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Against Reason: Schopenhauer, Beckett, and the Aesthetics of Irreducibility

# **Anthony McGrath**

### Abstract

This dissertation examines the relationship between the philosophy of Schopenhauer and the forms and themes of Beckett's critical and creative writings. My research aims to show that Beckett's aesthetic preoccupations are consonant with some of Schopenhauer's seminal arguments regarding the arational basis of artistic composition and appreciation and the impotence of reason in human affairs. While Beckett's critical writings are, in places, formidably opaque, this study explores the ways in which such texts can be elucidated when their intertextual affinities with Schopenhauer's arguments are revealed. Using Schopenhauer's thought as my presiding interpretative framework, I propose to demonstrate that the widespread presence of philosophical and theological ideas in Beckett's creative work signifies less about his personal convictions that it does about his authorial aims. In this sense, I highlight the ways in which discursive ideas were appropriated and manipulated by Beckett for literary ends. A central contention of this study is that to judge the place of ideas within Beckett's art we should ignore questions of their theoretical persuasiveness and consider their role as purely aesthetic devices, the value of which is revealed in terms of the existential impact they have upon his characters. In each of my chapters which deal with Beckett's fiction I describe the artistically energising tensions that exist between the concepts that Beckett's characters invoke in their attempts to comprehend the import of their experiences and their conative and affective tribulations which invariably prove resistant to such analysis. Accordingly, the means by which conceptual aporias engender semantic potentialities underpin my exploration of Beckett's creative assimilation of rational discourse. While my focus is directed to Beckett's early and middle fiction, which was composed at a time when the relationship between the chaos of quotidian ordeals and the value of rational thought became most acutely relevant for him, I provide numerous cross-references to his dramatic and poetical works in order to highlight the overall significance of these issues within his *oeuvre*.



**Against Reason: Schopenhauer, Beckett, and the Aesthetics of Irreducibility** 

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

February 2015

**Anthony McGrath** 

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**Anthony McGrath** 







By nature man tries to explain to himself everything, attributes a meaning to everythi (Arthur Schopenhauer, <i>Manuscript Remains</i> )	ng.
Of infinitely more interest than how this came to be so was the manner in which it mi exploited. (Samuel Beckett, <i>Murphy</i> )	ght be



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Against Reason: Schopenhauer, Beckett, and the Aesthetics of Irreducibility

# **Summary**

This dissertation begins with an examination of Beckett's early engagement with Schopenhauer's thought. It then moves to a consideration of previous studies which have attempted to relate Beckett's writings to the philosophy of Schopenhauer. I proceed by highlighting how my research aligns with, and deviates from, previous approaches. A concise consideration of biographical parallels leads to a detailed analysis of the conceptual aspects of Christianity to be found within the writings of Schopenhauer and Beckett. My Introduction continues with a description of the principles which governed my choice of texts and the methods which guide my exploration of my theme. It culminates with an outline of the individual chapters and Conclusion of my study.

My first chapter details those aspects of Transcendental Idealism, as formulated by Kant and Schopenhauer, which are most applicable to Beckett's *oeuvre*. Using Transcendental Idealism as my interpretative framework, I examine Beckett's critical writings and his aesthetic reflections as expressed in letters and interviews. This chapter proceeds by underscoring those areas within which Beckett's views pertaining to the creation and appreciation of art can be usefully contextualised when read in conjunction with Schopenhauer's thought.

My second chapter focuses upon those elements of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1992) which evince affinities with Schopenhauer's aversion to systematic approaches to the composition and reading of literature. Here I reveal how Schopenhauer's contentions regarding the primacy of perceptual experience in artistic creation can be related to the autobiographical elements of *Dream*. I show that, from a Schopenhauerian perspective, Belacqua is tormented by an intrapsychic dissonance which inspires his issueless attempts to decipher his experience; I also assess the ways in which such fissures of identity prove to be aesthetically alluring. I then examine how *Dream* reveals Beckett's early suspicions about the expressive capacities of words by exploring the novel's persistent references to painting and music.

In Chapter Three, I explore *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934) in relation to its portrayal of the intrapersonal divisions to which Belacqua is subject in a world pervaded by the enigmatic and ubiquitous nature of anguish. This chapter underscores Beckett's tragicomic portrayal of the impotence of rationality in human affairs by reading *More Pricks* in accordance with Schopenhauer's views regarding the inscrutability of suffering. Here I also reveal how Beckett creatively manipulates ideas regarding determinism and freedom in a way which generates the type of semantic indeterminacies that Schopenhauer considers to be core aspects of genuine art.

Chapter Four explores *Murphy* (1938) as a work which exemplifies Beckett's ability to employ systematic thought for purely aesthetic purposes. Here my Schopenhauerian reading of *Murphy* contends that, in Beckett's art, the ultimate value of systematic ideas is revealed by his characters through personal assimilation, whereby as fully imagined beings, beset by affective and psychological afflictions, they manage to enliven and interrogate the most abstract allusions.

My fifth chapter begins with a discussion of Beckett's deepening scepticism about the expressive potential of words and how such views can be seen to correlate with core contentions of Schopenhauer's philosophy. Drawing upon Schopenhauer's arguments regarding the inextricable associations between the incomprehensible and the ineffable, this chapter also explores the plight of Watt as more a victim than an inheritor of the Enlightenment's teachings about the potentialities of reason. My study of *Watt* (1954) deems it to constitute, in part, an incisively probing portrayal of the pretensions of rational enquiry.

My Conclusion briefly examines how the writings which succeeded *Watt* echo the works which have been explored in the main body of my dissertation. Here I seek to show how Beckett's enduring interest in the role of rationality in life and art can be read in conjunction with Schopenhauer's own lifelong fascination with the means by which existential and aesthetic affairs perennially defy the reductive tendencies of reason.

# Acknowledgements

Over the course of my doctoral studies I have had the privilege to work with a supervisor to whom I will remain deeply indebted. My research has benefited in numerous ways from the conscientious encouragement and profoundly insightful guidance of Sam Slote. While many will continue to benefit from Sam's academic expertise, my own sense of gratitude to him will be recalled with immense esteem for his qualities as a scholar and as a man.

I also wish to acknowledge the kind assistance that I received from Dr. Mark Nixon of Reading University, who, in providing me with early access to his work on Beckett's German Diaries, helped to shape some of my nascent ideas regarding my chosen theme. In promptly responding to various queries which arose during my studies, Mark showed a consistent willingness to aid my developing thoughts.

My readings of Beckett's unpublished writings at TCD were facilitated by the efforts of Jane Maxwell and Paula Norris who were unstintingly helpful in enabling me to access such material. I sincerely appreciate their willingness to aid my research.

My final year of study was carried out with the benefit of a Studentship from the School of English at TCD. I am grateful to those who deemed my work to be worthy of such invaluable support.

My academic development has benefited immeasurably from my involvement with The Waterford Philosophical Society. My lectures to the members of that Society have enhanced my awareness of the abounding rewards to be enjoyed from a cultivation of the mind in the presence of passionate enthusiasts. I wish to thank those who, in actively participating in my classes in Waterford, helped me to attain deeper insights into the masterworks of Western art and thought.

On a more personal level, I am inestimably indebted to three people who enabled me to pursue my academic goals in an atmosphere of love and abiding loyalty. Having lost those individuals during the course of my postgraduate studies I know that I have been left enduringly bereft, yet they reside within my thoughts as exemplars of all that I aspire to be. I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, my uncle, and my grandmother, whose lives enriched my being, whose passing has proved utterly harrowing. Moments of desolation have,

however, been considerably eased by the company of Trixie, a sentient being whose cherished presence has served to diminish despair.

Parts of Chapter One appeared in my essay entitled 'An Agon with the Twilighters: Samuel Beckett and the Primacy of the Aesthetic' in the Spring/Summer 2012 issue of the *Irish University Review*. I am thankful for the willingness of the editors of that journal, in particular Dr. Lucy Collins, to publish sections of my research.

# **Abbreviations**

# Works by Samuel Beckett

- (CDW) The Complete Dramatic Works (London: Faber and Faber, 1990).
- (CIWS) Company / Ill Seen Ill Said / Worstward Ho / Stirrings Still, ed. Dirk Van Hulle (London: Faber and Faber, 2009).
- (CPS) The Collected Poems of Samuel Beckett, eds. Seán Lawlor and John Pilling (London: Faber and Faber, 2012).
- (CSP) Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, ed. S. E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995).
- (D) Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1984).
- (DFW) Dream of Fair to Middling Women, eds. Eoin O'Brien and Edith Fournier (London: Calder Publications, 1993).
- (DN) Beckett's Dream Notebook, ed. John Pilling (Reading: Beckett International Foundation, 1999).
- (EB) Echo's Bones, ed. Mark Nixon (London: Faber and Faber, 2014).
- (ECEF) The Expelled / The Calmative / The End & First Love, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Faber and Faber, 2009).
- (El) Eleutheria, tr. Barbara Wright (London: Faber and Faber, 1996).
- (HII) How It Is, ed. Édouard Magessa O'Reilly (London: Faber and Faber, 2009).
- (LI) The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume I: 1929-1940, eds. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- (LII) The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume II: 1941-1956, eds. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dann Gunn and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- (M) Murphy, ed. J. C. C. Mays (London: Faber and Faber, 2009).
- (MC) Mercier and Camier, ed. Seán Kennedy (London: Faber and Faber, 2010).
- (MD) Malone Dies, ed. Peter Boxall (London: Faber and Faber, 2010).
- (Mo) Molloy, ed. Shane Weller (London: Faber and Faber, 2009).
- (MP) More Pricks Than Kicks, ed. Cassandra Nelson (London: Faber and Faber, 2010).

- (PTD) Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit (London: John Calder, 1965).
- (TNO) Texts for Nothing and Other Short Prose, 1950-1976, ed. Mark Nixon (London: Faber and Faber, 2010).
- (U) The Unnamable, ed. Steven Connor (London: Faber and Faber, 2010).
- (W) Watt, ed. C. J. Ackerley (London: Faber and Faber, 2009).

# Works by Arthur Schopenhauer

- (BM) On the Basis of Morality, tr. E. F. J. Payne (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995).
- (EFR) Schopenhauer's Early Fourfold Root, tr. F. C. White (Aldershot: Avebury, 1997).
- (FR) On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, tr. E. F. J. Payne (Illinois: Open Court, 1974).
- (FW) Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will, tr. E. F. J. Payne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- (GB) Gesammelte Briefe, ed. Arthur Hübscher (Bonn: Bouvier, 1987).
- (MRI) Manuscript Remains, Volume I, tr. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1988).
- (MRII) Manuscript Remains, Volume II, tr. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1988).
- (MRIII) Manuscript Remains, Volume III, tr. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1989).
- (MRIV) Manuscript Remains, Volume IV, tr. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1990).
- (PPI) Parerga and Paralipomena, Volume I, tr. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- (PPII) Parerga and Paralipomena, Volume II, tr. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- (VC) On Vision and Colours, tr. E. F. J. Payne (New York and Oxford: Berg Publications, 1994).
- (WN) On the Will in Nature, tr. E. F. J. Payne (New York and Oxford: Berg Publications, 1992).
- (*WWRI*) The World as Will and Representation, Volume I, tr. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1969).

(*WWRII*) The World as Will and Representation, Volume II, tr. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1969).

### Other Works

- (*CPR*) Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929).
- (GF) Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (eds.), Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1979).
- (Har) Maurice Harmon (ed.), No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998).
- (JK) James Knowlson, Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett (London: Bloomsbury, 1996).

# **Library Archives**

(TCD) Trinity College Dublin Library, Department of Manuscripts.

### Notes on the Text

Publication dates of Beckett's texts are provided in accordance with the original appearance of works in the specific language from which they are cited.



# Introduction

Just as supreme artworks perennially defy reductive exegesis, the innumerable predicaments of lived experience elude neat categorisations and facile solutions. Beckett's creative and personal realisations of the impotence of rationality in artistic and existential affairs were, in part, derived from his awareness of the ludicrous pretensions of thinkers who were all too willing to exalt intellection as a faculty upon which we could rely in our theoretical and practical endeavours. Research by critics such as Doherty and Feldman has revealed the extent to which Beckett's early knowledge of philosophers was reliant upon introductory works such as Mahaffy's Descartes (1880) and Windelband's A History of Philosophy (1893). However, the extensive range of intertextual traces of Schopenhauer's work which are to be found in Beckett's early writings suggest that his knowledge of Schopenhauer exceeded that which could have been obtained from secondary sources. Acheson claims that Beckett's "interest in Schopenhauer may have been initially sparked by an editorial in transition [Eugène Jolas' 'Notes on Reality'] in praise of the German philosopher" which was published in November 1929. While much of Beckett's initial acquaintance with philosophy was developed through the medium of secondary works, one of the earliest indications of his direct engagement with Schopenhauer's thought is contained in a letter to MacGreevy from July 1930: "I am reading Schopenhauer" (LI, 32-3). This was, as Van Hulle and Nixon confirm, the point at which Beckett's "appreciation [for Schopenhauer] started."<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, Nixon and Van Hulle note that Beckett read a French translation of Schopenhauer by Auguste-Laurent Burdeau in the same year.<sup>3</sup> Given Feldman's view that Beckett's composition of his 'Philosophy Notes' "most likely", did not commence until July 1932, it is remarkable that much of his early knowledge of Schopenhauer was derived from primary texts.

Beckett was unusually forthcoming in his professions of enthusiasm for Schopenhauer's thought. Having stated that he was "not reading philosophy," Beckett insisted that he did not care whether Schopenhauer "is right or wrong or a good or worthless metaphysician" (*LI*, 33). The stylistic beauty of Schopenhauer's philosophy clearly impressed Beckett with its profusive literary qualities, such as its magisterial command of metaphorical depiction. Beckett was particularly fascinated by Schopenhauer's apparent disregard for the rigid proprieties of logical inference: "it is a pleasure also to find a philosopher that can be read like a poet, with an entire indifference to the apriori forms of verification. Although it is a fact

that judged by them his generalisation shows fewer cracks than most generalisations" (*LI*, 550). Beckett purchased a collected edition of Schopenhauer's works during his travels in Germany in 1936; they were among the books that he "sent home" on November 4th. However, his extensive use of Schopenhauer's thought in *Proust* (1931) demonstrates that his familiarity with the philosopher's work was already well established prior to his study of those German editions. Pilling asserts that Beckett's absorption of Schopenhauer's writings was so profound that, "by the time of the *Murphy* ['Whoroscope'] notebook [it had] become so much second nature to him as not to need recording, with chapter and verse attached to facilitate re-reading."

In his probing study of Beckett's 'Interwar Notes' Feldman describes how Beckett's summaries of Windelband's account of Schopenhauer's thought "point toward both personal affinity and prior understanding." He goes on to claim that, "with the exception of Schopenhauer, and to a much lesser extent Descartes, Beckett did not undertake any philosophical excursus prior to the composition of the 'Philosophy Notes." Schopenhauer is scathing in his opposition to those who rely upon introductory texts and commentaries in their study of philosophy:

[O]nly in their own works and certainly not from second-hand accounts can we become really acquainted with philosophers . . . with those histories of philosophy the mind always receives only the movement that can be imparted to it by the stiff and wooden train of thought of a commonplace intellect. (*PPI*, 196)

Elsewhere, in a statement which typifies his aversion to how philosophy is ordinarily treated within academic contexts, he writes: "I can bear the thought that in a short time worms will eat away my body; but the idea of philosophy-professors nibbling at my philosophy makes me shudder" (*MRIV*, 393). However, Windelband's work served Beckett well insofar as it contains an accurate summation of some of the main tenets of Schopenhauer's writings. Van Hulle and Nixon report that Beckett, in his German edition of Schopenhauer's work, "marked Schopenhauer's long praise of Kant and the plea to read his works directly rather than through the mediation of an introduction, for the ideas of such an extraordinary mind do not allow any form of filtering." Given his lack of a formal education in philosophy, it is understandable that Beckett would have been drawn to works such as that by Windelband, but he may also have been struck by how Schopenhauer's gifts as a prose stylist renders his philosophy eminently accessible. The presiding aim of this dissertation is to show that an

intertextual reading of the *oeuvres* of Schopenhauer and Beckett reveals a vast range of thematic correspondence but I will also highlight how Beckett's critical and creative practices cohere with Schopenhauer's own meticulously developed views about the means by which art can engage with conceptual thought.

# **Definitions + Paradigms**

Beckett's enthusiasm for Schopenhauer's philosophy has been examined throughout the history of Beckett studies. Cronin states that Beckett's reading of Schopenhauer constituted "perhaps . . . the most important literary discovery of his life," while Knowlson claims that Schopenhauer was among those authors that Beckett had "so naturally absorbed and reworked . . . that, in some instances, when they [Schopenhauerian themes] creep unobtrusively into his work they are no longer easily detected" (JK, 653-4). Such remarks attest to the fact that the ultimate value of Schopenhauer's thought to Beckett consisted of the means by which he could creatively manipulate Schopenhauerian discourse for distinctly aesthetic ends. In this sense, Schopenhauer's concepts can be seen to figure in Beckett's work not as discursive dogmas but as an intrinsic part of the ludic tendencies of his compositional strategies. In a letter to MacGreevy, written in August 1930, Beckett notes: "Schopenhauer says defunctus is a beautiful word - as long as one does not suicide. He might be right" (LI, 36). Beckett went on to inform MacGreevy of his intention to "try [Schopenhauer's] 'Aphorismes sur la Sagesse de la Vie', that Proust admired so much" (LI, 43). In such cases Beckett provides clues which indicate the provenance of Schopenhauerian traces in his work, yet the variety of Schopenhauerian allusions in Beckett's writings usually compel the reader to "guess where" a narrator potentially "stole" (DFW, 191-2) them from. In the present study the identification of thematic congruence is not assumed to constitute incontrovertible evidence of Beckett's familiarity with specific textual sources of Schopenhauerian ideas. Critical works that are addressed to the avowed presence of Schopenhauerian traces in individual writings by Beckett will be examined in the following chapters. As a preliminary to such discussions, I will consider some of the more general developments in our understanding of Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauer's thought with reference to a number of issues which have been raised by previous studies upon which my research builds and from which it deviates.

In order to concur with Harvey's contention that, "Beckett evolves towards sparseness according to the Schopenhauer prescription," we must assume that Schopenhauer argued

that such compositional principles could be taught and that Beckett was willing to passively submit to such prescriptive dicta. For reasons that will become apparent in my first chapter such assumptions are overtly implausible. Schopenhauer observes that, "If the singer or virtuoso wishes to guide his recital by reflection, he remains lifeless. The same is true of the composer, the painter, and the poet. For art the concept always remains unproductive" (WWRI, 57). As we shall see, it was precisely owing to such convictions that Schopenhauer refused to provide aesthetic rules. Schopenhauer's delineations between authentic and inauthentic art were formulated in accordance with strictly descriptive intentions. In stating that "Schopenhauer's ideas would become in later years the philosophical foundation of Beckett's thought,"<sup>12</sup> Bair not only suggests that Beckett's art became increasingly dependent upon Schopenhauer's philosophy but that such reliance developed at a more advanced stage of Beckett's authorial career than is now commonly accepted. In his discussion of Beckett's Proust Pilling notes how Beckett "stole" his citation from Calderón by identifying its source in Schopenhauer's thought. 13 In the same year, Pilling, in his monograph entitled Samuel Beckett (1976), examined Beckett's "very considerable" debt to Schopenhauer as he astutely observed how "much of the discussion in *Proust* is based on Schopenhauer's very original aesthetics." Rosen concurred with Pilling's claims about the presiding role of Schopenhauer's philosophy in *Proust*: "Beckett's analysis depends not only on Schopenhauer's main ideas, but also on the details of that philosopher's thought, even on his literary allusions and examples."15

Beckett's use of Schopenhauerian notions in *Proust* and *The Unnamable* (1958) constitute the subjects of two essays, published in 1981 and 1988. In the first, entitled 'Where There's a Will There's a Way Out: Beckett and Schopenhauer,' O'Hara provides readers with an admirable précis of Schopenhauer's thought. He then moves to a consideration of the applicability of Schopenhauerian principles to Beckett's work, affording particular attention to *The Unnamable*. O'Hara also encourages us to be mindful of the stylistic impact that Beckett's reading of Schopenhauer seems to have produced upon the development of his critical consciousness: "Schopenhauer won him over, and there is an energy to the baroque and abrasive style of the Proust monograph quite different from the self-conscious intellectual mannerism of his earlier essay on Joyce." As I propose to show in Chapter One, Beckett had already employed exegetical principles in 'Dante... Bruno. Vico... Joyce' (1929) which are consonant with Schopenhauer's aesthetic views. Accordingly, it may have been the case that his independently formulated ideas were not merely corroborated but intensified by

his study of Schopenhauer's work prior to his writing of *Proust*. Unlike the speaker in 'From an Abandoned Work' (1956) who, despite being "A very fair scholar" had "no thought, but a great memory" (*TNO*, 59), Beckett impressed Rudmose-Brown by his "thoughtful appreciation of the texts that they were studying" (*JK*, 48) during Beckett's undergraduate years at TCD. In a letter to Valery Larbaud, written on 18 January 1929, Rudmose-Brown emphasised Beckett's independence of mind: "Un des mes élèves les plus intelligents, grand ennemi de l'impérialisme, du patriotisme, de toutes les Eglises." While Schopenhauerian discourse demonstrably pervades *Proust*, O'Hara, in his essay entitled 'Beckett's Schopenhauerian Reading of Proust: The Will as Whirled in Re-Presentation,' is overly eager to downplay Beckett's personal contribution to his examination of Proust's masterpiece: "The affinity between Beckett and Schopenhauer was a close one at this time; the philosopher's assertions spoke for the still mute, or nearly mute artist."

Like many of his predecessors in the field of Beckett studies, Wood was content to focus upon the salient parallels between the excoriating evaluations of earthly existence to be found in Schopenhauer's work and those offered by Beckett in *Proust*. He points to the enduring significance of Schopenhauer's despairing vision of worldly affairs for Beckett's compositional procedures: "Half-remembered snippets of these expressions of pessimism, all taken from Schopenhauer, reappear with some regularity in Beckett's later drama and prose." From the aforementioned examples it is clear that Beckett scholars were becoming increasingly attuned to the significance of Schopenhauer's philosophy to Beckett, but in broader academic circles even major publications could omit Beckett from the company of those who had allegedly been impressed by Schopenhauer's thought. In a seminal collection entitled Schopenhauer, Philosophy, and the Arts (1996), Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauer's work is not discussed, while W. B. Yeats is included in the pantheon of major artists who were reputedly "influenced" by Schopenhauer's thought, despite the fact that the biographical or intertextual evidence for Yeats's interest in Schopenhauer's writings remains scarce. Critics who have analysed the significance of Schopenhauer's philosophy for our understanding of Beckett's work have occasionally made the type of erroneous statement which merely serves to diminish our understanding of the range of Schopenhauerian echoes in Beckett's oeuvre. Wood writes, "For Schopenhauer, the only way of escaping this futile force which controls our lives lies in the aesthetic experience,"<sup>21</sup> while Wulf reiterates that view by stating that Schopenhauer considers "artistic contemplation" to be "the only means of overcoming the futility of our insatiable cravings."<sup>22</sup> According to Schopenhauer, "giving

up and denying the will is the highest wisdom" (*MRIII*, 360). While aesthetic experience provides transitory respite from the ceaseless striving to which we are ordinarily subject, it is neither the sole nor the most effective means of doing so. It is "Through suffering [that] a man is chastened and sanctified, in other words is liberated from the will-to-live" (*MRIII*, 642). As we shall see, Beckett's characters rarely achieve liberation from their woes through their experiences of artworks, but their personal tribulations occasionally inspire ephemeral cessations of their conative and epistemic cravings.

More recent studies have benefited from a use of Beckett's letters and notebooks thereby enriching our awareness of the textual sources from which Beckett's knowledge of Schopenhauer derived. However, key conceptual issues remain unaddressed, specifically the question of how Beckett, as a literary artist, could use Schopenhauer's inherently systematic and discursive writings. Acheson evinced an awareness of the issue by asserting that, "Much as he admires Schopenhauer, Beckett does not, in his fiction and drama, seek to promote that philosopher's theories."<sup>23</sup> However, that statement is difficult to reconcile with his later claim that, "it is clear that the philosophical 'key' to the *Nouvelles* is Schopenhauer's *The World as* Will and Idea."24 The following passage, transcribed from a conversation that Beckett held with d'Aubarède, serves to highlight Beckett's own aversion to such reductive statements: "people have wondered if the existentialists' problem of being may afford a key to your works. There's no key or problem" (GF, 217). In 1959 Mintz claimed that, "Murphy is inexplicable except by reference to [Geulinex's work],"25 while Bair averred that the philosophy of Geulincx constitutes "the key". to understanding Murphy. Knowlson and Pilling repudiate such views: "there is no key that will unlock every problem thrown up by his work, no formula that will elucidate every aspect of his oeuvre."<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Büttner is cautious about the hermeneutic value of bringing philosophical theories to bear upon the semantic enigmas that are continually posed by Beckett's work: "no philosophy is able to 'explain' it." 28 While I will discuss a wide array of Schopenhauerian traces in Beckett's art, at no point will any of Schopenhauer's ideas be postulated as definitive solutions to the aesthetically-enriching interpretative puzzles which repeatedly arise in our engagement with Beckett's work.

Given Schopenhauer's own assertions pertaining to the ability of genuine art to resist exhaustive interpretations, a reading of Beckett's work in conjunction with Schopenhauer's aesthetics enables us to appreciate the numerous ambiguities that suffuse Beckett's literary

worlds. It also provides us with a means of recognising why no philosophical reading of Beckett can prove ultimately determinative in exegetical terms. Given Schopenhauer's assertion that, "a concept can never be the source, and its communication can never be the aim, of a work of art" (*WWRI*, 240), an investigation of the parallels between Schopenhauer's aesthetic views and Beckett's critical reflections, such as that provided in Chapter One of the present study, can underscore the need for a re-evaluation of our notion of influence in relation to Beckett's use of Schopenhauer's ideas. When Büttner declares his intention to explore "the ways in which Schopenhauer's thought made it possible for Beckett to create his literary work" it would be easy to assume that Beckett's creative impulses originated in the abstract and systematic principles of that philosopher's writings. Büttner proceeds to highlight some of the ways in which Beckett's work "makes use of" Schopenhauer's "recommendations [involving] the practice of compassion and resignation." However, Schopenhauer is adamant that aesthetics and ethics are not to be understood as areas within which deontological prescriptions could be efficacious:

[J]ust as all the professors of aesthetics with their combined efforts are unable to impart to anyone the capacity to produce works of genius i.e., genuine works of art, so are all the professors of ethics and preachers of virtue just as little able to transform an ignoble character into one that is virtuous and noble. (WWRI, 527)

Having asserted that "Many of [Beckett's] works call forth similar feelings of compassion or resignation in the audience," Büttner subsequently claims that, "Resignation, for Schopenhauer, consisted in the denial of the will-to-live that it is the role of tragedy to evoke." While Schopenhauer argued that tragedy *could* actuate aspirations towards such renunciation, he did not think that artworks *ought* to have the type of instrumental purpose that Büttner describes. In Chapter One we will recognise the fervency with which Schopenhauer consistently decries ideas regarding the role of artworks as didactic repositories of ethical ideals. In such cases, art becomes "a mere means and instrument" (*PPII*, 562). Büttner's views regarding the potentially edifying effects of Beckett's own works are plausible, yet when juxtaposed so closely with his contestable estimation of Schopenhauer's reflections upon tragedy, they may serve to suggest that Beckett's creative impulses were fundamentally inspired by moral principles. The idea that it is the "role of tragedy to evoke" thoughts of withdrawal in the readers, viewers or listeners of Beckett's art would be difficult to reconcile with Schopenhauer's view that, "to wish to communicate [concepts] through *a work of art* is a very useless indirect course; in fact, it belongs to that

playing with the means of art without knowledge of the end which I have just censured. Therefore, a work of art, the conception of which has resulted from mere, distinct concepts, is always ungenuine" (*WWRII*, 409). The present study will identify numerous correspondences between Schopenhauer's ethics and Beckett's *oeuvre* but I am more interested in the purely aesthetic implications of such affinities than I am with the extent to which Beckett accepted Schopenhauer's arguments regarding compassion as an indispensable foundation of morally significant behaviour.

