet even though the frequency of the 'key-word' increases on a textual level, representing the 'lowest' semantic limits to which the text can push itself beyond the word, its significance does not lie on this level alone, and is not specifically highlighted on this level:

. . . I am words among words, or silence in the midst of silence, to recall only two of the hypotheses launched in this connection, though silence to tell the truth does not appear to have been very conspicuous up to now, but appearances may sometimes be deceptive. (Unnamable 392)

The space that the comma represents becomes significant in terms of the 'highest' form to the text, the form of the reading experience itself³⁸. When read out loud, we cannot fail to become aware of the "groaning of the air beneath the burden" (Unnamable 358)³⁹, an awareness which is accentuated, in our consciousness, by the manner in which the semantically overdriven voice negates its own meaning by pushing itself to the limits of comprehensibility. The voice, in combination with the breathing becomes a stream of almost meaningless, continual, noise:

Words, he says he knows they are words. But how can he know, who has never heard anything else? True. Not to mention other things, many others to which the abundance of matter has unfortunately up to now prohibited the least allusion. For example, to begin with, his breathing. (Unnamable 358)

Paradoxically, "These little pauses are a poor trick too. When they go silent so do I" (Unnamable 371). Breathing, like the comma, refutes meaning, the word 'breathe' being inapplicable: "More lies, he doesn't breathe yet, he'll never breathe. Then what is this faint noise, as of air stealthily stirred, recalling the breath of life, to those whom it corrodes?" (Unnamable 358). The 'breath', as reality, sustains the existence of linguistic meaning, and

yet negates an apprehension of itself because it is beyond meaning, even though we are unable to be *unaware* of it:

But what calm, apart from the discourse, not a breath, it's suspicious, the calm that precedes life, no, no, not all this time, it's like slime, paradise, it would be paradise, but for this noise, it's life trying to get in, no, trying to get him out, or little bubbles bursting all around, no, there's no air here, air is to make you choke . . . (Unnamable 367-8)

We thus experience the "air" of reality, which "chokes" us since it repudiates meaning, and the "air" of meaning which "chokes" us since it repudiates reality. The text heightens our awareness of the "noise" by reducing the voice to "noise", and concurrently heightens the consciousness of our inability to reconcile the two: "It is strange they do not go and fetch him in his den, since they seem to have access to it. They dare not, the air in the midst of which he lies is not for them, and yet they want him to breathe theirs" (Unnamable 361).

This reflects back onto this textual level, for the comma cannot actually be represented as a meaningful phenomenon, even though it forces us to *acknowledge* the (non)existence of the absence it signifies. What it actually highlights is the *gap*, the material whiteness of the paper on either side of it, this whiteness being as indispensable to the text's existence as the ink that constitutes it. The *totality* cannot be simultaneously grasped for we can only see white on black or vice versa: "If it's not white it's very likely black, it must be admitted the method lacks subtlety, in view of the intermediate shades all worthy of a chance" (Unnamable 377). The *grey*, the forms that we posit between the limits of language, is as fictional as the narrator's hypotheses:

. . . light is to close your eyes, that's where he must go, where its never dark, but here it's never dark either, yes, here it's dark, it's they who make this grey, with their lamps. (Unnamable 368)

. . . hell, I've contradicted myself, no matter. (Unnamable 402)

As textual or vocal meaning becomes intensified, these unattainable, unavoidable points of (un)conscious reality begin to manifest themselves with increasing frequency. It is these points which are “the only chance” that we “have of going silent, or of saying something that is not false” (Unnamable 324), or of finding a form which “admits the chaos and does not try to say that it is something else” (Driver 219). Beckett is, therefore, endeavouring to extend the minimum and the maximum units of meaning, from word and text, to grammar and reading experience. The ‘lowest’ unit of meaning, the comma and the ‘highest’ unit, the reading experience, are brought together at the end of the text, each propelled by the over determination of meaning, as the materiality of the comma and the materiality of our breathing become *almost* synonymous in consciousness:

The maxima and the minima of particular contraries are one and indifferent. Minimal heat equals minimal cold. Consequently transmutations are circular. The principle (minimum) of one contrary takes its movement from the principle (maximum) of one another. (“Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce” 21)

The circle remains incomplete since we must still concede that we cannot ‘say’ the material whiteness of the text that the black ink alerts us to, or the silence of consciousness that our breathing alerts us to. The circle never completely encompasses the infinitude of the real:

At no moment do I know what I’m talking about, nor of whom, nor of where, nor how, nor why, but I could employ fifty wretches for this sinister operation and still be short of a fifty-first to close the circuit, that I know, without knowing what it means. (Unnamable 341)

Just as the title of Beckett’s work is the incomplete *nam(e)* set in the midst of the word *un-able*, the text illustrates that we are also incomplete within ourselves and are *unable* to grasp our own, genuine, totality. Even though Beckett can diminish this gap, this diminishment only confirms that this gap remains in place, sustaining the text, the process of

in-vention: "I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I'll go on." (Unnamable 418).

8

ILL SEEN ILL SAID AND THE ENCHANTMENTS OF REALITY

The Unnamable's attempt to apprehend the figure which is meaning as it is implicated in the ground which is reality clearly reflects Beckett's assertion that the "mess" of reality "invades our experience at every moment. It is there and it must be allowed in... the form . . . exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates. To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now" (Driver 219). One can, perhaps, divine the precise nature of this 'mess', and its relation to perception, when Beckett refers to it as "this buzzing confusion" (Driver 218) later in the interview. As well as recalling the status of the Unnamable's voice by the end of the novel, this phrase also occurs in his early novel Murphy. Neary asserts: "'Murphy, all life is figure and ground.' 'But a wandering to find home,' said Murphy. 'The face,' said Neary, 'or system of faces, against the big blooming buzzing confusion. I think of Miss Dwyer'" (6). The phrase itself, however, is ultimately derived from the theories of William James who utilised it in order to describe the raw sensory experience of a newborn child, its undifferentiated visualisation of the world before it learns to perceptually divide it into discrete objects (Westen 504). Yet if this division is enacted by the figure/ ground dichotomy which allows for Miss Dwyer to be meaningfully defined as "the single, brilliant, organised, compact blotch in the tumult of heterogeneous stimulation" (7) then it is notable that it is difficult to find a more apt enactment of the figure/ ground dichotomy than in our empirical experience of the printed text, a factor which is hinted at in Murphy's answer to Neary: "'Blotch is the word" said

Murphy" (7). As The Unnamable demonstrates, the difference between figure and ground is not a difference between *signifiers*, any more than the difference between black and white on the printed page: as in the case of the page this difference is essentially that of presence and absence, that which is apprehended as a signifier and that which is not, there being no possibility of simultaneously apprehending both. Alternatively the figure/ ground dichotomy can be seen as the difference between a *meaningful* presence and a *meaningless* presence for the background against which the meaningful figure of Miss Dwyer is defined against is the witnessed meaninglessness of a "waste without form, and void!" (7). As ever, one should note the ambiguity here: is this an assertion that the waste is "void" or an assertion that it is "without . . . void"? Absolute absence or absolute presence? The confusion points to the distinctive characteristic of matter, a coincidence with one's absolute material *presence* simultaneously being a coincidence with one's meaningless physicality, the attainment of an absolute *absence* of consciousness: "Dear incomprehension, its thanks to you I'll be myself, in the end" (Unnamable 327). Nonetheless, Henri Bergson also points to this "waste without form" when he asserts that,

. . . the perceiving mind . . . marks out divisions in the continuity of the extended . . . But . . . to divide the real in this manner, we must first persuade ourselves that the real is divisible at will . . . we must throw . . . beneath concrete extensity, a network, of which the meshes may be altered to any shape whatsoever and become as small as we please: this substratum which is merely conceived, this wholly ideal diagram of arbitrary and infinite divisibility, is homogeneous space. (278)⁴⁰

One can see in this the manner in which Beckett's "mess" is paradoxically already "there" even as "it must be allowed in", being that which is *seen* (i.e. visually registered, inherent to visual data) yet is not *consciously* perceived by virtue of the fact that its homogeneity refutes the differentiation which is necessary for meaningful apprehension. As Bergson recognises, to be consciously aware of *everything* that one is visually registering is to negate the

meaningful differentiation which constitutes consciousness; to “perceive all the influences from all the points of all bodies would be to descend to the condition of a material object. Conscious perception signifies choice, and consciousness mainly consists in this practical discernment” (46). In terms of the printed text, for example, the failure of such discernment would be the failure to perceive the black ink as a *present* figure as set against the *absence* which is its white background (bearing in mind that one only *attends* to the figure which is the printed text): to simultaneously attend to both the white and the black (presence/presence) is to negate the difference between absence and presence which allows the figure of the text to be defined, even though, of course, this indifference is inherent in our vision of the text for both black and white *are* visually registered. Evidently, in order for the figure to become meaningfully *present* to consciousness, it must be defined against the ‘absence’ which is its ground, that which is implicit in vision yet is not consciously registered. It should also be noted that if we are not conscious of this ground, then the figure of which we *are* conscious necessarily bears its trace, for the fact that we *are* conscious of the figure as a meaningful *presence*, in itself, constitutes a trace of this defining ‘absence’. As Bergson recognises, the object is always defined by what it is *not*:

. . . does not the fiction of an isolated material object imply a kind of absurdity, since this object borrows its physical properties from the relations which it maintains with all others, and owes its determinations, and consequently, its very existence, to the place it occupies within the universe as a whole? (11-12)

Nevertheless, both Bergson’s and Beckett’s remarks point to the manner in which one’s material being can become identifiable with the homogeneous, passive ground which precedes, lies behind, and defines the figure of writing/ consciousness, a reading which is supported by the original assertion in *Murphy* that life is both “figure and ground” *and* “a wandering to find home” for Beckett’s characters. For Beckett it is this ‘ground’ which

occupies the position of Derrida's *archē*-writing, remaining 'other' to the differential activity of textuality even as it is recognised and enacted through this process. While, Derrida refuses to designate *archē*-writing a *logos*, merely delineating it as the textuality which precedes presence, Beckett does not shy away from identifying it with the pre-textual "mess" of material existence and implicitly, with the undifferentiated origin which incorporates the imaginary "figure" of the text. The final lines of Moran's narrative give a sense of the manner in which Beckett brings this *archē*-writing to our attention within the text: "It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows, It was not midnight. It was not raining" (Molloy 179). As a direct contradiction of the law of identity (something is what it is, and not what it is not) and the law of the excluded middle (the words are true or not true – there is no 'third' way) these words negate the logic of identity. They only become 'meaningful' in terms of difference (one statement is true, one statement is false). Yet there are no criteria with which to judge the veracity of each individual statement, rendering them undecideable. There is, therefore, no difference, merely homogeneity, a kind of blank space within the totality of the lines. We can only comprehend the lines as being a meaningful alternation between 'true/ false' and 'false/ true', presence/ absence and absence/ presence, even as we recognise the homogeneity of presence/ presence or absence/ absence through this alternation. To erase this alternation and achieve this homogeneity is to erase meaning altogether, in the same manner that the failure of selective perception or of the figure/ ground dichotomy (i.e. presence/ presence) erases difference which, for Bergson, allows us to *be* conscious. It is this perspectivism, and this annihilation, to which Nietzsche refers in asserting that

. . . there would be no life at all if not on the basis of perspective estimates and appearances; and if . . . one wanted to abolish the "apparent world" altogether – well, supposing *you* could do that, at least nothing would be left of your "truth" either. (Beyond Good and Evil 236)

Yet for Beckett it is this homogeneity, the 'mess' of reality, which is inherent in visual perception and in meaning itself, even as it remains unwitnessed, being that which is "there" even as it must be "allowed in".

Within the reading process, of course, what is "there" yet is not "allowed in" is the material presence which is the book itself: the book is *there* in the sense that it is being mutely witnessed, yet it is seen without being meaningfully registered, our mind being elsewhere, as in the case of the narrator in From an Abandoned Work : ". . . just went on, my body doing its best without me" (164). This analogy between the book and the body is suggestive of the manner in which Beckett can performatively utilise our (non)experience of the book at the point of reading, the difference between that which the eye sees and that which the mind sees. For Beckett, the book's seen/ unseen status can become a cipher for the "mess" which is inherent in visual experience yet is not consciously perceived, that which represents the possibility of coinciding with one's own material being. As a result, one frequently experiences Beckett's texts as allegories of the reading/ writing process, and/ or performative attempts to enact their own empirical materiality. Yet these processes are simultaneously allegories of the process of consciousness itself, the process of consciousness which is enacted within the text frequently parallels the process which *is* going on in the act of reading this text. Within this performativity the inapprehensible materiality of the book, the conceptual *space* that it seems to present, frequently becomes erotically identified with the self-identity of the body, that which is insistently ruptured and erased by the process of (self) signification. Like the body, the equivocal materiality of the book comes to represent the space of potentiality in which the self can be actualised, and the space from which fictions of the self are sublimated. It is these factors which underlie Beckett's assertion that Joyce's writing "is not about something; it is that something itself" ("Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce" 215) and his delineation of Proustian symbolism as

“*autosymbolism*”: “For Proust the object may be a living symbol, but a symbol of itself” (Proust 80). Beckett, nevertheless, recognises that one can only *attempt* to be “that something itself” for the absolute coincidence of representation and reality, figure and ground, would be precisely attainment of unconscious material being.

