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Absurdní konsekvence:Beckett a Berkeley

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my late grandparents, Rachel and David Adar.

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Introduction

Samuel Beckett has long been known as a philosophical author. His work has attracted response from numerous philosophers, from Battaille and Blanchot to Deleuze and Badieu. Jacques Derrida once said that he cannot write about Beckett because "he writes—in my language, in a language which is his up to a point, mine up to a point".[1] This affinity with contemporary philosophy stands in stark contrast to Beckett's own philosophical taste. The language he shared with 20th-century philosophers is rooted in a canonical and conservative interest in philosophy which rarely extends beyond the 19th-century – his great philosophical heroes are Heraclitus, Democritus, Geulincx and Schopenhauer. When Beckett embarked on a study of the history of philosophy as an aspiring young writer he invested most of his effort in Greek philosophy, especially the pre-Socratics, and gave up the project when he reached Nietzsche.[2] 20th-century philosophers represented in his library after his death include only Mauthner, Wittgenstein (whom he may not have read), Bachelard, Sartre, Adorno, and Cioran who was his friend.[3] The question then arises how did Beckett create from such an inauspicious philosophical 'diet' the haunting images and intricate texts that are felt by later philosophers to express so well their own questioning of the foundations of Western thought. This thesis aims to contribute to a better understanding of Beckett's reworking of early modern philosophy by examining how Beckett engages with the work of the 18th-century philosopher George Berkeley. It will show how Beckett directs contemporary questions at the religious and often conservative thinking of the Good Bishop, whom deliberately misreads in creative ways. In the Preface to his *Principles of Human Knowledge*, Berkeley writes that some passages of his work may be liable, when

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[1] Quoted in Asja Szafraniec, *Beckett, Derrida, and the Event of Literature* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2007) 2.

[2] Matthijs Engelbert, et al., eds. *Notes Diverse Holo: Catalogues of Beckett's Reading Notes and Other Manuscripts at Trinity College Dublin, with Supporting Essays* (Rodopi: Amsterdam & New York, 2006) 87.

[3] Dirk van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 157-169. Henceforth Beckett's Library.

read out of context, "to be charged with most absurd consequences".[4] It is exactly the kind of consequences, I willl argue, that Beckett draws from his works.

The relation of Beckett to Berkeley calls for particular attention because it covers a long stretch of time, with direct references made in such diverse works as the 1936 novel *Murphy* and the 1964 *Film* and Berkeleyan themes appearing throughout his work. Direct references to the philosopher appear very early in Beckett's writing, beginning with *Murphy* where Berkeley is alluded to multiple times, and his idealism is an important point of reference in the novel, as I will argue in Chapter 2. Berkeley's name also crops up in Lucky's speech in the English language version of *Waiting for Godot*, replacing the name of Voltaire in the original French version.[5] Beckett's latest, and arguably most important, theoretical essay on aesthetics from 1949 – *Three Dialogues between Samuel Beckett and George Duthuit* takes its title from Berkeley's *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, a philosophical dialogue expounding Berkeley's views. As will be shown in Chapter 3, there are close structural and conceptual connections between the two texts. The latest direct reference to Berkeley in Beckett's work is in the opening remarks to the script of his only movie – *Film* written in 1963, which takes Berkeley's famous dictum *Esse est percipi* as a precept that shapes the plot of the film.[6]

As will be shown in Chapter 1 which deals with archival evidence, Beckett spent time and effort on reading Berkeley and secondary materials about his philosophy, even though in interviews and letter the name of the philosopher is not mentioned as an

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[4] For the sake of accuracy in treating Berkeley's text, I'll be using a the commonly accepted editions by Luce and Jessop as a source for Berkeley's texts: George Berkeley, "A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge," *Philosophical Works including the Works on Vision*, Eds. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (London, Edinburgh, Paris, Melbourne, Toronto and NewYork: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1949) 3. Henceforth PHK.

[5] Samuel Beckett, "Waiting for Godot," *Complete Dramatic Works* (London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1990) 43. Compare with Samuel Beckett, *En attendant Godot* (Paris: Les Éditions de minuit, 1952) 57. The name of Voltaire in the original French was rendered as Samuel Johnson in the Faber and Faber edition of 1951 and then altered to Bishop Berkeley in the second British edition of 1965. See Daniel Albright, *Representation and the Imagination: Beckett, Kafka, Nabokov, and Schoenberg* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 43-4.

[6] Samuel Beckett, "Film," *Complete Dramatic Works* (London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1990) 323.

important influence. Whatever the reason for Beckett's silence on his interest in the good Bishop, themes and images taken directly from Berkeley's writings regularly appear in Beckett's texts across different media, from the 1930s to at the late 1960s and beyond. As I will show throughout the thesis, these contents are reinterpreted against the grain, with Beckett consistently ignoring the spiritual realm in Berkeley's view of the world and reading him in a paranoid and pessimistic manner. What Berkeley advances as a praise of God, Beckett renders as a threat from hostile forces. In Frederik Smith's succinct phrase, Beckett "reads Berkeley cruelly".[7]

My hypothesis in this thesis would therefore be that Beckett's engagement with Berkeley was more extensive than has been previously recognised, and that tracing this influence across the oeuvre can help illuminate how Beckett transposes Berkeley's arguments into a hostile environment that makes them take on a dangerous and malevolent aspect.

State of Research

Research into Beckett's philosophical sources has been an important subject right from the beginning of Beckett criticism. Significant early works include Ruby Cohn's "Philosophical Fragments in the Works of Samuel Beckett" (1964);[8] John Fletcher's "Beckett and the Philosophers" (1965);[9] and Edouard Morot-Sir, "Samuel Beckett and Cartesian Emblems" (1976).[10] This early research was mostly based on textual evidence from Beckett's work, including quotes, allusions and more or less direct references to various philosophers. What is common to these essays and other research published at the time is the identification of Beckett's thinking with a Cartesian stance, relying on Hugh Kenner's influential 1961 essay "The Cartesian Centaur"[11] which claimed that Beckett

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[7] Frederik N. Smith, "Beckett and Berkeley: A Reconsideration," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui 7 Beckett vs. Beckett*, eds. Marius Buning, et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998) 334.

[8] Ruby Cohn, "Philosophical Fragments in the Works of Samuel Beckett," *Criticism* 6:1 (1964): 33-43.

[9] John Fletcher, "Beckett and the Philosophers," *Comparative Literature* 17:1 (1965): 43-56.

[10] Edouard Morot-Sir, "Samuel Beckett and Cartesian Emblems," *Samuel Beckett: The Art of Rhetoric*, eds. Edouard Morot-Sir, et al. (Chapel Hill: U.N.C. Dept. of Romance Languages, 1976) 25-104.

[11] Hugh Kenner, "The Cartesian Centaur," *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (New York: Grove Press, 1961) 117-132.

was committed to the Cartesian division of body and mind, and that his work can be seen as an attempt to bridge this division. Both Fletcher and Morot-Sir mention Berkeley as a relevant source within a broader philosophical tradition. For Fletcher, Berkeley is a sceptic who is responsible, together with Hume, for casting doubt on the nature of language, a questioning that is most powerfully expressed in *Watt*.[12] Morot-Sir sees Berkeley as a post-Cartesian, "an idealist… whose 'esse est percipi' is a direct consequence of the *Cogito*."[13] These early indications of Berkeleyan influence on Beckett are, unfortunately, much too cursory to form a convincing argument. They lack empirical evidence to substantiate their claims on the one hand, and extended textual and philosophical analysis on the other. We can thus take them as a point of departure for further exploration.

Samuel Beckett's interest in Berkeley has since become common knowledge in Beckett studies, backed by archival materials, direct allusions and the occasional mention in the critical literature. The publication of James Knowlson's *Damned to Fame* in 1996[14] marks the beginning of an era of intensive archival research that brought to light materials that were previously only available to a small number of researchers. The wealth of new information has had a tremendous impact on the study of Beckett and philosophy by providing details on what philosophical sources Beckett was familiar with, his engagement with different thinkers, and his evaluation of them. It is important to note that Knowlson does not mention Berkeley in his biography, presumably because he did not consider him to be a major influence, an attitude that seems to be shared by other critics working on the philosophical sources of Beckett's writing. The more recent publication of Beckett's letters[15] and the catalogue of his library at the time of his death[16] testify nonetheless to Beckett's sustained interest in the Irish philosopher.

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[12] Fletcher 55.

[13] Morot-Sir 69-70.

[14] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press, 1996).

[15] The first volume of Beckett's correspondence contains direct references to Berkeley, see Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck, eds. *The Letters of Samuel Beckett 1929-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 154 and 318-9. Henceforth Letters 1.

[16] Beckett's Library 133-7.

This general silence, aside from a few articles which will be discussed below, can be explained by several factors. First, Beckett himself never mentioned Berkeley as an important source of inspiration. When asked about possible sources for interpreting his work, Beckett chose on two separate occasions, in 1956 and 1967, to single out Geulincx and Democritus as two "foci… where a commentary might take its rise."[17] Furthermore, references to Berkeley, such as the rejection of idealist tar in *Murphy*, are often hostile. The negative attitude is also apparent in the correspondence, where Beckett's only substantial comment about the philosopher is that he read "Berkeley's *Commonplace Book*… which is full of profound things, and at the same time of a foul (& false) intellectual canaillerie, enough to put you against reading anything more."[18] He also compares him unfavourably with Geulincx, who "does not put out his eyes … as Heraclites did & Rimbaud began to, nor like the terrified Berkeley repudiated them."[19] And yet Beckett did read something more of Berkeley and the traces left by this reading are apparent in many of his works, as will be shown in this thesis.

There have been several attempts to provide an account of Beckett's engagement with Berkeley, unfortunately opting for the short forms of magazine articles or single book chapters, which can only touch on a limited aspect of this complex subject. Anthony Uhlmann's chapter "Beckett, Berkeley, Bergson, *Film*: The Intuition Image" in his book *The Philosophical Image*[20] is perhaps the most extended attempt to take Berkeley seriously in trying to develop a significant theoretical framework for understanding Beckett's work in general. Uhlmann approaches Berkeley through Bergson to develop a concept of the image that results from an attempt to express an initial inexpressible intuition, and applies it to an interpretation of *Film*. Chapter 5 will draw on Uhlmann's argument to develop further aspects of the image in Beckett's work, as well as look into images in a wider variety of his texts. Branka Arsić also takes a philosophical approach to

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[17] David Tucker, *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx: Tracing a Literary Fantasia* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012) 38-9.

[18] Letters 1 154. Letter dated 23 April 1933.

[19] Letters 1 319. Letter dated 2 March 1936.

[20] Anthony Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

her reading of *Film* in *The Passive Eye: Gaze and Subjectivity in Berkeley*,[21] a book-length study of Berkeley's philosophy sub-titled "(via Beckett)". Her research looks at Berkeley's philosophy of vision and perception from a Beckettian perspective but offers little analysis of Beckett's work itself.

An early article by Jean-Michel Rabaté attempts to position Beckett's interest in Berkeley within the context of Irish modernism, as reflected in its title – "Berkeley entre Joyce et Beckett".[22] He points out that both Joyce and Beckett, the great figures of modernism, were interested in the Irish philosopher, and that he was instrumental to their endeavour to create a new kind of Irish literature in opposition to the Yeatsian revival. Inevitably Rabaté's attempt to cover such a broad scope in a single article results in an overview that is insightful yet brief. In a more focused article, "Beckett and Berkeley: A Reconsideration",[23] Smith proposes that Berkeley's short notes and aphorisms in the *Commonplace Book*[24] have influenced Beckett's mode of writing in the Trilogy of novels – *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable* as well as the later novel *How It Is*. Fascinating as Smith's suggestions are, the biographical foundations for his reading are not well substantiated. For example, he dates Beckett's interest in the philosopher to his years at Trinity whereas Beckett only began to get interested in Berkeley after he left university, as I shall show in Chapter 1. Moreover, the stylistic similarities he draws between Berkeley's *Commonplace Book* and Beckett's *How It Is* seem tendentious and fail to consider more likely sources for Beckett's fragmentary style and absence of punctuation, e.g. *Finnegans Wake* and other modernist texts. A more reliable account of Beckett's familiarity with Berkeley can be found in Steven Matthews' "'The Books are in the Study as Before': Samuel Beckett's Berkeley",[25] which reviews the archival materials

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[21] Branka Arsić, *The Passive Eye: Gaze and Subjectivity in Berkeley (via Beckett)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

[22] Jean-Michel Rabaté, "Berkeley entre Joyce et Beckett," *Études Irlandaises* 10 (1986): 57-76.

[23] Smith 331-348.

[24] I follow Beckett's name for the text. Today it is more common to call it *The Notebooks* since Berkeley used them to organise materials in preparation for writing his books rather than as a collection of unrelated materials which the term 'Commonplace Book' implies.

[25] Steven Matthews, "'The Books are in the Study as Before': Samuel Beckett's Berkeley," *Sofia Philosophical Review Special Issue: Beckett/ Philosophy* 1:1 (2011): 146-168. It was later reprinted in

available at the time. Its contribution, as well as shortcomings, will be discussed in Chapter 1 of the thesis. Finally, Dan Watt's short essay "*Esse est Percipi*: Beckett and Berkeley's Silent Conversation"[26] touches upon several key Berkeleyan themes that will be developed in more breadth in this thesis, including the connection between existence and perception, as well as blindness.

In addition to these works, Berkeley's name appears in the critical literature in connection with individual texts by Beckett which mention Berkeley explicitly. A comprehensive overview of these texts can be found in the *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*.[27] Such research will be referred to throughout the thesis as relevant to the subjects and texts under discussion.

Structure and Methodology

The thesis is divided into six chapters that follow Beckett's life and work in a roughly chronological order, beginning with Beckett's studies of philosophy in the early 1930's and proceeding to his literary works in the early, middle, and late period. It will address works in multiple media and genres, including prose, theatre, radio, and film, as well as Beckett's theoretical publications. The first chapter studies the archival evidence currently available regarding Beckett's interest in Berkeley, his reading of specific works by the philosopher and of secondary sources. The second chapter builds on this basis to offer an extensive interpretation of the early novel *Murphy* which is often read as anti-Berkeleyan. Chapter 3 analyzes Beckett's writing on aesthetics in order to demonstrate the emergence of a specifically Berkeleyan strand in his thinking about representation, while Chapter 4 endeavours to trace the impact of this aesthetic position on Beckett's artistic practice, focusing on the Trilogy. Chapters 5 and 6 cover seminal aspects of

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Matthew Feldman and Karim Mamdani (eds.) *Beckett/ Philosophy* (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2015) 211-234. References will be made to the later edition.

[26] Dan Watt, "*Esse est Percipi*: Beckett and Berkeley's Silent Conversation," *Beckett Re-Membered: After the Centenary*, eds. James Carney et al. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012) 74-88.

[27] C. J. Ackerley, and S.E. Gontarski, eds. *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 105-7.

perception and vision in Beckett's later work, the former examines Beckett's development of images and their affinity with Berkeley's theory of perception, whereas the latter is devoted to sight, blindness, and blind figures in both Beckett and Berkeley.

The question of methodology in studies of Beckett and philosophy has become a subject of debate since the publication in 2006 of Matthew Feldman's "Beckett and Popper, or, 'What Stink of Artifice': Some Notes on Methodology, Falsifiability, and Criticism in Beckett Studies".[28] Feldman distinguishes between empirical studies of sources that may have contributed to Beckett's writing based on archival materials, and subjective-evocative association of ideas that appear in Beckett's texts with those of other philosophers and writers. It is only the first, Feldman argues, that makes a significant contribution to our knowledge about Beckett since they are falsifyable, i.e. can be proven to be wrong, whereas subjective associations cannot be conclusively tested. Feldman's early position seems too extreme, its allowed field of research too exclusive, and its demands on the critic too strict to become the exclusive approach in the study of literature. Nevertheless, the underlying demand to base criticism on available archival materials, or at least take them into careful consideration when looking into possible connections between Beckett and other thinkers, remains valid and useful to this day. This thesis therefore opens with a review of archival materials regarding Beckett's engagement with Berkeley, and evidence collected from Beckett's notes, letters, annotations, and interviews will be constantly used to substantiate claims of his familiarity with specific arguments and ideas.

The archival research in itself, however, can only give us part of the picture, since Beckett's achievement as a writer results primarily from the playful, thoughtful or subsersive use he makes of the philosophical and other sources he was drawing on. In an answer to Feldman's article, Garin Dowd writes that "the temporal model underpinning Feldman's position is such that only the direction backwards to Beckett's notes… is valid. In order to write up the results of the excavation, however, the reverse journey is

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[28] Matthew Feldman, "Beckett and Popper, or, 'What Stink of Artifice': Some Notes on Methodology, Falsifiability, and Criticism in Beckett Studies," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui: Notes Divers Holo: Catalogues of Beckett's Reading Notes and Other Manuscripts at Trinity College Dublin*, eds. Matthijs Engelbert, et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006) 373-391.

required."[29] It is unnecessary to rehearse here all of Dowd's theoretical objections to Feldman, but this insight that the value of the identified sources can only be appreciated through subsequent study of Beckett's work informs the textual analysis and close readings that will be employed throughout this thesis. In the words of Morot-Sir, "the actual problem is not whether philosophy is a possible part of literature, but just how its intervention or interference comes about."[30] The emphasis in most of this thesis will therefore be laid on integrating the factual evidence with new readings of Beckett's writing that will allow us to appreciate his artistic achievements. It will attempt to play with what Feldman later described as the "two sides of the 'Beckett and Philosophy' coin",[31] namely looking forward to Beckett's sources, and then forward at Beckett's work using the Berkeleyan perspective.

Archival research and textual analysis will be complemented by references to philosophical interpretations of Berkeley's work, an element that is often lacking in studies of Beckett and Berkeley. My approach here is to treat the project as a multi-disciplinary study that pays as much attention to the complexity of Berkeley's philosophical position and his relation to the Western philosophical tradition, as it does to Beckett's challenging work. A better understanding of Berkeley's philosophy will contribute to the precision and nuance of the arguments presented in this thesis. The issues raised by Beckett's use and misuse of Berkeley's philosophy often address subjects that have been neglected or understudied by philosophers, thus opening new lines of questioning in Berkeley studies as well. His ability to bring new questions and perspectives to bear on Berkeley's philosophy can explain the fascination his work holds for contemporary thinkers.

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[29] Garin Dowd, "Prolegomena to a Critique of Excavatory Reason: Reply to Matthew Feldman," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui: Des éléments aux traces: Elements and Traces*, eds. Matthijs Engelberts, et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008) 384.

[30] Morot-Sir 28.

[31] Feldman, Matthew. *Falsifying Beckett: Essays on Archive, Philosophy, and Methodology in Beckett Studies* (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2015) 91.

1: Profound Things and Foul Canaillerie: Beckett Reading Berkeley

In *Falsifying Beckett* Mathew Feldman advocates a methodology that in its minimal form amounts to a preference for "theorising from a position of empirical accuracy".[32] This is a more moderate position compared with his previous pronouncement but it retains the crucial insistence on using archival materials to substantiate claims of Beckett's familiarity with various sources that have shaped current studies of Beckett and philosophy. The aim of the present chapter is to establish such an empirical basis for the study of Beckett's engagement with Berkeley by reviewing biographical and archival evidence about Beckett's interest in Berkeley, his knowledge of individual works, and the interpretations of Berkeley's philosophy that he was familiar with. It will examine references to Berkeley in Beckett's letters and interviews, the notes he took on philosophy,[33] and reading marks he left in the books in his possession at the time of his death.

Steven Matthews's 2011 article "'The Books are in the Study as Before': Samuel Beckett's Berkeley"[34] is a useful starting point for this research, since it reviews some of the most pertinent archival materials with regards to Beckett's interest in Berkeley, namely the published letters, the Philosophy Notes, and the titles of books in Beckett's library. The following discussion will review some of the same materials, as will be indicated by footnotes, but it will differ from Matthews on two important issues. First, it will expand his account with new materials that have recently become available, as well as further research. Second, the reading notes left by Beckett in his books of Berkeley's philosophy reveal, as will be shown later, a pattern of partial reading. This calls for a more careful approach to Beckett's knowledge of Berkeley and his contemporary critics, in contrast to Matthews' reliance on texts for which we have no proof that Beckett read,

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[32] Feldman, Falsifying Beckett 19.

[33] The notes, referred to as the Philosophy Notes, are kept at Trinity College Dublin, TCD MS 10967.

[34] Matthews 211-234.

especially Hone & Rossi's book on Berkeley, and Berkeley's own *A Theory of Vision*, as well as extensive parts of the *Commonplace Book*.

Getting to Know Berkeley

In "Beckett and Berkeley: a Reconsideration" Frederik Smith claims that Beckett's first encounter with Berkeley was as a student in Trinity College:

> Beckett's awareness of the eighteenth-century philosopher was sparked at Trinity College, where entrance examinations held students responsible, oddly enough, for a section of Berkeley's "Essay Towards Preventing the Ruin of Great Britain". More significantly, Beckett's assigned tutor upon his matriculation in 1923 was none other than A.A. Luce, Berkeley's modern editor; and although students at this time were not required to take courses *per se*, the young man met with his tutor on a fairly regular basis, and, therefore, it would not seem rash to speculate that in these meetings some Berkeley rubbed off. [35]

Smith does not specify which part of Berkeley's "Essay Towards Preventing the Ruin of Great Britain" was assigned, but the essay as a whole is concerned with the moral, political and social arrangements that will foster economic growth in Britain – a subject unlikely to attract Beckett's attention, beyond the compulsory reading.

It may be natural to assume that Beckett first became interested in Berkeley at Trinity, which numbered the famous philosopher among its prominent faculty and, as Smith notes, assigned Beckett to the supervision of one of the foremost Berkeley scholars of the 20th-century. The evidence for such early engagement are, however, slim. Beckett did not take any courses under Luce, but it has long been assumed that he discussed the work of Berkeley, the philosopher with whom he is now so closely identified, with his young student. There are, however, strong reasons to doubt this scenario. The main obstacle is that Luce's intensive work on Berkeley dates from the 1930s onwards, beginning several years after Beckett stopped having regular supervision meetings with him. Just before Beckett began his studies, in 1922, Luce published a study of Bergson – *Bergson's*

[35] Smith 332.

Doctrine of Intuition.[36] This was followed by an eight-year hiatus without a single article on Bergson, Berkeley or any other topic. The quiet spell was finally broken in 1931 with Luce's first Berkeley-related publication: "Berkeley's *Description of the Cave of Dunmore*", which appeared four years after Beckett earned his BA degree from Trinity. It is conceivable that Luce was interested in Berkeley prior to this publication, but there is nothing to suggest that he did any important work on the Irish philosopher when Beckett was under his tutelage, or that he discussed him with his students.

Moreover, Beckett himself denied that he was introduced to Berkeley by Luce. In response to an inquiry by David Berman about a possible interest in Berkeley through A.A. Luce, Beckett sent a short letter on 26 May 1983 to flatly deny such a connection – "No, I was not influenced by Dr. Luce's work on Berkeley".[37] The very brevity of the letter is striking. Beckett's general attitude towards factual questions from academics was usually much kinder and expressed a willingness to help which is completely lacking from his answer to Berman. To take but one example, a few days before he wrote to Berman, on 18 May 1983, he answered a similar question from Roger Little about whether he knew Dante through Thomas Rudmose-Browne, who taught Beckett at Trinity and had a strong influence on him at the time.[38] Beckett responds that he was not introduced to Dante through Rudmose-Browne but unlike the letter to Berman, he helpfully adds that he studied the poet on his own "with the help of my Italian teacher, Bianca Esposito."[39] No such willingness to correct an erroneous perception transpires in response to the question about Berkeley. This seems to indicate a certain nervousness around the subject, possibly due to a personal dislike of Luce, or at the very least a reluctance to discuss his knowledge of Berkeley. As the rest of this chapter makes clear, there was much that Beckett could have added to this single sentence.

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[36] Details about Luce's publications are taken from David Berman, "A Bibliography of the Published Writings of Dr A. A. Luce," *Hermathena* 123 (1977): 11-18.

[37] George Craig et al., eds. *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume 4, 1966-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) 613. Henceforth Letters 4.

[38] Knowlson 63-6.

[39] Letters 4 610.

From Beckett's letters we now know that the person who encouraged him to read Berkeley's philosophical work was in fact Joseph Hone, an acquaintance of Beckett and the co-author of *Bishop Berkeley: His Life, Writings, and Philosophy*. Hone (1882-1959) was an Irish historian, biographer, and writer and a well-know figure in Dublin intellectual circles.[40] Hone knew Samuel Beckett's father and befriended the son as well. In a letter to Thomas MacGreevy from 23 April 1933 Beckett reports that he was reading "Berkeley's *Commonplace Book*, which Hone recommended as a beginning, and which is full of profound things, and at the same time of a foul (& false) intellectual canaillerie, enough to put you against reading anything more."[41] This recommendation was almost certainly given when Beckett dined with the Hones on the last day of 1932.[42] The conversation around Berkeley should be viewed against a background of renewed interest in the Irish philosopher in Dublin of the 1930s which resulted in the publication of a new and revised edition of the *Commonplace Book* in 1930 which Beckett owned,[43] A. A. Luce's scholarly work *Berkeley and Malebranche* in 1934,[44] and the more popular work on Berkeley by Hone himself and Mario Rossi, *Bishop Berkeley: His Life, Writings, and Philosophy* in 1932.[45] The appeal of Berkeley was also apparent in literary circles. W.B. Yeats referred to Berkeley as a prominent thinker in the poems "Blood and the Moon" and "The Seven Sages"[46] and wrote the introduction to Hone & Rossi's book, while James Joyce refers to Berkeley in both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*.[47] Beckett's first encounter with Berkeley, therefore, was not in an academic setting but rather as one of

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[40] Letters 1 699.

[41] Letters 1 154. See also Matthews, esp. 211, 215-217.

[42] Letters 1 149.

[43] George Berkeley, *Berkeley's Commonplace Book*, ed. with Introduction by G.A. Johnston (London: Faber, 1930).

[44] A. A. Luce, *Berkeley and Malebranche* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934).

[45] J. M. Hone and M. M Rossi, *Bishop Berkeley: His Life, Writings and Philosophy*, Introduction by W. B. Yeats (London: Faber & Faber, 1932).

[46] William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989) 237, 241.

[47] See for example Rabaté 57-67; and Paul Anghinetti, "Berkeley' Influence on Joyce," *James Joyce Quarterly* 19:3 (1982): 315-329.

the subjects widely discussed in the literary and intellectual circles of 1930s Dublin. In this context, Berkeley's Irishness formed a large part of his appeal, as Matthews writes: "That there was a national immediacy to Beckett's interest in Berkeley is everywhere evident in both Beckett's allusion to him, and in the context out of which that reading derives."[48]

Talking about Berkeley: Letters and Interviews

Beckett's documented pronouncements about his interest in Berkeley are few and far between, mostly in personal correspondence. As shown above, we know that he was first encouraged to read Berkeley by Joseph Hone and his impressions were mixed.[49] Another letter to MacGreevy further strengthens the contention that his initial interest in the Irish philosopher was embedded in Dublin intellectual life. In a letter from 9 January 1936 Beckett criticises an article by Padraic Colum on "Berkeley and the Modern Artist" published in *The Saturday Review of Literature* in June 1935.[50] Colum was one of the regulars at Jack B. Yeats' 'at home' events, where various artists and intellectuals used to gather, including the young Beckett who admired the painter and developed a warm friendship with him.[51] Beckett writes to MacGreevy that "As I have been reading rhe[sic] sacré évèque I was alive to the badness of Colum's attempt in the last D.M. to relate him to the artist. Colum makes him make perception an act of will. Berkeley is at pains, in the Principles and Dialogues, to insist on the contrary."[52] The objection to Colum reveals, first of all, that by early 1936 Beckett was already familiar at first hand with both *The Principles of Human Knowledge* and *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*. This conclusion is supported by another letter to MacGreevy dated 31 December 1935

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[48] Matthews 215.

[49] Matthews discusses this letter, but none of the other letter covered by this section; see Matthews 211.

[50] Padraic Colum, "Berkeley and the Modern Artist," *The Saturday Review of Literature* 15 June 1935: 3-4 + 14-15. Beckett misremembers the source as Dublin Magazine to which Colum was a regular contributor. For a list of Colum's articles in the Dublin Magazine see Arthur Sherbo, "Padraic Colum in 'The Dublin Magazine'," *Studies in Bibliography* 49 (1996): 284-290.

[51] Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996) 139.

[52] Unpublished letter, quoted in Smith 332.

which states that "I read Philonous"[53], referring to one of the main characters of the *Three Dialogues*. As for the substance of Beckett's objection to Colum, it is probably directed at the following assertions:

> Being is in being perceived—this is Berkeley's main principle, and it is a principle which every artist actualizes. If things exist only in their being perceived, the more we give ourselves up to perception the more things will reveal themselves to us. Perception to Berkeley is an act of will. To perceive, to will to perceive with more and more energy, should be the human function. The deeper our perception, the richer is the reality of the thing perceived —this must be the corollary of the principle. This, then, is where Berkeley gives the artist a discipline and a support.[54]

For Colum, the importance of Berkeley's idealism for writers is that the richness and intensity of the world depends on the perceiving subject. He is certainly correct in highlighting that the mind for Berkeley is characterised by its active will. The connection he draws between the will of the perceiver and the richness of reality, however, borders on solipsism – "The extreme consequence of believing that knowledge must be founded on inner, personal states of experience, and then failing to find a bridge whereby they can inform us of any thing beyond themselves."[55] As Beckett points out, Berkeley was indeed careful to protect himself against such a charge, an issue that seemed to have occupied Beckett himself while he was reading, as will be described later in this chapater.

Beckett's criticism of Colum can be linked to his own reservations about Berkeley expressed to MacGreevy in a letter of 5 March, 1936. In this letter he compares Berkeley unfavourably with Geulincx whom he was reading at the time, and allows us to glimpse his view of Berkeley's idealism:

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[53] Unpublished letter, quoted in Beckett's Library 137.

[54] Colum 4.

[55] Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 356.

> I have been reading Geulincx… the work [is] worth doing, because of its saturation in the conviction that the *sub specie aeternitatis* vision is the only excuse for remaining alive. He does not put out his eyes on that account, as Heraclites did & Rimbaud began to, nor like the terrified Berkeley repudiate them. One feels them very patiently turned outward, &… turned in-ward.[56]

David Tucker clarifies the contrast sketched here between Geulincx and Berkeley (and others): "According to Beckett's comparisons, Geulincx's eyes are able patiently and with discipline to face the vicissitudes of an outward world without turning away or closing, in awareness too that an inner world offers little real refuge."[57] Berkeley is criticised for turning away from the external world by denying its existence and attempting to lead a separate existence, a solution that Beckett rejects. He seems to have retained this understanding of Berkeley albeit in a more sympathetic manner when he talked to Lawrence Harvey in 1970 about "being absent and… living existence by proxy", adding that he "made an association between this feeling and the idealist philosophy of Berkeley. Perhaps it is an Irish thing, basically a skepticism before nature as given, complicated by a skepticism about the perceiving subject as well."[58] This scepticism can be compared with Beckett's earlier statement that Berkeley denies his eyes, a denial that can be seen as the end result of the act of sceptical questioning. It is important to note that while in the letter to McGreevy Beckett portrays Berkeley as denying only the external world, in the conversation with Harvey he extends his scepticism also to the internal world of the subject, a mirroring of doubt that will become crucial for Beckett's writing on aesthetics, as will be discussed in Chapter 3 of the thesis.

Further mentions of Berkeley in the letters are few and unenlightening. In the correspondence with Alan Schneider about the production of *Film* Beckett uses the Berkeleyan terms *percipi* and *percipere* almost as technical terms, although they are taken from the philosophical motto that opens the script - *Esse est percipi*. In these letters,

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[56] Letters 1 318-9.

[57] Tucker 35.

[58] Lawrence E. Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970) 247.

Beckett calls *percipi* the area of the protagonist's field of vision, which the camera is attempting to avoid, while *percipere* is the area being watched by people or the camera. For example, in the moment when the camera confronts the protagonist from an open angle "beyond which he will enter *percipi*" and induce anxiety in the protagonist, whereas the people in the first scene are "all contentedly in *percipere* and *percipi*."[59] Beckett does not elaborate, however, why those terms have been chosen and how the film relates to Berkeley's philosophy as a whole, leaving room for interpretation which will be taken up in chapter 5. In order to learn more about Beckett's understanding of Berkeley find evidence of the works that influenced his interpretation of the Good Bishop.

Situating Berkeley: The *Philosophy Notes*

A crucial source for Beckett's encounter with Berkeley are the *Philosophy Notes*, a manuscript held in the Trinity College Dublin library. Beckett compiled the notes in the early 1930s in an attempt to improve his knowledge of the history of philosophy as described in the introduction to the catalogue:

> Beckett responded to an inquiry form Deirdre Bair that 'because he had not taken a philosophy course at Trinity College, which he felt was a serious defect in his education, he set out on what he thought was a systematic schedule of readings'... Clearly [the philosophy] notes are the result of that 'systematic schedule of readings' but pinpointing when he made them remains a matter of conjecture."[60]

The editors suggest that Beckett started working on the notes in 1930 or 1931 but the main work was undertaken in 1932 when Beckett lived in London.[61] The notes encompass Western philosophy from the pre-Socratics to Nietzsche but the treatment of different periods in philosophy is uneven. Beckett began with great enthusiasm,

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[59] Maurice Harmon, ed. *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998) 172.

[60] Notes Diverse Holo 69.

[61] Notes Diverse Holo 70-1. For an overview of Beckett's range of different notes and summaries and their connections to Beckett's personal and artistic interests, see Matthew Feldman, *Beckett's Books: A Cultural History of Samuel Beckett's 'Interwar Notes'* (New York & London: Continuum, 2006) 21-32.

collecting materials from multiple sources and typing his notes on the pre-Socratics. Later periods are treated less extensively, rely on Wilhelm Windelband's *History of Philosophy*[62] as the main source, and are hand-written. The section of the notes dealing with the 18th-century occupies 25 folio pages of 162 x 203 mm (194-219), similar to the number of folios devoted to the middle ages or the philosophy of the renaissance. This should be contrasted with over 100 folios devoted to Greek philosophy, from the pre-Socratics to Aristotle.[63] Within the notes on Enlightenment philosophy Berkeley is mentioned on eight hand-written folios - 194r, 194v, 196r, 196v, 202v, 207r, 207v, and 208r.

The catalogue editors claim that Windelband's *History of Philosophy* was "Beckett's… sole source of notes after fol 145" but in some cases Beckett supplements the information furnished by Windelband with additional details taken from an unidentified source, possibly an encyclopaedia. The use of an additional source is easiest to discern in the lists of central thinkers and their main works provided for each period, where Beckett sometimes adds information like book titles and short explanations that do not appear in the original list. A notable example is the entry for Jeremy Bentham which is significantly longer in Beckett's notes compared to Windelband's text. Beckett's entry mentions an additional title, the *Pan opticon* with a short description of its content in parenthesis and then appends a short explanation of the concept of utilitarianism. [64] In the entry for Berkeley, Beckett similarly adds two titles: *The Querist* and *Siris*. The mention of *Siris* is significant since it suggests that Beckett was aware of the work and Berkeley's praise of tar water directly, an issue that will be discussed in context in Chapter 2.

Aside from these small additions, Beckett follows the textbook closely. Windelband's exposition of Enlightenment thought begins with a general introduction to the period followed by a list of main thinkers, then moves on to discuss specific problems. Windelband structures the history of philosophy around broad themes and questions that

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[62] Wilhelm Windelband, *A History of Philosophy Vol. 2*, trans. James H. Tufts (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958 [orig. pub. 1901]).

[63] Notes Diverse Holo 67.

[64] TCD MS 10967 196r. Beckett probably refers to Bentham's treatise *Panoptic or The Inspection-House* published in 1791.

were discussed by various thinkers, not as a list of discrete systems developed by individuals. Berkeley is presented as a follower of Locke and Descartes who elaborated the sceptical elements in their work. His sceptic stance then becomes a stepping stone to Hume's more devastating critique. Beckett's notes cover most of the text touching on Berkeley, skipping a few explanations, and sometimes rephrasing or summarising Windelband's elaborate prose.

The section on the Enlightenment in Windelband is divided into two chapters: Theoretical Questions and Practical Questions. Berkeley is discussed under two sub-divisions of the first chapter that deal with Innate Ideas and Knowledge of the External World. The first question is concerened with whether we are born with some ideas before we have any experience of the world. Locke, Berkeley's direct predecessor, denied that we have any knowledge of the world that is not acquired by experience. He does allow, however, that we create new objects of knowledge through reflection, called abstract ideas, that are purely intellectual and have no relation to sensual impressions (450-2). In contradistinction, "Berkeley not only declared the doctrine of the Reality of abstract conceptions to be the most extraordinary of all errors in metaphysics, but also — like the extreme Nominalists of the Middle Ages — denied the existence of abstract ideas within the mind itself." (452) Knowledge for Berkeley, therefore, is always grounded in direct sensual experience.

The discussion of the second question — how the mind acquires knowledge about the material world which is fundamentally different to it — contains a more sustained description of Berkeley's philosophy of idealism, from page 469 to 472. Berkeley's main contribution to the vexed relation between body and mind is essentially negative – "*He demolished the conception of corporeal substance.*" (469. Emphasis in the original.) Windelband explains how this position relies on a critique of abstract ideas, developing Locke's empiricism while at the same time turning against him by denying the existence of substance that carries the qualities we perceive. Windelband then goes on to review some of the questions raised by this doctrine. First, the difficulty of differentiating between impressions received from external reality and those we attain through memory and imagination. This problem is solved by stating that all 'real' ideas exist in the mind of God, while ideas born from imagination and memory are only in the mind of man.

Beckett's criticism of Colum is thus in agreement with Windelband's account since the perception of the individual artist does not change the world. The second objection is that placing all knowledge within the mind may lead to solipsism, which is quickly disposed of by stating that "the solipsist refutes himself by beginning to prove his doctrine to others." (471) The very fact of writing a philosophical treatise proves that berkeley had faith in the existence of other people who will become his readers.

The final paragraph of this discussion passes a negative judgment on Berkeley's philosophy in terms that might have appealed to Beckett's love of intellectual paradox:

> Thus, following in the train of the Meditations, in which Descartes recognised self-consciousness as the rescuing rock in the sea of doubt, the result was finally reached which Kant later characterised as a scandal to philosophy; namely, that a proof was demanded for the reality of the outer world, and none adequate could be found. The French materialists declared that Berkeley's doctrine was an insane delusion, but was irrefutable. (472)

According to Windelband, Berkeley's philosophy thus leads to complete disbelief in the external world. As Beckett writes to MacGreevy – he denies his eyes.[65]

Matthews pointed out that Beckett's summary of Windelband's discussion of Berkeley sometimes diverges from Windelband's phrasing, suggesting an earlier familiarity with Berkeley's philosophy. A case in point is Windelband's formulation of Berkeley's key idea - "bodies are just exactly what is perceived, no more and no less." (470) which Beckett renders as "the *esse* of body is its *percipi*".[66] Matthews traces this phrasing to two possible sources: Hone & Rossi's book about Berkeley, or the *Principles of Human Knowledge* where Berkeley writes about unthinking things that "their *esse* is *percipi*".[67] The Latin form of this sentence – *esse est percipi* has subsequently been used as a shorthand for Berkeley's philosophical position and Beckett adopts this phrasing in

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[65] Letters 1 318-9.

[66] TCD MS 10967 207r. Quoted in Matthews 218.

[67] PHK 42. See also Matthews 218-9.

the script for *Film*. Beckett's variation on the phrase can thus be equally attributed to Berkeley's writing as to a secondary source.

It should also be noted that the terms *percipi* and *percipere* need not be exclusively associated with Berkeley. The *Dream Notebook*, a collection of material Beckett prepared before writing *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, contains the following quote taken from Jules de Gaultier's discussion of Schopenhauer in *From Kant to Nietzsche* (1900): "Curiosity focused on relation between the *object* & its *representation*, between the *stimulus* & *molecular disturbance*, between *percipi* and *percipere*."[68] This sentence is repeated almost verbatim in Belacqua's musings in the novel itself – "the desire to bind for ever in imperishable relation the object to its representation, the stimulus to the molecular agitation that it sets up, percipi to percipere".[69] Nevertheless, it would seem more likely to assume that Beckett was familiar with this terminology through reading Berkeley's work before or at the same time he was compiling the *Philosophy Notes*. Based on the letters, we know that Beckett was reading the *Principles of Human Knowledge* prior to September 1935. The date for the section on Berkeley in the *Philosophy Notes* is unknown but according to Frost et al. Beckett kept on working on them until 1936, [70] which would make direct contact with Berkeley's text the most likely source for Beckett's formulation.

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[68] The phrase is quoted and discussed in Erik Tonning, "'I am not reading philosophy': Beckett and Schopenhauer," *Beckett/ Philosophy*, eds. Matthew Feldman and Karim Mamdani (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2015) 93.

[69] Dream 134.

[70] Notes Divers Holo 21.

Reading Berkeley

The marks and notes Beckett made when reading the books in his possession are an invaluable resource for understanding the extent of Beckett's first hand knowledge of Berkeley and dating his readings. A wealth of information is currently available through the Beckett Digital Library, an online resource which creates "a digital reconstruction of Samuel Beckett's personal library, based on the volumes preserved at his apartment in Paris, in archives (Beckett International Foundation) and private collections". [71] The assertion made by Dirk van Hulle and Mark Nixon in the book that accompanies the project: "The lack of access to the library has so far been a missing link in terms of understanding Beckett's intellectual heritage as well as his cultural milieu"[72] is definitely true for Beckett's interest in Berkeley. The publication of the library makes it possible to appreciate the extent of Beckett's reading of Berkeley, as well as highlight some of the issues that occupied him while he was reading the Good Bishop.

At the time of his death, Beckett had two books by Berkeley in his library — *Berkeley's Commonplace Book* published in 1930 and *A New Theory of Vision and other Selected Philosophical Writings* published in 1926. The fact that Beckett kept the books is significant, since in his old age he gave away many of his books to friends, and therefore he probably had a special connections with the ones that he chose to keep.[73] *Berkeley's Commonplace Book* is a stand-alone edition of the notes Berkeley took as he was preparing to write his most important philosophical works: *New Theory of Vision* (1709) and *The Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710). They were first discovered in Trinity College Dublin by A.C. Fraser who edited and published them in 1871.[74] The edition owned by Beckett, edited by G. A. Johnston, is revised to reflect the original chronological order of Berkeley's notes and correct mistakes in Fraser's edition. The

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[71] Dirk van Hulle, et al. "About," *Beckett Digital Library*, Samuel Beckett Digital Manuscript Project, 2016. <http://www.beckettarchive.org/library/home/welcome> 5 November 2017.