In considering Beckett's employment of Schopenhauerian themes, Weller goes beyond a mere identification of intertextual correlations and encourages us to recognise how the notions of ontological guilt which are the focus of those studies which deal with the Schopenhauerian aspects of *Proust* are radically reworked in Beckett's later writings: "Schopenhauer's sense of life as expiation for the sin of having been born gets twisted out of shape by the crooked logic of a number of Beckett's post-war works."<sup>32</sup> This dissertation will highlight numerous cases wherein Beckett adapts various elements of Schopenhauer's thought in accordance with his early authorial aims. Schopenhauer's unparalleled importance for artists of the first rank such as Turgenev, Flaubert, Tolstoy, Conrad, Proust, Hardy, Mann, Wagner, and Mahler ensures that he will continue to inspire much critical commentary, yet within Beckett studies extended treatments of Schopenhauer-Beckett issues are strikingly rare. To date, Pothast's The Metaphysical Vision: Arthur Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Art and Life and Samuel Beckett's Own Way to Make Use of It (2008) provides the most comprehensive published account of Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauer's work currently available in English. Like his predecessors, Pothast focusses on two of Schopenhauer's works: The World as Will and Representation (1818) and Parerga and Paralipomena (1851). Given his acknowledgement that Beckett "seems to have studied" works such as On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (1813) "extensively indeed,"<sup>33</sup> his neglect of Schopenhauer's other writings, including On the Fourfold Root, is somewhat perplexing. Schopenhauer's core conceptual claims are embedded in a strict referential totality, whereby his aesthetic reflections are unintelligible without a sense of their epistemological presuppositions. Guided by Schopenhauer's "demand that whoever wishes to make himself acquainted with my philosophy shall read every line of me" (WWRII, 461), I make extensive references to the entire body of English translations of his philosophical oeuvre. I also employ Schopenhauer's posthumously published manuscripts in instances where a broader intratextual reading of Schopenhauer can illuminate concepts which seem to

have been aesthetically valuable to Beckett. I deviate from Pothast's view that Beckett "remained an author with a distinctly metaphysical tendency." Quite apart from Beckett's explicitly declared indifference to Schopenhauer's value as a metaphysician, in Chapter One I examine how Beckett's study of Proust is more in line with readings of Schopenhauer which regard the metaphysical connotations of his aesthetics to be dispensable in light of his own fervent views regarding the primacy of perceptual experience in creative practices. Pothast subsequently claims that, "important elements of the theoretical as well as aesthetic framework of Schopenhauer's philosophy were left behind by Beckett very soon after having used them for his own purposes in *Proust*." I aim to demonstrate that Beckett's creative ventures which succeeded the composition of *Proust* contain numerous thematic and formal alignments with Schopenhauer's thought.

My research also differs from that of Pothast in going beyond a mere focus on *Proust* and encompassing a wide array of Beckett's critical reflections from a variety of periods in his life in order to demonstrate the extent of the consonance between Schopenhauer's philosophy and Beckett's aesthetic views. My inclusion of cross-textual references to Beckett's later prose and drama throughout this dissertation will oppose Pothast's assertion that "There is an obvious parallelism between Beckett and Nietzsche in that both set out with Schopenhauer's philosophy of art and left it behind later in their lives." That statement is more verifiable in the case of Nietzsche, who, by working primarily through the medium of concepts, engaged in a more overt rebuttal of his erstwhile educator. Schopenhauer's work was of abiding interest to Beckett. As Pilling and Knowlson have noted, it is far more plausible that Beckett had internalised Schopenhauer's thought to such an extent that it informed his writing in a variety of subtle and nuanced ways throughout his authorial life. In a laudably comprehensive depiction of the problems facing discussions of the relationship between Schopenhauer's philosophy and Beckett's art, Tonning observes that,

Schopenhauer's utility for Beckett is such that, once noticed, it becomes hard to discuss almost any passage in Beckett, or any aspect of his thought, without referring to this influence. However, such a vague sense of ubiquity has created something of a quandary for Beckett scholarship. Generalized explication of Beckett texts in terms of Schopenhauer's ideas can feel like a distinctly tired exercise: the ideas themselves grow overfamiliar, distinctions between individual Beckett texts begin to blur, and the entire *oeuvre* starts to resemble a ludicrously extended argument for a certain metaphysics. On the other hand, strictly limiting the discussion to documented allusions risks seriously under-estimating the full impact of the relationship under study, not least because allusions generally are much fewer and

often hard to identify in Beckett's post-war work. This is not to suggest that the alternative method of simply assuming that Beckett "must be" alluding to this or that Schopenhauer passage in a given instance is any improvement.<sup>37</sup>

My research differs from Tonning's insofar as it eschews notions of Schopenhauer's "influence" over Beckett. I am also averse to his suggestions regarding the difficulties of ridding ourselves of a sense of Schopenhauer's omnipresence in Beckett's oeuvre. Tonning is, however, justified in accentuating the issue of repetition. *Proust* has been repeatedly revisited by critics in their search for instances of the thematic congruence between Schopenhauer's writings and those of Beckett. Tonning is also aware that the specifically literary value of Beckett's work can be diminished when he is portrayed as an apologist for Schopenhauer's metaphysical views. This dissertation prioritises the purely aesthetic value of Schopenhauer's work to Beckett by showing how Schopenhauer's epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical reflections were exploited by Beckett for creatively enriching ends. Tonning also remarks that, "While much excellent work has been done on Beckett's reading of philosophy from about 1932 onward, it is arguable that Beckett's fundamental philosophical (or anti-philosophical) position had already been formed through his first encounter with Schopenhauer." Schopenhauer may have provided Beckett with a confirmation of ideas about life and art which he had previously intuited in an inchoate yet formative way. If we consider Beckett's notes on authors such as à Kempis and Geulincx it is remarkable that many of the transcriptions contained therein are of a piece with Schopenhauer's vituperation of worldly endeavours and his commendation of those who recognise the sheer futility of the incessant striving to which we seem ordinarily predisposed. At various points in this dissertation I will note how Beckett's prior reading of Schopenhauer would have acquainted him with themes which pervade the writings of figures such as à Kempis and Geulinex who espouse quietist views. As we shall see, the most revelatory aspect of such chronological precedence is that Beckett derived numerous insights from Schopenhauer regarding the means by which an author could employ the conceptual discourses of philosophy and theology in his texts without thereby imperilling their specifically artistic value.

Having read Tiedtke's thesis on Proust, entitled *Symbole und Bilder im Werke Marcel Prousts*, Beckett was moved to condemn what he viewed as the "tedious academic distinctions" upon which it relied in its use of "[c]lassification, definitions + paradigms."

Beckett lamented that, in his reading of Tiedtke's study, he did not receive even a "whiff of Proust as ARTIST." Any interrogation of the intertextual concordance between the works of Schopenhauer and Beckett must provide an outline of the inherently systematic underpinnings of Schopenhauerian concepts. In this sense, provisions of "[c]lassification, definitions + paradigms" are indispensable if Schopenhauer's arguments are to be properly contextualised. *Proust* is notorious for its omission of an adequate exposition of its Schopenhauerian foundations; Acheson justifiably avers that it is "obscured by the lack of an adequate background discussion of Schopenhauer." However, Beckett may well have been confronted with an unavoidable problem that can be discerned in the aforementioned critical studies. In the essays which investigate Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauer's thought we invariably get little "whiff" of Beckett as artist owing to the unavoidable necessity for critics to cover the fundamental elements of Schopenhauer's thought while facing relatively restricted word counts.

# Concepts of Influence

Tonning's repeated use of the concept of influence in his exploration of Schopenhauerian notions in Beckett's work echoes similar practices in the writings of many of those who have sought to probe the place of Schopenhauer's ideas in Beckett's oeuvre. By highlighting Beckett's acute awareness of Schopenhauer's opposition to art which is overtly guided by rational discourse, this dissertation specifies the ways in which uncritical notions of influence can impede our understanding of Beckett's commitment to the primacy of the aesthetic. Any consideration of the role of Schopenhauer's philosophy in the work of a creative artist should acknowledge Schopenhauer's own explicit assertions regarding the inferiority of art which is subservient to conceptual thought. Kaufmann, in his study of Thomas Mann's engagement with Schopenhauer's work, notes that, while the reading of Schopenhauer was "the decisive intellectual experience of [Mann's] youth," such an encounter was "of a catalytic rather than generative nature; it brought him into his own."41 In the majority of discussions of the role of Schopenhauer's thought in Beckett's work critics have not addressed the notion of influence upon which their research manifestly relies. Within Beckett studies, categorical assertions such as the following, made by Lees, are commonplace: "Beckett was deeply and permanently influenced by the writings of Schopenhauer."<sup>42</sup> Acheson claims that in *Murphy* "The influence of Leibniz, Geulinex and Schopenhauer is especially important." Grouping Schopenhauer with such philosophers overlooks core issues in his aesthetics which radically problematize our basic assumptions about the concept of influence between the writings of

philosophers and literary artists. Unlike Leibniz and Geulincx, Schopenhauer examines the distinctions between philosophy and literature in a way which can prove profoundly instructive in understanding how Beckett's ideas and practices can be related to Schopenhauer's thought. Even the more recent surveys of Schopenhauer's importance to Beckett are illustrative of a tendency to proceed without a prior examination of the conceptual implications of the notion of influence. Büttner notes, "From the first studies on Beckett in the sixties until the present, Schopenhauer has been recognized as a major influence on [Beckett]," while Tonning is adamant that previous explorations of Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauer's thought understate its significance: "there simply *is* no comparable influence on Beckett's work, philosophical or otherwise." Both writers appear to disregard the ways in which the application of the concept of influence to their subjects of study warrants prior analysis, especially in light of Schopenhauer's highly refined sense of the relationship between philosophy and literature.

Pothast deviates from the aforementioned critics insofar as he would "very much hesitate to speak of an 'influence' of Schopenhauer on Beckett." He goes on to claim that, "Concerning Beckett's literature, the idea of influence seems to be altogether mistaken."<sup>46</sup> Pothast thereby echoes the views of Knowlson, who observes that, "With a creative mind like that of Beckett, influence is simply too straightforward and too deterministic a concept to be very helpful. Instead, recognition - of affinities and resemblances - is much more appropriate to the ambiguity, subtlety and suggestiveness of his artistic world."<sup>47</sup> Beckett may well have been sensitive to the problem of assigning the concept of influence to Proust's engagement with Schopenhauer's thought. In the words of O'Hara, "Curiously . . . Beckett never notes that influence, despite his own persistent application of Schopenhauer to the text."48 As the present study attempts to show, Beckett was very much in agreement with Schopenhauer's insistence upon the proper role of ideas in literary texts. In his consistent commendation of art which resists the logical proprieties of analytic thought in its inception and reception, his views are very much of a piece with those of Schopenhauer. This dissertation will underscore various elements of Schopenhauer's thought which render the concept of influence essentially contestable in relation to Beckett's work, particularly in our attempts to comprehend the critical and creative significance of Schopenhauer's philosophy to Beckett's authorial procedures.

# **Against Reductionism**

The history of Beckett criticism abounds with examples of reductionist readings. Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage (1979) presents us with many instances wherein Beckett's works are read as vehicles for philosophical investigations. French points to the apparently dogmatic tendencies of Beckett's literary endeavours in stating that, by 1969, Beckett had "moved into an abstract world of unchallengeable assertion" (GF, 33). Beckett's claim, reportedly uttered to Tandy, that he was "not unduly concerned with intelligibility" and that he hoped Not I (1973) "may work on the nerves of the audience, not its intellect" (GF, 36), accords with similar statements made by him throughout his artistic career. He was, nevertheless, consistently treated as an author who used his art as a declarative manifesto which served to propagate his worldview. Commentators who had previously offered favourable reviews of Beckett's work were moved to denigrate his supposedly doctrinaire purposes. Tynan railed against what he considered to be Beckett's desire to elevate subjective intimations of despair to the level of indubitable fact: "I suddenly realised that Beckett wanted his private fantasy to be accepted as objective truth" (GF, 166). Beckett has also been regarded as a writer who employs allegory as part of his didactic intentions. According to Fraser, Waiting for Godot (1954) is best understood as "a modern morality play, on permanent Christian themes" (GF, 100). My discussion of Beckett's aesthetic views in Chapter One demonstrates how Beckett's hostility towards allegorical practices is commensurate with key aspects of Schopenhauer's aesthetics. While I do not wish to suggest that Beckett subscribed to Schopenhauer's philosophy as an authoritative system of normative principles from which he was loath to deviate, I aim to highlight those areas of Beckett's art which align most suggestively with Schopenhauer's views upon the creation and appreciation of art.

Some critics have taken Beckett to task for failing to exemplify the principles of despair that his work apparently espouses. In this sense, Beckett is assumed to have proselytising designs upon his readers. Toynbee argues that, "By continuing to live and, still more, by continuing to write, the author refutes his own message" (*GF*, 75). The fallacious notion that Beckett desired to supply his readers with a blueprint for living is based upon a failure to understand or accept his deeply Schopenhauerian attitudes regarding the relationship between philosophy and art. In an interview with d'Aubarède he categorically asserted that he "wouldn't have had any reason to write [his] novels if [he] could have expressed their subject in philosophic terms" (*GF*, 217). Nevertheless, in spite of Beckett's consistent disavowals of philosophical

intentions, we can still come across statements which confidently assert that works such as *Eleutheria* (1995) are "true to [Beckett's] philosophy."<sup>49</sup> Following his admirable exegesis of Schopenhauerian principles and their relevance to Beckett's work, O'Hara confidently asserts that *Murphy* "has a thesis"<sup>50</sup> and that the ideas in the novel "create an ambience" which "permits readers to experience the novel's intellectual argument."<sup>51</sup> From a Schopenhauerian perspective, such statements pose serious questions regarding the status of *Murphy* as a work of art. O'Hara later sounds a note of censure in commenting upon Beckett's earlier works where he contends, "aside from Murphy, Beckett's presentations were essentially static. Each psychological problem was stated and examined; none was worked through."<sup>52</sup> One is here reminded of Beckett's refusal to engage in an analysis of Hamm or Clov: "Hamm as stated and Clov as stated, together as stated, nec tecum nec sine te, in such a place, and in such a world, that's all I can manage, more than I could" (*D*, 109). Beckett's refusal to create art in which his characters' predicaments are "worked through" reveals his distinct antipathy towards such therapeutic finality.

As we shall see, Beckett's insistence upon the purely descriptive function of art is one of the most salient aspects of his affinities with Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer formulates a strict distinction between philosophical and literary methodologies. As a conceptual discipline, philosophy is concerned with abstract problems which distance the theorist from the world, whereas the perceptual basis of art is founded upon its creator's inherence in the world. According to Schopenhauer, "the concept . . . is eternally barren and unproductive in art" (WWRI, 235). It is from this Schopenhauerian perspective that we can point the limitations of Butler's view that, "if Beckett laughs at and plays with the answers of traditional philosophy it can only be because he is concerned with the same questions. In spite of all his protestations to the contrary, Beckett is working the same ground as the philosophers."53 While it is the case that Schopenhauer points to a certain overlap between the aspirations of artists and philosophers given that both art and philosophy "work at bottom towards the solution of the problems of existence" (WWRII, 406), Butler is quite adamant in referring to what he deems to be Beckett's strictly philosophical intentions. He attempts to extract a conceptual solution from Murphy by reading it as indicative of Beckett's desire to look "for a way out of dualism." 54 As recently as 2013 Butler's claim was reiterated by Okamuro who pronounced that "Surmounting Cartesian dualism was Beckett's lifelong desire." 55 Those who wish to locate a specifiable worldview in Beckett's work are frequently repelled by what they discern therein. One of the most notable examples of this is O'Casey's

impassioned declaration that Beckett's "philosophy isn't my philosophy, for within him there is no hazard of hope, no desire for it; nothing in it but a lust for despair, and a crying of woe." Kenner asserts that *Waiting for Godot* is barbed with designs upon our philosophical dispositions. He cites the opening words of *Godot* in support of his claim that the words "Nothing to be done" (*CDW*, 11) constitute the play's "message" and are voiced early on "as though to get the didactic part out of the way." Kenner's view is representative of a significant trend within Beckett studies according to which the attribution of a philosophical motive to his work is a prelude to a reductionist reading. Calder attempted to distil a philosophical essence from Beckett's *oeuvre* in *The Philosophy of Samuel Beckett* (2001). This text, in its assertion that what we can expect to find in his work is "above all an ethical and philosophical message; the novels and plays will increasingly be seen as the wrapping for that message," continues a critical tradition which was given rather extreme form by Esslin, who claimed that Beckett's early poem, 'The Vulture' (1935), anticipates "the future argument of Beckett's complete *oeuvre*."

In ascribing philosophical intentions to Beckett commentators have overlooked his overt alignment with Schopenhauer's reflections upon the artist's vocation. Schopenhauer's confidence in the overall unity of his interrelated concepts prompted him to declare that his entire work articulates a "single thought" (WWRI, xii), yet he was also keen to point out that such coherence is the prerogative of the philosopher, not of the artist. The present work will show that to treat Beckett's writings as if they are cumulatively related to some ultimate conclusion is to ignore the vast range of distinctly Schopenhauerian reflections within his own critical texts, interviews, and letters which consistently reveal his animus against such endeavours. My formal and thematic analysis of Beckett's creative writings will underscore the means by which Beckett exalted semantic ambiguity in a way which can be mimetically related to his sense of the irreducible particularities of quotidian existence. As an author who had acquired direct insights into the distinctions between literature and philosophy, Murdoch's dictum that, "the literary writer deliberately leaves a space for his reader to play in. The philosopher must not leave any space,"60 is invaluable for those who attempt to understand the delineations between systematic thought and literary art. Murdoch's assertion echoes Schopenhauer's view that, "We are entirely satisfied with the impression of a work of art only when it leaves behind something that, in spite of all our reflection on it, we cannot bring down to the distinctness of a concept" (WWRII, 409). Beckett was clearly fascinated by the capacity of art to point beyond itself to realities which could not be explicitly stated. He

refers to poetry's capacity for producing an "extraordinary evocation of the unsaid by the said" (D, 94) and notes how painting can involve "un métier qui insinue plus qu'il n'affirme" (D, 130). Schopenhauer considers literature to be markedly adept at affording "profound glimpses" of those perplexing aspects of human character which are "beyond explanation" (EFR, 58). My research evaluates Beckett's assertion that the key word in appreciating the abounding interpretative ambiguities of his plays is "perhaps" (GF, 220) in relation to such cardinal elements of Schopenhauer's thought. Just as Gide had, according to Beckett, sought a "new narrative form, [which might be] analytical without being demonstrative, interrogative, not conclusive" (TCD MIC 60/16), Beckett creatively assimilated seminal ideas and conscripted them for aesthetic ends without submitting himself to the semantic constraints of strict philosophical methods. Those who have been closely involved with the staging of Beckett's plays recognise the importance of avoiding the demands of spectators and actors for explanatory closure. As Pountney puts it, "it is important not to reduce Beckett's work to a single interpretation, since its particular delight is its richness of possibility."  $^{61}$ 

1911 witnessed the publication of a book entitled Thomas Hardy: An Illustration of the Philosophy of Schopenhauer. Its author, Helen Garwood, made a significant contribution to the emerging area of literary studies which sought to examine the relationship between the philosophy of Schopenhauer and a major novelist, but in its very title her text begs a question which should be uppermost in the mind of anyone who wishes to investigate the presence of Schopenhauerian concepts in the pages of a creative writer. In what sense could any literary text be an "illustration" of a philosophy without constituting a mere translation of abstract discourse into artistic terms? That problem attains particular urgency when we consider Schopenhauer's damning indictments of art which is produced in accordance with conceptual thought. I propose to show how Beckett was demonstrably adept at relating the plight of his characters to culturally-hallowed ideas without rendering them artistically sterile or transforming them into the type of "clockwork cabbages" (PTD, 120) that inhabit Balzac's literary worlds. Butler is all too willing to ignore Beckett's aversion to Balzacian methods when he judges Beckett to be a dictatorial author who insistently coerces his characters into serving him as accomplices in a distinctively philosophical quest: "Beckett pushes and pushes his people into tighter and tighter corners in his search for a self that will be more than a self: clearly he does not just want to 'find himself' in the romantic cliché - he wants to find 'the Self,' that is, something that will render 'the mess' intelligible, something really quite like

Being."<sup>62</sup> Such statements belie Beckett's assertion that the "mess" must be observed, but it cannot be understood - "It is not a mess you can make sense of" (*GF*, 218-9). This dissertation will evince how Beckett's art derives much of its aesthetic value from its persistent exploitation of the aporias which beset the minds of his protagonists when they encounter the radically unintelligible nature of being.

It is incumbent upon any study of the relationship between the philosophy of Schopenhauer and the writings of Beckett to examine the precise nature of Beckett's understanding and use of Schopenhauerian thought. Thomas Mann's own sense of indebtedness to Schopenhauer was immense, but not unduly deferential. He notes that, "artists often become 'betrayers' of a philosophy" and that they understand the subject in "their way, an emotional way." Beckett was clearly adept at appropriating "grand, old, plastic words" (DFW, 191) for personal and artistic ends. He once admitted to the ways in which he had "twisted" elements of à Kempis' thought "into a programme of self-sufficiency" (LI, 257), yet in his use of the writings of other thinkers and artists he was equally proficient in creatively adapting their works for his own authorial purposes. Bloom's concept of "The clinamen or swerve" which amounts to "creative revisionism," is helpful in suggesting how Beckett manipulated key ideas from Schopenhauer's philosophy when composing of his critical and creative writings. Having observed that Beckett wrote Proust "presumably with no edition of Schopenhauer at hand to refer to,"65 Pilling subsequently claims that "it remains a moot point whether Beckett was simply working from a fallible memory, or whether his own developing creative vision - with words so very much a 'shadow' and a limitation - was beginning to generate its own refractory music."66 In this sense, "affinities and resemblances" are occasionally less readily decipherable owing to the extent to which Schopenhauer's thought was inflected in accordance with Beckett's authorial strategies. Beckett commended Joyce for being a "superb manipulator of material" (GF, 148); as the following chapters endeavour to reveal, Beckett was himself remarkably adept at reworking aspects of Schopenhauer's thought throughout his literary career.

## Suffering and Solitude

A comparative reading of the biographies of Schopenhauer and Beckett evinces many interesting parallels regarding experiences which proved formative for both writers in personal and authorial terms. Beckett recalled being precociously "aware of the unhappiness" around him; he had "little talent for happiness" as a child, while

Schopenhauer was "always very melancholy as a youth." Schopenhauer's sensitivity to suffering rendered the religious tenets with which he had been indoctrinated utterly untenable:

When I was seventeen, without any proper schooling, I was affected by the *misery and wretchedness of life*, as was the Buddha when in his youth he caught sight of sickness, old age, pain and death. The truth which the world truly and loudly proclaimed soon threw off the Jewish dogmas that had been stamped on my mind, and the result for me was that this world could not be the work of an all-bountiful, infinitely good being but rather of a devil who had summoned into existence creatures in order to gloat over the sight of their anguish and agony. (*MRIV*, 119)

Such revelations, derived as they were from direct perceptions of the world rather than from detached impersonal theorising, did not, however, engender Buddha-like compassion for humanity. In terms which echo Beckett's later discussions of his isolationist tendencies and his sense of "arrogant 'otherness'" (*LI*, 258) as a young man, the following passage reveals some of Schopenhauer's earliest misanthropic tendencies:

I have always kept myself from contact with others whenever in my youth I hankered after society; thus without reflection, in other words without knowing it, I recognised the paltriness of the rabble and the meaning of the words "you cannot be anything to me and I am nothing to you" which were present not as an idea but as a feeling . . . an individual nature bearing no resemblance to others is a burden in youth. (MRIV, 281)

Beckett recalled, "I wasn't at all what you would call a sociable sort of boy. The main requirement was to be alone," yet such propensities led to "misery & solitude & apathy" (LI, 258). However, Beckett may have derived temporary solace from Schopenhauer's insistence that those who are artistically inclined are beings apart, impervious to the alleged charms of interpersonal engagement. In mentioning "the fatuous torments that [he] had treasured as denoting the superior man" (LI, 259), Beckett echoed a variety of Schopenhauer's assertions that show how "the human of genius is in a higher degree a human being" (WN, 45). Schopenhauer's portrayal of the blissful states which are the pre-eminent privilege of genius is tempered by his declaration that "suffering [is] the essential martyrdom of genius as such" (WWRI, 191) and that "great mental superiority isolates a person more than does anything else" (WWRII, 228). When, in Proust, Beckett observed that "art is the apotheosis of solitude" (PTD, 64), it seems that personal experience and philosophical reflection had deeply converged. During his tour of Germany between 1936 and 1937, which

involved frequent trips to galleries and occasional opportunities to enjoy rapt absorption in pictorial masterpieces, Beckett was moved to confide to his diary the words "[h]ow I ADORE solitude." However, isolation occasionally weighed rather heavily on him: "I am utterly alone (no group even of my own kind)." While Beckett would later become renowned for what Whitelaw described as his "Compassion; a general love of his fellow human-beings," people who would have constituted Beckett's "own kind" at that specific point in his life were likely to have been exceedingly rare. In an uncharacteristically forthright and poignant admission of his own interpersonal predicaments, Schopenhauer writes:

Throughout my whole life I have felt terribly lonely and have always sighed from the depths of my heart: "Now give me a human being!" But alas in vain. I have remained in solitude; but I can honestly and sincerely say that it has not been my fault, for I have not turned away, have not shunned, anyone who in his heart and mind was a human being. I have found none but miserable wretches of limited intelligence, bad heart and mean disposition. Goethe, Fernow, possibly F. A. Wolf, and a few others were the exceptions. (*MRIV*, 501)

As I intend to show in Chapter One, the associations between solitude, suffering, and genuine creative impulses were intimately allied in the minds of Schopenhauer and Beckett. Beckett's profound and enduring admiration for Samuel Johnson was not based upon the "wit and wisdom machine" presented by Boswell; it was inextricably associated with Johnson's existential predicaments, such as "the horror of annihilation, the horror of madness, the horrified love of Mrs Thrale" (quoted in *JK*, 270). While recognising that, "there can hardly have been many so completely at sea in their solitude," Beckett acknowledged that Johnson had a "necessity of suffering" (*LI*, 529).

Schopenhauer and Beckett experienced highly ambivalent feelings towards mothers who exerted an intolerable personal, if creatively energising influence, while the world of academia inspired in both figures feelings of revulsion which were aroused through ill-fated stints as lecturers. While Schopenhauer claimed that, "I could not be tempted to sell myself in order to be merely a tool for the deliberate stultification of scholars" (*MRIV*, 96), Beckett "could not bear teaching others what he did not know himself." Schopenhauer and Beckett were indebted to fathers whose deaths eventually allowed them to pursue their philosophical and artistic aims without serious financial concerns, even if the fathers in question had originally hoped that their sons would succeed them in family firms. At various points in their

lives Schopenhauer and Beckett would endure feelings of remorse for their failure to fulfil perceived filial duties. Beckett "always felt guilty at letting [his father] down." When we learn that, "Where [Schopenhauer] had found sex he had not been in love, and where he had been in love (e.g. with Karoline Jagemann in Weimar) sex had been excluded," we are reminded of Beckett's own experience of amatory dilemmas with women such as Ethna McCarthy and Peggy Sinclair. Schopenhauer would argue that "all amorousness is rooted in the sexual impulse alone" (*WWRII*, 532), while Beckett would exclaim "No love . . . Only fuck." For both Schopenhauer and Beckett, public approbation was slow in coming, yet their attitudes to such recognition were similar. While Schopenhauer railed against the "numberless throng" (*MRIII*, 571) who were incapable of appreciating what he considered to be his seminal achievements, he pointed to the negative consequences of success. Such acclaim "falsifies our aspirations" (*MRIII*, 571). Similarly, Beckett voiced his indifference to public renown and claimed that he was more at home with failure "having breathed deep of its vivifying air" (*LII*, 594) for much of his writing life.