In this light, it is striking that Christopher Ricks, in rejecting readings which would seek to subsume Beckettian textuality into a post-structuralist schema which “has no truck with any positing of the *real*” (145) should illustrate his point with a quotation from Beckett’s Ill Seen Ill Said which he can subsequently link to Derrida’s notion of the *pharmakon*:

On resumption the head is covered. No matter. No matter now. Such the confusion now between real and – how say its contrary? No matter. That old tandem. Such now confusion between them once so twain. And such the farrago from eye to mind. For it to make what sad sense of it may. No matter now. Such equal liars both. Real and – how ill say its contrary? The counter-poison. (82)

The ‘poison’ is not the writing which, for Derrida, precedes and encompasses self-apprehension, transgressing the notion of the ‘real’ and erasing the possibility of any transcendental grounding to the text. The real’s unspeakable contrary is, rather, the “counter-poison” and it is, therefore, the real rather than that which erases the real which is the poison, this being a poison of the *eye* rather than the mind. One should also note, in this respect, the characteristically elliptical pun through which Beckett identifies this reality with matter: “Such the confusion now between real and – how say its contrary? No matter”. The quotation, moreover, is performative, intersecting with the inherently *present* act of reading: “On resumption the head is covered. No matter. No matter *now*”. The final sentence suggests that the reader, in the very act of meaningfully articulating/ apprehending these printed words is erasing their materiality - there is “No matter *now*” that you are reading these words or, more specifically, the printed words that you are presently looking *at* have no materiality at

the precise moment that the *book* being translated into the *text* through the act of reading. We cease to be meaningfully aware of the book at the point when we are “thinking the thoughts of another” (104) to use Poulet’s description of the reading process. Similarly, the garbled syntax (“And such the farrago from eye to mind. For it to make what sense of it may. No matter now”) *presently* forces us to “make what sense of it may” indicating that the “farrago” to which the text refers is the very farrago in which we are implicated in the act of reading the words, acting as a form of defamiliarisation, a disruption of the habit which, as Beckett asserts in relation to one’s blank apprehension of the “isolated and inexplicable” object, “has laid its veto on this form of perception, its action being precisely to hide the essence – the Idea – of the object in the haze of conception – preconception” (Proust 23).

In the “farrago from eye to mind” the mind is the “counter-poison” for as we become aware of the text we cease to be aware of the book at which we are *looking*. As Georges Poulet asks in relation to the act of reading:

Where is the book I held in my hands? It is still there, and at the same time it is there no longer, it is nowhere. That object, that thing made of paper . . . that object is no more, or at least as if it no longer existed, as long as I read the book. . . . the book is no longer a material reality. (102)

Poulet’s assertion that the book is “no longer a material reality” at the point of reading is, however, equivocal. As Beckett was aware one could equally assert that the book is *only* witnessed as material reality at this point, this being the point at which this object is blankly seen yet remains unperceived, being unencumbered by meaning or the meaningful concept ‘book’: it is, as Blanchot delineates it, a “non-absent absence” (Infinite Conversation 422). It should be noted that this factor is, specifically, peculiar to the act to writing: in Proust for example Beckett asserts, the “subject and object . . . are separated by the subject’s consciousness of perception, and the object loses its purity and becomes a mere intellectual pretext or motive” (Proust 74). Yet within the reading process the reader is *not* conscious of

perception because of the split between what the eye sees and what the mind apprehends, and the purity of the object, therefore, is not reduced to the concept. In this context Plato's warning, in the *Phaedrus*, against allowing the eroticism of writing to usurp the role of the Forms should be recalled, for it is hardly coincidental that Beckett's language, in writing of Proust, should echo the Platonic:

'Enchantments of reality' has the air of a paradox. But when the object is perceived as particular and unique and not merely the member of a family, when it appears independent of any general notion and detached from the sanity of a cause, isolated and inexplicable in the light of ignorance, then and then only may it be a source of enchantment. Unfortunately Habit has laid its veto on this form of perception, its action being precisely to hide its essence – the Idea – of the object in the haze of conception – preconception. (Proust 22-23)

Yet if it is the act of reading which prevents any conceptual awareness of the object in front of us, then it is evident that the only means of *seeing* the book in this manner is to insert the text into the reader's consciousness in order that the "Concept", or the "Habit" which Proust rejects "in favour of the Idea" (Proust 81) can be stripped away: "Not possible except as a figment. Not endurable. Nothing for it but to close the eye and see her. Her and the rest" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 74). We "close the eye" in reading, becoming unconscious to what we are looking *at* in order that we may "see her", which is to bring the woman into imaginary or textual being *via* this act of reading. As a result we are allowed to blankly witness the reality of the book at this point. The *aporia* of this situation then, is that the book can only be present to vision in this manner if we remain unconscious as to its presence, for the moment that it is conceptually apprehended *as* a book this blank vision is lost. The book must be hidden from meaningful awareness, masked by the text, in order that it can be stripped of this conceptuality and seen.

It is evident, therefore, that any attempt to *meaningfully* approach this 'pure' vision *via* the text, to allow in that which is "already there" (Driver 219), reinstates conceptuality

and erases this vision into meaning. Beckett, therefore, allows the text to covertly act as a *placebo* for the book, referring to that which is *being* witnessed yet maintaining the distance between what the eye sees and what the mind registers in order that this vision does not betray itself to conceptuality or awareness. In other words, in order to be “ill seen” (i.e. not meaningfully registered, *unperceived*) the book needs to be “ill said”, or it will be “ill seen” (i.e. meaningfully seen): “She is vanishing. With the rest. The already ill seen bedimmed and ill seen again annulled. The mind betrays the treacherous eyes and the treacherous word their treacheries. Haze sole certitude. The same that reigns beyond the pastures” (88). This quotation gives some impression of the fine balance that Beckett is trying to maintain here *via* the spectrality which is the woman: our “mind betrays” our “eyes” in the act of reading and the “treacherous word” of the text will betray *their* treacheries, transforming the book from that which is “ill seen bedimmed” (i.e. unperceived) into that which is “ill seen . . . annulled” (i.e. perceived/conceptualised) *unless* the treacherous word ‘woman’ remains in place, veiling the book from cognisance while illicitly referring to it. In order to see the “haze” that we are blankly witnessing beyond the “zone of pasture” (which, it should be noted, is where “she”, the *book*, “is best to be seized” (63)), the text must continually distract *attention* from what we are seeing: “What is it defends her? Even from her own. Averts the intent gaze. Incriminates the dearly won. Forbids divining her. What but life ending. Hers” (64). As this quotation suggests the woman is utilised within the text in a manner which hovers between her function as an enactment of the reality of the book and her function as a *mask* for the book. This duality is enacted in the obvious contradiction between the fact that she cannot be divined and the narrator’s/ our awareness of her, which implies that she *has* been divined. Yet our awareness of the woman, and our awareness that she *is* a woman, only occurs as a result of the fact that the book is being read: the woman only *exists* in her purely imaginary form by virtue of the fact that we are looking at the book even as it is translated to

a text: "Close it for good this filthy eye of flesh. What forbids? Careful" (74). "What forbids" is suggested by the self-exhortation "Careful", being that to which the narrator cannot refer without erasing our meaningless view of its reality, that from which the "intent gaze" is averted by the woman, and that which constitutes the reality of the "undivined" woman, the *book*: "She is there. Again. Let the eye from its vigil be distracted a moment" (66). It is *this* reality, that which we are looking at in the very act of reading these words, from which we are "distracted" by the woman, and that Beckett places the undivined "real" woman into this conceptual space merely testifies to its absolute mystery, for one's blank view of the book never comes into meaningful being, even as one cannot close one's eye to it:

Slaving away forever in the same place. At this and that trace. And what if the eye could not? No more tear itself away from the remains of trace. Of what was never. Quick say it suddenly can and farewell say say farewell. If only to the face. Of her tenacious trace (96)

What the book is a trace *of* is apparent in the identification of that which "Forbids divining her", the text, as "life ending" (64). This identification is symptomatic of the manner in which the initiation of self-awareness or, analogously, of the reading process through which we become aware of the woman, constitutes an erasure of the reality of the self/ the book. Both remain undivined by virtue of our 'awareness' of them. To become aware of the woman in the act of reading, or to become self-aware *via* signification/ writing, is, to utilise Malone's phrase, to give "birth to into death" (Malone 285). We are born "into death" in the act of coming to awareness since we erase any possibility of affirming one's own reality through this act, and we also to give birth "to . . . death" as a factor which can be imagined but not divined. As Freud asserts "Our own death is indeed unimaginable, and whenever we make the attempt to imagine it we can perceive that we really survive as spectators" (Collected Papers 304-305). Yet to imply that our consciousness of death inherently implies our inability to be authentically aware of it, then this cannot be applied in this case for we are

unconscious spectators of the inapprehensible book. In bringing the woman into imaginary being we “Close [the eye] for good and all and *see* her to death” (74), a remark which points to the thanatological nature of the book, for in this context the significance of the tomb to which the woman insistently returns becomes apparent:

Changed the stone that draws her when revisited alone. Or she who changes it when side by side. . . . Granite of no common variety assuredly. Black as jade the jasper that flecks its whiteness. On its what is the wrong word its uptilted face obscure graffiti. Scrawled by the ages for the eye to solicit in vain . . . Such ill seen the stone alone where it stands at the far fringe of the pastures. (84-85)

The *eye*, as opposed to the mind, solicits meaning in vain, *seeing* the “obscure graffiti” without meaningfully perceiving its materiality, and it does so by virtue of the fact that the mind does *not* solicit in vain, perceiving this materiality as the meaning which is the text.

It should be noted however that the “death” implied here is not simply the cessation of consciousness but our own meaningless corporeality. That the *eye* solicits in vain indicates the meaningless physicality of our sensations at this point, the fact that these sensations bear no relation to that which the mind apprehends through them, for we may be conscious of what the book says to us, the text, but we are not conscious of our immediate experience of the book itself. The book and our physical experience of it are, therefore, restored to their meaningless reality at these points, points at which not only the reality of the book becomes inapprehensible, but also “Unspeakable globe” (95) which blankly witnesses this reality. It is at the precise point of reading that we are unconscious of what we see and unconscious of *ourselves* in relation to what we see, our minds being elsewhere. This fact is also ironically reflected later on in the book when the woman imaginatively re-enacts the unperceived yet seen tomb of which she has been unaware and in doing so averts her eyes from the lamb

which follows her, another imaginative allegory of the reality which is erased/ restored with every textual utterance:

One evening she was followed by a lamb. . . . It halts at the same instant as she. At the same instant as she strays on. Stockstill as she it waits with head like hers extravagantly bowed. Clash of black and white that far from muting the last rays amplify. . . . Does she see the white body at her feet? Head haughty now she gazes into emptiness. That profusion. Or with closed eyes sees the tomb. (79)

To this extent, if we accept Berkeley's assertion that '*esse est percipi*', both the book and ourselves can be considered inexistent by virtue of the fact that neither are being recognised that they can be said to meaningfully exist. We cease to appoint meaning to ourselves or to conceptualise ourselves: accordingly, the woman, like the reader at this point (or *as* the reader) "[w]ith herself . . . has no more converse. Never had much. Now none" (61). Like the reader at the point of reading these lines, she remains wholly unaware of herself by virtue of her awareness of the text, a factor which is contrasted with our usual self-awareness ("never had much").