[72] Beckett's Library xiv.

[73] Beckett's Library xiii-xiv.

[74] Johnston provides an account of the text's history and early editions in his introduction to the volume owned by Beckett, see esp. Commonplace Book xvii-xxi.

second volume Beckett kept is a collection of Berkeley's major works, including *A New Theory of Vision*, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, and *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*. Taken together, these two volumes contain all of Berkeley's important works from the early and most influential period. Marginal annotations by Beckett alongside the texts testify to a sustained reading of the majority of these texts.

The marginal annotations include markings next to multiple passages in these volumes, and a few comments. While these notes cannot be considered to exhaust all of Beckett's knowledge of Berkeley, or even indicate all the passages that are pertinent to his writing, they provide positive evidence about what Beckett read that is highly valuable. *The Commonplace Book* is a case in point, since it contains a small numbers of marks which only appear in the first few pages of the book — up to page 10. The absence of marks in the rest of the volume should be correlated with Beckett's writing to MacGreevy that the "intellectual canaillerie" of the text made him unwilling to read anything more.[75] The reading marks thus raise the possibility that Beckett did not pursue his reading of *The Commonplace Book* until the end of the volume at the time that the marks were made, presumably 1933. Other possibilities are that he found nothing to comment about or maybe paid less attention to his reading from a certain point onwards. This means that if we want to rely on passages that appear later in *The Commonplace Book* it will be necessary to provide additional evidence, such as direct quotes, to support the interpretation. In any case, the marks allow us to assert that Beckett was indeed familiar with the text and found at least some of the propositions interesting enough to note for possible future use.

The marks and notes in *A New Theory of Vision and Other Selected Philosophical Writings* present a similar situation of partial annotation. There are no marks of any kind in the introduction and the first work collected in this volume, i.e. *A New Theory of Vision*. As will be explained in the chapters concerning vision, it is plausible that Beckett's knowledge of Berkeley's optical theories is derived from secondary materials and Berkeley's own recounting of them in other works. The first mark in the book appears on page 128 alongside clause 32 in the *Treatise Concerning the Principles of*

[75] Letters 1 154.

Human Knowledge. In this case it seems safe to assume that Beckett started at the beginning and therefore also read the first 40 pages of the book which are unmarked. The marks continue almost to the end of the text, indicating that Beckett read the work in its entirety. The pattern in the next, and last, text collected in the volume is similar. *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* begins on page 197 but Beckett's first mark appears on page 245, in the middle of the second dialogue. The marks continue almost until the end of the text, the last one appearing on page 282, leaving about 20 pages until the end of the dialogue unmarked. The distribution of marks reinforces the evidence from the letters and enables us to confidently assert that Beckett was familiar at first hand with the two most important expositions of Berkeley's immaterialist philosophy.

The letters allows us to pinpoint a date of reading for two out of the three works that Beckett left reading marks in: *The Commonplace Book* in 1933 and *Three Dialogues* in 1935. Since Beckett did not mention in a letter that he was reading the *Principles of Human Knowledge,* its dating is less certain. Having said that, the material traces he left on the margins of the books provide tantalising clues that can lead to a tentative dating. The marks in the book margins were made with pencils of different colours, one grey and one green. In addition to the colour, the 'style' of the marks is different. The grey pencil is used to create straight, continuous lines, while the green marks are undulating and often a series of short lines spans a whole paragraph rather than a single long line. The green pencil was also used to make the two marginal notes in the book, on pages 146 and 189. The same green pencil was used in *The Commonplace Book*, suggesting that they were made around the same time, thus dating the reading of the *Principles* to 1933.[76] The grey marks, on the other hand, are similar to those used in *Three Dialogues*, which Beckett was reading in 1935. Although impossible to prove conclusively, the combination of marks does suggest that Beckett read the *Principles of Human Knowledge* on two different occasions in two years – if true, this is a strong indication of the importance of Berkeley's philosophy for the young writer. The other possibility is that Beckett read the *Principles* only once, maybe making some of the notes later, or else changing pencils half-way through a single reading. Even if the pencil marks are not

[76] See also Beckett's Library 134.

correlated with those made in the two other works, Beckett's reading of he *Principles of Human Knowledge* must have taken place between 1933 and 1935. Even the absence of a precise date, the overall picture is of a sustained engagement in the first half of the 1930s.

The marks Beckett made in the three works touch upon various subjects. In *The Commonplace Book* Beckett marked four propositions, all of them concerned with different aspects of perception. The first expresses the conviction that we cannot separate the thought of existence from the thought of being perceived even when dealing with mathematical abstractions: "M 36. When we imagine 2 bowls v.g. moving in vacuo, 'tis onely conceiving a person affected with those sensations." (4) That is, although we talk about objects moving in empty space, we see them in our mind's eye and thus necessarily assume perception. The second is one of a series of propositions that prove the heterogeneity of sight and touch. Beckett marks the second one "49 2nd. One made to see that had not yet seen his own limbs or anything he touch'd, upon sight of a foot length would know it to be a foot length if tangible foot & visible foot were the same idea, sed falsum id ergo et hoc." (6) This proof is very similar to the Molyneux problem, which appears in the very next line and will become important for Beckett, as will be discussed in Chapter 6 that deals with vision and blindness.

The next mark is concerned with self-perception, a crucial issue for Beckett: "84: Men die or in a state of annihilation oft in a day." (9) In the margin Beckett added a note: "*esse est percipere*". Taken together, the note and the marked proposition present the problem Berkeley is contending with here – if the existence of the mind is felt as a succession of impressions and thoughts and the being of the subject is the act of *percipere*, what happens when it stops perceiving, for example in sleep? Berkeley's proposition can be understood either as a consequence that he is willing to accept, or a reduction ad absurdum of a false conclusion. Whatever the case, its appeal to the creative imagination is undeniable. More than that, *Proust*, Beckett's early study of the French modernist published in 1930, contains a sentence that is very close in its formulation: "The subject has died—and perhaps many times—on the way."[77] This sentence refers to the role of memory in shaping the self, with every day changing the subject so that what

[77] Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove Press, 1970) 3.

we hoped for yesterday cannot satisfy us today. Despite the different contexts, the striking similarity between Berkeley's proposition and what Beckett himself wrote only three years before reading the *Commonplace Book* may have been responsible for Beckett's special attention. The last mark in this volume relates to God's perception: "94: qu. whether if succession of ideas in the Eternal mind, a day does not seem to God a 1000 years rather than a 1000 years a day?" (10) Like the previous marked proposition this question takes a line of thought to its extreme, opening new possibilities for thinking about time.

The marks made in the *Principles of Human Knowledge* are too numerous to be discussed individually here and will be quoted as relevant to the context throughout the thesis. Most of these marks can be grouped under several main topics: causality, affirmation of external reality, the limitations of the human mind, and the nature of spirits. The importance of causality is evidently tied with Beckett's interest in Geulincx, probably through Windelband's account of the Belgian philosopher as the apex of occasionalism.[78] Beckett marks effectively the whole of Berkeley's argument against the occasionalists, from proposition LXVI next to which he wrote in the margin "against Geulincx?" through to proposition LXXII.

Beckett also marks many of Berkeley's repeated clarifications that his denial of matter does not amount to a solipsistic denial of external reality and that his system concurs with the naïve view that the world exists independently of our mind. For example, proposition XXXV clarifies that "I do not argue against the existence of any one thing that we can apprehend, either by sense or reflection. That the things I see with mine eyes and touch with my hands do exist, really exist, I make not the least question."[79] The source of the confusion, Berkeley claims, are distinctions made by philosophers who complicate things unnecessarily, and Beckett duly marks proposition LI which contains the famous statement: "in such things we ought to *think with the learned, and speak with*

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[78] See Beckett's Library 134-5.

[79] George Berkeley, "A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge," *A New Theory of Vision and Other Select Philosophical Writings* (London: J. M. Dent, 1926) 130. This is the edition used by Beckett and will henceforth be referred to as Beckett's PHK.

the vulgar."[80] These marks are a crucial proof that Beckett knew that Berkeley was aware of the dangers of solipsism and explicitly refuted it, especially important since Matthews assumes that Beckett followed Hone & Rossi in regarding his philosophy as advocating the solipsistic position.[81]

Beckett is also interested in passages that deal with what he called in his conversation with Harvey "skepticism about the perceiving subject"[82], such as proposition LXXXVI:

> This, which, if I mistake not, hath been shown to be a most groundless and absurd notion, is the very root of scepticism ; for so long as men thought that real things subsisted without the mind, and that their knowledge was only so far forth real as it was conformable to real things, it follows, they could not be certain that they had any real knowledge at all.[83]

Although Berkeley affirms that his system overcomes such doubts and allows us to have complete confidence in our perceptions and knowledge of the world, his expression of the state of ignorance are convincing enough to be attractive to Beckett's own sceptical outlook. In this context it is also interesting to note the last mark Beckett made in the book next to proposition CLII which justifies the shortcomings of the created world: "We should *further consider*, (1) that the very blemishes and defects of nature are not without their use, in that they make an agreeable sort of variety, and augment the beauty of the rest of the creation, as shades in a picture serve to set off the brighter and more enlightened parts."[84]

Some of the most important marks in the *Principles of Human Knowledge* are made towards the end of the book, where Berkeley discusses the nature of spirits. As already mentioned, they serve to demonstrate that Beckett was aware of Berkeley's distinction

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[80] Beckett's PHK 138.

[81] Matthews 224-225.

[82] Harvey 247.

[83] Beckett's PHK 164.

[84] Beckett's PHK 193.

between passive ideas and active spirits as two separate and incommensurable types of entities:

> CXXXVII: That an *idea*, which is inactive, and the existence whereof consists in being perceived, should be the image or likeness of an agent subsiding by itself, seems to need no other refutation, than barely attending to what is meant by those words.
>
> CXXXVIII: For by the word *spirit* we mean only that which thinks, wills, and perceives; this, and this alone, constitutes the signification of that term. If, therefore, it is impossible that any degree of those powers should be represented in an idea, it is evident there can be no idea of a spirit.[85]

The fact that Beckett treats people as perceivable ideas in some of the most 'Berkeleyan' moments of his work would thus be the result of a wilful subversion of the philosophical principle rather than ignorance or lack of attention.

The marks made in the next work in the volume, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, show a consistent purpose in clarifying the relation between perception and existence. For example, Beckett marks the passage where Philonous insists that perceived things do not exist outside the mind in another argument that targets the occasionalist position: "For philosophers, though they acknowledge all corporeal beings to be perceived by God, yet they attribute to them an absolute subsistence distinct from their being perceived by any mind whatever, which I do not."[86] Philonous and the occasionalists agree that all things are perceived by God. The difference between them is that for Philonous this perception is a good enough guarantee of existence, while the occasionalists allow to material objects an independent existence that does not rely on God's perceptions.

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[85] PHK 185.

[86] George Berkeley, "Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous," *A New Theory of Vision and other select Philosophical Writings by George Berkeley Bishop of Cloyne* (London: J. M. Dent, 1926) 245-6. Henceforth Beckett's Three Dialogues.

One of the longest marked passages again confirms that we can absolutely rely on our senses, and explains optical illusion in an original manner. Hylas brings up the illusion that an oar appears crooked when it is in the water as a proof that our perceptions are sometimes misleading. To which Philonous answers:

> Thus in the case of the oar, what [a man] immediately perceives by sight is certainly crooked; and so far he is in the right. But if he thence conclude, that upon taking the oar out of the water he shall perceive the same crookedness, or that it would affect his touch as crooked things are wont to do, in that he is mistaken.[87]

In other words, what makes the appearance illusory is not a mismatch between what we perceive and the real nature of the oar, but our expectation that our visual impression at one point in time will agree with the visual perception of the same object at another time, as well as with the sense of touch. According to Philonous here, the oar is both crooked and straight, depending on the circumstances and the sense that we employ to perceive it. This explanation is certainly counter-intuitive and works against Berkeley's claim to "speak with the vulgar", yet its crooked logic does not escape Beckett's attention.

Taken together, the passages marked by Beckett in all three of Berkeley's works can be said to encompass the central tenets of Berkeley's philosophy. It is also evident that Beckett paid special attention to the refutation of the occasionalist position, which he identified particularly with Geulincx. Beckett's personal predilections towards ignorance, scepticism and paradox seem to have found ample material in the writings of the Good Bishop.

Reading about Berkeley

The final source of knowledge about Berkeley that requires consideration here are the various interpretations of his philosophy that Beckett may have been familiar with, in addition to Windelband's *History of Philosophy* which was discussed above. Matthews assumes that Beckett had read Hone & Rossi's book on Berkeley, together with the

[87] Beckett's Three Dialogues 275.

introduction by Yeats, but there is in fact no evidence that Beckett ever read the book. He was certainly aware of the publication, because he calls Rossi "the Berkeley better half" in a letter to MacGreevy from 5 January 1933.[88] As already mentioned, Beckett was acquainted with Hone and had discussed Berkeley with him. He may have also talked about the philosopher with his so-called better half - Mario Rossi. Yet this friendship was not close enough to assume that Beckett would feel an obligation to read the book they wrote together. Similarly, it would seem unwarranted to assume, as Matthews does, that Beckett was interested in, or sympathised with, W.B. Yeats' introduction to the work which co-opts Berkeley into the celebrated poet's own poetics, of which Beckett was highly critical at the time. In the 1934 article "Recent Irish Poetry" he disparaged Yeats' attitude as antiquarianism, writing that he was: "delivering with the altitudinous complacency of the Victorian Gael the Ossianic goods."[89] Beckett's understanding of Berkeley, therefore, may have been influenced only by Hone's general understanding conveyed through conversation rather than through the details of the published work. It is therefore meaningful to sketch in broad outline what Hone and Rossi considered to be Berkeley's main achievement, as well as his weaknesses.

Hone & Rossi's assessment of Berkeley's thought revolves around what they call the "New Principle" – a phrase they adopt from the *Commonplace Book* to describe Berkeley's new insight into the nature of cognition:

> Fundamentally, the New Principle is the negation of all substance, i.e. of all underlying ground to our sensations or *ideas*, as Berkeley called them, which cannot in itself and for itself be immediately known. *Esse est percipi*, to be is to be perceived — such is the celebrated axiomatical expression: but it can easily lead to confusion. Berkeley meant that we have no means of going further than our mental contents: our knowledge extends only to what we are aware of, and therefore what we call 'being' is only what we can know and experience directly."(36-7)

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[88] Letters 1 150.

[89] Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 1983) 78.

This presentation limits Berkeley's idealism to epistemology alone – it is our knowledge that can go no further than appearances, and it does not entail a view about the nature of the world which in this interpretation becomes unknowable. In the authors' opinion, Berkeley's denial of matter in the ontological sense is a "not entirely justified expression" (37) that can even be described as "provocative" (60). The most serious objection they raise against Berkeley is that his philosophy leads to solipsism:

> Idealism *starts* with the affirmation of spirit as sole reality and then strives to reduce to this first truth… all forms of being… It could also go further and apply the same criticism to the mind, ending with the denial of the spirit: the way Hume went.
>
> On the road of the New Principle it is then impossible to avoid the peril of solipsism, i.e. of affirming that our mind, and our mind *only*, is real. (61-2)

It has already been indicated above that Beckett was attentive in his reading to Berkeley's clarifications that his system did not lead to solipsism. Consequently, although Hone had induced Beckett to read Berkeley, they may have interpreted him in different ways.

Another possible source of influence on Beckett that should be considered are the introductions to the two books by Berkeley in Beckett's library – the *Commonplace Book* and the collection of Berkeley's main works. As noted earlier, neither of them show any sign of reading, which leaves open the question of whether Beckett actually read them or not. Even so, the availability of these introductions to Beckett calls for a brief review of their contents. The introduction to the *Commonplace Book* by G. A. Johnston reviews the history and editing of the text and offers little by way of interpretation. [90] On the other hand, A. D. Lindsay's introduction to the volume *Theory of Vision and Other Writings by Bishop Berkeley* offers a critical overview of Berkeley's early work, situating him, like Windelband, as a link between Locke and Hume.[91] According to Lindsay, Berkeley

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[90] Commonplace Book ix- xxi.

[91] A.D. Lindsay. "Introduction," *A New Theory of Vision and Other Select Philosophical Writings* (London: J. M. Dent, 1926) vii-xxiv.

attempts to correct Locke's theory of ideas by accepting that our knowledge derives only from sense impressions, but then denying that these include general abstract ideas that cannot be directly perceived. Lindsay makes several objections to Berkeley's immaterialism, leading to the concluding observation that Berkeley introduces the concept of notions in order to account for the knowledge of our own mind, other spirits, and of course God. Notions then become an additional type of knowledge, contrary to the original assertion that all we know derives from ideas based on experience.[92] Berkeley's attempt to account for knowledge of the self and other minds is thus singled out as a weak point in his system, an issue that is important for Beckett's engagement with Berkeley which constantly returns to the question of self-perception.

An additional and so far overlooked source for Beckett's understanding of Berkeley is the writings of the other philosophers Beckett read. Thanks to the Beckett Digital Manuscripts Project it is possible to see that Beckett was not reading each philosopher in isolation, but was attuned to the relations between different thinkers. As van Hulle and Nixon explain, Beckett "tried to understand… philosophies by contrasting or comparing them with other philosophies".[93] Beckett marked passages referring to Berkeley and the nature of idealism in three different authors — Fritz Mauthner, Ernst Cassirer writing on Kant, and Arthur Schopenhauer. In Mauthner's *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* Beckett marked two passages, both reflecting unfavourably on Berkeley. The first passage criticises Kant for placing the real world, the thing in itself, outside the reach of human reason. Mauthner claims that Berkeley, Fichte and Max Stirner[94] — all of whom he understands to have denied the existence of external reality — are refuting their own theories every time they eat food to assuage their hunger, because they are effectively putting something of the external world into their own body.[95] The image of Molloy violently throwing away the tea and toast offered to him by a social worker may be seen

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[92] Lindsay xxiv.

[93] Beckett's Library 6.

[94] "pseudonym of Kasper Schmidt (1805–56), German philosopher who proposed a theory of radical individualism." Robert Audi, ed. *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 878.

[95] Fritz Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache Vol. 1* (Leipzig: F. Meiner, 1923) 690-1.

as a reaction to this philosophical attitude.[96] The second marked passage is much shorter and mentions Berkeley as preparing the way for Hume's critique of causality, criticising Berkeley's philosophy as "idealism *ad absurdum*".[97]

The marks in the two other books also situate Berkeley as a precursor of Kant who proposed an idealist system that Kant adopted and expanded. In Cassirer's 1921 book, "Kants Leben und Lehre" [Kant's Life and Teaching], Beckett marks Berkeley's name in a list of philosophers that Kant studied with care.[98] Schopenhauer also mentions Berkeley as a precursor of Kant in a passage that compares him unfavourably to the German philosopher who is the main subject of this passage which praises his achievements.[99] However, given that Beckett marked a large section of this paragraph, it is probable that his main interest was the connection between Kant and Schopenhauer, not necessarily Berkeley.

The list of philosophical assessments of Berkeley would remain incomplete without the famous anecdote related by Boswell in *Life of Johnson* which must have been familiar to Beckett who studied Johnson passionately and planned to write a play about him.[100] The passage merits to be quoted in full:

> After we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter, and that everything in the universe is merely ideal. I observed that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget

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[96] Samuel Beckett, "Molloy," *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 1994) 24.

[97] Mauthner 476.

[98] Ernst Cassirer, *Immanuel Kants Werke XI: Kants Leben Und Lehre* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1921) 207.

[99] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Sämmtliche Werke Vol. 2: Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1923) xxiv.

[100] Knowlson, Damned to Fame 249-251.

> the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, — 'I refute it thus.'[101]

The merit of Johnson's refutation is doubtful but reading it from a Beckettian perspective we become more aware of the pain which striking the stone "with mighty force" may have caused him, making physical suffering a measure against which to judge a philosophical theory. The testing of philosophy through pain was very likely to appeal to Beckett's sensibilities.

To conclude, the accumulation of Beckett's own pronouncements, traces of his reading, and the notes he kept, show beyond doubt that he read Berkeley rather extensively and was aware of various evaluations and criticisms of his work. We have therefore a good empirical basis for a study of the manner in which this knowledge found its way into Beckett's writing from the mid-1930s onwards. The main strands arising out of the various traces of Beckett's reading and knowledge include the denial of matter which leads to the suspicion of solipsism. Instead of external reality, Berkeley suggests that existence is in fact perception, either perceiving or being perceived, an issue that also concerns vision and other types of sensual perception, and the images they give rise to. The importance of the mind to the existence of the world then raises the question of self-perception, rejected by Berkeley as contradictory, but an ongoing pursuit for Beckett. The following chapters will elaborate on these themes in Beckett's writing for various genres and media, spanning the long period from the 1936 novel *Murphy* to the late fragments collected in *Fizzles*.

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[101] James Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1953 [orig. pub. 1791]) 333.

2: The Idealist Tar

Berkeley scholar David Berman wrote in some disappointment that "Beckett's dismissal of Berkeley's immaterialism is like Dr Johnson's - any kick will show that matter is a plain fact".[102] The comment refers to the reservations regarding Berkeley's idealism expressed in Chapter Six of Beckett's early novel *Murphy*. The chapter describes the mind of the eponymous character Murphy as closed to the outside world, and yet "This did not involve Murphy in the idealist tar. There was the mental fact and there was the physical fact, equally real if not equally pleasant."[103] Edouard Morot-Sir reads this same passage as Beckett's vow of allegiance to Descartes: "Murphy is not an idealist-Berkeleyan type of character. He is an orthodox Cartesian, a true dualist, obsessed with the problem of communication between the two substances of body and mind".[104]

The prominence of Descartes in discussion of Beckett's philosophy has been later criticised as being too narrow and exclusive. Already in 1982 Michael E. Mooney lamented that "if the 'Cartesian' approach provided an illuminating perspective, it had the regrettable effect of pre-empting other avenues of inquiry."[105] More recent research turned to archival materials to challenge this view and call for more nuanced philosophical readings. Mathew Feldman's 2006 study of Beckett's philosophy and psychology notes, *Beckett's Books*, is at pains to show that "The '*Philosophy Notes*' mandate a serious reappraisal of formulations on a 'Cartesian Beckett', and simultaneously point to a panorama of philosophical influences based not on a single system or 'ism', but on the *system of Western philosophy itself*."[106] Feldman reconstructs the history of Beckett's engagement with Descartes based on archival research and advances the hypothesis that "Beckett's knowledge of Cartesian philosophy was

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[102] David Berman, *Berkeley and Irish Philosophy* (London & New York: Continuum, 2005) 228.

[103] Samuel Beckett, "Murphy," *Samuel Beckett: The Grove Centenary Edition Volume 1: Novels* (New York: Grove Press, 2006. 1-168) 67.

[104] Morot-Sir 33.

[105] Michael E. Mooney, "Presocratic Scepticism: Samuel Beckett's *Murphy* Reconsidered," *ELH* 49:1 (1982): 214.

[106] Feldman, Beckett's Books 39.

superficial and anecdotal."[107] Beckett's familiarity with Descartes was based on a few secondary sources and an edited selection of his writings, pointing to a limited interest in comparison with Beckett's more extensive reading of complete works by other philosophers such as Schopenhauer (or indeed Berkeley).[108] This is not to say that Descartes had no relevance to Beckett's writing of course, but rather that he was only one of a range of philosophers Beckett chose to engage with, alongside other thinkers who may be more important sources for his various texts.

This chapter revisits *Murphy* to take a closer look at Berkeley's presence in the novel in light of the archive evidence discussed in the previous chapter, a re-examination motivated by the realization that the novel was written at the same time that Beckett was reading Berkeley's works. It will argue that Berkeley's philosophy plays a role in the novel that goes beyond an educated reference and that Beckett's objections to idealism are neither casual nor simplistic as Berman implies. Looking at references to Berkeley throughout the novel, and contextualising them within an overall interpretation of the work will allow us to appreciate Beckett's position with regards to the philosopher at this early stage in his writing life.

Immaterialise or Bust: Berkeley and *Murphy*

Murphy, Beckett's first published novel, is the first work mentioned in the entry about Bishop Berkeley in *The Grove Companion*.[109] The companion identifies three moments in the novel that relate to the Irish Bishop: Berkeley's name coming up in a conversation between Neary and Wiley as an example of escapist tendencies, the reference to tar water already quoted, and the use of the terms *percipi* and *percipere* in the aftermath of Murphy's chess game with Mr. Endon towards the end of the novel. Based on the evidence from Beckett's letters expounded in the previous chapter, the relevant chronology pertaining to Beckett's engagement with Berkeley and his work on the novel *Murphy* would be:

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[107] Feldman, Beckett's Books 46.

[108] Feldman, Beckett's Books 46-57.

[109] The Grove Companion 106.

31 December 1932: Beckett dines with Hone and they talk about Berkeley[110]

23 April 1933: Beckett is reading *The Commonplace Book*[111]

22 September 1935: Beckett wrote 9,000 words of what will become the novel *Murphy*[112]

31 December 1935: Beckett is reading *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*[113]

9 January 1936: Beckett already read *Principles of Human Knowledge* and *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*[114]

9 June 1936: Beckett completes the first draft of *Murphy*[115]

As we shall see, Beckett's reading is reflected in the novel and is essential to understanding Murphy's difficulties and his ultimate fate.

Murphy can be described as a novel of ideas taking its starting point from the distinction made by the eponymous protagonist between the big world of external reality and the little world inside his mind, "where he could love himself".[116] In what is probably the most famous passage of the novel Murphy ties himself in his chair in order to enter the world of his own mind. This scene sets up the main dichotomies for the novel and thus justifies a lengthy quotation:

> He sat naked in his rocking-chair of undressed wood… Seven scarves held him in position… Only the most local movements were possible… Somewhere a cuckoo-clock, having struck between twenty and thirty, became the echo of a street-cry, which now entering the mew gave *Quid pro quo! Quid pro quo!* directly.

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[110] Reported in a letter to McGreevy of 5 January 1933, see Letters I 149.

[111] Letters I 154.

[112] Letters I 277.

[113] Unpublished letter, quoted in Beckett's Library 137.

[114] Unpublished letter, quoted in Smith 332.

[115] Letters I 340.

[116] Beckett, Murphy 6.

> These were sights and sounds that he did not like. They detained him in the world to which they belonged, but not he, as he fondly hoped…
> He sat in his chair because it gave him pleasure! First it gave his body pleasure, it appeased his body. Then it set him free in his mind. For it was not until his body was appeased that he could come alive in his mind, as described in section six. And life in his mind gave him pleasure, such pleasure that pleasure was not the word. (3-4)

The passage draws a distinction between the external world of the street with its noise and mercantile quid pro quo and the world of Murphy's mind which is private, immobile and quiet. The first is painful for Murphy, the second extremely pleasurable. The passage also opposes the body which must be tied down in order for the mind to be set free, implying that they cannot be both free at the same time.

Murphy's attempt to immerse himself in the inner world is disturbed by his lover Celia who demands that he find a job to support them. Murphy is reluctant to work because he feels the change will disturb his current existence, as he explains: "What do I have now?... You, my body and my mind… In the mercantile gehenna… one of these will go, or two, or all."(27) When Murphy eventually finds a job he first loses Celia because he moves to the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat to work as a nurse for mental patients. From Murphy's point of view, the mental patients who lost touch with reality are actually fortunate to be able to live in their own mind: "The issue therefore, as lovingly simplified and perverted by Murphy, lay between nothing less fundamental than the big world and the little world, decided by the patients in favour of the latter" (107). Murphy's joy at being close to those who live in the little world does not last long alas. On his first night shift he plays a game of chess with one of the patients, Mr. Endon, and this brings about a form of breakdown which causes him to lose his mind for a while, as will be described later in more detail. Leaving the ward and his duties as a nurse, Murphy hurries to his room where he is killed by a gas explosion, losing his body as well.

Other characters in the novel are also struggling with the difficulties of adjusting to an external world that does not treat them well. Neary, who was Murphy's teacher, seeks reunion with a beloved who will be the sole figure obliterating the ground in his gestalt

world-view. His friend Wiley sees the world as a state of equilibrium where "For every symptom that is eased, another is made worse." (38) Celia, Murphy's lover, adopts his method of tying oneself in a chair, and loses herself in memories until she feels herself rid of history (90). The main concern in the novel thus seems to be ethical – how to comport oneself in a hostile world, rather than metaphysical – how does the soul relate to the body. The various philosophical and psychological systems adopted by the different characters are attempts to overcome human misery, not theoretical arguments about agency. In the following discussion, I will examine Berkeley's presence in the novel through a study of the references to his philosophy in key moments in the text. The discussion will suggest that eventually the dependence of existence on perception stands between Murphy and the pleasures of the hermetic mind, constituting an important and little acknowledged influence of Berkeley in the novel.

Neary: Figure and Ground

The first reference to Berkeley occurs in Chapter Four when Neary, having been rejected by Miss Counihan, asks his friend and disciple Wylie for advice. In reply, Wylie expounds his theory that in human life there is equilibrium of ills and one cannot suppress one without giving rise to another. He illustrates this theory with the example of "the young Fellow of Trinity College… [who] sought relief in insulin… and cured himself of diabetes" (38). According to Ackerley, "insulin coma-therapy was then used at the Bethlem Royal Hospital as a means of controlling schizophrenia, controlled doses producing effects similar to electro-convulsive therapy (ECT). The relief implied is death by means of insulin injection."[117] It is unclear why Beckett associates Berkeley with insulin treatment which was not available in the 18th century. The phrase 'young fellow of Dublin' could refer to many historical figures and the specific allusion is only provided by Neary who identifies him as George Berkeley and answers that "I don't wonder at Berkeley… He had no alternative. A defence mechanism. Immaterialise or bust. The sleep of sheer terror." (38) The only relation between Berkeley and insulin seems to be the extremism of the treatment. Insulin injections that cause death on the one hand, and a

[117] C.J. Ackerley, *Demented Particulars: An Annotated Murphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) 79.

philosophical theory which denies the material world on the other. Berkeley's denial of matter is understood by Wiley and Neary as a solution for unbearable situations comparable to not being loved by Miss Counihan. In fear of the "sweated sinecure" (38),[118] Berkeley chooses to deny reality. In the words of Beckett's letter to McGreevy from 5 March, 1936, written a short time before the completion of the novel: "the terrified Berkeley repudiates [his eyes]".[119] Neary, therefore, sympathises with what he considers to be Berkeley's difficulty but rejects the idealist solution of denying reality which is compared to death by insulin overdose. Presumably, the resort to a strong and possibly dangerous treatment like insulin injection is called for by the terror that grips Berkeley in the face of existence.

Neary cannot accept the idealist solution because of his need for external reality, specifically the reality of young and beautiful women, which supersedes all other considerations. Earlier in the novel, Neary discusses with Murphy a similar situation of longing for a young woman, except at that time the young woman was Miss Dwyer. In this earlier conversation Neary declared that "all is dross, for the moment at any rate, that is not Miss Dwyer. The one closed figure in the waste without form, and void!" (5) By Chapter Four Neary's desire has been transferred to Miss Counihan, who like Miss Dwyer before her, occupies for him the whole universe: "There is no non-Miss Counihan… There is only one symptom… Miss Counihan." (38) To Neary, whose only interest is consummating love in the material world, an idealist mind-dependent existence has nothing to offer. Thus, Neary makes the first gesture of rejecting Berkeley's idealism in the novel, a gesture that will be emulated by his student Murphy.

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[118] Smith suggests that the sinecure refers to "Berkeley's youth upon entering Trinity College Dublin (he was only fifteen)", see Smith 333.

[119] Letters 1 318-9.

Murphy's Mind: Hermetically Closed

The next reference to Berkeley appears in the famous Chapter Six which aims to provide a "justification of the expression 'Murphy's mind'" (67) by describing how it conceived of itself:

> Murphy's mind pictured itself as a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without. This was not an impoverishment, for it excluded nothing that it did not itself contain. Nothing ever had been, was or would be in the universe outside it but was already present as virtual, or actual, or virtual rising into actual, or actual falling into virtual, in the universe inside it. (67)

This brief passage posits a closed mind without access to the outside world, thus raising the spectre of solipsism, a subject that occupied Beckett while he was reading Berkeley as was already discussed. This implication is explicitly denied in the next paragraph – "This did not involve Murphy in the idealist tar. There was the mental fact and there was the physical fact, equally real if not equally pleasant." (67)

The description of Murphy's mind does not include the term solipsism but it strongly suggests it. Surprisingly, the term appears earlier in the novel, when the narrator describes Murphy as a "seedy solipsist". The context in which this description appears is a reflection on Murphy's plan to get more tea than he paid for. This petty fraud pits "a colossal league of plutomanic caterers" against "a seedy solipsist and fourpence." (52) The term solipsist in this case seems to denote egotistic behaviour, as well as poke fun at the pettiness of Murphy's fraudulent scheme. As Ackerley notes, this is a reference to Schopenhauer for whom solipsism is an ethical stance, which he describes before rejecting it. If one believes that other people do not exist then there is no need to take into account the needs of anyone else and there is no barrier to selfishly consulting one's interest only.[120] Like elsewhere in the novel, philosophical positions are considered as ethical injunctions to be adopted in daily life rather than all-embracing truths. At the

[120] Ackerley, Demented Particulars 99-100.

same time this justification of a petty theft puts the philosophical musings of Chapter Six in perspective.

The term used in Chapter Six, however, is not solipsism but the *idealist* tar, a term that directly refers to Berkeley, as Ackerley explains in an annotation:

> The metaphor derives [from] Berkeley's *A Chain of Philosophical Reflexions and Inquiries Concerning the Virtues of Tarwater* (1744), the Bishop's curious nostrum for ills of the material body. This came to Beckett via Fielding, as an entry in the Whoroscope Notebook indicates: "Dropsical: neither residence in dung (Heraclitus) nor Berkeley's Tarwater (Fielding), able to dissipate watery accumulation." … the second refers to the compelling account in Fielding's *A Voyage to Lisbon* of how the writer, dying of the dropsy, turned to Berkeley's tarwater and gained immediate relief but no lasting cure.[121]

Ackerley adds little aside from identifying the source of the term. This brevity is perhaps an inescapable consequence of the commentary form that can only offer isolated identifications of sources rather than overall interpretations. Even so, the identification itself is in need of expansion since we now know Beckett was familiar with the Bishop's treatise on tar water from multiple sources, including the work of Hone and the unidentified source from which he added information to the *Philosophy Notes*. Regardless of which source first informed Beckett of Berkeley's essay, it is misleading to reduce Beckett's familiarity with the work to a single reference such as Fielding's journal.

Berman and other commentators who had more room to expand on possible connections between this passage and Berkeley's philosophy, however, also tend to downplay its significance. According to Matthews:

> The seemingly passing reference adds to the anecdotal and satiric tone with which the philosophizing in *Murphy* more broadly is treated, and suggests that Berkeley presents no lasting solution to the intractable dichotomies with which *Murphy* is

[121] Ackerley, Demented Particulars 119-120.

broadly engaged—dichotomies between mind and matter, the material and the immaterial, crucially.[122]

For Matthews, the reference is "seemingly passing" because in his reading it contradicts Neary's sympathetic view of Berkeley as one who had no alternative but to hide from reality. The contradiction between Berkeley's lofty philosophy of immaterialism and the very material cure of tar water reflects interpretations of the philosopher that Beckett was familiar with.[123] According to Matthews, Murphy's comment about tar water is a form of response to Neary's more complex understanding of Berkeley, "a more various understanding of Berkeley's situation, one at least open to the context which gave to his idealizing philosophy 'no alternative,' and which is haunted by the nightmare which encroached upon him."[124] In my view, Neary and Murphy actually agree on Berkeley's irrelevance to their search of means to handle a hostile world, regardless of their personal sympathy towards the philosopher.

The choice of the word tar to refer to Berkeley is obviously motivated in part by Beckett's early display of erudition and wit, yet it uncovers a more serious concern that is part of the main argument of the novel. The *Murphy* manuscript – which was unavailable until 2013 – does not mention tar water, only idealism, referring simply to the "the *idealist's* position".[125] In the previous chapter it was pointed out that several sources used by Beckett associated Berkeley with the German idealist tradition, as a precursor of Kant and Schopenhauer. It is thus conceivable that Beckett has in mind here a broader philosophical movement, not just a single philosopher. Given that Irish authors like Colum and Yeats read Berkeley from a neo-Kantian perspective the conflation of Berkeley with later German idealism seems fairly likely. This interpretation of Berkeley's idealism is poetically expressed by Yeats in the poem "Blood and the Moon" from the 1929 collection *The Winding Stair*:

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[122] Matthews 213.

[123] Matthews 213-4.

[124] Matthews 214.

[125] Manuscript held in the Samuel Beckett Archive in Reading MS 5517. Emphasis mine.

> And God-appointed Berkeley that proved all things a dream,
> That this pragmatical, preposterous pig of a world, its farrow that so solid seem,
> Must vanish on the instant if the mind but change its theme[126]

We have no evidence of Beckett's appreciation of this Yeats poem, but we do have his reaction to the article by Colum who follows a similar interpretation. Beckett criticised Colum for writing that perception depends only on the will of the individual in Berkeley, and this criticism may easily be extended to Yeats and others. Reducing Berkeley's philosophy to an affirmation of individual will was evidently unpalatable to Beckett and it may well be that it is this view, and not the whole of Berkeley's philosophy, which is rejected by Murphy in Chapter Six since he affirms that he encounters an external reality that not only fails to follow his own desires, but is inherently inimical to him.

At first sight, it seems surprising that Murphy, who values the mind so highly, rejects a philosophical position that gives it absolute primacy. The reason is that Murphy's mind cannot affect the big world in which Murphy lives, and has no choice but to recognize the existence of external reality because it makes him suffer:

> He neither thought a kick because he felt one nor felt a kick because he thought one… Perhaps there was… a non-mental non-physical Kick from all eternity, dimly revealed to Murphy in its correlated modes of consciousness and extension, the kick *in intellectu* and the kick *in re*. But where then was the supreme Caress? (68)

Murphy's stance in this passage posits the independent existence of a body and a mind whose mode of relation is uncertain. This may be described as a Cartesian position, but could be equally attributed to any philosopher who subscribes to a dualistic world view. More than pitting Descartes against Berkeley, Murphy is arguing for a dualistic world-view and discards monism in general. What is most important in this passage is that it rejects the form of idealism Beckett was critical of – making the world depend on

[126] Yeats 238.

the will of the individual mind. Beckett's criticism of Colum clarifies that he was aware that ascribing such idealism to Berkeley is erroneous, since the world of ideas in Berkeley does not rely on the will of a single person. Consequently, Chapter Six cannot be taken to constitute a wholesale rejection of Berkeley's philosophy.

It is typical for the novel's emphasis on ethical comportment over abstract speculation that the interaction between the mind and the external world remains unresolved and the problem is deemed "of little interest" to Murphy. (68) Yet if the text devotes a whole chapter to these speculations, they must hold some interest, at least for the author and the reader. So far, we have discussed Murphy's opinion of the relevance of Berkeley's philosophy, but his view is not the only one that needs to be considered, since the novel is told by a narrator who may disagree with him. We get a glimpse of the narrator's view at the very beginning of the chapter, which cautions against identifying too closely with the way Murphy pictures his mind. The tone of the opening paragraph is rife with sarcasm:

> It is most unfortunate, but the point of this story has been reached where a justification of the expression "Murphy's mind" has to be attempted. Happily we need not concern ourselves with this apparatus as it really was – that would be an extravagance and an impertinence – but solely with what it felt and pictured itself to be. Murphy's mind is after all the gravamen of these informations. A short section to itself at this stage will relieve us from the necessity of apologizing for it further. (67)

Unlike Murphy who is happy to contemplate his own mind at any time, for the narrator the task is unfortunate and requires an apology. The word gravamen means the subject of a complaint or appeal, implying some kind of conflict or dispute. Moreover, the narrator hints that Murphy's mind "as it really was" is not the same as it imagined itself to be. These warning signs clarify that while Murphy rejects the idealist position, it does not mean that the narrator and Beckett as the author dismiss Berkeley's "tar" wholesale, as will become manifest in Murphy's encounter with Mr. Endon.

Mr. Endon: Amental Pattern

For the novel's first edition, Beckett wished the cover of *Murphy* to include a photograph of two monkeys playing chess that he found in a newspaper.[127] At the time, this proved impossible, but the choice itself indicates that he considered Murphy's chess game with the mental asylum inmate, Mr. Endon, to be an essential moment in the novel. The game occurs in Chapter Eleven, when Murphy – who recently started to work in the mental asylum – is taking on the night shift for the first time. Murphy took on the job since he felt close to the mental patients who are shut off in a world of their own. He envies their state but is unable to emulate them, a failure which he feels most acutely at night-time:

> By day he had not felt the gulf so painfully as he did now… there was Bom and other staff, there were the doctors and the visitors to stimulate his sense of kindred with the patients. There were the patients themselves… He could mix with them, touch them, speak to them, watch them, imagine himself one of them. But in the night of Skinner's there were none of these adminicles, no loathing to love from, no kick from the world that was not his, no illusion of caress from the world that might be. (143)

This passage reflects the opposition between a kiss and a caress that was outlined in Chapter Six and highlights its irrelevance to the mental asylum. Murphy loathes the big world, but his expectation of a caress and a fraternity with other inhabitants of the little world is disappointed because it would require a relation with other people which is impossible in an isolated existence. In this state of mind, Mr. Endon's invitation to play chess arouses in Murphy an inevitable hope "that his feeling for Mr. Endon was in some small degree reciprocated." The narrator is quick to point out that this hope is unfounded: "Whereas the sad truth was, that while Mr. Endon for Murphy was no less than bliss, Murphy for Mr. Endon was no more than chess."[128] The game itself consists of Mr.

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[127] Knowlson, Damned to Fame 231-2.