Having both visited institutions for the mentally ill, their memories of such places would explicitly inform aspects of their writings. They were both taken to task for their relentless engagement with the world's woes. Schopenhauer lamented that, "They cry out against the *melancholy and disconsolate nature of my philosophy*; but this rests merely on the fact that, instead of inventing a future hell as the equivalent of their sins, I have shown that where there is sin, there is already in the world something akin to hell" (*MRIII*, 66). Beckett, in noting that "some people object" to the prevalence of distress in his work, told the following story in his interview with Driver:

At a party an English intellectual - so-called - asked me why I write always about distress. As if it were perverse to do so! He wanted to know if my father had beaten me or my mother had run away from home to give me an unhappy childhood. I told him no, that I had had a very happy childhood. Then he thought me more perverse than ever. I left the party as soon as possible and got into a taxi. On the glass partition between me and the driver were three signs: one asked for help for the blind, another help for orphans, and the third for relief for the war refugees. One does not have to look for distress. It is screaming at you even in the taxis of London. (*GF*, 221)

Religion provides one of the most suggestive points of commonality between the lives of Schopenhauer and Beckett. Their early religious instruction gave both figures a sense of the inevitability of pain in a fallen world. Through his Low Church upbringing, Beckett imbibed

a dark and thoroughly austere version of Christianity. As was the case with Schopenhauer, his lifelong sensitivity to suffering ensured that certain aspects of Protestantism would remain as indelible features of his mindset, becoming thematic constants within his work. Hübscher, in his The Philosophy of Schopenhauer in its Intellectual Context (1989), provides us with an insightful account of the role of Pietist thinking in Schopenhauer's upbringing, particularly in what he considers to be its stress on the congenital sinfulness of being. Schopenhauer, in spite of his impassioned opposition towards those who would revere a God who created a world suffused with pain, maintained an abiding interest in the teachings of Pietism: "the catalogue of his library holdings, left behind after his death, shows to what extent he searched through the writings of the Pietists right up to the last moments of his life. He could still find confirmation there for many of his own ideas."<sup>78</sup> In Beckett's *oeuvre* characters frequently attempt to understand their afflictions in accordance with the systematic tenets of Christian discourse. In exploring the variety of ways in which the troublesome lives of Beckett's protagonists fail to attain solace from conceptual thought this dissertation will note how the interpretative principles thereby evoked echo some of Schopenhauer's own evaluations of the central doctrinal precepts of Christianity.

#### The Hermeneutics of Pain

During a bout of illness in September 1937 Beckett became increasingly aware of the reasons for his enduring admiration for Schopenhauer's philosophy:

When I was ill I found the only thing I could read was Schopenhauer. Everything else I tried only confirmed the feeling of sickness. It was very curious. Like suddenly a window opened on a fug. I always knew he was one of the ones that mattered most to me, and it is a pleasure more real than any pleasure for a long time to begin to understand now why it is so. (*LI*, 550)

Some of the most moving passages in Beckett's writings portray attempts by characters to impose an explanatory framework upon their woeful lives. At such points the significance and efficacy of conceptual discourse is incisively probed. Schopenhauer is adamant that "people positively need an *interpretation of life*" (*PPII*, 325), specifically owing to the ubiquity of suffering. He points to our requirement for "an account of the *mauvaise* plaisanterie of this existence which we have to go through without ever getting to know why and what for" (*MRIII*, 498). However, in a statement which provides a useful commentary upon the predicaments of Beckett's protagonists, Schopenhauer argues that such a necessity intensifies the misery of human existence: "generally our greatest sufferings do not lie in the

present as representations of perception or as immediate feeling, but in our faculty of reason as abstract concepts, tormenting thoughts" (WWRI, 298). He goes on to characterise the faculty of reason as a "strict, untiring, and most troublesome governess" (WWRII, 98). Beckett's fascination with the possible import of misery is encapsulated in a question which he posed to Thomas MacGreevy: "Is there some way of devoting pain & monstrosity & incapacitation to the service of a deserving cause?" (LI, 258) In an earlier letter Beckett had declared that his admiration for Schopenhauer's work was partly based upon the philosopher's provision of "An intellectual justification of unhappiness - the greatest that has ever been attempted" (LI, 33). Schopenhauer and Beckett were unrelenting in their determination to compose works which come to terms with a world which is permeated by woe. While Schopenhauer contended that "A philosophy, in between the pages of which one does not hear the tears, the weeping and gnashing of teeth and the terrible din of mutual universal murder, is no philosophy,"<sup>79</sup> Beckett, in a conversation with Harold Pinter, was disturbingly frank about his own authorial criteria. He stated, "I was in hospital once. There was a man in another ward, dying of throat cancer. In the silence, I could hear his screams continually. That's the only kind of form my work has."80 Beckett was acutely aware that in art "everything" could be "made to" end "like a fairy tale . . . even the most unsanitary episodes" (DFW, 109). As Cohn observes, Beckett's meticulous search for a mode of expression which could convey his tenebrous vision of existence was central to his creative endeavours, even if he invariably "despaired of finding form for his sadness."81 Such a distinctly lifelong preoccupation was articulated very early in his authorial career. In 'Casket of Pralinen for a Daughter of a Dissipated Mandarin' (1931) Beckett states: "I am ashamed in the end / of this dud artistry, / I am ashamed of presuming / to align words, / of everything but the ingenuous fibres / that suffer honestly" (CPS, 33). To read such lines as mere evidence of Beckett's obsession with desolate themes would be to overlook their revelation of the deep aesthetic imperatives which were fundamental to his compositional procedures. As we shall see, Beckett's desire to provide authentic depictions of the actuality of lived experience inspired his ongoing struggles with what he felt to be the falsifying capacities of words and reason.

Critics such as Zeifman argue that readings of Beckett's work from orthodox Christian perspectives are undermined by the "ironic counterpoint", that separates his writings from such normative positions. However, to place Beckett in a reactive dialogue with Christianity is to ignore the polysemic essence of concepts such as love and mercy which are foundational

elements of that religion. Winnie can praise the "Holy light" (*CDW*, 160) which will radiate with infernal intensity over the ensuing hours, just as Mouth can solemnly declare "God is love" in the hope that she is simply being "purged" (*CDW*, 381). It is tempting to point out the discrepancies involved between the anguish of such characters and their purported beliefs in a beneficent power that authorises their wretchedness, but the principles of logic which would lead to such inferences are, as we shall see, a dubious source of comfort to the inhabitants of Beckett's literary worlds. Schopenhauer's "justification of unhappiness" is inextricably associated with his reading of Christianity. He argues, "Actually and in point of fact *pain is the purpose of life*. In keeping with this we often find discussed in Christian devotional literature the *salutary nature of the cross* and of suffering . . . Thus the fundamental tendency of man's life remains essentially *tragic*" (*MRIII*, 690). In Beckett's work Christological themes abound. When the narrator of *How It Is* (1964) states that there are "crosses everywhere indelible traces" (*HII*, 90) we are reminded of the ubiquity of allusions to Christ's agonies throughout Beckett's *oeuvre*.

Beckett admitted that his plays engage with similar facets of experience as Christianity as both "deal with distress" (GF, 221). The pervasive presence of Biblical themes in Beckett's writings is perhaps nowhere more evident than in those cases where the occurrence of suffering seems to necessitate and evade hermeneutical reduction. Likewise, Schopenhauer's habitual employment of theological discourse in his depiction of the unavoidable realities of earthly torments serves to underscore the relationship between religion and pain in his work. He argues that the most profoundly intractable of theological questions are generated, not by detached reasoning, but by our affective and conational engagement with the world. The questions which tend to invoke theological discourse have, according to Schopenhauer, emanated "from the heart not from the head or knowledge, as is pretended" (PPI, 118). However, Schopenhauer's contentions regarding the limits of reason led to his view that human life is ineluctably fraught with insoluble enigmas which arise from our experiential immanence in the world. In a statement which coheres with Beckett's view of Christianity as a religion which engages with anguish, Schopenhauer contends that, "The centre and heart of Christianity consist of the doctrine of the Fall, original sin, the depravity of our natural state, and the corruption of man according to nature . . . But Christianity thus shows itself to be pessimism (PPII, 387-8).

However alluring Judaeo-Christian discourse proved to be when set against the radical

inscrutability of existence, Schopenhauer and Beckett were avowedly intolerant to views which portray earthly misery as being vindicated by God's sapiential schemes. Schopenhauer wrote, "I despise this optimism, which dishonours and unnerves the human being by trying to tell him that all this is justifiable, in order, and necessary." Knowlson describes Beckett's attendance at a sermon, within which a minister, voicing his discomfort at the traumatic spectacle of pain with which the world is suffused, proclaimed to the congregation that, "the crucifixion was only the beginning. You must contribute to the kitty" (*JK*, 67). Knowlson reports Beckett's horror at hearing such a callous reduction of earthly torments to an insipid doctrinal formula:

How, Beckett argued with himself, could one possibly justify pain and death as making a 'contribution' to anything? 'The kitty' was simply a senseless accumulation of pain. How then could pain and suffering have any moral value? And how cynical it seemed to him to regard such suffering as preparing one for an afterlife that would be all the better for the suffering that preceded it. (*JK*, 67-8)

However, Beckett's authorial consciousness was imbued with Low Church themes. In Chapter One we shall see how he queried the aesthetic value of opera. In denouncing what he called "Wagnerism" Beckett declared: "I do not believe in collaboration between the arts, I want a theatre reduced to its own means, speech and acting, without painting, without music, without embellishments. That is Protestantism if you like, we are what we are" (*LII*, 218). Resemblances between Beckett's stripped-down stage sets and the austere bareness of church interiors within Low Church traditions of Protestantism are suggestively evoked by such statements, while our sense of the purely aesthetic value of Low Church ideas within Beckett's work is similarly enhanced. When asked by Juliet if he had been able to "do away with the influence of religion" Beckett proffered a splendidly inchoate reply: "In my outward behaviour probably . . . but as for the rest . . . . "84

Schopenhauer was keenly aware of the ways in which interest in his philosophy would increase as confidence in Christian doctrines diminished: "Belief in these is daily disappearing and people will, therefore, have to turn to my philosophy" (*PPI*, 132). When Christianity failed to provide Beckett with a credible account of the meaning of pain, it was highly probable that Schopenhauer's thought would fulfil that role, just as it had for many of the greatest artists in Western culture, such as Mahler, whose creations were inspired by such vexed reflections as: "*What did you live for?* Why did you suffer? Is it all only a vast, terrifying joke?" Beckett's characters persistently enunciate the deep existential urgency of

such questions. It is intriguing to consider the reasons why Christianity, which is ostensibly a religion of hope, could prove abidingly alluring to figures such as Schopenhauer and Beckett, who are more readily classified as purveyors of gloom. In the present work Beckett's fascination with Christian traditions will be considered in relation to their inexorable yet issueless attempts to rationalise the rueful characteristics of what Schopenhauer describes as "our very mysterious and enigmatical existence" (*PPII*, 235). Christianity is a "mythology with which [Beckett] was perfectly familiar" from early childhood; its expansive thematic presence in his works reveals that he had imbibed those elements of Christianity which purportedly engage with the reality of human anguish by accommodating its existence within theodical frameworks.

As Pilling points out, Beckett was reading Augustine "at much the same time" as he was engaging with Schopenhauer's work. He proceeds to make the plausible claim that Beckett "must have been impressed by the force of Schopenhauer's attack on Augustine's theodicy,"87 but it is equally likely that Beckett was intrigued by Schopenhauer's qualified approval of Augustinian ideas. Beckett's attraction to Christianity as a source of interpretative concepts, which engages with the multifarious problems of being, echoes Schopenhauer's judgements upon the most valuable insights of Christian thought. Schopenhauer makes the striking claim that his "teaching could be called Christian philosophy proper, paradoxical as this may seem to those who do not go to the root of the matter, but stick merely to the surface" (PPII, 314-5). Schopenhauer denounces rationalist approaches to Christianity owing to their inability to appreciate those principles which honour the bewildering aspects of human affairs: "With the present-day rationalistic view . . . many doctrines of the Augustinian dogmatics, established in the New Testament, appear absolutely untenable and even revolting, for example predestination. Accordingly, what is really Christian is then rejected" (WWRI, 406 n. 72). Schopenhauer is quite insistent that it is precisely the arational aspects of Christianity that provide an apt commentary upon the lamentable nature of human existence. He argues that, "These rationalists are honest men, yet they are trite and shallow fellows who have not an inkling of the profound meaning of the New Testament myth" (PPII, 388). Schopenhauer's reading of Augustine's work led him to designate it as the quintessential expression of authentic Christianity: "only the Augustinian doctrine, confirmed also by Luther, is perfect Christianity" (PPII, 364). In accordance with his claim that his philosophy coheres with Christological reflections upon the illimitable mysteries of being, Schopenhauer argues that his work "is not at variance even with the old

and genuine Christianity" (WN, 143).

Schopenhauer contends that, "The spirit and ethical tendency . . . are the essentials of a religion, not the myths in which it clothes them" (WWRII, 623). By "spirit and ethical tendency" Schopenhauer refers to the renunciatory aspects of religious thought in accordance with which we are enjoined to arraign worldly pleasures. As we shall see, Beckett, "who seem[s] never to have had the least faculty or disposition for the supernatural" (LI, 257), was nevertheless moved to employ Christian themes and terminology throughout his *oeuvre* for distinctly aesthetic ends. The prevalence of Augustinian ideas in Beckett's work is noteworthy in any consideration of the intertextual affinities between the writings of Schopenhauer and Beckett. A core contention of the present work is that Beckett's use of religion and philosophy signifies more about his authorial intentions than it does about his personal convictions. Johansson emphasises the nature of Christ's role in Beckett's work where "Christ's sufferings remind us of our own predicaments, but they also comfort us."88 The textual evidence for such a statement is minimal. As a consolatory discourse confronted with "the moment of crisis," Christianity had, for Beckett, "no more depth than an old-school tie" (GF, 220). While Christ's tribulations are a prominent feature of Beckett's writings, his artistic personages are impervious to the systematic succour that Christological themes purportedly afford. Nevertheless, Christ, as a victim of unspeakable miseries is, in both a Schopenhauerian and Beckettian sense, a supreme archetype of humanity. Beckett rejected doctrinal commitments; in this sense his employment of Christianity can be seen as deeply inquisitorial. He presents scenarios wherein the experiences of his characters evoke Christian narratives of pain, guilt, and atonement within which those concepts undergo creative interrogations.

According to Cronin, Beckett's interest in the "need for expiation, of course, relates to [his] feeling that mere being was in itself an offence, a feeling powerfully reinforced by Schopenhauer. No doubt his Low Church Irish Protestantism, so near to Calvinism, had something to do with this too. If you were not among the elect, being was an offence." In *Happy Days* (1962) Winnie can dismiss her most grievous state through gratitude for the "great mercies" (*CDW*, 152) she enjoys, unlike Mouth in *Not I*, whose chilling laugh at her early indoctrination into the ways of a "merciful" (*CDW*, 377) God bespeaks the poignant reality of her life. Bryden states, "For someone to be deemed 'loving' and 'merciful', they must not just assume these qualities on occasion; they must incarnate them. This is the crucial

test which the God-candidate fails within the Beckettian scenario." As the narrator of *Watt* might put it, Bryden's assertion reveals a certain degree of "anthropomorphic insolence" (*W*, 175). In the words of Malone, "God does not seem to need reasons for doing what he does, and for omitting to do what he omits to do, to the same degree as his creatures, does he?" (*MD*, 73) God's immunity to such necessities taunts characters whose desolate lives engender issueless pursuits of unequivocal comprehension. Bryden's claims are certainly more justifiable in relation to Beckett's life than to his work. Beckett's biographers have documented how he railed against a God who could allow people, such as his mother and brother, who obediently subscribed to doctrinal orthodoxies, to endure prolonged periods of terminal illness, yet Beckett's *oeuvre* is replete with references to the inscrutable ways of a wrathful deity who torments creatures who insist upon interpreting their woeful states in accordance with prominent Low Church themes. The widespread presence of such cases within Beckett's writings poses questions about their significance. Throughout this dissertation I will examine the ways in which such issues can enhance our understanding of the affinities between Schopenhauer's philosophy and Beckett's art.

My choice of texts in exploring my theme was influenced by the fact that Beckett's treatment of the dissonance between abstract reflection and the immanent problems of existential reality is analogous to many of the personal difficulties that he endured in the years spanning the composition of novels from Dream of Fair to Middling Women (1992) to Watt (1953). Knowlson's Damned to Fame: A Life of Samuel Beckett (1996) shows the extent to which Beckett's early fiction is infused with an array of autobiographical material. In *Dream* and More Pricks Than Kicks (1934), we notice how the brilliant, if rather quixotic Belacqua, endures deeply tumultuous struggles that are suggestively comparable to those that Beckett himself reportedly faced. The odious world of carnal desire threatens the distinctly cerebral and physically reticent Belacqua in a way which reminds the student of Beckett's life and work of Beckett's own tempestuous ordeals with women such as his "unofficial fiancée," 91 Peggy Sinclair, and his inability to reconcile the lusts of the flesh with the supposedly purer yearnings of the mind or spirit. In each of my chapters I will reflect upon the aesthetically enlivening tensions that exist between the systematic structures of philosophy and theology and their relation to the miseries which pervade Beckett's *oeuvre*. Nixon observes that Beckett's "early writing acts like a secret, codified map to events in Beckett's life: an intricate network of references encompassing his travels, opinions, relationships, his reading and artistic preoccupations."92 The following chapters will show that, in his capacity to

synthesise erudition with experiential insights, Beckett created art which can be read, from a Schopenhauerian standpoint, as abounding with artistically enriching indeterminacies. In writing about Beckett's art one can employ an analytic technique which amasses examples of a theme that build cumulatively towards an inevitable conclusion. Should one choose to do so, it would be difficult not to classify that dénouement as Beckett's "worldview," whatever that might be. By highlighting parallels between Schopenhauer's thought and Beckett's aesthetic principles, I show that such an approach typifies the "vulgarity of a plausible concatenation" (*PTD*, 81-2) which Beckett consistently avoids, particularly, as we shall see, in his own reflections upon the work of his fellow artists. It is instructive to heed Beckett's view that, "Car aux enthymemes de l'art ce sont les conclusions qui manquent et non pas les prémisses" (*D*, 57). Zurbrugg considers *Proust* to be "alarmingly ambiguous." According to O'Hara, Beckett's early essays contain "no academic rigor," while Acheson echoes such views by asserting that *Proust* is "seriously underargued." However, as I propose to show, Beckett's refusal to subject art to the normative tenets of systematic discourse is eloquent of his respect for the alogical and ineffable elements of aesthetic experience.

Critics who search for an incorrigible perspective, derived from an incremental development of premises supplied by individual texts are engaged in a practice which I will demonstrate to be antithetical to the fruitful ambiguity of Beckett's own theoretical and creative strategies which are themselves consonant with Schopenhauer's hostility towards reductive approaches to the appreciation of art. Schopenhauer admitted that his philosophy contained inconsistencies and apparent contradictions. As a philosopher who was keenly aware of the limits of reason he seems to have been remarkably unperturbed by what would be considered from a purely analytic perspective as severe defects. In the following passage he offers a fascinating insight into his compositional methods:

My works consist of mere themes . . . where one idea inspired me, and for its own sake I wished to fix it by writing it down. From this such works are put together with little lime and mortar, and so they are not shallow and tedious as are those of men who sit down and then on a fixed plan write page after page of their book. (MRIV, 272)

As we have noted, Beckett claimed that, in reading Schopenhauer, he was "not reading philosophy." We may also recall his appreciation for the philosopher's "entire indifference to the apriori forms of verification." In contending that Schopenhauer can be "read like a poet" Beckett can be seen to have implied that the splendours of art involve an eschewal of the

normative principles of logical procedures.

When, as readers, we find ourselves submerged in one of Beckett's delightfully meandering texts, we may be inclined to share Belacqua's curiosity in 'Echo's Bones' in asking "Where do you suppose . . . all this is leading to?" (EB, 15) In such cases, it is instructive to note how Beckett advised his readers to desist from treating his work as containing a singular and readily-deducible message: "My writing is pre-logical writing. I don't ask people to understand it logically, only to accept it." This dissertation seeks to honour Beckett's own stance regarding the proprieties of criticism by ensuring that Schopenhauer's conceptual discourse will be used not as a semantic determinant but as a set of exegetical principles which can illuminate the primacy of aesthetic value in Beckett's work. By showing the extent to which Beckett's own critical practices align with Schopenhauer's reflections upon art, I will reveal that, from a Schopenhauerian perspective, attempts to extrapolate philosophical conclusions from Beckett's *oeuvre*, which are guided by a critic's desire to make definitive statements about Beckett's authorial intentions, are futile. In commenting upon Rudmose-Brown's engagement with the work of Racine, Beckett seems to have provided a true estimation of the best instances of critical writing. Rudmose-Brown's reflections offer "not the truth, but a courageous appreciation (how rare)" (LI, 31).

Beckett's prolonged and intensive therapy with the psychoanalyst Wilfred Ruprecht Bion in the aftermath of his father's death in 1933 addressed issues above and beyond the debilitating sense of loss that he inevitably endured. These included Beckett's aloofness and his tendency to seek withdrawal from interpersonal engagement in the domains of art and philosophical ideas. Through his meetings with Bion and his own studious bent, Beckett acquired deep insights into some of the most eminent schools of psychology. Such knowledge is thoroughly interwoven into the text of *Murphy*, with great comic effect, thereby implying the limitations of systematic interpretations of human anguish. *Watt* is less autobiographical than the preceding fiction in terms of its relative absence of verifiable personages and locales from Beckett's life, yet it constitutes a *reductio ad absurdum* of the idea that the mind can be a refuge from worldly activity or a receptacle of solutions to life's perennial tribulations. Beckett's residence in a war-torn France in the years of *Watt*'s genesis acquainted him with the abject failure of reason to dissuade purportedly civilised nations from partaking in the barbarism of war and racial extermination. France, a country acclaimed for its glorious intellectual past, personified in figures such as Diderot and his associates among the

Encyclopaedists, who were instrumental in advancing the apparent apotheosis of rationality, was now home to a writer who would provide a penetrating depiction of the consequences of humanity's seemingly unshakeable, yet risibly overweening esteem for reason. In the words of Malone, "theory is one thing and reality another" (*MD*, 74). The present study will explore how such a disjunction has numerous aesthetic and existential connotations in Beckett's critical and creative writings.

### Outline

In my first chapter I will provide a comprehensive account of those aspects of Transcendental Idealism, as formulated by Kant and Schopenhauer, which are most relevant to my reading of Beckett's oeuvre. With Transcendental Idealism as my hermeneutical framework, I will focus upon Beckett's critical writings and the artistic reflections that he expressed in letters and interviews in order to highlight those areas within which his thought accords most suggestively with the philosophy of Schopenhauer. Here I will also address how the question of Schopenhauer's "influence" upon Beckett must be examined with reference to Beckett's clear understanding of Schopenhauer's own reflections about the relationship between philosophy and art. Wood contends that, "under the old certainties of the Schopenhauerian system, it was art that provided access to a stable position which made things clear." This chapter will dispute Wood's claim by underscoring the extent to which Beckett's critical writings mirror Schopenhauer's views regarding the aesthetic virtues of semantic indeterminacy. My synoptic reading of Schopenhauer's writings, together with my explanation of their Kantian basis, will enable me to move beyond the standard approach of arguing for identity by association, wherein Beckett, by virtue of his alleged pessimism, is neatly catalogued as a purveyor of doom, reiterating the gloomy insights of eminent precursors such as Schopenhauer and Leopardi. This chapter will reveal the extent to which Beckett's dismissal of critical writing as being mere "art cackle" (LII, 145) is of a piece with Schopenhauer's fervent contentions regarding the insurmountable impediments which we perennially confront in our attempts to comprehend and articulate our experiences of art.

By bringing the conceptual resources of Schopenhauer's thought to bear upon Beckett's critical endeavours, Chapter One will attempt to elucidate some of the most seemingly opaque elements of Beckett's reflections. I also wish to show that the terms of criticism which have been directed against some of Beckett's work, such as Rabinovitz's observation that the plot of 'Echo's Bones' (2014) is "improbable [and] the characters bizarre," are not

as damning as they seem, owing to Beckett's opposition to the logical virtues of plausibility and clarity within art and his abiding sense that, "the pure incoherence of times & men & places is at least amusing." Pilling remarks that Beckett "refuse[d] to write *Proust* in the way convention dictates a critical essay must or ideally ought to be written." <sup>100</sup> By showing how the "anti-intellectual" (PTD, 81 n. 1) thematic and formal elements of Proust cohere with reflections upon aesthetics that Beckett offered throughout his life, my presiding aim in this chapter is to show how Beckett's interpretative principles can be elucidated when they are examined in relation to Schopenhauer's thought. Caselli observes that, "Since there are no surviving notebooks for the years 1928-30, the textual occurrence of Leopardi in the early works (together with, among others, Schopenhauer) has no archival correlative, but his presence can be traced in 'Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce. 101, We are similarly reliant upon Proust as an indispensable source for our understanding of Beckett's early knowledge of Schopenhauer's philosophy. Frost considers the "strong likelihood" that Beckett took notes from Schopenhauer's work prior to composing Proust. He justifiably claims that "The absence of Schopenhauer [from the extant early notebooks] is particularly surprising", but postulates that the text containing possible transcriptions and appraisals of Schopenhauer's thought, along with similar entries relating to figures such as Kant, Leopardi, and Proust was most likely lost.

My second chapter will focus on *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. Knowlson observes that, "The creative impulses in Beckett . . . can be either emotionally grounded (Beckett himself once claimed to be "all feeling") or they can be intellectually inspired. Sometimes the two are barely distinguishable." <sup>104</sup> I propose to show that the inextricability of such a link is one of the ways in which Schopenhauer's aesthetic criteria and Beckett's authorial practices converge in *Dream*. *Dream* is a rich source of metatextual declarations by a narrator who possesses clear convictions about the proper role of the artist, yet I will demonstrate the limitations of interpreting Belacqua as a submissive oracle of his creator's aesthetic values. I will contend that, from a Schopenhauerian perspective, Belacqua is tormented by a tension between claims of reason, which prompt him to decipher his plight in Judaeo-Christian terms, and his renunciatory experiences, which prove mercifully resistant to the onerous trials of intellection. Given Beckett's interest in Descartes, and the prevalence of dualistic ideas regarding the relationship between mind and body in *Dream*, this chapter will examine the ways in which Schopenhauerian ideas regarding the ineluctable nature of intrapsychic conflicts are more pertinent to an understanding of Belacqua's predicaments. Here I will also

note how Belacqua's ability to tolerate the oppressive physical presence of female characters can be viewed in relation to his capacity to view them as objects of purely aesthetic attraction. By underscoring how *Dream* repeatedly alludes to the world of the visual arts I read the novel in relation to Schopenhauer's suspicions regarding the expressive potentialities of words.

In Chapter Three I will explore *More Pricks Than Kicks* and 'Echo's Bones' in relation to their depiction of the intrapersonal dissonance to which Belacqua is subject as an utterly fragmented self in a world permeated with woe. I propose to show that Beckett's penetrating awareness of the impotence of rationality in human affairs is present in his portrayal of characters who are continually assailed by the incomprehensible spectacle of worldly suffering and how such themes are consonant with fundamental aspects of Schopenhauer's thought. Beckett's art presents us with lucid accounts of the predicaments of characters who call upon the standard repertoire of theological analogies that fail to ameliorate the troubles they endure. This chapter will also reveal how Beckett engages with the philosophically intractable yet aesthetically energising antinomies of freedom and determinism by relating some of the prominent themes of *More Pricks* to core conceptual tensions in Schopenhauer's work.

Chapter Four will demonstrate how Beckett's familiarity with the philosophy of Schopenhauer acquainted him with themes which he subsequently studied in the work of à Kempis and Geulincx. Here my research will contend that, in Beckett's art, the ultimate impotence of conceptual thought is revealed through personal appropriation and inner commitment, whereby his characters invigorate the most abstruse standpoints in a tragi-comic way. By underscoring such qualities, I intend to show that *Murphy* (1938) is not a thinly-veiled treatise within which Beckett attempts to proselytise on the basis of personal predilections.

Watt marks a notable departure from the overt allusiveness of Murphy, but its relationship to the conceptual discourses of religion and philosophy is repeatedly borne out by its titular character's insatiable desire to comprehend his distressingly baffling experiences. My fifth chapter will explore the position of Watt as a victim of his own irrepressible need to rationalise. This chapter will emphasise how Beckett's awareness of the capacity of art to express the ineluctable strangeness of lived experience is abundantly evident in Watt.

My Conclusion points towards some of the ways in which Beckett's later works bring new perspectives to bear upon some of the themes which constitute the focus of the main body of my discussion. Here I examine a series of excerpts from texts which can be related to Schopenhauer's views about how our imaginative and perceptual faculties serve to provide our most enriching experiences when the intellective tendencies to which we are ordinarily subject temporarily cease. Here I also contend that the linguistic austerity of Beckett's later prose results from evolutions in his attitude towards the proper role of ideas in art.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> James Acheson, Samuel Beckett's Artistic Theory and Practice: Criticism, Drama and Early Fiction (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 143.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Mark Nixon and Dirk Van Hulle, 'Beckett's Library: From Marginalia to Notebooks' in Daniela Guardamagna and Rossana Sebellin (eds.), *The Tragic Comedy of Samuel Beckett*: 'Beckett in Rome' (Rome: Laterza, 2009), p. 68.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Matthew Feldman, 'Beckett's Poss and the Dog's Dinner: An Empirical Survey of the 1930s "Psychology" and "Philosophy Notes" in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, n. s. 13.2 (Spring 2004), p. 75.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Quoted in Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937* (London: Continuum, 2011) p. 201 n. 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> John Pilling, 'From a (Whoroscope) to *Murphy*' in John Pilling and Mary Bryden (eds.), *The Ideal Core of the Onion* (Reading: Beckett International Foundation, 1992), p. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Matthew Feldman, *Beckett's Books: A Cultural History of Beckett's 'Interwar Notes'* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Van Hulle and Nixon, Samuel Beckett's Library, p. 151.