Yet it is inaccurate to say that these factors are inexistent for it would be more accurate to assert that they are *no more existent* than that of which we (or the woman) are aware of through the text at this point: for Beckett's text can be seen as a hieroglyph of what is occurring beyond awareness at the point of reading, being an allegory of the reading process as a purely physical phenomenon. To this extent the figure of the woman is not merely an imaginary enactment of the witnessed reality of the book, but of our own physicality during the reading process, that which we are not consciously acknowledging by virtue of the text. The reader, therefore, *is* the woman at the point of reading, the woman being an allegory of the figure of the reader at the point when she is brought into imaginative existence *via* the reading process. What "defends" the woman, "[e]ven from her own", is that

which defends us from our own and “averts the intent gaze” from our own physicality at the point of reading - the *text* or the imaginary enactment of the woman/ ourselves:

To the imaginary stranger the dwelling appears deserted. Under constant watch it betrays no sign of life. . . . Watches all night in vain for the least glimmer. Returns at last to his own and avows, No one. She shows herself only to her own. But she has no own. Yes yes she has one. And who has her.
(62)

The imaginary stranger is, of course, the physical reality of the reader at the point of reading these words, that which cannot enter into textuality at the point of reading, *except* as that which is imagined. It is apparent from this that the narratorial reticence about referring to the book is also applicable to the reader or the reading process itself. We must remain unconscious to ourselves and our own physicality in relation to the book, not in order to avoid any apprehension of these factors (since they cannot be meaningfully apprehended without their blank physicality being erased) but in order that we do not become conceptually aware of them, thus negating their unconscious ‘presence’ during the act of reading. This, of course, is *not* to be unconscious but is merely to fail to appoint meaning to this reality. This is why the phrase “[r]eturns at last to his own” is imbued with irony: it implies the cessation of the reading process, yet the imaginary stranger is no less imaginary for this return, continuing to avow “[n]o one” at the point that self-awareness is supposedly reinstated. The only difference between this imaginary awareness of the self and that which occurs during the reading process is that the latter *masks* this status and thus prevents any conceptualisation of our physical reality, the difference between having no converse with the self and having little converse with the self. Yet, like the book, this reality *is* covertly enacted within the text as the woman: we are imagined as the woman, and if we are an imaginary stranger to ourselves at this point then so is she. The reader (the “imaginary stranger”) ceases to witness the woman (who is an “imaginary stranger” to herself) and ironically *coincides* with this imaginary

enactment of his or her own physical presence. More accurately, in reading this passage we coincide with her/ our inability to apprehend herself/ ourselves at the point of reading, except as the anonymous and “imaginary stranger”, who as phrase implies, is not *there*. We could also apply this to the figure of the narrator, who we also become in reading the text, and who is certainly an “imaginary stranger”, being no less unreal and no less anonymous than the figure that he ironically imagines. Every imaginary figure is, therefore, telescoped into the absolute anonymous self-identity of our own physical presence, “the body that scandal” (75) as we become, in some sense, present at our own absence *via* the text. There is, therefore, no one in at the woman’s dwelling by virtue of the fact that this imaginary stranger (who is the woman, the narrator and the reader) cannot meaningfully apprehend its own physical presence, *because* it is imagining this presence *via* the text.

As this suggests, at the point of reading our minds are ‘elsewhere’ as the reading situation, the materiality of the book and our own physical presence, escape the meaningful recognition through which they can be said (*ill* said) to exist; they remain, in terms of ‘*esse est percipi*’, inexistent. We are, like the “imaginary stranger” not *there* and this is precisely what is occurring to *us* at the point of reading, as we are defended, even from our own presence, by the textual awareness of ourselves or, synonymously, by our awareness of the imaginary woman/ narrator/ stranger. The reader, therefore, is absent by virtue of this failure to be meaningfully aware of its own physicality at the point of reading, and this lack of awareness is enacted within the text which is being read, the very text which *distracts* from this self-awareness. Through these means the characters are allowed to absolutely coincide with our ‘absent’ physicality, or, alternatively, our physicality is allowed to coincide with these ‘absent’ characters, the dividing line between the real and the imaginary becoming blurred: “Such the confusion now between real and –how say its contrary? No matter. That old tandem. Such now the confusion between them once so twain” (82). What is defended by

this imaginary awareness can be compared to the empty room which figures in the stock philosophical question of proving the existence of the unperceived: the room's unperceived status remains intact even as the reader is present, the reader being a purely physical presence who is no more conscious of itself at the point of reading than it is of the room that it inhabits. It is no coincidence therefore that the woman's home, "The cabin", is "at the inexistent center of a formless place", a designation which need not merely apply to the *purely* fictional but also to that which is inexistent in the Berkeley's sense, that which is unperceived and has no *formal* (i.e. meaningfully witnessed) existence. The irony of this enactment of the reader's situation is, again, signalled by self-exhortation and also by the fact that the narrative immediately formalizes this "formless place", a reflection of the purely intelligible nature of any textual enactment of the reader's situation, the reason why it cannot be referred to in any direct manner: "The cabin. Its situation. Careful. On. At the inexistent center of a formless place. Rather more circular than otherwise finally. Flat to be sure" (58). That this 'inexistent' and 'formless' place is never purely imaginary, merely bearing no relation to the formality of the text which 'ill says' it, is reflected in the narrator's inability to affirm that the woman, the stones, the "hovel", and indeed "[t]he lot' are purely imaginary:

If only she could be pure figment. Unalloyed. In the madhouse of the skull and nowhere else . . . Cooped up there with the rest. Hovel and stones. The lot. And the eye. How simple all then. If only all could be pure figment. Neither be nor been nor by any shift to be. Gently gently. On. Careful. (67)

Notably, this list includes the physicality of the eye itself, thus suggesting the manner in which this eye is necessary within the act of reading in order that we can be aware of these imaginary factors at all. The irony is that the eye *is* one of these imaginary factors (since it is *textually* enacted here), demonstrating that the physical reality of the reading process cannot be apprehended *within* the reading process except on the imaginary level, and this is no more than a reflection of our inability to meaningfully apprehend our own physicality *within* our

own physicality except as an imaginary construct: “The most ideal tautology presupposes a relation and the affirmation of equality involves only an approximate identification, and by asserting unity denies unity” (Proust 70).

Moreover, that the book does not escape this absolute self-identity is reflected in the fact that the woman “shows herself only to her own”, a remark which is demonstrative of the manner in which the witnessed meaninglessness of the book mirrors the meaninglessness of the “filthy eye of flesh” which blankly sees it, both becoming self-identical: “But she has no own. Yes yes she has one. And who has her” (62). This “one” is the “imaginary stranger”, the physicality which never apprehends itself by virtue of the fact that it always *is* itself, continually sublimating this self-identity in the self-fiction which is the text, in the same manner that the reality of the reading process is textually allegorised *within* the reality of this process. As the narrator later asserts in attempting to explain the appearance of this textual spectre of reality: “For what reason? For one not far to seek. For others then said obscure. One other above all. One other still far to seek. Analogy of the heart? The skull?” (92). The physicality of the self is “not far to seek” and “still far to seek”, inapprehensible *because* of its punctuality, absent because of its absolute self-presence, a presence which is continually “said obscure”. As Beckett asserts, utilising the words of Proust: “We cannot know and we cannot be known. “Man is the creature that cannot come forth from himself, who knows others only in himself, and who, if he asserts the contrary, lies” (Proust 66).

CONCLUSION

THE EXIGENCY OF THE ARCHÉ-TRACE AND THE EXIGENCY OF THE LOGOS

How legitimate is writing's claim to the rights of reality? Can it finally expunge the potentiality that *contests* these rights? In light of Derrida's allegation that "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" (literally, 'there is no outside-text') (*Grammatology* 158), it would seem that the more overt ambiguity of the English translation, which, in an all-too-Beckettian fashion, can be self-consciously read as referring to 'nothing' as an existential phenomenon ('there *is* nothing outside of the text') is more appropriate. For, while we can never conceptualise the 'reality' of textuality, a reality that lies beyond the conceptual margins of its own form, this does not invalidate, or more importantly, allow us to *escape* our awareness of its possibility, even if we simultaneously concede that this possibility is, within consciousness, unviable. Our analyses would seem to suggest, therefore, that writing can no more lay claim to these rights than consciousness itself. This becomes apparent when one considers Derrida's claim for writing in light of its inherently speculative, theoretical nature, a consideration which reveals the fallacy of accepting or applying theory without taking this theoretical nature into account, a fallacy which not only affects the texts read but one's interpretation of the philosophical role of writing itself. The hypothetical status of writing's 'rights to reality' reflects the hypothetical status of consciousness' claims to these rights, a parity which historically assigns writing its literary value, for it is writing which exteriorises consciousness' failure to claim reality for itself.

If there is one thing that is certain about writing in the narrow sense it is that its historical advent allows for the full *articulation* of a consciousness that is no longer constrained by its own immediacy, by the limits of memory or the empirical. As Nietzsche demonstrates, writing constitutes the means through which consciousness can now *explore* its

own failure to be installed within these rights of reality, thus constructing its own possibilities and consequently *fulfilling* its potentiality. As Nietzsche also recognises, and as Beckett demonstrates, it is the nebulous yet undeniable *possibility* of reality which constitutes the space from which these potentialities are sublimated: to utilise an image which is used by Giorgio Agamben in his description of Aristotle's writing, the author *dips his pen in thought* (214), a thought which, of course, incorporates its own ambiguity, its irresolute nature, its *potentiality*. If one considers writing in this context it becomes apparent that Plato's *Phaedrus* does not constitute the originary moment of writing's repression but is rather an attempt to protect the imaginative space that writing exteriorises, a space which, as his identification of myth with the oral tradition suggests, had not previously existed. It is the *reduction* of writing to reality, as myth becomes reality within the oral tradition, which Plato opposes. It is deeply ironic, therefore, that Derrida should interpret this refusal of writing's 'rights to reality' as the repression of writing: such a refusal constitutes a *recognition* of the value of writing, an acceptance of its reduction *of reality* to a potentiality, a potentiality which is negated if one attempts to finally resolve the pharmaceutical question of writing, that which is also the pharmaceutical question of the origin. As all of the authors under discussion demonstrate this question can never be finally resolved, a fact which Derrida is forced to acknowledge in admitting the inherently speculative nature of his thought. Such speculation is facilitated by the very reality that writing and consciousness retain *as a potentiality*, the potential status of the *logos* assigning *writing* its status as potentiality in every sense of the word. It is this recognition that opens up the possibility that the 'repression' which characterises the logocentric *epistēme* is actually indicative of the manner in which the retention of a possible reality is recognised to be that which constitutes our *own* possibility, this being the very fact that writing exteriorises. That the question of writing rarely arises within this metaphysical tradition is not as sign of its debasement, but of its

pervasive influence on human consciousness. If this is the case, then the extension of writing to a limitless text which is uncontested by any other potentiality, constitutes the *closure* of writing, the final actualisation which philosophy, and more importantly, literature has always resisted.

It is Derrida's failure to acknowledge all of the possibilities that we have discussed, his refusal to acknowledge that it may be the *possibility* of presence which has prevented any closure to textuality, which underlies his, and others', misinterpretation of the authors that we have discussed, a misinterpretation which is merely a manifestation of a more general misinterpretation of the historical significance of writing itself. This is not to assert that Derrida's theory of writing is *wrong*, for as has been demonstrated, this theory is allowed *as a possibility* by the writers under discussion. It is rather that these writers can only acknowledge the Derridean approach to writing *as* a possibility, a freedom that Derrida does not grant to himself or to writing itself.

For Derrida, writing, in its historicity, constitutes the means through which the general text is exteriorised, the identification of this limitless field of signification with writing being based on writing's methodological role in exteriorising this field. For Derrida, the historical usurpation of reality by writing thus reflects the theoretical role of the *archē*-trace, the usurpation which must be methodologically posited as a means of gaining access to the limitless text, such a positing being the only means of demonstrating that this usurpation has always already occurred, that the origin has always already *gone*:

. . . the value of the transcendental arche [*archie*] must make its necessity felt before letting itself be erased. The concept of the arche-trace must comply with both that necessity and that erasure. . . . The trace is not only the disappearance of the origin – within the discourse that we sustain and according to path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin. From then on, to wrench the concept of the trace from the classical scheme, which would derive it from a presence or from an originary nontrace . . . one must indeed speak of an

originary trace or arche-trace. Yet we know that that concept destroys its name and that, if all begins with the trace, there is above all no originary trace. (Grammatology 61)

As Derrida's remarks imply, the methodological value of the *archē*-trace means that it is a theorem that *commands* assent, not being a potentiality (in the sense that it can be denied), but rather an integral absence. Derrida must *admit* the usurpation of the origin (and thus the origin itself) only that he can reveal that such a usurpation entails that there has never been an origin (and thus no usurpation of this origin):

. . . a thought of the trace can no more break with a transcendental phenomenology than be reduced to it. . . . to pose the problem in terms of choice, to oblige or to believe oneself obliged to answer it by a yes or no, to conceive of appurtenance as an allegiance or nonappurtenance as plain speaking, is to confuse very different levels, paths and styles. In the deconstruction of the arche, one does not make a choice. (Grammatology 62)

Yet even as Derrida implies the necessity of the *archē*-trace in asserting that "one does not make a choice" in this matter, he reveals that this necessity is *itself* a matter of choice, it being more accurate to assert that one does not make this choice *if one wishes to deconstruct the archē*. That the "value" of the *archē*-trace only manifests itself "within the discourse that we sustain and according to path that we follow" reveals that this value *is* methodological rather than a philosophical, the *archē*-trace being a *means* of intervening in the text that the ontological pre-suppositions on which this text rests can be deconstructed: the *archē*-trace ". . . must leave a track in the text. Without that track, abandoned to the simple content of its conclusions, the ultra-transcendental text will so closely resemble the precritical text as to be indistinguishable from it" (Grammatology 61). The onus here is on avoiding the transcendental assumptions on which the pre-critical (i.e. the undeconstructed) text is based, refusing to permit the possibility of any limiting pre- or extra- textual reality that can contest the text's installation within the rights of reality.