[128] Beckett, Murphy 144. Moorjani shows how Murphy's encounter with Mr. Endon draws on the Racinian plot of unrequited love where Mr. Endon is "a projection of Murphy's ideal self, the object of his self-love." See Angela Moorjani, "Beckett's Racinian Fictions: 'Racine and the Modern Novel' Revisited,"

Endon advancing, then retracing all his pieces without making contact with any of Murphy's pieces, causing the latter to concede defeat just before Mr. Endon's King is returned to its original position.[129] The effect of this game on Murphy is described in terms that are taken directly from Berkeley:

> Following Mr. Endon's forty-third move Murphy gazed for a long time at the board before laying his Shah on his side, and again for a long time after that act of submission… Murphy began to see nothing, that colourlessness which is such a rare postnatal treat, being the absence (to abuse a nice distinction) not of *percipere* but of *percipi*. His other senses also found themselves at peace, an unexpected pleasure.[130]

Mr. Endon's refusal to recognise Murphy as an opponent, or in any other way, leads to a unique experience in which Murphy loses himself and becomes immersed in nothingness. He retains his ability to sense, the *percipere*, but for a short while he ceases to be because he is not perceived, he loses his *percipi*. By refusing to recognise Murphy, Mr. Endon makes him unseen even to himself, in a complex reversal of Berkeley's *esse est percipi*. For Mr. Endon, Murphy is nothing and Murphy gets submerged in this non-existence. However, Murphy cannot maintain this state. According to Ruby Cohn, "Murphy is torn between the pleasures of the senses and those of the mind—a conflict externalized in two of the book's characters, the prostitute Celia Kelly… and the schizophrenic Mr. Endon (Greek for "within")."[131] Mr. Endon's schizophrenia is not a form of dual personality, contrary to the common misconception, but should rather be

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Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui: Early Modern Beckett/ Beckett et le début de l'ère moderne – Beckett Between/ Beckett entre deux, eds. Angela Moorjani, et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012) 45.

[129] A detailed analysis of the game can be found in Neil Taylor and Bryan Loughrey, "Murphy's Surrender to Symmetry," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 11-12 (1989): 79-90.

[130] Beckett, Murphy 147-8. On the Presocratic associations of this passage see Shane Weller, "'Gnawing to be Naught': Beckett and Pre-Socratic Nihilism," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui: Des éléments aux traces: Elements and Traces*, Eds. Matthijs Engelberts, et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008): 323-4.

[131] Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008) 73.

understood in the medical sense that Beckett is using – Mr. Endon is out of touch with reality, confining himself, in Murphy's terms, to the little world. The chess game clarifies to Murphy that he does not belong in the internal world of Mr. Endon, or more accurately that inhabiting the little world of one's mind indefinitely means giving up all human relations, and with them the caress that he longs for.

Murphy is caught up in the paradox of the solipsist who feels the urge to share his theory with others. His situation is similar the argument advanced by Windelband's *History of Philosophy* in order to refute the strong form of solipsism which he considers to be a consequence of the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*: "This doctrine was at that time designated as Egoism, now it is usually called Solipsism. It is a metaphysical sport which must be left to the taste of the individual; for the solipsist refutes himself by beginning to prove his doctrine to others."[132] This argument is summarised by Beckett in the *Philosophy Notes*[133] and may have informed his thinking about the ability of the subject to shut itself off from the world. In a letter to McGreevy from 16 January 1936 he quotes Malraux to describe Murphy's plight: "Il est difficile à celui qui vit hors du monde de ne pas rechercher les siens (negative)" [it is difficult for one who lives isolated from the everyday world not to seek others like himself].[134]

Murphy comes out of this trance to discover that Mr. Endon has left the cell where he was supposed to be confined for the night, and is wandering around the ward: "For quite a little time Mr. Endon had been drifting about the corridors, pressing here a light-switch and there an indicator in a way that seemed haphazard but was in fact determined by an amental pattern as precise as any of those that governed his chess." (148) Mr. Endon's nightly stroll can be contrasted with Murphy's duty as the night guard. Murphy was also walking along the corridors pressing buttons, just like Mr. Endon's aimless walk. The difference is that Murphy's walking and pressing buttons followed external rules that were dictated to him by the big world and serve a clear purpose, whereas Mr. Endon was making up his own rules which are at the same time both precise and incomprehensible to

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[132] Windelband 471-2.

[133] TCD MS 10967 207r.

[134] Letters 1 299. The quote is taken from Malraux' 1933 novel *La Condition humaine*. Source and translation provided in a footnote to the letter; see Letters 1 302.

anyone but himself. Mr. Endon performs the same actions as Murphy – pressing buttons in the ward, but he follows a completely different logic which can be seen to parody the nurse's solemn duty and clarifies beyond doubt how much Murphy participates in the big world and how far he is from being able to dwell in the little world.

Having put Mr. Endon to bed, Murphy looks into his eyes and analyzes the situation as an interplay of reflections: "The last Mr. Murphy saw of Mr. Endon was Mr. Murphy unseen by Mr. Endon. This was the last Murphy saw of Murphy." (150) Murphy is seeing himself in Mr. Endon's eye, yet Mr. Endon does not see him, and this unseeing is the image of himself that Murphy will carry with him. The play of seeing and unseeing is the last for Murphy, as he will shortly die in a gas explosion. Murphy cannot ensconce himself in a little world of his own because he craves recognition from others – Celia, the mental patients, Mr. Endon. He cannot give up his need to be perceived by other people and in his last moments he decides to call Celia in the morning to resume the pleasures of the senses (151). Thus, Murphy's attempts to come alive in his mind are short and temporary, his feeling that his mind is hermetically closed gives in to the need to be perceived and have meaningful relations with others.[135] Earlier in the novel Murphy rejects idealism because in his view it cannot account for the inimical nature of the external world, but the novel as a whole shows that he is caught up in another aspect of Berkeley's philosophy – the dependence on perception which makes the gaze of the other indispensable to the existence of bodies.

The presence of Berkeley is felt throughout *Murphy* as a whole in different modes. The system of idealism that asserts the primacy of mind over matter is rejected first by Neary and then by Murphy as a model for how one should comport oneself in the world. It is described as a defence mechanism that attempts to ignore the problem, rather than a possible solution. In the final chapters of the novel, a different aspect of Berkeley's

[135] Rónán McDonald adds that Murphy also shows interest in the external world by writing a will to be executed after his death: "In death Murphy breaks his own ascetic resolutions, his own urge to abnegate worldly desires and pursuits. Leaving a 'will' at all indicates an act of yearning at odds with his intellectual outlook." See Rónán McDonald, *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 80.

immaterialism is revealed as indispensable for understanding Murphy's plight, namely the necessity of relation with another mind. This interpretation pits Murphy's need for companionship against the Cartesian reading of *Murphy* as concerned with the relation of mind and body within the individual. The novel begins with Murphy rejecting the body in favour of the mind and ends with the recognition that relations are essential for his well-being. In other words, Murphy's description of his trouble is badly formulated. He treats the external world as the source of his suffering while what he really wants is a more friendly connection with the people in this world. Looking at the novel through a Berkeleyan perspective therefore qualifies Cartesian readings of the work in significant ways. As we shall see in the following chapters, the question of relation continued to occupy Beckett, and he would return to Berkeley's philosophy to draw on the philosopher's original thinking about relations, and their absence.

Although Murphy's plight stems from a need to be perceived, the novel does not follow Berkeley's precepts closely but rather conflates body and mind in manner that Beckett will continue to use throughout his writing life. In a more faithful Berkeleyan world Murphy would have no need for external perception since his mind is a spirit that exists by the act of perceiving rather than by virtue of being passively perceived. Perhaps if Murphy had more faith in his own mind, he would find peace in his sense of self and would not have to pursue Mr. Endon for recognition.

3: Fruits on Plates: Beckett's Post-war Aesthetics

The relation between self and the world which was the onus of Murphy's trouble continues to be a central issue for Beckett after the war, and nowhere more so than in his writing about painting and the position of the artist. As this chapter will show, Beckett's writing about aesthetics in the 1940s manifests a process of development that culminates in "Three Dialogues between Samuel Beckett and George Duthuit",[136] a title that in itself reveals a Berkeleyan influence. This chapter will therefore inquire into possible parallels between Beckett's theoretical writing and Berkeley's philosophy. Since neither Beckett nor Berkeley ever produced a coherent or comprehensive aesthetic theory, the discussion cannot consist in a straight-forward comparison of two clearly formulated arguments. Instead, it will follow the development of Beckett's thinking on aesthetics as reflected in his published work and letters, and its intersections with Berkeley's philosophy.

The best source for Beckett's post-war thinking on art is a series of articles he wrote about painters and painting in the late 1940s. Although these texts are concerned with the work of other artists, they reveal Beckett's understanding of the creative challenges and the role of the artist at the time. As Andrea Oppo points out, they are "thoroughly focused on the origin as well as the meaning, possibility, and achievements of art per se… In short, art as a philosophical problem".[137] The main argument of this chapter is that Berkeley's philosophy was crucial for the development of Beckett's thinking about art, especially in its latest form of praise for 'inexpressive' art.

Writing about Modern Art

Beckett's writings on art or artists are scarce and mostly written before the second world war when Beckett was still unsure about his future occupation. These include an article on Joyce in 1929 (Disjecta 19-33), an extended essay on Proust from 1930,[138] and several articles about contemporary writers and related issues, which he later described as "mere

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[136] Samuel Beckett, "Three Dialogues between Samuel Beckett and George Duthuit," *Transition* 5 (1949) 97-103.

[137] Andrea Oppo, *Philosophical Aesthetics and Samuel Beckett* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008) 31.

[138] Beckett, *Proust*.

products of friendly obligation or economic need".[139] Such statements need to be taken with a grain of salt and the early articles have justifiably attracted the attention of critics. This chapter, however, will concentrate on the theoretical texts written after WWII when Beckett was developing his mature style. These articles admittedly draw on earlier work but also diverge from it in important ways.

In the late 1940s Beckett published a series of texts about the work of Dutch painters Bram and Geer van Velde which delineate Beckett's post-war thinking about art and the development of a new aesthetic position. These texts are "La peinture des van Velde ou le monde et le pantalon" (Disjecta 118-132) and "Les peintres de l'empêchement" (Disjecta 133-7) which adhere, as will be seen below, to an understanding of art as essentially representational, and the "Three Dialogues between Samuel Beckett and George Duthuit" which charts a new direction and has been accepted by critics, in Paul Stewart's words, as "the closest thing we have to a manifesto of Beckett's artistic beliefs."[140]

Beckett's theoretical writings are commonly read as outlining his own reflections on art rather than an attempt to convey the artistic agenda and beliefs of the artists they discuss. This approach can be justified by two considerations with regards to the post-war articles – first, after the war Beckett only wrote about artists he appreciated as close to his own views and second, the lack of reference to biographical details, descriptions of the work, the painters' own assessment of their work, or any other extrinsic detail that would indicate an attempt at an academic or objective study of these artists.[141] Moreover, within the articles themselves Beckett often indicates that his writing about the van Veldes has more to do with his own thinking than with their art. For example, he opens "La peinture des van Velde ou le monde et le pantalon" by declaring himself to be an amateur, and

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[139] Quoted in Ruby Cohn, "Foreword," *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (London: John Calder, 1983) 6. The Foreword also contains a good review of Beckett's critical writing throughout the years, see 7-16.

[140] Paul Stewart, *Zone of Evaporation: Samuel Beckett's Disjunctions* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2006) 183.

[141] A similar point is made in Steven Barfield, "The Resources of Unrepresentability: A Lacanian Glimpse of Beckett's 'Three Dialogues'," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui 13: "Three Dialogues" Revisited*, eds. Marius Buning et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003) 16.

then goes on to enumerate different ways in which his subject can be approached, such as general aesthetics or a collection of anecdotes. In the end he opts for an annoying and confused chatter ("bavardage désagréable et confus"; Disjecta 119) because eventually all writing is self-description: "Avec les mots on ne fait que se raconter. [you cannot do anything with words except tell your own story]" (Disjecta 119).

The main aesthetic problem explored in these texts is the relation between the artist and her material. Although presented as a dual relation of artist-world, there is in fact a third term that is a major part of the problem even though it is not explicitly mentioned, namely the work of art produced by the artist. As shown in the previous chapter, the relation of the self to the world is not a new problem for Beckett, and indeed he already addressed it as a specifically artistic concern in the early article "Recent Irish Poetry", published in 1934 (Disjecta 70-76), shortly before beginning work on *Murphy*. The article contains a review of contemporary poets which Beckett proposes to examine according to their attitude towards a specific problem:

> awareness of the new thing that has happened, or the old thing that has happened again, namely, the breakdown of the object, whether current, historical, mythical or spook. The thermolaters… would no doubt like this amended to breakdown of the subject. It comes to the same thing – rupture of the lines of communication. (Disjecta 70)

The problem Beckett formulates here is concerned with representation – the artist wishes to write about something, an object, but this object is unavailable, there is a "space that intervenes between him and the world of objects" (Disjecta 70). In this early article, the problem is merely stated without analysis, further explanation or suggestions for a way out, and Beckett moves on to catalogue contemporary Irish writers based on their approach to this situation.

The question of how a subject can access an object is closely associated with the question of how the mind can gain access to the external world that preoccupied philosophers of the 18th-century. Windelband amply demonstrates this understanding of the period when he writes that during the Enlightenment

> philosophy, as a whole, aims to base all knowledge upon the observation of the actual processes of the psychical life. After Locke had set up the principle, that prior to all metaphysical considerations and controversies the general question must be decided of how far human insight reaches, and that this in turn is possible only by exact exhibition of the sources from which knowledge derives, and of the course of development by which it is brought about, from that time *epistemology*, the theory of knowledge, was brought into the front rank of philosophical interests, and at the same time *empirical psychology* was recognised as the authoritative and decisive court of last resort for epistemology.[142]

In the introductory chapter to *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, Knud Haakonssen formulates this common understanding of "the core of early-modern philosophy" in even stronger terms as "the epistemological paradigm" which

> sees philosophy as essentially concerned with the justifications of beliefs and judgements; it understands such justification in terms of events, either perceptive or inferential, in the mind – or, as if in the mind – of the individual person; and it tends to apply this idea of epistemological justification as the criterion for what is properly included within the discipline of philosophy.[143]

Haakonssen goes on to enumerate the limitations and blind spots of this monolithic understanding of the 18th-century, such as ignoring non-European philosophies or philosophies written by women, as well as marginalising ethics, aesthetics, social practices and other topics that were widely discussed at the time but do not conform to the accepted view of modern philosophy as an individualistic pursuit of knowledge. While acknowledging that the view of the 18th-century as the "century of epistemology"

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[142] Windelband 447. Beckett summarises Windelband's long paragraph in one sentence, see TCD MS 10967 202r.

[143] Knud Haakonssen, "The History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy: History or Philosophy?" *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 7.

may be an oversimplification, the fact remains that from Descartes onwards, philosophers have been questioning the sources of knowledge and certainty with unprecedented urgency. Beckett's preoccupation with the possibilities of representation is not unusual for a modernist writer but his choice to formulate the basic problem facing contemporary artists as a rupture between artist and object indicates the extent to which his thinking was influenced by early modern philosophy. For Beckett as for the modern philosophers, there is no certain way to access reality in order to represent it or discern its true nature.

After the war, Beckett returns to this artistic question of relation between artist and subject matter in *"*La peinture des van Velde ou le monde et le pantalon" which begins with a witty defence of contemporary art against conservative attacks that question its value and the proficiency of its creators. In the second part of the article, Beckett describes his own appreciation of the painting of the van Velde brothers and characterizes Bram van Velde's work as aspiring to "aperception" (Disjecta 125). According to Beckett, art was always trying to pull back objects from the grip of time to create spaces and bodies which remain inalterable (Disjecta 125), and each brother has found a different way to represent such objects. In Bram van Velde's painting, the object is not merely suspended, but becomes completely stuck, immobile, a pure object wrenched away from the world and made to exist solely in the visual realm (Disjecta 126). In Geer van Velde's work, on the other hand, Beckett finds an infinite movement, highlighting change: "Ici tout bouge, nage, fuit, revient, se défait, se refait." [Here everything moves, swims, flees, returns, breaks down, reassembles] and Beckett summarizes "A. van Velde peint l'étendue. G. van Velde peint la succession" [A. van Velde paints extension, G. van Velde paints succession] (Disjecta 128).

One brother creates an ideal timeless extension that can only exist as an inner sense, the other is completely given to the changing external appearances of things in time. Each brother chooses his own solution, but both are responding to the same dilemma – how to represent change? In the immobile medium of painting it is impossible to depict change directly and so each artist illustrates a partial aspect of change – Bram van Velde paints the object being changed, Geer van Velde conveys the cause of the change. The article thus revolves around the possible access to a certain object, i.e. change, which is incompatible with the possibilities of painting as a static medium. This problem of

representation is necessarily circumscribed, since other objects of representation may prove to be less recalcitrant. What is at stake here is a particular object that resists representation rather than a general situation affecting all possible objects of painting. Moreover, both brothers overcome this difficulty, each in his own way, thus reaffirming the possibility of representation and implying that even extremely resistant objects are in the final analysis available to the artist for the purpose of creating art.

In "Peintres de l'empêchement", originally published in French in 1948, Beckett returns to the initial question of the artist's relation to the object, and provides a little more detail about its elusiveness, explaining that "L'objet de la représentation résiste toujours à la représentation, soit à cause de ses accidents, soit à cause de sa substance, et d'abord à cause de ses accidents parce que la connaissance de l'accident précède celle de la substance." [The object of representation always resists representation, either because of its accidents, or because of its substance, but primarily because of its accidents since knowledge of the accident precedes that of the substance] (Disjecta 135).[144] Accordingly, Beckett distinguishes two trends in modern art. The first endeavours to express the "substance", or the essential nature of the object, its innermost nature. This attempt, made by painters such as Matisse, Bonnard, Braque, Rouault and Kandinsky, aims to "experimer en quoi un clown, une pomme et un carré de rouge ne font qu'un, et du même désarroi, devant la résistance qu'oppose cette unicité à être exprimée. Car ils ne font qu'un en ceci, que ce sont des choses, la chose, la choseté." [express the sense in which a clown, an apple and a red square are one and the same, and of the same disorder, overcoming the resistance this unity opposes to any attempt to express it. Because they are one only in the sense that they are things, the thing, thingness] (Disjecta 135-6). In other words, this group of modern artists are seeking to express what is common to all

[144] Beckett is using Aristotle's distinction between sensible qualities and coincidentally sensible qualities in *De Anima*, meaning the difference between qualities that directly affect our senses, and those that we can only infer indirectly from the immediate sensible qualities. This distinction was picked up by scholastic philosophers, and later adopted by Locke and other modern philosophers. See Mi-Kyong Lee, "Introduction," *Primary & Secondary Qualities: The Historical and Ongoing Debate*, ed. Larence Nolan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 31-34.

objects, the substantiality of substance as it were. This trend, according to Beckett, has run its course and is no longer viable.

Another group of artists, however, seeks to "représenter les conditions de cette dérobade" [represent the conditions of this evasion] (Disjecta 136), expressing the failure of representation itself. This, according to Beckett, can be done by isolating each term in the subject-object relation: "l'un dira: Je ne peux voir l'objet, pour le représenter, parce qu'il est ce qu'il est. L'autre: Je ne peux voir l'object, pour le représenter, parce que je suis ce que je suis."[one would say : I can't see the object to be represented because it is what it is. The other: I can't see the object to be represented because I am what I am] (Disjecta 136). In other words, the problem is double-edged as both the object and the subject cannot establish communication. These two attitudes characterise the work of Geer van Velde and Bram van Velde respectively. In this second article devoted to the van Veldes, Beckett explicitly advances for the first time the claim that the history of painting is the history of the artist's relation to the object. Development in art can result either from finding new objects to represent, or from finding new ways to represent them – "Ce qui renouvelle la peinture, c'est d'abord qu'il y a de plus en plus des choses à peindre, ensuite une façon de les peindre de plus en plus possessionelle" [Renewal in painting results firstly from having more and more things to paint, and subsequently a way of painting them that is ever more possessive] (Disjecta 135). Beckett sees the van Veldes as taking a step forward in the continuous effort of artists to expand their possibilities of representation by pursuing a new object for representation, which is paradoxically the impossibility of representation.

In the previous article the Dutch brothers were praised for their success in representing change, now Beckett reformulates their achievement as the ability to represent their own inability to represent. This reformulation of the value of their paintings attributes to them a more difficult task but yet again reinforces rather than challenges the conceptualization of art as representation. Despite the paradoxical premise, we still have the triple relation of an artist who depicts an object on canvass, the artist-painting-object relation of representation. The elusiveness of the object becomes a new object for the artist to represent in his chosen medium. The confident conclusion of "Peintres de l'empêchement" becomes the main subject of inquiry in Beckett's next

critical text, "Three Dialogues between Samuel Beckett and George Duthuit". As Beckett himself writes to Duthuit: "To [write], as I have already been cowardly enough to do, that [Bram van Velde's painting] expresses the impossibility of expressing anything is just to march him back in line with the others".[145]

Writing in Dialogue

The *"*Three Dialogues between Samuel Beckett and George Duthuit*",* dating from 1949, is the last critical text Beckett ever wrote. It grew out of an ongoing conversation between Beckett and his friend George Duthuit, an art critic and the editor of the journal *Transition*.[146] Some of the exchange has been preserved in a series of letters, but they do not cover all of the discussion, since part of it took place face to face. Following this amicable exchange, Duthuit asked Beckett to write up his position as an article. In the final text Beckett incorporates some of Duthuit's comments who, as Lois Oppenheim shows, was involved in the composition of the work and read most of the manuscript before publication.[147] Although it takes its starting point from correspondence and conversations, the text of the "Three Dialogues" is not a faithful documentation of specific exchanges but a new composition. Beckett was asked by Duthuit to write up his position as an article for *Transition*, and he opted for the form of a dialogue, a significant choice that will be discussed later in the chapter. The resulting text should therefore be considered as his own individual work. Later in life, Beckett contributed a few short notes for his artist friends' exhibitions and spoke about art in rare interviews or conversations with friends,[148] but he never again attempted a systematic exposé of his thinking about another artist's work or art in general. In a letter to Duthuit, about the composition of the "Three Dialogues" he calls it "my (positively final) farewell of

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[145] Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, et al., eds. *The Letters of Samuel Beckett. 1941-1956* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 170. Henceforth Letters 2.

[146] On the intellectual exchange between Beckett and Duthuit see Anthony Uhlmann, "Beckett, Duthuit and Ongoing Dialogue", *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts* ed. S.E. Gontarski (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014) 146-152.

[147] On the genesis of the *"*Three Dialogues*"* and Duthuit's involvement in its writing and editing, see Lois Oppenheim, "Three Dialogues: One Author or Two?" *Journal of Beckett* S*tudies* 8:2 (1982): 61-72.

[148] See Cohn, Foreword 15-16.

aesthetics".[149] His subsequent reluctance to translate "Three Dialogues" is another indication of a wish to distance himself from the theoretical mode.[150] As he famously told Gabriel d'Aubarède: "I wouldn't have had any reason to write my novels if I could have expressed their subject in philosophic terms."[151]

Three Dialogues is composed of three conversations between B (Beckett) and D (Duthuit) about the value of the work of three contemporary painters – Tal Coat, André Masson and Bram van Velde.[152] Although the text presumes to discuss the work of other artists, it is clear that the opinions expounded by B refer mostly to Beckett's own thoughts and aesthetic position. This is already made clear in the first dialogue when D comments that B's argument is "a violently extreme and personal point of view, of no help to us in the matter of Tal Coat", leaving B speechless (98). D further points out that B's position reflects his personal wishes and does not describe any of the actual paintings – "that impoverished painting… to which *you* aspire" (100. Emphasis mine). He even wonders why the discussion is about painting at all, instead of B's work and cautions B to "Try and bear in mind that the subject under discussion *is not yourself*" (102. Emphasis mine). B readily acknowledges that his opinions on van Velde's work may be completely unrelated to this painter's intentions, suggesting "How would it be if I first said what I am pleased to *fancy* he is, *fancy* he does, and then that *it is more than likely that he is and does quite otherwise*?" (102. Emphasis mine) and when he has finished presenting his argument he concedes that "Yes, yes, I am mistaken, I am mistaken." (103)

Unlike the congratulatory tone of Beckett's previous articles about the van Veldes, the dialogues are obsessed with failure – the failure of communication between subject and object, the failure of artists to paint, and the failure of B to express "the thing I am

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[149] Letters 2 154.

[150] Beckett only translated the third dialogue, leaving the translation of the first two to Edith Fournier. See publication details in Samuel Beckett, *Trois Dialogues*, traduit de l'anglais en partie par l'auteur, en partie par Edith Fournier (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1998).

[151] Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman, eds. *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1997) 217.

[152] On Beckett's interest in contemporary schools of art see Jean-Michel Rabaté, "Beckett's Masson: From Abstraction to Non-Relation," *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014) 131-133.

trying in vain to say" (102). David Tucker suggests this preoccupation is related to Geulingian philosophy and specifically to the ethical axiom "ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis", a loaded phrase which, as the introduction to the translation of Geulincx' *Ethics* explains, can and have been translated in various ways:

> 'Ubi nihil vales ibi nihil velis' has often been translated by Beckett critics as: 'Where one is worth nothing one should want nothing'. The Latin, 'valeo', carries the meaning both of 'to be able to, to have force' and 'to be worth'. Beckett makes use of both senses, in what seem to be translations of this in his works. He uses the formula where one is 'worth nothing' in *Murphy*, and alternatively, where one 'can do nothing' in *The Unnamable*. Martin Wilson has translated Geulincx' phrase in this edition as 'wherein you have no power, therein neither should you will'.[153]

According to Tucker, "This combination of impotence and obligation… resonates with Beckett's critical writings of the period as regards his thinking about an art of failure."[154]

This valorisation of failure should be contrasted with B's view of the history of art as a continuous attempt to expand the artist's means of expression: "The much to express, the little to express, the ability to express much, the ability to express little, merge in the common anxiety to express as much as possible, or as truly as possible, or as finely as possible, to the best of one's ability" (101). This striving for expression is based on a mediated relation between the subject who is an artist with what B calls "occasion" ,[155] a relation that has been disrupted. This position is similar to the problem Beckett has identified as facing the young Irish poets almost fifteen years earlier.[156] Despite the

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[153] Arnold Geulincx, *Ethics with Samuel Beckett's Notes*, trans. Martin Wilson, eds. Hans van Ruler, Anthony Uhlmann, and Martin Wilson (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006) 305. Partially cited in Tucker 18.

[154] Tucker 135.

[155] Beckett's use of this term will be discussed below.

[156] Beckett himself made the connection with this article in his correspondence with Duthuit about Bram van Velde; see Letters 2 131.

various solutions suggested by Irish writers or Dutch painters, Beckett now sees these efforts as evasions that ultimately conform to a traditional view of art:

> I agree that [modern artists] have prodigious value, but a value cognate with those already accumulated. What we have to consider in the case of the Italian painters is not that they surveyed the world with the eyes of building contractors, a mere means like any other, but that they never stirred from the field of the possible, however much they may have enlarged it. The only thing disturbed by the revolutionaries Matisse and Tal Coat is a certain order on the plane of the feasible.(98)

For B there is little difference between the realist art of the Italian masters and the modernist revolt against their standards. In both cases, the artists adhere to the same task – representing an object on canvass.

The first two artists discussed in the dialogues are aware of the "rupture of the lines of communication" and are trying to overcome it through a more accurate representation of their sense impressions, rather than some external object, thereby making their own modes of perception a new object for representation. For B their attempt is doomed to failure because of the problematic nature of both terms of the relation:

> The analysis of the relation between the artist and his occasion, a relation always regarded as indispensable, does not seem to have been very productive… It is obvious that for the artist obsessed with his expressive vocation, anything and everything is doomed to become occasion, including… the pursuit of occasion.(102)

The Occasion of Painting

Before analyzing Beckett's arguments further, it is important to clarify what he means by the term "occasion". The English original of the *"*Three Dialogues*"* offers no definition or explanation of this term. In earlier articles and the correspondence with Duthuit[157] Beckett consistently uses the term object.[158] Moreover, "Peintres de l'empechement" was originally titled "Le Nouvel objet".[159] Replacing "object" with "occasion" seems to indicate that Beckett felt uncomfortable with the former term and was looking for a new way to describe the relation of "self – the rest",[160] which for him covers both internal and external relations as he explains in a letter of 9 March 1949 to Duthuit:

> By relation we understand, naturally, not only the primary form, that between the artist and the outside world, but also and above all those which, within him, ensure that he has lines of flight and retreat, and changes of tension, and make available to him, among other benefits, that of feeling plural (to put it no higher), while remaining (of course) unique.[161]

We can only speculate about the reasons for Beckett's uneasiness and his choice of the term occasion. According to Ruby Cohn, the word occasion "seems less stable and solid" [162] than an object, and this indeterminacy may have been part of its attraction. Occasion also implies a coincidence of time and place, an event that can be fluid and changing instead of a static object that exists independently. This interpretation gains further support in the first dialogue where B explains what he understands by the term "nature" – "By nature I mean here, like the naivest realist, a composite of perceiver and

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[157] Beckett, Letters 2 131, 156.

[158] "[T]he breakdown of the object" in "Recent Irish Poetry" - Beckett, Disjecta 70, "il était peut-être temps que l'objet se retirát" in "Le peinture des van Velde" - Beckett, Disjecta 126, or "deuil de l'objet" in "Peintres de l'empechement" - Beckett, Disjecta 135.

[159] Cohn, Foreword 14.

[160] Letters 2 165.

[161] Letters 2 138.

[162] Cohn, Foreword 15.

perceived, not a datum, an experience."(97) The meaning of the French word 'occasion' – bargain or discount – may have also played a part, as a parodic twist on the idea of a special situation or circumstances.

The choice of this word was probably also motivated by Beckett's interest in occasionalism which is evident from his diligent reading of Geulincx in the late 1930s.[163] As mentioned in Chapter 1, Beckett paid special attention to passages in Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge* devoted to a refutation of occasionalism and added in the margins "against Geulincx?" In a nutshell, "Occasionalism is the doctrine that all creatures, finite entities that they are, are absolutely devoid of any causal efficacy, and that God is the only true causal agent."[164] Bodies or minds cannot affect other bodies or minds directly. It is only through God's will that objects and minds are affected and He arranges things in such a way that they always move in a concerted manner which we tend to interpret erroneously as natural law. The movement of bodies or the human will are an opportunity for God to exercise his will. For example, when we want to raise our arm, God makes our arm rise, but the movement of our arm is not the effect of our own will, but of God's benevolence in making the two events coincide. Thus, the term occasion describes a connection between two events, either mental or physical, that is indirect and non-causal, while still binding them together under certain circumstances.[165] The non-causal causality of occasionalism may have served Beckett in the "Three Dialogues" to inclusively describe an encounter between the artist and some material that is not necessarily a direct relation of the subject to a determined object, and has the added value of covering not only external entities, as implied by the term object, but also internal mental states.

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[163] Beckett's interest in occasionalism was noted from very early on, see for example Cohn, Philosophical Fragments 170-174, and Fletcher 54-5. For a more recent appreciation, see The Grove Companion 116-7. Beckett's interest in Geulincx has recently received much critical attention, see Uhlmann, Philosophical Image 69-74, Feldman, Beckett's Books 131-136, and most comprehensively the book-length study by Tucker.

[164] Steven Nadler, "Malebranche on Causation," *The Cambridge Companion to Malebranche*, ed. Steven Nadler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 115.

[165] Andrew Pyle, *Malebranche* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003) 96-7.

It is important to note that the occasionalist connection between body and mind did not satisfy Berkeley. In the passages marked by Beckett he answers the objection that "if any man shall… say that he means [by matter] an inert senseless substance, that exists without the mind, or unperceived which is the occasion of our ideas, or at the presence whereof God is pleased to excite ideas in us".[166] For Berkeley, occasionalist causality is too fluid and inexplicable, introducing more problems than it solves. In a passage from *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* that Beckett marked in his copy of the work he writes: "For philosophers, though they acknowledge all corporeal beings to be perceived by God, yet they attribute to them an absolute subsistence distinct from their being perceived by any mind whatever, which I do not."[167]

For Beckett this ambiguous causality may have actually been attractive as an analogy with artistic inspiration. The occasionalist position imported into a theory of art like Beckett's introduces the ineffable into artistic creation, where the 'occasion' is transformed into a painting in an unexplained way, just like God's causation cannot be fully understood by our limited minds. According to Malebranche, the mind is completely passive, and attention is a kind of prayer.[168] Beckett similarly writes in his notes on Geulincx's *Ethics* that "with my action, for example, willing to speak or wrestle, God in an ineffable manner conjoins certain motions, whether of tongue, or hands and feet, within this little body of mine, the action of my will".[169] The occasionalist believer, like the artist, is not in full control of her actions and has no ability to move the body or change the environment. Similarly, the artist has no fixed method or series of actions that she can follow in order to create a new work of art. The ancient Greeks prayed to the muses to help them in their work. Modern artists do not trust themselves to the power of prayer, but they are still in need of an inspiration whose source is undetermined and uncertain. The term occasion thus allows Beckett to describe a coincidence of subject and object without committing to the nature of the agent who brings about this relation.

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[166] Beckett's PHK 97.

[167] Beckett's Three Dialogues 245-6.

[168] Pyle 96.

[169] Geulincx 331.

It is further remarkable that Beckett added a footnote to the French translation of the third dialogue published 1957,[170] explaining the term occasion to be "l'ensemble d'antécédents dont le tableau se veut le conséquent" [the sum total of precedents of which the painting intends/ pretends to be the consequence].[171] This explication is also concerned with causality, this time as a historical connection with previous paintings that somehow results in a work which would be their consequence, or effect. In this perspective, the painting repeats what has been done before, making it the representation of a representation rather than a direct depiction of some object. In literary terms, this would be equivalent to intertextuality – drawing on previous texts in order to create a new one. This is a much more deterministic approach and seems like a departure from the connotations of the term in the original English version. One reason may be the passage of time – Beckett translated the third dialogue in 1957, almost a decade after the publication of the English original, even though in a 1949 letter to Duthuit he already calls Bram van Velde's work "painting without precedent".[172] Unfortunately, there is not enough evidence for Beckett's thinking on art in the late 1950s, so I would take this baffling footnote as yet another warning sign against using the "Three Dialogues" as a definite statement on Beckett's thinking about aesthetics that can be unproblematically applied to any period in his writing career.

Object, situation, non-causal cause, the artistic muse, or the repetition of precedents, it is difficult to determine just exactly what Beckett means when he writes about the 'occasion' of the painting, and such inquiry, to adopt Beckett's own phrase, threatens to lose "its way in disquisitions on the nature of occasion."(102) What is common to all these interpretations, however, is that they describe a relation between the artist and something else that is necessary in order to create the work of art, replacing the object but retaining its place in the three-part scheme – the artist, the painting and the occasion.

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[170] The third dialogue was translated by Beckett for an exhibition of Bram van Velde's work in the Galerie Michel Warren in Paris. See copyright details on the inner cover of Beckett, Trois Dialogues.

[171] Beckett, Trois Dialogues 25.

[172] Beckett, Letters 2 130.

The Expression That There Is Nothing to Express

To get back to B's argument in the "Three Dialogues", he claims there is no alternative to the relation between the artist and the occasion: "Two things are established, however precariously: the aliment, from fruits on plates to low mathematics and self-commiseration, and its manner of dispatch."(103) In yet another reformulation of the basic problematics, the object is "an unstable term", but no less than the artist who is "hardly less so, thanks to his warren of modes and attitudes."(102-3) The modes and attitudes may be understood either as the variety of techniques and the artist's reliance on technical skills, or refer to the artist's mind which has many modes and attitudes. This second possibility seems to gain strength from the evocation of Freud in the second dialogue.(99) And if both ends of the relation are questioned, then "All that should concern us is the acute and increasing anxiety of the relation itself" leading to "attempts to escape from the sense of failure, by means of more authentic, more ample, less exclusive relations between representer and representee" (103).

According to Beckett, Tal Coat and Masson attempt to overcome the problem of representation through a more faithful approximation or by conveying the conditions of perception, a position very close to the modern artists Beckett wrote about in "Peintres de l'empêchement". However, in the *"*Three Dialogues*"* Beckett reconceptualises his critique by turning against representation itself – the shortcoming of the two painters is that they only discover new objects for painting without breaking away from the framework of representation. Beckett traces a different direction for the artist and singles out Bram van Velde as the only painter who was the ""the first to desist from this estheticised automatism, the first to submit wholly to the incoercible absence of relation, in the absence of terms or, if you like, in the presence of unavailable terms, the first to admit that to be an artist is to fail".(103) This position is a turning point in Beckett's appraisal of the achievement of van Velde, who was praised in "Peintres de l'empêchement" as finding a new object for painting. Here Beckett ignores the painting of Geer van Velde, and describes Bram's painting not as a new object, but as the acceptance of the failure of representation. This preoccupation with failure is nothing new for Beckett since the text, as Ruby Cohn points out, is "circling round to the

Descartes of Beckett's 1930 *Whoroscope* 'Fallor, ergo sum!'".[173] However, in the *"*Three Dialogues*"* he extends what has previously been a personal dwelling on failure and defeat into a tentative artistic program, probably for the first time.

Beckett's new direction for art not only leads to failure, but it is also blatantly illogical.[174] The very idea of expressing that there is nothing to express is paradoxical because expression is necessarily an expression of something. As D asks in the second dialogue: "But how can Masson be expected to paint the void?"(99) One possible way, suggested by D in the third dialogue, is to make the impossibility of expression itself an occasion for painting, which will henceforth express its own aporia. B rejects this view outright and suggests:

> let us for once, be foolish enough not to turn tail. All have turned wisely tail, before the ultimate penury, back to the mere misery where destitute virtuous mothers may steal stale bread for their starving brats. There is more than a difference of degree between being short, short of the world, short of self, and being without these esteemed commodities (102).

Beckett reiterates his description of the development of art as an attempt to enlarge the number of objects to be painted, but unlike his position in "Peintres de l'empêchement", now this effort is seen in a negative light. Bram van Velde should be admired not for expanding the domain of painting, but for being the first to paint in the absence of occasion, eliminating from the creative situation a component previously thought to be essential to it:

> I suggest that van Velde is the first whose painting is bereft, rid if you prefer, of occasion in any shape and form, ideal as well as material, and the first whose

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[173] Cohn, Foreword 15.

[174] See Stewart, Zone of Evaporation 189-191 for an analysis of the disagreement between D and B as between a demand for coherence and logic against an attempt to exploit the disjunction between artist and her 'occasion'.

> hands have not been tied by the certitude that expression is an impossible act (101).

Without providing a theoretical explanation of how painting can become inexpressive, Beckett advocates an ethical imperative which calls the artist to paint from within the impossibility of painting.[175] He is fully aware of the impossibility of his position, affirming that he realizes the absurdity of his imperative and ending the text with B affirming "(warmly) Yes, Yes, I am mistaken, I am mistaken" (103).

To summarise the trajectory outlined so far, although we can discern a continuity in Beckett's formulation of the crisis of modern art as the rupture of the connection between artists and their material, his thinking about the possibilities open to the artist has significantly changed. Reading the three texts Beckett wrote about painters - "Le monde et le pantalon", "Peintres de l'empêchment" and "Three Dialogues" - as reflecting an evolving conception of aesthetics can help distinguish Beckett's unique proposition in the "Three Dialogues" which sets it apart from his earlier thinking despite being preoccupied with similar themes. This distinction is crucial in light of the tendency in Beckett criticism to treat his writings on art as reflecting a constant aesthetic position that has remained essentially the same since the beginning of his writing career.[176]

In the first two articles about the van Veldes Beckett praises art that expresses the conditions of its own impossibility. In the "Three Dialogues" Beckett refutes his previous position and advocates inexpressive art as the only (impossible) possibility for the artist. The most important aspect, for the purposes of the present discussion, is not so much the theoretical and philosophical validity of Beckett's position, or even its consistency, but rather its debt to the epistemological "disquisitions" of early modern philosophy. If we

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[175] In addition to the Geulingian influence mentioned above, Mitchell Breon and Lois More Overbeck add that this ethical imperative has an autobiographical dimension, inspired by the artists Beckett met in Germany in the 1930s who struggled to work under the Nazi regime. See Mitchell Breon and Lois More Overbeck, eds. *Word and Image: Samuel Beckett and the Visual Text, Mot et Image: Samuel Beckett et le texte Visuel (Catalogue)* (Alabama: Emory University Press, 1999) 11.

[176] To take but one example, Matthews conflates the arguments of "Three Dialogues" with those of "Peintres de l'empechêment"; see Mathews 232.

take B to represent Beckett and believe that he really tried "two or three hundred"(102) ways to conceptualise the impasse of representation and find a way forward for art, then it must certainly be significant that in this final attempt he was using George Berkeley's work as a model.

Thinking through Berkeley

Before comparing Berkeley's philosophy of immaterialism and Beckett's aesthetic position in the *"*Three Dialogues*"*, it would be useful to show the deep parallels between Beckett´s text and Berkeley's *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous.*[177] To start with, the titles of the two texts are almost identical. The choice of the genre of philosophical dialogue to expound the author's views is also unmistakable. Based on Beckett's readings in the 1930s, Matthew Feldman suggests Hume (10) and Schopenhauer (12) as additional sources for the dialogue form, while recognising that in this text "we find the most explicit appropriation of Berkeley's form by Beckett: the 1949 Dialogues are modelled upon the 1713 *Dialogues*." (11)

Berkeley himself adopted the form of the Platonic dialogue, where one interlocutor asks questions of another person holding different views in order to reveal contradictions in their position, sometimes followed by an exposition of the "correct" view by the questioner. The form of the dialogue was very popular in the 18th century, as Michael Prince writes: "between 1650 and 1750 dialogue became a central mode of philosophical writing. Dryden, Shaftesbury, Mandeville, Berkeley, and Hume all composed important works in dialogue form, as did innumerable minor figures; and dialogue became the object of extensive critical reflection."[178] It is therefore important to discuss the particularities of the Berkeleyan dialogue. Berkeley was one of the major figure to renew the form. As Peter Walmsley observes:

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[177] George Berkeley, "Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous," *The Works of George Berkeley Bishop of Cloyne Vol. 2*, Eds. A.A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (London, Edinburgh, Paris, Melbourne, Toronto and NewYork: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1949) 147-263. Beckett's familiarity with this text was discussed in Chapter 1.

[178] Michael Prince, *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment: Theology, Aesthetics, and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 12-13.

> The style of the *"*Three Dialogues*"* is strikingly unlike that of other dialogues of his time. In general, Ciceronian models prevailed… [such as] Cicero's *De republica,* in which a character who holds a mistaken opinion is corrected at length by an opponent, but is permitted to interrupt now and again with objections or demands for clarification… Berkeley depicts a tight, logical wrangling: not a placing of a right opinion against a wrong one, but a relentless questioning… The model for this style of dialogue is itself ancient, its chief practitioner and apologist being, of course, Plato.[179]

While the Ciceronian model presents an unequal exchange between an authoritative speaker and a counterpart who mostly listens, the Platonic dialogue assumes, at least outwardly, an equality between the various speakers and is open to a serious questioning of the views expressed by the main protagonist.