Anthony Cronin, Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist (London: Harper Collins, 1996), p.120.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 401.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p. 79.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> John Pilling, 'Beckett's *Proust*' in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, o. s. 1 (Winter 1976), p. 12.

- <sup>18</sup> J. D. O'Hara, 'Beckett's Schopenhauerian Reading of Proust: The Will as Whirled in Re-Presentation' in Eric von der Luft (ed.), *Schopenhauer: New Essays in Honour of His 200<sup>th</sup> Birthday* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), p. 277.
- <sup>19</sup> Rupert Wood, 'Beckett as Essayist' in John Pilling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 6.
- <sup>20</sup> Dale Jacquette, 'Schopenhauer's Metaphysics of Appearance and Will in the Philosophy of Art' in Dale Jacquette (ed.), *Schopenhauer, Philosophy, and the Arts* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> John Pilling, Samuel Beckett (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), pp. 126-7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Steven J. Rosen, *Samuel Beckett and the Pessimistic Tradition* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1976), p. 145.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> James D. 'O Hara, 'Where There's a Will There's a Way Out: Beckett and Schopenhauer' in *College Literature*, 8 (1981), p. 263.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Quoted in Roger Little, 'Beckett's Mentor, Rudmose-Brown: Sketch for a Portrait' in *Irish University Review*, 14.1 (Spring 1984), p. 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Wood, 'Beckett as Essayist', p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Catharina Wulf, *The Imperative of Narration: Beckett, Bernhard, Schopenhauer, Lacan* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1997), p. 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Acheson, Samuel Beckett's Artistic Theory and Practice, p. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Samuel Mintz, 'Beckett's *Murphy*: a Cartesian Novel' in *Perspective*, 11.3 (Autumn 1959), p. 156.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 92.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> James Knowlson and John Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press, 1980), p. xii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Gottfried Büttner, *Samuel Beckett's Novel Watt*, tr. Joseph P. Dolan (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), p. 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Gottfried Büttner, 'Schopenhauer's Recommendations to Beckett' in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, 11 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), p. 114.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Shane Weller, *A Taste for the Negative: Beckett and Nihilism* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2005), p. 133.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Ulrich Pothast, *The Metaphysical Vision: Arthur Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Art and Life and Samuel Beckett's Own Way to Make Use of It* (New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 2008), p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Erik Tonning, "I am not reading philosophy": Beckett and Schopenhauer' in *Sofia Philosophical Review*, 5.1 (2011), p. 29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Quoted in Nixon, Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937, p. 107.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> James Acheson, 'Beckett, Proust, and Schopenhauer' in *Contemporary Literature*, 19 (1978), p. 172.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Fritz Kaufmann, *Thomas Mann: The World as Will and Representation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), pp. 40 & 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Heath Lees, '*Watt*: Music, Tuning, and Tonality' in S. E. Gontarski (ed.), *The Beckett Studies Reader* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), p. 168.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Acheson, Samuel Beckett's Artistic Theory and Practice, p. 45.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Büttner, 'Schopenhauer's Recommendations to Beckett', p. 114.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Tonning, "I am not reading philosophy", p. 21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Pothast, *The Metaphysical Vision*, p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> James Knowlson, 'Beckett's First Encounters with Modern German (and Irish) Art' in Fionnuala Croke (ed.), *Samuel Beckett: A Passion for Paintings* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 2006), p. 70.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> J. D. O'Hara, *Samuel Beckett's Hidden Drives: Structural Uses of Depth Psychology* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), p. 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Barbara Wright, 'Translator's Note' in Samuel Beckett, *Eleutheria*, tr. Barbara Wright (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p. v.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> O'Hara, Samuel Beckett's Hidden Drives, p. 69.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Lance St. John Butler, Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being: A Study in Ontological Parable (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

- <sup>55</sup> Minako Okamuro, 'The Occult' in Anthony Uhlmann (ed.), *Samuel Beckett in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 345.
- <sup>56</sup> Sean O'Casey, *Blasts and Benedictions: Articles and Stories*, ed. Ronald Ayling (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), p. 51.
- <sup>57</sup> Hugh Kenner, *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996), p. 25.
- <sup>58</sup> John Calder, *The Philosophy of Samuel Beckett* (London: Calder Publications, 2001), p. 1.
- <sup>59</sup> Martin Esslin, *Mediations: Essays on Brecht, Beckett, and the Media* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980), p. 113.
- <sup>60</sup> Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, ed. Peter Conradi (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1999), p. 5.
- <sup>61</sup> Rosemary Pountney, *Theatre of Shadows: Samuel Beckett's Drama 1956-1976* (London: Colin Smythe, 1998), p. 37.
- <sup>62</sup> Butler, Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being, p. 12.
- <sup>63</sup> Thomas Mann, 'Schopenhauer' in *Essays of Three Decades*, tr. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), pp. 396-7.
- <sup>64</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry, Second Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 42.
- <sup>65</sup> John Pilling, 'Proust and Schopenhauer: Music and Shadows' in Mary Bryden (ed.), Beckett and Music (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 176.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 177-8.
- <sup>67</sup> Cronin, Samuel Beckett, p. 14.
- <sup>68</sup> Quoted in Alec Reid, 'The Reluctant Prizeman' in Arts, 29 (1969), p. 64.
- <sup>69</sup> David Cartwright, *Schopenhauer: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 4.
- <sup>70</sup> James and Elizabeth Knowlson (eds.), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), p. 28.
- 71 Quoted in Nixon, Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937, p. 50.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- <sup>73</sup> James Knowlson, 'Practical Aspects of Theatre, Radio and Television: Extracts from an Unscripted Interview with Billie Whitelaw' in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, o. s. 3 (Summer 1978), p. 89.
- <sup>74</sup> Quoted in Brigitte Le Juez, *Beckett before Beckett*, tr. Ros Schwartz (London: Souvenir

Press, 2008), p. 71.

- <sup>76</sup> Safranski, *Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy* tr. Ewald Osers (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press), p. 136.
- <sup>77</sup> Quoted in John Montague, Company: A Chosen Life (London: Duckworth, 2001), p. 132.
- <sup>78</sup> Arthur Hübscher, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer in its Intellectual Context: Thinker against the Tide*, tr. Joachim T. Baer and David E. Cartwright (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), p. 30.
- <sup>79</sup> Quoted in Safranski, Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy, p. 306.
- <sup>80</sup> Quoted in Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 528
- 81 Knowlson and Knowlson (eds.), Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett, p. 129.
- <sup>82</sup> Hersh Zeifman, 'Religious Imagery in the Plays of Samuel Beckett' in Ruby Cohn (ed.),
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  p. 85.
- <sup>83</sup> Quoted in Hübscher, The Philosophy of Schopenhauer in its Intellectual Context, p. 269.
- <sup>84</sup> Charles Juliet, *Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde*, tr. Tracy Cooke, Aude Jeanson, Axel Nesme, Morgaine Reinl, and Janey Tucker (Champaign and London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2009), p. 40.
- <sup>85</sup> Knud Martner (ed.), *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler*, tr. Eithne Wilkins, Ernst Kaiser, and Bill Hopkins (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 180.
- <sup>86</sup> Quoted in Colin Duckworth, *Angels of Darkness: Dramatic Effect In Beckett and Ionesco* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972), p. 18.
- <sup>87</sup> Pilling, Samuel Beckett, p. 118.
- <sup>88</sup> Birgitta Johansson, 'Beckett and the Apophatic in Selected Shorter Texts' in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, 9 (2000), p. 63.
- 89 Cronin, Samuel Beckett, p. 376.
- <sup>90</sup> Mary Bryden, Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998), p. 127.
- <sup>91</sup> James Knowlson, 'Samuel Beckett: The Intricate Web of Life and Work' in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, n. s. 16.1 & 2 (2007), p. 21.
- <sup>92</sup> Nixon, Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937, p. 15.
- <sup>93</sup> Nicholas Zurbrugg, *Beckett and Proust* (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Limited, 1988), p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Knowlson and Knowlson (eds.), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, p. 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> O'Hara, Samuel Beckett's Hidden Drives, p. 101.

<sup>95</sup> Acheson, Samuel Beckett's Artistic Theory and Practice, p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> Knowlson and Knowlson (eds.), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, p. 109.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> Wood, 'Beckett as Essayist', p. 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> Rubin Rabinovitz, *The Development of Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), p. 55.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Nixon, Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937, p. 178.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> John Pilling, *Beckett before Godot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Daniela Caselli, 'Italian Literature' in Anthony Uhlmann (ed.), *Samuel Beckett in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 246.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> Everett C. Frost, 'Preface' in Matthijs Engelberts, Everett Frost, and Jane Maxwell, "Notes Diverse Holo": Catalogues of Beckett's Reading Notes and other Manuscripts at Trinity College, Dublin, with Supporting Essays (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), p. 22.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.. n. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> Knowlson, 'Samuel Beckett: The Intricate Web of Life and Work', p. 18.

# Chapter 1

# The Aesthetics of Ambiguity

I aim to show that a familiarity with Schopenhauer's thought aids one's understanding of some of Beckett's most enigmatic critical pronouncements and ultimately serves to highlight how Beckett's reflections upon the role of the artist are of a piece with Schopenhauer's viewpoints regarding the formal principles of artistic creation. While I intend to reveal the ways in which many of Beckett's somewhat obscure critical statements can be clarified when read in conjunction with Schopenhauer's ideas, at no point do I suggest that Beckett's aesthetic views were unequivocally determined by Schopenhauer's thought. Beckett's critical writings do not constitute a consistent system of aesthetics. It is tempting to think that such texts can supply us with a theoretical blueprint that can be applied to his creative writings as a means of elucidating their innermost complexities. As this chapter will show, Beckett's aversion to art which is created under the influence of discursive theories accords with Schopenhauer's own views regarding the compositional foundations of genuine art. According to Schopenhauer, the notion that "every genuine work of art must result from a well-thought-out application of aesthetic rules" is "absurd" (WWRI, 526-7). Hence an artist who formulates a set of rigid aesthetic concepts which are then employed to guide his creative procedures is "like a person who first sang a song to himself, and afterwards danced to it" (WWRII, 122).

According to Schopenhauer, it would "be very desirable if instruction in philosophy were dropped at the universities and young men wanting to devote their time to it were to employ this in reading genuine and original philosophers with serious views" (*MRIV*, 153). Beckett looked upon his lack of a formal education in philosophy as a "serious defect," yet his formidable erudition included an acquaintance with Western thought which was remarkably deep and wide-ranging. Beckett's notes on relatively obscure philosophers such as Geulincx are a testament to his fascination with philosophical concepts, yet his attraction to Kant's work signifies a great deal more about the tenacity of his scholarly endeavours. While abounding in insights of seminal importance, the philosophy of Kant is justifiably renowned for its daunting complexity. Beckett's awareness of Kant's work is revealed at various points throughout his *oeuvre*, yet one of the earliest references to it can be found in 'Le Concentrisme' (1983), a lecture which he delivered to Trinity College Dublin's Modern Language Society in November 1930. Almost eight years later, Beckett purchased an eleven-

volume German edition of Kant's philosophy. P. J. Murphy claims that, "Beckett found Kant to be the indispensable philosopher, the thinker who more than any other supplied him with a philosophical grammar." Interestingly, it has been noted that Beckett's knowledge of Kant was partly derived from his reading of Schopenhauer and that his decision to purchase a sizeable German edition of Kant's works was prompted by Schopenhauer's advice to his readers regarding the need to engage with Kant through direct study rather than through the mediation of introductory writings. Likewise, as I intend to show in my chapter on *Murphy*, Beckett's admiration for writers such as à Kempis and Geulincx can be interpreted as deriving from his earlier engagement with the philosophy of Schopenhauer, given the centrality of themes such as quietism and renunciation in their respective works.

## Vain Reasonings

As the originators of Transcendental Idealism, Kant and Schopenhauer are best studied in relation to each other, especially when we note Schopenhauer's admission of his explicit indebtedness to Kant: "I am a metaphysician of Kant's school" (GB, 191). Schopenhauer advises his readers to study Kant's philosophy owing to its foundational contribution to his own system: "my line of thought, different as its content is from the Kantian, is completely under its influence, and necessarily presupposes and starts from it" (WWRI, 416-7). Schopenhauer's reliance upon Kant's work can be readily discerned across many areas of his thought, yet it is Kant's ideas regarding our epistemic plight that are most intriguingly applicable to Beckett's art. The inhabitants of Beckett's literary worlds enliven Kant's notion that, "Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer" (CPR, 7). For Kant, metaphysical speculation is inspired by the innate constitution of rationality, yet it is prone to perpetual frustration in its attempts to comprehend the deepest questions of human existence. In this sense, human consciousness is perennially riven between lofty intellectual pretensions and insurmountable epistemic restrictions. The "unavoidable problems" that reason generates relate to "God, freedom, and immortality" (CPR, 46). As we shall see, the limitations of the intellect regarding such concepts, is a thematic constant within Beckett's work.

Kant contends that any philosophical system which fails to conduct a prior examination into the capacities of human reason is essentially dogmatic and prone to unjustifiable claims. He argues that our minds impose certain conditions upon what we can experience, thereby precluding us from acquiring knowledge of the world of noumena or things-in-themselves, which exist independently of any sentient subject:

Space and time, as the necessary conditions of all outer and inner experience, are merely subjective conditions of all our intuition and that in relation to these conditions all objects are therefore mere appearances, and not given us as things in themselves which exist in this manner. For this reason also, while much can be said *a priori* as regards the form of appearances, nothing whatsoever can be asserted of the thing in itself, which may underlie these appearances. (*CPR*, 86-7)

In Kantian terms our minds are thoroughly restricted to knowledge of that which lies within the phenomenal world - that which is conditioned by the spatiotemporal framework to which all our cognitive experiences are subject. In this sense, human experience is characteristically spatiotemporal, yet causality is, along with space and time, *a priori* and is, as such, a constitutional feature of our intellectual apparatus: "the concept of cause does not allude to any condition whatsoever that attaches to things but only to a condition that attaches to experience, namely, that experience can be an objectively valid cognition of appearances and their sequence in time."<sup>5</sup>

Among the various afflictions that harrow the psyches of Beckett's characters, time exerts a particularly onerous effect. It is therefore instructive to note Kant's contention that temporality, apart from depriving us of knowledge of the noumenal nature of objects, is among those features of our cognitive apparatus which prevent us from obtaining any comprehensive level of self-knowledge:

Through observation and analysis of appearances we penetrate to nature's inner recesses, and no one can say how far this knowledge may in time extend. But with all this knowledge, and even if the whole of nature were revealed to us, we should still never be able to answer those transcendental questions which go beyond nature. The reason of this is that it is not given to us to observe our own mind with any other intuition than that of inner sense; and that it is yet precisely in the mind that the secret of the source of our sensibility is located. The relation of sensibility to an object and what the transcendental ground of this [objective] unity may be, are matters undoubtedly so deeply concealed that we, who after all know even ourselves only through inner sense and therefore as appearance, can never be justified in treating sensibility as being a suitable instrument of investigation for discovering anything save always still other appearances - eager as we yet are to explore their non-sensible cause. (CPR, 287)

Time is, for Kant, the form of inner sense; along with space and causality it provides the

fundamental framework of our phenomenological awareness. Such awareness is therefore, by definition, mediated. This conclusion opposes the tenets of realism, which portray our access to reality as direct and independent of any subjective conditions. This aspect of Kant's work points towards our congenital inclination towards error. We are predisposed to interpret the contents of consciousness, specifically sensory data, as being in no way subject-dependent. By doing so, we "take the subjective necessity of a connection of our concepts, which is to the advantage of the understanding, for an objective necessity in the determination of things in themselves. This is an *illusion* which can be no more prevented than we can prevent the sea appearing higher at the horizon than at the shore" (*CPR*, 299). Kant's diagnosis of the intellect's inherent limits points to epistemic problems which he takes to be permanently insoluble.

Given the issues of dualism faced by Beckett's protagonists such as Belacqua and Murphy, their inability to reconcile mental and physical experience is, in Kantian terms, inevitable:

The much-discussed question of the communion between the thinking and the extended, if we leave aside all that is merely fictitious, comes then simply to this: *how in a thinking subject outer intuition*, namely, that of space, with its filling-in of shape and motion, *is possible*. And this is a question which no man can possibly answer. This gap in our knowledge can never be filled. (*CPR*, 359-60)

Beckett's characters aspire to achieve states of tranquillity which are free from the demands of intellectual comprehension, yet such states are painfully fleeting. Schopenhauer, in his development of Kant's arguments, discusses emancipatory states of consciousness which transcend spatiotemporal concerns: "Peace, serenity, and bliss dwell only where there are no Where and no When" (PPII, 45n. \*). Beckett's protagonists enjoy momentary glimpses of the bliss which such states afford, yet they cannot achieve enduring freedom from intellective concerns. As Molloy puts it, "To know nothing is nothing, not to want to know anything likewise, but to be beyond knowing anything, to know you are beyond knowing anything, that is when peace enters in, to the soul of the incurious seeker" (Mo, 64). In the following statement Kant can be seen to offer a neat précis of the predicaments commonly endured by Beckett's protagonists, wherein they are baffled by experiences which at once demand and resist analysis:

Unfortunately for speculation, though fortunately perhaps for the practical interests of humanity, reason, in the midst of its highest expectations, finds itself so compromised by the conflict of opposing

arguments, that neither its honour nor its security allows it to withdraw and treat the quarrel with indifference as a mere mock fight; and still less is it in a position to command peace, being itself directly interested in the matters in dispute. (*CPR*, 423)

As the subsequent chapters of this study will show, the denizens of Beckett's literary worlds insist upon rationalising their lives by interpreting troubling personal experiences within systematic contexts. Yet their knowledge of various philosophical and religious concepts includes an often sardonic realisation of the incongruity between the basic precepts of such doctrines and the irreducibly particular nature of affective and psychological anguish.

Kant states, "human reason is by nature architectonic. That is to say it regards all our knowledge as belonging to a possible system" (CPR, 429). The ordeals of intellection which haunt Beckett's protagonists are repeatedly described in terms of those systematic principles of Low Church theology which Schopenhauer deeply admired. The pitiful insistence of Beckett's characters to obtain a cogent interpretation of their mournful states is movingly dramatized in Not I, where Mouth suspects that "she was being punished . . . for some sin or other . . . or for the lot . . . or no particular reason . . . for its own sake" (CDW, 377). In this sense, she tries, by means of "vain reasonings" (CDW, 377), to render her horrific situation meaningful by contextualising her suffering within a Judaeo-Christian narrative of atonement, before contemplating the possibility of the sheer arbitrariness of her distress. She is, nevertheless, prompted to consider the "tender mercies" (CDW, 381) which she infrequently enjoys. When faced with tribulations, Calvin encourages us "not to inquire any farther" but to "content ourselves with this word [mercy] alone, instead of all reason." Mouth's dark musings are also redolent of Kant's claim that "there is in fact something insidious in our pure concepts of the understanding, as regards enticement towards a transcendent use." Our misapplication of such concepts is a consequence of reason's irrepressible search for ultimate, thoroughly unconditioned, and totalising explanations that sate its curiosity. This is rarely more apparent than in our efforts to understand the ultimate basis of suffering. Like Mouth, the narrator of Company (1980) is prompted to question God's essential character in a way which seems to privilege immanent experience over ontological speculation in light of the limitations of reason: "Pure reason? Beyond experience. God is love. Yes or no? No" (CIWS, 34). According to Kant, "to orient oneself in thinking in general means: when objective principles of reason are insufficient for holding something true, to determine the matter according to a subjective principle."8 It is precisely

such a clash between abstract discourses and existential reality which Beckett's art insistently interrogates. In *Texts for Nothing* (1959-1967) we encounter a narrator who pleads for the cessation of his anguish which is exacerbated by futile speculations regarding its provenance and significance:

If I'm guilty let me be forgiven and graciously authorised to expiate, coming and going in passing time, every day a little purer, a little deader. The mistake I make is to try and think, even the way I do, such as I am I shouldn't be able, even the way I do. But whom can I have offended so grievously, to be punished in this inexplicable way, all is inexplicable, space and time, false and inexplicable, suffering and tears. (*TNO*, 34)

If we assume that our worldly torments are essential to our atonement for existing, we may endure life with fortitude. However, even if we can laugh derisively with Hamm at the notion that our desolate lives might "mean something," we might still entertain a lingering hope that our earthly pain "won't all have been for nothing" (*CDW*, 108). Beckett's incisive treatment of such psychological dissonance is indicative of the unsettling power of his art, whereby his protagonists are tantalised with terms of discourse which confer dubious meanings upon their wretchedness.

Having ruled out the possibility of transcendent knowledge, Kant claims that we are entitled to speculate about God, the soul, and immortality as "ideas of reason", which can regulate our behaviour by serving as normative principles: "Reason has, in respect of its practical employment, the right to postulate what in the field of mere speculation it can have no right to assume without sufficient proof' (CPR, 617). In Beckett's art such ideas of reason are negligible in terms of the practical difference they make to his characters, yet they pervade their afflicted psyches as the roots of cognitive dilemmas. Kant's point is that we can possess ideas of reason without having any direct knowledge of the things to which they pertain. They are "necessary concepts whose object nevertheless *cannot* be given in any experience." Following his meticulous dissection of the nature of reason, Kant specifies three questions as epitomising the theoretical and practical issues of rationality: "1. What can I know? 2. What ought I to do? 3. What may I hope?" (CPR, 635) Those who search Beckett's oeuvre for definitive answers to such questions encounter protagonists whose personal odysseys have seemingly induced nothing but ignorance, passivity, and despair. Yet, however negative such states might seem, they can be regarded as fundamental to the selfawareness of many of Beckett's characters.

### The Irreducible Aesthetic

Schopenhauer insists that Kant has delineated the profound and seemingly impenetrable enigmas which lived experience persistently engenders, yet philosophy strives to attain clarity in its elucidation of such problems: "In general the real philosopher will always look for clearness and distinctness, he will invariably try to resemble not a turbid, impetuous torrent, but rather a Swiss lake which by its calm combines great depth with great clearness, the depth revealing itself precisely through the clearness" (FR, 4). That statement serves to remind us of an important distinction between philosophy and literature which Beckett seems to have duly noted and creatively employed. Philosophy, particularly in the tradition of systematisers such as Kant and Schopenhauer, strives to attain a cogent account of human experience, wherein basic premises will underpin conclusions across diverse areas such as epistemology and ethics. In purely philosophical terms logical consistency is thereby enshrined as a supreme imperative. Beckett's work defies attempts to subsume the thoughts and behaviour of his protagonists under grand conceptual narratives, yet in many of the trials that his characters face, the discordance between the terrifying immediacy of affective ordeals and the abstract comforts of systematic discourse yield profoundly moving passages. Beckett was deeply aware of the tendency of critics to associate him with authors such as Kafka who were seen to have a philosophical agenda. However, Beckett's contestable claim that "the Kafka hero has a coherence of purpose. He's lost but he's not spiritually precarious, he's not falling to bits. My people seem to be falling to bits" (GF, 148) compels close attention in any consideration of his aesthetic views. Beckett's reflections on Kafka's work were remarkably consistent. Atik refers to Beckett's conviction that, "Kafka's subject-matter called for a more disjointed style." In a letter to Cohn, Beckett spoke of his surprise that in Kafka's writings "the form is not shaken by the experience it conveys;" that claim would suggest that in Beckett's art it is the personal nature of his characters' experiences that governs the form within which their lives are described. In such cases religious and philosophical ideas are entirely subservient to Beckett's authorial aims and are important only insofar as they can be manipulated for aesthetic ends. Schopenhauer argues that, when the genuine artist "makes use of concepts," he does so "only as a means" (MRI, 230). In this sense, he can be differentiated from the artist who allows himself to be guided by concepts in the processes of creation.

Beckett's own evaluation of art was based upon its ability to resist rigid contextualisation within discursive frameworks. Comparing La Madeleine church to Chartres, Beckett states, "This [the Madeleine church] does not allow the mystery to invade us. With classical art all is

settled. But it is different at Chartres. There is the unexplainable, and there art raises questions that it does not attempt to answer" (*GF*, 220). That assertion is directly in line with Schopenhauer's own distinction between such architectural styles:

Ancient architecture shows exact suitability of each part or member to its immediate purpose which it thus naïvely displays. It shows it also in the absence of everything useless and purposeless, in contrast to Gothic architecture which owes its dark and mysterious appearance precisely to the many pointless embellishments and appendages, in that we attribute to these a purpose which to us is unknown. (*PPII*, 427)

Later in this chapter I will discuss Schopenhauer's approbation of art which is devoid of utilitarian motives and its relevance to Beckett's work. Elsewhere, Beckett states that art "has always been . . . pure interrogation" (D, 91). The implications of that statement can be seen to align with Schopenhauer's dismissal of the notion of artistic interpretation as a search for singular, conceptually-embodied meanings which have been placed there by the artist in order to be sought by those who experience the work. Schopenhauer argues that, "It is . . . an undertaking as unworthy as it is absurd when, as has often been attempted at the present day, one tries to reduce a poem of Shakespeare or Goethe to an abstract truth, the communication whereof would have been the aim of the poem" (WWRII, 409). Beckett cultivated semantic ambiguity as a profoundly effective aesthetic device, thereby unsettling our habitual modes of thought and perception. His exasperation regarding those who sought hermeneutic closure in their readings of *Godot* is a case in point: "the early success of *Waiting for Godot* was based on a fundamental misunderstanding, critics and public alike insisted on interpreting in allegorical or symbolic terms a play which was striving all the time to avoid definition." <sup>13</sup> In those rare instances when Beckett was willing to express an opinion on the ultimate fate of his characters, equivocation served his splendidly evasive tendencies: "I don't think that Murphy can have committed suicide, in the material circumstances, but the possibility can't be ruled out" (LII, 247).

Beckett considered Leibniz to be "a cod" but praised his work for containing many "splendid little pictures" (*LI*, 172), while Karl Ballmer's painting led Beckett to thoughts of Leibniz's monads (*JK*, 239). With such statements in mind, it is interesting to note that Schopenhauer wanted Leibniz's conceptions of monads and pre-established harmony to be "painted by a skilled artist" (*MRIV*, 341). While discussing the merits of Ballmer's "fully a posteriori painting," Beckett noted that its object is "not exploited to illustrate an idea . . . but primary.

The communication exhausted by the optical experience that is its motive and content."<sup>14</sup> Beckett's comments evince his own conviction about the appropriate place of ideas within art. Rather than governing the artist's creative procedures, ideas are totally subordinate to his aesthetic vision. Beckett claimed that "Krapp is not a way of looking at the world . . . this is just Krapp, not a world-view."<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, Krapp cannot be taken as a personification of an abstract truth which is amenable to reductive analysis. Beckett's animus against philosophical judgements of literary characters is perhaps best exemplified by an entry from his German Diaries. Here Beckett notes the imperative of authorial discretion: "Never define a book. The critic has merely then to elaborate the contrary. Never for a second betray awareness of reader + critic . . . Even the title must not give a direction. Thus Damian [sic] a good title, + Notwendige Reise a bad one, because all I need then prove is that it was not in the least necessary. It is impossible to controvert Murphy."<sup>16</sup>

Beckett regarded attempts to render experience fathomable according to neatly constructed conceptual schemes as a falsification of the traumatic and inscrutable contingencies of human existence. He lamented the fact that artists who seek to express the inherently unintelligible nature of experience were condemned as obscurantists for their refusal to impose coherence and clarity upon the shapeless and enigmatic. He possessed "An instinctive respect, at least, for what is real, + therefore has not in its nature, to be clear." Similarly, in spite of Schopenhauer's reputation as a systematiser, his philosophy repeatedly alludes to the inexhaustible mysteries that arise within human experience. He states that, "we simply cannot imagine anything objectively of which no 'why' could be further demanded" (WWRI, 483). He describes the "better consciousness" as that mental state wherein we cannot "think and know because it lies beyond subject and object" (MRI, 72); it is therefore free from the limitations of analytical reflection. Such a state is intriguingly akin to what Beckett described as "the real consciousness" which has "no premises or conclusions or problems or solutions or cases or judgements" (LI, 546). Schopenhauer viewed art which is devoid of systematic foundations, as being distinctly adept at honouring the intricacies of human experience. Unlike many of his predecessors, Schopenhauer readily admitted the futility of trying to provide a purely discursive account of philosophical problems, such as the nature of time, which are not merely the concern of the detached theorist but of the perpetually striving agent:

The present hour has hurled the previous one into the bottomless abyss of the past and has forever

reduced it to nothing not through causality, but directly through its mere existence itself, yet the taking place of this was inevitable. It is impossible to make this plainer or more intelligible from mere concepts; on the contrary we recognize it immediately and intuitively just as we do the difference between right and left and all that depends thereon, for example that the left glove does not fit the right hand. (FR, 40)

Schopenhauer argues that, within the world of appearances, subject and object are inextricably linked and unintelligible without reference to each other: "these halves are inseparable even in thought, for each of the two has meaning and existence only through and for the other; each exists with the other and vanishes with it" (*WWRI*, 5). The unambiguous nature of that statement makes it difficult to reconcile with Pothast's claim that, for Schopenhauer, "there is no unity of subject and object in the world of phenomena." It is essential for readers to grasp Schopenhauer's contentions regarding the indissoluble link between perceiver and perceived, especially, as we shall see, in light of its relevance to Beckett's aesthetic views and the epistemic problems that his characters endure. When critics such as Hunkeler talk about Beckett's "conviction of the radical subject-object dichotomy, which permeates his work," they attribute it to his reading of the writings of Kant and Schopenhauer. Yet Schopenhauer emphasises those implications of Kant's thought which undermine any notion of a radical dissociation between subject and object: "being subject means exactly the same as having an object, and being object means just the same as being known by the subject" (*FR*, 209).