As our examination of Beckett has demonstrated, the pre-critical text and its author are under no comparable obligation, the deconstruction of any presumptive *logos* being the obligation of the deconstructive critic rather than his object. This is not to say that the notion of the *archē*-trace has no philosophical validity, that it is imposed on the text from an external source or that this notion is a *purely* instrumental means of deconstructing the primary text. On the contrary, all of these texts incorporate the problematic which is the *archē*-trace and in doing so leave themselves open to deconstruction or to deconstructive interpretation, Derrida being correct in maintaining that his theories of writing are intrinsic to the primary texts that he studies. As a result of this incorporation, all of these writers share the Derridean view that writing is the historical factor that reveals the supplement at/ of the origin, this being the exigency of writing. This is why Plato accepts myth rather than any rational explanation of the origin, why Nietzsche acknowledges that his textual self has a *de jure* priority over his putative physical presence, and why the Beckettian narrator has no apparent being to himself (and indeed no apparent 'self') beyond language. This usurpatory status of writing and the relationship of this usurpation to the representational status of consciousness extends the significance of writing beyond its commonplace definition as a supplement to speech or mere marks on the page. It is this recognition of the philosophical significance of writing which facilitates Derrida's deconstructive readings of Plato and Nietzsche or, in Beckett's case, which facilitate post-structuralist readings that draw on Derrida's theory of writing.

What these texts contest, therefore, is not the *archē*-trace but rather the *necessity* of the *archē*-trace, all of the writers in question demonstrating that the usurpation of the *logos*, and the resultant contention that the *logos* has always already been usurped, is *no more* verifiable than the *logos* itself. In the absence of the methodological necessity of accepting the *archē*-trace, this trace is reduced to a mere possibility which necessarily permits the

correlate possibility of the origin, Derrida's assertion that the "[u]surpation" has always already begun", in itself, entailing that there has never been a verifiable usurpation of the origin, there being no means of eliminating the possibility that the origin *has not been usurped*. Neither of these possibilities can be affirmed or denied; it is rather the case that these texts reduce Derrida's theory to a theory, a hypothesis, an irresolvable possibility. Where these authors differ from Derrida is in the translation of this recognition of the supplement at/ of the origin to the assertion that there is, and has never been, an origin. This is the distinctive contribution that deconstructive readings make to our awareness of the nature of these texts, although, as we have seen, Derrida's assertion that he is "too close" to be able to "write, sign, countersign performatively texts which "respond" to Beckett' . . ." ("This Strange Institution" 60) implies that no such contribution can be made to the Beckettian text, there apparently being *no question* that Beckettian textuality has ever resisted this translation. Similarly, this translation is often taken as an unquestioned article of faith by post-structuralist critics, as though the existence of the supplement at/ of the origin *proves* the absence of any origin, the reduction of any pre-textual reality to that which has never been. Derrida is not alone in this assumption, as becomes apparent in Barthes' assertion that,

[a]s soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, the disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins. ("The Death of the Author" 145)

Theory, here, is translated into unquestioned fact, there being no question that the origin can continue to exist in the presence of its supplement. Yet if writing entails the 'death of the Author' then, for Derrida, this death has always already occurred, there being no 'before' the text by virtue of the supplement at/ of the origin: "Writing did not 'enter' philosophy, it was

already there. This is what we have to think about – about how it went unrecognised, and the attempts to repudiate it” (A Taste for the Secret 8). The exigency of the *archē*-trace is that it facilitates the translation in question, being that which contests any repudiation by allowing the notion of any pre-textual reality to be usurped by the notion of an *archē*-text, a writing which is *always already* in place no matter how much one excavates this origin. It is, therefore, no longer a ‘self’ that speaks, but an unbounded text which usurps the originary position of this self and the originary position of reality itself.

Nevertheless, our examination of this notion of usurpation in relation to Plato, Nietzsche and Beckett raises significant questions with regards to the justification of this translation. We must ask, for example, whether the *archē*-trace allows a *recognition* that the origin has always already been usurped or whether the *archē*-trace actually *facilitates* this usurpation of reality by the *archē*-text. How can we verify that the *archē*-text is not a theoretical *product* of this intervention, the absence of any *logos* consequently being no less of a speculation than the *logos* itself? On what basis, other than a desire to contest the *logos*, does one make a judgement on this issue? Is it the case that a reading based on the exigency of the *archē*-trace is, as Seán Burke puts it, “an act of critical choice governed by the protocols of a certain way of reading rather than any ‘truth of writing’”¹ (Death and Return of the Author 176)? In the absence of any final answer to these questions there is always the danger that the argument for the *archē*-text can be reduced to the prosaic observation that we can have no access to the reality of an absent past or the observation that we can have no access to reality apart from the mediation of representation. Even if we accepted this theorem as being epistemologically valid it remains the case that any delineation of the *archē*-trace consists of the positing of an origin and of a usurpation of the origin only in order to reveal that these factors have never existed or occurred: yet does not the fact that one can *begin* with the origin and *logically demonstrate* the means through which this linguistic non-existence

can arise, *in itself*, imply the origin's ontological possibility to precisely the same extent as it implies its linguistic impossibility? To take a Nietzschean view of this, the body's inability to apprehend or actualise itself within its own presence may mean that it is impossible for the body to exist *to itself*, the reason why the text, even in the presence of the body, possesses a *de jure* 'right to reality': yet as Nietzsche was clearly aware, this fact does not permit one to unequivocally say that the pre-textual body *does not exist* which is why he retains this possibility in order to facilitate his own redemption.

Clearly, these are questions for the deconstructive critic rather than the writers in question, for it is the critic, rather than the pre-critical text or the author of that text, which is subject to the methodological exigency which is the *archē*-trace, that which refutes the possibility of any limiting pre- or extra- textual reality which can contest the text's historical installation within the rights of reality. The Derridean perspective is always complemented by another perspective, another possibility, any installation of writing within the rights of reality only occurring at the expense of a 'bracketing off' of one possibility in order that the other possibility can be resolved. It is implying the necessity of the *archē*-trace, the exigency of avoiding transcendental assumptions, that this 'bracketing off' takes place, transforming the text from a mode of potentiality into an "ultra-transcendental text" which "overruns all limits assigned to it . . ." (Derrida "Living on – Border Lines" 257). As we saw in the case of Nietzsche, such a 'bracketing off' of any possible reality is facilitated by writing; yet, as Nietzsche also demonstrates, this acceptance of one possibility over the other, the acceptance of the *text's* 'rights to reality' over *reality's* 'rights to reality', is also derived from methodological considerations rather than from ontological considerations. Whereas Plato attempts to 'bracket off' the *pharmakon* which is the irresolvable (and thus irrelevant) *question* of the origin, passively accepting the text's status as a mode of potentiality in order that he can concentrate on the contextual *truth* of a particular example of writing, Nietzsche

actively accepts the text's status as a mode of potentiality, utilising the inherent and irresolvable *aporia* between the two possibilities which inhabit the text as a *means* of ultimately resolving one possibility in favour of the other. He redeems the potentiality which is the body (the *self*) in a process of self-overcoming, of writing/ redemption, a process which not only entails an acceptance of the text's 'rights to reality', of the Derridean *possibility*, but also of the *archē*-trace's complementary possibility, there being no redemptive self-overcoming without a self which *can* be overcome, an origin which *can* be redeemed. This is why the redeemed textual subject (e.g. Zarathustra) can only possess a *de jure* right to reality *in Nietzsche's own presence*, there being no *de facto* installation of the text within the rights to reality as long as the possibility of the origin remains in place. It is in accepting the text's *de jure* rights to reality (thus 'bracketing off' the origin) while simultaneously retaining the text's *de facto* status as a mode of potentiality that Nietzsche facilitates his own redemption.

In the case of Derrida, however, the failure to recognise the methodological value of the *archē*-trace is the reason why the text's status as a mode of potentiality is overlooked, most clearly, as we have seen, in the case of Beckett. The frequency with which the ambivalent status of Beckettian textuality in relation to reality is critically resolved in favour of the Derridean possibility, the acceptance that Beckett's writing unequivocally conforms to the notion of an "ultra-transcendental" text which is wholly unanchored from any pre- or extra- textual reality, is indicative of the manner in which the exigency of the *archē*-trace for deconstructive readings is frequently taken as the exigency of the text itself, the 'truth of writing'. As David Watson puts it: "What the text is 'about' then, is no longer some originary, given reality, but rather itself as language, as a structure of signification as a process of the prior construction of that reality" (Watson 24), a remark which is clearly derived from Derrida's assertion that "within the discourse that we sustain and according to path that we follow . . . the origin did not even disappear . . . it was never constituted except

reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin". Yet Watson's usurpatory interpretation of the Beckettian text stands in stark contrast to the Beckettian narrator's frequent assertions of his pre-natal status, his incessant inability to verify that he has ever *left* the origin or ceased to coincide with himself: "I gave up before birth, it is not possible otherwise . . . It was he who wailed, he who saw the light, I didn't wail, I didn't see the light, it's impossible I should have a voice, impossible I should have thoughts, and speak and think . . . (Fizzles 234). The post-structuralist *confidence* that we are dealing with a text "without origin – or which, at least, has no origin than language itself . . ." (Barthes "The Death of the Author"146) is, therefore, rarely shared by the Beckettian narrator, and when it is, this confidence is fleeting, being quickly undercut by the inescapable and irresolvable possibility of the origin and one's implication in this origin. For Beckett, the *archē*-trace is split, representing, on one hand, the possibility of a usurpation that has always already occurred, a text without limit, and, on the other hand, the inescapable origin itself, a usurpation or a 'birth' which has never occurred in the sense that has incessantly *yet* to verifiably occur. The latter possibility always reasserts itself as a result of the inherently *hypothetical* nature of the former possibility, the denial of this hypothetical status (*via* the exigency which is the *archē*-trace) being a methodological consideration of the critic rather than the Beckettian text². The possibility of the origin thus postpones any acceptance of the text's 'rights to reality' or any final deconstruction of the *logos*, sustaining itself as a mode of potentiality which is open to both of the possibilities in question: as the Unnamable puts it in articulating this equivocal position: ". . . I who am on my way, words bellying out my sails, am also that unthinkable ancestor of whom nothing can be said" (Unnamable 355).

Evidently, this logocentric aspect of Beckettian textuality is not merely a consequence of historical determination, an inability to escape the conceptual resources or the language of metaphysics: indeed, this aspect of Beckettian textuality most clearly manifests itself in the

performative nature of these writings rather in their surface meaning, Beckett utilising our relationship with the very text in front of us as a means of exteriorising our inability to either affirm or deny the *logos* in question, thus replicating the position of the narrator himself. A recognition of the nature of this performativity not only reveals the nature of the double bind in which the narrator is caught in relation to the *logos*, that which defines the text's status as a mode of potentiality, but also the significance of writing for Beckett. There is, of course, no question of the *potential* origin which is the narrator himself (or the author) being present during the readerly performance of the text, just as he *apparently* cannot be present in the narrative situation itself: indeed, that the origin is 'absent' in both cases is the basis of the immediacy of the Beckettian text, the sense that language no longer mediates a reality but constitutes this reality in the present. This absence is the also the basis of the significance of writing for Derrida, writing being the supplement at/ of the origin which reveals that one is not present even in one's own 'presence'. To read Beckett on this basis *alone*, however, is to overlook the double bind in which the Beckettian narrator always finds himself, thus succumbing to the "easing of the mind and of life" (147) against which Christopher Ricks warns post-structuralist interpreters of Beckett. If the absence of any apparent origin could be result of the narrator's inability to escape his own, incessantly potential, presence, this being a *de jure* rather than a *de facto* usurpation, then indistinguishably, even if the originary usurpation in question *has* (or, as Derrida argues, has *always already*) occurred then there is no means of verifying this usurpation, the *potentiality* which is this presence remaining in place. One may, therefore, *possibly* escape the origin but one can never escape the possibility that *is* the origin. To recall Molloy:

. . . . if it is true that regions gradually merge into one another, and this remains to be proved, then I will have left my region many times, thinking I was still within it. But I preferred to abide by my simple feeling and its voice that said, Molloy, your region is vast, you have never left it and you never

shall. And wheresoever you wander, within its distant limits, things will always appear the same, precisely. (Molloy 65)