Walmsley's distinction between the Ciceronian and Platonic models should be understood as referring to the style, rather than to the content of the dialogues, since Berkeley differs from the Platonic dialogue by revealing, at least partially, what he considers to be the correct position right at the beginning of the dialogue, instead of pretending to reach it by mutual inquiry. In the Platonic dialogues, Socrates is claiming not to know the right answer from the start, but rather to establish it through the dialectical method together with the other participants in the conversation. For example, in the *Cratylus*, Hermogenes asks Socrates to help him understand Cratylus' argument that every name has an inner meaning, necessarily connected with the object referred to. Socrates agrees to help, but instead of explaining what Cratylus might mean, or giving his own views, he begins questioning Hermogenes on his alternative suggestion that names are conventional. When Socrates debunks Hermogenes' naïve nominalism, the latter asks in frustration what the correct opinion would be, only to learn that Socrates has no

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[179] Peter Walmsley, *The Rhetoric of Berkeley's Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 68. On Berkeley's close interest in Plato, see ibid. 69. For a more general account of Plato's influence on Berkeley's early writing, see Costica Bradatan, *The Other Bishop Berkeley: An Exercise in Reenchantment* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006) 18-39. For a closer analysis of Berkeley's philosophical dialogues see Prince 74-131.

confirmed opinion, and is just investigating the matter (391b). Later, Socrates declares himself open to be corrected by Cratylus (482a), and only proffers some definite statements at the end of the dialogue, but even then he provides no final answer and the dialogue ends with complete uncertainty about the nature of names (440c). Other Platonic dialogues, such as *Euthyphro*, *Charmides*, *Theatetus* and others, also feature an open ending, or aporia, that encourages readers to continue to speculate on their own, or despair of ever reaching a final truth according to their preference.[180]

Berkeley's *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* takes a different approach to the rhetorical role of the conversing friends. Whether or not we believe that Socrates is genuinely interested in the opinions of his counterparts, or whether his ideas are developed through the exchange rather than preconceived, he does not admit to having a pre-existing view of the matter under discussion. Philonous, on the other hand, states right from the start "That there is no such thing as what philosophers call *material substance*, I am seriously persuaded", then challenges Hylas to prove him wrong, "but if I were made to see anything absurd or sceptical in this, I should then have the same reason to renounce this, that I imagine I have now to reject the contrary opinion." (172) Unlike Socrates' open-ended inquiry, the figure of Philonous was created for the sole purpose of presenting and defending Berkeley's immaterialist philosophy, already published in an affirmative form in *The Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710).

Beckett's "Three Dialogues between Samuel Beckett and George Duthuit" is closer to Berkeley's form of dialogue than to Plato's open discussion. The first dialogue already contains in a nutshell B's theory of the history of art as a limited endeavour: "All I wish to suggest is that the tendency and accomplishment of this painting are fundamentally

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[180] The extent to which the Platonic dialogues encourage the reader to form her own opinions is a matter for debate. On the one hand their open structure seems, "an invitation to the reader to… investigate the problems raised but not solved in the dialogue." according to Diskin Clay, *Platonic Questions: Dialogues with the Silent Philosopher* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000) 167. However, Plato is an accomplished author who mobilises multiple rhetorical devices to persuade the reader, as illustrated, for example, by Rossetti, Livio. « Le côté inauthentique du dialoger patonicien », *La forme dialogue chez Platon: Évolution et réceptions* (Grenoble: Jêrôme Millon, 2001) 99-118. Whatever the case may be, the dialogues declare themselves to engage in honest and open dicussion, without resoting to authority.

those of previous painting, straining to enlarge the statement of a compromise"(97), and his wish that artists will allow themselves to choose the path of failure: "Yet I speak of an art… weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing"(98) which will result in "The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express."(98) The rest of the text can be seen as a modulation, clarification and explication of these initial gnomic pronouncements.

In addition to the rhetorical strategy adopted by both Berkeley and Beckett, the general structure of the two texts is similar. Two speakers who hold opposing views meet on three different occasions to discuss a given subject. In Berkeley's text the speakers meet on three consecutive mornings, every time promising to "meet here again tomorrow morning" (207)[181] in order to allow Hylas time to examine his opinions after he yields to Philonous' reasoning. The setting for Beckett's dialogues is less realistic, but at the end of the first one D suggests that "Perhaps that is enough for today."(98) while the second dialogue ends when B "(Exit weeping)"(100). In fact, the only explicit reference to the passage of time in Beckett's text occurs during the third dialogue when B takes a fortnight to answer one of the questions.(101) This would suggest that the dialogues presented as continuous at the level of discourse may be discontinuous at the level of the plot and have actually taken place at different times, thus highlighting the fictionality of the text in a typically Beckettian fashion.[182]

Beckett also follows Berkeley's division of the argument between the three dialogues. From the outset, B announces that he is dreaming about a different type of art, while D attempts to defend the originality of the artists he appreciates in the first two dialogues. This attempt encounters the cynical scepticism of B, for whom their work contains no great innovation. Only in the last dialogue does B elaborate on his initial argument and

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[181] A similar proposition is made at the end of the second dialogue, 226.

[182] According to Eyal Amiran, the overt fictionality and dramatization of the *"*Three Dialogues*"* undermines the validity of its theoretical claims, see Eyal Amiran, *Wandering and Home: Beckett's Metaphysical Narrative* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993) 6-7. This position seems too extreme for a text that has emerged out of earnest discussions on the nature of art but it is a good indication of the ambiguities embedded in Beckett's text.

explains what he sees as van Velde's unique achievement. In Berkeley's text, Philonous, who speaks for the author, also states his position right at the beginning, which is criticised in the first two dialogues by his interlocutor Hylas, who holds the opinion that the external world is made of matter which exists outside of any mind.[183] It is in the third dialogue that the author's mouthpiece makes the case for his own theory. Philonous argues at length that reality is completely spiritual and defends this position against Hylas' objections. Both texts dedicate the first two dialogues to the argument of the opponent and leave the full development of the author's ideas to the third one.

Furthermore, the thematic organization of the work is also common to both texts.[184] In Berkeley's text the first dialogue is concerned with the senses and with reconciling idealism with the accepted view that the source of sensual impressions are material objects. In Beckett the first dialogue deals with Tal Coat's attempt to capture the "fleeting instant of sensation" (97). In the second dialogue Philonous reveals his opinions on man's position with regards to God. Beckett never mentions God, but describes Masson's attempt to "break through [the objects'] partitions to that continuity of being" (99), an experience that connects the individual with a metaphysical realm beyond sensible reality. Taking a wider perspective, it is possible to say that in both texts the second dialogue is dealing with man's place in the universe.

The third dialogue is preoccupied with the uncertainty of human knowledge, but this doubt is treated differently by the two authors. For Berkeley it is Hylas, the proponent of erroneous opinions, who is haunted by doubt, claiming that "Truly my opinion is that all our opinions are alike vain and uncertain… We… spend our lives in the pursuit of [knowledge], when, alas we know nothing all the while: nor do I think it possible for us ever to know anything in this life." (227) Doubt is of course perceived negatively and

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[183] Stoneham claims that we should treat Berkeley and Philonous "as different people, for that reminds us that what Philonous is trying to do in a particular speech might be different from what Berkeley is trying to do in describing that speech". At the same time, he concedes that the reader may reasonably assume that Berkeley endorses Philonous' arguments; see Tom Stoneham, *Berkeley's World: an Examination of the "Three Dialogues"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 21-2.

[184] Stoneham offers a handy "Quick Reference Guide to the Three Dialogues" outlining the themes and structure of each of Berkeley's Dialogues. See Stoneham 42-5.

Philonous goes to great length to establish the certainty of the knowledge of God to counter such scepticism. In Beckett's text, however, it is B, the writer's mouthpiece, who is the ignorant one. When asked why van Velde is obliged to paint, B answers "I don't know" and he later denies his own argument without making any specific counter-arguments beyond the general proclamation "I am mistaken." For Berkeley, Hylas' doubts are an error to be corrected while for Beckett ignorance is an essential part of the argument.

In addition to the structural and thematic resemblance of the two works, Beckett also seems to incorporate some textual echoes from Berkeley into his work. In the third dialogue Philonous complains that the belief in matter leads to "endless disquisitions" (258) about the relation between mind and spirit, echoed by B's complaint that the "analysis of the relation between the artist and his occasion" has "lost its way in disquisitions" (102).[185] In both works the opponents blame the author's mouthpiece of propounding an absurd position. Hylas declares that Philonous "may draw as many absurd consequences as you please, and endeavour to perplex the plainest things; but you will never persuade me out of my senses." (184) In Beckett, however, B readily concedes the absurdity of his position:

> D. – You realize the absurdity of what you advance?
> B. – I hope I do.(101)

Another textual echo can be found in Hylas' exaggeration – "I have told you so a hundred times." (258) matched in Beckett by B's "two or three hundred" (102) attempts to say in vain what he tries in vain to say. Taken separately, each of these textual similarities may be a mere coincidence, but their occurrence in such a short text seems to indicate that Beckett had Berkeley in mind when writing the "Three Dialogues" and that a close reading of this text may have left its mark on Beckett's language.

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[185] One may wonder, indeed, what are the disquisitions on the nature of the occasion Beckett refers to, given his own unstable terminology.

The Old Thing that Had Happened Again

Once we recognize the debt owed by Beckett to Berkeley's text in this particular attempt to say what he "tried in vain to say", we must inquire to what extent Beckett's position on aesthetics as presented in the *"*Three Dialogues*"* tallies with Berkeley's immaterialist philosophy. This question is especially vital since the differences between the two texts cannot be denied. Each of them belongs to a different discipline and pursues different goals. While Berkeley is addressing metaphysical questions, Beckett is concerned with aesthetics. Berkeley's main motivation is to defend Christianity, whereas Beckett ignores all questions of religion. Berkeley is searching for a stable and dependable view of the world rooted in rational thinking, Beckett is preoccupied with ignorance and failure. The situation in which Berkeley's dialogues take place is depicted in a natural, realistic manner,[186] while Beckett highlights the dramatic and fictional aspects of the dialogue.[187] The list can go on and yet there is a deep affinity between Berkeley's refutation of matter and Beckett's disavowal of the occasion.

Beckett's rejection of representation in art can be seen to mirror Berkeley's philosophical rejection of representation in ontology and epistemology. As shown above, Beckett conceives of the problem of representation in a manner similar to modern philosophy as regards the troubled relation between the mind and the world which prevents the artist from offering a faithful representation of objects. Representation is similarly most pertinent philosophically when considering the way our mind perceives the world, especially in vision. The question of how the mind, understood as a spiritual substance, can perceive material substances that are completely alien to its nature, has

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[186] By analyzing the circumstances of their meeting, Stoneham manages to deduce multiple details about Hylas and Philonous – according to him, they both belong to the same college, but Philonous is a slightly more senior member who is trying to educate Hylas; see Stoneham 17-19. The college setting was assumed without argumentation in Hone and Rossi 80.

[187] Barfield suggests that Beckett is constructing the *"*Three Dialogues*"* as psychoanalytic sessions, see Barfield 17. Thought-provoking as this reading is, it is based on meagre textual evidence and ignores the tradition of philosophical dialogues most other critics associate with this text. The fact that Beckett's text allows such an interpretation, while not excluding competing ones, testifies to the text's non-specificity as to time and place.

occupied thinkers ever since Descartes introduced his radical doubt. Branka Arsić offers a useful formulation of the Cartesian explanation of how the mind perceives external reality in Descartes' 1637 treatise "Optics", which highlights its reliance on representation:

> The face of the world is a map, and the projection of this map is threefold. The map of the visible is inscribed through the pressure by which the motion of light rays projects points on the bottom surface of the eye so that to every point of the visible there corresponds a point drawn in the eye… Once this map has been inscribed, the tubes [in the brain] will take over the role of light rays and, point by point, project the map from the eye onto the internal surface of the brain… And this procedure will be repeated: dark corridors of tubes lead from the internal surface of the brain to the pineal gland, corridors that fill the role of light rays. The different apertures of the tubes determine the strength of "micro-motions" of animal spirits, which move along the routes of this internal pipeline and thus enable the projection of the map from the surface of the brain unto the reflecting surface of the pineal gland. It is this map alone that will become the object of sight. We always see the map of a map of a map.[188]

In Cartesian optics, a triple representation is required to enable us to see. First, light rays represent the material surface of the world to the eye. Second, this map is inscribed by the eye on the brain, and lastly, the representation in the brain is reflected onto the pineal gland, where the spirit can perceive it. Thus, the mind gains access to material reality through a series of representations that transfer information between distinct realms: material world – sense impressions - spirit. [189] The physical pressure of external

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[188] Arsić 27.

[189] For an analytical study of the representational theory of perception in modern philosophy, see the chapter called "The Representation Theory of Perception and the Problem of Perception" (which also discusses Locke's version of the theory) in Georges Dicker, *Berkeley's Idealism: A Critical Examination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 27-41.

reality causes the formation of sense impressions in the brain, which are then conveyed to the spirit.

Berkeley offers a radically different explanation of how the spirit can perceive material reality, and most crucially one that does not depend on representation. He proposes to do away with the material realm altogether so that the ideas received by our senses are not a representation of a radically different matter, but rather a direct presentation of spiritual ideas. This position has been first introduced in the *Principles of Human Knowledge* and later re-formulated in a different form in the "Three Dialogues". Berkeley's reasoning is based on the assumption that everything we know

> are either ideas actually imprinted on the senses, or else such as are perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind, or lastly ideas formed by help of memory and imagination, either compounding, dividing, or barely representing those originally perceived in the aforesaid ways. (PHK 41 §1)

If all our knowledge of the external world depends on ideas derived from sense impressions, then when we say that something exists, what we really mean is that we can sense it in some way (PHK 41-2 §3). The objects we see, hear or touch do not exist independently of such sense impressions: "For what are the forementioned objects but the things we perceive by sense, and what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations" (PHK 42 §4). In fact, there is no independent existence that precedes and gives rise to sense impressions. According to Dicker, Berkeley's "basic claim is that none of the sensible qualities that make up things like houses and mountains and trees can be abstracted from perception."[190] What we think of as the material world is in fact made up of spiritual sensations, a collection of sense impressions that can only exist in a human or a divine mind:

> all the choir of heaven and furniture of earth, in a word all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any subsistence, without a mind, that their being is to be perceived or known; that consequently so long as they are

[190] Dicker 75.

> not actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind or that of any other created spirit, they must either have no existence at all, or else subsist in the mind of some eternal spirit: it being perfectly unintelligible and involving… absurdity… to attribute to any single part of them an existence independent of a spirit. (PHK 43 §6)

In Stoneham's succinct formulation: "For Berkeley the objective world is subjectively available in perception, so once perception occurs, there can be no further gap which needs to be bridged."[191] What Berkeley does, effectively, is to deny the existence as well as the utility of any mechanism which would represent the material world to the mind. Moving from a tripartite relation of spirit – sense impressions – world, he advances a direct mental relation between mind and sense impressions. In other words, he advocates a non-representational model of how our mind works.

The structure of Berkeley's world-view is surprisingly similar to B's "dream" (100) of non-representational art where there is nothing to express in the absence of relation. The artist paints, she applies paint to canvass, but she has no occasion, precedent or object to convey or rework. Representation is short-circuited and we end up with a direct relation between artist and medium. Beckett's renouncement of the occasion turns the tripartite relation artist – painting – world into a direct relation of artist – painting, just as Berkeley's denial of matter replaces the representational model of spirit – sense impressions – world with the dual relation of spirit – sense impressions. The structure of both arguments is virtually the same. It would seem, therefore, that when Beckett was thinking about art and the possibilities open to the artist in the wake of the breakdown of the relation between subject and object, he turned to Berkeley's philosophy to open a possible line of flight.

The similarity in the structure of the argument between Berkeley's metaphysics and Beckett's aesthetics only serves to expose the gap between Berkeley's optimistic, confident assertions and Beckett's intentionally absurd and despairing confusion. This difference between Berkeley's immaterialism and Beckett's art of non-relation may stem

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[191] Stoneham 32.

from the absence of God or any other fixed principle that can become a source of certainty for the artist. For Beckett, there is no God to safeguard the relation of the artist to her world so she could represent it. In J.E. Dearlove's words "all sense of assurance, completion and fixity disappear."[192] The only way for the artist to continue and make art in this situation, according to Beckett, is to face the canvass in the absence of any dependable standard to guide her hand, or divine inspiration to ensure the outcome of her action. This is why the situation of the artist is "that of him who is helpless, cannot act" (101) and the position of B who aspires to non-representational art is "unenviable" (103). The painter Avigdor Arikha, a close friend of Beckett, expressed the predicament of the artist in similar terms: "In fact nothing can be illustrated. Forsaking the haven of the imaginary, the code of modernism, the arsenal of the avant-garde, I find myself, like Diogenes throwing away his bowl, disarmed before the visible."[193] In the same vein, Bram van Velde himself is quoted in the same issue of *Transition* as asking "I have nothing in my pockets, nothing in my hands. Where shall I find what I need?"[194]

What kind of art is this impossible art? How can the artist who cannot express still go on to create art? She cannot, and therefore art is for Beckett first and foremost a failure, or in his own words "to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living." (103) The failure of the artist is not a failure to create art, because van Velde goes on painting and Beckett goes on writing, it is rather an art of failure. From the 1940s onwards Beckett takes failure as his starting point, working from the impossibility of writing. The next chapter will explore the role that Beckett's "anti-representational" position plays in his own literary creation.

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[192] J.E.Dearlove, *Accommodating the Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Nonrelational Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1982) 3.

[193] Quoted in Breon 23.

[194] Bram van Velde, "Some Sayings of Bram van Velde," *Transition* (1949) 104.

4: Three Novels: The Undoing of Representation

Beckett's theoretical understanding of the position of the artist has left its mark on the fiction he was writing at the time. This chapter will examine how the anti-mimetic stance of the "Three Dialogues" is expressed in Beckett's literary work of the 1940s and draw out some additional affinities with Berkeley, suggesting that Berkeley's influence went beyond the shaping of arguments. Given the wealth of Beckett's writing at the time, and the extensive research devoted to it, the discussion will focus on the undoing of fictional narrative in the Trilogy, one of Beckett's most important achievements and the main prose work of the period. I will address mainly the aspects of representation and anti-representation that form part of the change in Beckett's writing of the period.

Misuse of Language: The Early Work

As a young writer and Joyce admirer, Beckett has steered away from the genre of literary realism which strives to represent reality along the lines of Stendhal's famous image of the novel as "a mirror you turn this way and that as you go down a path".[195] In a canonical study of realism, *S/Z*, Roland Barthes challenges the realist presumption to represent reality objectively, or in an unmediated manner, through a close reading of Balzac's story "Sarassine", considered to be a masterpiece of literary realism. Barthes points out that the mirror itself can only reflect a part of reality, and contends that framing is the most fundamental act of the artist: "To describe is thus to place the empty frame which the realistic author always carries with him before a collection or continuum of objects which cannot be put into words without this obsessive operation."[196] Seen through the frame, a certain section of reality is turned into a two-dimensional fixed surface that can be scrutinised like a painting, and then copied by the writer's words.

Realism therefore does not possess a privileged access to reality, but is rather caught up in a play of reflections :

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[195] Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, trans. Catherine Slater (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 210.

[196] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1974) 54.

> Thus, realism (badly named, at any rate often badly interpreted) consists not in copying the real but in copying a (depicted) copy of the real: this famous reality, as though suffering from a fearfulness which keeps it from being touched directly, is set farther away, postponed, or at least captured through the pictorial matrix in which it has been steeped before being put into words: code upon code, known as realism.[197]

The reflection of a reflection of the real world in literary realism is thus structurally similar to the way Beckett explains the history of painting. The realist writer isolates an 'occasion' to describe verbally just as the painter finds an occasion to depict on the canvass.

What Barthes challenges theoretically, modernist writing has been challenging artistically since the beginning of the 20th-century, including the young Beckett. This challenge already appear in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, Beckett's first written novel which was finished in 1932 but only published posthumously. The novel criticizes Balzac for the mechanical workings of his plots and characters, which are hardly life-like in his opinion: "Balzac … has turned all his creatures into clockwork cabbages and can rely on their staying put wherever needed or staying going at whatever speed in whatever direction he chooses."[198] Not only is Balzac's rendering of human beings too limited and mechanical, but his presumption to represent reality is unfounded: "We all love and lick up Balzac, we lap it up and say it is wonderful, but why call a distillation of Euclid and Perrault Scenes from Life? Why human comedy?"[199] For Beckett, Balzac's art is closer to geometry than to real life, being too abstract and deterministic. Even as a young writer, therefore, Beckett was evidently searching for an alternative to realist representation.

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[197] Barthes, S/Z 55.

[198] Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2011) 104-5.

[199] Beckett, Dream 105. Beckett's dissatisfaction with Balzac is also apparent in the parody of Balzac's narratives of the advent of brilliant young men in the story of Saposcat and the Lamberts in *Malone Dies*. See John Bolin, *Beckett and the Modern Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 156-8.

Beckett's first publication, the 1930 poem *Whoroscope*,[200] amply displays an anti-mimetic attitude. The poem is based on the historical figure of Descartes, but its framing highlights mere trivialities – Descartes' predilection for eggs hatched a specific number of days or his habit of rising late. The internal monologue Beckett attributes to him verges on the nonsensical and cannot in any way be mistaken for the actual speech or internal reflections of the venerable philosopher. The notes at the end of the poem underline the work's reliance on previous texts and create an intertextual link with T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, positioning the poem within the world of textual constructs, rather than any kind of objective reality. For Barthes, calling upon external semiotic and linguistic codes in any text belies possible claims to represent reality directly – "to write can no longer designate an operation of recording, of observing, of representing, of 'painting'", as the text is "a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original: the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture."[201]

One of Beckett's strategies for highlighting fictionality in the early work is multiplying citations. *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* is highly intertextual. As Knowlson points out, Beckett's style at this stage is "very Joycean in its ambition and its accumulative technique", bringing together "hundreds of quotations from other works of literature, philosophy, and theology."[202] Enoch Brater identifies among the sources cited in the novel "Dante… Baudelaire, St Augustine, Schopenhauer, Balzac, Mallarmé, Ruskin, Horace, Hölderlin, Homer, Matthew Arnold, Lord Byron, Racine, Keats, Virgil, Ronsard, Dickens, Einstein, Freud, Nietzsche, Pushkin, Leopardi, Confucius, Plautus, and 'Bernard Pygmalion'", a list that he admits is necessarily partial.[203] The very title *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* echoes Lord Tennyson's early poem "A Dream of Fair

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[200] Samuel Beckett, "Whoroscope," *Selected Poems 1930-1989*, ed. David Wheatley (London: Faber and Faber, 2009) 3-8.

[201] Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author," *Image Music Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977) 142-148.

[202] Knowlson, Damned to Fame 145.

[203] Enoch Brater, "Intertextuality," *Palgrave Advances in Samuel Beckett Studies*, ed. Lois Oppenheim (New York: Palgrave, 2004) 32.

Women", which in its turn cites "The Legend of Good Women" by "the first warbler" Geoffrey Chaucer who is praised as the epitome of the power of poetry.[204] This invocation of the English literary tradition, together with the Dantean protagonist Belacqua and a myriad of borrowings from French, German and other traditions, serve to convey the amount and range of the literary codes embedded in this text.

Beckett employs a variety of linguistic and stylistic techniques to undermine any assumption of an objective, reliable representation of events. In the oft-quoted letter to Axel Kaun, Beckett reflects on his intention to misuse language along the same lines:

> It is indeed becoming more and more difficult, even senseless, for me to write an official English… language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it… Let us hope the time will come… when language is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused… To bore one hole after another in [language], until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today.[205]

The letter expresses a dissatisfaction with the medium - the language of literature that veils or hides something from the reader. The task of the writer, paradoxically, is to transcend the language that defines him as an author. Being unable to reach this trans-linguistic ideal, he "must be satisfied with little… somehow finding a method by which we can represent this mocking attitude towards the word… this dissonance between the means and their use".[206] The tone of narration and the stylistic virtuosity in *Dream* manage to convey this attitude and dissonance to a high degree, interjecting the narrative with sarcastic comments. To take just one example, this is how the narrator describes Belacqua after he breaks up with the Smeraldina:

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[204] Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "A Dream of Fair Women," *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London & New York: Routledge, 2007) 81-92.

[205] Beckett, Disjecta 148.

[206] Beckett, Disjecta 149.

> Explicit, he said aloud, and gratias tibi Christe. And so it was. For once in his life he was correct in what he said. Except of course, that certain aspects of her abode in his heart, like wind in a dyspeptic's stomach, and made themselves felt from time to time in the form of a sentimental eructation that was far from being agreeable. She continued to bother him as an infrequent jolt of sentimental heartburn, nothing to write home about.[207]

The passage mixes together heart ache and digestion problem in a satirical mode that debases the lofty romantic sentiments Belacqua might have felt. The affirmation that he was correct for once in his life, casts doubt on the protagonist's ability to correctly judge other situations. The intricate metaphor and the use of Latin make the passage difficult to interpret, forcing the reader realise that language is not a transparent description of reality.

Little or not, Beckett's attempt to tear away the veil of language in the early work still relies on, and thereby reinforces, the model of literature as representation. The metaphor of language as a veil that hides reality implies a triple relation of subject-medium-object, even if this object is really the Nothingness, spelled with a capital N. Language, the medium, is seen as an obstacle standing between the artist and the 'occasion' she wants to express, an obstacle that must be overcome, or at least, as Beckett says, brought into disrepute. In the language of the "Three Dialogues", these early efforts can be seen as "a thrusting towards a more adequate expression of natural experience, as revealed to the vigilant coenaesthesia", a mere "straining to enlarge the statement of a compromise."(97) By increasing the distance between the speaker and the events of the story, irony and parody call upon the reader to distinguish between the events and actions of the characters, presumed to exist independently, and the voice of the narrator which represents them as an independent layer of commentary or perspective. Beckett's intertextual practice and heightened artificiality in the early work draw attention to the constructed nature of the text, but they do not break away from the basic assumptions that narrative fiction is a form of representation. In John Pilling's more poetic formulation,

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[207] Beckett, Dream 97.

"Beckett is continually chafing against the boundaries of 'the field of the possible' without finally transcending them".[208]

In the Darkness You Don't Know: The Post-War Period

"Three Dialogues between Samuel Beckett and George Duthuit" was written in 1948 – in the middle of one of the most prolific periods in Beckett's life. In a few short years he published the three novels of what is now often called the Trilogy, i.e. *Molloy* (written 1947, published 1952), *Malone Meurt* (written 1948, published 1952), and *L'innomable* (written 1949, published 1953), as well as his most famous play, *En Attendant Godot* (written 1949, published 1952).[209] This "frenzy of writing"[210] was triggered by a vision Beckett had when he was staying with his mother in Foxrock in 1946, as he described to James Knowlson:

> I realised that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one's material. He was always adding to it… I realised that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding.[211]

The rhetoric of impoverishment is mentioned briefly in the "Three Dialogues" among the hundreds of ways B was trying to convey his thoughts: "The pathetic antithesis possession-poverty was perhaps not the most tedious", only to be immediately rejected: "But we begin to weary of it, do we not?" (102) In an interview with Tom Driver Beckett chose a different way to describe the change: "Molloy and the others came to me the day I became aware of my own folly. Only then did I begin to write the things I feel."[212]

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[208] John Pilling, "Beckett's English Fiction," *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. John Pilling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 19.

[209] Publication of Beckett's works from the late 1940s was delayed due to copyright issues, see Knowlson, Damned to Fame 341-2.

[210] This is Beckett's own reflection on this period, quoted in Knowlson, Damned to Fame 325.

[211] Quoted in Knowlson, Damned to Fame 319.

[212] Beckett to Tom Driver (Summer 1961), reprinted in Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman, eds. *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1997) 219.

These explanations should be seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive, an attempt to come to terms with a change of perspective that was complicated and pervasive, extending also to a change of language from English to French. Berkeley's philosophy, as suggested in the previous chapter, also contributed to the growing resistance to representation that characterises this new kind of writing.

The three novels *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* constitute a progressive unravelling of the representational assumptions of narrative fiction, culminating in the complete dismantling of any attempt to reconstruct a possible object of representation in *The Unnamable*. In the words of J.E. Dearlove: "Beckett [had to] discover strategies and structures by which his medium may be induced to suggest its antithesis."[213] The relation between textual constructs and the characters and events that they represent has been studied in depth by the discipline of narratology, which developed at least partly in response to the attempts of the modernist writers to "bring language into disrepute". It therefore constitutes a useful theoretical framework to analyze representation in fiction and I will be drawing on the work of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan who wrote one of the clearest and most comprehensive accounts of narratological theory in her 1983 book *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*.[214] She opens the discussion with drawing a distinction between story and text:

> 'Story' designates the narrated events, abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in their chronological order, together with the participants in these events.
>
> Whereas 'story' is a succession of events, 'text' is a spoken or written discourse which undertakes their telling. Put more simply, the text is what we read. In it, the events do not necessarily appear in chronological order, the characteristics of the

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[213] Dearlove 3-4.

[214] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002). The distinction between text and story draws on the Russian formalist distinction between Fabula and Syuzhet, for an overview of the Formalist view, see Wolf Schmid, *Narratology: An Introduction*, trans. Alexander Starritt (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010) 175-185.

> participants are dispersed throughout, and all the items of the narrative content are filtered through some prism or perspective ('focalizer'). [215]

This classification portrays literary texts as a representation of events, where events that are seemingly independent of their narration are described by a narrator. In the three novels, Beckett endeavours to obliterate this distinction and create a text that does not represent any events that can be reconstructed as preceding it.

All three novels feature homodiegetic narrators, that is, narrators who participate in the story they are telling, [216] and the circumstances of narration are meticulously described. In *Molloy* there are two narrators who begin their discourse by explaining why they are producing a text – Molloy is writing at the behest of unknown "they" who pay him for writing (7), while Moran is writing a report for his employer (92 and 175-6). Malone in *Malone Dies* is telling stories as he lies in bed waiting for death,[217] and *The Unnamable* continuously attempts to make up stories about himself.[218] All of these narrators indulge in commentary on their narration, which according to Rimmon-Kenan, "is concerned not with the represented world but with the problems of representing it,"[219] and these problems seem to increase for each consecutive narrator. By foregrounding the circumstances of narration, Beckett undermines it from within, and mercilessly attacks the distinctions and constructs that enable a sequence of letters to be seen as a representation of plausible events in a possible world.

It Was Not Raining: Undoing Representation

The central strategy for undermining representation in *Molloy* is what Brian Richardson has called 'denarration' – "a narrative negation in which a narrator denies significant

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[215] The term is taken from Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1980) 243. See also Rimmon-Kenan 3.

[216] Rimmon-Kenan 98.

[217] Samuel Beckett, "Malone Dies," *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 1994) 179-288.

[218] Samuel Beckett, "The Unnamable," *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 1994) 291-414.

[219] Rimmon-Kenan 102.

aspects of her narrative that had earlier been presented as given."[220] Richardson's prime examples of a "sustained and relentless deployment of denarration"[221] derive from Beckett's *Molloy*. One is taken from the first part of the book, where Molloy spends six pages on describing the chance meeting of two characters, complete with speculations about the travellers' goals and habits, their possible past, descriptions of nature and musings on the behaviour of Pomeranian dogs (8-14), only to cast a doubt on the entire story by writing:

> I am perhaps confusing several different occasions, and different times, deep down… And perhaps it was A one day at one place, then C another at another, then a third the rock and I, and so on for the other components, the cows, the sky, the sea, the mountains. I can't believe it. No I will not lie, I can easily conceive it. (14)

In this passage Molloy suggests that the encounter has never taken place at all, refuting his own words. Molloy's method here – taking elements experienced at different times and in different places and combining them in a new way to produce a new fiction, is similar to the operation of the human mind according to Berkeley. The mind produces new objects of knowledge from its previous experiences "with the help of memory and imagination, by compounding or dividing or simply reproducing ideas" (PHK 41 §1). Talia Mae Bettcher explains that for Berkeley "the only mental actions are (or at least reduce to) the production and destruction of ideas."[222] The act of thinking is nothing else than the creation and combination of ideas within the mind of the thinker. Moreover, this activity is fully conscious – "According to Berkeley, whenever we think, we make ideas. And whenever we make ideas, we are conscious that we make ideas."[223] Similarly,

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[220] Brian Richardson, "Denarration in Fiction: Erasing the Story in Beckett and Others," *Narrative: Contemporary Narratology* 9.1 (2001): 168.

[221] Richardson 168.

[222] Talia Mae Bettcher, Berkeley's Philosophy of Spirit: Consciousness, Ontology and the Elusive Subject (London: Continuum, 2007) 71.

[223] Bettcher 72.

Molloy is aware that he is creating the scene that he is describing by combining various elements and this awareness is just as important to Beckett's text as the details of Molloy's description which are being questioned by this awareness. For Berkeley, the creation and combination of ideas is a way to create and improve knowledge, but with Beckett they serve to prevent the creation of knowledge.

Molloy abounds in such instances of overt prevarication. Richardson goes on to list other disavowals in the novel, which together with Molloy's confused perception and memory leave the reader only with the assurance that "what really happened was quite different" (88; qtd. Richardson 170). Perhaps the most striking and well known act of denarration frames Moran's narrative in the second part of the book. Moran embarks on his story by writing that "It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows" (92) and concludes it by stating the exact opposite – "Then I went into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining." (176; qtd. Richardson 171) Although the text refutes its first two statements, it is uncertain to what extent the rest of the report is false. According to Leland de la Durantaye, "this last line reverberates like a thunderclap through all that preceded it… for we have to wonder if it was just the weather and the time of day that was altered, or every single line."[224] For example, in both the opening paragraph and the end of the novel Moran's son is asleep in the house (92 and 175). This detail may indicate that the report is being written at night, so perhaps it is the act of denarration that is the false statement. Maybe it was indeed midnight and raining and Moran is just being contrary. The effect of denarration is to make it impossible to tell whether the closing lines of the novel amount to a complete disavowal of the whole narrative, or only of some parts of it, or none at all. They do not support any conclusive judgement, only suspend the narrative in a state of ambiguity.

Some narratologists have attempted to account for narrative uncertainties through the concept of the unreliable narrator – "one whose rendering of the story and/ or commentary on it the reader has reasons to suspect" (Rimmon-Kenan 103). According to

[224] Leland de la Durantaye, *Beckett's Art of Mismaking* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2016) 32.

Rimmon-Kenan, possible reasons for unreliability include the narrator's "limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value scheme." (103) To illustrate how a narrator can be suspected of telling lies she gives examples of narrators who are too young, vindictive, or morally reprehensible. These examples are all modelled on narrators who present their narrative as true, while discrepancies in their story, or the personality of the narrators reflected in their text, make the reader aware that there may be gaps or falsities in their version of events. The reader is urged to think of narrators as people and use common knowledge of the way people tell stories in order to judge the reliability of the narration, looking for signs of a faulty memory or hidden interests. Matthews, in fact, suggests that Molloy in this passage was too distant to see the events clearly, comparing his situation to Berkeley's descriptions of the processes of seeing in *A New Theory of Vision*.[225] This explanation, however, seems unfounded, since the narrators of *Molloy* explicitly discredit their own story on numerous occasions, and blurred vision due to distance can hardly explain why Molloy is unsure of how many people he saw – two persons walking towards each other, or a solitary figure. There is no need for suspicion or second-guessing the narrators' motives when they willingly declare that the text they have been producing is a false account. They should therefore be considered as constituting a different category of narrators, who are unreliable and reliable at the same time. We can trust their assessments that their accounts are false.

Iser offers a different perspective on this special kind of narrators. For him, their stories are unreliable not because of any shortcomings on their part, but rather because of the nature of the events that they are trying to narrate. Molloy understands well the difficulties inherent in making language represent reality and therefore his narration is self-questioning and approximative. His inability to deliver a trustworthy account,

> is embedded in a process which Molloy would like to narrate but he has to falsify because the convention of narration has its own laws, that have little or no bearing upon actual *reality*. Narration sets out to convey something which cannot possibly be conveyed by it, and so any narrative representation must inevitably be a lie…

[225] Matthews 230.

> The first-person narrator can only bring this knowledge [of narration] to bear by offering the *reality* he has observed as the mere product of his mode of presentation, which is unlikely to coincide with whatever may be the true nature of that *reality*.[226]

In his discussion of *Molloy*, Iser repeatedly highlights the gap between the novel's discourse and the unattainable reality it fails to account for. His interpretation is useful for understanding the challenge that Beckett's novel poses for narratological analysis since this reality is unattainable except through the text, and moreover has no independent existence since Molloy and his consciousness, impressions and adventures are all fictional constructs. The unavailability of reality can be seen as analogous to the philosophical discussion of matter that Berkeley criticizes. Like the philosophers who believe in the existence of matter that they can neither perceive nor know anything about, Iser evokes a reality that is neither available to us, nor necessary for our reading of the text. We may say with Berkeley that "if there were external bodies [or reality in the novel], it is impossible we should ever come to know it; and if there were not, we might have the very same reasons to think there were that we have now." (PHK 49 §20)

The explicit denial of one's own narrative constitutes a much more radical act than a misleading storytelling or an approximation of lived experience. The radical denarration in *Molloy* dispels the illusion that the text represents any kind of event that would be external to it, as Richardson explains:

> there will not be much recoverable story at all, but rather a general, undifferentiated conglomerate of past events which may or may not have occurred, within an inchoate temporality that cannot be analytically reconstructed into any

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[226] Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, translated by the author (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974) 166. Emphasis mine.

> sustained order. All that is left for the narratologies to work with is the discourse… we are left with discourse without a retrievable story.[227]

Using Beckett's terms from the "Three Dialogues", the writing of Molloy is "[t]he act is of him who, helpless, unable to act, acts, in the event [writes], since he is obliged to [write]." (127) Instead of a tripartite structure of representation, event-text-narrator, we are left to ponder a text that may not be said to refer to anything besides itself.

Nevertheless, there are two stable instances in *Molloy*, namely the narrators themselves. Fallible and unreliable as they may be, we can still treat them as a unified locus of narration and understand them as subject to whom our knowledge of psychology and human behaviour may be applied. The last novel in the Trilogy, *The Unnamable*, sets out to dismantle this unity of character by staging a futile attempt by the narrating voice to give a satisfactory account of itself through a persistent questioning of its mode of existence.

Who Now? *The Unnamable*

In *Molloy* denarration operates at the level of passages or a whole narrative, but in *The Unnamable* it is employed in every sentence. The speaking voice comments on this strategy, saying that "I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me… how proceed? By aporia pure and simple? Or by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later?... There must be other shifts" (291). The speaker in the text is a fictional voice that is completely incapable of revealing or inventing any kind of biography for himself. It claims it was Basil, later renamed Mahood, who "told me stories about me, lived in my stead, issued from me, came back to me, entered back into me, heaped stories on my head." (309) The stories arrive from outside, from a commanding voice that erases the Unnamable's own: "his voice continued to testify for me, as though woven into mine, preventing me from saying who I was". (309) Given that in a written text we cannot distinguish between different voices, it becomes impossible for the reader to differentiate the voice of the Unnamable from the external voice of Mahood the teller of stories, if indeed they are external. Consequently the stories that rise through the

[227] Richardson 173.

narrative – the one-legged creature hopping towards his family home, the stump in the jar and the unfeeling Worm – may all come from Basil, or Mahood, and not the from the 'real' Unnamable, however we conceive of him. Alternatively, the stories could also be told by the Unnamable who is trying to mask his own involvement in them.

Like other Beckett texts, *The Unnamable* evokes modern philosophy as a domain of knowledge to be exhausted and dismissed. It transforms the Cartesian doubt it opens with – "Where now? Who now? When now?", into a questioning of the speaker's being – "I, say I. Unbelieving." (291)[228] Beckett's radical questioning of subjectivity and narration in this novel draws on many philosophical sources. To take one example of a general interpretation, *The Grove Companion* suggests, within the space of four pages, Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Schopenhauer, Fritz Mauthner, Plato, nominalism, scholasticism, and atomism as useful philosophical systems to understanding the novel.[229] This list should be expanded to accommodate some distinctly Berkeleyan concepts, specifically the reliability of sense impressions and the complicity of perception and existence.

In the *History of Philosophy* Windelband explains that for Berkeley a "body is what one sees, touches, tastes, smells, and hears: its *esse* is *percipi*. *Body* is then nothing but a *complex of ideas*."[230] In the *Philosophy Notes* Beckett has transcribed this last sentence and summarized the next paragraph of Windelband's argument: "If we abstract from a cherry all the qualities which can be perceived through any of the senses, what is left ? Nothing. The idealism which sees in a body nothing farther than a bundle of ideas is the view of the common man; it should be that of philosophers also."[231] Beckett's shorter rendering of this argument is ""Body therefore is a *complex of ideas*—nothing real. What remains when the real qualities are abstracted? Nothing."[232] If the Cartesian certainty is founded on knowledge of the self, then certainty for Berkeley is found in the senses. Having refuted the existence of Malone, the others, the voices he heard and the lights

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[228] In the French original, the question "Qui maintenant" is the third in sequence, see Samuel Beckett, *L'Innomable* (Paris: Les Éditions de minuit, 2004) 7.

[229] The Grove Companion 918-922.

[230] Windelband 470. Emphasis in original.

[231] Ibid.

[232] TCD MS 10967 207r. Quoted in Matthews 224-5.

around him, the Unnamable returns to the question of his own existence, rejecting self-knowledge in favour of sense impressions which seem at first to be more reliable:

> I, of whom I know nothing, *I know* my eyes are open, because of the tears that pour from them unceasingly. *I know* I am seated, my hands on my knees, because of the pressure against my rump, against the soles of my feet, against the palms of my hands, against my knees. (304. Emphasis mine)

In the Berkeleyan world view this enumeration of sense impressions is useful because a body is nothing but a collection of ideas, separate impressions that are held together by association: "by our senses, we perceive sensible qualities and 'bundles' of sensible qualities, but cannot perceive the underlying substance to which they supposedly belong".[233] The Unnamable also echoes Berkeley's theory that we orient our interpretation of visual impressions through the internal tactile pressure of our muscles: "But what makes me say I gaze straight before me, as I have said? I feel my back straight, my neck stiff and free of twist and up on top of it the head" (304).[234] Predictably, these bodily impressions are refuted on the next page of the novel: "Organs, a without, it's easy to imagine, a god, it's unavoidable, you imagine them… I'm a big talking ball, talking about things that do not exist, or that exist perhaps, impossible to know" (305). Berkeley's reliance on sense impressions is discarded, but it was evidently important enough to merit serious consideration before being rejected like all other systems of thought.