Schopenhauer's idealism is, in some respects, more Berkeleian than Kantian in that it denies the existence of a plurality of noumenal objects. Schopenhauer was unperturbed by this; he was eager to point out that Berkeley's work had been "revived" (*MRIV*, 255) through his philosophy. In the following passage he takes Kant to task for attempting to distance himself from the Berkeleian implications of the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781):

That things exist as such outside our representation of them has neither meaning nor sense; for it is a concept whose substance and essence cannot be realized at all through any intuitive perception. Let us try to do this and to ask what intuitive perception could form the basis of the concept of objective things outside all representation. The answer would be either none at all, or simply the perception of things within the representation; and so with the above concept we conceive either nothing or the opposite of what we are saying . . . Kant cannot have conceived any objects under his things-in-themselves, and this follows quite necessarily from the fact that he declared space to be amere form of our intuitive perception which did not pertain to things-in-themselves. For that which is not in space is

also not an object. Consequently the being-in-itself of such things can no longer be an objective being, but only something toto genere different, something merely metaphysical. Thus in the proposition "space is a form pertaining to our intuitive perception" there is really to be found already the proposition that "no object is without a subject, in other words the objective world as such exists only in our representation." (MRIII, 594)

An interesting upshot of Schopenhauer's development of the tenets of Transcendental Idealism is his view that processes of artistic creation are inherently subjective.<sup>20</sup> Our everyday modes of consciousness are restricted to observations of the activities of objects, including ourselves as physical entities, interacting within a deterministic world of spatiotemporal and causal laws. Yet those objects are strictly subject-dependent: "objects are only for the understanding, are conditioned by it, and without it are nothing" (*MRI*, 218). However, our attempts to fathom the mysteries of existence lead us beyond the world of appearances from which such problems initially arise:

The world and our own existence present themselves to us necessarily as a riddle. It is now assumed, without more ado, that the solution of this riddle cannot result from a thorough understanding of the world itself, but must be looked for in something quite different from the world (for this is the meaning of "beyond the possibility of all experience"); and that everything of which we can in any way have *immediate* knowledge (for this is the meaning of possible experience, inner as well as outer) must be excluded from that solution. (*WWRI*, 427)

According to Schopenhauer, our cognitive constraints can be alleviated by the type of contemplative states that aesthetic experience affords. Ordinarily, our minds operate in accordance with the principle of sufficient reason, which inspires questions regarding the interrelationships between objects, including the motive-driven actions of animals and humans. While reason is "the source of all error" (*MRI*, 46), the modes of sentience induced by art enable us to consider perceptual objects independently of the principle of sufficient reason. We thereby renounce our usual fascination with the reasons, causes, or grounds of objects:

Raised up by the power of the mind, we relinquish the ordinary way of considering things, and cease to follow under the guidance of the forms of the principle of sufficient reason merely their relations to one another, whose final goal is always the relation to our own will. Thus we no longer consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither in things, but simply and solely the *what*. Further, we do not let abstract thought, the concepts of reason, take possession of our consciousness, but, instead of all this, devote the whole power of our mind to perception . . . in such perception the individual has lost

Schopenhauer distances himself from what he considers to be Kant's unduly pessimistic attitude towards our epistemological potential, insofar as he allows for the possibility of knowledge which is free from the spatiotemporal and causal conditions of our normal sensory awareness of the world: "my path lies midway between the doctrine of omniscience of the earlier dogmatism and the despair of the Kantian Critique" (*WWRI*, 428). Schopenhauer also rebukes Kant for disregarding the role of perceptual knowledge in the formulation of philosophical principles:

Philosophy... is for him a science of concepts, but for me a science in concepts, drawn from knowledge of perception, the only source of all evidence, and set down and fixed in universal concepts. He skips over this whole world of perception which surrounds us, and which is so multifarious and rich in significance, and he sticks to the forms of abstract thinking. (WWRI, 453)

The fact that Kant "probably never had the opportunity to see an important work of art" (WWRI, 529) led to what Schopenhauer considers to be the artificiality of his system of aesthetics. Schopenhauer evinced a profound love for the visual arts throughout his life. His capacity to immerse himself in the contemplation of a painting was strikingly similar to Beckett's own inclinations. Beckett could be found "gazing at a painting, print or drawing a long while without uttering a word. He would simply gaze, marvel, nod, and sigh,"21 while Zimmern reports that, "For hours Schopenhauer might be seen sitting before some picture." <sup>22</sup> Knowlson claims that Beckett "used to spend long periods of time totally absorbed in its [Dublin's National Gallery] paintings."<sup>23</sup> Schopenhauer's reflections upon aesthetics are thoroughly enriched by the abundance of examples he draws from his own intimate acquaintance with individual art works. His thought is thereby permeated with perceptual insights that illustrate his conviction that concepts can only be fruitful if they derive their material directly from a sensory engagement with the world. A more fundamental shortcoming in Kant's system is "the complete absence of any distinction between abstract, discursive knowledge from the intuitive" (WWRI, 473). A cornerstone of Schopenhauer's aesthetics is his delineation between conceptual thought and our perceptual acquaintance with the world. His accordance of primacy to the latter has, as we shall see, many interesting implications for a Schopenhauerian reading of Beckett's oeuvre. In a statement which articulates some of the essential predicaments of characters such as Watt, Schopenhauer states, "The man who reflects a great deal finds it very troublesome to cease doing this and to

turn from the speedy course of concepts to the peace and quiet of perception" (MRI, 173). The following statement amounts to an elaboration of such views:

Perception by itself is enough; therefore what has sprung purely from it and has remained true to it, like the genuine work of art, can never be false, nor can it be refuted through any passing of time, for it gives us not opinion, but the thing itself. With abstract knowledge, with the faculty of reason, doubt and error have appeared in the theoretical, care and remorse in the practical. (WWRI, 35)

Beckett's protagonists, haunted by a sense of their inexpiable transgressions and epistemic penury, are enthralled by the perfidious allure of intellection. Watt, in his insatiable desire to understand the enigmas with which he is afflicted, becomes "lacerated with curiosity" (*W*, 196); the Unnamable "expiate[s] vilely, like a pig, dumb, uncomprehending" (*U*, 84-5); while in *Stirrings Still* (1988) we learn of a state of consciousness which is free from the agonising promptings of reason: "Unknowing and what is more no wish to know nor indeed any wish of any kind nor therefore any sorrow" (*CIWS*, 113). In Beckett's work the desire to know is never induced by a detached Platonic or Aristotelian sense of wonder, but by the various tribulations that his protagonists endure. In this sense, his characters' experiences align with Schopenhauer's contention that it is "the suffering and misery of life that give the strongest impulse to philosophical reflection and metaphysical explanations of the world" (*WWRII*, 161). Yet, within Beckett's art, while personal traumata seem impervious to rational explanation, interpretative structures such as those provided by religion and philosophy, are seemingly indispensable to those protagonists who must confront the sheer inscrutability of their existence.

Schopenhauer accepts Kant's basic division between the world as it is in-itself and the world as it appears to us with one brilliantly insightful correction. Reading Kant on his own terms, Schopenhauer reminds us that space and time are the principles of individuation.

Accordingly, objects are rendered mutually distinct by their occupation of different points of space at distinguishable times. Hence the realm of the thing-in-itself, being outside of space and time, must be one and undifferentiated; it cannot be composed of *noumena*, it must be the *noumenon*. As to what the underlying reality that subsists outside space and time might be, Kant dismisses all claims to such knowledge. Schopenhauer seems to defy Kant's strictures: "Kant's thing-in-itself is will . . . and what is active in all the fundamental forces of nature shows itself to be simply identical with what we know in ourselves as will" (*WN*, 85). Our knowledge is ordinarily restricted to what we can learn from the interrelated behaviour of

objects, including human bodies. Yet our awareness of the states of our own bodies is not exclusively external as it is when we observe the behaviour of others; we also have intimate access to it by virtue of the successive frustrations and satisfactions of our volitional desires. As Schopenhauer puts it, "to everyone the thing-in-itself is known immediately in so far as it appears as his own body, and only mediately in so far as it is objectified in the other objects of perception" (*WWRI*, 19). However, Schopenhauer is keen to point out that our knowledge of Will<sup>24</sup> can never be direct: "the will, as far as we discover and perceive it in ourselves, is not actually the *thing-in-itself*. For this will enters consciousness in individual and successive acts of will; thus, these already have the form of time and therefore are already appearance." Accordingly, "strictly speaking we know our will only as appearance and not according to what it may be absolutely in and by itself" (*WWRII*, 494).

Schopenhauer's terminology is, however, apt to mislead his readers into interpreting the Will, with its obvious associations with human endeavours as being anthropocentrically specific. However, in spite of his misanthropic tendencies, Schopenhauer does not categorise the human will as intrinsically evil, however much it may be capable of objectifying itself in depraved deeds, but he is keen to point out the inherent malignance of the noumenal Will. He claims that the Will "alone is the source of all our sorrows and sufferings" (PPII, 415). It is for this reason, that the Will, as a "blind urge," (PPII, 414) is "detestable" (PPII, 315). The Will is objectified within the universe through all the activity that occurs in and between organic and inorganic entities. Schopenhauer notes Kant's contradictory postulation of a causal relationship between the world of noumena and that of phenomena. As we have seen, in Kantian terms, causality obtains only within the phenomenal world as a constitutional feature of our cognitive apparatus. Schopenhauer's insistence that there is no causal relationship between the Will and our specific volitional behaviour is consistent with Kant's arguments about the a priori basis of causal laws. The Will, as noumenon, is inherently free from causality, yet insofar as our bodies occupy the world of appearances, they are subject to the same physicochemical determinants as all other material entities. Willing, bereft of any intrinsic aim, subjects us to unending torments in the form of insatiable striving. Schopenhauer's portrayal of human and animal life is suffused with a sense of the intrinsic tragedy of existence. This accounts for the disturbingly bleak, yet disconcertingly plausible conclusions which are derived within his stylistically elegant work. He states:

The basis of all willing . . . is need, lack, and hence pain, and by its very nature and origin it is therefore

destined to pain. If, on the other hand it lacks objects of willing, because it is at once deprived of them again by too easy a satisfaction, a fearful emptiness and boredom come over it; in other words, its being and its existence itself become an intolerable burden for it. Hence its life swings like a pendulum to and fro between pain and boredom, and these two are in fact its ultimate constituents. This has been expressed very quaintly by saying that, after man had placed all pain and torments in hell, there was nothing left for heaven but boredom. (*WWRI*, 312)

However, by accentuating the tragic elements of Schopenhauer's worldview, one can diminish its relevance to Beckett's art. Schopenhauer is keen to point out the risible aspects of human misery in a passage which repudiates dichotomous notions of life as being essentially tragic or comic:

The life of every individual, viewed as a whole and in general, and when only its most significant features are emphasised, is really a tragedy; but gone through in detail it has the character of a comedy. For the doings and worries of the day, the restless mockeries of the moment, the desires and fears of the week, the mishaps of every hour, are all brought about by chance that is always bent on some mischievous trick; they are nothing but scenes from a comedy. The never-fulfilled wishes, the frustrated efforts, the hopes mercilessly blighted by fate, the unfortunate mistakes of the whole life, with increasing suffering and death at the end, always give us a tragedy. Thus, as if fate wished to add mockery to the misery of our existence, our life must contain all the woes of tragedy, and yet we cannot even assert the dignity of tragic characters, but, in the broad detail of life, are inevitably the foolish characters of a comedy. (WWRI, 322)

Schopenhauer subsequently claims that, while we make "definite demands" upon the artist to create works which are "either perfectly happy or wholly tragic . . . human affairs do not readily take so decided a turn" (*PPII*, 440). Bitter laughs reverberate through Beckett's *oeuvre* with such regularity that to speak with confidence of the integral tragedy or comedy of his central themes is a misguided enterprise. As he puts it in one of his aphoristic poems, "en face / le pire / jusqu'à ce / qu'il fasse rire" (*CPS*, 210). In Beckett's writings even a sneer can appear "sepulchral" (*MP*, 136). In *Endgame* (1958), Nell famously avows that, "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness" (*CDW*, 101), yet the discomfiting role of humour within Beckett's work was piquantly described by Adorno in his claim that, "the laughter it inspires ought to suffocate the laughter."<sup>26</sup>

Schopenhauer argues that the Will is manifested in the interminable yearning of humanity for the fulfilment of its various desires. In his 'Philosophy Notes,' wherein he draws extensively from Windelband's *History of Philosophy*, Beckett, through a transcription which deviates

slightly from Windelband only to accentuate the agonies of human existence, summarises these insights of "dear Arthur" when he speaks of "the absolute unreason of objectless will. Creating itself alone and perpetually it is the never satisfied, the <u>unhappy</u> will; and since world is nothing but self-revelation (objectivation) of the will, it must be a balls aching world" (TCD MS 10967/252.1). However, suffering is, for Schopenhauer, an essential prerequisite for enlightenment. In accordance with Schopenhauer's views, the afflictive realities of life motivate us to seek emancipation in art, yet such a move can never amount to facile escapism because some of the greatest artworks are themselves lucid testaments to the intrinsic absurdity of our tribulations. Given our innate propensity towards realism we are habitually deluded by the assumption that our senses deliver direct access to a world which subsists independently of sentient perceivers. Schopenhauer dismisses such views:

One must be forsaken by all the gods to imagine that the world of intuitive perception outside, filling space in its three dimensions, moving on in the inexorably strict course of time, governed at each step by the law of causality that is without exception, but in all these respects merely observing laws that we are able to state prior to all experience thereof - that such a world outside had an entirely real and objective existence without our participation, but then found its way into our heads through mere sensation, where it now had a second existence like the one outside. (*FR*, 76)

Schopenhauer's classification of consciousness as being predisposed towards error allows him to champion art and numerous doctrines of Buddhism and Christianity as being invaluable sources of insight. Schopenhauer, in developing fundamental Kantian premises, insists that ultimate reality is inaccessible via our standard, spatiotemporal engagement with the world, while language impedes our attempts to communicate perceptual experience: "Insofar as words constitute the contents of dictionaries and hence of language, they always express universal representations, concepts, never the things of intuitive perception" (FR, 148). He goes on to claim that, "to reduce the whole essence of such a world [of perception] to abstract concepts is the fundamental business of the faculty of reason, a function that it can carry out only by means of language" (FR, 149). Beckett's scepticism regarding the expressive potentialities of words has prompted scholars such as Nixon to query its significance: "The need for a 'Literatur des Unworts [literature of the unword]' is explicitly connected to the 'Unnatur des Wortes', the unnatural and therefore artificial aspect of language . . . Beckett does not specify why this 'Unnatur', mysteriously translated as 'vicious nature' in *Disjecta*, does not underlie the other arts, specifically music and painting."<sup>27</sup> When considered in relation to Schopenhauer's views, it is possible to see why music and painting

would elude Beckett's suspicions.

Schopenhauer's contention that percepts are the source of genuine art is predicated upon his arguments regarding the purely derivative nature of conceptual thought. Language, being "a tool of concepts and nothing else" (EFR, 37), is unable to offer the type of communicative immediacy that is provided by music and the visual arts. As we shall see, the aesthetic implications of this view are suggestively similar to Beckett's own reservations regarding the efficacy of language as a tool for creative purposes. Schopenhauer contends that some of our most significant experiences are entirely ineffable: "there are some [ideas] which never find words, and alas these are the best" (FR, 154). This view prompts him to commend music as the art form which most readily enables an artist to convey his<sup>28</sup> knowledge of the objects he perceives. For Schopenhauer, the ultimate value of any concept rests with its foundation in perceptual experience: "this much may be affirmed, that every true and original piece of knowledge and every genuine philosopheme must have as their innermost kernel and root some intuitive apprehension" (FR, 155). He argues that concepts are formed by reason, not primarily as part of any philosophical quest for understanding, but in the service of the Will. Such notions amount to a refutation of the exalted evaluations of intellection which Scholastic philosophy propounds; they also undermine the secular appraisals which Enlightenment thinkers formulated in their determined championing of rationality. Beckett rejected the confidence in rational thought that imbued the minds of the eighteenth-century Encyclopaedists: "They give reason a responsibility which it simply can't bear, it's too weak. The Encyclopaedists wanted to know everything."<sup>29</sup>

In *Happy Days* Winnie's tale of the couple who observe her woeful state evinces an aspiration towards rational explanation on the part of the witnesses of her plight. The exasperated reply of Mrs Shower/Cooker to the question, "What's it meant to mean?" can be seen to signify a repudiation of the assumption that conclusive answers to the most intricate problems of being are attainable through the faculty of reason. In her acerbic rejoinder "And you... what's the idea of you... what are you meant to mean?" (*CDW*, 156) she also voices her antipathy to the belief that pain must possess a deeper significance. In my Introduction I noted Beckett's view that the "mess" must be observed, but it cannot be understood - "It is not a mess you can make sense of" (*GF*, 218-9). If art is to provide a faithful descriptive testament of the distressing perplexities of human experience, it cannot be subservient to rigid norms of intelligibility. Beckett was clearly irritated by those who sought to neatly categorise

his work. Such feelings are perhaps best summed up by the plea, "Don't ask me for any meaning in the thing; it just is what it is." Given Mauthner's "near hero-worshipping" of Schopenhauer, Beckett may have been struck by some of the thematic convergences between the writings of Schopenhauer and Mauthner that are, at times, intriguingly apparent. In his 'Whoroscope Notebook' Beckett transcribed a passage from Mauthner's work which contains a distinctly Schopenhauerian evaluation of reason:

Reason . . . is not a superhuman gift bestowed on humanity, that it is not an unchanging and eternal deity, that reason evolved in humanity and evolved into what it is, but that it also, however, could have evolved differently; when we recognise with a twitch as that of a wriggling worm that we are, not only in every step in our miserable existence, but also in what we hold to be the eternal and unalterably fixed fundamental laws of our intellectual being, merely a game played by the coincidence that is the world; when we recognise that our reason (which, after all, is language) can only be a coincidental reason, because it rests on coincidental senses, then we will only smile when we consider the argumentative passion with which anthropologists have laboured over questions of custom, belief, and other collective psychological 'facts'.<sup>32</sup>

Schopenhauer's demotion of the intellect from its role as that which ennobles humanity to being a mere servant of Will, allows him to extol art as that by which we can attain relief from the persistent demands of rational thought and physical yearnings. Our phenomenological awareness is composed of the various attainments and frustrations of our Will-induced desires: "within us the known as such is not the knower but the willer, the subject of willing, the will" (FR, 211). Willing "is the most immediate of all our knowledge; in fact this immediacy must ultimately throw light on all the other branches of knowledge which are very mediate" (FR, 212). The questions which perpetually arise within human experience emanate from the troubles to which we are perennially subject as Will-governed beings, but in a statement which resonates with significance for Schopenhauerian readings of Beckett's *oeuvre*, Schopenhauer observes that the conclusions reached by rational thought can be "falsified by the will's interference" (WWRII, 215). Schopenhauer's assertion of the primacy of Will over intellect ensures that the value of abstract systems of knowledge can only be judged in accordance with their ability to address the concrete specificity of human experience. His works abound with quotations from the preeminent authors of Western literature, including Shakespeare and Goethe. In such cases, it is the ability of those authors to encapsulate the immediacies of experiential reality that is the source of their greatness. In a particularly despairing acknowledgement, Schopenhauer claimed that, as a philosopher, his

vision of "the essential nature of the world" can only be related "feebly in concepts" (*MRI*, 248). Rather than using masterpieces of literature to illustrate his contentions, Schopenhauer can be seen to cite such works as the standards according to which we should judge his insights: "The *measure of my mind* should be taken from those cases where I am in agreement with great men" (*MRIV*, 69).

As his early philosophical ideas developed, Schopenhauer asked, "why . . . are philosophy and rational knowledge so poor?" He was led to the conclusion that they merely lead to "knowledge for the faculty of reason, an abstract knowledge" (MRI, 188). Accordingly, the concurrence of his ideas with the insights of literary artists can be seen as intrinsic to his confidence in their value. In light of Beckett's recognition of the literary merits of Schopenhauer's writings, it is interesting to note that Schopenhauer's stylistic excellence is attributable to his early desire for his work to amount to "philosophy as art" (MRI, 203). Tolstoy was moved to assert that Schopenhauer's philosophy constitutes a depiction of "the whole world in an incredibly clear and beautiful reflection."<sup>33</sup> The renowned Schopenhauer scholar, David Cartwright, in observing that, "at times, reading Schopenhauer is an aesthetic experience of the first order,"34 echoes the terms of commendation offered by Tolstoy and Beckett. Cartwright thereby also supports the view of John G. Robertson, who, in his work A History of German Literature (1902), noted that, "Schopenhauer was what no German thinker had been before him, a master of style; he is one of the most eminent prose writers of the first half of the century." <sup>35</sup> Beckett read Robertson's text as he embarked upon a study of German literary traditions; he clearly agreed with Robertson's view of Schopenhauer's stylistic eminence.

Schopenhauer's hierarchical division of faculties depicts reason as utterly subservient to the demands of the Will; the Will is "the autocrat who is everywhere present" (*WN*, 38). Given that "Will-less knowing is the condition, indeed the essence of all aesthetic comprehension" (*WN*, 81-2), art conveys knowledge of a radically different kind than rationality can deliver. The consumption or production of art can temporarily ease the otherwise inexorable yearnings of the Will, yet the Will is ordinarily omnipotent in human affairs: "destined originally to serve the will for the achievement of its aims, knowledge remains almost throughout entirely subordinate to its service; this is the case with all animals and almost all men" (*WWRI*, 152). Schopenhauer portrays the processes of artistic creation as involving a disappearance of the egotistical aims which usually dominate the mind of the artist and

humanity in general: "the most perfect knowledge, the purely objective apprehension of the world, that is, the apprehension of the genius, is conditioned by a silencing of the will so profound that, so long as it lasts, even the individuality disappears from consciousness, and the man remains *pure subject of knowing*, which is the correlative of the Idea" (*WWRII*, 219). Beckett once described his own creative experiences in terms which mirror such core features of Schopenhauer's aesthetics: "I write the odd poem when it is there, that is the only thing worth doing. There is an ecstasy of <u>accidia</u> - willless in a grey tumult of <u>idées obscures</u>" (*LI*, 546).

For Schopenhauer, the meaninglessness of existence is attributable to the cravings of the Will which are devoid of any teleological significance: "absence of all aim, of all limits, belongs to the essential nature of the will in itself, which is an endless striving" (*WWRI*, 164). The tyrannical Will manifests itself within the universe by governing the behaviour of entities ranging from the simplest causal interactions of matter to the most sophisticated endeavours of mankind. The Will is objectified in various grades; inorganic matter is the most basic form of such objectification, while human beings are the highest, with plants and animals embodying the intervening grades respectively:

Those different grades of the will's objectification, expressed in innumerable individuals, exist as the unattained pattern of these, or as the eternal forms of things. Not themselves entering into time and space, the medium of individuals, they remain fixed, subject to no change, always being, never having become. The particular things, however, arise and pass away; they are always becoming and never are. Now I say that these *grades of the objectification of the will* are nothing but *Plato's Ideas*. (*WWRI*, 129)

Schopenhauer rejects Plato's description of our means of access to such Ideas. According to Schopenhauer's contestable reading, Plato argues that knowledge of Ideas is attained "exclusively with abstract concepts" (*PPI*, 43). Given his description of reason as the source of abstract concepts, Schopenhauer dismisses Plato's views in arguing that any acquaintance with Ideas can only be gained through perceptual experience. It is the prerogative of the authentic artist to perceive the Ideal essence of entities, encapsulate that vision in a work of art and thereby communicate it to others. He asserts that, "the knowledge of genius . . . consists in the apprehension of the (Platonic) Ideas of things, and is therefore essentially intuitive" (*WWRII*, 75). As we shall see, Beckett's analysis of Proust's art invokes the Schopenhauerian concept of Ideas, while the primacy of the percept within his own creative

work is indicative of his appropriation of many aspects of such core aspects of Schopenhauer's aesthetics. Schopenhauer categorically states that, "the apprehended Idea . . . is the true and only source of every genuine work of art" (*WWRI*, 235). That assertion constitutes a normative principle of his thought and it is elaborated upon in his claim that, "just because the Idea is and remains perceptive, the artist is not conscious *in abstracto* of the intention and aim of his work" (*WWRI*, 235). Beckett's critical writings are imbued with similar views, as are many of his personal admissions.

In his exploration of Abraham van Velde's creative practices Beckett states, "Il sait chaque fois que ça y est, à la façon d'un poisson de haute mer qui s'arrête à la bonne profondeur, mais les raisons lui en sont épargnées" (*D*, 131). Similarly, in a letter to Bob Thompson, Beckett spoke of the enigmatic origins of his own art: "I don't know where the writing comes from and I am often quite surprised when I see what I have committed to paper." Our willingness to take such pronouncements seriously can be enhanced by an understanding of the Schopenhauerian overtones within Beckett's discussions of his fellow writers. His examination of Devlin's work highlights a clear affinity with Schopenhauer's thought in his description of the poet's compositional procedures:

The process is obviously one of working up the perceived, when it is not a screen for the failure to perceive, according to the usual mechanism. Because it seems an altogether perceptive, sensuous, instinctive & immediate talent, not at all conceptive or even meditative. When he gets metaphysical it is awful. (*LI*, 549)

Schopenhauer is adamant that "it is not possible to be simultaneously a poet and a philosopher" (*PPII*, 653). Poets who, as Beckett puts it, "get metaphysical," are foregoing the world of intuitive perception in their desire to communicate abstract thoughts. However, in his review of *Intercessions* (1937), Beckett points to the merits of Devlin's work, which rest with its use of imagery and its restraints upon intellectualising. Here we also note Beckett's aversion towards art which strives for lucidity above all other considerations:

It is naturally in the image that this profound and abstruse self-consciousness first emerges with the least loss of integrity. To cavil at Mr Devlin's form as overimaged (the obvious polite cavil) is to cavil at the probity with which the creative act has carried itself out, a probity in this case depending on a minimum of rational interference, and indeed to suggest that the creative act should burke its own conditions for the sake of clarity. (*D*, 94)

When the narrator of *Company* becomes troubled by the occurrence of "rational interference," he is led to ask, "what kind of imagination is this so reason-ridden?" (CIWS, 21) Beckett told Juliet that the writing of Molloy (1951) took place without any preconceived intent: "I planned nothing - worked out nothing ahead of time." When read in relation to Schopenhauer's portrayal of artistic production, one can recognise the plausibility of Beckett's claim. Schopenhauer asserts that "the unpremeditated, unintentional and indeed partly unconscious and instinctive element that has at all times been observed in the works of genius, is just a consequence of the fact that the original artistic knowledge is one that is entirely separate from, and independent of, the will, a will-free, will-less knowledge" (PPII, 418). According to Schopenhauer, the genuine artist cannot be aware in abstract terms of the meaning of his work given the inherently perceptual nature of its beginnings. Schopenhauer's rejection of rationality as an instrument of genuine artistic creation prompts him to assert the importance of imagination as a primary faculty of the artist's compositional practices: "unusual strength of imagination is a companion, indeed a condition, of genius" (WWRI, 187). Imagination counters rationality's obsession with clarification and reduction. Here we discern a key distinguishing factor between the vocation of the artist and that of the philosopher, wherein the latter, compelled to act according to intellectual imperatives alone, will, as we have seen, "always look for clearness and distinctness."