There is, therefore, no solution to the aporetic situation in which the Beckettian narrator finds himself, no meta-assertion which can disentangle him from the *frame* of contradiction in which the subject constantly oscillates between the affirmation and denial of the origin, the affirmation and denial of its absence. Indeed, it is the inability to verify any usurpation which affords Beckett the means of transposing the equivocal situation of the narrator onto the performative situation of the reader, the materiality of the text or the reading situation frequently taking on the status of this potential origin. It is not merely the case, as in Derrida, that the absence of the origin in the reading situation is transposed onto the original situation, revealing the usurpatory supplement at/ of the origin³; rather, the original situation, incorporating the potentiality which *is* the origin, is transposed onto the reading situation, thus performatively revealing the double bind in which consciousness is caught, the manner in which an inability to verify the usurpation of the origin leaves the origin in place *as a potentiality* even if this usurpation *has* occurred (there being no question the origin of the text in front of us being present). In this Beckett follows Plato, who also recognises the unverifiable status of this usurpation in enacting the myth of the cicadas, they who continue to sing even *after* they have died (Phaedrus 259b-c)⁴. Plato utilises this equivocality, writing's inability to affirm its own usurpatory status, in order to transpose the situation in which the myth of Thamus is recited (or the myth of Thamus *itself*) onto the our performative reading of the Phaedrus; the erotic movement towards the origin (indistinguishably the materiality of the text or the past) which is initiated *within* the Phaedrus being replicated in the present reading situation, there being no *textual* verification that this origin has been usurped. Clearly, both of these authors recognise that the significance of writing lies not merely in its ability to suggest that the origin has been usurped but in its ability to exteriorise

our inability to *verify* this usurpation. In both cases, writing does not merely reflect a process of consciousness (if one can still use the term) that is not grounded in any extra-textual reality, for it simultaneously *embodies* this process of consciousness with all its fertile ambiguity, its inability to *escape* the potentiality that is the origin. The texts facilitate both readings, this being the very mode of potentiality in question. Evidently, therefore, there can be no *simple* transposition of textuality onto the process of consciousness here, this usurpation being *another* possibility. The usurpatory status of the 'internal text' is not nearly so assured as that of the 'external text', a fact that Nietzsche *utilises* in order to maintain the space between the pre-mortem and post-mortem 'texts', as space in which he can re-write and redeem himself⁵.

Again, it is this divided nature of the Beckettian text which reveals that the writer is not subject to the same obligations as the deconstructive critic, the failure to recognise this fact being the reason why such critics frequently fail to note that Beckett's novels are situated within a logocentric tradition, as is suggested by the Aristotelian or hylomorphic aspect of his novels. This logocentrism it should be noted, is not a question of the authorial intention (or the *apparent* authorial intention) that is frequently said to be undercut in post-structuralist readings of the primary text. As the Beckettian narrators recurrently demonstrate, there is no desire to repress the effects of writing on subjectivity or to maintain the *logos*, the desire being, rather, for an affirmation of *either* the presumptive *logos* itself *or* of the textual free play which has usurped (and has always already usurped) this *logos*, an unrestricted play which as these texts reveal, is no less presumptive than the *logos* itself. Yet if Beckettian textuality is situated within a logocentric tradition then this is not to say that Beckett finds existential reassurance in the possibility of the *logos* or that he represses the effects of writing. As the futility of the Beckettian text incessantly demonstrates the possibility of a self-identical *logos* does not represent a solution to the linguistic *aporia* in which the narrator

frequently finds himself; on the contrary, such self-identity is acknowledged to be the very *cause* of this problem. Within this *hypothesis* the absence of the *logos* is not necessarily a consequence of the difference on which representation is contingent or the usurpation which this act of representation/ differentiation entails: both Nietzsche and Beckett acknowledge the inescapable possibility that this absence could equally be a consequence of the self-identical status *of* the origin. As the Unnamable puts it:

I shall not say I again. . . . It will make no difference. Where I am there is no one but me, who am not. . . . Not to mention other things, many others, to which the abundance of matter has unfortunately up to now prohibited the least allusion. (Unnamable 358)

Similarly, the Nietzschean body never escapes “the abundance of matter”, transcending its own *undifferentiated* presence so that it can become present *to* itself: it produces, rather, the mask or the proxy for the body which is Zarathustra, he who remains inapprehensibly implicated in the body and thus has no *de facto* ‘right to reality’ in the body’s own presence. Like the Beckett’s textual ‘proxies’, the “tittle *I thought* I could put from me, in order to witness it” (Unnamable 305 My emphasis), Zarathustra can only be a *nascent* reality: “The time for me hasn’t come yet: some are born posthumously” (Ecce Homo 715). The ‘difference’ between origin and his representation is thus comparable to the hylomorphic ‘difference’ between formal substance and matter within Aristotelian theory, this difference not being actual but rather an *apparent* product of matter’s incessant inability to finally actualise itself *as matter*: ultimately substance and matter are inseparable, a self-identity which continually ensures that matter *remains* a potentiality rather than an actuality. Similarly, the Beckettian text frequently enacts the homogeneous, passive ground which lies behind and incorporates the figure of writing/ consciousness, identifying it with the incessantly potential origin in which the text, and the reader, is inapprehensibly implicated, that which remains ‘other’ to the differential activity of textuality only in the sense that it

cannot be represented. Beckett does not shy away from identifying this ground with the pre-textual material “mess” the indifference of which allows us an awareness that we cannot ‘think’ our being by virtue of the fact that we can only unspeakably ‘be’ our thought. Respectively, we are “unable to act, obliged to act” (“Three Dialogues” 145). Again, this *possibility* does not disprove Derrida’s anti-essentialist thesis but rather reveals that this thesis is itself a mere possibility, the Beckettian text being constantly torn between the possibilities of absence and immanence: “That should have been enough for him, to have found me absent, but it’s not, he wants me there with him, with a form and a world, like him, in spite of him, me who am everything like him who is nothing” (Texts for Nothing 114)⁶.

This is why, in reading Beckett, one cannot escape the sense that these novels are *centred* on the question of the *logos*, the origin which is never present because it never verifiably escapes its own, incessantly potential, presence. Watson’s assertion that “what the text is ‘about’ . . . is no longer some originary, given reality” is undercut by our sense that this is all that many of Beckett’s novels *are* about, Molloy’s narrative journey being predicated on the possibility of his mother, the narrator of Company constantly trying to apprehend his ‘otherness’ to his own language, the Unnamable and Texts for Nothing incessantly meditating on the question *of* the unnameable origin, or Ill Seen Ill Said covertly enacting and admitting the very reality that it usurps. In all of these cases the narrator cannot deny the *possibility* of his *de facto* self-identical status, the texts constituting the revelation that the *logos* is no longer the solution to the problem but is the problem itself, an absolute which constantly proposes the non-identity within identity and, in doing so, always *restates* the possibility of self-identity. One could say that meaning is not, as in post-structuralism, that which constantly transgresses identity, but that which transgresses the opposition between identity and non-identity itself, and indeed any meaningful binary opposition, including those which post-structuralist theorists utilise to distinguish their own project from

the metaphysical epoch, for the profoundly aporetic nature of the Beckettian text also erases the distinction between the metaphysical and the non-metaphysical. The self-identical *logos* of which man has dreamed is not the answer to the crisis of meaning or subjectivity, but is the fundamental metaphysical problem itself, that which is (*possibly*) always already silently attained and remains a problem *because* it is already attained.

That this recognition of the radically indeterminate nature of the *logos* (or of its absence) is not a specifically modern phenomenon is indicated by Plato's refusal to enter into the pharmaceutical question of the origin except, that is, to performatively demonstrate the pointlessness of doing so, the manner in which this question erases the text's status as a mode of potentiality. Derrida concisely sums up the Platonic attitude to writing in asserting that: "This logocentrism, this *epoch* of full speech, has always placed in parenthesis, suspended, and suppressed for essential reasons, all free reflection on the origin and the status of writing . . ." (*Grammatology* 43). Yet Derrida fails to recognise that Plato does not suspend the question of the origin to which writing gives rise because this question contests the *logos*, but because this question can never be answered, the status of writing in relation to the origin being as irresolvable as the aporetic situation of the Beckettian narrator. Indeed, it is in suspending the question of the origin that Plato *accepts* its effects of writing, just as he *accepts* the *hupomnēme* that is myth in suspending the question of its rational origins (230a). Plato accepts that there is no escape from writing, which is to say that there is no escape from the mode of potentiality that is human existence, the exigency of the *archē*-trace and the "ultra-transcendental text" being a methodological consequence of polemically contesting a repression of writing that has *not occurred*. Yet, as Derrida acknowledges, it is the polemic status of this repression, the "violent hierarchy" (*Positions* 41) to which it gives rise, which not only designates Plato the father of metaphysics⁷ but which also justifies the *polemos*, the

“phase of *overturning*” that is the “*general strategy of deconstruction*” (Positions 41), that which defines the strategic exigency of the *archē*-trace:

Of course, if there is *polemos*, and irreducible *polemos*, this cannot, in the final analysis, be accounted for by a taste for war, and still less for polemics. There is *polemos* when a field is determined as a field of battle because there is no metalanguage, no locus of truth outside the field, no absolute and ahistorical overhang. . . . As a result, those who are inscribed in this field are necessarily inscribed in a *polemos*, even if they have no special taste for war. There is a strategic destiny, destined to stratagem by the question raised over the truth of the field. (A Taste for the Secret 12)

Derrida, therefore, must *presuppose* the repressive status of the text, one *polemos*, in order to justify the strategic nature of the *archē*-trace, another *polemos*, and he must do so even as he utilises this strategy as a means of demonstrating the repressive status of the text. Clearly, such a pre-supposition, the affirmation of what one *already* knows, requires an unwavering confidence in the repressive nature of the metaphysical epoch, this being the structure which must be pre-supposed if it is to be deconstructed. That a figure as significant as Plato, the supposed inaugurator of this epoch, does not repress writing but rather recognises and freely submits to the irresolvable *aporias* to which writing exteriorises raises the possibility that Derrida’s ‘war’ against logocentrism is misdirected. Derrida defines the age of metaphysics as “. . . *the greatest totality* . . . within which are produced, without ever posing the radical question of writing, all the Western methods of analysis, explication, reading, or interpretation” (Grammatology 46). Such a thesis rests on the assumption that the writing has been historically received as that which reveals the absence at/ of the origin, contesting metaphysical reality’s ‘rights to reality’ and being repressed on this basis. Yet *Derrida* can only reveal that this is the case by succumbing to the strategic necessity of the *archē*-trace: that Plato is not subject to this necessity means that the text, for him, remains a mode of potentiality rather than an “ultra-transcendental text”. Plato, therefore, does not *need* to repress the *archē*-trace by virtue of the fact that this theorem, on its *own* terms, cannot be

affirmed, the usurpation of/ at the origin consequently remaining as hypothetical as Socrates' mythological enactment of the advent of writing in the myth of Thamus. Indeed, as we have seen, his treatment of this myth can be seen as an *exteriorisation* of this *archē*-trace and of its status as a mere possibility. In asserting that Plato represses writing, therefore, Derrida is assuming that he is subject to the same methodological or polemical demands as the deconstructive critic, for it is only in refusing to succumb to the strategic demand of the *archē*-trace that Plato can be *said* to repress writing. Plato does not repress writing precisely *because* the text, as a mode of potentiality, does not make this strategic demand in the first place, the *archē*-trace being a mere possibility, the text's 'rights to reality' never *finally* being ratified. As Seán Burke points out (Death and Return of the Author 128-38 *passim*), if one considers the points within the "*greatest totality*" of the metaphysical epoch that Derrida does seize upon in order to reveal the universally repressive nature of this epoch, then the paucity of overt or significant instances of logocentrism becomes evident: we have Plato's *Phaedrus*, Rousseau's Essay on the Origin of Languages, Freud's "tiny" 'Note on the Mystic writing Pad, a footnote to Heidegger's Being and Time, a few remarks in Saussure's Course in General Linguistics. Such scarcity, of course, may *reflect* the universal nature of this repression, the assumption of the *logos* being so integral to the metaphysical thought that it does not need to be overtly defended. Yet, as our examination of Plato suggests, such scarcity may also reflect the fact that Derrida, in unequivocally resolving the *possibility* which is the usurpation of the origin, transforming this possibility into a determined *fact* of writing, is revising the past, imposing this *necessity* of the *archē*-trace onto this epoch and thus retrospectively defining it as repressive. It is hardly, surprising, therefore, that the all-encompassing nature of this repression is not reflected in the historical canon itself.