An additional Berkeleyan theme that will become increasingly important to Beckett is being perceived as a warranty of existence. The speaking voice repeatedly refers to the idea of being watched, whether by God or by authoritative others. For example, the head in the jar avatar can turn its gaze until it meets "the statue of the apostle of horse's meat, a bust. His pupilless eyes of stone are fixed upon me. That makes four, with those of my creator" (327). The eyes of the statue are a set of non-seeing eyes, made of stone but also "pupilless". The head in the jar is not satisfied with these looks, and requires that other

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[233] Dicker 89.

[234] Berkeley's theory will be further discussed below.

people look at him in order to "have some kind of assurance that I was really there" (342). This is a Beckettian version of the dictum *esse est percipi* since for Berkeley the self is an active spirit that does not rely on perception to exist, as already pointed out in Chapter 2. The narrative of the head in the jar ends when the woman who took care of it, the only human being to acknowledge its existence, has lost faith and stopped paying attention to its needs, after which the story dissipates –"Nothing has happened" (344).

Both Berkeleyan themes are woven together in the introduction of Worm:

> Worm, to say he does not know what he is, where he is, what is happening, is to underestimate him. What he does not know is that there is anything to know. His senses tell him nothing, nothing about himself, nothing about the rest, and the distinction is beyond him. Feeling nothing, knowing nothing, he exists nevertheless, but not for himself, for others, others conceive him and say, Worm is, since we conceive him, as if there could be no being but being conceived. (346)

Worm, another of the narrator's avatars, does not exist for itself, being unable to feel or distinguish between this 'self' and the rest of the world. He exists for others according to a formulation that closely resembles the Berkeleyan principle 'to be is to be perceived'. In Berkeleyan terms, Worm is not a spirit but an object whose existence is dependent on the perception of others, even as they perceive him as a subject. The description of Worm is strangely fused with the ontological argument for the existence of God, which originated with Anselm in the 11th-century and then was revived by Descartes. It states that if we can conceive of a perfect being then the attribute of existence must be included in this concept, and therefore "existence be thought of as part of the definition or essence of a supremely perfect being."[235] This interlacing of Berkeley's formulation with a theological argument illustrates that while Berkeley is not the main source for *The Unnamable*, his philosophy informs at least some of its language and stories. In Beckett's later works, the conflict between perception and existence will be further elaborated through the creation of images for page and stage, as will be discussed in chapter 5 and 6.

[235] Blackburn 269-70.

Sense impressions and external observation are just two of the many ways in which the Unnamable tries to vouchsafe an existence to no avail. The indeterminacy of the speaking voice wavers on the verge of fiction and constitutes, according to Cohn, a "change of focus from a fiction of a fiction to a highly charged prose that wavers between fiction, prose poetry, and dramatic monologue, which is spoken by a kaleidoscopic and indeterminate voice."[236] *The Unnamable* is Beckett's most radical departure from the mimetic assumptions of narrative fiction. Carnero-González describes it as "[breaking] up all the schemes of the scholar of linguistic discourse; the most basic and simple logic is missing."[237] Its language frustrates any attempt to tear apart the veil of words and reach beyond it. As Rabaté also writes:

> *The Unnamable* teaches us, again and again, by changing points of view and arguments, by endlessly contradicting itself, that the speaking voice is nothing but language... Moreover, this language is not "his," that is it does not belong to the Unnamable because, in many senses, it is the language of others.[238]

The novel thus completely debunks the voice of the narrator, leaving the reader with a sequence of statements and fragments of stories that can in no way be assigned to a unified origin.

A Hatchet Job: The Limits of Refutation

Beckett's non-representational art in the Trilogy progresses through a negative approach that repeatedly denies the validity of the object of representation. This strategy can be equated to a certain extent with Berkeley's style of philosophical writing which also preferred counter-arguments and refutation to positive presentation. The very name of the doctrine most associated with Berkeley's philosophy – *im*matterialism – indicates an

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[236] Cohn, A Beckett Canon 184.

[237] Jose Carnero-González, "Silence In Beckett: 'The Unnamable' – A Hinge Work," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui: Beckett in the Nineties*, eds. Marius Buning and Lois Oppenheim (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993) 209.

[238] Jean-Michel Rabaté, *Think Pig: Beckett and the Limits of the Human* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016) 59.

emphasis on negation. Although refuting alternative arguments is an integral part of every philosophical work, Berkeley pursues it to a greater extent than most others. He puts unusual emphasis on dismantling the claims of his opponents, an effort which takes up the larger part of his two attempts to expound his philosophical system, *Principles of Human Knowledge* and *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*. The fact that he never published the second part of *Principles of Human Knowledge* which was supposed to elaborate his world view in positive terms contributes to the overall impression that his work is mostly preoccupied with attacking other doctrines at the expense of developing its own. In the introduction to Berkeley's works, the editors explain that

> [The 2nd] Part was to deal with what Berkeley called Moral Philosophy, taken to include Metaphysics. It was to treat of the distinction between the corporeal and the mental, the nature of God, the freedom of man, the commonplaces of ethics, and apparently a nominalist logic of demonstration[239]

The manuscript of Part 2 was lost when Berkeley travelled in Italy and he never attempted to reconstruct it with the result that he "has given us not a system, but only the skeleton of a system, though clothed upon here and there with living flesh, and by a miracle of philosophical vision and literary art already informed with a soul."[240]

Berkeley's emphasis on negative arguments caused many writers to label him as a sceptic and his contribution to philosophy is often considered to be his critique of materialism rather than the positive content of his theories. Windelband, for example, summarizes Berkeley's philosophy as "the nominalistic denial of abstract ideas".[241] John Russell Roberts affirms that Berkeley's "attack on material substance provides us with an excellent model of the analytic hatchet job."[242] This term is justified by the observation

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[239] A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (eds.), "Editor's Introduction," *Works of Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne. Vol 2* (London, Edinburgh, Paris, Melbourne, Toronto and New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1949) 5.

[240] Luce and Jessop 6.

[241] Windelband 472.

[242] John Russell Roberts, *A Metaphysics for the Mob: The Philosophy of George Berkeley* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) xvi.

that "when Berkeley is done one feels *that he has left one with nothing* to embrace. What Berkeley gives us is what we might call a 'negative metaphysics.' The great bulk of his effort is directed toward a negative point, i.e., establishing that reality in no way consists of material substances.[243] This may be one of the reasons why Berkeley's denial of matter was said to "*admit of no answer and produce no conviction*",[244] in the famous assessment by David Hume.

For Berkeley, demolishing the belief in matter is a necessary preliminary to establishing the true nature of things, whereas uncertainty and doubt are essential to Beckett's novels. In both cases, however, readers are tempted to fill in the gaps on their own. In the case of narrative fiction, the figure of the narrator is a necessary function that allows the text to be unified and understood, even when this function is as disturbed as in *The Unnamable*. The narrator who denies his (or her) own capability to narrate a story only spurs the reader to devise ever more intricate ways of understanding the role of the narrator and its complex manifestations.[245] As Rimmon-Kenan observes, "Exceptions can only be discerned against the background of the rule, and narratology formulates some of the regularities which specific narratives gloriously defy." (150)

Beckett's vicious attacks on the underlying representational assumptions of literary texts still, inescapably, evoke these very assumptions at the same time that they deny them, leading the reader to search for ways to understand the narrative despite its unbridgeable gaps. In *The Implied Reader*, Iser analyses literary texts from various historical periods to study the diverse ways in which they invite the reader to interact with them. The point of departure for this process is negation:

> The reader discovers the meaning of the text, taking negation as his starting-point; he discovers a new reality through a fiction which, at least in part, is different

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[243] Roberts xvii. Emphasis mine.

[244] David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Millican (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 131 [Endnote to 12.15]. Emphasis in original.

[245] For a reading of Malone the narrator as a source of unity for both "Malone Dies" and "Molloy", see Audrey Wasser, "From Figure to Fissure: Beckett's Molloy, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable," *Modern Philology* 109:2 (2011): 248-250.

> from the world he himself is used to; and he discovers the deficiencies inherent in prevalent norms and in his own restricted behaviour. (xxiii)

Readers go through a process of discovery with every work of fiction they encounter, in order to bridge the gap between their own world and the world described in the text. In the Trilogy, however, the world of the novels is constantly cancelled out, calling for a different kind of engagement. Iser describes them as "irritants, for they refuse to give the reader any bearings by means of which he might move far enough away to judge them. The text forces [the reader] to find his own way around, provoking questions to which he must supply his own answers." (175) Readers may attempt to supply their own answers, but the novels refuse to support any specific interpretation, making the reader's solutions highly subjective. They only serve to distance the reader from the text. When we become aware of this constantly renewed distance, according to Iser, we start scrutinising our own assumptions and preconceptions, entering an endless process of self-discovery — "Whenever this occurs, the reader approaches the level of consciousness of Beckett's characters… If he enters into the movement of the text, he will find… himself increasingly drawn into the exposure of the conditions that underlie his own judgment." (177)

Iser's interpretation is a good illustration of both the strengths and the weaknesses of the anti-representational impulse of the Trilogy. On the one hand, he argues persuasively that the novels cannot be read as a representation of reality or even be unified into a single narrative. On the other hand, the fragmentation of the text is judged to be a better representation of lived experience. Reality, our world, our life, are not experiences that can be adequately formulated in words, even to ourselves: "Though we are alive, we do not know what it means to be alive. If we try to find out what it means to be alive, we are forced to seek the meaning of something we cannot possibly know." (267) In order to grasp these realities we must turn them into a story, but this story is always a fiction. If the nature of life is necessarily open-ended, then realising the impossibility of enclosing it within a fiction may actually be more realistic than coherent narratives. The contradictions and self-cancellations of the protagonists in the novels are not just an

arcane writing strategy, but a faithful representation of the contradictions and aporias that we encounter in our own lives. According to Iser,

> Without the production and subsequent negation of fictions, this open situation could not possibly be established. But this, in turn, means that even in cases such as the Unnamable is concerned with, the usefulness of fiction cannot be dispensed with. That is to say, even the unmasked fiction cannot destroy itself. A great comfort for literature and a great nuisance for ideology! (268)

In the end, all the negations and resistance turn out to be a roundabout way of affirming the power and utility of fictions as a privileged access to reality. In this reading, the Trilogy is more representative of life than Balzac's realist novels, they present reality in its confusion and abundance without the framing of the Stendhalian mirror. Iser concludes that "the negativeness of Beckett's texts, then, consists in the technique he uses in order to involve us in the complex process of manufacturing fictions and to open our eyes to the nature of fiction itself." (273) The progressive breakdown of narrative conventions in the novels of the Trilogy turns the disruption of literary norms into a new object of representation, making it "expressive of the impossibility to express" (Three Dialogues, 101),[246] as D suggests in the "Three Dialogues", or "a thrusting towards a more adequate expression of natural experience, as revealed to the vigilant coenaesthesia", a mere "straining to enlarge the statement of a compromise." (97). In response to which we might conclude with B of the "Three Dialogues" that "No more ingenious method could be devised for restoring him, safe and sound, to the bosom of [the literary equivalent of] Saint Luke." (101) Beckett's rejection of a similar assessment of the van Veldes, as discussed in the previous chapter, clarifies that his goal in the Trilogy was not drawing attention to the nature of the predicament of the artist.

The attack on representation in the Trilogy was inspired by a conception of art that resembles Berkeley's immaterialism and utilised certain elements of Berkeley's philosophy. Like Berkeley's attack on the existence of matter, it is caught up in a

[246] A similar point is raised by Wasser 254-6.

negative polemic that gives it its impetus, but also has its inherent limitations. The spectacular achievements of the Trilogy, nevertheless, led Beckett into an impasse, out of which emerged new ways of writing for page and stage which can be related in some of their aspects to Berkeley's work on vision and the image. These will be discussed in the next two chapters.

5: Paranoid Perception: The Image

In Knowlson's biography the title of the chapter dealing with the years following the publication of the Trilogy, *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* is "Impasse and Depression."[247] It was a time when Beckett "began to experience renewed doubt about whether there was any way out of the dead end into which *The Unnamable* and *Fin de partie* had led him."[248] In a letter to A.J. Leventhal of 6 August 1953, Beckett writes that "Inertia, literary, continues, haven't the least desire to put pen to paper".[249] The impossible art promoted by the "Three Dialogues" powered the self-cancellation of representation in the Trilogy, but its energy seems to have been completely spent.

The Unnamable's questions at the beginning of the novel have remained unanswered – "what should I do, in my situation, how proceed? By aporia pure and simple? Or by affirmation and negations invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later?" (291) By the end of the final novel of the Trilogy, the unnamed narrator is uncertain whether the future holds a story for him, or only silence: "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" (414). As in Franz Kafka's parable "Before the Law",[250] an unnamed protagonist stands before a door that he is unable to open in order to pursue his destiny, even though it was created personally for him. Unlike Kafka's man from the country, however, Beckett's creature has no hopes of finding anything desirable beyond the door, nor any wish to go in, and yet death will not come to him, nor silence.

From within this impasse Beckett gradually began to create images and chart lines of flight that allowed him to go on, albeit in a different direction. This chapter will two of these interrelated new directions that revolve around visual images and the relations of the one who sees to the one being see. It will open with a theoretical discussion of the

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[247] Knowlson, Damned to Fame 377.

[248] Knowlson, Damned to Fame 387.

[249] Letters 1 395.

[250] Franz Kafka, "Before the Law," *Collected Stories*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, ed. Gabriel Josipovici (New York: Random House Knopf, 1993) 179-180.

image in Berkeley and Beckett, and then move on to discuss several pertinent examples from Beckett's work in more depth.

The Philosophical Image

Both Gilles Deleuze and Anthony Uhlmann have contended that Beckett's way forward after the crisis caused by the search for non-representational art in *The Unnamable* was found in turning to the image as a non-relational form of expression, an argument that serves well a Berkeleyan reading of Beckett's later writings. According to Deleuze, Beckett's work can be seen as a progression by means of exhaustion. In the 1993 essay "The Exhausted"[251] he distinguishes three languages in Beckett: a language of names, a language of voices and a language of images. Each of these languages attempts to exhaust all available possibilities – the language of names enumerates objects, the language of voices exhausts the sources of possible fictional worlds and the language of images concentrates and then dissipates the very energy of the work.[252] Deleuze's tripartite classification may be too schematic to account for the complexity of Beckett's texts, but his conceptualisation of the use of images is a productive and convincing way to look at Beckett's later work.

In *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image* (2006) Uhlmann develops Deleuze's observations and investigates the philosophical and literary sources and implications of Beckett's use of images. I will be relying on his analysis for a preliminary definition of the image:

> sights, sounds, smells, tastes and things touched all produce 'images' to the sense organs which are interpreted by the brain… As images, firstly, they are 'something' which requires interpretation, secondly they are interpreted by the brain as meaningful sensations and brought into contact with sign systems,

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[251] Gilles Deleuze, "The Exhausted," *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 152-174.

[252] Uhlmann suggests that the exhaustion of ideas should be added as another layer of exhaustion to this list. See Anthony Uhlmann, "*Ideas in Beckett and Deleuze*," *Deleuze and Beckett*, eds. S.E. Wilmer and Audronė Žukauskaitė (Basingstoke UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) 23-35.

> including language… Rather than creating or structuring thought, [the image] induces thought. It also precedes thought and exceeds thought. It can be understood to be a sign but is not always or only a sign (that is, one can fail to understand an image, one can find multiple and shifting sense in an image, and the meaning of an image can exceed the meanings assigned to it by signifying systems).[253]

Thus, the image bridges between the sensual-physical world and the mind. This is a psychological process that is intimately related to thinking and has a complex relation to philosophy. Images operate as signs – they stand for, or replace, an intangible meaning, but their expressiveness may extend further, "not always or only a sign". As indicated by Uhlmann's title – some images are philosophical in the sense that they are inextricable from the attempt to rationalise them into articulate language as ideas or arguments. They call for a philosophical interpretation, but they cannot be subsumed by it.

The interaction between input from the senses and its interpretation by the mind was a main concern for Berkeley who calls the sense impressions as conceived by the mind 'ideas' rather than 'images'. As already discussed, for Berkeley the external world is composed of ideas rather than of material objects, making them essential to his philosophical system. Berkeley devoted his first published book, *A New Theory of Vision* (1709)[254] to an inquiry into how the mind perceives and interprets sense impressions, especially the interpretation of visual data and its correlation with tactile impressions to create the illusion of external bodies. This work paves the way for the immaterialist philosophy of the *Principles of Human Knowledge* published a year later (1710) where ideas derived from the senses are central to the argument. Berkeley considered his views on vision to be an essential part of his philosophical position and later re-published *A New Theory of Vision*, more than twenty years after its original publication, together with the first edition of *Alciphron* (1732).

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[253] Uhlmann, Philosophical Image 3.

[254] George Berkeley, "An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision," *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne Vol 1*, eds. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (London, Edinburgh, Paris, Melbourne, Toronto and NewYork: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1949) 141-239. Henceforth NTV.

In "Philosophical Intuition," a lecture given in 1911 and later collected in *The Creative Mind*, Henri Bergson turns to Berkeley's philosophy in order to elaborate a concept of an image of thought, which is "almost matter in that it still allows itself to be seen, and almost mind in that it no longer allows itself to be touched,--a phantom which haunts us".[255] The image of thought hovers between the world and the mind, a liminal and indefinable state of being in-between. According to him, every philosopher develops a system from a simple intuition that can never be put into words by either the philosophers themselves or their readers, but the attempt to approximate such a formulation generates philosophical writing. In Berkeley's work Bergson identifies four strands that derive from contemporary philosophical systems but are interrelated in a new and original way, concluding that:

> What Berkeley's idealism signifies is that matter is coextensive with our representation of it; that it has no interior, no underneath; that it hides nothing, contains nothing; that it possesses neither power nor virtuality of any kind; that it is spread out as mere surface and that it is no more than what it presents to us at any given moment. (95)

The complexity of the ways matter, representation, and the surface are woven together in Berkeley's thought is seen as stemming from a much simpler intuition that is only accessible through a visual image - the image of the veil: "Berkeley perceives matter as a thin transparent film situated between man and God. It remains transparent as long as the philosophers leave it alone, and in that case God reveals Himself through it." (97) This image is later formulated even more succinctly as "matter is a language which God speaks to us." (98)

Despite the designation of the image as philosophical, it is not a representation of a logical argument, but rather a visual given that the philosophical treatises attempt to explicate and interpret within a rational discourse. Bergson's assumption of the existence of an initial intuition which the philosophical image attempts to represent has the same

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[255] Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2007) 97.

structural function in his argument as the belief in the existence of matter rejected by Berkeley. In both cases a hidden source is supposed to give rise to the image, whether visual or philosophical, but this source can never be accessed directly. As such, Bergson's initial intuition would be vulnerable to the same criticism that Berkeley directs against the existence of matter which is equally inaccessible and unfathomable. And yet, if we foreclose the search for an originary intuition, then Bergson's formulation of the image as that which is partly material and partly spiritual can be useful for understanding Beckett's images as well.[256]

Deciphering the Image

If the image is understood as a sensual given which requires interpretation, then it logically follows that in some cases interpretation will be easier than in others. Berkeley was mostly concerned with the usual conduct of human behaviour, and therefore with the way certain interpretations are made so readily that they come to seem natural to us to the extent that we don't even notice the interpretive stage. In *A New Theory of Vision* Berkeley explains that the visual input we receive through our eyes is strictly two-dimensional and does not resemble the way we normally experience the world. What allows us to perceive distance, size and orientation is in fact a normative way of interpreting visual data that we learn from experience through the conjunction of visual with tactile data. For example, we are able to judge the distance of close objects by the movement our eyes must make to focus on such objects. The need to squint in order to bring a close object into focus is felt as a sensation of touch, as the muscles of the eye contract to shorten the distance between the pupils. It is this sensation that tells us that the object is close to us, rather than a purely visual clue:

> it is certain by experience that when we look at a near object with both eyes, according as it approaches or recedes from us, we alter the disposition of our eyes, by lessening or widening the interval between the pupils. This disposition or turn of the eyes is attended with a sensation, which seems to me to be that which in this case brings the idea of larger or lesser distance into the mind. (NTV 174)

[256] Uhlmann also analyzes Bergson's essays; see Uhlmann, Philosophical Image 118-9.

The section on orientation adds a striking application of the principle that experience teaches us how to relate visual images to tactile ones where Berkeley attempts to account for the reason visual images appear to be upside down on the retina and yet we experience them as aligned with the orientation of our body. Instead of assuming that the mind somehow corrects the image, Berkeley claims that we simply learned to associate a certain area of the visual image with being close to our feet and the earth, and the opposite direction as being far from them, and that orientation is exclusively conceived by touch (NTV 217-9). The image on the retina, therefore, would be completely correct with regards to visual sensation alone, i.e. there is no reversal of the visual image at all. At the same time, our interpretation of the image as reversed in relation to our own body, with the upper part closer to our feet and the lower part in the direction of our head, is also absolutely correct with regards to touch. Initially, these two realms of sensation are perceived separately, but once we learn to inter-relate them in the proper manner, we will encounter no difficulty in orienting ourselves.

Berkeley is mostly interested in images that allow us to negotiate our external environment correctly. We learn to decipher them in infancy, and afterwards accurately interpret them without difficulty. As the examples above show, the act of interpretation goes beyond the visual realm by conflating it with tactile experience to create a conception that would be useful for the conduct of daily life. Errors in interpretation are an inherent possibility in this account, resulting in visual illusions. *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* includes a well-known example of such a discrepancy - the illusion that the moon on the horizon seems bigger than it is in the meridian. Without going into the intricacies of Berkeley's explanation of this phenomenon, suffice it to say that it is based on the principle that "the judgment we make on the magnitude of a thing depends not on the visible appearance alone, but also on divers other circumstances" (21), reiterating the distinction between what the retina registers and what the mind perceives. As Margaret Atherton explains, it establishes "a distinction between the immediate objects of sight, the ones we undeniably see, and the mediate objects, suggested by the

presence of the visible objects although not in themselves visible".[257] The image as conceived by the mind, therefore, is not the immediately perceived raw data, but a mediated construct that is partly visual and partly conceptual, and most importantly, relies on context for interpretation.

It is this distinction between visual input and image that accounts both for the usefulness of the system and for its possible errors. Berkeley compares the expressiveness of visual data to linguistic symbols: "Faintness, as well as all other ideas or perceptions which suggest magnitude or distance, doth it in the same way that words suggest the notions to which they are annexed." (31) Interpreting such signs can lead to error but may also become a source for artistic and intellectual exploration. When writing about the philosophical image, Bergson, on the contrary, is interested in images that are difficult, or even impossible, to fully interpret. According to Uhlmann, the creation of novel images that challenge the way we interpret the world and give rise to philosophical questions is the special provenance of art. Through a conjunction of Bergson and Deleuze, he develops a distinction between representation – images that are readily interpreted because they stand in a clear relation to other images, and presentation – "an image which requires interpretation and thus strikes us with its power."[258] The specificity of this type of artistic image is the absence of relation or context, as Uhlmann clarifies when contrasting it with metaphors:

> An image is both more and a little less than a metaphor. It is more because it belongs to a philosophical conceptual lineage that relates it to immediate perception, to a plenitude of sensory information that is only later filtered by conscious perception. It is less because it does not necessarily include a point of

[257] Margaret Atherton, *Berkeley's Revolution in Vision* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1990) 126. For a detailed account of the moon illusion see 122-127.

[258] Uhlmann, Philosophical Image 11.

relation (whereas metaphors, which compare two things, necessarily involve relations).[259]

Beckett's late work abounds in such haunting images, as will be discussed throughout the rest of this chapter.

Structural and Dramatic Convenience: *Film* and the Image

Any discussion of Beckett, Berkeley and the visual image must engage with *Film* whose script opens with the maxim *esse est percipi*. The 1964 film is one of a kind in Beckett's oeuvre. It is his only excursion into the film medium, an unusual reluctance for Beckett who usually produced multiple works in the media he was working in. The 'General' section of the script presents Berkeley's maxim as a mechanism for structuring the film:

> Esse est percipi.
> All extraneous perception suppressed, animal, human, divine, self-perception maintains in being.
> Search of non-being in flight from extraneous perception breaking down in inescapability of self-perception.
> No truth value attaches to the above, regarded as of merely structural and dramatic convenience.
> In order to be figured in this situation the protagonist is sundered into object (O) and eye (E), the former in flight, the latter in pursuit.
> It will not be clear until end of film that pursuing perceiver is not extraneous, but self.[260]

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[259] Anthony Uhlmann, "Samuel Beckett and the Occluded Image," *Beckett after Beckett*, eds. S.E. Gontarski and Anthony Uhlmann (Gainsville: University Press of Florida, 2006) 79. A similar distinction between presentation and representation is made by Branka Arsić when contrasting Cartesian and Berkeleyan optics: "we are no longer dealing with the order of representation, but rather with the order of presentation"; see Arsić 54.

[260] Samuel Beckett, "Film," *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London & Boston: Faber & Faber, 1986) 323.

This is quite a revealing explanation for a taciturn author like Beckett, famous for refusing to discuss his work. As he wrote to Alan Schneider, the Director of *Film*, "My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin." (Disjecta 97) Beckett's short explanation of the film plot is a rare glimpse into the way he was structuring this work around the central image of self-perception.

The protagonist O, played in the film by Buster Keaton, is attempting to evade perception by hiding from the possible looks of other people, then from animals, and finally from the image of a gaze in a picture of a God. Beckett reverses the direction of being in Berkeley's maxim – if to be is to be perceived, then not to be perceived amounts to non-being. In other words, the protagonist's escape from perception is not just a desire for solitude, but a pursuit of non-being, i.e. it constitutes a suicide attempt. With this in mind, the protagonist's constant checking of his pulse may be read as a further indication that he equates not being perceived with the physical death of the body. Every time he believes that he has escaped perception, he checks his pulse to ascertain whether he still maintains in being. The reasoning that a person's existence depends on being perceived treats the protagonist as an object, an idea that in Berkeley's philosophy is completely passive. Beckett thus pointedly ignores Berkeley's description of the soul as a spirit that is independent of perception. Jean-Michel Rabaté further points out that Beckett's reversal of Berkeley's formulation from being to non-being reveals a pursuit of nothingness that brings it closer to the Democritean maxim – nothing is more real than nothing. In Beckett's reimagining of philosophy the first materialist in Western thought and the first immaterialist end up saying the same thing.[261] Eventually, the effort proves fruitless, as suicidal schemes often do in Beckett, since the protagonist finds out at the end of the film that the camera that was pursuing him is actually his own gaze.[262]

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[261] Rabaté, Berkeley entre Joyce et Beckett 70.

[262] For a reading of the escape from self perception as directed against the Cartesian cogito, see Alain Badiou, *On Beckett*, trans. and eds. Nina Power and Alberto Toscano (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2003) 10.

As Dan Watt observes,[263] the theme of a frustrated suicide may be related to Berkeley's biography through an episode purported to have happened in his student years. The incident was probably known to Beckett through Joseph Hone, who reports it in his book on Berkeley: "The story is that he attempted, with Contarine's assistance, to hang himself in order that he might know the sensation of death. Cut down in the nick of time, his first words on recovering were: 'Bless my heart, Contarine, you have rumpled my band'. (22) In an indignant footnote, Hone & Rossi add that "The first edition of the *Bibliographia Britannica* denied the truth of the execution story on the ground that Berkeley 'had no chums'." (22) True or false, Beckett probably found the story of a failed suicide at least of "structural and dramatic convenience", since *Film* brings together the Berkeleyan world of ideas and the theme of a protagonist attempting to leave this world, but unable to do so.

According to Branka Arsić, *Film* is an image of Berkeley's 'divine optics' (49). For Berkeley, as was already noted, human vision is two-dimensional, turning the world into a flat surface, on which images appear, much like the screen on which *Film* is projected. The flat surface is both the medium on which we see the film, and the wall that protects the protagonist's flank in the first scene. In her interpretation, the pursuing E is the eye of God, changed from benevolent guarantor of consistency and order in the world, into a relentless pursuer (49-50). This reading encounters the obvious problem that it contradicts Beckett's own explanation that the pursuer is O himself, who moreover persists after he has extinguished divine perception in the form of a picture of the deity, but it does highlight Beckett's paranoid rendering of the ubiquity of perception in Berkeley's philosophy.

Deleuze also views *Film* as an image of Berkeley, but as the individual personality rather than the abstraction of a philosophical argument: "We might imagine that the whole story is that of Berkeley, who had enough of being perceived (and of perceiving)."[264] His reading is rather more positive, since there is a 'General Solution' to the invasive perception problem: "When the character dies, as Murphy said, it is because

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[263] Dan Watt 74-88.

[264] Gilles Deleuze, "The Greatest Irish Film (Beckett's 'Film')," *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 23.

he has already begun to move in spirit."[265] I have argued elsewhere[266] that both Deleuze and Arsić overlook a central discrepancy between Berkeley's view of the self and the basic premise for Beckett's plot. I contend that the introduction of self-perception goes directly against Berkeley's distinction between ideas and minds and his position that minds, or souls, cannot be perceived at all.[267] In the *Principles of Human Knowledge* Berkeley explicitly rejects the possibility of self-perception. In Chapter 1 I already noted Beckett's familiarity with Berkeley's contention that the soul can only perceive ideas, but does not constitute one in itself, and therefore it cannot be perceived. He marked several passages touching upon this subject in his copy of the work, including the following:

> CXXXVIII: For by the word *spirit* we mean only that which thinks, wills, and perceives; this, and this alone, constitutes the signification of that term. If, therefore, it is impossible that any degree of those powers should be represented in an idea, it is evident there can be no idea of a spirit.[268]

The soul can only perceive ideas, but does not constitute one in itself, and therefore it cannot be perceived. This kind of self-perception is exactly the goal of the pursuing camera in *Film*. The film unfolds a double plot – the story of the pursuing eye – E and that of the pursued object – O. As viewers our perspective is that of the camera, which remains unseen as it allows us to see. The gaze of the camera is not neutral, but rather a frightening look as befits its description as "pursuer". Its threatening nature is made evident in contrast to the calm exchange of looks between the couple on the street. Only when the camera is turned on them do they react with terror, implying that there is something special about the pursuing gaze of E. Although Beckett never explains why E is so frightening, one possibility is that its terror stems from its impossible pursuit of self-

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[265] Deleuze, Greatest Irish Film 26.

[266] Einat Adar, "*Or Percipere*: How Berkeleyan Is Samuel Beckett's *Film*?" *Tradition and Modernity: New Essays in Irish Studies*, eds. Radvan Markus, et al. (Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, 2014) 39-50.

[267] For a similar reading, see Sylvie Debevac Henning, "'Film': A Dialogue between Beckett and Berkeley," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 7 (1982): 89-99.

[268] Beckett's PHK 185.

perception that can never be fulfilled, neither in philosophical speculation nor through cinematic technique. E's desire aspires to a state of full presence that can only be called madness, which may explain its horror.

When Beckett introduces self-perception into Berkeley's world of perception-dependent existence, he creates a contradiction that cannot be resolved. In Ulrika Maude's formulation, "If autonomy is based on the fact that the subject is the *agent* rather than the *object* of perception, by focusing perception on the self, Beckett collapses the categorical distinction and shatters the illusion of autonomous subjectivity".[269] This can be seen in the final scene when E is revealed as the inner perception of O, but the only way to convey this encounter on screen is by using shot-counter shot of Keaton looking at himself from two different angles that stand for the different points of view of the perceiver and the perceived, but also imply a different position in space for each of them which cannot be reconciled within a single body.[270] If at the end of the film O becomes "an impersonal yet singular atom that no longer has a Self",[271] it is because self-perception has sundered, to use Beckett's term, the stable self-knowledge of the Berkeleyan self.[272] In fact, as Illeana Marculescu[273] observes, the character in the film seems rather more intent on obeying the Geulingian dictum *inspectio sui*, calling for an inspection of the self that only teaches us "the spirit's impotency of probing into the abyss of matter and of itself."[274]

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[269] Ulrika Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 46.

[270] For a similar reading of the shot-counter shot technique; see Colin Gardner, *Beckett Deleuze and the Televisual Event: Peephole Art* (Basingstoke UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 44.

[271] Deleuze, Greatest Irish Film 26.

[272] The contradiction underlying self-perception has been noted before, without reference to Berkeley. See Uhlmann, Philosophical Image 121-2 about the disintegration of the self, and Thomas Tsakalakis, "Beckett's Film: A Polycentric Parodic Pictorial Parable For Perennial Paradoxes," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui: Beckett in the Cultural Field*, ed. Jürgen Siess, Matthijs Engelberts and Angela Moorjani (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2013) 157-168, for a reading of *Film* in light of Russell's paradox of a set that contains itself.

[273] Illeana Marculescc, "Beckett and the Temptation of Solipsism," *The Beckett Studies Reader*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (Florida: Florida University Press, 1993) 215.

[274] Marculescu 216.

The Observing Eye

The terror associated with the pursuing eye of O may also be related to the role of surveillance in the modern state. According to Michel Foucault, "Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap."[275] Foucault is commenting on the architectural innovation proposed by Jeremy Bentham for the better management of public structures including prisons, hospitals, mad houses and schools. Bentham's paradigmatic 'panopticon' structure imposes discipline on its occupants by creating a central observation point that allows guardians to clearly see all inmates without being seen themselves. In consequence, the inmates internalise the surveillance mechanism and control their actions at all times even in the absence of an actual supervisor.[276] Bentham's essay on the panopticon is mentioned in Beckett's *Philosophy Notes*, testifying to his awareness of the concept.[277] In Beckett's *Film* the source of the gaze is also an agency hidden from sight which exercises power, similar to the prison wardens looking through the panopticon, but the observed is less submissive (and has more freedom) than Bentham's imaginary prisoners, and attempts to escape from the authoritarian gaze. Nonetheless, as Bentham has planned, the authority of the gaze is internalised and revealed as self-perception – the control of the self by the self. What is frightening about the gaze of O may thus be the power of the state embodied within the individual.

According to Uhlmann, the single staring eye sequence that opens and closes *Film* is the main image of the whole film, which Beckett originally titled 'The Eye'.[278] In its play with the audience, the eye stares at the spectators, unseeing, while being also the unseen object of their gaze, both O and E at the same time.[279] This image adds another layer of impossible self-awareness to the film, at the level of its reception by the audience. It

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[275] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) 200.

[276] Foucault, Discipline and Punish 200-203.

[277] TCD MS 10967 196r. The term 'panopticon' or 'pan opticon' as Beckett transcribes it is not mentioned in Windelband. This addition is discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[278] See Uhlmann, Philosophical Image 121.

[279] Uhlmann, Philosophical Image 121-2.

creates a discrepancy between what is seen on screen – the eye, and the common interpretation of this visual image – seeing. In *Film*, the attempt to see ends in blindness. O, running from his own self-perception, is blind to the self that pursues him, while the pursuing E is unable to see O's face for most of the film, since he must remain behind his back until the final moment.

The image of the eye in *Film* is impossible to interpret correctly, because it contains a contradictory notion, and yet it affects our perception. Gardner, evoking an analysis by Enoch Brater, raises the possibility that the eye of the opening sequence is Keaton's defective eye, hidden behind a patch throughout the film, and adds that the eye "is also blind to the inevitability of self-perception", making it doubly blind.[280] Whether we accept this interpretation or not, it is clear that in *Film* the eye is sighted and blind at the same time. The outcome may be best described in the words that Bram van Velde used to characterise his own painting: "a blinded eye that continues to see, and sees what blinds it."[281]

The Image of God

In the *Film* script Beckett mentions divine perception as one of gazes the protagonist is trying to run away from, practically performed by Buster Keaton tearing a printed image of a divinity after a close up on the eyes of the figure. The relation between man and personal divinity forms, as I will argue, a major theme in Beckett's mime play *Act without Words 1* which features the learning process of a man in an unfamiliar environment, a theme which carries Berkeleyan overtones.

In 1955 Beckett responded to the request of the mime artist Deryk Mendel and wrote a short mime play for one actor. The mime, originally written in French, features a man thrown into a desert,[282] where various objects mysteriously descend from above,

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[280] Gardner 45-6.

[281] Quoted in Charles Juliet, *Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde*, trans. Tracy Cooke, et al. (Champaign and London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2009) 58.

[282] Lois Oppenheim relates the physical throwing of the actor into the scene with the Heideggerian concept of thrownness, the awareness that we are part of a world that we did not create or choose; see Lois

promising to ameliorate his situation by providing shade, water, and even the means for suicide, only to be taken away as soon as he is about to use them. *Act without Words 1* can be read as a theological comedy that parodies Berkeley's attempt to demonstrate God's personal involvement in human affairs. This short mime is also a good illustration of Beckett's strategy of reworking philosophical images in a non-religious setting and of his use of the image on the stage.

The mime is often read within the context of Beckett's interest in psychology. For example, Knowlson writes that:

> The mime […] reflects Beckett's readings in behavioural psychology as a young man in the 1930s, when he looked at Wolfgang Köhler's book *The Mentality of Apes*, about the colony of apes in Tenerife, where experiments were conducted in which the apes also placed cubes one on top of another in order to reach a banana.[283]

In a footnote, Knowlson mentions that Köhler's book contained photographs of the apes successfully performing the tasks required to reach their food, adding a visual layer to the textual description.

Beckett has previously referred to Köhler and his work in *Murphy*, in the conversation between Murphy and his once-teacher Neary. As Neary longs to "gain the affections of Miss Dwyer", Murphy retorts with "'And then?' … 'Back to Tenerife and the apes?'" (5) Murphy, the pursuer of the pleasures of the mind, rejects carnal desire, the only kind of love there is according to Neary (6). Ackerley explains that the phrase Tenerife and the apes is "prosaically, back to the Gymnasium and the students",[284] which in this context refers to the humdrum of daily life but also introduces the theme of

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Oppenheim, *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett's Dialogue with Art* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000) 36.

[283] Knowlson, Damned to Fame 376. Feldman relates the play to Beckett's reading of Robert Woodworth's *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* and the notes he took of it; see Feldman, Beckett and Popper 383.

[284] Ackerley, Demented Particulars 37.

education – the apes are taught by Köhler, just as Murphy is taught by Neary. Obviously, an escape from drudgery through sexual desire is unacceptable to Murphy who is only interested in his own mind and therefore rejects Neary's teachings. The tone of the novel may mock his aspirations, but the image of the apes as students subjected to a mechanistic learning process is clear nonetheless.

The ability to learn how to use tools is shared by both humans and apes, a common trait that blurs the distinction between the species. The hesitations and mistakes of the mime's protagonist cast some doubts as to his intelligence. Remarkably, he finds it difficult to arrange two cubes in order to climb them to reach up, exactly the type of task the apes have managed to master:

> He turns, sees cube, looks at it, at carafe, reflects, goes to cube, takes it up… tries in vain to reach carafe, renounces, gets down, carries cube back to its place, turns aside, reflects.
> A second smaller cube descends from flies, lands…
> He turns, sees second cube, looks at it, at carafe, goes to second cube, takes it up, carries it over and sets it down under carafe, tests its stability, gets up on it, tries in vain to reach carafe, renounces, gets down, takes up second cube to carry it back to its place, hesitates, thinks better of it, sets it down, goes to big cube, takes it up, carries it over and puts it on small one, tests their stability, gets up on them, the cubes collapse, he falls, gets up immediately, brushes himself, reflects.[285]

The man in the mime goes through every possible mistake before finding a practicable way to arrange two cubes of different sizes in order to grab the carafe, a skill that we expect every normal person to have.

If the man in the mime is not far superior to an ape, then the entity responsible for the arrangement of objects is much more vicious than Köhler the scientific observer. Whenever the man is about to enjoy the smallest comfort, this invisible agency deprives him of it. Köhler was examining the learning skills of the apes by attempting to teach

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[285] Samuel Beckett, "Act without Words 1," *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1990) 204.

them new ways to reach food, but the unseen agency that sends objects to the man in Beckett's play can only teach him to resign to suffering and the futility of all endeavour that may alleviate it, since none of his ventures is successful. And the man eventually learns resignation – when a third, even smaller cube, descends from the flies he refuses to even try to make use of it (204), and by the end of the play he is completely immovable:

> The carafe descends from flies and comes to rest a few feet from his body.
> He does not move.
> Whistle from above.
> He does not move.
> The carafe descends further, dangles and plays about his face.
> He does not move.
> The carafe is pulled up and disappears in flies.
> The bough returns to horizontal, the palms open, the shadow returns.
> Whistle from above.
> He does not move.
> The tree is pulled up and disappears in flies.
> He looks at his hands. (206)[286]

Whether the man's apathy is a lesson successfully taught or a form of resistance to the behaviourist scheme of reward and punishment is unclear. David Tucker relates the cruel treatment of the man, previously criticised for being too easy to interpret in an existentialist vein, to Geulincx's postulation of life as a 'guignol world'[287] where "God brings humanity into the world to act here, connected invisibly to and conducted entirely at the mercy of this unknowable, unspeakable, 'ineffable' authority."[288] In this reading,

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[286] The man's refusal to move is read by Ackerley and Gontarski as a triumphant rebellion in the spirit of Camus' heroic Sisyphus, but it is hard to discern any note of triumph or achievement in the actor's passive resignation; see The Grove Companion 36.

[287] Tucker 162-5.

[288] Tucker 165.

the final resignation of the man to his fate is the attitude recommended by Geulincx as the only logical response to the suffering induced by life on earth.

Tucker's reading should be complemented by a consideration of the structure of intentionality implied by the scientific experiment which he does not account for. For Geulincx, the Will of God is completely inaccessible to us:

> He is the Father of Men, He is ineffable, and in creating us men shows himself to be supreme in all things whose modality (that is, the manner of that supremacy) we cannot understand, but can understand only that we can never understand that modality; in which lies the full measure of *ineffability*.[289]

The intentions behind God's actions are not simply unknown, but also unknowable in principle. This ineffability stands in contrast to the scientist who constructs a controlled environment for the apes he is studying with a clearly defined purpose that may even be considered to be beneficial to mankind. By bringing the scientific experiment into play, *Act without Words 1* makes us question the purpose of the experiment unfolding on the stage. George Berkeley, unlike Geulincx, discerns a clear purpose in the natural world, which can be discovered by any thinking man. In another passage summarised by Beckett from the *History of Philosophy*, Windelband writes:

> The reality of bodies consists, therefore, in this, that their ideas are communicated by God to finite spirits, and the order of succession in which God habitually does this we call *laws of Nature*… And finally, since the actual corporeal world is thus changed into a system of ideas willed by God, the purposiveness which its arrangement and the order of its changes exhibit gives rise to no further problem.[290]

According to this reading of Berkeley the world has a purpose, expressed through the laws of nature. In *Alciphron* Berkeley goes as far as claiming that "God speaks to man in

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[289] Geulincx 84.