In the following passage Schopenhauer observes that an element of semantic ambiguity necessarily inheres within authentic artistic representations:

the *Ideas* are essentially something of perception, and therefore, in its fuller determinations, something inexhaustible. The communication of such a thing can therefore take place only on the path of perception, which is that of art. Therefore, whoever is imbued with the apprehension of an *Idea* is justified when he chooses art as the medium of his communication. The mere *concept*, on the other hand, is something completely determinable. (*WWRI*, 409)

In a letter written to Mary Manning Howe on 13 December 1936, Beckett related details of his thoughts and feelings regarding the creative impasse which he had experienced since the completion of *Murphy*. Despite such problems he retained "An instinctive respect, at least, for what is real, & therefore has not in its nature, to be clear." He revealed his frustration with publishers and critics who could not appreciate the mimetic integrity to which his compositional efforts aspired. Reflecting upon the means by which the oblique realities of existence may be encapsulated by works of literary art, Beckett wrote: "when somehow this

goes over into words, one is called an obscurantist. The classifiers are the obscurantists" (*LI*, 397). Elsewhere, Beckett claims that, "art has nothing to do with clarity, does not dabble in the clear and does not make clear" (*D*, 94). Even when he was willing to acknowledge his use of conceptual material, he was eager to downplay its purely analytic value: "If I were in the unenviable position of having to study my work my points of departure would be the 'Naught is more real . . .' and the 'Ubi nihil vales . . .' both already in *Murphy* and neither very rational" (*D*, 113). Similarly, in discussing *Murphy*, he was evidently wary of analysis: "If I am not careful I shall become clear as to what I have written" (*LI*, 422). The logical soundness of the precepts of Democritus and Geulincx was, to Beckett's mind, negligible. Accordingly, such ideas were creatively employed not as a result of Beckett's philosophical allegiances, but as material to be manipulated according to his strictly aesthetic aims.

## The Primacy of the Percept

'Le Concentrisme' may be seen to evince Beckett's nascent awareness of the concepts of Kant and Schopenhauer. It also draws upon many biographical details from Beckett's life in its discussion of a fictional French poet, Jean du Chas. Beckett's travels through Germany, which proved so formative for him in both personal and artistic terms, inform du Chas' life. Du Chas visits Kragenhof during the summer months, while his intellectual and literary interests include the works of Descartes, Racine, and Proust. In the final paragraph of this satirical text, Beckett cautions his listeners against reductionist readings of du Chas' art: "Mais ce qui est certain, c'est que si vous insistez à solidifier l'Idée, Celle dont il parle, à concreter la Chose de Kant, vous ne ferez que degrader en vaudeville de Labiche cet art qui, semblable à une résolution de Mozart, est parfaitement intelligible et parfaitement inexplicable" (D, 42). Beckett's association of the Idea with Kant's "Thing" echoes Schopenhauer's tendency to somewhat awkwardly equate the two. As Schopenhauer puts it, "those two great and obscure paradoxes of the two greatest philosophers of the West [are] not exactly identical, but yet very closely related" (WWRI, 170). Kant does not employ Platonic Ideas in his work, yet he agrees with Plato that ultimate reality exists beyond the world that we can apprehend through sensory experience. However, Platonic Ideas are distinct from the Will insofar as they exist as a plurality, while Will, existing outside space and time is necessarily one. Another notable distinction is that Ideas can be an object for a subject within aesthetic modes of consciousness, while the Will can never be an object for a subject. Schopenhauerian Ideas are the archetypal core of everything that exists within the phenomenal world. By accessing them through art, we attain the most essential knowledge of

the entities wherein they are embodied.

If, as Beckett claims in 'Le Concentrisme,' Ideas resist solidification, they are, by implication, ethereal in nature. Their existence within Schopenhauer's system is deeply problematic - a fact which is revealed by the thoughts of many of the most esteemed scholars of Schopenhauer's philosophy. Heine asserts her opposition to Schopenhauer's theory of Ideas because "The Ideas play by no means as fundamental a role in the philosophy of Schopenhauer as in that of Plato. They are not the ultimate constituents of reality. They are not presupposed in all human knowledge, nor are they its final object."<sup>38</sup> Schopenhauer's appropriation of Platonic Ideas baffles Hamlyn, who states that they are "suddenly and surprisingly"<sup>39</sup> introduced and that they are "in fact incoherent"<sup>40</sup> when considered as part of Schopenhauer's overall system. Such reservations are echoed by Magee, who is "not convinced that the Platonic Ideas - adduced primarily to explain the existence of genera and species - are necessary to Schopenhauer's philosophy at all." Magee suspects that a "careful shave with Occam's razor could . . . succeed in removing them without a trace." Foster concurs with the foregoing remarks in stating that, "Ideas obscure rather than clarify Schopenhauer's aesthetic observations. It is possible to appreciate and perhaps enhance our understanding of Schopenhauer's aesthetic vision without them."<sup>43</sup> It is not my intention to evaluate the role of Ideas within Schopenhauer's thought, but it is important to note that Beckett's indifference to Schopenhauer's value as a metaphysician may well have prompted him to ignore Schopenhauer's claims about the nebulous role of Ideas within artistic creation and appreciation. However, despite their dubious ontological status, Schopenhauer's statements about Ideas are primarily focussed upon establishing the perceptual basis of genuine art. A central contention of the present work is that Beckett shared Schopenhauer's views about the primacy of the percept in art without accepting the metaphysical underpinnings of his aesthetics. Some commentators argue that it is preferable to read his theory of Ideas in such a way. As Young puts it, "The Ideas might just be ordinary perceptual objects . . . their universality having to do . . . with the selectiveness of attention paid to them by the observer . . . Perceiving an Idea . . . is a matter of perceiving an ordinary object but with one's attention focussed on its essential and away from its inessential aspects."44

A primary aim of this dissertation is to show that the existence of identifiable locales and acquaintances from Beckett's youth within his early fiction can be seen as indicative of his concurrence with Schopenhauer's views regarding the importance of perceptual experience in

the genesis and reception of art. The ways in which Beckett deployed his erudition certainly evolved as his authorial career progressed, becoming increasingly subtle and nuanced, but his constant revisiting of childhood scenes throughout his *oeuvre* can be seen to corroborate Schopenhauer's assertion that, "what man gains in insight and knowledge up to the age of puberty is, taken as a whole, more than all that he learns subsequently, however learned he may become" (*WWRII*, 394-5). Given Schopenhauer's view that perceptual absorption acquaints us with that which is timeless, it could be said that art which is forged from such refined reminiscences evokes what the narrator of 'Texts for Nothing 10' (1967) describes as, "that old past ever new" (*TNO*, 41). Beckett's admission that scenes from his childhood were "obsessional" (quoted in *JK*, xxi) within the composition of his work allows us to recognise how observed reality played a fundamental role in his authorial consciousness.

Schopenhauer's insistence that we are particularly attuned to perceptual reality during childhood and early adulthood has particular relevance for our understanding of the autobiographical elements of Beckett's *oeuvre*. He claims that the sensory impressions of childhood were indelibly registered by his psyche: "In the *vivid recollections from childhood* I feel in myself that which is unchangeable and which does not move away with time" (*MRIII*, 570). Although childhood can seem to be, in retrospect, "a lost paradise" (*WWRI*, 198), it was just as replete with "incurable sorrows" (*WWRI*, 198) as the present happens to be. Beckett's ambivalent estimation of his own early years is consonant with such views, but Schopenhauer's more specific reflections upon the importance of childhood experience for the incipient artist is particularly relevant here. Schopenhauer claims that,

The years of our childhood are a continuous poem. Thus the essence of poetry, as of all art, consists in purely objective and consequently will-less knowing, and thus in comprehending the (Platonic) Idea, in other words the essential in the individual and therefore what is common to everything different, so that each individual thing becomes a representative of the species, one case holding good for a thousand. Now although it seems that in the scenes of our years of childhood we are always busy with the individual object or small event for the time being, and indeed only to the extent that it interests our momentary willing, nevertheless it is at bottom different. Thus life in all its significance stands before us so fresh and new, without any deadening of its impressions through repetition, that in the midst of our childish activities, we are always secretly, and without any clear intention concerned in the individual scenes and events with comprehending the essential nature of life itself, the basic types of its forms and methods of presentation. (MRIII, 43)

He subsequently remarks that, throughout our childhood years, "what we perceive is really

the (Platonic) *Idea* of the species, and beauty is essential to this" (*MRIII*, 234). The recurrence of passages throughout Beckett's *oeuvre* which abound in sensuous evocations that his biographers have shown to emanate from his childhood and early manhood can be instructively related to Schopenhauer's view that,

the real kernel of knowledge, which an individual can reach and whose varied expressions are all the products of his mind, already exists prior to his thirty-fifth year . . . The world of intuitive perception has then made its whole impression and has thereby formed the foundation of real, i.e. intuitive knowledge and such a foundation underlies and gives true substance to all further artistic creation, poetry and abstract thought. (MRIII, 444-5)

While Ideas cannot be solidified, Kant's insistence that the noumenal realm is unknowable, that it has "no assignable positive meaning" (*CPR*, 293) would render any attempt to "concretise" it futile. Regardless of the facetious nature of 'Le Concentrisme,' it would seem that, within the text Beckett employs some of the central tenets and terminology of Transcendental Idealism in order to assert a vision of the intrinsic enigmas of art which necessarily defy our conceptualising tendencies. As we shall see, he reiterates those principles as part of a more serious critical project in *Proust*.

Within Beckett's critical writings, the notion that the greatest art is that which is most impervious to conceptual explanations is a thematic constant. Schopenhauer insists upon our inability to demand anything from a work of art; in beholding a masterpiece "we must comport ourselves as with a great nobleman; thus we must stand before it and wait until it says something to us" (*MRI*, 164). This attitude of due reverence is certainly conveyed by Beckett in his comments upon his attempt to write an appraisal of Jack B. Yeats' achievements on the occasion of a 1954 exhibition of the painter's work. Such sentiments also bespeak Beckett's distinct unease regarding his role as critic:

I have dreadful difficulty with this form of writing, it is real torture, and spent days before the blank sheet before I could do anything, and the result is no more than the most clumsy of obeisances. But I hope the bowing down is what matters. To prove or defend or describe or situate seem to me all equally superfluous in the presence of such an achievement. (*LII*, 470-71)

Beckett eventually managed to remark that, "In images of such breathless immediacy as these there is no occasion, no time given, no room left, for the lenitive of comment. None in this impetus of need that scatters them loose to the beyond of vision" (*D*, 149). As Atik reports,

literature could overwhelm Beckett in similar ways:

King Lear was the play he could say least about, its power being indescribable as well as unstageable, perhaps because anything one could say was foredoomed to fall short. I noticed that his face darkened, his lips tightened whenever it was mentioned. He expressed his feelings about it most by conveying that one couldn't. 45

Nixon notes that Beckett "generally favoured introductory books which were factual rather than interpretative." As a "Crritic" (CDW, 70) Beckett was deeply aware that his own written judgements may amount to little more than "un bavardage désagréable et confus" (D, 119) but his existentially engaged critical reflections attest to his determination to avoid the "restrained & professorial" (LI, 531) approach of critics such as Eliot. His reticence as a commentator on art is consonant with Schopenhauer's scepticism about the use of words in our attempts to describe the essential nature of aesthetic experiences. When confronted with critical tasks, Beckett was frequently beset with feelings of "helplessness . . . speechlessness, and of restlessness" (LII, 105). Commenting upon his essay about the van Velde brothers, 'La Peinture des van Velde ou le monde et le pantalon' (1945), Beckett states that what he said there was little, yet somehow excessive: "C'était peu, c'était trop" (D, 133). In that essay and in 'Peintres de l'Empêchement' (1948), Beckett is remarkably hesitant in making claims about the work of the van Velde brothers. Moran's observation that, "all language [is] an excess of language" (Mo, 121) was undoubtedly realised by his creator in his attempts to describe artistic experiences. Yet, somewhat ironically, in each of the aforementioned essays Beckett's comments about paintings are prefaced by lengthy, verbose, and distinctly tangential reflections upon the critic's role in the analysis of art which serve to defer the act of analysis. Such instances are eloquent of Beckett's profound scepticism about the value of exegesis.

Jack B. Yeats insisted that, "There's no book of words, no direction by which you or anyone else can understand all about painting. If there were such a book it would ring the knell of painting." Beckett would undoubtedly have endorsed such sentiments as he was acutely aware that the task of elucidating a work of art is impeded by the nature of language itself: "Avec les mots on ne fait que se raconteur . . . Et jusque dans le confessional on se trahit" (*D*, 119). In this sense, the object that is apprehended in artistic experience by the type of focussed percipience that Schopenhauer describes is immune from possible explanation given that the very processes of critical commentary are governed by that principle of sufficient

reason which is precluded from aesthetic consciousness. Schopenhauer claims that a proper appreciation of painting "requires that we stick to what is perceived and ceases to have any effect the moment we pass over to abstract representations" (*MRI*, 339). When viewing a painting, the aesthetic bliss that we experience is grounded in perceptual absorption; as soon as we begin to analyse the work in question we are compelled to subject it to the conceptual norms of reason. If asked to speak or write about such experiences, we rely upon words which are themselves intrinsically abstract and, as Beckett suggests, inordinately self-expressive and thereby antipathetic to the Schopenhauerian notion of selfless bliss which is rooted in the purely objective aspects of aesthetic contemplation. In a statement which attests to his direct confrontation with such problems, Beckett admitted: "I'm afraid I couldn't write about pictures at all. I used never to be happy with a picture till it was literature, but now that need is gone" (*LI*, 388).

In Schopenhauerian terms, "All *explanation* is simply seeking and stating the necessary connexion of any of our representations with one another; the necessity of this connexion of representation with others has the *principle of sufficient reason* as its expression" (*MRI*, 104). Beckett reiterates and elaborates upon his sense of the futility of attempting to relate his aesthetic experiences as follows: "Tout ce que vous saurez jamais d'un tableau, c'est combien vous l'aimez (et à la rigueur pourqoi, si cela vous intéresse)" (*D*, 123). He goes on to say:

Ce qui suit ne sera qu'une défiguration verbale, voire assasinat verbal, d'émotions qui, je le sais bien, ne regardent que moi. Défiguration à bien y penser, moins d'une réalité affective que de sa risible impreinte cérébrale. Car il suffit que je refléchisse à tous les plaisirs que me donnaient, à tous les plaisirs que me donnaient, les tableaux d'A. van Velde, et à tous les plaisirs que me donnaient, à tous les plaisirs que me donnaient, les tableaux de G. van Velde, pour que je les sente m'échapper, dans un éboulement innombrable. Donc, un double massacre. (D, 124)

According to Schopenhauer, the rapt attention that art inspires in the mind of the percipient is partially based upon the removal of egotistical self-consciousness which is ordinarily prevalent within our Will-driven behaviour. Beckett claims that Bram van Velde's "originality" is manifested most clearly in his "objectivité prodigieuse" (D, 127), thereby employing a criterion which is at the core of Schopenhauer's description of genuine art. Schopenhauer states, "It is an original view of the world which presupposes an absolutely exceptional objectivity, this being the essence of genius" (MRI, 155). However, when we attempt to describe the effect that art has upon us, the self becomes manifest in our projection

of personal obsessions onto the work we are scrutinising, or as Beckett might put it, "the observer infects the observed" (*PTD*, 17). In a letter to Duthuit, Beckett admitted to his inability to judge art objectively. He stated, "I am not someone to talk art with, and on that subject I am not likely to utter anything other than my own obsessive concerns" (*LII*, 473). Beckett seems to have grasped in an entirely concrete and experiential way that the inexpressible intensity of the aesthetic experience could never be made explicable, especially through the medium of words which, as we have seen, are burdened by their conceptual nature and systematic associations. As Schopenhauer puts it, "only concepts are communicable through words" (*MRI*, 155).

Beckett states, "Écrire aperception purement visuelle, c'est écrire une phrase dénuée de sens. Comme de bien entendu. Car chaque fois qu'on veut faire faire aux mots un véritable travail de transbordement, chaque fois qu'on veut leur faire exprimer autre chose que des mots, ils s'alignent de façon à s'annuler mutuellement" (D, 125). From a Schopenhauerian standpoint, the analytic imperatives of criticism ensure that the non-conceptual aesthetic experience must be communicated through processes of intellection which are inimical to the artist's Ideal vision. Beckett, in a rather despairing admission about his exploration of the van Velde brothers' works states, "La boîte crânienne a le monopole de cet article" (D, 126). The pointlessness of our endeavours to communicate aesthetic insights that we have derived from our engagement with works of art rests with the fact that the intrinsically particular is not amenable to rational examination: "Impossible de raisonner sur l'unique" (D, 127). As I noted in my Introduction, Schopenhauer is adamant that the lasting appeal of art is dependent upon its capacity to resist reductive commentary. The following passage constitutes a useful summary of his position:

If, when considering a work of plastic art, or reading a poem, or listening to a piece of music (which aims at describing something definite), we see the distinct, limited, cold, dispassionate concept glimmer and finally appear through all the rich resources of art, the concept which was the kernel of this work, the whole conception of the work having therefore consisted only in clearly thinking this concept, and accordingly being completely exhausted by its communication, then we feel disgust and indignation, for we see ourselves deceived and cheated of our interest and attention. We are entirely satisfied by the impression of a work of art only when it leaves behind something that, in spite of all our reflection on it, we cannot bring down to the distinctness of a concept. (WWRII, 409)

In not being able to reduce such impressions to "the distinctness of a concept," which can be

readily expressed in language, we recognise the acuity of Felix Mendelssohn's observation that the most profoundly moving music evokes thoughts that are "not too indefinite, but on the contrary, too definite to put into words." Contrary to the assertion of Wall, who follows Beckett in stating that, "music is the idea itself," Schopenhauer argues that music is the only form of art that is not related to Ideas. He contends that music, "since it passes over the Ideas, is also quite independent of the phenomenal world, positively ignores it . . . is not a copy of the Ideas, but a *copy of the will itself*" (*WWRI*, 257). However, it is worth remembering that the Will, as *noumenon*, exists outside of time, while our experience of music is necessarily governed by the temporal succession of its constituent notes. Music is the most profoundly expressive of all the arts insofar as it is independent of the mediating role of Ideas. Its communicative power cannot be encapsulated by words:

[It] relates the most secret history of the intellectually enlightened will, portrays every agitation, every effort, every movement of the will, everything which the faculty of will summarizes under the wide and negative concept of feeling, and which cannot be further taken up into the abstractions of reason. Hence it has always been said that music is the language of feeling and passion, just as words are the language of reason. (*WWRI*, 259)

At various points in Beckett's work music can be seen to probe areas of human experience to which words cannot penetrate - for example, in *Ghost Trio* (1976) and *Nacht and Träume* (1984). Beckett, in his review of Edward Moerike's *Mozart on the Way to Prague* (1856), mentions what he considers to be the specific shortcomings of the author's approach, yet he also refers to the fundamental futility of enlisting words in the description of works of musical genius. Such an exercise has "betrayed all the ingenuity and intelligence of men very much more highly endowed than Eduard Moerike . . . in which all writing *qua* writing is bound to fail" (*D*, 62). Beckett's lifelong passion for music has been amply documented by his biographers and in the recollections of his friends and associates within the world of theatre. Mandell was "fascinated by Beckett's descriptions of actions in musical terms. As a director, he seemed to conduct with both his hands raised like wings." Beckett's reverence for music also prompted him to classify his dramatic works in musical terms, thereby suggesting that the standard terms of literary discourse were not equal to the task. He described *Endgame* as a "cantata for two voices" and as a "string quartet;" *Play* (1964) as "a score for five pitches."

Tensions arose between Beckett and Blin over the staging of *Endgame* owing to Beckett's

insistence upon looking "on his play as a kind of musical score. When a word occurred or was repeated, when Hamm called Clov, Clov should always come in the same way every time, like a musical phrase coming from the same instrument with the same volume."54 Pater's contention that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music" might well be invoked in order to provide critics with an established cultural framework within which to place Beckett's widely documented esteem for music, yet Pater's assertion lacks the elaborate conceptual foundations that Schopenhauer's aesthetics provide and which enrich our understanding of Beckett's own creative methods. It is also worth noting that, in 1814, Schopenhauer anticipated Pater's famous dictum by observing that, "Music is so very much what all art aspires to be" (MRI, 238). In a seminal letter to Axel Kaun, written on July 9, 1937, Beckett laments the possibility that literature might "remain behind in the old lazy ways that have so long ago been abandoned by music and painting" (D, 172). Language is, in Schopenhauerian terms, limited by its readily-assignable conceptual associations. Accordingly, discussions of art are distinctly problematic in that any utterance would seem to amount to a compromise of the artist's inspiring vision. In such cases, "the transition from the Idea to the concept is always a descent" (WWRI, 238). In this context it is instructive to note Beckett's claim that "the book, picture, music, etc. is incidental, what matters, the primary, is the illumination by which they are the vulgarisations, falsifications."56 In a letter to Reavey, Beckett claimed that his "idea" for a play about Samuel Johnson's relationship with Mrs Thrale had not been "degraded to paper" (LI, 533). It is what Beckett refers to as "l'urgence et la primauté de la vision intérieure" (D, 130) that poses problems of communication for the artist, whose processes of composition inevitably involve a diminishment of that "interior vision" when it finds form in its creator's chosen medium. Such factors can be seen to inform Beckett's notion that, "to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail . . . failure is his world" (PTD, 125). In the following passage, Schopenhauer examines the fundamental impediments to expression:

It would be foolish to hope and expect that words and the abstract idea could become and fulfil that which the living intuitive perception was and fulfilled, a perception which evoked the idea. The thought itself is only a mummy of the perception and the words are the lid of the sarcophagus. Here we have the limit of mental communication; it excludes the best. (MRIII, 24)

In his conversations with Büttner, Beckett is reported to have said "Every word is a lie" because the creative process "occurs at a very deep level within himself. Words are of no use in expressing what happens there, where it is calm, still, and simple." To use terminology

which, from a psychological and creative point of view intrigued Beckett, it is clear that literary works are never "properly born" (*CDW*, 217) insofar as the perceptual intensity of a creative vision must be conveyed by the conceptual essence of words. Beckett's use of increasingly minimalist language in his later works, which are renowned for their austerity of expression, could be read, from a Schopenhauerian perspective, as his attempt to preserve as much as possible of that perceptual vision which engendered his creative impulse. Beckett's own resistance to demands for an explanation of his work are equally well documented. In a letter to Schneider, Beckett proclaimed his resolute refusal "to be involved in exegesis of any kind" (*D*, 109). As we have noted, in Schopenhauerian terms, the artist lacks any conceptual understanding of the origins and ultimate meaning of his work. As Beckett put it during one of his lectures, the 'véritable artiste reste toujours à demi innocent de lui-même" (TCD MIC 60/11). Given that his reading of Schopenhauer would have acquainted him with some of the most stringent criteria ever developed by a philosopher regarding the means by which we can demarcate authentic from inauthentic art, it is interesting to note that Beckett was exploring ideas regarding the "véritable artiste" at such an early period.

We have seen how Schopenhauer disclaims any responsibility on the artist's part to be conscious in abstract terms of the aims and significance of his creations. C. G. Jung - another enthusiast for Schopenhauer's thought - speaks of the act of creation in the following distinctly Schopenhauerian terms: "Art . . . seizes a human being and makes him its instrument, one who allows art to realise its purposes through him . . . He is subordinate to it and we have no right to expect him to interpret it for us. He has done his utmost by giving it form."58 Schopenhauer reveals a more categorical stance on this issue in his claim that "genius can never give an account of its own works" (MRI, 24). That which has been forged in the artist's creative consciousness is impervious to the conceptual constitution of reason and its modes of communication. Beckett was clearly aware of the importance of avoiding precedents set by poets such as Carducci who, "through a desperate self-conscious effort . . . produced poetry by sheer force of intellect" (TCD MS 10965/32). In the following chapters I will examine some of the ways in which Beckett managed to incorporate his extensive erudition into his creative writings by interweaving the most seemingly disparate threads of learning and experiential insight. In a statement which epitomises Beckett's opposition to questions of authorial intentionality, he declares: "concerning a work in which there is so little of my head, my head will never come up with anything worthwhile" (LII, 392). The following passage is an excerpt from one of Beckett's most extended responses to a demand

for an analysis of Waiting for Godot:

I don't know who Godot is. I don't even know if he exists. And I don't know if they believe in him or not - the two who are waiting for him . . . Everything that I knew I showed. It's not much, but it's enough for me by a wide margin. I'll even say that I would have been satisfied with less. As for wanting to find in all that a broader, loftier meaning to take away after the performance, along with the program and the Eskimo pie, I don't see the point of it. <sup>59</sup>

Beckett, in a typically elusive move, goes on to suggest that explanations of the significance of *Godot* might well be provided by its characters. This can be seen as a reiteration of his notion that the evaluative principles of the critic should not be determined by socio-cultural ideologies. In 1938, Beckett spoke of "The relief of poetry free to be derided (or not) on its own terms and not in those of the politicians, antiquaries (Geleerte) and zealots" (*D*, 91). While such statements can be seen to cohere with cardinal principles of aestheticism, their alignment with Schopenhauerian themes is equally striking. Schopenhauer dismisses all art that proceeds from a conceptual source as formulaic, semantically limited, and a prey to the vicissitudes of cultural fashions and the ignoble demands of economic expediency. However, the genuine artist "is driven to express in permanent works what he sees and feels, without being conscious here of any further motive" (*MRIV*, 46). The discovery of the abstract message contained within conceptually-inspired works entails hermeneutic closure:

When ordinary minds write poetry they have a few traditional, indeed conventional, opinions, passions, noble sentiments, and the like, obtained in the abstract; and these they attribute to the heroes of their poems. In this way such heroes become a mere personification of those opinions; and hence to a certain extent they are themselves abstractions, and thus dull and wearisome. If they philosophise, they take possession of a few wide abstract concepts which they cast about in all directions, as though it were a matter of algebraical equations, and hope that something will result therefrom. (*WWRII*, 73)

With such comments in mind, Beckett's acerbic description of Balzac's art as a "distillation of Euclid" (*DFW*, 120), which is thereby an antithesis of Proust's "anti-intellectual attitude" (*PTD*, 85), can be seen as a notable application of Schopenhauerian strictures. Beckett's former student, Rachel Burrows, confirmed his opposition towards the "enchaînement mécanique, fatal, de circonstances" (TCD MIC 60/40) that Balzac's writings propound. As we learn in *Dream*, Balzac is "absolute master of his material, he can do what he likes with it, he can foresee and calculate its least vicissitude" (*DFW*, 119) The neat, deterministic associations of cause and effect, and rational deduction are seen by Beckett as being inimical

to true artistic production in a way which coheres with Schopenhauer's depiction of the genesis of genuine art in the utterly involuntary and inscrutable recesses of the creator's psyche.