Similarly, that even post-structuralist precursors such as Nietzsche and Beckett do not, or *cannot*, unequivocally conform to the deconstructive tenet that *there is no origin*,

retaining this possibility and thus the text's status as a mode of potentiality, is suggestive of the manner in which the exigency of the *archē*-trace is peculiar to the deconstructive project rather than to textuality itself. It must be recalled, however, that it is the *exigency* of the *archē*-trace, rather *than* the *archē*-trace, which peculiar to the deconstructive project, the *possibility* of the usurpation of the origin being undeniable even as it is irresolvable. The significance of this project, therefore, lies in the fact that it explores the consequences of one undeniable *possibility* that inhabits the text, and few would argue that Derridean *theory* (and one should note the implications of this word), in unfolding this possibility, has had a profound and frequently persuasive effect on our view of textuality. Yet as we have seen in the case of Derrida's influence on Beckett studies, the problem with this theory of textuality is that it is frequently *too* persuasive, *too* all encompassing, frequently being transformed from a theory of writing to the unequivocal *truth* of writing. To impose this 'truth' onto the primary texts, or rather to unequivocally imply that this 'truth' defines textuality itself, is to not only to risk a closure in which excludes all that does not conform to this 'truth', rendering oneself blind to the dialectic possibilities of the primary text; it is also to risk the kind of critical stalemate which has been in place since the late 1960's, the impasse between an Anglo-American thought which is frequently regarded as paleocritical and conservative, and a French critical theory which is regarded as obfuscatory and logically incoherent. It is this impasse which has been mirrored in Beckett studies and *which can be mirrored by* the Beckettian text itself.

As our examination of Beckettian textuality has demonstrated, the nature of this impasse is, to some extent, artificial, it not being the case that the logocentric and anti-logocentric poles of this argument are mutually exclusive; on the contrary, we have seen that for Beckett the nature of the *logos* in itself implies the *possibility* of its absence, even as the absence of the *logos* in itself implies the possibility of its presence: "It's not true, yes it's

true, it's true and it's not true, there is silence and there is not silence, there is no one and there is someone, nothing prevents anything" (*Texts for Nothing* 154). This is the significant point on which Beckett differs from Derrida and his historical delineation of the metaphysically reassuring role of the *logos*: unlike Derrida, Beckett does not allow such historicity to effect his view of textuality, recognising that it has no bearing on the actual role of this potentiality within the text. The notion of the *logos*, for Beckett, is far from reassuring, for any verifiable usurpation of the origin and the consequent ratification of the text's 'rights to reality' is no less of a mirage than the meaningful attainment of the *logos* itself, its apprehension as a transcendental signified. This is why the two poles in this debate, within the Beckettian text, are constantly locked in the dialectic between being and non-being, the dialectic that constitutes human existence. In this context, any attempt to promote one possibility over the other is fundamentally misguided, a distortion of the very problems that the Beckettian text embodies. The mode of potentiality which is language, incorporating the problematic which is *writing*, bestrides the space between both arguments, both possibilities, holding them in suspension in relation to each other even as the two can never truly be separated. That this remark also echoes the relationship between consciousness and writing in Plato and Nietzsche, their willingness to maintain the distance between the two even as they utilise their continuities, points to the equivocal role of writing in this paradigm: we can no more affirm or deny the relationship between the consciousness and writing, origin and supplement, than we can finally affirm or deny *ourselves via* the medium of language. It is, therefore, only in utilising the notion of *potentiality* that the two critical positions can be shown to complement each other, allowing for a simultaneous acceptance of both. The recognition of textuality as a mode of potentiality facilitates a common ground for discussion in the debates about that nature of reality, and our definitions of reality. To refuse this notion,

to absolutely deny either position in an act of interpretative closure, is not only to deny the validity of Beckettian textuality, it is to deny our very mode of existence.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION: WRITING AND THE RIGHTS OF REALITY

¹ A Treatise Concerning Human Understanding (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) *passim*.

² Subsequently published (1967) as "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" in Derrida's Writing and Difference ed. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978) 351-70.

³ *Archē* from the Greek *arké* – founding or controlling principle. The significance of writing, it should be noted, also suggests why it should be the literary theorist rather than the academic philosopher who attempts to elude the classical opposition between realism and idealism *via* recourse to textuality.

⁴ In conversation, Derrida asserts that he feels "too close" to "write, sign, countersign performatively texts which 'respond' to Beckett" ("This Strange Institution" 60).

⁵ For a wide-ranging view on Nietzsche's equivocal status in relation to contemporary theory see Nietzsche as Postmodernist: Essays Pro and Contra ed. C Koelb (Albany: State U of New York, 1990).

⁶ The term 'post-structuralism', of course, was not in use at this point.

⁷ See Jean-Marie Benoist's The Structural Revolution (London: NLB, 1978).

⁸ Descartes "Second Meditation" in Meditations on First Philosophy trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980) 24-25.

⁹ As Alex Callinicos asserts, for Derrida, "...any attempt to halt the endless play of signifiers, above all by appealing to the concept of reference, must... involve postulating a "transcendental signified" which is somehow present to the consciousness without any discursive mediation" (74).

¹⁰ Derrida concisely captures the strategic nature of the *archē*-trace in his self-negating assertion that, "[m]eaning must await being said or written in order to inhabit itself, and in order to become, by differing from itself, what it is: meaning" ("Force and Signification" 11). The point of speech or writing, the usurpatory point at which meaning "differs from itself", entails that meaning, or the text, is *already* in place, the usurpation in question having *always already* (i.e. *never*) occurred; "Meaning must await...".

¹¹ The word supplement, it should be noted, not only indicates that which is an *addition* to the origin but also the compensation for the lack that is the origin.

¹² Alex Callinicos has argued that there are two variants of post-structuralist theory, a "worldly poststructuralism" (a term borrowed from Edward Said) which retains the distinction between the discursive and the non-discursive and, therefore, the possibility of a reality which is not subject to discursive mediation, and the "textualist post-structuralism" (a term borrowed from Richard Rorty) in which any reality can only be an effect of discourse. See Against Postmodernism (London: Polity, 1989) 68. As Jeremy Hawthorn points out (181), post-structuralism in its textual or Derridean variant has had a far greater influence on literary studies than its "worldly" version.

¹³ The most famous example of the kind of debate that is articulated between these positions is probably the 1977 exchange between Derrida and John Searle on the question of intention in the philosophy of J.L. Austin. See Derrida "Signature Event Context" (Glyph I 172-97), John R. Searle "Reiterating the Differences" (Glyph I 198-208) and Derrida "Limited Inc" (Glyph II 162-51).

¹⁴ "Logocentrism is *also*, fundamentally, an idealism. It is the matrix of idealism. Idealism is its most direct representation, the most constantly dominant force. And the dismantling of logocentrism is simultaneously – *a fortiori* – a deconstitution of idealism or spiritualism in all their variants" (Positions 51).

CHAPTER ONE: THE QUESTION OF WRITING: PLATO, MYTH, AND THE ENCHANTMENTS OF
REALITY

¹ In *Dissemination* trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone P., 1981) 67-171. The original French version is in *La Dissémination* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972) 71-197 although this version was preceded by an early version published in *Tel Quel* 32 and 33 (1968).

² My own references to Plato are taken from *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indiana: Hackett, 1997). The translation of the *Phaedrus* in this edition is by Alexander Nehemas and Paul Woodruff. Derrida's references to Plato in the original version of "Plato's Pharmacy" from *Platon: Oeuvres Complètes IV: Phèdre*, 2nd Edition, 1950. Barbara Johnson's translation of "Plato's Pharmacy" utilises *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* Bollingen Series LXXI., ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, Princeton UP, 1961).

³ *Plato the Myth Maker*, ed. and trans. Gerard Naddaf (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998).

⁴ Translation by Paul Woodruff in *Plato: Complete Works* ed. John M. Cooper (Indiana: Hackett, 1997).

⁵ Such a breach has always been implicit to the oral tradition, the boundaries of selfhood giving way to a communal experience.

⁶ One should compare this to Luc Brisson's formulation of the role of myth in Plato: "...for Plato, myth ...is a form of discourse which transmits all information that a community conserves in memory of its distant past and passes on orally from one generation to the next... Myths offer replies to [their] questions, but they are replies which can only be set forth, for they tolerate neither questions nor explanations. Thus, a myth is never "myth" for the person who adheres to it. It only becomes a "myth" for those who consider it from the outside and who question its validity" (9).

⁷ Gerard Naddaf, translator's introduction, *Plato the Myth Maker*, by Luc Brisson (Chicago: U of Chicago P) xxiii.

⁸ This characterisation of writing in terms of the rational *logos* is reminiscent of Karl Popper's delineation of writing as the third world: "We can call the physical world "world 1," the world of our conscious experiences "world 2," and the world of the logical *contents* of books, libraries, computer memories, and suchlike "world 3" (*Objective Knowledge* 74). Popper also situates mathematics in this third world (138) and it is notable that Theuth is not only the god of writing, but of measuring and calculation (274d).

⁹ References to this myth are common in classical literature and all of these enact her subsequent marriage and the birth of her twin sons Zetes and Callais. See Apollodorus *Library of Greek Mythology* 3.15.2, Pausanias *Description of Greece* 1.19.5, Herodotus *The Histories* 7.189 and Ovid *Metamorphoses* 6.683.

¹⁰ *The Essentials of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Anna Freud and trans. James Strachey, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986) 218-68.

¹¹ Just as the mythological form of Thamus' arguments are irrelevant to their truth value.

¹² Is Phaedrus usurping the originary position of Lysias here, or is Lysias usurping the present position of Phaedrus? The undecidable nature of this question can be applied to the Platonic deconstruction of Derrida, for Derrida also abdicates any responsibility for his own 'voice' in implying that his theory of writing is intrinsic to the text that he deconstructs (see Introduction 21-23). Is he usurping the originary text (as writing always already has) here or is the Platonic text usurping the contemporary figure of Derrida, erasing him into a play of textuality which re-states the authoritative figure of Plato?

¹³ Faust *Mephistopheles* I.iv.

¹⁴ Luc Brisson argues that Plato's myth of Atlantis in the *Timaeus* (17a-27c) is a self-consciously ironic pastiche of myth and its status as "unverifiable information" thus bearing comparison to the myth of Thamus (*Plato the Myth Maker passim*).

¹⁵ As Socrates asserts in relation to the realm of forms: "What is in this place is without color and without shape and without solidity, a being that really is what it is, the subject of all true knowledge, visible only to the intelligence, the soul's steersman" (247c-d).

¹⁶ Translation by Alexander Nehemas and Paul Woodruff in *Plato: Complete Works* ed. John M. Cooper (Indiana: Hackett, 1997).

CHAPTER TWO: THE POTENTIAL BODY AND THE BODY'S POTENTIALITY: THE USURPATION OF NIETZSCHE

¹ *The Ear of the Other* ed. Christie McDonald and Trans. Peggy Kamuf (Lincoln NE: U of Nebraska P) 1985.

² Quotations from Nietzsche which are not incorporated into to Derridean text are taken from *Ecce Homo* in *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche* ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House) 1966.

³ "Roundtable on Autobiography" *The Ear of the Other* 41-89.

⁴ "...life will be verified only at the moment the bearer of the name, the one whom we, in our prejudice, call living, will have died. It will be verified only at some moment after or during death's arrest" ("Otobiographies" 9).

⁵ This paradigm, of course, also informs the reversal between cause and effect which defines Nietzsche's view of the will to knowledge, the notion of an impersonal view based on conventional notions of causation being supplanted by retrospective and inherently subjective process in which the philosopher derives the premises of his thesis from the conclusion that he wishes to justify: "...from the work to its author, from the deed to its doer, from the ideal to him who *needs* it, from every mode of thinking and valuing to the imperative *want* behind it" (*The Joyful Wisdom* 333-34).

⁶ This assertion, of course, needs clarification: the only *immediate* bodily presence that writing requires is that of the *reader*.

⁷ Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986).

⁸ It should also be noted that the totality involved here can be that of one's body or of one's life, these two factors being indistinguishable by virtue of the fact that one's subjective awareness can no more transcend its life, achieving an "afterworld", than it can transcend the body, achieving an "outside": in either case, the self cannot transcend the presence which *is* the self that this presence can be independently affirmed.

⁹ In this respect the Nietzschean paradigm also reflects Barthes' "The Death of the Author". The author does not 'exist' as an author until he *writes*, even as this is, simultaneously, the moment that he enters into his own death. Yet it is clear from this that the author has never existed, has never been born in order that he *can* die: however, it would, perhaps, be more accurate to assert that he has never been brought into existence in order that this existence can be *contested*, for it is precisely in this elusiveness that the concept of the author sustains itself, remaining a perpetual *possibility* which can never be finally erased. As Nietzsche demonstrates, the text *itself* can be seen as a manifestation of this possibility, this being the potentiality of the body in a dual sense; firstly in that it reflects the body's inability to affirm its own existence (the body is a *mere* potentiality) and secondly in the sense that it is this inability which allows the body to realise itself, to *fulfil* its potentiality *through* writing.