[290] Windelband 470. Beckett summarised this passage in TCD MS 10967 196r-196v.

the same clear and sensible manner as one man doth to another"[291] using the language of visual images through which "we are taught and admonished what to shun, and what to pursue; and are directed how to regulate our motions, and how to act with respect to things distant from us, as well in time as place".[292] For Berkeley, God's directions are constantly active in guiding our steps in the conduct of daily life and thus his philosophy is a great safeguard against theism. Although it is extremely unlikely that Beckett ever read *Alciphron*, it is helpful in understanding some of the ways in which arguments from Berkeley's earlier work can be developed.

The mysterious agency offering and then withdrawing comfort from the protagonist in *Act without Words 1* also directs the behaviour of the man by enticing him to find relief by changing his position, climbing on cubes, etc. However, unlike Berkeley's benevolent God, this entity is clearly malevolent, and its directions only mislead the protagonist. Instead of guiding him towards relief from the heat, it only brings him frustration and futility. Yet again, Beckett renders Berkeley's philosophical statements in a paranoid manner. The God who observes man and helps him negotiate his world turns into a frightening pursuer who maliciously offers false hopes in order to add misery to an already deplorable situation.

Perceiving the Other, Perceiving the Self

The paranoid aspect of *esse est percipi* and God's involvement in human life are also pervasive in Beckett's theatre which abounds in unbearable looks and skewed vision, particularly in the earlier plays. Beckett's characters often refer to the other's gaze, sometimes desiring and sometimes dreading it.[293] The need of Estragon and Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot* to be perceived has already been researched in connection with

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[291] George Berkeley, "Alciphron," *Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher in Focus*, ed. David Berman (London: Routledge, 1993) 91.

[292] Berkeley, Alciphron 92.

[293] Knowlson relates Beckett's images of seeing to 17th-century Dutch painting and especially Jan Vermeer. See James Knowlson, "Beckett and Seventeenth-Century Dutch and Flemish Art," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui. Where Never Before: Beckett's Poetics of Elsewhere/ La poétique de l'ailleurs*, eds. Sjef Houppermans, et al. (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2009) 37-8.

Berkeley,[294] especially since Lucky's speech in the English version of the play mentions the philosopher by name (43). At the end of Act I Vladimir asks the boy twice if he observes him, first if he heard and then if he saw him (50), and demands that Estragon look at him when they meet at the beginning of act II (54). Later in the play, it is Estragon who wonders if God sees him (71). Beckett also explores the meta-theatrical aspect of perception, since the players on stage exist only for the sake of the audience. When Vladimir and Estragon look out to the audience, they describe the theatre as a charnel house and the spectators as skeletons and corpses, a spectacle from which the two vagabonds cannot turn away (60). Didi and Gogo need each other, therefore if one of them commits suicide, the other will be left alone. In a roundabout way, their mutual perception keeps them in being, similar to the inability of the protagonist of *Film* to disappear from being because he is perceiving himself. Yet again, it should be noted that Beckett wilfully neglects Berkeley's theory of spiritual beings in order to reduce the characters to the material existence of their body.

A similar trope can be found in *Happy Days* when Winnie feels that "Someone is looking at me still. [Pause.] Caring for me still. [Pause.] That is what I find so wonderful."[295] Unlike Winnie, who feels herself being watched, Woman 2 in *Play* asks "Is anyone looking at me? Is anyone bothering about me at all?".[296] The Man, on the other hand, seems to desire the light, wondering "Have I lost… the thing you want? Why go out? Why go –" (315). The light, like the eye of the camera in *Film* is felt as a menace by the mere fact of its existence, being watched is experienced as an inquiry. The camera, or the spot light, are neutral, impersonal, described by the Man as "Mere eye. No mind. Opening and shutting on me. Am I as much… Am I as much as… being seen?" (317) Woman 2 in the play finds her situation unbearable as well, wondering what she needs to do in order to make the light abandon her (314).

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[294] See for example Dan Watt 79.

[295] Samuel Beckett, "Happy Days," *Complete Dramatic Works* (London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1990) 160. Also quoted in Watt 85.

[296] Samuel Beckett, "Play," *Complete Dramatic Works* (London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1990) 314.

The role of the spot light in *Play* is more complex however. Whenever it shines on a character it brings it into the perception of the audience. Their being is literally being seen. As described by Anna McMullan, "*Play* self-consciously refers to those operations of sight and judgement essential to the establishment of truth according to logocentric rules… The Light is… associated both with revelation and with judgement."[297] As the characters are revealed to the audience, they speak their lines, often abruptly interrupted when the spot moves on to the next character. This compulsion to act, whether imposed by the light or an attempt by the characters to placate it, can also be seen as a cruel interrogation, so much so that the light was called "an instrument of torture" by Billie Whitelaw.[298] As Steven Connor points out, the spotlight is subject to the same compulsion as the players who are forced to speak: "the effect of the repetition is to reveal that the light is no freer than they are, but is itself forced to repeat the inquisition, having learned nothing, or with no more knowledge than its victims of what has already passed."[299]

As in *Waiting for Godot*, the audience themselves become important observers, as they witness the suffering of the figures and the spot light, played for their entertainment. This situation results in an endless series of observers and observed:

> The audience are therefore crucial to *Play*, for it is they, and they only, who realize what is happening, as the light, identified as scrutineer in the first half of the play, becomes the object of scrutiny the second time through. This transfer of position is not a permanent transfer of power, because the self-consciousness induced by the awareness of repetition may also bring about an embarrassed sense

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[297] Anna McMullan, *Theatre on Trial: Samuel Beckett's Later Drama* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993) 17.

[298] S.E. Gontarski, ed. *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett Vol. IV: The Shorter Plays* (Faber & Faber: London & Grove Press: New York, 1999) xix.

[299] Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory, Text* (Colorado: The Davies Group, 2007) 197. Digital Edition.

in the audience that they themselves are being observed, perhaps by some other audience.[300]

Who is the observer scrutinising the audience? It may be the critic who writes about the play, it may be a camera documenting the performance, or it may be, to adopt a Berkeleyan stance, God who observes all things at all times to guarantee their existence. This latter possibility brings out, yet again, the threatening and dominating nature of Berkeley's divine perception that haunts Beckett's writing.

The Eye that Speaks: Ill Seen Ill Said

In the prose work and late plays, perceiving and being perceived remains a major strand in an exploration of the transition from the visual input to its processing that carries a different emotional quality. Some of the late works consist entirely of description of visual data, such as *Imagination Dead Imagine*[301](orig. French 1965) and *Ping* (orig. French 1966),[302] as well as in the novel *The Lost Ones* (orig. French 1970).[303] Perception plays an important part in the construction of imaginary worlds in these texts, too numerous to be dealt with comprehensively within the scope of this thesis. For the present discussion I will focus on two individual late works - *Ill Seen Ill Said* which configures the issues of the visual image, language, and power in a new way, and *Rockaby* which stages a renunciation of both perception and self-perception. Taken together, these texts convey a different quality of observation as a relation between seer and seen with a spirit of resignation and conciliation.

In the texts discussed so far in this chapter, the pursuing gaze is always silent. If the image is a composite of sense impressions and their interpretation, as Uhlmann writes, then these works are preoccupied with perception only. The Unnamable and the

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[300] Connor 198. McMullan interprets *Play* in a similar vein, see McMullan 22-4.

[301] Samuel Beckett, "Imagination Dead Imagine," *The Complete Short Prose*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995) 170-172.

[302] Samuel Beckett, "Ping," *The Complete Short Prose*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995) 179-180.

[303] Samuel Beckett. "The Lost Ones," *The Complete Short Prose* ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995) 183-199.

characters in *Play* speculate about the nature and intentions behind their interrogation from the point of view of the objects of perception. In *Film* we see through the point of view of the pursuing camera, while it remains invisible to us as it prevents us from seeing the perceiving eye itself. Even when the camera is identified as O, his facial expression remains fixed, inscrutable. In *Ill Seen Ill Said*[304] the technique of seeing through a camera-like point of view is accompanied by a verbal description which often refers to itself, as its gaze pursues an old woman. According to Rabaté, the novel describes an eye encumbered with a speaking voice which doubles it and interferes with the act of seeing:

> Cet oeil qui parle, et qui parle, mal, comme il voit, mal, s'acharne, surveille sans relâche, fouille, guêtte pendant des jours et des nuits, figure un nouvel avatar de la caméra indiscréte et terrifiante de *Film*, mais il se double d'un énonciateur… dont les hésitations, les redoublements, les associations incongrue de mots finissent par créer un comique très particulier.
> [This eye that speaks, and that speaks, badly, of what it sees, badly, striving, surveying without cease, searching, watching day and night, figures a new avatar of the indiscrete and terrifying camera of *Film*, but it is doubled by a speaker… whose hesitations, repetitions, incongruous association of words eventually create a distinctive comedy.] [305]

The encounter with the image in this novel is portrayed as confusing and uncertain for the perceiver. If the visual according to Berkeley is a kind of language, then it is an alien and torturing language:

> "*Esse est percipi*, oui mais *with a vengeance* : tout le malheur d'être adhère à la cornée, envahit la chambre noire de la rétine, et parasite le cerveau de son langage universel déréglé qui ne laisse aucun répit.

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[304] Samuel Beckett, "Ill Seen Ill Said," *Nohow On: Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho* (London: John Calder, 1989)

[305] Rabaté, Berkeley entre Joyce et Beckett 73.

> [*Esse est percipi* with a vengeance: all the misery of being attaches itself to the cornea, invades the dark chamber of the retina, and colonizes the mind with its deranged universal language without respite.]"[306]

As the title indicates, the difficulty in *Ill Seen Ill Said* is twofold – a difficulty to see and a difficulty to say. In the case of the image, the two difficulties are interrelated. The image is not the raw visual data that meets the eye, but a combination of this input with an interpretation as has been discussed above. It is 'ill seen' because there is no ready made interpretation for this image, or, to use Uhlmann's terms, the visual image has not yet been transformed from presentation to representation. This difficulty of interpretation can account for the difficulty in 'saying' the image – a necessarily failed attempt to describe what is difficult for the mind to conceive.

Comparing the novel with *Film*, it is possible to trace a similar structure of a trailing gaze. The eye in *Film* was determined to pursue the protagonist and confront him. The eye of *Ill Seen Ill Said,* on the other hand, seems tormented by the act of seeing, much like O and other Beckett characters who suffer when exposed to the gaze in earlier works. *Ill Seen Ill Said* reveals the vulnerability of the perceiver who encounters an image that becomes unbearable. In his paradigmatic interrogation of the power relations established by the structure of observation, Foucault describes a hierarchy of gazes within the physical architecture of the panopticon. In the panopticon prison, jailers ensconced in a central position watch inmates in cells organised in a cylinder around them. Since the jailers are invisible, the inmates feel constantly watched and consequently internalise the discipline, watching over their own behaviour even in the absence of jailers. The proper function of the panopticon is to dissociate "the see/ being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring [of prison cells], one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without being seen."[307] In Beckett's novel a woman is being 'ill seen', while the narration that accompanies it exposes the seer to the scrutiny of the reader. In the panopticon the observing position of the jailers is accessible to the public who can visit and observe both the inmates and the prison guards, adding a measure of public

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[306] Rabaté, Berkeley entre Joyce et Beckett 73.

[307] Foucault, Discipline and Punish 201-202.

oversight to the workings of the prison. This observation of the observers, often neglected, adds complexity to the gaze of the observer, a complexity which the narration of *Ill Seen Ill Said* exposes. The anonymous narrating voice follows the woman, while readers follow both what it sees, and its attempt to understand what it sees. The decoupling of the roles of seer and seen allows us to understand the process and its implications.

Crucially, the observers, whether prison guards, narrating voice, or people in general, are affected by their contact with the visual field. In Arsić's reading of Berkeleyan optics, "the disappearance of the labour of mediation between the eye and the visible means that the eye is never distant from what it sees for it always sees by being affected by… the collection of sensations."[308] What the eye sees affects it immediately, thus leaving it vulnerable to the action of the object of vision upon it. The position of the seer is just as dangerous as that of the seen, as the seer in *Ill Seen Ill Said* makes evident:

> What remains for the eye exposed to such conditions? To such vicissitude of hardly there and wholly gone. Why none but to open no more. Till all done. She done. Or left undone. Tenement and unreason. No more unless to rest. In the outward and so-called visible. That daub. Quick again to the brim the old nausea and shut again. On her. Till she be whole. Or abort. Question answered. (80)

Ill Seen Ill Said can be read as looking at the Berkeleyan *esse est percipi* from a new and different angle. The seer and the object of seeing are tied to one another, "She shows herself only to her own. But she has no own. Yes yes she has one. And who has her." (62) The eye seems trapped in the domain of the woman, its field of vision limited to the hut, its occupant, the surrounding zone of stones, and the surrounding pastures. When the woman goes away, there is an interval of waiting until she reappears (64-5). The eye is coerced to see the woman, as if against its will: "Not endurable. Nothing for it but to close the eye for good and see her. Her and the rest. Close it for good and all and see her to death. Unremittent. In the shack." (74) The plight of the eye disturbs the implied power structure between pursuer and pursued, and illustrates how both are trapped in their respective positions, yet without obliterating the distinction between them. This mutual

[308] Arsić 55.

torment can only be resolved in *Ill Seen Ill Said* by exhausting the visible: "Illumination then go again and on return no more trace. On earth's face. Of what was never. And if mishap some left then go again. For good again. So on. Till no more trace. On earth's face." (96)

All Eyes: Rockaby

The late play *Rockaby* (1981),[309] a play published the same year as *Ill Seen Ill Said*, is another elaboration of the theme of self-perception, but this time it is the attitude of the observed that has changed. A figure in a rocking chair appears repeatedly in Beckett's work, associated with contemplation and self-perception in *Murphy*, discussed in Chapter 2, as well as *Film* where the camera manages to confront O when he is relaxing in a rocking chair. *Rockaby* concentrates this motif into a single image – a woman in rocking chair, alone on stage, being rocked mechanically throughout the duration of the play. The figure sitting in a chair in this late play also evokes Murphy who tied himself to a rocking chair in order to come alive in his mind, except that the intentionality of *Murphy* is reversed – Murphy is actively seeking the life of the mind, whereas the woman is sitting passively while the chair is rocking her on its own. Although both sitters die in the armchair, Murphy goes out with a bang in an unintended accident while the unnamed woman is being gently rocked to death with her own consent.

Another echo from *Murphy* appears in the text spoken by the voice in the play.[310] The disembodied voice repeats a very similar text four times, each time introducing a new motif for repetition and permutation. In the second repetition, the new motif specifies that the woman is sitting "at her window… facing other windows" (437). According to Knowlson, the woman in the armchair draws on two biographical sources: "There was the frail figure of his maternal grandmother, 'little Granny," Annie Roe, dressed 'in her best black,' sitting in a rocking chair… [and] Beckett himself sat, often for hours on end,

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[309] Samuel Beckett, "Rockaby," *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1986) 431-442. On the process of composition, see Knowlson, Damned to Fame 582-3.

[310] On the discrepancy between stage presence and voice in Beckett's late theatre as a decentralisation of authority, see McMullan 10-12.

staring at the rows of Santé prison cell windows."[311] The spatial arrangement of a window opening unto other windows also evokes the opening of *Murphy* who lives in "a medium-sized cage of north-western aspect commanding an unbroken view of medium-sized cages of south-eastern aspect." (3) The contemplative Murphy draws the curtain to avoid external sounds and sights which "detained him in the world to which they belonged." (4) The woman in *Rockaby*, on the contrary, is searching for such evidence of external beings, looking "for another… another like herself/ a little like/ another like herself" (437) driven by a Berkeleyan need "to see/ be seen" (439), but the windows are opaque: "all blinds down" (438).[312] The blinds might be drawn because the inhabitants of these houses are unwilling to look out, but they may also carry a more sinister note. In *Krapp's Last Tape* the tape recorder plays Krapp's description of his mother's death in which the moment of her passing away is marked only by the drawing of the blind in her hospital room.[313] In a way, the drawn blinds already pre-figure the death of a woman at the end of the play.

Beckett re-actualises the cliché of the eye as a window into the soul by reversing its direction from eyes to windows. The woman in the chair is seeing "all eyes/ all sides" (435), she is the only one who "let up the blind" (437), but the other windows/ eyes are still blind and do not perceive her. The image of a row of blind eyes, staring back at the woman, resembles the eye of Buster Keaton in *Film* who stares from the screen, unseeing, at the audience. Like the camera in *Film* and the narrator of *Ill Seen Ill Said*, the woman wants to become a pursuing eye, but she can find no object to pursue, there is no O to her E. The eye becomes the site of desire for the other which is also the self at the same time, as McMullan writes: "The desire to perceive the other seems to be the desire for a

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[311] Knowlson, Damned to Fame 583. An early draft of the novel featured a character looking into a hospital; see Ackerley, Demented Particulars 28.

[312] On the motif of blind windows in Beckett and its relation to Leibnizian monads, see Naoya Mori, "Beckett's Windows and the Windowless Self," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui*: *After Beckett/ D'après Beckett*, eds. Anthony Uhlmann, Sjef Houppermans, and Bruno Clément (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004) 357-370.

[313] Samuel Beckett, "Krapp's Last Tape," *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber & Faber, 1990) 220.

reflection of the self, or rather, the desire to recognize the desire of the 'self' in the desire of the other."[314]

The woman, however, could not find an object to direct her gaze at and so she herself becomes an object, both for the audience watching her in the theatre, and for herself. [315] The woman turns her gaze upon herself, sits down in the rocking chair, and gives herself up to self-perception. This is presented on stage through the division of her voice and image. Unlike the man in *Film* she is not frightened by her own perception or tries to evade it, but rather revels in it, asking four times for "More".[316] There is no conflict between perceiver and perceived in this play, creating an atmosphere of resignation and acceptance that rock her gently unto death. In Jane Alison Hale's succinct summary, "the woman of *Rockaby* retreats from the outer world to the sanctuary of her rocking chair, where she descends into the depths of self-perception in an attempt to reach the end of her compulsion to perceive."[317]

In *Ill Seen Ill Said* the compulsion to see ends with the erasure of a trace by exhausting it: "Illumination then go again and on return no more trace. On earth's face. Of what was never. And if mishap some left then go again. For good again. So on." (96) In a similar manner, *Rockaby* repeats a text, each time expanding it with a new motif, until the traces "left" are all exhausted. The refrain "Time she stopped" is reiterated throughout the play, but the 'action' of the play only partially fulfils this statement. The phrase first appears at the beginning of the monologue as the woman is rocking in the chair, listening to her own voice speaking to her (435). Both the rocking and the speaking continue until the end of the play, with several breaks. With each repetition, the woman verbalizes the refrain together with the voice in an increasingly softer tone (434). Each time the woman goes on and asks for more and the spectator can imagine her being rocked on interminably without ever actually stopping, like other Beckett characters who seem unable to die. Only the last repetition that evokes the mother who died in the same

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[314] McMullan 105.

[315] On the role of the audience's gaze in the plays involving a female character, see Connor 200-202.

[316] Beckett, Rockaby 435, 436, 438, 440.

[317] Jane Alison Hale, *The Broken Window: Beckett's Dramatic Perspective* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1987) 135.

chair breaks the pattern and the woman passes away. Significantly, in this final repetition there is a recognition of self-perception reminiscent of the concluding moment of *Film* in an embryonic form: "time she went down/ down the steep stair/ time she went right down was her own other/ own other living soul" (441). Both mother and daughter resign from the world in favour of the rocking chair, but in contrast to the famished eye of the daughter, the mother's eyes are closed:

> rocked
> with closed eyes
> closing eyes
> she so long all eyes
> famished eyes (441)

In the end the daughter closely imitates the mother, not only by sitting in the same chair, but also by renouncing her desire to see:

> saying to the rocker
> rock her off
> stop her eyes
> fuck life
> stop her eyes
> rock her off
> rock her off (442)

Giving oneself up to the rocking of the chair is another image of self-perception – sought after in *Murphy*, rebelled against in *The Unnamable*, dreaded in *Film* and appeasing in *Rockaby*. The woman's repetition of the refrain "time she stopped" clearly marks her desire to be "stopped", which in the context of play would indicate a wish for death. In *Film*, the desire to see keeps the eye open, and the protagonist from disappearing from *percipi*, and hence keeps him alive. The Unnamable also speculates that he might be in a similar inward-looking situation: "Can it be... that one day I simply stayed in" (291) and yet he continues to generate discourse – to stop the motion of the

body is not enough, since self-perception keeps the subject in being. In *Rockaby* the eyes are described as stopped, closely associated with the decision to give up life, as the rocking motion and the voice come to a stop together. The observer of *Ill Seen Ill Said* delights in perceiving and its passion is satisfied at the end of the novel – "Lick chops and Basta… Grace to breath that void. Know happiness." (97) The woman in *Rockaby*, who could find no object to pursue, chose a different path and became the willing object she was looking for, delighting in the self-perception that eases her out of being.

The power of the image, the act of perception and the state of being perceived return again and again in Beckett's writing across all genres and media. These interests closely align with, and reflect on, Berkeley's most central tenets. Even as Beckett deliberately misinterprets them, he is often referring or alluding to Berkeleyan concepts and precepts in these works, making Berkeley's philosophy a source that needs to be considered even in those works that do not mention him by name or obvious allusion. Beckett interprets in an emotional and pessimistic manner philosophical content that was conceived of as neutral, logical arguments. This emotional value transitions across the works discussed here from threat and paranoia to attachment and reconciliation. Like Uhlmann's philosphical images which generate whole systems of thought, Beckett may be said to repeatedly turn to the relation of perception in order to create works of art that can never quite exhaust it.

6: Blind Seers: Vision and Blindness

The previous chapter was concerned with the theoretical implications of the image as a composite of the intellectual and the sensual. The current chapter looks more closely at the process of seeing and its corollary – not seeing, i.e. blindness. Since various aspects of vision in Beckett's work have been well studied, I will begin by briefly reviewing the existing research. This will be followed by a study of blindness in Beckett and Berkeley – an issue that keeps recurring in both authors. Blindness and impaired vision are a constant motif in Beckett from the blind beggar in Beckett's first written novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*[318] to the very title of *Ill Seen Ill Said*. His work, moreover, features many blind characters, both on stage and in the prose. In Berkeley's writing, blind men are a recurrent trope used to illustrate the nature of vision. My purpose is to show that both Berkeley and Beckett think of blindness in similar ways, as well as argue that the former was a source of inspiration for at least one of the latter's blind men – the unnamed A in *Rough for Theatre 1*.

Beckett and the Visual

In her seminal work, *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett's Dialogue with Art*,[319] Lois Oppenheim argues that Beckett´s imagination was primarily visual. Beckett's interest in art and artists has been well documented, and numerous artists found rich materials in his work to inspire visual creation. Oppenheim distinguishes four paradigmatic aspects of the specular in Beckett's writing: explicit references to art, breaking the relation between self and world, a thematic figuration of the act of seeing, and visual effects.[320] In the following review I will address the first and last aspects, since the previous chapter addressed the thematisation of seeing and being seen, while Chapter 3 of this thesis dealt extensively with Beckett's art of non-relation.

In the preface to his biography of Beckett, Knowlson singles out music and art as areas that had been "least explored" in Beckett criticism and notes that Beckett "was a

[318] Becket, Dream 162.

[319] Oppenheim, Painted Word.

[320] Oppenheim, Painted Word 29-45.

passionate connoisseur of painting and sculpture, and his startling post-modern images appear to have been influenced by his love of the Old Masters: Dürer, Rembrandt, Caravaggio, Mantegna, Antonello, Giorgione, Blake, Jack B. Yeats.".[321] In the years that passed since the biography was published in 1996, Beckett's interest in painting and the visual arts received much more critical attention and the list of painterly influences has been further expanded.[322]

Beckett began to attend galleries regularly during his years at Trinity, and he kept an interest in art throughout his life.[323] When travelling in Germany in 1936-7 he kept a diary where he wrote at length about the paintings he saw. According to Mark Nixon, "The descriptive detail and the sheer volume of notes that Beckett took on the paintings he saw in German art galleries testify to his passionate interest in the visual arts, an interest that extended to sculpture and architecture."[324] Beckett also took a keen interest in, and formed close friendships with, several contemporary artists, most notably Jack B. Yeats, Bram van Velde, Henry Hayden and Avigdor Arikha.[325] Later in life he was generous with permissions for artists to illustrate his work.[326]

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[321] Knowlson, Damned to Fame 21.

[322] See for example, Raymond Federman's analysis of Beckett's landscapes as a gradual progression of artistic schools from Surrealism and Cubism to Abstract Minimalism in the late texts: Raymond Federman, "The Imaginary Museum of Samuel Beckett," *Symplokē* 10: 1/2 (2002): 153-172. Joanne Shaw has studied Beckett's use of lighting effects of 17th-century Dutch painting in the late prose: see Joanne Shaw, "Light and Darkness in Elsheimer, Caravaggio, Rembrandt and Beckett," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui: Early Modern Beckett*, eds. Jürgen Siess, Matthijs Engelberts and Angela Moorjani (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2011) 220-231.

[323] Knowlson, Damned to Fame 71-2. See also Knowlson, Beckett and Seventeenth-Century Art 27-29.

[324] Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936–1937* (London & New York: Continuum, 2011) 133.

[325] See David Lloyd, "'Siege Laid Again': Arikha's Gaze, Beckett's Painted Stage," *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014) 25-43.

[326] See Oppenheim, The Painted Word 157-189, and Breon, for a catalogue of Livres d'Artist. This willingness should be contrasted with Beckett's reservations about rendering his work in different media; see The Grove Companion 38.

One of the most remarkable 'painterly' effects of Beckett's work is his use of colours on page and on stage. It is important to note that colours were also central to 18th-century discussions of vision and optics. Early modern philosophy took it for granted that light and colours were the proper objects of sight, inaccessible to any other sense. For example, Simon Ockley, who translated the 12th-century Muslim philosopher Ibn Tufayl into English in 1708,[327] was outraged by the suggestion that a blind man will be able to understand the nature of light and colour, writing that "'tis very improper, because 'tis utterly impossible to give a Man that is born Blind, the least notion or idea of Light or Colours."[328] Berkeley concurs that colour is the most basic unit of information that can be absorbed by our sense of vision – "By sight I have the ideas of light and colours with their different degrees and variations." (PHK 41 §1) What was considered to be a secondary quality by previous philosophers, is for Berkeley the most certain and necessary attribute of visual ideas, alongside shape:

> I can consider the hand, the eye, the nose, each by itself abstracted or separated from the rest of the body. But then whatever hand or eye I imagine, it must have some particular shape and colour. Likewise the idea of man that I frame to myself, must be either of a white, or a black, or a tawny, a straight, or a crooked, a tall, or a low, or a middle-sized man. (PHK 29)

Oppenheim traces the development of Beckett's use of colour from vibrant variety in the early work to muted colours and grey-scale in the late work.[329] She especially notes

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[327] Ibn Tufail (Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Tufail al-Qasi), *The Improvement of Human Reason Exhibited in the Life of Hai Ebn Yokdhan*, trans. Simon Ockley (London: Edm. Powell, 1708). Ockley's was the third translation into English, preceded by George Keith in 1674 and George Ashwell in 1686. The multiple translations testify to the work's popularity at the time. For a timeline of Ibn Tufayl's influence in the west, see Samar Attar, *The Vital Roots of European Enlightenment: Ibn Tufayl's Influence on Modern Western Thought* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto & Plymouth UK: Lexington Books, 2010) xv-xviii.

[328] Ibn Tufayl, *The Improvement of Human Reason Exhibited in the Life of Hai Ebn Yokdhan*, trans. Simon Oakley (London: Powell, 1708) 9 (translator's note).

[329] Oppenheim, The Painted Word 41-43.

that "black and white, and the grays that lie between, suffice to render the nonvisible visible".[330] The absence of vivid colours is apparent in the late dramatic and prose works. The grey scale of Beckett's drama is the subject of a whole chapter in Enoch Brater's *Ten Ways Of Thinking About Samuel Beckett*. His main argument is that:

> In Beckett's work grey, the colour grey, becomes a vast serial motif in a wide range of genres. Mixtures of black and white, shades of the colour grey bring a variety of tonal values to his writing, and the different properties he assigns to them display a subtle coordination of rich textual and theatrical effects.[331]

The instructions for the staging of *Footfalls* (1976), for example, describe the protagonist May as having "dishevelled grey hair, worn grey wrap hiding feet, trailing", pacing in a "dim" light.[332] The short prose text "Lessness" (1968) describes a similarly grey body in a grey landscape: "Grey sky no cloud no sound no stir earth ash grey sand. Little body same grey as the earth sky ruins only upright. Ash grey all sides earth sky as one all sides endlessness."[333] Fragment number 8 in *Fizzles* (1976) describes how a skull creates a world that is revealed by a grey dawn: "By degrees less dark till final grey or all at once as if switched on grey sand as far as eye can see beneath grey cloudless sky same grey."[334] The grey tones of Beckett's work create a world of shadows, where the figures are hardly distinguishable. This is brought into relief in his TV work, where low resolution and small screens made the plays border on the invisible according to Luz María Sánchez:

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[330] Oppenheim, The Painted Word 42.

[331] Enoch Brater, *Ten Ways Of Thinking About Samuel Beckett: The Falsetto of Reason* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2011) 48.

[332] Samuel Beckett, "Footfalls," *Complete Dramatic Works* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1990) 399.

[333] Samuel Beckett, "Lessness," *The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989* (New York: Grove Press, 1995) 181.

[334] Samuel Beckett, "Fizzles," *The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989* (New York: Grove Press, 1995) 210.

> these productions are in black and white or, to be precise, a range of greys. Their fades to black, fade ups, and cross dissolves, as a result of their duration and the characteristics of lighting, make very difficult the act of 'seeing' these TV productions. Taking into account TV sets between 1965 and 1985, these short pieces that emerge from total blackness to a grey space already speak of the difficulty intrinsic in the act of *trying to see*.[335]

Amidst the general dim and gloom of the late work Beckett also offers glimpses of primary colour. One of his peculiar uses of colour is as a means of differentiating between otherwise indistinguishable figures such as the three women Flo, Vi and Ru in *Come and Go*[336] (1966) or the four dancers in *Quad I*.[337] In both plays, the figures on stage wear a full body costume that hides the personal traits of the actors or dancers – long coats and large hats in *Come and Go* and "Gowns reaching to ground, cowls hiding faces" (452) in *Quad I* (1982). Each figure is dressed in a different colour, thus allowing the audience to distinguish between them, but this distinction is formal rather than personal, reminiscent of Berkeley's view of humanity as "white or black or tawny". The different colours therefore provide visual interest, at the same time as they erase difference and individuality. This erosion of personality is evident in *Quad II* (1982) where the variously coloured costumes which distinguished the figures are replaced by "four identical grey gowns" (454), turning the play into a grey-scale world of reduced visibility.

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[335] Luz María Sánchez, *The Technological Epiphanies of Samuel Beckett: Machines of Inscription and Audiovisual Manipulation*, trans. John Z. Komurki (Mexico: Futura Textos, 2016) 44-5. Emphasis in the original.

[336] Samuel Beckett, "Come and Go," *Complete Dramatic Works* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1990) 351-7.

[337] Samuel Beckett, "Quad," *Complete Dramatic Works* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1990) 449-454.

The Act of Blindness

Beckett's interest in colour and visual effects is complemented by an equally prominent interest in invisibility and blindness, a subject that remains relatively unexplored in his work. For Beckett, visual impairment was a close and personal topic. He never enjoyed good eyesight and according to Knowlson, when he was volunteering with the UN in post-war France, "his eyesight was so bad that some of the unfortunate nurses whom he drove back from Cherbourg or Dieppe at great speed were terrified."[338] Later on in life he had to undergo cataract operations several times.[339] Eye problems and blindness are frequently mentioned in Beckett's work.[340] This section will review some of Beckett's best known blind figures, and the connections between visual impairment and art.

In *Memoirs of the Blind*[341] Jacques Derrida meditates on blindness and painting through a discussion of drawings of blind figures hosted in the Louvre. He proceeds from the hypothesis that "the drawing is blind, if not the draftsman or draftswoman. As such… the operation of drawing has something to do with blindness, would in some way regard blindness".[342] The blindness is later explained as, among others, the result of a paradox of representation – the artist can never see the model and the drawing at the same time:

> at the instant when the point at the point of the hand (of the body proper in general) moves forward upon making contact with the surface, the inscription of the inscribable is not seen… even if the model is presently facing the artist, the *trait* must proceed in the night.[343]

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[338] Knowlson, Damned to Fame 316-7.

[339] Beckett had to be operated in both eyes, see Knowlson, Damned to Fame 512-6.

[340] Dan Watt also observes in passing that blindness is also frequently mentioned in Berkeley, see Watt 80.

[341] Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Nass (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

[342] Derrida 2.

[343] Derrida 45.

The artist, like the blind man, must draw on memory and imagination in order to represent the world, even if for the brief moment in which the eyes move from the model to the paper. The artist can either look at the model to be painted, or at the page on which it is drawn, but not at both at the same time, forcing a choice between blindness to reality and blindness to the work of art.

This intimate connection between drawing, the art of visual representation, and blindness can be assimilated to a certain conception of the artist. The figure of the blind poet, from Homer to Milton and beyond, was influential in propagating the idea that blindness is compensated by a sort of inner vision. The extinction of light in this perspective, reveals a hidden truth that lies beyond the phenomenal world, and thus "perhaps the Chaos and Darkness which were antithetical to [Milton's] Heaven were truer representations of the universe" than his youthful dreams of a new political order. [344] In Milton's case, inner vision is gained at the price of disappointment and the discovery of a bleak truth, themes that resonate with Beckett's depictions of the artistic creations of the blind in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*.

Angela Moorjani evokes inner vision when she writes about blind characters in Beckett as "the blind half pictured as an ironic image of the artist (looking inward)".[345] She observes that Pozzo who turns blind in the second act of *Waiting for Godot* and Hamm, the blind protagonist of *Endgame* both compose texts of a literary nature. The image of these blind men as artists can be seen as directly parodic rather than discreetly ironic - both Pozzo's and Hamm's so-called poetic production is hackneyed and undercut by the speaker's prosaic turn of mind and plain viciousness. Katharine Worth describes one of Pozzo's speeches as "a dismal sample of his powers, creaking between the utterly prosaic and an affected lyricism."[346] In a letter to Schneider Beckett explains that Pozzo

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[344] Edward Larrissy, *The Blind and Blindness in Literature of the Romantic Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) 12-13.

[345] Angela Moorjani, "Peau de chagrin: Beckett and Bion on Looking Not to See," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui: After Beckett/ D'après Beckett*, eds. Jürgen Siess, Matthijs Engelberts and Angela Moorjani (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2004) 30.

[346] Katharine Worth, *Waiting for Godot and Happy Days: Text and Performance* (London: Macmillan Press, 1990) 25.

is plainly insane: "He is a hypomaniac and the only way to play him is to play him mad."[347] Pozzo's mad oscillation between the poetic and the prosaic is evident when he launches into the twilight speech Worth refers to, by inviting his audience to look at the sky with him:

> [*He looks at the sky*.] Look. [*All look at the sky except* LUCKY *who is dozing off again*, POZZO *jerks the rope*.] Will you look at the sky, pig! [LUCKY *looks at the sky*.] Good, that's enough. [*They stop looking at the sky*.] What is there so extraordinary about it? Qua sky. It is pale and luminous like any sky at this hour of the day. [*Pause*.] In these latitudes. [*Pause*.] (37)

Pozzo's invitation to look at the sky plays off the cliché of the poetic description of the beauty of the twilight and nature in general. He undermines this cliché by asking that his audience look at the sky directly which would make the description superfluous. This observation is performed mechanically for a limited amount of time and results in a generality that annuls the value of looking at the sky at that moment. Pozzo's attitude towards the sky is more akin to science than to poetry, for if the sky is typical for the latitude, what is the benefit of observing it on this specific day? Furthermore, Pozzo's coarse treatment of Lucky undercuts any presumption to refined feelings.

In *Endgame*, Hamm gives an equally non-convincing performance as regards poetical production, albeit in a different manner. According to Katherine Weiss:

> The audience sees Hamm acting the tyrant throughout even to the point of insisting that all listen to him while he tells a story that he has been constructing, presumably, for some time… He is not only an author but also, as his name suggests, he is a ham actor; his text as well as his performance of it are overdone.[348]

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[347] Quoted in Paul Lawley, *Waiting for Godot: Character Studies* (London & New York: Bloomsday, 2008) 92.

[348] Katherine Weiss, *The Plays of Samuel Beckett* (London: Methuen Drama, 2012) 26.

In the "Three Dialogues" Beckett equates the scrutiny of inner feelings with depictions of the external world, showing no preference for looking inwards over looking outwards, as discussed in Chapter 3. Pozzo describes the outside world in a mechanical and careless manner, making his subsequent blindness seem like an expression of his attitude towards the world. Hamm is blind from the beginning of the play, so we have no knowledge of his attitude while still sighted, but it appears that losing his eyesight has brought him no insight. As Daniel Albright observes about *Endgame*: "Hamm is a sour blind Prospero, his staff broken, his book drowned, a Prospero of dead imagination."[349]

The Moral Blind Spot

One of the consistent aspects of Beckett's representation of blind persons is the power they yield over their fellow human beings, as Pozzo and Hamm do. As early as *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, Belacqua is watching a blind man begging in the street:

> Across the way, under the arcades of the Bank, the blind paralytic was in his place, he was well tucked up in his coverings, he was eating his dinner like any working man. A friend, not even a friend, a hireling, would come for him at the appointed hour and wheel him home through the dark streets. He would be put to bed. He would be called for punctually and wheeled gently, for he was a power in the Coombe.[350]

The blind beggar in this early novel shares many characteristics with blind characters in Beckett's later writings. Despite his physical disabilities – the man is both blind and crippled – he is "a power" in the neighbourhood, to be feared rather than pitied. He earns his own living by begging, and even has enough money to afford to pay an assistant to get him to and from his place of work. We find a similar arrangement with an aide in *All that Fall* where blind Dan Rooney, who earns his living by doing unspecified work in an

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[349] Daniel Albright, "Beckett's Recent Activities: The Liveliness of Dead Imagination," *Essays for Richard Ellmann: Omnium Gatherum* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982) 382.

[350] Becket, Dream 162.

office, pays a young boy to help him get to and from the train station, so he can travel to the city.[351] As Moorjani pointed out, blind men in Beckett's work are instead often accompanied by a younger aid:

> Many generational pairs are split into one blind and one seeing party, as in Gall Senior and Junior, Pozzo and Lucky, Hamm and Clov, Dan and Jerry, with the blind half pictured as an ironic image of the artist (looking inward) while acting out an imperious form of neediness and dependence on the seeing half (looking outwards).[352]

These blind men and their helpers form pseudo-couples that are inter-dependent on each other. The blind depend on the assistance of the sighted aides, and in return they share some of their material wealth with them in the form of salary or food. This relation of mutual dependence is highlighted in *Watt* (pub. 1953) where it is the only indication that Gall Senior is, in fact, blind:

> They were two, and they stood, arm in arm, in this way, because the father was blind, like so many members of his profession. For if the father had not been blind, then he would not have needed his son to hold his arm, and guide him on his rounds, no, but he would have set his son free, to go about his own business. So Watt supposed, though there was nothing in the father's face to show that he was blind, nor in his attitude either, except that he leaned on his son in a way expressive of a great need of support.[353]

It is important to note that in all these couples, the blind man is the partner who has money and power, whether being able to earn it like the older Mr. Gall in *Watt* and blind

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[351] Samuel Beckett, "All that Fall," *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1990) 188.

[352] Moorjani, Peau de chagrin 25-38.

[353] Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012) 71-72. Dirk van Hulle and Mark Nixon point to King Lear as a source for these characters; see van Hulle and Nixon 9.

Dan, or possessing wealth from an unknown source as Pozzo or Hamm. Despite their physical disability, Beckett's blind men can be seen as the privileged partner in these relationships.

The blind men in *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*[354] and *All that Fall* are all lacking in empathy and moral sense despite, or maybe because, of their disabilities. From the experience of their own limitations, we might expect them to show empathy towards other people in need, but instead they exhibit a marked lack of compassion. Blind Dan in *All that Fall* is particularly imperious and vicious, especially towards children. The radio play suggests that he may have pushed a child off the train to its death, or at least contemplated killing a child, as he confesses to his wife: "Did you ever wish to kill a child? [Pause.] Nip some young doom in the bud. [Pause.] Many a time at night, in winter, on the black road home, I nearly attacked the boy."[355] Dan's dubious morality is questioned in the *Grove Companion*: "Does blind Dan fantasize about nipping "some young doom in the bud," or was he involved in the child's having "fallen" from the train?"[356] Mr. Rooney not only admits that he thought of killing a child, but this murderous desire is so strong it is difficult for him to keep it in check, even while he is being led by the boy on whom he depends in order to reach his home. Whether the child's death on the train journey was Dan's doing or not, he comes across as a threatening figure rather than a pitiful invalid.

In *Endgame*, similarly, Hamm treats his aging father as a nuisance:

> NAGG: Me pap!
> HAMM: Accursed progenitor!
> NAGG: Me pap!

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[354] Samuel Beckett, "Endgame," *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1990) 89-134.

[355] Beckett, All that Fall 191.

[356] The Grove Companion 50.

