

David Vichnar, PhD
OPPONENT'S REPORT:

re "*Resonance and Self-resonance: Gilles Deleuze's Involuntary Memory in Samuel Beckett and Marcel Proust,*"
by Tomáš Suchánek
(BA dissertation, 2017)

Mr Suchánek's BA thesis is an ambitious project whose goal is nothing lesser than evaluate the applicability of Gilles Deleuze's early-phase ontology (esp. as developed in his *Nietzsche and Philosophy* [1962] and *Proust and Signs* [1964; 1975], but also later on in the famous tomes co-authored with Félix Guattari) to Samuel Beckett's famous first *Trilogy*. The obvious triangulation point between these two is clearly the work of Marcel Proust, which exerted considerable influence on both the thinker and the writer.

Mr Suchánek presents a cogent and informed summary of Deleuze's thinking on such complex issues as truth (understood as a duality of the *aposteriority* of judgment and reasoning, and the *apriori* essentialism of temporal heterogeneity) and transversality (refreshingly contextualised with reference to Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return) in Chapters 1 & 2; and, in Chapter 3, more relevantly for Beckett, the ramifications these two have for the conception of the Self (the "subversion of selfhood" [61] these two seem to share). This extended theoretical excursion is followed by a "textual analysis" of Beckett's *Trilogy*, with an exhaustive coverage of its rhetorical and narrative strategies (whatever "grammatical strategies" [68] may refer to is not clear) and an analysis of the concept of "self-resonance" (what Mr Suchánek with Deleuze's help identifies as the "three dimensions of narrative introspection" [87]), in the longest Chapter 4, which comprises the second half of the thesis. A super-brief "epitaph" then manages to bring the discussion to an end by highlighting its perhaps crucial point and a Q.E.D., that Deleuze's terminology indeed "furnishes the reading of Beckett with a perspicacious view and enlightens its main topos – the narrator's self-projection in signs" (139).

In both its scope (some 140 pp.), competence of philosophical analysis and complexity of material covered, Mr Suchánek's thesis presents an exceptional undertaking vastly exceeding the Department's standards for a BA thesis. For this opponent, the most immediately enjoyable and enlightening was Chapter 4 and the highly competent close-reading of Beckett's *Trilogy* performed by Mr Suchánek. Points such as that "Beckett complexifies the relationship between [...] the remembering narrator and writing narrator [...] when he concocts the present with the past threads of the narrative self-projection" (73) are simply brilliant; as is Mr Suchánek's discussion of Molloy's "anomal" and his reading of the famous "interrogation scene" (94-96).

That said, the opponent also feels obliged to voice some of his misgivings. While I commend the candidate's steadfast adherence to the original French of all three authors discussed, I must admit that the sheer vastness of the passages quoted and constant to-ing and fro-ing between the two languages (more often than not mid-sentence or even mid-phrase), proved detrimental to this opponent's ability to follow Mr Suchánek's argument. In itself, the high incidence of quotations makes it dubious as to whether there actually *is* a line of argument to follow – a usual page of Mr Suchánek's thesis features more quotations and footnotes than original/main text. Without hoping to further linguistic imperialism, I am of the opinion that original wording in a work as detailed as this one need be consulted, but only used where the translation departs from, or is otherwise

inferior to, the original. To my knowledge, Hugh Tomlinson's and Richard Howard's translation of the *Nietzsche* and *Proust* books, respectively, have been widely undisputed and proved reliable throughout the Anglophone world. This tendency on the candidate's part then proves quite absurd in the case of *Trilogy*, of which we of course have Beckett's very own English rendering.

Sadly enough, the clarity of Mr Suchánek's argumentation further suffers from some formal and language-related shortcomings. Only in the first paragraph of the thesis, there are no fewer than three language errors ("the way how", "it will adumbrate what are the criteria", "a framework with help of which" [10]), and throughout the thesis, there are missing and/or superfluous articles (in French also: Proust's work appears as both *Recherche* and *La Recherche*), faulty prepositions (apply & applicable goes with "to", not "on"; one partakes "of", not "on" sth, and is independent "of" or "from" sth, but not "on", etc.) and stylistic awkwardnesses which at times obscure the message. Most noticeable of these is Mr Suchánek's predilection for long meandering sentences with multiple sub-clauses and inserted quotes – a particularly poignant example of these is an endless 12-line sentence on pp. 57-8, which begins with the phrase, "In a word..." With a topic as complex and abstruse as Mr Suchánek's, clarity of language and succinctness of expression are indispensable. That said, the thesis seems to be well-edited and proofread, with a minimum of typos or oversights.

Departing from these concerns, my questions for the candidate are the following:

1. What's the basis of your focus on "involuntary memory" in Deleuze's *Proust* book if right in the first paragraph Deleuze posits that it doesn't "constitute the unity" of Proust's *Search* and that "the madeleine or the cobblestones" are "not essential" (3) to it? The fact that the construction of the self in the *Trilogy* is "involuntary" (48-52) doesn't seem to quite justify why "involuntary memory" should have made it into the title – more needs to be said here. Speaking of which, it should be *Proust's* involuntary memory *in Deleuze*, not Deleuze's in Proust, right?

2. While I commend and enjoy your close-readings in Chapter 4, I'm unsure what to make of the first couple of subchapters – what is the rationale behind suddenly regressing from the Deleuzian vocabulary and conceiving of Beckett's narrator (thus far, "schizoid", "multiple" or "becoming-narrator") in terms of the traditional notion of an "unreliable" one, "perform[ing] ironic twist[s] at the expense of his actions" (75)? Hasn't your argument so far made this traditional category irrelevant?

3. More generally, how you address the notion of "applicability," especially important while dealing with Deleuze's "immanent" approach to Proust? How is Deleuze's reading of a particular body of writing applicable to your reading of a markedly different one, and why should it be? I agree that merely reading Deleuze and/or Beckett *on* Proust would be less exciting than reading these transversally, but still: how can Deleuze's hierarchy of signs as used in Proust's *Search* have any meaningful bearing upon their use in Beckett's *Trilogy*, which is after all a text profoundly different from Proust's *Search*, beyond just the occasional resemblance?

I recommend that Mr Suchánek's outstanding thesis be graded either excellent or very good, depending on the candidate's performance at the defence.