¹⁰ Indeed, the manner in which Thamus is erotically utilised as a *mask* for the unspeakable self-identity of the book or the object (incorporating the speaker who has abdicated responsibility over his own voice) bears

comparison to Nietzsche's utilization of Zarathustra as a mask (*necessarily* a mask) for the unspeakable self-identity of the body.

¹¹ As Michael A. Sells asserts: "The authentic subject of [the apophatic] discourse slips continually back beyond each effort to name it or even to deny its nameability. The regress is harnessed and becomes a guiding semantic force, the *dynamis*, of a new kind of language" (2). As Nietzsche demonstrates, this semantic force can be progressive as well as regressive, for he does not merely give credit to the body's existence, but to what the body will become at the point of death.

¹² In this light of the danger of textually referring to one's present 'actuality', rather than to the mask, the actuality of what one *will* become, is all too evident: this is why Nietzsche, or the body which *is* Nietzsche, is loathe to speak of its actuality, what it is rather than what it is becoming. Yet paradoxically Nietzsche cannot warn that this actual self should not be confused with his written self without referring to this 'reality': "Under these circumstances I have a duty against which my habits, even more the pride of my instincts, revolt at bottom – namely, to say: *Hear me! For I am such and such a person. Above all, do not mistake me for someone else*" (673).

¹³ Of course, one could equally assert that the body constitutes the bridge over which the textual enactment of this origin is 'carried', since the post-mortem breach between the body and signification, Nietzsche's presence and its self *récit*, has yet to occur.

¹⁴ As this redemptive process suggests, the mysterious actuality Nietzsche/ the body is not merely a "bridge to the overman" (*Zarathustra* 147) for as we have seen the body finally *becomes* the overman at the *post-mortem* point of redemption: the overman, or, indistinguishably, the *body*, overcomes *himself/ itself*, being both the means and the end, the bridge *to* the textual figure *and* the textual figure. Nevertheless, the writer has no end *to* himself because of his pre-mortem inability to apprehend his own physical presence, and his inability to be physically present at the *post-mortem* point of textual redemption: "There it was...that I picked up the word "overman"...and that man is something that must be overcome – that man is a bridge and no end" (*Zarathustra* 310). Nietzsche's actuality, his 'empirical' presence, thus constitutes the bridge to this textual figure, a bridge which can only be apprehended *as it is redeemed* by this textual figure: the actuality of this "illusive" bridge is *never* apprehended for it is constantly translated into that which *is* to come, into what is *currently* an illusion, in the act of being overcome.

¹⁵ One should note the Shakespearian allusion here:

Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of? (*Hamlet* Act III Sc.I)

As Nietzsche asserts, in contrasting the complacent acceptance of illusion as a present *possibility* as opposed to the future *certainty* which defines one's actions in the process of becoming: "...action requires veils of illusion: that is the doctrine of Hamlet, not that cheap wisdom of Jack the dreamer who reflects too much and, as it were, from an excess of possibilities does not get around to action. Not reflection, no – true knowledge, an insight into the horrible truth, outweighs any motive for action, both in Hamlet and in the Dionysian man" (*The Birth of Tragedy* 60). As Nietzsche asks in *Ecce Homo*: "Is Hamlet understood? Not doubt, *certainty* is what drives one insane. – But one must be profound, an abyss, a philosopher to feel that way. – We are all afraid of the truth" (702). Similarly, the significance of *Hamlet* cannot be divined from the words, for these words enact the superficiality of the present rather than the truth of future, of the "undiscover'd country", merely revealing the characters' inability to apprehend the overall significance of the plot by virtue of their current implication *in* the plot (as contrasted with the transcendental position of the chorus). The play's true significance lies in its totality and the actions, the *becoming* which leads to this totality and which is only wholly explicable in this transcendental context: for Greek poet's, "the myth does not at all obtain adequate objectification in the spoken word. The structure of the scenes and the visual images reveal a deeper wisdom than the poet himself can put into words and concepts: the same is also observable in Shakespeare, whose Hamlet, for instance, similarly, talks more superficially than he acts, so that the previously mentioned lesson of Hamlet is to be deduced, not from his words, but from a profound contemplation and survey of the whole" (*The Birth of Tragedy* 105).

CHAPTER THREE: ... HELL, I'VE CONTRADICTED MYSELF, NO MATTER: BECKETT, ARISTOTLE
AND THE HYLOMORPHIC TEXT

¹ See Introduction 21-23.

² Typical and recent examples are Anthony Uhlmann Beckett and Post-structuralism (1999), Daniel Katz Saying I No More (1999) and Richard Begam Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity (1996), although, as H. Porter Abbott has noted (Beckett Writing Beckett 24), this revaluation can be traced back as far as Angela B. Moorjani's Abysmal Games in the Novels of Samuel Beckett (1982).

³ The breach in question being that between existential humanism or phenomenology and post-structuralism (Trezise ix).

⁴ See Introduction 17-19.

⁵ Benveniste's Problèmes de Linguistique Générale was published in 1966: Barthes' "The Death of the Author" was written in 1968.

⁶ I follow Benveniste here in defining 'discourse' as the semantic level of language, the meaning which is articulated *via* textuality.

⁷ One is reminded of Derrida's conclusion that "[t]he graphic image is not seen; and the acoustic image is not heard" (Grammatology 65) in the act of reading or hearing, our failure to be meaningfully *conscious* of the physical reality of discourse at the point of interpretation leaving nothing but a consciousness of what this discourse *says*, there being nothing (i.e. no graphic image/ no acoustic image) beyond the 'everything' which is the text and also no "'natural" hierarchy between the sound-imprint and the visual (graphic) imprint" (Grammatology 65).

⁸ Aristotle Metaphysics 1046e 25-32. The edition used in this section is Aristotle Metaphysics trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Bloomington: Indiana UP) 1966. However, reference will occasionally and necessarily be made to the more lucid translation by Giorgio Agamben and Daniel Heller-Roazen in Potentialities ed. and trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford UP) 1999. As well as exteriorising the Beckettian text's status as a mode of potentiality, this section simultaneously can be read as an application of Agamben's philosophical interpretation of Aristotle to Beckett or, conversely, a Beckettian interrogation of Agamben's view of Aristotelian potentiality.

⁹ Metaphysics 1050b 10-12.

¹⁰ See Ludwig Wittgenstein The Wittgenstein Reader. Ed. Anthony Kenny (London: Blackwell, 1994).

¹¹ An allusion to Democritus: Murphy, for example, desires the peace which is attained "when the somethings give way, or perhaps simply add up, to Nothing, that which in the guffaw of the Abderite naught is more real" (Murphy 138).

¹² See Aristotle's Physics III.i 201 a10-11.

¹³ "...the mutability of changeable things is itself capable of receiving all forms into which mutable things can be changed. But what is this mutability? Surely not mind? Surely not body? Surely not the appearances of mind and body? If one could speak of a 'nothing something' or 'a being which is non-being', that is what I would say" (Confessions XI.vi).

¹⁴ De Anima 430a1.

¹⁵ As in Nietzsche, whose Zarathustra, his textual self, is not yet actual but is *already* actual to him. Again, one can see in this why Beckett frequently alludes to the imaginary status of language and thought, the word "imagine" denoting an image of that which is (possibly) not yet real, an image of a mind which does not yet

exist. Similarly, Zarathustra is an 'image' or an 'imagining' of Nietzsche's body, that which is (possibly) real but has not yet been installed within the 'rights of reality' as Zarathustra.

¹⁶ See the discussion of Plato's myth of the cicadas 75-78.

¹⁷ The phrase is notoriously difficult to translate. I have used the translation 'thisness' since it is not only the commonest translation, but because it also expresses the indicative dimension to the term. As the text (Apostle 1966) suggests, it has also been translated as 'whatness'.

¹⁸ See Plotinus *The Enneads*, ed. Stephen Mackenna (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992).

¹⁹ Knowlson 109.

²⁰ This comparison, however needs to be qualified. To say that language itself cannot be appointed any formal meaning, or that it lacks the defining quality of 'thisness', is not to unequivocally assert that it lacks form or that it can *simply* be designated "unformed matter". In the case of the "nothing something" which is language it is, rather, that "a thing that was nothing had happened with the utmost formal distinctness" (Watt 73). Language possesses a form which may be apparent but this form remains indefinable, lacking the quality of 'thisness': this is why the Beckettian narrator's words remain 'nothing' (or in Augustine's terms a "nothing something") in spite of their form. Such a form, even as it is experienced, is unnameable, remaining meaningless even as it *facilitates* meaning. As in the case of Watt's "nothing something", his unnameable "pot", language itself cannot come into meaningful being and its form is not *meaningfully* experienced: "Watt had been frequently and exceedingly troubled, in his time, by this imperceptible, no, hardly imperceptible, since he perceived it, by this indefinable thing that prevented him from saying, with conviction, and to his relief, of the object that was so like a pot, that it was a pot..." (Watt 79). This meaninglessness becomes apparent in the act of reading; during this act, one is not meaningfully conscious of the form of the words that one is looking at but, rather, of the meaning which is articulated through that form. In other words, in apprehending the meaning of a word one is not meaningfully *conscious* that word's immediate form even as one experiences this form in purely sensory terms. Even if one *was* 'meaningfully' aware of language's formal characteristics one could not articulate this meaning without recourse to expression, what the word *says* always being other to the formal apparency of the word itself.

That the form of such language cannot be appointed the quality of thisness thus raises the question of whether such form can be validly said to exist in the absence of any meaningful *consciousness* of that form. One could say that language possesses 'form' in much the same way that an unseen object possesses a 'form' (e.g. Watt's 'imperceptible' pot). Such an object *is*, in a sense, "unformed matter" by virtue of the fact that its form has not been meaningfully recognised *as* a form (i.e. it is not a substance). The 'form' of such an object is not actual but is, like "unformed matter", potential: in the same manner the Beckettian narrator has *yet* to speak, by virtue of his inability to existentially verify his own language, transforming this language from a potentiality to an actuality, the 'form' of an unseen object exists *in potentiality* in that it has *yet* to be meaningfully verified, the object having *yet* to become actual. Like the language of the Beckettian narrator, therefore, an unseen object is not a *this* since it does not exist in the "Intellectual Realm" (to recall Plotinus). Within the Beckettian text, therefore, language itself is like "unformed matter" in that it is not a *substance*: in spite of its 'formal' characteristics it is unnameable, not being separable and it lacking the quality of thisness (these qualities being reserved for the meaning which language articulates).

This, in turn, raises the question of whether an Aristotelian substance can be said to exist when it is not meaningfully present to a consciousness. Clearly, while a substance may be a definable *this* by virtue of its form, form *itself* is not enough to define it as a substance. This form also needs to be meaningfully present to a consciousness in order that it can actually *be* a *this*. We cannot define language (for example) as *language* unless it is present to a consciousness, unless its meaning has been *actualised*: being present to consciousness is what makes language what it *is*, this factor being part of its essence, and one could equally assert that this presence is part of the essence of substance itself, as is suggested by Berkeley's recognition that "*esse est percipi*". Aristotle, however, fails to recognise that his view of substance is a specifically *human* view, human cognition being necessary to *appoint* thisness to a substance that it can actually *be* a substance. This is symptomatic of Aristotle's pre-Cartesian viewpoint, his failure to distinguish between mind and externality (such a failure could be linked to Heidegger's rejection of Cartesian thought and his notion of 'being-in-the-world'). Nevertheless, it should be noted that Aristotle's identification of thisness or substance with actuality continues to conform to Berkeley's tenet that the *reality* of sensible things consists in being perceived. Berkeley's rejection of the notion that existence is one thing, and perception is another clearly echoes Aristotle's belief that thisness is a precondition of actuality. Aristotle merely fails to appreciate the problem of

attributing thisness or form to an object which is not meaningfully present to consciousness, believing that such qualities can unproblematically be *said* to exist independently of our awareness of them. As Zeller points out, Aristotle attributes substance and thisness to *the world* rather than to *man*:

The 'Forms' had for him...a metaphysical existence of their own....And keenly as he followed the growth of ideas out of experience, it is none the less true that these ideas, especially at the point that they are farthest removed from experience and immediate perception, are metamorphosed in the end from a logical product of human thought into an immediate presentment of a supersensible world, and the object, in that sense, of an intellectual intuition. (Aristotle Vol I, 204)

As Bertrand Russell asserts in relation to this quotation: "I do not see how Aristotle could have found a reply to this criticism" (A History of Western Philosophy 179).

²¹ "We should not then inquire whether the soul and body are one thing, any more than whether wax and its imprint are..." (De Anima II.i).