> HAMM: The old folks at home! No decency left! Guzzle, guzzle, that's all they think of.[357]

Instead of caring for his ageing and crippled father, Hamm begrudges him the food that keeps him alive. Throughout the play Hamm treats the other characters on stage and in his story with obvious disdain and often, sadism.[358] Hamm, like Tiriel the eponymous hero of William Blake's poem,[359] has mistreated his children and is now left, old and blind, to wander the world, figuratively speaking, where he encounters his senile parents. Tiriel, an "early personification of tyranny",[360] fails to see that the laws he tried to impose on his children were unsuited for their needs and incited them rebellion. Like Hamm, he is blind to the way his actions might affect other people. Seán Kennedy has suggested that Hamm's refusal to assist the peasants dying of hunger may be viewed as a figurative reference to the Protestant Ascendancy and a critique of the "betrayal of W. B. Yeasts's suppression of the darker aspects of the Ascendancy's Irish history, in particular the Irish Famine of 1845-1852".[361] This refusal to acknowledge past crimes is another kind of self-imposed blindness that testifies to an unethical position.

In Western culture the figure of a blind man is often associated with ethical deficiency. One of the foundational sources for this conception is alluded to in *All that Fall* when Mr Rooney asks Mrs. Rooney: "Are you in a condition to lead me? [*Pause*.]

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[357] Beckett, Endgame 97.

[358] In an early version of the play Hamm treats Clov even worse than in the final text, forcing him to crawl; see Mary Bryden, "The Sacrificial Victim of Beckett's 'Endgame'," *Literature and Theology* 1:2 (1990): 219-225.

[359] William Blake, "Tiriel," *Blake: The Complete Poems*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (London and New York: Routledge: 2014) 79-99.

[360] Larissey 2. See Larissey 70-77 for an interpretation of Tiriel and his father, Har, as failed law-givers.

[361] Seán Kennedy, "Edmund Spencer, Famine Memory and the Discontents of Humanism in *Endgame*," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui: Early Modern Beckett*, eds. Jürgen Siess, Matthijs Engelberts and Angela Moorjani (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2012) 105. For a different reading of *Endgame* as dramatizing post-colonial relations, see Nels C. Pearson, "'Outside of Here It's Death': Co-Dependency and the Ghosts of Decolonization in Beckett's 'Endgame'," *ELH* 68:1 (2001): 215-239.

We shall fall into the ditch."[362] The warning evokes the biblical condemnation of the Pharisees: "And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?" (Luke 6: 39, King James version). Derrida comments that in the New Testament, "It is always the other who did not yet see…Here is a symbol: the blindfolded synagogue. The Pharisees… are blind. They see nothing because they look outside, only at the outside."[363] Blindness is thus being treated as the result of a moral decision, an affliction that one brings on oneself by refusing to see things from the point of view of the believers.

In a famous painting by Pieter Brueghel the Elder, *The Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind*, the biblical allegory is given literal interpretation. It depicts the allegorical figure of the blind man as a series of realistic blind individuals suffering from diverse afflictions, concretising the parable and tying moral values to physical disability, but at the same introducing ambiguity and realism into the biblical parable.[364] According to Knowlson, the painting is "recreated in the second act [of *Waiting for Godot*] (with reduced numbers in Beckett's play) by Pozzo following his guide, Lucky, on a shorter lead than in the first act."[365] Mrs. Rooney similarly takes the allegory literally, adding a typical sexual innuendo in reaction to the threat of falling into a ditch: "Oh, Dan! It will be like old times!"[366]

The series of vicious blind men in Beckett's work comes to an end with blind Dan and the blind beggar A in *Rough for Theatre I*, a play that will be discussed later in this chapter. Blind characters as such do not appear in subsequent works, but the interest in visual impairment persists. It is not always clear whether the persons described are sighted or not. For example, in *The Lost Ones* the environmental conditions within the cylinder in which a group of people live affect their ability to see. The narrator wonders

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[362] Beckett, All that Fall 189.

[363] Derrida 18.

[364] Each of the six figures in the painting is suffering from a different medical condition that causes blindness which is depicted in a realistic manner. See Rose-Marie Hagen and Rainer Hagen, *What Great Paintings Say: Vol. 2* (Köln: Taschen, 2003) 191.

[365] Knowlson, Damned to Fame 539.

[366] Beckett, All that Fall 189.

about the "Consequences of this light for the searching eye. Consequences for the eye which having ceased to search" (183) and later on the narrator explains that the light "not only dims but blurs into the bargain." (192). This makes the sense of vision much less useful, even if it was not affected by the extreme conditions of the cylinder resulting in "nothing short of blindness" (196). For those who search for relatives or friends "The gloom and press make recognition difficult." (184) Inside the tunnels, they "crawl blindly" and when it comes to the vanquished who gave up the search "it would be more correct to speak of the blind and leave it at that." (192) The visual difficulties of the searchers within the cylinder result from an environment which affects their eyes on the one hand, and obstructs vision on the other. It is a generalised impairment forced on all dwellers, regardless of their own attitudes or social standing. Blindness is no longer a personal marker, but a limitation of the world. The blind characters in the plays discussed above may be seen as allegories of moral deficiency, but the blindness of the cylinder dwellers generalises the disability to the conditions of existence itself.

A similar situation appears in fragment no. 1 in *Fizzles*, which describes a man trying to find a way out of a dark maze. The absence of light is so constant and inviolable that he gives up any attempt to use his sense of sight:

> Do his eyes, after such long exposure to the gloom, begin to pierce it? No, and this is one of the reasons why he shuts them more and more, more and more often and for ever longer spells. For his concern is increasingly to spare himself needless fatigue, such as that come of staring before him, and even all about him, hour after hour, day after day, and never seeing a thing.[367]

The dark environment imposes blindness, yet the man is criticised for giving in to the gloom: "but perhaps he was wrong not to persist, in his efforts to pierce the gloom… The moon may appear, framed at the end of the vista, and he in no state to rejoice or quicken his step".[368] In this more complex scenario, blindness is both a condition of existence and a personal choice, since the pressure of the environment influences his will over time.

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[367] Beckett, Fizzles 200.

[368] Beckett, Fizzles 200-201.

There is no indication that the situation will change in the future, but the man can still choose to keep his eyes open, if only for the sake of keeping hope alive.

The Light of Enlightenment

For Berkeley and early modern philosophers in general, sight was not only a physical ability or an allegory of morality, but first and foremost a way of perceiving and understanding the world. The following section will discuss the primacy of vision in Berkeley's time, and Berkeley's nuanced position towards it. Unlike most of the discussions in this thesis, there is no direct evidence to suggest that Beckett was familiar with the details of Berkeley's theory of vision. There are no reading marks in the work *Towards a New Theory of Vision* included in the volume of Berkeley's works left in Beckett's library at the time of his death. Nevertheless, Berkeley discusses the main tenets of his theory of vision in his other works, including all three works read by Beckett – *The Commonplace Book*, *Principles of Human Knowledge* and *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*. Beckett was therefore familiar with the outline of Berkeley's theory. Given the importance and originality of Berkeley's philosophy of vision, a comparison with Beckett's attitude to the subject will be valuable since it involves similarities in outlook even in the absence of direct influence.

D. A. Caeton states that in the Enlightenment period "blindness became fetishised in debates among both rationalists and sensualists."[369] Fetishisation is made apparent in the emergence of vision, after Descartes, as a key metaphor to describe human understanding. This emphasis on vision is often termed 'oculocentrism'. In his seminal 1993 study, *Downcast Eyes : The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-century French Thought*, Martin Jay argues that:

> Descartes may thus not only be responsible for providing a philosophical justification for the modern epistemological habit of "seeing" ideas in the mind, but may also have been the founder of the speculative tradition of identitarian reflexivity, in which the subject is certain only of its mirror image. In addition, he

[369] D. A. Caeton, "Blindness," *Keywords for Disability Studies*, eds. Rachel Adams et al. (New York & London: New York University Press, 2015) 109.

> is also often seen as legitimating a mode of scientific investigation through visual observation of evidence (from the Latin videre), which could lead in a decidedly empirical direction.[370]

The privilege of vision in both idealist contemplation and empirical data dominated philosophy in the 17th and 18th centuries, and justifies a literal application of the term the 'age of enlightenment'. Jay shows the central role played by light and visibility and contrasts it with a critique of visual metaphors in 20th-century French thought, which could have been discerned in Derrida's choice to focus on drawings of the blind in the essay discussed above.

The centrality of vision goes hand in hand with a privileging of the sense of sight, as explained by James Hill:

> Generally, philosophical oculocentrism, in Descartes and elsewhere, involves two steps. Firstly, sight is taken to be pre-eminent among the bodily senses. It is treated as the peculiar sense of knowing when compared with the other four senses. In particular, it is thought to be superior to touch — a vaguely-defined sense modality which… often includes such things as the awareness of our own posture and of our bodily movement. Secondly, with the pre-eminence of vision established, philosophers are then led to employ visual metaphors in making sense of the higher cognitive faculties, particularly of the intellect itself.[371]

While the primacy of vision in Descartes and other early modern philosophers is uncontested, some qualifications must be made with regards to this broad generalisation. In *Blindness and Enlightenment*, Kate E. Tunstall proposes that the reading of the 18th-century oculocentrism by Jay is missing the important literary and philosophical

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[370] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-century French Thought* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1993) 70-71.

[371] James Hill, "Berkeley against the 'Despotism of the eye," unpublished manuscript.

preoccupation with blindness and the figure of the blind man at the time.[372] This concurs with Foucault who identified "two great mythical experiences on which the philosophy of the eighteenth-century had wished to base its beginning: the foreign spectator in an unknown country, and the man born blind restored to light."[373] Sudden vision serves as a metaphor for the discovery of hitherto unknown truth, and the blind man who regains sight was viewed like a child learning a new lesson, or a scientist making a discovery. The state of blindness was regarded as a state of ignorance which should be overcome in order to reach the truth without preconceptions.[374] Tunstall's discussion of blindness can therefore be understood as adding nuance to Jay's basic argument, rather than contradicting it.

Another important reservation about oculocentrism in the 18th-century is that Cartesian optics were not universally accepted. Most notably, George Berkeley's theory of vision stands out in its insistence on touch as a necessary sense that allows us to understand visual input, as discussed in the previous chapter. Our understanding of visual data necessitates the input from the sense of touch to make sense for our practical purposes. Atherton adds that the basis for Berkeley's theory of vision is "that for each sense organ, there is a range of sensations we become aware of by virtue of possessing that sense organ"[375] so none of the senses have an advantage over any other. The result is a reduction in the content of the sense of sight, since it is limited to light and colours only and is thus significantly more restricted in comparison with Cartesian optics where sight covers all spatial features. For Berkeley, the combination of coloured blotches can only be understood as objects and distances when we learn to correlate them with our past experience of touching other objects after advancing a certain distance before reaching

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[372] Kate E. Tunstall, *Blindness and Enlightenment: An Essay with a New Translation of Diderot's 'Letter on the Blind' (1749) and a Translation of La Mothe le Vayer's 'Of a Man-Born-Blind' (1653)* (New York & London: Continuum, 2011) 14.

[373] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2003) 65.

[374] Foucault, Birth of the Clinic 64-5.

[375] Margaret Atherton, "How to Write the History of Vision," *Sites of Vision: The Discursive Construction of Sight in the History of Philosophy*, ed. David Michael Levin (Cambridge MA and London: The MIT Press, 1997) 151.

them – "We learn to see distance by associating our kinesthetic sense of distance with small and faint colour blobs, because we have learned that when we see something small and faint, it will take a good time to get there."[376] In Berkeley's account of vision, therefore, what we perceive by sight is far less important and autonomous than what was assumed by Descartes, and furthermore it requires additional input from other senses in order to be understood.

Berkeley's theory of vision, then, treats sight as one sense among others, but still accords it usefulness and importance. This is made apparent in Berkeley's description of a seeing man in a land of the blind in *Alciphron*. The story appears in the Fourth Dialogue at a point when Euphranor is describing sight as divine language. Euphranor, another mouthpiece for Berkeley's philosophical ideas, explains that visual input is God's direct communication which helps us find our way in the world, as already mentioned in the previous chapter. His opponent, the eponymous Alciphron, objects that we do not find sight such a miraculous faculty that induces a sense of wonder in us. Euphranor then uses the story of a seeing man among a nation of the blind in order to convey the wonder of sight through a comparison with people who do not possess it:

> But let us suppose a nation of men blind from their infancy, among whom a stranger arrives, the only man who can see in all the country; let us suppose this stranger travelling with some of the natives, and that one while he foretells to them that, in case they walk straight forward, in half an hour they shall meet men or cattle, or come to a house; that, if they turn to the right and proceed, they shall in a few minutes be in danger of falling down a precipice; that, shaping their course to the left, they will in such a time arrive at a river, a wood, or a mountain. What think you? Must they not be infinitely surprised that one who had never been in their country before should know it so much better than themselves? And would not those predictions seem to them as unaccountable and incredible as prophecy…?[377]

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[376] Atherton, How to Write the History of Vision 153.

[377] Berkeley, Alciphron 103.

According to Euphranor, we are so used to the ability to predict what objects we will encounter if we walk forward, or foresee possible negative consequences if we move in a another direction that we never appreciate this almost miraculous ability. A nation of blind men, according to this reasoning, would react with amazement when encountering such ability for the first time, especially if they were not previously aware of its existence. In this account, the sense of vision is at once understood and appreciated by the blind men, who would be amazed by this superior knowledge. Thus, although Berkeley does not go on to tell us that the traveller becomes king, we may assume that these clear advantages would guarantee for him an important position in that country.

In *Alciphron*, then, it is taken for granted that the blind nation will find the sense of sight useful and admirable. At first sight, Euphranor's argument would seem to diverge from Berkeley's previous demotion of sight and its dependence on touch, but in fact it can easily be reconciled with *A New Theory of Vision*. When the sighted stranger arrives at the country, the blind are already familiar with their environment and can verify the truth of his observation by referring to their own experience that is based on the sense of touch, making touch a guarantee for sight. The stranger's vision is superior because he knows in advance what they can find out for themselves only by walking to the object and touching it which will take both time and exertion. Vision thus has the advantage of predicting what will happen, hence its comparison to prophecy, but touch is the sense used to verify its forecasts since, to use Hill's formulation, it has "epistemic priority in our acquaintance with qualities of external, extended things."[378]

King and Knave

There is no indication that Beckett ever read *Alciphron* and it seems highly unlikely that he engaged with it, given that it was considered unimportant for most of the 20th-century. "The generally accepted view," writes Berman in 1993, "is that Alciphron is a work of Christian apologetics that has little significant connection with Berkeley's distinctive philosophy".[379] Nevertheless, studying attitudes towards blindness in Berkeley

[378] Hill, Berkeley against the 'Despotism of the eye'.

[379] David Berman, "Introduction," *Alciphron, or The Minute Philosopher: in Focus* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) 7.

may be instrumental in teasing out the philosophical implications of Beckett's work even in the absence of direct engagement. This section will examine the power relations between sighted and blind characters in Beckett from the point of view of cognitive superiority, as expressed in the proverb 'in the land of the blind the one-eyed man is King'.

The proverb was collected in *The Adages*, a collection of proverbs from Greek and Latin compiled by Desiderius Erasmus and published in 1500, and conveys a similar situation to Berkeley's blind nation. According to the modern editor of a selection from the book, the collection was highly successful: "in the early sixteenth century, when good Latin style had a social important and could actually get you a job, the *Adages* became a best-seller".[380] The proverb was originally coined to denigrate the one-eyed man who only seems to have superb vision because he is compared with people who have no vision at all, just as the blind nation admires the traveller. This encounter between a nation of blind people and a sighted person can be seen as a thought experiment in the form of a narrative that can be picked up and developed in literary works. The experiment is premised on the existence of a nation of people who had no sight from infancy and have never encountered sighted persons before. In spite of this limitation, we must assume that they to survive somehow and develop their own culture, as well as gain adequate knowledge of their land in order to compare it with the observations of the stranger. To all intents and purposes, then, sight for this blind nation is redundant. It can be argued that the self-sufficiency of the blind is a necessary narrative device that serves only as a contrast to the abilities of the sighted person. Still, it falls in line with the tendency in Berkeley to assume that blind people are not helpless creatures with no knowledge of their environment.

An illustration of a similar encounter that takes lays more emphasis on the self-sufficiency of the blind than Berkeley's parable can in fact be found in a 1904 story called "The Country of the Blind" by H.G. Wells which imagines what it would be like for a seeing man to encounter a society of blind people who have adjusted their habits

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[380] Desiderius Erasmus, *The Adages of Erasmus: Selected by William Barker* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2001) ix.

and material culture to their perceptual abilities. In the story, a lost traveller finds his way info a hidden valley where he discovers a prosperous village of people who have been blind for generations. In contrast to his initial expectation of becoming King, he finds that the wise elders of the village "would believe and understand nothing whatever he told them [about vision], a thing quite outside his expectation. They would not even understand many of his words."[381] In a reversal of roles, the blind men consider the traveller to have limited cognitive ability because they treat his claims to have an extra sense as an extravagant fantasy.

This story has been read as a parable of social conformism and resistance to new ideas,[382] but it can equally be read as an illustration of strict empiricism, where the elders refuse to acknowledge the traveller's assertions because they can find no match for them in their personal experience. In this perspective, Wells' story can be viewed as an elaboration of Berkeley's thought experiment, adding psychological realism to Euphranor's abstractions. Even further, the elders' attitude uncovers a hidden contradiction within Berkeley's writings. If, as Berkeley insists, people without vision can have no idea of sight since each sense carries a unique and incommensurable type of sensation, how can blind men understand the advantages of vision? If the blind nation has no idea of sight how can it appreciate its utility? In fact, Berkeley seems to be aware of this pitfall and is careful to introduce a prediction that involves a transitory event, i.e. meeting people or cattle which are mobile and therefore their being at a certain place cannot be predicted by knowledge of fixed objects in the landscape and yet can be verified by the blind by going to the place and touching the people. He also emphasises that the traveller knows the land better than the inhabitants even though he has never

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[381] H.G. Wells, *The Country of the Blind and Other Stories* (Auckland, New Zealand: The Floating Press, 2008) 739. Digital Edition.

[382] See J.R. Hammond, *An H.G. Wells Companion* (London & Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1979) 73; and a reading along similar lines that attributes the addition of an optimistic ending in a 1938 version of the story to the advent of modern technology in Cheri Colby Langdell and Tim Langdell, *Coping with Vision Loss: Understanding the Psychological, Social, and Spiritual Effects* (Santa Barbara, Denver and Oxford: Praeger, 2011) 43-4.

visited it before: "What think you? Must they not be infinitely surprised that one who had never been in their country before should know it so much better than themselves?"[383]

The situation of the blind nation in Berkeley's parable is similar to some of Beckett's blind characters. They are empowered and self-reliant but also able to appreciate the advantage of sight. The blind beggar from the Coombe and Dan Rooney require assistance to conduct their daily lives. The situation of Gall senior, Pozzo and Hamm is less certain, but they have enough power, or at least authority, to make sure their sighted helpers will cater for their needs. The position of power occupied by these blind men is similar to that of the blind elders in Wells' story. The blind are the ones laying down the rules in the world of the hidden valley, exactly like Hamm in the isolated shelter of *Endgame* who calls its confined space "the world" (94-5). We could expect Clov, the only character who is capable of both seeing and moving,[384] to be the most powerful figure in the play but instead he is only a servant who looks after the other characters. Hamm, in fact, seems to call him "my dog" (93).

Unlike the blind elders in Wells who deny the existence of sight and cannot find any advantage in it, Hamm acknowledges Clov's superior powers, and uses them to maintain his own life and power - the seeing man in the land of the blind is a slave rather than a king:

> HAMM: How are your eyes?
> CLOV: Bad.
> HAMM: How are your legs?
> CLOV: Bad.
> HAMM: But you can move.
> CLOV: Yes.
> HAMM: [Violently.] Then move! (95)

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[383] Berkeley, Alciphron 103.

[384] These superior capabilities are emphasised in the opening tableau, as Clov walks around the stage looking at the other sleeping figures and out through the windows; see Beckett, Endgame 92-3.

Berkeley's optimistic assumption that cognitive superiority will be appreciated by the blind is disappointed in both Wells and Beckett by exclusive attention to material needs, narrow-mindedness and conservatism. The 'one-eyed man' in the land of the blind discovers that a better understanding of the world does not necessarily give him an advantage over his fellow men.

It is further important to note that Hamm also fantasises about a superior creature who would have an additional sense that will allow it to perceive himself and Clov better than they can themselves, much as a traveller to the land of the blind will have a better knowledge of it than the inhabitants:

> HAMM: We're not beginning to … to … mean something?
> CLOV: Mean something! You and I, mean something! [*Brief laugh*.] Ah that's a good one!
> HAMM: I wonder. [*Pause*.] Imagine if a rational being came back to earth, wouldn't he be liable to get ideas into his head if he observed us long enough. [*Voice of rational being*.] Ah, good, now I see what it is, yes, now I understand what they're at! [CLOV *starts, drops the telescope and begins to scratch his belly with both hands. Normal voice*.] And without going so far as that, we ourselves … [*with emotion*] … we ourselves … at certain moments … [*Vehemently*.] To think perhaps it won't all have been for nothing! (108)

The rational being who would know what Hamm and Clov "mean" is a clever jab at the audience who are struggling to make sense of Beckett's opaque play. At the same time it creates a hierarchy between the being whose superior rationality enables him to understand the supposedly irrational Hamm and Clov, which is structurally similar to the superiority of the sighted man over the blind nation. Clov's ability to see gives him an advantage over the blind Hamm, but both are equally lacking in cognitive powers compared to the 'rational' being. The prospect of such knowledge meets with complete indifference on the part of Clov and is soon forgotten by Hamm as well. The ability to make sense would change nothing in their world. Berkeley's confidence in human knowledge is disappointed and rejected by Beckett, even while using the same tropes.

The Gift of Sight

Religious revelation, sensory power and the ability to conduct oneself in the world come together in Beckett's play *Rough for Theatre 1*, which reworks the trope of the blind man made to see, so central in the Enlightenment discussion of blindness in general and Berkeley in particular. The one-act play was written in the late 1950s and so far received limited critical attention. Knowlson writes that an early version of the play was "probably thematically too close to *Fin de partie* and may well have seemed too personal and sentimental as well."[385] Both plays feature a blind man and a cripple in a post-apocalyptic world and revolve around their relationship. Ackerley and Gontarski judge the final version to suffer from the same weaknesses, contending that the interaction between the blind man and the cripple "was developed more artfully in *Fin de partie*".[386] The similarity between the two plays is certainly conspicuous. A blind man and a cripple feature in both of them, and their interaction generates the dramatic tension. Yet, as I will show, *Rough for Theatre 1* stages a very specific moment in the forming of the relationship between the blind man and the cripple and the play as a whole explores quite different issues to *Endgame*.

Critics have traced the sources of the play to a medieval French farce, through Yeats' *Death of Cuchulain* and *The Cat and the Moon* and J.M. Synge's *The Well of the Saints*.[387] I would like to suggest another, less obvious source of inspiration for Beckett's play, reading it as a dramatization of the Molyneux problem.[388] The problem appears in a philosophical question raised by William Molyneux, founder of the Irish Philosophical Society and the author of the first treatise on dioptrics in English, who was married to a

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[385] Knowlson, Damned to Fame 388.

[386] The Grove Companion 763.

[387] See James Knowlson and John Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull* (London: John Calder, 1979) 229, and Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei, "Broken Bodies: Comic Deformity in the Plays of Samuel Beckett, Kyōgen and Contemporary Japanese Theatre," *Theatre Intercontinental: Forms, Functions, Correspondences,* eds. C. C. Barfoot and Cobi Bordewijk (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993) 97.

[388] I made a similar argument within the context of Irish theatre to the one presented in this section elsewhere; see Einat Adar, "From Irish Philosophy to Irish Theatre: The Blind (Wo)Man Made to See," *Estudios Irlandeses* 12 (2017): 1-11.

blind woman. [389] Molyneux was an admirer of John Locke, to whom he sent this inquiry in 1688:

> a Jocose Problem, that, upon Discourse with several concerning your Book and Notions, I have proposed to Diverse very Ingenious Men, and could hardly ever Meet with One that at first dash would give me the Answer to it, which I think true; till by hearing My Reasons they were Convinced. Tis this. Suppose a Man born blind, and now adult, and taught by his Touch to Distinguish between a Cube and a Sphere (Suppose) of Ivory, nighly of the same Bignes, so as to tel, when he felt One and tother, Which is the Cube which the Sphære. Suppose then, the Cube and Sphære placed on a Table, and the Blind man to be made to see. Quære whether by his sight, before he touchd them, he could now Distinguish and tel which is the Globe which the Cube.[390]

This problem became known as the Molyneux problem, and Berkeley quotes the letter and Locke's answer in his *New Theory of Vision* as part of his discussion of the connection between ideas of sight and touch (47). It also appears in a different form in *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* which Beckett read in its entirety. Beckett even marked one of the arguments in favour of the heterogeneity of sight and touch in *Commonplace Book* of which is similar to the Molyneux problem: "49 2nd. One made to see that had not yet seen his own limbs or anything he touch'd, upon sight of a foot length would know it to be a foot length if tangible foot & visible foot were the same idea, sed falsum id ergo et hoc."[391] The Molyneux problem itself appears on the very next line in Berkeley's text.

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[389] For an intellectual biography of Molyneux and his correspondence with Locke see Thomas Duddy, *A History of Irish Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2002). 68-78. On Molyneux' work in dioptrics, see Peter Abrahams, "When an Eye is Armed with a Telescope: The Dioptrics of William and Samuel Molyneux," *Analytica Chimica Acta* 33 (2007): 229-246.

[390] John Locke, *The Correspondence of John Locke, vol. 4*, E. S. De Beer, ed (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) 651.

[391] Berkeley, Commonplace Book 6.

As already mentioned, the blind man who regains sight was considered by Foucault to be a foundational trope for the Enlightenment. For Foucault, the issue is primarily epistemological, describing the method in which the truth about the world is revealed to a person who has no prior knowledge of it, and therefore no prejudice or pre-conceived ideas that would affect his perception of what she sees directly. This very metaphor, of a man discovering a new truth as a blind person seeing the world for the first time, was itself developed in particular historical contexts and thus carries resonances and associations that make the Molyneux very different from the clean slate it advocates as a guarantee of truth. This is especially important within the Irish context, where, David Berman argues, "The similitude of the blind man… is the root metaphor, as it were of Irish philosophy."[392] In the Irish context the similitude is mostly understood in a religious sense – the relation of the blind man to the visual world stands for the relation of a believer to the Christian mysteries.

According to Berman it is possible to discern a distinct philosophical school in Ireland between the 1690s and 1750s:

> It was born with John Toland, grew with Peter Browne, William King, George Berkeley and Francis Hutcheson, and died with Robert Clayton and Edmund Burke. This tradition was largely autochthonous or indigenous, and it engaged most of the outstanding Irishmen of the time, as well as a host of lesser figures[393]

The blind man trying to identify the light and colours which he is seeing for the first time with the objects he has long known by touch is an epistemological metaphor for the relation between our sense impressions and external reality. In the Irish tradition, however, this epistemological issue was interpreted in a theological context. What to us may seem like a scientific or psychological problem, for the Irish philosophers "turns

[392] Berman, Berkeley and Irish Philosophy 87.

[393] Berman, Berkeley and Irish Philosophy 79.

precisely on the question of representation; and at the core of the dispute lies the issue of our knowledge of God", according to Terry Eagleton. [394]

John Toland's 1696 book *Christianity Not Mysterious* gave, according to Berman, the initial impetus to the Irish philosophical school. Toland argued that since we cannot assign any definite meaning to the Christian mysteries, they can have no sense and cannot be said to exist.[395] He relies on Locke's principle that for a word to have sense it must correspond to a clear idea in the mind, a condition obviously impossible in the case of religious mysteries, for example transubstantiation or the afterlife. This requirement casts a doubt on any religious discourse, since man's finite reason cannot attain the infinite wisdom of God, and thus we can never form a clear and distinct idea of religious matters such as divine grace or the afterlife. The attempt to vindicate the existence of God and the Christian religion against Toland's argument gave rise to a series of direct refutations as well as indirect attempts to provide an account of the foundations of human knowledge that will accommodate a rational proof for religion.

The Molyneux problem crystallises these concerns in the form of a practical question. It also relies on Locke's empiricism to question the limits of human understanding, with the blind man standing for the believer who knows that God and the afterlife exist, but cannot form a rational concept of them. The challenge to religion posed by this problem which arises out of Locke's empiricism may be gauged by comparing the Molyneux problem with a blind man imagined much earlier by the philosopher Ibn Tufayl. Little is known about the life of the influential 12th century thinker and only one of his texts has survived in its entirety – the story of Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān, a child who grew up alone on a desert island. According to the book's latest translator, Lenn Evan Goodman, "His Adam-like position alone on an island, his Promethean role as discoverer of fire, his progress and backsliding, brilliantly experimenting with fire and rashly trying to grasp "a piece of it," show that he is intended to symbolize mankind, for he… must discover

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[394] Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London & New York: Verso, 1995) 50.

[395] Berman, Berkeley and Irish Philosophy 82 ff.

everything newly for himself."[396] In the introduction to the book, Ibn Tufayl describes another man who must learn about his environment – a blind man:

> imagine a child, growing up in a certain city, born blind, but otherwise intelligent and well endowed, with a sound memory and an apt mind. Through his remaining channels of perception he will get to know the people as well as all sorts of animals and objects, and the streets and alleys, houses and markets— eventually well enough to walk through the city without a guide, recognizing at once everyone he meets. But colors, and colors alone, he will know only by descriptive explanations and ostensive definitions. Suppose after he had come this far, his eyesight were restored and he could see. He would walk all through the town finding nothing in contradiction to what he had believed, nor would anything look wrong to him. The colors he encountered would conform to the guidelines that had been sketched out for him. Still there would be two great changes, the second dependent on the first: first the daybreak on a new visual world, and second, his great joy.[397]

Ibn Tufayl's work has been widely read in the 17th-century and was first translated into English in 1674. John Locke was almost certainly acquainted with the work in Latin translation,[398] and it may have been known to Molyneux as well.

The Molyneux problem challenges Ibn Tufayl's confident assumption that a blind man may be made to understand vision through guidance by his sighted peers, the use of his other senses and the application of reason. Molyneux, in other words, questions whether the human mind can gain knowledge of what it cannot directly sense. From this

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[396] Lenn Evan Goodman, "Introduction," *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Tale* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 9.

[397] Ibn Tufayl, *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzān: A Philosophical Tale*, trans. Lenn Evan Goodman (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 97.

[398] G.A. Russell, "The impact of the *Philosophus Autodidactus*: Pocockes, John Locke, and the Society of Friends," *The 'Arabick' Interest of the Natural Philosophers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Leiden, New York & Köln: Brill, 1994) 224-265. The influence of Ibn Tufayl's work on European thought in the 17th and 18th-century is the main subject of Attar, The Vital Roots.

perspective, the cognitive limitation of the blind man with regards to the world becomes a metaphor for the epistemological limitation of any person who seeks the infinite truth of God. What is at stake in the Molyneux problem, within the Irish philosophical context, is the question whether human understanding can achieve knowledge of the divine, a question which Toland would have answered in the negative. Berkeley makes this connection explicit by writing that "allowing that knowledge and wisdom do, in the proper sense of the words, belong to God, and that we have some notion, though infinitely inadequate, of those divine attributes, *yet still more than a man blind from his birth can have of light and colours*."[399] Berkeley thus distinguishes between the theological and the epistemological problems, suggesting that for him the relation between human understanding and the truth of God is more akin to Ibn Tufayl's description of a blind person who can understand the nature of vision to a certain degree even without possessing the actual sense.

Berkeley dissociates himself from the theological implications of the Molyneux problem, even though he is evidently aware of them. Berkeley's own answer to the Molyneux problem is that the blind man will not even understand the question:

> From what hath been premised it is a manifest consequence that a man born blind, being made to see, would at first have no idea of distance by sight; the sun and stars, the remotest objects as well as the nearer, would all seem to be in his eye, or rather in his mind. The objects intromitted by sight would seem to him (as in truth they are) no other than a new set of thoughts or sensations, each whereof is as near to him as the perceptions of pain and pleasure, or the most inward passions of his soul. For our judging objects perceived by sight to be at any distance, or without the mind, is… intirely the effect of experience, which on in those circumstances could not yet have attained to (NTV 186).

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[399] George Berkeley, "The Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained," *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne Vol 1*, eds. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (London, Edinburgh, Paris, Melbourne, Toronto and NewYork: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1949) 254 §6. Emphasis mine.

As discussed in Chapter 5, he argues that our knowledge of distance and form is not achieved through direct perception, but through from the experience of combining visual cues and tactile memory. A man who recently gained sight will thus be literally unable to see a cube and a globe in front of him, perceiving only a coloured plane without depth or distance that he must learn to analyze in order to discern separate objects and relate the different colours to distance, size, and form. This solution maintains the empiricist position that we have no innate knowledge, but must, and can, learn from experience everything there is to know about the world. Berkeley is able to maintain his religious faith and an empiricist position on the Molyneux problem at the same time, thanks to this distinction between the psychological problem of how the mind understands visual input, from the theological question of our knowledge of God.

The distinction, however, raises a new difficulty. If our notion of the divine is closer to its real nature than a blind man's understanding of light an colour, then how was this knowledge acquired? God, like the self, cannot be directly sensed according to Berkeley, and therefore direct perception is an inadequate metaphor to discuss our understanding of God. Instead, he uses the term "notion", without explaining the nature of this special type of knowledge. Hill has reviewed the conflicting positions of Berkeley scholars on the extent and value of his theory of notions, and suggested that the concept amounts to a unique contribution to modern philosophy.[400] In Hill's reading, a notion is a potential rather than a fully formed idea, and thus "the notion of God is natural to us, while also allowing that it is not originally present in our minds nor universal to all minds."[401] Therefore, "The notion of God… requires reason and reflection"[402] which goes against the teachings of mystical practices that pursue an experience that will reveal the nature of God all at once. Inquiring further into Berkeley's doctrine of notions and its theological and philosophical implications goes beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is important to note that in Hill's interpretation, notions are the result of a rational process akin to a scientific or philosophical inquiry.

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[400] James Hill, "The Synthesis of Empiricism and Innatism in Berkeley's Doctrine of Notions," *Berkeley Studies* 21 (2010) 3-15.

[401] Hill, Synthesis 7.

[402] Hill, Synthesis 12.

The interaction between the blind man and the cripple in Beckett's *Rough for Theatre I* reveals similar preoccupation with knowledge and mystical experience. The play evokes a religious context through its references to 20th-century Irish theatre, most notably Yeats' *The Cat and the Moon*[403] and Synge's *The Well of the Saints*.[404] In both plays a saint cures blind characters of their blindness with dubious results. In *The Cat and the Moon* a blind beggar carries a lame beggar on his back all the way to see a Saint who could cure them of their afflictions. As in Beckett's play, the blind man is interested in material things and even questions the utility of gaining his eyesight, since this would put him at a disadvantage in begging (Yeats 308). The lame beggar is more enterprising – he comes up with the idea of going to see the Saint, and is also the more spiritual of the two, speculating that "maybe we'll see the blessed saint this day… and maybe that will be a grander thing than having my two legs" (308). When given a choice between a cure and a blessing, the blind man chooses a cure. The first thing he notices is that the lame beggar was stealing from him, for which he gives him a good beating (310-11). The blind man leaves satisfied but the audience learns that he missed the greater gift, since the lame beggar is also cured after he tells the saint that he is happy to have chosen a blessing (311-2). In Yeats' play the blind man remains blind to the spiritual world even after his eyes have been opened.

The initial situation of the beggars in Yeats' play becomes the goal of B in Beckett's play. The play is set in a post-apocalyptic urban space, where A, a blind beggar, is playing his fiddle on a street corner. B, a cripple "in a wheelchair which he propels by means of a pole" arrives to see where the music is coming from. B's initial impulse to withdraw is checked when it occurs to him that he might join forces with the blind beggar "and live together".[405] B wants to form a pseudo-couple with A, similar to the blind and lame beggars, or Hamm and Clov in *Endgame* who find a way to exist in a way that is

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[403] W.B. Yeats, "The Cat and the Moon," *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats Vol. II: The Plays*, eds. David R. Clark and Rosalind E. Clark (New York: Scribner, 2001) 307-312.

[404] J. M. Synge, *The Well of the Saints*, ed. Nicholas Grene (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America, 1982).

[405] Samuel Beckett, "Rough for Theatre 1," *Complete Dramatic Works* (London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1990) 227.

mutually beneficial, at least to some extent. The crucial difference is that in this play, A and B are not tied by such a bond. B would like to create a bond, but he to do this he will need to convince A.[406] B offers a union couched in a discourse of courtship. He muses they could "live together, till death ensue" (227), asks A whether he thinks that "we could make a match", and later confirms that "If you ask me we were made for each other." (229) A on his part remains unmoved by B's enterprising spirit and only the mention of tinned food elicits a response from him, though even this is not enough to convince him (227). Dramatic tension is thus generated by B's attempt to woe A out of his apathy and form a couple with him.

Unlike the blind beggar in Yeats' play, however, A is not exclusively interested in material things and is asking B for more information about the world around him. A's first question is "How are the trees doing?" (228) Trees are a motif that may suggest nature, regeneration, or even a source of food. But they are also a popular example of a remote object in treatises on optics. Berkeley, for example, writes that "we speak of the magnitude of anything, for instance a tree or a house." (NTV 191) What may seem like a far-fetched suggestion is soon reinforced by the blind man's consequent questions, which are concerned with light: "Is it day or night?", and when the cripple remains non-committal he specifies "But light?" As discussed earlier, light was considered by Berkeley to be the proper object of sight. A confirms that he cannot perceive light and colour by remarking that "It seems to me sometimes I spend the night here, playing and listening" (228), implying he cannot tell light and darkness apart. Later in the play he will ask about the colour of B's wen and "Is there no green anywhere? (232)" A insists on questioning B about what he sees but B is reluctant to respond, and to A's question "But you look about you?", B responds violently "No!" (230) Finally, A says that he was "always" blind (228) an important premise of the Molyneux problem.

A's preoccupation with external appearances calls to mind the blind couple in Synge's *The Well of the Saints*, Mary and Martin Doul who believe that they are extremely beautiful until their eyes are opened by a miracle-performing saint who passes through their village. Similar to Ibn Tufayl's blind man, they think they know everything

[406] On A and B in comparison to other couples in Beckett's plays, see Knowlson and Pilling 229.

about their environment through the descriptions of their fellow-villagers, but they were being deceived. The people of the village take the role of the Cartesian evil demon and lie to the couple about the state of affairs, telling them that they are extremely beautiful when in fact they are old and ugly, a truth that is quickly revealed after they gain their sight. In Beckett's play, A's aesthetic inquisitiveness remains mostly unsatisfied due to B's evasiveness. In Synge's play the Douls are roused from their imaginary dream by being given sight, and they resent the harsh reality that is revealed to them, refusing to let the saint restore their sight after it had deteriorated again.

In Beckett's bleak outlook the basic condition of human existence is ignorance and thus there can be no moment in which truth is revealed, be it the scientific truth of Enlightenment epistemology, a mystical truth of God, or the personal truth about one's partner. And yet, B's offer to serve as A's eyes seems to promise an amelioration in their situation:

> B: …Of course if you wish me to look about me I shall. And if you care to push me about I shall try to describe the scene, as we go along.
> A: You mean you would guide me? I wouldn't get lost any more?
> B: Exactly. I would say, Easy, Billy, we're heading for a great muckheap, turn back and wheel left when I give you the word… I see a round tin over there in the gutter, perhaps it's soup, or baked beans. (230)

This is the first time that A responds favourably to B's suggestions. But there is a difference between B's offer to "describe the scene" and A's utilitarian interpretation of the request that he would "guide" him, which B picks up immediately by describing how he could help A avoid obstacles and find food, an inference that brings to mind Berkeley's blind nation and their wonder at the practical abilities of a sighted man. This transition from aesthetic description to finding one's way in the world echoes Berkeley's theory of vision which focuses mainly on utility.

The attempt by A and B to form a pseudo-couple, however, is presented in the play not only as a practical arrangement, but also as involving a mystical experience:

A: Baked beans! [He gets up, puts down fiddle and bowl on the stool and gropes towards B.] Where are you?

B: Here, dear fellow. [A lays hold of the chair and starts pushing it blindly.] Stop!

A: [Pushing the chair] It's a gift! A gift! (230)

The ejaculation "It's a gift!" conveys A's enthusiasm in terms of a miraculous cure in its evocation of the stock phrase "the gift of sight", reminiscent of the cure of the blind beggar by the Saint in Yeats' *The Cat and the Moon*[407] and the Douls in *The Well of the Saints*.[408] A is still blind, but he is confident that B will serve as his eyes, effectively allowing him to see. The combination of A's ambulatory powers with B's vision creates a compound creature that may be described as a blind man made to see. Beckett dramatizes the premise of the Molyneux Problem in an altered, but still recognizable form. Inevitably, a Beckett play allows for no miracles and the direct result of A's enthusiasm is that B changes his attitude, hitting him with the pole to stop him from madly pushing the wheelchair around. Like the blind man in *The Cat and the Moon* who gains material sight but cannot see the saint, or the Douls in *The Well of the Saints* who choose stay blind by the end of the play, A loses his new ability to see without getting the least benefit from it. The pursuit of knowledge and practical utility implied in the trope of the blind man made to see, together with the aspiration to transcend human knowledge, have failed.

The intrepid B then makes another attempt at forming a union, this time a through a physical contact, by asking A to tuck his foot. Their physical encounter carries sexual overtones with A kneeling before the sitting B and asking him "Is all the rest there?" referring to the amputation of his leg, and B exclaiming "what hands you have!". This second attempt at a union also evokes the concept of grace, when B is so touched by A's willingness to do him a service that he wouldn't let go of his hand , and A musing that he "could stay like that forever, with my head on an old man's knees." (231-2) Once again, A's exaggerated happiness rouses B's temper, partly because he resents A's intensity and partly because he is offended by the insensitive reminder that he only has one knee. This

[407] Yeats, The Cat and the Moon 10.

[408] Synge, 47-49.

is an attempt to establish a connection between the two protagonists who can truly be described as having "some notion, though infinitely inadequate"[409] of each other's thoughts and intentions.

What sets Beckett's play apart from the plays of Yeats and Synge, and from his own *Endgame*, is the complete failure of the attempted union. At the moment of ecstasy when A grabs the chair and endows B with motion, B offers no visual description, only a blow with the pole. The man born blind remains as blind as ever. In return, A does not take B anywhere. In both *The Cat and the Moon* and *The Well of the Saints*, the blind who are granted sight can immediately use their new sense, just as well as seeing people, with one important reservation. The blind beggar in *The Cat and the Moon* is unable to see the saint with whom his lame colleague is conversing. This defect is not due to any problem with his eyes, but to his moral shortcomings. His physical eyes are cured, but his soul remains base. It might be the case that A, who is also primarily interested in material things, also remains blind because he lacks in moral virtue. In this possible reading he would continue the line of vicious old men from the earlier plays. The material interests of A, nonetheless, are much less offensive than the cruelty of Pozzo, Hamm and Dan towards the people around them. The cripple B, on the other hand, is much more imperious and seeks control rather than intimacy with A. The play thus opens a way of viewing blindness in a different way, not as moral deficiency, but simply as impairment. Blindness limits the ability of A to care for himself so that teaming up with another person clearly beneficial for him.