#### The Palliation of Life

For Schopenhauer, the creation and consumption of art involves liberation from the incessant miseries to which our Will-governed lives are invariably prone. Accordingly, art affords rare moments of pleasure, wherein our individual desires for physical satisfaction and intellectual comprehension are temporarily renounced:

The most perfect knowledge, the purely objective apprehension of the world, that is, the apprehension of the genius, is conditioned by a silencing of the will so profound that, so long as it lasts, even the individuality disappears from consciousness, and the man remains *pure subject of knowing*, which is the correlative of the Idea. (*WWRII*, 219)

In such a state we are emancipated from our habitual conative yearnings and our rationalising tendencies. Art eases, however briefly, such burdensome realities of being: "What might . . . be called the finest part of life, its purest joy, just because it lifts us out of real existence, and transforms us into disinterested spectators of it, is pure knowledge which remains foreign to all willing, pleasure in the beautiful, genuine delight in art" (*WWRI*, 314). Schopenhauer's admiration for Leopardi's work exemplifies his conviction that art and philosophy address the innumerable problems of human existence. In stating that, "Schopenhauer did not know of any form of art which might be capable of representing the content of his metaphysical views on the vanity and suffering of life," Pothast overlooks Schopenhauer's admiration for Leopardi, a writer for whom Beckett also expressed deep appreciation, listing him in *Proust* among the "sages" whose "wisdom" (*PTD*, 18) extols a renunciation of yearning. While Schopenhauer stated, "I think and act . . . according to Leopardi's maxims" (*MRIV*, 492), Beckett admitted that, "Leopardi was a strong influence when I was young (his pessimism, not his patriotism!)." Schopenhauer commends Leopardi for his lucid depiction of the horrors of being:

[N]o one has treated this subject so thoroughly and exhaustively as Leopardi in our own day. He is entirely imbued and penetrated with it; everywhere his theme is the mockery and wretchedness of this existence. He presents it on every page of his works, yet in such a multiplicity of forms and applications, with such a wealth of imagery, that he never wearies us, but, on the contrary, has a diverting and stimulating effect. (*WWRII*, 588)

Leopardi shares Schopenhauer's vision of art as a rare source of solace in an otherwise desolate world:

Works of genius have this intrinsic property, that even when they give a perfect likeness of the nullity of things, even when they clearly demonstrate and make us feel the inevitable unhappiness of life, even when they express the most terrible despair, nevertheless to a great soul, that may even find itself in a state of utter prostration, disillusionment, futility, boredom and discouragement with life, or in the harshest and most death-dealing adversities (whether these appertain to the strong and lofty emotions, or to any other thing); they always serve as a consolation.<sup>63</sup>

Art may deepen our awareness of the prevalence of pain in this world, yet it also serves to relieve our afflictions when we enter the type of contemplative states which, for Schopenhauer, constitute aesthetic bliss. In a passage from his 'Clare Street Notebook' Beckett describes a psychic state wherein we are fleetingly acquainted with the inner reality of the world and free from the delusive aspects of hope:

There are moments when the veil of hope is finally torn apart and the liberated eyes see <u>their</u> world, as it is, as it must be. Unfortunately it does not last long, the revelation quickly passes. The eyes can only bear such pitiless light for a short while, the membrane of hope grows again and one returns to the world of phenomena.<sup>64</sup>

In a forthright assertion of his attainments, Schopenhauer claimed that he had "lifted the veil of truth higher than has any mortal before" (*MRIV*, 328). His philosophy repeatedly invokes the Eastern notion of the "veil of Maya" (*WWRI*, 352) to describe the illusive influence of the principle of sufficient reason within our normal modes of consciousness.

Schopenhauer underscores the ability of the genius to illuminate our lives. He speaks of how it "radiates its own light" and refers to "great minds" as "the lighthouses of mankind" (*PPII*, 77). When read in conjunction with such statements, Beckett's comments about the works of Jack B. Yeats and MacGreevy are rich in Schopenhauerian connotations. Yeats is lauded by Beckett for his role in diminishing the ineluctable pain of life: "He brings light, as only the great dare to bring light, to the issueless predicament of existence" (*D*, 97). Following the painter's death, Beckett told H. O. White that, "The light of Jack Yeats will always come with me." The processes by which MacGreevy created art are described by Beckett as "self-absorption into light" (*D*, 69) while he continually employs terms which refer to the capacity of art to irradiate human existence including: "shining," "fire," "blaze," and "radiance" (*D*,

69-70). Beckett admired MacGreevy's creative endeavours but he did not share MacGreevy's ideological criteria. Yeats's achievement, despite MacGreevy's protestations to the contrary, is not to be associated with any nationalist sentiment that his art embodies. W. B. Yeats's oracular assertion, "There is no great literature without nationality, no great nationality without literature," serves to highlight the type of sentiment to which Beckett was fervently opposed. When we consider Beckett's claim that, "the artist who stakes his being is from nowhere, has no kith" (*D*, 149), it is instructive to note its resemblance to Schopenhauer's description of the illuminating capacities of preeminent artists, who, as "fixed stars . . . do not belong to one system (nation) alone, but to the world" (*PPII*, 454). In this sense, we can interpret Beckett's estimation of Yeats's stature according to criteria other than the semantically limited concept of patriotic intent. Beckett's reflections upon the value of Yeats's work can also be seen to exploit the highly suggestive notion of art's potential to alleviate even the darkest mysteries of human experience, thereby showing a significant agreement with Schopenhauer's claim that,

If anything in the world is desirable, so desirable that even the dull and uneducated herd in its more reflective moments would value it more than silver and gold, it is that a ray of light should fall on the obscurity of our existence, and that we should obtain some information about this enigmatical life of ours, in which nothing is clear except its misery and vanity. (WWRII, 164)

In opposition to the views of MacGreevy, Beckett reveals his animus against those who wish to conscript the painting of Yeats in the service of nationalist ideals: "the national aspects of Mr Yeats's genius have, I think, been over-stated, and for motives that are not always remarkable for their aesthetic purity. To admire painting on other than aesthetic grounds, or a painter, qua painter, for any other reason than that he is a good painter, may seem to some uncalled for" (D, 96-7). Readers might be tempted to consider that statement as a Pateresque declaration of the importance of aesthetic autonomy in artistic appreciation, yet its Schopenhauerian implications are equally apparent. Conceptually-based art is, according to Schopenhauer, markedly deficient. If it is created in the service of a contemporary cause which can be readily determined by means of socio-cultural discourse, its appeal to posterity is limited to a sociological or historical, rather than an aesthetic judgement. Schopenhauer is adamant that the "work of genius may be music, philosophy, painting, or poetry; it is nothing for use or profit. To be useless and unprofitable is one of the characteristics of the works of genius; it is their patent of nobility" (WWRII, 287). In dismissing claims about the significance of nationalist themes within Yeats's art, which simply embody "the local

accident" (D, 97), Beckett can be seen to consider it worthy of an aesthetically purer evaluation, especially in light of his description of Yeats's work as "art of genius" (D, 95). Beckett's notorious susceptibility for lauding the work of friends on the basis of personal esteem rather than aesthetic merit might well prevent certain readers from taking his endorsement of Yeats's painting seriously. However, given that Schopenhauer's principles of artistic integrity are nothing if not stringent, our ability to read Beckett's admiration for Yeats's work in accordance with such criteria allows us to view it as more than a mere gushing appraisal.

Schopenhauer rejects notions that art must be subservient to prescriptive ideals: "no one can prescribe to the poet that he should be noble and sublime, moral, pious, Christian or anything else, still less reproach him for being this and not that. He is the mirror of mankind, and brings to its consciousness what it feels and does" (WWRI, 249). Here his conviction of the descriptive imperatives of philosophy and literature is clear: "For the philosopher morality can as little take preference over truth as for the poet" (MRIV, 109). Schopenhauer's own work reveals his presiding desire to present a thoroughly descriptive account of reality and his passionate aversion to those who censure art or thought on ethical grounds. Rachel Burrows, who attended Beckett's classes at TCD, speaks of his preference for the works of Racine over those of Corneille in terms which echo Schopenhauer's distinction between prescriptivist and descriptivist art: "Now why he hated Corneille and why he did Le Kid, which was a skit on Corneille, was that he felt that Corneille was utterly artificial. He was distorting the real by his heroics, showing people as they were meant to be. Racine, on the other hand painted men as they were."67 It is interesting to note that, at a time when Beckett was making such statements in his lectures, he also, according to another of his former students, Evelyn Nora Goodbody, "talked of",68 Schopenhauer.

In *Proust* Beckett may be seen to concur with Proust's hostility to "literature that 'describes' . . . . the façade, behind which the Idea is prisoner" (*PTD*, 78-9). Here it is necessary to distinguish traditional realist approaches which merely "describe the surface" (*PTD*, 79), from Schopenhauer's exaltation of genuine art which is descriptive insofar as it penetrates beyond surface realities to convey visions of the Ideas which subsist beyond normal perception. As we shall see in the following chapters, Beckett's refusal to indulge in narratorial reflections which would determine a reader's interpretative judgements is clear at various points in his *oeuvre*. It could be said that, in such cases, "There is no position here, no

possibility of a position, no faculty for one" (D, 67). Given Schopenhauer's convictions regarding the futility of prescriptive endeavours in ethics and the laudable uselessness of genuine art, Beckett's distinctly Schopenhauerian reading of Proust underscores the absence of proselytising tendencies in À la recherche du temps perdu (1913-27): "Here, as always, Proust is completely detached from all moral considerations. There is no right and wrong in Proust nor in his world" (PTD, 66). Insofar as Elstir "paints what he sees and not what he knows he ought to see" (PTD, 86-7) he refuses to express anything other than perceptual reality. When we consider Jack B. Yeats's claim that, "The artist compromises when he refuses to paint what he himself has seen, but paints what he thinks someone else would like him to have seen,"69 our understanding of Beckett's profound esteem for Yeats is thoroughly enhanced. Beckett's reactions to the paintings of Yeats were comprised of "perception and dispassion" (LI, 536) - terms which resound with Schopenhauerian significance. Here perceptual absorption, which is borne out of aesthetic experience, eschews moralising evaluations. In *Proust* Beckett stresses the author's "complete indifference to moral values" (PTD, 89). Zurbrugg observes that Beckett was all too eager to accept Marcel's rejection of moral considerations as being indicative of Proust's general stance without acknowledging Proust's occasional assertions regarding the erroneous nature of Marcel's views. Accordingly, "Beckett seems to have had no difficulty in taking Marcel's confessions of amorality quite literally."<sup>70</sup> While Zurbrugg's observation is relatively valid, he does not consider the possibility that Beckett's zealous dismissal of ethics from Marcel's considerations is itself saliently indicative of his eagerness to read Proust's work in Schopenhauerian terms. Similarly, Beckett's withering critique of Papini's approach to Dante is based on his aversion to Papini's desire to classify Dante's work as "morale negotium" (D, 80) rather than as literature.

While Beckett perceived the inchoate and fragmentary nature of human experience to be an obstacle to its accommodation within logically consistent conceptual schemes, he consistently shared Schopenhauer's opposition to deontological aims in art. This was a point noted by Michael Roberts when, in a letter to George Reavey, he discussed the poems contained in *Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates* (1935): "What is their virtue apart from the negative one of not expressing any opinion or moral judgement . . . ?" (*LI*, 323 n.1) Beckett's descriptivist approach, wherein the quotidian is enshrined as the primary focus of expression, is perhaps best articulated in a letter which he wrote to Carlheinz Caspari, a German director who had sought various clarifications from Beckett in relation to the staging of *Godot*.

#### Beckett states:

First and foremost, it is a question of something that happens, almost a routine, and it is this dailiness and this materiality, in my view, that need to be brought out. That at any moment Symbols, Ideas, Forms might show up, this is for me secondary - is there anything they do not show up behind? In any event there is nothing to be gained by giving them clear form. The characters are living creatures, only just living perhaps, they are not emblems. I can readily understand your unease at their lack of characterisation. But I would urge you to see in them less the result of an attempt at abstraction, something I am almost incapable of, than a refusal to tone down all that is at one and the same time complex and amorphous in them. (*LII*, 392)

It is on the basis of such claims that we can understand why Beckett "could never agree with the notion of a theater of the absurd. It involves a value judgement." His unwillingness to subordinate his creative practices to the normative dicta of declarative manifestos remained steadfast throughout his writing career. The assertion, "it is not my desire to teach or improve," constitutes his most explicit eschewal of a prescriptivist approach to literary creation. *Catastrophe* (1982) may be seen to have transgressed what seems to have been an otherwise determined refusal to treat art as a vehicle for ethical or political discourse. In considering the circumstances which engendered its composition, Beckett's decision to deviate from previous standpoints may be viewed as eminently admirable, yet even the most committed Beckettian may consider the play to be as aesthetically negligible as it is morally commendable.

## **Archetypal Visions**

At the core of Schopenhauer's arguments about Ideas is the notion that genuine art engages with the immutable realities of human affairs. Ideas, existing outside of all temporal boundaries, constitute the truly essential aspects of existence and are therefore unaffected by the socio-cultural circumstances of any specific period. Schopenhauer's utter indifference to historical contingencies is apparent throughout his philosophy and is part of his overall anti-Hegelian stance. He was not interested in the ephemeral preoccupations of his contemporaries; he preferred to focus upon that which "concerns humanity in the same way at all times and in all countries." For Schopenhauer, art which aims at articulating a nationalist spirit or a politically-inspired message is more serviceable to historians and anthropologists than to lovers of art, insofar as it concerns itself with something "small and narrow [such] as the present conditions of any particular time or country." Within Beckett

studies the attempt to link Beckett's work with historical and political circumstances is represented, perhaps most prominently, by the work of Adorno and Kenner. According to Adorno, Beckett's work presents human existence as being "like a concentration camp," while Kenner refers to Beckett's use of "the Gestapo theme." The affinities between Schopenhauer's assertion of the ahistorical and apolitical basis of genuine art and Beckett's own creative and critical practices encourage us to adopt an entirely different perspective to those provided by such critics. Bair reports a significant revision of *Godot* where the line "Estragon: avec Bim; Vladimir: avec Bom, les comiques staliniens" was omitted by Beckett because "He finally decided that remarks about Stalin destroyed the timelessness of the rest of the dialogue." Beckett is also reported to have said, "I take away all the accidentals because I want to come down to the bedrock of the essentials, the archetypal." In this sense, Beckett's creative drives were consonant with Schopenhauer's insistence that the proper focus of art should be that which transcends the fleeting specificities of time and place.

In 1936, while visiting art galleries in Nazi Germany, Beckett witnessed the nefarious consequences of politically motivated ideas about art and was moved to "disparage"<sup>79</sup> historical art which was valued merely for its articulation of approved nationalist sentiments. In his outline for his proposed 'Journal of a Melancholic,' which would have dealt with his travels in Germany from 1936 to 1937, Beckett writes: "No social or political criticism whatever, apart from what the fact as stated implies."80 In an assertion which echoes some of Schopenhauer's central aesthetic views, Beckett described "artistic statement [as] the extracture of essential real" (TCD MIC 60/53). His critical writings consistently dismiss any overt link between societal energies and the creation of art. They speak enthusiastically of the severing of the connection between "social reality" (D, 91) and the obligations of the artist. Similarly, artistic appreciation must not be dictated by ideological concerns. Beckett's former student, Grace West, who attended his lectures at Trinity College Dublin, spoke of his reluctance to "explain Andromaque by Troy etc. as Balzac would have done . . . Balzac whose background was a devouring thing to his characters."81 Beckett's preference for the work of Racine over that of Corneille can also be partially accounted for, given his claim that "Racine unlike Corneille was not interested in local colour . . . Racine [was] interested in non-historical."82 An indifference to historical considerations is a conspicuous point of commonality between the authorial attitudes of Schopenhauer and Beckett. Perhaps Beckett's anti-historical stance on aesthetics is best summed up in his claim that, "What counts is the spirit . . . I cannot see it historically. . . History, for me, it's a black out."83

# Stating the Particular

In 'Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce' Beckett examines the place of systematic thought within Joyce's Work in Progress. This essay, polemical from the outset, reveals a number of details which are of interest to anyone who wishes to determine those aspects of Beckett's work which cohere with the philosophy of Schopenhauer. Beckett's opening pronouncement is intriguing, not only for its applicability to the subject he goes on to discuss, but also for its usefulness as a guide for anyone who chooses to consider his writings from a philosophical perspective. Here the "danger is in the neatness of identifications" (D, 19), where equivalences between conceptual thought and literary texts can be all too readily found if we have a penchant for reductionism. Equipped with his "handful of abstractions" (D, 19) in the form of "a mountain, the coincidence of contraries, the inevitability of cyclic evolution, a system of Poetics, and the prospect of self-extension in the world of Mr Joyce's Work in *Progress*" (D, 19), Beckett is aware of the pitfalls of treating literary criticism as "bookkeeping" (D, 19). These involve a "distortion in one of two directions" (D, 19), wherein the critic is compelled to "wring the neck of a certain system in order to stuff it into a contemporary pigeon-hole, or [to] modify the dimensions of that pigeon-hole for the satisfaction of the analogy-mongers" (D, 19). As the 'Whoroscope Notebook' reveals, Beckett, in considering how to proceed with the composition of Murphy, was determined to "keep whole Dantesque analogy out of sight."84 In a statement which can be related to his own creative employment of conceptual thought, Beckett opposes any assumptions the reader might have regarding Joyce's philosophical agenda. Vico's "social and historical classification is clearly adapted . . . as a structural convenience - or inconvenience. [Joyce's] position is in no way a philosophical one" (D, 22). Accordingly, Joyce served as an example of an author who could deploy discursive material within his work without thereby committing himself to the truth value of the concepts in question. Similarly, in the script of Film (1967), Beckett is keen to declare his own distance from the Berkeleian principle Esse est percipi, while highlighting its importance as a formal construct within the work: "No truth value attaches to above, regarded as of merely structural and dramatic convenience" (CDW, 323).

Another remarkable feature of this essay, which can be related to Beckett's appreciation and use of Schopenhauer's work, is its concern with the representational limits of language. Joyce surmounts such problems by ensuring that his writing eradicates the distinction between meaning and being: "[his language] is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*" (*D*,

27). In a statement which anticipates his sense of the need for literature to aspire to the expressive qualities of painting and music Beckett claims that Joyce's "stuff... is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to" (D, 27). He observes that Joyce "has desophisticated language. And it is worthwhile remarking that no language is so sophisticated as English. It is abstracted to death" (D, 28). We can view such statements as prefiguring Beckett's adoption of French as the language which proved, for a time, most serviceable to his artistic intentions. However, it is noteworthy that Schopenhauer highlighted key aspects of all languages which rendered them problematic as vehicles for artistic communication: "language, like every other phenomenon that we ascribe to reason, and like everything that distinguishes man from the animal, is to be explained by this one simple thing as its source, namely concepts, representations that are abstract not perceptive, universal not individual in time and space" (WWRI, 40). For Schopenhauer, the mimetic limitations of language rest with its conceptual, and thereby derivative foundations. Being an inherently abstract system of signification it cannot communicate the uniquely specific. Given that "concepts . . . can quite appropriately be called representations of representations" (WWRI, 40), language impairs the artist's ability to convey his knowledge of Ideas which is itself founded upon direct percipience. Elsewhere, Schopenhauer claims that, "the actual life of a thought lasts only till it has reached the extreme point of words; it is then petrified and thereafter is dead" (PPII, 508). According to Beckett, Joyce's ability to offer "primitive economic directness" (D, 29) in his art ensures that "there is no attempt at subjectivism or abstraction, no attempt at metaphysical generalization. We are presented with a statement of the particular" (D, 29). While Proust is more explicitly imbued with Schopenhauerian concepts, 'Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce' can be read as being accordant with Schopenhauer's own statements regarding the proper role of philosophical ideas within literary composition and appreciation.

### Between Ennui and Desire

In my Introduction I referred to Frost's suggestion that a notebook which potentially contained some of Beckett's earliest reflections upon Schopenhauer's philosophy was most likely lost. In the absence of mentions of or citations from Schopenhauer's work in the *Dream Notebook* (1999), *Proust* is invaluable insofar as it serves to indicate the extent and accuracy of Beckett's early knowledge of Schopenhauer's thought. *Proust* abounds with material which anyone familiar with Schopenhauer's work would readily discern, even if it is likely to baffle even the closest readers of Proust by its repeated attributions of Schopenhauerian contexts to the lives of Proust's characters. Quite apart from any thematic

congruence between the works of Schopenhauer and Proust that this text locates, in formal terms it reveals a distinctly Schopenhauerian aversion towards the reduction of literary writings to logically coherent arguments. It is a strikingly meditative text in the sense that it consistently eschews the norms of inferential validity which are characteristic of analytical criticism and systematic critiques. In a statement which evinces Beckett's own indifference towards philosophical ideals of consistency, he declared that *Proust*'s "premises are less feeble than its conclusions" (LII, 385). When read in conjunction with Schopenhauer's aesthetics, this text provides us with suggestions about the extent to which Beckett's compositional methods were themselves informed by Schopenhauerian principles. *Proust* has inspired diverse opinions among critics who choose to evaluate it according to its intrinsic importance as a study of Proust. Shattuck commends it for containing "Seventy of the most probing and succinct pages ever written on Proust's work." In doing so, he opposes Kermode's dismissal of *Proust* as "a model of what such books ought not to be . . . obscure, pedantic in manner, and not, as criticism should be, in the service of the work it undertakes to elucidate . . . the best introduction to Beckett, though not to Proust."86 Such comments undoubtedly contain elements of truth, yet the significance of *Proust* as Beckett's only extended work of criticism on a single artist is incontrovertible. Its overt display of erudition is matched by its personally engaged and impassioned analysis of an artist who is ultimately judged according to highly distinct, if mainly unacknowledged, Schopenhauerian criteria. Beckett's examination of Proust's art reveals his deep understanding of Schopenhauerian themes, however irrelevant they may occasionally seem to his ostensible subject of study. Reflecting upon the composition of *Proust*, Beckett admitted that he may have "overstated Proust's pessimism a little." However much that admission might diminish our sense of the value of the text as a contribution towards our knowledge of Proust's work, it immeasurably enhances it as a demonstration of the intensity of Beckett's interest in Schopenhauer's thought. In spite of his belated provision of the aforementioned disclaimer, Proust reveals far more than Beckett's personal "appropriation of Schopenhauer's pessimism."88 Above all, Proust epitomises Beckett's anti-reductionist approach to art in a way which is exemplary to those who study Beckett's oeuvre in relation to its engagement with philosophical ideas.

Schopenhauer highlights the consequences of optimism, which are, to his mind, distinctly unethical. He excoriates those who can maintain a cheerful outlook in the face of the suffering with which our world is thoroughly suffused:

If we were to conduct the most hardened and callous optimist through hospitals, infirmaries, operating theatres, through prisons, torture chambers, and slave-hovels, over battlefields and to places of execution; if we were to open to him all the dark abodes of misery, where it shuns the gaze of cold curiosity, and finally were to allow him to glance into the dungeon of Ugolino where prisoners starved to death, he too would certainly see in the end what kind of a world is this *meilleur des mondes possibles*. For whence did Dante get the material for his hell, if not from this actual world of ours? (WWRI, 525)

The aforementioned scenes of misery are compounded by the pain that we witness among non-human animals. Such animals are inspired by the Will to hunt and devour each other in an incessant cycle of striving, brief satisfaction and renewed want, to such an extent that "the suffering animal world" convinces us that "essentially *all life is suffering*" (*WWRI*, 310). In order to delude ourselves into thinking that life possesses some intrinsic worth, we refuse to acknowledge the ubiquity of pain in our world. In line with Schopenhauer, Beckett asserts that our lives are customarily enveloped by the "haze of our smug will to live, of our pernicious and incurable optimism" (*PTD*, 15). We are, in this sense, benighted beings, whose anguish is linked to our fleeting contact with attainment, which rests with the "identification of the subject with the object of his desire" (*PTD*, 14) and which is itself so ephemeral that such satisfaction is well-nigh worthless. As Schopenhauer puts it, "every fulfilled desire reveals itself more or less as a disappointment" (*PPII*, 589).

Revulsion against what Pozzo terms "accursed time" (*CDW*, 83) is a quintessentially Beckettian theme. As Clov wistfully states "it must be nearly finished" (*CDW*, 93), we note his experience of time as "that double-headed monster of damnation and salvation" (*PTD*, 11). For those who suffer, time can be a source of seemingly interminable agony, yet it is also that which will herald the eventual cessation of such torments, which vacillate between *ennui* and desire, in death. As Beckett puts it, the periods of fundamental transition in our lives are when the "boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being" (*PTD*, 19). In Beckett's *oeuvre*, characters are frequently obliged to devise coping strategies which will enable them to endure the tortuous nature of temporality. Schopenhauer states, "Not a little is contributed to the torment of our existence by the fact that *time* is always pressing on us, never lets us draw breath, and is behind every one of us like a taskmaster with a whip" (*PPII*, 292). Beckett's notion of "the poisonous ingenuity of Time in the science of affliction" (*PTD*, 15) is sufficiently damning to echo Schopenhauer's views regarding the oppressive omnipresence of time. In Beckett's *oeuvre* "the unforgiving seconds" (*HII*, 51) afflict protagonists

throughout their lives. The narrator of *Company* recalls how, in childhood, following his ill-fated attempt to aid a hedgehog, he was required to "look for something else to pass the time heavy already on [his] hands at that tender age" (*CIWS*, 18).

Beckett's characters face the imperative of engaging in seemingly issueless conversations and behaviour, yet in doing so they can be seen to avoid rational reflections which would reveal the sheer vacuity of their existence. In this sense, "habit is a great deadener" (*CDW*, 84) and incessant dialogue defers thought. In *Godot* Estragon and Vladimir "won't think" (*CDW*, 58) as long as they can perpetuate speech. Schopenhauer states:

Behind *need* and *want* is to be found at once *boredom*, which attacks even the more intelligent animals. This is a consequence of the fact that life has no *genuine intrinsic* worth, but is kept in *motion* merely by want and illusion. But as soon as this comes to a standstill, the utter barrenness and emptiness of existence become apparent. (*PPII*, 287)

When juxtaposed with the following passage from *Mercier and Camier* (1974) such thoughts serve to deepen our awareness of the striking correspondences between Schopenhauerian and Beckettian themes:

Take one for example entirely free from pain all over, both his body and the other yoke. Where can he turn for relief? Nothing simpler. To the thought of annihilation. Thus, whatever the conjecture, nature bids us smile, if not laugh. And now, let us look things calmly in the face. (*MC*, 46)

The absence of mental or bodily pain would hardly stimulate the need for "relief" were it not for the incursion of *ennui*, which promptly succeeds such anguish. When, in the same text, we read that, "There are two needs: the need you have, and the need to have it" (*MC*, 58), a Schopenhauerian echo can be clearly discerned as we recognise that, without such need, the protagonists may be compelled to confront "the utter barrenness and emptiness of existence."

When Vladimir strives to comprehend the tale of the inexplicable fate of the two thieves who were crucified with Christ, Estragon's indifference betrays a level of boredom that defies relief: "I find this really most extraordinarily interesting" (*CDW*, 14). Such sarcasm may well add to the comic tone of *Godot*, but the poignant position of Vladimir who tries to "pass the time" (*CDW*, 14) by way of such meditations is no less apparent. Yet, when liberated from conversational engagement with Estragon, Vladimir attains insights of terrible lucidity. As he elaborates upon Pozzo's claim "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant,

then it's night once more" (*CDW*, 83), the haunting beauty of Vladimir's words seems to emanate from his occupation of a "perilous zone" which is "dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being" (*PTD*, 19). Schopenhauer considers suffering and boredom to be the twin poles of existence between which our lives swing "like a pendulum" (*WWRI*, 312):

Now the nature of man consists in the fact that his will strives, is satisfied, strives anew, and so on and on; in fact his happiness and well-being consist only in the transition from desire to satisfaction, and from this to a fresh desire, such transition going forward rapidly. For the non-appearance of satisfaction is suffering; the empty longing for a new desire is languor, boredom. (*WWRI*, 260)

Beckett, using Schopenhauer as a clear, if unacknowledged source, claims that, "The pendulum oscillates between these two terms: Suffering . . . and Boredom" (PTD, 28). Leopardi's prose writings are also imbued with the notion that human life is essentially comprised of those alternating states, being as it is "composed and interwoven, partly of pain and partly of tedium; and is never at rest from one of these passions without falling into the other."89 Yet, as we have seen, the bleakness of Schopenhauer's vision is tempered by his exaltation of art as a palliative of the foremost significance in the lives of human beings. Free from Will-inspired longings and abstract reflections, aesthetic contemplation heralds momentary relief from the harrowing rounds of ennui and desire. In Beckett's oeuvre, art occasionally facilitates endurance of life's ubiquitous trials. The Smeraldina's anguished longing for Belacqua is diminished by her musical abilities: "I will try and struggle through the Beethoven sonate, it is the onely thing that can take me away from my misery" (DFW, 58). In All That Fall (1957) Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden' (1831), pervaded as it is with intimations of mortality, provides an eerily soothing soundtrack to the profoundly moving isolation of "a very old woman" who "All day [plays] the same old record. All alone in that great empty house" (CDW, 197). Similarly, in Happy Days Winnie derives consolation from her faltering ability to recall lines from seminal literary works: "That's what I find so wonderful, a part remains, of one's classics, to help one through the day" (CDW, 164).