²² "...actuality is prior ...in substance; and in one sense it is prior in time, but in another it is not" (Metaphysics 1049b 11-13). Aristotle does not explicitly elaborate this statement, but its sense is implicit in the remark "matter exists potentially in view of the fact that it might come to possess a form" (Metaphysics 1050a 17). Matter *already* exists (it has temporal priority) yet has never become actual *as matter* (form has temporal priority).

²³ One is reminded of Nietzsche's/ Zarathustra's assertion that "[y]ou are going your way to greatness: here nobody shall sneak after you. Your own foot has effaced the path behind you, and over it there is written: impossibility" (Zarathustra 265). Nietzsche's body, the possibility that he utilises in the will to power, will never manifest *itself* as a substance, even on death. Like Aristotelian matter, it is an *impossible* possibility.

²⁴ As Juliet recollects:

I add that he has abandoned the discourse in terms of the positive and preferred to rely on an approach based on the negative.

He takes me up on this:

- *Negation is no more possible than affirmation. It is absurd to say that something is absurd. That's still a value judgement. It is impossible to protest, and equally impossible to assent.* (165)

Such remarks clearly problematise any delineation of Beckett's work in terms of negation alone. Daniel Katz, for example, asserts that "...notions of expression are resolutely rejected in Beckett's post-war prose" (1) this being reflected in the title of her work Saying I No More. Beckett can no more reject the obligation to express than he can than he can resolve this obligation, this work always being resolutely *equivocal*.

²⁵ "Now matter is potentiality, and form is actuality, and this in two ways, one that in which knowledge, the other that in which contemplation, is actuality" (De Anima II.i).

²⁶ Metaphysics 1047a 24-26.

²⁷ "...this is not an alteration – since here there is the gift of the self to itself and to actuality [*epidosis eis auto*]".

²⁸ The significance of this lecture, and this remark, on Beckett's work has been noted by all three of Beckett's autobiographers (Bair 221, Knowlson 616, Cronin 221).

²⁹ Lawrence E. Harvey Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970).

³⁰ Beckett's theory of the text, unlike Nietzsche's, does not *require* the body: it is simply that it cannot escape this *possibility*.

³¹ One should note the ambiguity which inhabits the quotation: when the narrator says, "I greatly fear, since my speech can only be of me and here, that I am once more engaged in putting an end to both" we are prompted to

ask whether he is speaking of “putting an end to” “me and here” or whether he speaking of “putting an end to” both “my speech” and “me and here”, as is suggested by his return to the beginning. Clearly, this return to the beginning implies that both his speech is undone, and the possibility of actualising the origin *via* speech is undone, neither speech *nor* the origin having been installed within the rights of reality.

³² One should note that one possible etymology of the name ‘Mahood’ is the word ‘Manhood’, the absence of the ‘n’ enacting man’s/ the Unnamable’s inability to *name* himself, thus bringing himself into being or actualising himself. The Unnamable like, Molloy, aspires to be “a man, a fortiori myself” (Molloy 11), yet he is incessantly ‘Un-able’ to completely ‘nam[e]’ himself.

³³ “*Pi* - ...an irrational number (one that cannot be expressed as a simple fraction or as a decimal with a finite number of decimal places) and a transcendental number (one without continuously recurrent digits)” (Encyclopaedia Britannica CD-ROM).

³⁴ “Common approximations to *pi* are 22/7 and 3.14, although the value 3 can be used as a rough approximation” (Hutchinson New Century Encyclopedia)

³⁵ It is notable that elsewhere in this interview, Beckett refers to this “mess” as “this buzzing confusion” (218), a phrase which also occurs in Murphy: Neary asserts, “‘Murphy, all life is figure and ground.’ ‘But a wandering to find home,’ said Murphy. ‘The face,’ said Neary, ‘or system of faces, against the big blooming buzzing confusion. I think of Miss Dwyer’” (7). The phrase was coined by the psychologist William James in order to describe the manner in which a new-born child visualises the world before it learns to perceptually divide it into discrete objects (Westen 504), and thus describes pure sensory experience. This is what Beckett means when he describes it as ‘invading’ our experience. As we shall see, this paradigm recurs throughout the Trilogy and is particularly relevant to Moran’s narrative.

³⁶ In speech, of course, there are no letters, merely phones (“The smallest perceptible + discrete+ segment of speech sound” (Crystal 427)), and the phoneme (“The smallest contrastive unit in the sound system of a language” (Crystal 427)) is therefore the lexeme (“The smallest contrastive unit in a semantic system” (Crystal 424)). Phonemes, however, do not exist in writing in the strictest, material sense, (even if we class them as syllables), which merely consists of letters and words (“The smallest unit of grammar that can stand alone as a complete utterance” (Crystal 433) “The simplest – if not the original – linguistic formation is the single word” (Ingarden Literary Work of Art 35)). Beckett constantly seems to allude to words as though they are phonemes: “In a word, shall I be able to speak of me...?” (Unnamable 305): “In a word there seems to be the light of the outer world...” (Malone 221): “I told him to go and wash himself, to straighten his clothes, in a word, to get ready to appear in public” (Molloy 94). This tends to suggest that the narrator cannot meaningfully divide the word into anything other than more words, which indicates his scriptural status. This process is analogous to the manner in which, in attempting to grasp himself as a singular, meaningful unit, he merely supplements himself.

³⁷ Roman Ingarden asserts that the highest unit can be either the sentence or the text: “...both views... are correct and are not contradictory... One may observe the whole either in its ‘becoming’ as it arises from subjective operations, or as something already *complete*, which we can apprehend solely by understanding the individual sentences contained in it” (The Literary Work of Art 146). Beckett’s text, of course, gradually moves towards a conflation of both which, as we shall see, suggests a movement towards textual homogeneity. Since the reader has the text before them, they cannot escape an awareness of its totality and, even if the sentence is the highest unit in the reading *experience*, the apprehension the whole text, as a unit of meaning is the teleological end of this experience.

³⁸ Ingarden asserts that the reader and the material text both lie beyond the meaning of the literary structure: “...the attributes, experiences, or psychic states of the reader do not belong to the structure of the work” (The Literary Work of Art 23): “The print does not belong to the elements of the literary work of art itself but merely constitutes its physical foundation.... The printed signs are not grasped in their individual physical form but rather... as ideal types” (The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art 14-15). One is prompted to ask what “ideal type” the comma represents since as Ingarden asserts: “‘punctuation marks’... according to their function, are nothing other than various dependent, functional words” (The Literary Work of Art 108).

³⁹ “Writing, the letter, the sensible inscription, has always been considered by Western tradition as the body and matter external to the spirit, to breath, to speech, and to the logos” (Derrida Grammatology 35).

⁴⁰ Henri Bergson *Matter and Memory* trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (London: Allen and Unwin, 1911). As John Pilling (7) and Anthony Cronin (127) have pointed out, Beckett lectured on Bergson at Trinity College, Dublin, in the early 1930s.

CONCLUSION: THE EXIGENCY OF THE ARCHĒ-TRACE AND THE EXIGENCY OF THE LOGOS

¹ Burke is specifically referring to the question of the disappearance of the Author here, but such a disappearance is, of course, a consequence of the *archē*-trace.

² Derrida, of course, admits that the usurpation of the origin is hypothetical in the sense that this usurpation is merely posited as a means of demonstrating that there has never been an origin in the first place. Yet, as Beckett is aware, an inability to verify any such usurpation always leaves the origin in place as a possibility, the immanent status of the text *also* being a mere hypothesis.

³ As we have seen, to do so in the case of Nietzsche is to remove any possibility of redemption, rendering the subject “[p]owerless against what has been done... an angry spectator of all that is past. The will cannot will backwards... he cannot break time and time’s covetousness” (*Zarathustra* 251).

⁴ This also recalls the myth of Orpheus, whose head continues to sing in spite of the dismemberment of his body by the Maenads. Ihab Hassan, in emphasising the continuities between modernism and post-modernism, enacts the heroism of modernism as the moment of surrender itself, the willingness of the writer to escape the ideological constraints of metaphysics and history as they succumb to the dismemberment which is language, a masculinist heroism which he articulates through the myth of Orpheus. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that “[t]he cults that we associate with his name blend word and flesh into the dance of existence” (5) this being the reason why “[t]he singing body of Orpheus holds... a contradiction-between the dumb unity of nature and the multiple voice of consciousness...” (6). In speaking of the writer’s exile, specifically of Beckett, Hassan asserts that “(a)ll exiles, Henry Miller reminds us in his book about Rimbaud, exile themselves from the world’s body, the mother’s flesh” (213). Yet the instances in which the mother, who Hassan identifies not only with history, but also with matter, remains the elusive object of desire in modernist literature belies the kind of heroism which Hassan claims for the modernist: the journey of Beckett’s *Molloy*, for example, only occurs as a desire for the mother, reminding one more of a headless chicken than a heroically disembodied lyricist. Other references to the myth of Orpheus are pertinent here, Elizabeth Sewall, for example: “Language and mind, poetry and biology meet and bear on one another in the figure of Orpheus... The human organism, that body which has the gift of thought, does not have the choice of two kinds of thinking. It has only one, in which the organism as a whole is engaged all along the line” (5, 19). Similarly, “...whereas the older poet...knew and acknowledged mediation, the modern either does not acknowledge or does not know a mediator for his orphic journey. He passes through experience by means of the unmediated vision. Nature, the body, and human consciousness-that is the only text” (Geoffrey Hartman *The Unmediated Vision* 155).

⁵ In this respect, Beckett and Plato differ from Nietzsche, who is less interested in utilising writing as a means of performatively *revealing* the potentiality which is the origin (and thus the status of consciousness) than he is in utilising this potentiality in the process of self-overcoming. With Nietzsche, the emphasis is on discontinuity, the *breach* between the origin and its representation, for he insists that “I am one thing, my writings are another matter...” (*Ecce Homo* 715). Nietzsche utilises the possibility of the usurpation that writing affords as a means of facilitating his redemption as the textual figure that he desires, even as he maintains that there can be no *de facto* usurpation in his own (potential) presence. This is why Nietzsche relies on the *reader* to finally verify this textual figure’s *post-mortem* “right to reality”, a fact which *simultaneously* means that this usurpation cannot be verified, there being no verifiable usurpation in the absence of any origin *to usurp*; the textual self *now* constitutes the only reality that Nietzsche has ever had: “*To redeem those who lived in the past and to turn every ‘it was’ into a ‘thus I willed it’ – that alone should I call redemption*” (764-65). Nevertheless, even as Nietzsche *lives* the *archē*-trace, the translation of the origin into that which has never *been*, he retains the potentiality which is the origin, the “‘it was’” which is opposed to the “‘thus I willed it’”.

⁶ One could argue that this dichotomy between absence and immanence, liberation from and enslavement to the origin is a specifically modernist characteristic of these writers. This dichotomy, for example, is replicated in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*: Lily Briscoe, in another utilisation of the maternal figure as a symbol of metaphysical reassurance, desires to logocentrically *attain* the matriarchal figure of Mrs Ramsey, a figure who

symbolises the unity of the origin, a unity that Lily cannot attain: "What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored? ... for it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men..." (57). Meaning, however, is constantly caught at the point of liminality, not merely by virtue of one's inability to attain this unity, but by virtue of the fact that this unity is *inescapable*, for Lily cannot liberate herself from the immanence of Mrs Ramsey's presence in order that she (Mrs Ramsey or Lily Briscoe) can become a *meaningful* presence: even when Mrs Ramsey is deceased, Lily still remains caught in the chain of desire, as is demonstrated by the effect of her painting: "Here she was again, she thought, stepping back to look at it, drawn... into the presence of this formidable ancient enemy of hers-this other thing, this truth, this reality, which ... emerged stark at the back of appearances..." (172). That Lily is, again, "drawn...into the presence" of this object by virtue of her "stepping back to look at it" is suggestive of the double-bind in which the apparent liberation from the origin simply restates the object of desire which one cannot transcend, an object which one always appears to be liberated from by virtue of the fact that one is constantly inapprehensibly *in* its presence. Analogously, one could say that the object of desire is that from which one never escapes by virtue of the fact that one is always liberated from it, a liberation which reiterates the desire to attain it, as desire becomes a constant signifier for one's awareness that this object has always *already* been silently attained: for Lily cannot fulfil her desire for unity with Mrs Ramsey by virtue of the fact this desire signifies the manner in which she is already *captured* by Mrs Ramsey's immanent, though inapprehensible, presence: "Was it wisdom? Was it knowledge? Was it, once more, the deceptiveness of beauty, so that all one's perceptions, half-way to truth, were tangled in a golden mesh?" (57).

⁷ "...what seems to inaugurate itself in Western literature with Plato will not fail to re-edit itself at least in Rousseau, and then in Saussure" ("Plato's Pharmacy" 158).

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