The attempt of the blind man and the cripple to form a union in Beckett, however, requires a coordination and cooperation that they fail to achieve, giving up almost as soon as they attempt to compensate for each other's disability. With more patience and effort they might be able to match their movements, but this requires a process that neither of them seems willing to undertake. The need for a process of learning and adjustment before the blind man can see echoes Berkeley's answer to the Molyneux problem, as well as the potential for a knowledge of God which must be nurtured in order to develop. A and B, like so many other Beckett characters, are just unable to complete this process and

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[409] Berkeley, Theory of Vision Vindicated 254 §6.

perhaps they were "wrong not to persist, in [their] efforts"[410] as Beckett writes about the man who has given up hope of ever seeing again as he wonders about the maze of *Fizzles 1*. A, the last of Beckett's blind men, is a figure of transition between the literally blind of the early prose and plays, and more ambiguous figures whose vision is limited by external circumstances. His affliction resembles the earlier figures, but unlike them he is not seeking power over his fellow men. With him blindness can no longer be seen as an expression of a faulty morality, but rather as a disability that affects his eyes but not necessarily his heart. On the other hand, his inability to join forces with the crippled beggar points to a human deficiency that may be at some distance from the cruelty of earlier blind character, but can still be criticised.

[410] Beckett. Fizzles 200.

Conclusion

Having read Berkeley as a young man, Beckett continuously turned to Berkeley for inspiration and simulation, and the results of this preoccupation encompasses on the one hand most of Berkeley's main philosophical tenets, and Beckett's writing in different genres and media on the other. Combining empirical study of archival materials with theoretical studies and close readings in the present study facilitated a much better understanding of how Beckett used and abused Berkeley's philosophy. Beckett borrowed many ideas from Berkeley over the years – the philosopher's main tenets, the structure of the *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, as well as single metaphors and philosophical images. These borrowings, however, go much beyond simple copying of ideas and situations. Beckett thinks through Berkeley's philosophy about the questions that are important to him personally, including how to face a hostile world, how to create a new art, how to emerge out of an artistic impasse , and the moral responsibility of the individual.

I Read Philonous

Beckett's engagement with Berkeley was considerable both in terms of Beckett's active study and interest in the Irish philosopher, and in the frequent appearance of Berkeleyan themes and tropes in Beckett's work. Using archival materials, it was possible to reconstruct a more accurate timeline of Beckett's introduction to, and reading of, Berkeley than was hitherto available. The common assumption that A. A. Luce must have discussed Berkeley with his young student was shown to be unfounded. In fact, Beckett's interest in Berkeley was awakened in Dublin social and intellectual circles, where patriotic feelings contributed to a small revival of the most eminent Irish philosopher. In 1933 Beckett first read Berkeley's *Commonplace Book*, which was recommended by his acquaintance Joseph Hone. He went on to read *Principles of Human Knowledge* at an uncertain date, and *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* in 1935. Dating these readings is important for any argument regarding Beckett's familiarity with the philosopher, especially in the early work. Beckett's knowledge of Berkeley extended even further than these readings, since he was also familiar with other interpretations of

Berkeley through Windelband's *History of Philosophy* and his reading of other philosophers and writers. The archival materials, in total, point to a consistent interest in the philosopher and a good familiarity with his writings and their contemporary interpretations.

Beckett's early interest in Berkeley is reflected in his work throughout the years. This thesis showed that Berkeley's philosophy is an important source for *Murphy* rather than serving as a passing reference inserted into the novel to display Beckett's erudition. It also discussed *Film* and its script which takes *esse est percipi* as its basic premise. In addition to these works, whose connection to Berkeley is well known, the thesis offered new interpretations of texts that were informed by his philosophy without mentioning his name, especially the theoretical text *Three Dialogues between Samuel Beckett and George Duthuit* whose close resemblance to *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* was previously mentioned but never analysed in depth. The short plays *Rough for Theatre 1* and *Act without Words 1* were also shown to be heavily indebted to Berkeleyan images. *Rough for Theatre 1* enacts the Molyneux problem which Berkeley has treated in length, while *Act without Words 1* Beckett treats a theme drawn directly from Berkeley – the divinity which guides man's steps in the world.

Finally, themes taken from Berkeley appear in many of Beckett's texts even if they do not constitute the main source. Chapter 4 looked at the stylistic change in Beckett's post-war writings to discern both a general anti-mimetic influence and specific Berkeleyan moments in *Molloy* and *The Unnamable*. Chapter 5 explored the play of perception between observer and observed in the theatre plays *Play* and *Rockaby*, as well as the late novel *Ill Seen Ill Said*. Chapter 6 traced parallels between blindness in Berkeley and the numerous blind people in Beckett's texts, including *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, *Watt*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *All the Fall*, and the late prose fragments *Fizzles*. For most of these works, the thesis proposed a Berkeleyan angle of interpretation for the first time, highlighting aspects that have hitherto gone unnoticed.

The Shape of Ideas

Beckett once told Harold Hobson: "I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe in them."[411] This sentence may characterise much of Beckett's reworking of Berkeleyan themes – he keeps the shape of the ideas while subjecting their content to intentional misreadings and creative distortions. It is possible to discern three characteristic ways in which Beckett engages creatively with Berkeley. One is materialistic renditions of Berkeley's philosophy that treat people as objects rather than spirits, the other is attributing malevolence to divine guidance, while the third focuses on the difficulties of perception.

Berkeley's presence in *Murphy* can be seen as paradigmatic of the first tendency – Berkeley's philosophical system is deemed by Murphy and his friends to be unhelpful in facing the privations of life, an attempt to ignore the problem rather than courageously face it. Yet one aspect of Berkeley's work shapes the destiny of the protagonist, i.e. the need for perception by the other, as in Berkeley's famous maxim: *esse est percipi*. The need to be seen is essential for Murphy but also for numerous other characters in Beckett's writing for page and stage. It is explicitly connected to Berkeley in *Murphy*, but this reference is misleading. As pointed out throughout this thesis, Beckett distorts the maxim. For Berkeley, as Beckett was well aware, there are two types of substances – ideas whose existence depends on being perceived, and spirits which cannot be perceived and whose existence consists in perceiving. The latter obviously include human beings. By ignoring this distinction Beckett eliminates the spiritual existence of human beings, reducing them to mere bodies. Murphy's need for Mr. Endon's approval therefore expresses a materialist view of humanity, a view which also appears in the theatre plays *Waiting for Godot*, *Happy Days* and *Play* as discussed in Chapter 5. It is only in the late work that the perspective of the perceiver begins to emerge, for example in the novel *Ill Seen Ill Said* in which a disembodied voice talks about the vicissitudes of perceiving.

Treating people as ideas rather than spirits opens the possibility of self-perception where the mind perceives and is being perceived at the same time. For Berkeley, self-

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[411] Harold Hobson, "Samuel Beckett. Dramatist of the Year," *International Theatre Annual* 1 (1956) 153.

perception is an impossible and contradictory notion, and yet it plays a major role in Beckett. This distinction has been the focus of my reading of *Film*, usually considered Beckett's most Berkeleyan work, as well as *Rockaby* which has hitherto not been interpreted in relation to the Irish philosopher. The quality of self-perception is different in each work – in *Film* it is a threatening possibility that materialises a moment of horror, while in *Rockaby* it is accepted with resignation and a growing sense of inner peace. In both texts Beckett uses Berkeleyan tropes to render an experience that is fundamentally alien to Berkeley's world view.

Alongside the materialistic reinterpretation of Berkeley's idealism, Beckett also undermines the religious optimism that informs Berkeley's writing. This tendency can already be discerned in *Three Dialogues* where Berkeley's anti-representational philosophy of matter is being harnessed by Beckett for artistic purposes. Both authors reject an external existence in favour of a direct relation of presentation. The difference lies in the certainty and constancy of the relation. For Berkeley, the denial of matter is no great loss since God safeguards the existence of the world and the reliability of the laws of nature which allow human beings to live and thrive. For Beckett, on the other hand, there are no certainties or rules that can be followed and the artist must work in the absence of determinate relations. The language of absurdity and the threat of madness which Beckett's *Three Dialogues* conjures clearly point to the dangers of pursuing such aesthetics in a godless world.

Beckett reinterprets the relation between spirits and ideas as a psychological relation between individuals and an unknown entity that they depend on, but tends to fail them. The unseen provider of objects in *Act without Words 1* is a malevolent divinity who gives the protagonist false hopes that are disappointed time after time. In *Film*, the observer is a pursuer to be feared, while in *Play* the spot light is an interrogator that torments the man and two women who are forced to tell their stories without assurance that they are being heard or that their torment will ever end. A more conciliatory relation can be discerned in the late work, where the observer comes into focus. In *Ill Seen Ill Said* we look at a woman through the eyes of an observer who wants nothing more than to watch her. Even though the observation is difficult and causes suffering, the observer bears no ill-will towards the woman, and there is no threat in its gaze.

Finally, both Beckett and Berkeley were highly interested in visual images and the way our mind interacts with them, albeit with different emphases. Berkeley was trying to account for our ability to intuitively decipher the meaning of visual input, while Beckett creates images that are opaque and difficult to understand, as can be gleaned even from his predilection for dark and muted colours. Impediments to seeing and interpreting afflict Beckett's numerous blind men, an interest shared with Berkeley. The blind figures of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *All that Fall* not only lack the ability to see the world, but they are also wanting in empathy and consideration for other people. Read alongside Berkeley's theory of the visual as a divine language that God is using to guide us, Beckett's blind men are completely without guidance on both the sensual and the spiritual levels.

An important alternative is presented in *Rough for Theatre 1* where two unnamed characters, the blind A and crippled B, attempt to form a union in order to compensate for each other's deficiencies. As I have shown, this play draws on the Molyneux problem that asks about the ability of a blind person to understand visual input immediately after gaining eyesight, and Berkeley's famous answer that he would not. This question has far-reaching religious and psychological ramifications, which Beckett examines in conjunction with several important dramas of the Irish Literary Revival. The play ultimately questions our ability to acquire new types of knowledge. Crucially, Beckett presents us with a blind man who can never be made to see, since he is unable to cooperate with another person. The moral deficiency of the blind beggar does not consist in abusing the cripple he encounters, but in his failure to understand his needs and work together with his fellow human being for the benefit of both.

The affinities between Beckett's writing and Berkeley's philosophy are apparent throughout Beckett's work but at the same time, they can be said to be embedded within the atheistic, pessimist and materialist convictions of the 20th century. To what extent, then, can Beckett be said to be a Berkeleyan in the sense that early criticism considered him to be a Cartesian? I would suggest that this question misses the complexity and depth of Beckett's relation to philosophy. First of all, Beckett did not adhere to the doctrines and main concerns of any one philosopher, but rather harnessed his broad knowledge of

various philosophical systems in the service of his own personal preoccupations. Beckett's idiosyncratic approach to philosophical arguments is especially conspicuous in his reworking of Berkeleyan themes. Beckett didn't simply copy images and arguments from Berkeley but re-imagined the important principles of his philosophy in a world that was completely alien to it, where the horrors of World War II and other episodes of recent history stand in bleak contrast to Berkeley's optimistic outlook. This reinterpretation brings the 18th-century concepts into our own era in an uncomfortable and jarring manner which forms part of the haunting atmosphere of Beckett's work.

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Abstract

Samuel Beckett has long been known as a philosophical author, who drew on philosophical work to create haunting images and intricate texts that are felt by later thinkers to express so well their own questioning of the foundations of Western thought. On the other hand, Beckett's own interests lay with philosophical writers of the 17th and 18th centuries. This thesis looks at the way Beckett infuses the tenets and metaphors of the 18th-century philosopher George Berkeley with new meanings that transform early modern theories into artistic works that continue to appeal to audiences and thinkers to this day.

Research into Beckett's philosophical sources was an important subject from early Beckett criticism onwards. Significant early works include Ruby Cohn's "Philosophical Fragments in the Works of Samuel Beckett" (1964);[412] John Fletcher's "Beckett and the Philosophers" (1965);[413] and Edouard Morot-Sir, "Samuel Beckett and Cartesian Emblems" (1976).[414] What is common to these essays and other research published at the time is the identification of Beckett's thinking with a Cartesian stance. The increasing amount of archive materials available to researchers, including letters, his personal notes, and the books left in his library after his death, has had a tremendous impact by showing that Descartes was only one of many philosophers Beckett studies and drew upon.

Samuel Beckett's interest in Berkeley has become common knowledge in Beckett studies, backed by archive materials, direct allusions and the occasional mentions in the criticism. There have been several attempts to provide an account of Beckett's engagement with Berkeley. These include Anthony Uhlmann's chapter "Beckett, Berkeley, Bergson, *Film*: The Intuition Image" in his book *The Philosophical Image*[415],

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[412] Ruby Cohn, "Philosophical Fragments in the Works of Samuel Beckett," *Criticism* 6:1 (1964): 33-43.

[413] John Fletcher, "Beckett and the Philosophers," *Comparative Literature* 17:1 (1965): 43-56.

[414] Edouard Morot-Sir, "Samuel Beckett and Cartesian Emblems," *Samuel Beckett: The Art of Rhetoric*, eds. Edouard Morot-Sir, et al. (Chapel Hill: U.N.C. Dept. of Romance Languages, 1976) 25-104.

[415] Anthony Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Branka Arsić's *The Passive Eye: Gaze and Subjectivity in Berkeley (via Beckett)*,[416] an early article by Jean-Michel Rabaté "Berkeley entre Joyce et Beckett",[417] "Beckett and Berkeley: A Reconsideration"[418] by Frederik Smith, and the latest contribution is Steven Matthews' "'The Books are in the Study as Before': Samuel Beckett's Berkeley".[419] These studies unfortunately opted for a short form of a single chapter or magazine article, thus failing to give an extensive account. Moreover, archival materials released recently provide many more details on what philosophical sources Beckett was familiar with, his engagement with different thinkers, and his evaluation of them. This thesis proves that Beckett spent time and effort on reading Berkeley and secondary materials about him, even though he mostly kept silence on his interest in the philosopher. It studies themes and images taken directly from Berkeley's writings, which regularly appear in Beckett's texts across different media, from the 1930s to at least the late 1960s. By following the different appearances of Berkeleyan themes in Beckett it is possible to see that Beckett read Berkeley's text against the grain, consistently ignoring the spiritual realm and taking a pessimistic and paranoid view. What Berkeley advances as a praise of God, Beckett renders as a threat from hostile forces. In Frederik Smith's poignant formulation, Beckett "reads Berkeley cruelly".[420]

Using archive materials it was possible to reconstruct a more accurate timeline of Beckett's introduction to and reading of Berkeley than was hitherto available. The common assumption that A. A. Luce must have discussed Berkeley with his young student was shown to be unfounded. Beckett's interest in Berkeley was awakened in Dublin social and intellectual circles, where the Irish philosopher was widely discussed at

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[416] Branka Arsić, *The Passive Eye: Gaze and Subjectivity in Berkeley (via Beckett)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

[417] Jean-Michel Rabaté, "Berkeley entre Joyce et Beckett," *Études Irlandaises* 10 (1986): 57-76.

[418] Frederik N. Smith, "Beckett and Berkeley: A Reconsideration," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui 7 Beckett vs. Beckett*, eds. Marius Buning, et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998) 331-348.

[419] Steven Matthews, "'The Books are in the Study as Before': Samuel Beckett's Berkeley," *Sofia Philosophical Review Special Issue: Beckett/ Philosophy* 1:1 (2011): 146-168. It was later reprinted in Matthew Feldman and Karim Mamdani (eds.) *Beckett/ Philosophy* (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2015) 211-234. References will be made to the later edition.

[420] Smith, 334.

the time. Beckett first read a work by the famous philosopher in 1933, starting with the *Commonplace Book* on the recommendation of his acquaintance Joseph Hone. He went on to read *Principles of Human Knowledge* at an uncertain date, and *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* in 1935. Dating these readings is important for any argument regarding Beckett's familiarity with Berkeley, especially in the early work. Beckett's knowledge of Berkeley extended even further than the primary texts, since he was also familiarized himself with other interpretations of Berkeley through his summaries of Windelband's *History of Philosophy* and his reading of other philosophers and commentators. The archive materials, in total, point to a consistent interest in the philosopher and a good familiarity with his major works alongside their contemporary interpretations.

Beckett's interest in Berkeley is reflected in his work throughout the years. This thesis shows that Berkeley's philosophy is an important source for *Murphy* rather than a passing reference inserted to display Beckett's erudition. It also discusses *Film* and its script which takes *esse est percipi* as its basic premise. The span of years between the early novel written in 1936 and the film produced in 1964 in itself indicates a lasting interest. In addition to these works whose connection to Berkeley is well-known, the thesis proposes new interpretations of texts that are informed by the philosopher without mentioning his name, especially the theoretical text *Three Dialogues between Samuel Beckett and George Duthuit* whose close resemblance to *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* was occasionally mentioned but not analysed in depth before. The short plays *Act without Words 1* and *Rough for Theatre 1* were also shown to be heavily indebted to Berkeleyan themes and images.

Additionally, themes taken from Berkeley appear in many of Beckett's texts even when they do not constitute the main source of inspiration. Chapter 4 illustrates how the anti-representational stance Beckett adopts from Berkeley plays out in the Trilogy and its anti-mimetic strategies. Chapter 5 explores the image as an interface between the sensual and the mind, as well as the play of perception between observer and observed, in the theatre plays *Play* and *Rockaby* and the late novel *Ill Seen Ill Said*. Chapter 6 traces parallels between blindness in Berkeley and the numerous blind people in Beckett's writings, including *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, *Watt*, *Waiting for Godot*,

Endgame and *All the Fall* and the late prose fragments *Fizzles*. For most of these works, the thesis proposes a Berkeleyan angle of interpretation for the first time, highlighting aspects of the texts that have hitherto gone unnoticed.

Following the various appearances of Berkeleyan themes in Beckett's work it is possible to see a consistent of pattern of a peculiarly Beckettian interpretation of Berkeley's philosophy. Beckett once told Harold Hobson "I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe in them."[421] This sentence may characterise much of Beckett's reworking of Berkeley – he keeps the shape of the ideas while subjecting them to very different premises. It is possible to discern three characteristic ways in which Beckett creatively misreads Berkeley. One is materialistic renditions of Berkeley's philosophy that treat people as objects rather than spirits, the other is attributing malevolence to divine guidance, while the third highlights the difficulties of perception.

Berkeley's presence in *Murphy* can be seen as paradigmatic of the first tendency. Berkeley's philosophical system is deemed to be an unhelpful way of facing up to the privations of life, an attempt to ignore the problems encountered by the characters rather than courageously face them. Yet one aspect of Berkeley's work shapes the existence of the main character, i.e. the need for perception by the other, as in Berkeley's famous maxim: *esse est percipi* – to be is to be perceived. The need to be seen is essential for Murphy but also to numerous other characters in Beckett's writing for page and stage. The need for interpersonal confirmation of one's existence is a constant motif in Beckett, which tallies well with Berkeley's philosophy.

As pointed out throughout this thesis, Beckett distorts the famous maxim. For Berkeley, as Beckett was well aware, there are two types of substances – ideas whose existence depends on perception, and spirits which are impossible to perceive and whose existence consists in active perceiving. By ignoring this distinction Beckett eliminates the spiritual existence of human beings, reducing them to mere bodies. Murphy's need for Mr. Endon's approval therefore expresses a materialist view of humanity that reduces a person to his or her body. A similar view of people as objects of perception also appears

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[421] Harold Hobson, "Samuel Beckett. Dramatist of the Year," *International Theatre Annual* 1 (1956) 153.

in the theatre plays *Waiting for Godot*, *Happy Days* and *Play* as discussed in Chapter 5. *Ill Seen Ill Said* adds another perspective on the maxim – the suffering of the perceiver who cannot break away from the existence it perceives.

Treating people as ideas rather than spirits opens the possibility of self-perception where the mind is perceiver and perceived at the same time. For Berkeley, self-perception is an impossible and contradictory notion, and yet plays a major role in Beckett. This is true for *Film*, usually considered Beckett's most Berkeleyan work, as well as *Rockaby* which is not usually read in relation to the Irish philosopher. The quality of self-perception is different in each work – in *Film* it is a threatening possibility that materialises in the end in a moment of horror while in *Rockaby* it is accepted with resignation and a growing sense of inner peace. In both texts Beckett uses Berkeleyan tropes to render an experience that is fundamentally alien to Berkeley's world view.

Alongside the materialistic reinterpretation of Berkeley's idealism, Beckett also undermines the religious optimism that informs Berkeley's writing. This tendency can already be seen in *Three Dialogues* where Berkeley's anti-representational philosophy of matter is being harnessed by Beckett for artistic purposes. Both authors reject external existence in favour of a direct relation of presentation, with Beckett adopting a similar title and structure to Berkeley's' text. The difference lies in the certainty and constancy of the relation. For Berkeley, the denial of matter is no great loss since God safeguards the existence of the world and the reliability of the laws of nature which allow human beings to live and thrive. For Beckett, on the other hand, there are no certainties or rules that can be followed and the artist must work in the absence of stable relations. The language of absurdity and the threat of madness which Beckett's *Three Dialogues* conjures up clearly point to the dangers of pursuing such aesthetics in a Godless world.

Beckett reinterprets the relation between spirits and ideas as a psychological relation between individuals and an unknown entity that they depend on, but tends to fail them. The unseen provider of objects in *Act without Words 1* is a malevolent divinity who gives the protagonist false hopes that are disappointed time after time. In *Film* the observer is a pursuer to be feared, while in *Play* the spot light is an interrogator that torments the heads who are forced to tell their stories without assurance that they are being heard or that their torment will ever end. A more conciliatory relation can be discerned in the late work

where the observer comes into focus. In *Ill Seen Ill Said* we look at a woman through the eyes of an observer who wants nothing more than to watch her, conveying a melancholy and nostalgic mood that indicates a community of suffering, without threat or ill-will.

Finally, both Beckett and Berkeley were highly interested in visual images and the way our mind interacts with them, albeit with different emphases. Berkeley was trying to account for our ability to intuitively decipher the meaning of visual input, while Beckett creates images that are opaque and difficult to understand, as can be gleaned even from his predilection for dark and mute colours. In *Ill Seen Ill Said* the narrating voice attempts to perceive and interpret what it sees of a woman inhabiting a certain area, but its ability to see is limited and the interpretation is uncertain. Trouble with sight and interpreting visual data also afflict Beckett's numerous blind men, an interest he shared with Berkeley. The blind figures of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *All that Fall* not only lack the ability to see the world, but they are also wanting in empathy and consideration for other people. Read alongside Berkeley's theory of the visual as a divine language that God is using to guide us, Beckett's blind men are completely without guidance on both the sensual and the spiritual levels.

An important alternative is presented in *Rough for Theatre 1* where two unnamed characters, the blind A and crippled B, attempt to form a union in order to compensate for each other's deficiencies and fail. Their single moment of union can be seen as a dramatization of a philosophical problem that Berkeley addresses in several works – the Molyneux problem. An influential philosophical riddle, the Molyneux problem asks whether a blind man made to see would be able to distinguish by sight object that were known to him only by touch. Beckett's play brings together two beggars whose union can allow each of them to rely on the abilities of the other, giving the blind man, in a sense, the ability to see. Berkeley has emphasized the need for practice and adjustment in the process of gaining the ability to understand visual sense impressions, while Beckett's beggars fail exactly because they are unwilling to invest the necessary effort and time to coordinate their movements and intentions. Despite their ultimate failure, however, the blind beggar A remains a neutral figure, indicating a turning away from the malevolent blind men of the earlier plays.

The affinities between Beckett's writing and Berkeley's philosophy are apparent throughout Beckett's work. They can be seen to be embedded within the atheistic, pessimist and materialist convictions of the 20th century. Beckett didn't simply copy images and arguments from Berkeley but re-imagined his early modern philosophy in a world that was completely alien to it, where the horrors of WWII and other events of recent history stand in bleak contrast to the Good Bishop's optimistic outlook. This reinterpretation brings the 18th century concepts into our own era in an uncomfortable and jarring manner which forms part of the haunting atmosphere of Beckett's work.

Abstrakt

Samuel Beckett je dobře znám jako filosoficky orientovaný autor. Ve své tvorbě čerpá z řady filosofických děl, s jejichž pomocí vytváří znepokojivé obrazy a spletité texty, v nichž moderní myslitelé často spatřují vyjádření svých vlastních otázek a pochybností dotýkajících se samotných základu západního myšlení. Sám Beckett se však často zaměřuje na filosofy tvořící v sedmnáctém a osmnáctém století. Disertační práce zkoumá způsob, jímž Beckett dává nový význam názorům a metaforám významného filosofa, George Berkeleyho, a přetváří ranně novověké teorie v umělecká díla, která dodnes fascinují bezpočet diváků a myslitelů.

Zkoumání Beckettových filosofických zdrojů hrálo významnou roli již v prvních kritických reflexích jeho díla. Mezi nejvýznamnější rané kritické studie patří práce Ruby Cohnové: "Philosophical Fragments in the Works of Samuel Beckett" (1964);[422] Johna Fletchera: "Beckett and the Philosophers" (1965);[423] či Edouarda Morot-Sira, "Samuel Beckett and Cartesian Emblems" (1976).[424] Společným rysem těchto esejí, ale i ostatních kritických prací z daného období, je identifikace Beckettova myšlení s karteziánskou pozicí. Zvyšující se počet dostupných archivních materiálů – dopisů, poznámek či knih nalezených po Beckettově smrti nalezeny v jeho knihovně – přispěl významnou měrou k potvrzení faktu, že Descartes byl pouze jedním z celé řady filosofů, jejichž studiu se Beckett systematicky věnoval a z nichž čerpal náměty pro své díla.

Beckettův zájem o Berkeleyho, o němž svědčí zmíněné archivní materiály, přímé reference či zmínky v kritických studiích, je v kontextu beckettovských studií vnímán jako všeobecně přijímaný fakt. Této otázce bylo v minulosti věnováno několik studií, mezi něž patří: kapitola Anthony Uhlmanna "Beckett, Berkeley, Bergson, *Film*: The

[422] Ruby Cohn, "Philosophical Fragments in the Works of Samuel Beckett," *Criticism* 6:1 (1964): 33-43.

[423] John Fletcher, "Beckett and the Philosophers," *Comparative Literature* 17:1 (1965): 43-56.

[424] Edouard Morot-Sir, "Samuel Beckett and Cartesian Emblems," *Samuel Beckett: The Art of Rhetoric*, eds. Edouard Morot-Sir, et al. (Chapel Hill: U.N.C. Dept. of Romance Languages, 1976) 25-104.

Intuition Image" v knize *The Philosophical Image*[425]; studie Branky Arsić *The Passive Eye: Gaze and Subjectivity in Berkeley (via Beckett)*[426]; článek Jean-Michel Rabatého "Berkeley entre Joyce et Beckett",[427] "Beckett and Berkeley: A Reconsideration"[428] Frederika Smithe či nejnovější příspěvek Stevena Matthewse "'The Books are in the Study as Before': Samuel Beckett's Berkeley".[429] Zmíněné studie nepřekračují rozsah jedné kapitoly či odborného článku a tudíž nenabízí prostor pro vyčerpávající diskusi dané problematiky. Nedávno zveřejněné archivní materiály navíc nabízí zcela nové poznatky o filosofických zdrojích, s nimiž byl Beckett obeznámen, a přináší detailní informace o jeho vztahu a postoji k celé řadě dalších myslitelů. Disertační práce jasně dokládá, že Beckett, přestože o svém zájmu zpravidla otevřeně nehovořil, vynaložil značný čas a úsilí na četbu Berkeleyho textů a studium sekundární literatury věnované jeho filosofii. Práce se zaměřuje na rozbor námětů a obrazů převzatých přímo z Berkeleyho prací, se kterými se lze setkat v Beckettových textech od let třicátých až po pozdní léta šedesátá. Důsledná analýza jednotlivých berkeleyovských témat objevujících se v Beckettově díle umožňuje sledovat Beckettovo netradiční čtení Berkeleyho textů, v němž Beckett systematicky ignoruje jejich duchovní význam a zaujímá pesimistická a paranoidní východiska. Beckett podává Berkeleyho chválu Boha jako ohrožení nepřátelskou silou a, slovy Frederika Smithe, "čte Berkeleyho velmi krutě".[430]

Práce s archivními materiály umožnila přesněji určit, kdy se Beckett seznámil s Berkeleym a kdy se věnoval četbě jeho děl. Obecně přijímaný předpoklad, podle něhož A. A. Luce diskutoval o Berkeleyho filosofii se svým mladým studentem, se ukázal jako nepodložený. Beckettův zájem o Berkeleyho se zrodil v dublinských společenských a

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[425] Anthony Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[426] Branka Arsić, *The Passive Eye: Gaze and Subjectivity in Berkeley (via Beckett)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

[427] Jean-Michel Rabaté, "Berkeley entre Joyce et Beckett," *Études Irlandaises* 10 (1986): 57-76.

[428] Frederik N. Smith, "Beckett and Berkeley: A Reconsideration," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui 7 Beckett vs. Beckett*, eds. Marius Buning, et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998) 331-348.

[429] Frederik N. Smith, "Beckett and Berkeley: A Reconsideration," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui 7 Beckett vs. Beckett*, eds. Marius Buning, et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998) 331-348.

[430] Smith, 334.

intelektuálních kruzích, kde byla irská filosofie častým tématem. Beckett poprvé četl Berkeleyho dílo – *Commonplace Book* – na doporučení svého známého, Josepha Honea. Později navázal četbou *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (Pojednání o principech lidského poznání) a v roce 1935 *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (Tři dialogy). Datace Beckettova čtení těchto textů hraje zásadní roli v jakékoliv diskusi o Beckettově znalosti Berkeleyho filosofie a to především v kontextu Beckettova raného díla. Beckettova znalost Berkeleyho díla se neomezovala pouze na studium primárních textů. Beckett znal i další interpretace Berkeleyho filosofie, četl Windelbandovu History of Philosophy a studoval práce mnoha dalších filosofů a komentátorů. Archivní materiály souhlasně podávají svědectví o Beckettově dlouhodobém zájmu o Berkeleyho a o solidní znalosti jeho hlavních děl i jejich dobových interpretací.

Bekettův zájem o Berkeleyho se dlouhodobě odráží v jeho umělecké tvorbě. Disertační práce jasně dokazuje, že Berkeleyho filosofie hraje významnou roli v raném románu *Murphy* (1936) a neleze ji tak pokládat za pouhou náhodnou referenci, jejímž cílem je vystavět na odiv autorovu erudici. Předmětem diskuse je i Beckettův *Film* a jeho scénář, který přijímá Berkeleyho *esse est percipi* jako svou základní premisu. Za důkaz Beckettova dlouhodobého zájmu o Berkeleyho filosofii lze považovat i téměř třicet let, které uběhly od prvního vydání výše zmíněného románu a jeho filmového zpracování v roce 1964. Vedle těchto známých berkleyovských děl se práce věnuje i interpretaci textů, jež byly ovlivněny Berkeleyho filosofií, aniž by v nich filosofovo jméno bylo přímo zmíněno. Jedná se především o teoretický text *Three Dialogues between Samuel Beckett and George Duthuit*; podobnosti mezi Berkeleyho *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* dosud nebyla věnována detailnější kritická pozornost. Vliv Berkeleyovských témat a myšlenek je dále patrný v krátkých hrách *Act without Words 1* a *Rough for Theatre 1*.

Náměty převzaté z Berkeleyho filosofie se dále objevují v celé řadě dalších Beckettových textů, přesto, že v nich nepředstavují hlavní zdroj autorovy inspirace. Čtvrtá kapitola se opírá o analýzu způsobu, jímž Beckett rozehrává svůj berkeleyovský antímimetický postoj v Trilogii. Pátá kapitola je věnována diskusi obrazu chápaného jako interface mezi smyslovým vnímáním a myslí a perceptivní hře odehrávající se mezi

pozorovatelem a pozorovaným v divadelních hrách *Play* (Hra), *Rockaby* a pozdním románu *Ill Seen Ill Said*. Šestá kapitola sleduje paralely mezi motivem slepoty v Berkeleyho filosofii a bezpočtem slepců v Beckettových textech jako jsou *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, *Watt*, *Waiting for Godot* (Čekání na Godota), *Endgame* (Konec Hry) a *All the Fall* a pozdním fragmentům *Fizzles*. Disertační práce nabízí, v případě většiny z těchto textů vůbec poprvé, interpretaci opírající se o Berkeleyovské motivy zaměřenou na aspekty Beckettových textů, jež zůstávaly doposud nepovšimnuty.

Studium berkeleyovských námětů a motivů v Beckettově díle umožňuje spatřit konzistentní kód původní bekettovské interpretace Berkeleyho filosofie. Jak Beckett sám svěřil Haroldu Hobsonovi: „Zajímá mě tvar myšlenek, i když s nimi nesouhlasím.“ [431] Právě tato věta do značné míry vystihuje způsob, jímž Beckett přetváří Berkeleyho myšlení – zachovává tvar myšlenek a zároveň je podřizuje naprosto odlišným východiskům. V tomto smyslu je možné rozlišit tři základní tendence či způsoby, jimiž Beckett tvořivě dezinterpretuje Berkeleyho: 1) materialistické ztvárnění Berkeleyho filosofie, jež chápe člověka jako předmět spíše než jako ducha; 2) připisování zlovůle božskému vedení; 3) zdůraznění obtíží spojených s percepcí.

Roli Berkeleyho myšlenek v románu *Murphy* lze interpretovat jako paradigmatický příklad první z těchto tendencí. Berkeleyho filosofický systém je zde vnímán jako neužitečný z hlediska nutnosti čelit životním strastem, a zároveň jako pokus jednotlivých postavy ignorovat problémy, s nimiž se setkávají, místo toho, aby jim srdnatě čelily. Jeden z aspektů Berkeleyho díla přesto utváří existenci hlavní postavy románu, jmenovitě potřeba být vnímán druhými, jež souzní s Berkeleyho slavným výrokem: *esse est percipi* – být znamená být vnímán. Potřeba být vidět je zásadní pro Murphyho i pro bezpočet dalších postav v Beckettových prozaických i divadelních textech. Potřeba interpersonální konfirmace lidské existence, jež souzní s Berkeleyho filosofií, je v Beckettově díle trvale přítomným motivem.

Disertační práce zároveň důsledně zdůrazňuje, že Beckett Berkeleyho slavný výrok neustále deformuje a překrucuje. Beckett si byl velmi dobře vědom Berkeleyho učení o

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[431] Harold Hobson, “Samuel Beckett. Dramatist of the Year,” *International Theatre Annual* 1 (1956) 153.

existenci dvou substancí: idejí, jejichž existence závisí na vnímání, a duchů, jež není možné vnímat a jejichž existence spočívá v aktivním vnímání. Zavrhnutí této distinkce umožňuje Beckettovi ignorovat duchovní existenci lidských bytostí a redukovat je tak na pouhá těla. Murphyho potřeba uznání ze strany pana Endona tak vyjadřuje materialistické pojetí lidskosti, jež redukuje člověka na jeho tělo. Podobné pojetí člověka se objevuje i v divadelních hrách *Waiting for Godot*, *Happy Days* či *Play* rozebíraných v kapitole 5. *Ill Seen Ill Said* toto pojetí navíc rozšiřuje o novou perspektivu – utrpení vnímajícího, jenž není sto odvrátit se od vnímané existence.

Chápání člověka jako ideje spíše než ducha otevírá možnost sebe-vnímání, kdy se mysl stává vnímajícím a zároveň vnímaným. Vnímání sebe sama, jež je pro Berkeleyho něčím nemožným a vnitřně rozporuplným, hraje v Beckettově díle zásadní roli. Tento výrok platí nejen o *Filmu*, jenž je obecně považován za Berkeleym nejvíce ovlivněné dílo, ale i o *Rockaby*, jemuž se berkeleyovské interpretace obvykle vyhýbají. Kvalita vnímání sebe sama se v jednotlivých dílech značně liší. Ve *Filmu* ohrožuje možnost vnímat, jež se zhmotňuje na konci v děsuplném okamžiku, zatímco v *Rockaby* je přijímána jako rezignace a narůstající pocit vnitřního míru. V obou zmiňovaných dílech využívá Beckett Berkeleho tropy ke ztvárnění zkušenosti, jež je fundamentálně cizí Berkeleyho pohledu na svět.

Vedle materialistické reinterpretace Berkeleyho idealismu podkopává Beckett i duchovní optimismus, jenž prostupuje všemi Berkeleyho pracemi. Tuto tendenci lze vysledovat již v *Three Dialogues*, kde si Beckett uzurpuje Berkeleyho antirepresentationalistický filosofii hmoty pro své umělecké účely. Oba autoři odmítají vnější existenci ve prospěch přímého vztahu zpodobnění a Beckett dokonce pracuje s podobným názvem i strukturou jakou má Berkeleyho text, rozdíl však spočívá v míře jistoty a stálosti zmiňovaného vztahu. Zatímco pro Berkeleyho nepředstavuje popření existence hmoty zásadní ztrátu, neboť nad existencí světa a jistotou přírodních zákonů, jež jsou předpokladem lidského života a prospěchu, bdí Bůh, pro Becketta však neexistují žádné jistoty ani pravidla, jež by bylo možné následovat, a umělec tak musí tvořit v situaci absence jakýchkoliv trvalých vztahů. Jazyk absurdna a neustálá hrozba šílenství, jež Beckettovy *Three Dialogues* navozují, jasně poukazují na nebezpečí spojené se snahou o dosažení takovéto estetiky ve světě bez Boha.

Beckett reinterpretuje vztah mezi duchy a idejemi jako psychologický vztah mezi jednotlivcem a neznámou entitou, na níž jsou závislí, a která je zároveň velmi často zrazuje. Neviditelný poskytovatel předmětů v *Act without Words 1* je zlomyslným božstvem, který hlavnímu hrdinovi nabízí pouze falešné naděje a opakované zklamání. Ve *Filmu* se pozorovatel proměňuje v pronásledovatele, jehož je radno se obávat, zatímco v *Play* se světlo reflektoru stává vyšetřovatelem, jenž mučí hlavy, které jsou přinuceny vyprávět své příběhy, aniž by se jim dostávalo jistoty, že budou vyslechnuty nebo že muka sama skončí. O něco rozporuplnější vztah je možné nalézt v Beckettově pozdní práci, v níž se do středu zájmu dostává sám pozorovatel. V *Ill Seen Ill Said* vidíme ženu očima pozorovatele, který netouží po ničem jiném, než ji pozorovat, a navozuje tak dojem melancholie a nostalgie poukazující na komunitu utrpení, jež je prosto jakékoliv hrozby či zlovůle.

Jak Beckett, tak Berkeley se, byť s odlišným zřetelem, úzce zajímali o vizuální obrazy a způsob jejich interakce s lidskou myslí. Berkeley se snažil podat vysvětlení naší schopnosti intuitivně dešifrovat význam vizuálních vstupů, zatímco Beckett vytváří obrazy, které jsou matné a jen obtížně pochopitelné, jak lze ostatně vytušit i z jeho záliby v temných a tlumených barevných odstínech. Vypravěč v *Ill Seen Ill Said* se pokouší vnímat a interpretovat to málo, co je schopen zahlédnout z ženy obývající určité místo; jeho schopnost vidět je však omezená a jeho interpretace nejistá. Potíže se zrakem a interpretací vizuálních dat je charakteristická i pro řadu Beckettových slepců. Stejný zájem pak lze najít i u Berkeleyho. Slepcům z děj jako *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, a *All that Fall* se nedostává nejen schopnosti vidět svět, ale zároveň postrádají i empatii a ohleduplnost vůči ostatním lidem. Prizmatem Berkeleyho teorie vizuálna jako božského jazyka, s jehož pomocí Bůh vede naše kroky, lze Beckettovy slepce vnímat jako jedince naprosto postrádající vedení a to jak na smyslové, tak duchovní úrovni.

Zajímavou alternativu nabízí *Rough for Theatre 1*; dvě bezejmenné postavy, slepec A a mrzák B se pokoušejí spojit své síly, aby překonali společné nedostatky, a nakonec selhávají. Okamžik jejich spojení lze vnímat jako dramatizaci filosofického problému známého jako Molyneuxova otázka, jíž se Berkeley pokouší vyřešit hned v několika svých textech. Molyneuxova otázka je vlivnou filosofickou hádankou, jež se táže, zda by

slepec, který by získal možnost vidět, byl schopen rozlišit pomocí zraku předměty, jež předtím znal pouze pomocí hmatu. Beckettova hra svádí dohromady na jevišti dva žebráky, jejichž spojení či spolupráce by jim umožnilo spolehnout se navzájem na schopnosti toho druhého a umožnilo tak, svým způsobem, slepci schopnost vidět. Berkeley v tomto bodě zdůrazňuje, že pro získání schopnosti chápat smyslové vjemy je nutná praxe, zatímco Beckett nechává pokus obou žebráků ztroskotat právě proto, že nejsou ke koordinaci svých pohybů a úmyslů ochotní vynaložit potřebný čas a snahu. Navzdory konečnému selhání však žebrák A zůstává postavou celkově neutrální, což naznačuje Beckettův odklon od zlomyslných slepců raných her.

Blízký vztah mezi Beckettovým dílem a Berkeleyho filosofií je patrný v celém Beckettově díle. Lze se domnívat, že Beckett zde vychází z kontextu ateistického, pesimistického a materialistického uvažování 20. století. Nelze však tvrdit, že Beckett jednoduše kopíruje obrazy či argumenty z Berkeleyho filosofie, ale spíše znovu utváří jeho raně novověkou filosofii ve světě, jenž je těmto myšlenkám zcela vzdálen, ve světě, kde hrůzy druhé světové války spolu s ostatními tragickými událostmi moderních dějin stojí v ponurém protikladu k optimistickému vidění „dobrého biskupa“. Beckettova reinterpretace tak do naší doby přenáší koncepty 18. století a činí tak znepokojujícím a nepříjemným způsobem, jenž tvoří jeden ze základních prvků jeho díla.