### The Proustian Ideal

Beckett claims that Proust "does not deal in concepts, he pursues the Idea, the concrete" (*PTD*, 79). A reader who is unacquainted with that basic Schopenhauerian division might well assume that Beckett had misread Plato by denying what Schopenhauer regards as the inherently conceptual nature of Platonic Ideas. As we have seen, within Schopenhauer's

aesthetics, physical entities are embodiments of Ideas, those archetypal grades of the Will's objectification. Schopenhauer consistently affirms that, "A genuine artist . . . never starts from concepts" (*PPII*, 232). Concepts, being the products of reason, deal only with the "relations of things not [with] the real and true inner nature thereof; and so all their knowledge proceeds on the guiding line of the principle of sufficient reason" (*PPII*, 417). Ideas, as "the real material and kernel, as it were the soul, of a genuine work of art" (*PPII*, 418), are inaccessible to rational analysis, but can be perceived by the mind of the artist of genius in those moments of Will-free contemplation which involve what Beckett terms "inspired perception" (*PTD*, 84). Such states are characterised by perceptual absorption and imaginative openness wherein the artist is by no means bound to the Ideas which are at any given time the direct correlatives of his consciousness as a pure subject of knowing:

Knowledge of the genius would be restricted to the Ideas of objects actually present to his own person, and would be dependent upon the concatenation of circumstances that brought them to him, did not imagination extend his horizon far beyond the reality of his personal experience, and enable him to construct all the rest out of the little that has come into his own actual apperception, and thus to let almost all the scenes of life pass by within himself. (*WWRI*, 186)

Beckett echoes such insights in a passage which would be largely unintelligible without an awareness of its Schopenhauerian underpinnings:

Reality, whether approached imaginatively or empirically, remains a surface, hermetic. Imagination, applied - a priori - to what is absent, is exercised in vacuo and cannot tolerate the limits of the real. Nor is any direct and purely experimental contact possible between subject and object, because they are automatically separated by the subject's consciousness of perception, and the object loses its purity and becomes a mere intellectual pretext or motive. But thanks to the reduplication, the experience is at once imaginative and empirical, at once an evocation and a direct perception, real without being merely actual, ideal without being merely abstract, the ideal real, the essential, the extratemporal. But if this mystical experience communicates an extratemporal essence, it follows that the communicant is for the moment an extratemporal being. (*PTD*, 74-5)

Acheson is right to assert that in such instances Beckett "plunges into obscurity," yet an awareness of the consonance between Beckett's critical views and the central precepts of Schopenhauer's aesthetics renders such passages remarkably clear. In 1936 Beckett would again invoke his distinctly Schopenhauerian notion of the "ideal real" and associate it explicitly with the "mobility and autonomy of the imagined" (*D*, 89). Having written *Dream*, a novel which, as we shall see, is replete with instances of Beckett's concern for the "mobility

and autonomy of the imagined," Beckett's decision to return to Schopenhauerian terminology, which had been initially employed five years earlier in *Proust*, signifies the enduring significance of the philosopher's work for his critical views.

However, at a time when Beckett lacked substantial experiences of creative processes, in composing *Proust* he seems to have been rather precociously aware of the compromises which are demanded from the artist. Beckett states that Proust "is not altogether at liberty to detach effect from cause" (PTD, 11). In Dream of Fair to Middling Women such views are echoed when Beckett voices his opposition towards the "lovely Pythagorean chain-chant solo of cause and effect" (DFW, 10), yet as we shall see, in writing that novel, Beckett used fragmentation as both a formal and thematic principle of composition. As an artist aspiring to create that which is "interrogative, not conclusive," Beckett was keen to preserve the "integrity of incoherence" (TCD MIC 60/16) which could resist the formal rigidities of conceptually-inspired art. Proust "accepts regretfully the sacred ruler and compass of literary geometry" (PTD, 12), yet such an acceptance does not necessarily contravene Schopenhauer's strictures regarding the creation of genuine art. Schopenhauer, while insisting upon the banishment of reason from the unification of the artist as pure subject of knowing with the Idea, acknowledges the role of rationality and Will in the arrangement of the composition: "with the execution of the work, where the purpose is to communicate and present what is known, the will can, and indeed must, again be active, just because there exists a purpose. Accordingly, the principle of sufficient reason (or ground) here rules once more, whereby the means of art are suitably directed to the ends thereof" (PPII, 419). Following his disinterested and blissful apprehension of the Idea which he will proceed to communicate in his work, the artist must deliberate, thereby exercising those faculties of volition and intellection which are inimical to the perceptual process by which he acquired the subject matter of his art.

As we have seen, the distinction between the respective roles of rationality and percipience is, for Schopenhauer, an integral feature of his demarcation between philosophy and art. Beckett's critique of Baudelaire in *Proust* shows how conscious he is of Schopenhauer's arguments concerning the differences contained therein. Baudelaire's work is "abstract and discursive" and in being "determined by a concept [is] therefore strictly limited and exhausted by its own definition" (*PTD*, 79). This is clearly consonant with Schopenhauer's view that the "mere *concept*... is something completely determinable, hence something to

be exhausted, something distinctly thought, which can be, according to its whole content, communicated coldly and dispassionately by words" (*WWRII*, 409). While philosophy, in the tradition of the great systematisers, aims for such cold and dispassionate coherence, genuine literature allows for a multiplicity of readings, not only in terms of its thematic content, but also in its formal aspects. As we have noted, Schopenhauer claims that "the author must always leave something over for the reader to think" (*WWRII*, 408). In this sense, Beckett, according to Schopenhauer's criteria, questions the very status of Baudelaire's work as art insofar as it forecloses the reader's interpretative freedom. It is also instructive to note how Schopenhauer's denunciation of allegory emerges from the aforementioned distinction and is paralleled by that of Beckett. According to Schopenhauer,

An allegory is a work of art signifying something different from what it depicts. But that which is perceptive, and consequently the Idea as well, expresses itself immediately and completely, and does not require the medium of another thing through which it is outlined or suggested. Therefore that which is suggested and represented in this way by something quite different is always a concept, because it cannot itself be brought before perception. Hence through the allegory a concept is always to be signified, and consequently the mind of the beholder has to be turned aside from the depicted representation of perception to one that is quite different, abstract, and not perceptive, and lies entirely outside the work of art. (WWRI, 237)

Beckett, in spite of his passionate interest in Dante's art, expresses reservations about its allegorical elements: "Dante, if he can ever be said to have failed, fails with his purely allegorical figures, Lucifer, the Griffin of the Purgatory and the Eagle of the Paradise, whose significance is purely conventional and extrinsic. Here allegory fails as it always must fail in the hands of a poet" (*PTD*, 79). The readily identifiable association between conventional concepts and literary characters diminishes the semantic potential of allegory. Proust's work evades such strictures. Beckett classifies Proust as an "impressionist" given his

non-logical statement of phenomena in the order and exactitude of their perception, before they have been distorted into intelligibility in order to be forced into a chain of cause and effect . . . we are reminded of Schopenhauer's definition of the artistic procedure as 'the contemplation of the world independently of the principle of reason'. In this connection Proust can be related to Dostoievski, who states his characters without explaining them. (*PTD*, 86-7)

The above passage reminds us of Beckett's claim that, "the classifiers are the obscurantists." If our perceptual and affective experiences acquaint us with the enigmas and obscurities

which are an intrinsic part of reality, artists or critics who strive to write works which prioritise lucidity and coherence are effectively denying the inherent intricacies which pervade self and world. Given Schopenhauer's view that the world is intrinsically comprised of "jangle and discord" (*MRIV*, 126), literature which is composed in accordance with an author's fondness for specious unities falsifies the actuality of lived experience.

The following chapters will show how Beckett's creative writings accord with Schopenhauer's vision of the ineluctably chaotic nature of existence. Schopenhauer considers the world to be composed of phenomena which we experience, both mentally and physically, as intrinsically "separated, detached, innumerable, very different, and indeed opposed" (WWRI, 352). Reason is thereby prone to abject failure in its perpetual attempts to comprehend or order the inherently disparate and fragmented realities of experiential affairs. Beckett's admiration for Dostoevsky's insistence that, within literature, abstract ideas should always be subordinate to aesthetic ends and be thereby immune to demands for purely rational explication was founded upon his recognition that Dostoevsky refused to "distort reality" by ensuring that "ideas [are the] function of [the] character - human and inexplicable" (TCD MIC 60/29). By comparing Proust to Dostoevsky, Beckett commends their ability to relate their characters' behaviour to known conceptual frameworks, without thereby rendering them existentially subordinate or semantically reducible to the discursive ideas involved. We learn that Proust "explains [his characters] in order that they may appear as they are - inexplicable" (PTD, 87). From a Schopenhauerian perspective, artists are set apart from other people by their ability for sustained contemplation of the world without recourse to the principle of sufficient reason which ordinarily strives to determine the ground or cause of phenomena and acts as a motive to perceiving subjects. Art focuses upon the uniquely specific: it "pauses at this particular thing; it stops the wheel of time; for it the relations vanish; its object is only the essential, the Idea. We can therefore define it accurately as the way of considering things independently of the principle of sufficient reason" (WWRI, 185).

Schopenhauer opposes those critics who assume that artistic creation must be answerable to ideological systems, in its genesis and appreciation. Artists who become preoccupied with formal considerations are likely to be stultified by conceptual concerns. He states, "no one ever became an artist by studying aesthetics . . . men composed correctly and beautifully long before Rameau" (*WWRI*, 45). His conviction that, "For art the concept always remains

unproductive" (*WWRI*, 57), is an integral feature of his designation of art as an arational domain. In a reiteration of views expressed about Joyce in 'Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce,' Beckett claims that, "For Proust the quality of language is more important than any system of ethics or aesthetics. Indeed he makes no attempt to dissociate form from content. The one is a concretion of the other, the revelation of a world" (*PTD*, 88). *Proust* is a fascinating text insofar as it shows how Beckett could apply the systematic contentions of Schopenhauer's work to its subject without simply treating Proust's writings as literary illustrations of philosophical principles. Beckett's analysis of Proust's work relies upon a wide range of Schopenhauerian concepts. In the following passage Beckett reveals a knowledge of Schopenhauer's philosophy that seems to go beyond aesthetic issues:

Flower and plant have no conscious will. They are shameless, exposing their genitals. And so in a sense are Proust's men and women, whose will is blind and hard, but never self-conscious, never abolished in the pure perception of a pure subject. They are victims of their volition, active with a grotesque predetermined activity, within the narrow limits of an impure world. But shameless. There is no question of right and wrong. (*PTD*, 89)

The following chapters of the present work will point to various instances in Beckett's *oeuvre* where his protagonists share the plight of Proust's Will-governed personages. According to Schopenhauer,

The truth that the will can exist without knowledge is apparent, we might say, palpably recognizable in plant life. For in it we see a decided striving, determined by needs, modified in many different ways, and adapting itself to the variety of circumstances - yet clearly without knowledge. And just because the plant is without knowledge, it ostentatiously displays its organs of generation in complete innocence; it knows nothing of them. (*WWRII*, 295)

While previous studies such as those of Acheson<sup>91</sup> and Pothast<sup>92</sup> have noted the overt Schopenhauerian echoes in Beckett's discussion of plants, they do not examine the inherent aesthetic significance to be found therein. A mere juxtaposition of passages may reveal neat identifications but it does not suffice to underscore the more implicit correlation between Schopenhauer's aversion to art which concerns itself with embodying ethical proprieties and Beckett's reading of Proust's refusal to use art as a vehicle for conveying conventional mores. Beckett goes on to say:

Like members of the vegetable world [Proust's characters] seem to solicit a pure subject, so that they

may pass from a state of blind will to a state of representation. Proust is that pure subject. He is almost exempt from the impurity of will. He deplores his lack of will until he understands that will, being utilitarian, a servant of intelligence and habit, is not a condition of the artistic experience. When the subject is exempt from will the object is exempt from causality (Time and Space taken together). And this human vegetation is purified in the transcendental apperception that can capture the Model, the Idea, the Thing in itself. (*PTD*, 90)

Beckett's employment of the Kantian notion of transcendental apperception points to the indissoluble link between the pure subject of knowing and the Idea which he perceives. The above passage also repeats Schopenhauer's view that "causality unites space and time" (WWRI, 10). The Idea can only manifest itself in a consciousness which has been liberated from the exigencies of the Will. In order to become such a pure subject of knowing, the artist must be temporarily liberated from Will-induced desires as "Will-less knowing is the condition, indeed the essence, of all aesthetic comprehension" (WN, 81). Our customary ways of perceiving objects are dictated by the Will, specifically in terms of how we see them as causally related to ourselves as, for example, useful, valuable, intrusive, or hostile. The pure subject of knowing, adept at contemplating objects in a disinterested way, is exempt from such considerations. Beckett's refusal to reveal the exact Schopenhauerian underpinnings of his claims leads to a possible confusion or, as Bloom might put it, clinamen between the Will as metaphysical substratum of the phenomenal world and those individual acts of human volition which are manifestations of that noumenal Will. As we have seen, the Will exerts an autocratic role over the intellect, so Beckett's description of Proust's experience of the will as a "servant of intelligence" may be viewed as a misreading or creative misprision of Schopenhauer's thought. However, the overall accuracy of his employment of Schopenhauer's purely aesthetic principles would suggest that Beckett paid less attention to Schopenhauer's metaphysical reflections. It is important to recognise that *Proust* is not simply a catalogue of thematic correlations between the philosophy of Schopenhauer and the work of Proust; it also constitutes a practical application of Beckett's views as to how literature should be read in conjunction with philosophy.

Beckett notes the role of Schopenhauer's examination of music in Proust's work. In doing so, he claims that music is separated by Schopenhauer from the other arts by virtue of its being "the Idea itself" (*PTD*, 92). As we have seen, the notion that music has any relation to Ideas is mistaken. Schopenhauer is quite insistent that "music does not, like all the other arts, exhibit the *Ideas* or grades of the will's objectification, but directly the will itself" (*WWRII*,

448). However, the Schopenhauerian ethos of Beckett's reflections prompts him to take that listener to task who tries to reductively analyse music by "incarnating the Idea in what he conceives to be an appropriate paradigm" (*PTD*, 92). Yet again we recognise Beckett's resistance to those who wish to reduce art to pre-conceived exegetical frameworks.

Continuing his discussion of music, he goes on to condemn opera as "a hideous corruption of this most immaterial of all the arts" (*PTD*, 92). Beckett spoke of his contempt for "the terrible materiality of the word surface" (*D*, 172) which the writer would be compelled to penetrate if the type of expressive immediacy that characterises music were to be emulated by literature. Schopenhauer points to the uneasy union of words and music that opera involves. Speaking of "methods of knowledge" he contends that, "the most direct is that for which music expresses the stirrings of the will itself, but the most indirect that of the concepts denoted by words" (*WWRII*, 449). One implication here is that instrumental music is superior to opera by virtue of its ability to bypass Ideas and the conceptual nature of language. Action and words are the elements of opera which would seem most likely to diminish our concentration upon its purely musical aspects. Schopenhauer states that,

Grand opera is really not a product of the pure artistic sense, but rather of the somewhat barbaric notion of the enhancement of aesthetic pleasure by the accumulation of the means, the simultaneous use of totally different impressions . . . The mind during a piece of highly complicated opera music is at the same time acted on through the eye by means of the most variegated display and magnificence, the most fantastic pictures and images, and the most vivid impressions of light and colour; moreover it is occupied with the plot of the piece. Through all this it is diverted, distracted, deadened, and thus rendered as little susceptible as possible to the sacred, mysterious, and profound language of tones. (PPII, 432)

As Magee points out, Schopenhauer, in passages such as that cited above, specifically refers to *Grand opera*. He notes that Schopenhauer was "an enthusiastic opera-goer all his life," however much he might have vituperated the shallowness and frivolity of that particular form of opera which emerged in Paris in the nineteenth century. Beckett's animus against opera seems to have been more general than that of Schopenhauer, notwithstanding his occasional enjoyment of Mozart's operatic work. <sup>94</sup> Readers who have grasped the core points of Schopenhauer's aesthetics would be familiar with the notion of the greatest art as being both eminently intelligible and thoroughly indescribable. Schopenhauer claims that music is "so easy to understand and yet so inexplicable" (*WWRI*, 264). Repeating a claim made in 'Le Concentrisme' about the intrinsic nature of music, Beckett states that the 'Da capo' is a

"testimony to the intimate and ineffable nature of an art that is perfectly intelligible and perfectly inexplicable" (PTD, 92). Schopenhauer claims that music justifiably requires repetition owing to its inexhaustibly rich semantic potentialities: "How full of meaning and significance the language of music is we see from the repetition signs as well as from the Da capo which would be intolerable in the case of works composed in the language of words. In music, however, they are very appropriate and beneficial; for to comprehend it fully we must hear it twice" (WWRI, 264). Beckett's capacity for enthralled immersion in the aesthetic glories of music and painting was expressed in a statement made regarding his viewing of Nolde's Christus und die Kinder (1910) in November 1936: "I want to spend a long time before it, & play it over & over like the record of a quartet."95 When Schumann was quizzed about the meaning of one of his compositions his immediate reaction was to play it again. 96 The Beckettian notion of music as an "impassive statement of itself" (DFW, 181), which defies paraphrase, is of a piece with Schopenhauer's views. One wonders what Schopenhauer would have thought of Beckett's Play within which the Da capo seems so indispensable or How It Is wherein, as O'Reilly notes, "repetition is a crucial organisational as well as expressive resource. Word-groups become familiar as units of meaning thanks to frequent repetition" (HII, p. x).

Beckett's thoroughly Schopenhauerian reading of the predicaments to which Proust's characters are repeatedly subjected is likely to prove problematic for those who are unaware of the source of his interpretative framework, yet his refusal to attribute philosophical motives to Proust is remarkable. Conceptual systems such as philosophy and religion attempt, by rationalistic means, to fit the disparate and often inchoate elements of our lives into architectonic schemes. In endeavouring to do so, they fail to grasp the irreducibly unique and chaotic specificity of events. An artist who prioritises narratorial neatness over mimetic fidelity to the realities of human experience is essentially imposing an artificial structure upon that which inherently defies coherent arrangement. In Beckett's words, to let "being into art" amounts to letting "in chaos and what is not ordered." Beckett's mordant critique of Feuillerat's study of Proust points to the author's deliberate misconstrual of Proust's intentions. Feuillerat, in his aversion to "grave dissonances and incompatibilities, clashing styles [and] internecine psychologies" (D, 63), attempts to discover within Proust's work "uniformity, homogeneity, cohesion, selection scavenging for verisimilitude (the-stock-intrade exactly of the naturalism that Proust abominated)" (D, 64), yet Feuillerat's ultimate failing is to read the tribulations of Proust's characters as attributable to their want of "the

sweet reasonableness of plane psychology à la Balzac, for the narrational trajectory that is more like a respectable parabola and less like the chart of an ague" (D, 64). Beckett's use of language which is more discernibly redolent of scientific analysis than literary discourse amounts to a Schopenhauerian indictment of critics such as Feuillerat who project their own predilections for thematic and formal harmonies into their aesthetic judgements. In Schopenhauerian terms, such critics are thereby unable to resist categorising the actions of literary characters according to their own conceptual criteria. As Beckett puts it, Feuillerat suggests that, "If Proust had lived, he would have so altered the original writing as to remove all discord and dissension, a beautiful unity of tone and treatment would have, as it were, embalmed the whole" (D, 64). Contrary to the aspirations of critics such as Feuillerat, it is, according to Schopenhauer, a privilege of the artist to be able to resist the harmonising tendencies of rationality. Schopenhauer argues that science, by which he means any systematic body of knowledge, is permanently restricted to an analysis of the causal interrelations of entities within the world of representation:

All science in the real sense, by which I understand systematic knowledge under the guidance of the principle of sufficient reason, can never reach a final goal or give an entirely satisfactory explanation. It never aims at the inmost nature of the world; it can never get beyond the representation; on the contrary, it really tells us nothing more than the relation of one representation to another. (*WWRII*, 28)

Schopenhauer thereby concurs with Kant's view of the architectonic nature of reason which strives to assimilate human experience into carefully ordered conceptual frameworks that form the basis of our habitual modes of understanding. In referring to the "perturbations and dislocations" of Proust's masterpiece within which characters reside as "stupefying . . . indeterminates" (D, 64), Beckett can be seen to oppose Feuillerat's analytical obsessions by reminding us of the arational basis of his own exegetical values.

In a passage which outlines his view of the defamiliarising merits of intuitive perception, Schopenhauer argues that, "where *a perception or intuition* was the basis of an author's thinking, it is as if he has wrote from a land where his reader has never been, for everything is fresh and new, since it is drawn directly from the primary source of all knowledge" (*WWRII*, 72-3). With such claims in mind, it is interesting to note Beckett's view that, "Proust is positive only insofar as he affirms the value of intuition" (*PTD*, 86). Beckett's sense of the pernicious role of habit in dulling our perceptual engagement with the world and with art is evident at various points in his writings. In *Dream* we learn that, "Der Mench [sic] ist ein

Gewohnheitstier" (DFW, 75). In *Proust* Beckett outlines the destructive force of habit as follows:

When the object is perceived as particular and unique and not merely the member of a family, when it appears independent of any general notion and detached from the sanity of a cause, isolated and inexplicable in the light of ignorance, then and then only may it be a source of enchantment.

Unfortunately Habit has laid its veto on this form of perception, its action being precisely to hide the essence - the Idea - of the object in the haze of conception - preconception. (*PTD*, 22-3)

Those elements of Schopenhauer's philosophy which highlight the affinities between genius and madness enrich our sense of what Beckett means by the "sanity of a cause." As Schopenhauer put it, both madness and genius "rest chiefly on that very separation of the intellect from the will [which is] contrary to nature" (WWRII, 387). Ordinarily, the relationship between will and intellect is that of master and slave. We are considered most rational when we can discern the causal connections between one entity and another and how such entities interrelate within a systematic whole. While a preeminent ability to do so marks great scientific and philosophical minds, the artist of genius, just like the insane person "leaves out of sight knowledge of the connection of things, as he neglects that knowledge of relations which is knowledge according to the principle of sufficient reason" (WWRI, 194). He does so "in order to see in things only their Ideas, and to try to grasp their real inner nature" (WWRI, 194). Such statements also cohere with Beckett's views upon the distorting effects of rationality and the numbing aspects of habit. Beckett, in claiming that habit "drugs [the] handmaidens of perception" (PTD, 20), implies that an enslavement to habitual assumptions impedes our perceptual engagement with reality, whereas suffering "opens a window on the real and is the main condition of the artistic experience" (PTD, 28). Proust's awareness of the creatively fruitful implications of anguish was clearly of interest to Beckett as a critic and as an aspiring artist. Marcel's impassioned musings upon the various emotions induced in him by Albertine's duplicitous ways culminate in an eventual recognition that she "made [him] productive through suffering."98

We have already observed how Schopenhauer considers the lot of the artist to be of ambivalent worth. While he can experience relatively sustained periods of Will-free consciousness, he is also prone to suffer owing to his heightened sensitivity and alienation from his fellow humans. Beckett's own experience as an artist confirmed his reflections about the inescapable difficulties to be endured in literary composition. Knowlson "felt how much

his sensitivity, even his vulnerability were preconditions of his creative endeavour,"99 while Pinget noted that Beckett's "despair" was "the very "[main]spring of his art." In describing David Cecil's The Stricken Deer, or the Life of William Cowper (1929) as "Very bad," Beckett wondered how such a life which "depressed and terrified" him could be the source of "such bad poetry" (LI, 366). Beckett's puzzlement suggests not only his conviction that autobiographical material can be a primary source of art, but that suffering is the "main condition" of artistic creation. It is within such contexts that one can discern the significance of his early desire to "turn [his] dereliction, profoundly felt, into literature" (quoted in JK, 252). According to Schopenhauer, those of us who are bereft of the gifts of mind which are necessary for the creation of art must, in a cruelly ironic way, depend upon the genius, "whose inner affliction is the womb of immortal works" (WWRII, 390), for solace. For Schopenhauer, art is both a palliative against the unavoidable suffering of our existence as individuals, and a means by which we can acquire the deepest insights into the desolate nature of the human condition as a whole. Beckett acknowledged that Leopardi and Schopenhauer had "preceded him" in noting that "everything in this damned world calls for indignation,"101 yet he also claimed that with them there was "perhaps . . . still hope for an answer, for a solution. Not with me." 102 It would be simplistic to suggest that this confirms Beckett's pessimism to be more extreme than that of Leopardi and Schopenhauer. As a philosopher, Schopenhauer consciously set about deciphering the enigmatic essence of life. Beckett, as an artist whose work aligns with central dicta of Schopenhauer's aesthetics, both in terms of his estimation of the artist's proper role and his compositional methods, knew that art must resist the type of allegedly definitive conclusions that characterise many aspects of Schopenhauer's thought. However, it is unlikely that Leopardi had any pretensions about the value of a search for rational solutions. In a letter to Pietri Giordani Leopardi described reason as "the executioner of the human race . . . a torch that should illuminate but not burn up, as unfortunately it does." <sup>103</sup> Interestingly, speaking of the mystical traditions personified by individuals such as St. John of the Cross, Beckett referred admiringly to "their illogicality ... their burning illogicality - the flame . . . the flame . . . which consumes all our filthy logic ...." Beckett's kinship with those mystics who evinced the "same way of submitting to the unintelligible" was, as we shall see, an enduring aspect of his authorial mindset.

In Schopenhauer's philosophy causality is, along with space and time, an organising principle of consciousness, but when we perceive Ideas as pure subjects of knowing, we do so without any propensity to situate what we experience within a causally-structured whole.

Schopenhauer notes that most people settle for facile conceptual accounts of the significance of their experiences, thereby obviating the opportunity for the type of enraptured perceptual engagement with the world that induces aesthetic bliss: "the ordinary man does not linger long over the mere perception, does not fix his eye on the object for long, but in everything that presents itself to him, quickly looks merely for the concept under which it is to be brought just as the lazy man who looks for a chair, which then no longer interests him" (WWRI, 187). Such experiences are analogous to our interpretative practices when confronted with the polysemic indeterminacies engendered by masterworks of art. Armed with handfuls of abstractions, and inspired by reductionist motives, according to which we strive to decipher the meaning of a work, we can clearly fall foul of the same type of indictment. In one of the very few instances where Beckett offered a temperate commendation of critical pursuits he noted that they can "lift from the eyes, before rigor vitae sets in, some of the weight of congenital prejudice" (D, 95). In Proust Beckett explores the ways in which the mind ordinarily searches for a conceptual framework within which to interpret its various experiences. However,

when it is opposed by a phenomenon that it cannot reduce to the condition of a comfortable and familiar concept, when in a word, it betrays its trust as a screen to spare its victim the spectacle of reality, it disappears, and the victim, now an ex-victim, for a moment free, is exposed to that reality an exposure that has its advantages and disadvantages. (*PTD*, 21)

In such a state, the ego is emancipated from willing and its associated demands for rational comprehension, but such fleetingly blissful experiences are inevitably disconcerting, owing to our congenital subservience to the Will's intellective and conational influence. Beckett, in a typically Schopenhauerian declaration, states: "For in the brightness of art alone can be deciphered the baffled ecstasy that [Marcel] had known before the inscrutable superficies of a cloud, a triangle, a spire, a flower, a pebble, when the mystery, the essence, the Idea, imprisoned in matter, had solicited the bounty of a subject" (*PTD*, 76). Such bafflement arises when Marcel is joyously immune from the need to rationally comprehend his distinctively perceptual experience.

Beckett once described a performance of *Not I* in terms which denote direct parallels with Schopenhauer's descriptions of the arational states which are inducible through art. Mouth's agonised monologue was heard by Beckett as "breathless, urgent, feverish, rhythmic, panting along, without undue concern with intelligibility. Addressed less to the understanding than to

the nerves of the audience which should in a sense share her bewilderment" (Har, 283). If, as Schopenhauer puts it, "the understanding is in itself irrational" (WWRII, 25), the ultimate value of art is that it provides us with a source of comprehension which is free of any servitude to reason. Worth notes that, as we view or read Beckett's plays, "the sceptically questioning, rationalistic mind is induced to take a rest and we enter another order of consciousness." <sup>106</sup> The relief afforded by such contemplative states is, according to Schopenhauer, the ultimate reward for the creation and consumption of art, activities which are thus a basic source of meaning in our lives, acquainting us with the most concrete specificities of reality. Moorjani echoes Worth's views regarding the capacity of Beckett's art to generate modes of consciousness which corroborate Schopenhauer's contentions regarding the palliative value of art. In describing Ohio Impromptu (1981) she notes that, "listening to the story about art's consolation and soothed by the rhythmic tempo of the reading, spectators experience the calming pleasure of art." When compared with the testimonies of such renowned Beckettians, Pothast's claim that, "we find that reading one of Beckett's postwar novels or watching one of his plays is most unlikely to produce the effect Schopenhauer thought typical for an adequate reception for a work of art" seems remarkably presumptuous. As we have noted, Beckett avers that our habitual modes of consciousness conceal the Ideal nature of objects "in the haze of conception - preconception" (PTD, 23). Art, in its ability to temporarily resist our rationalising tendencies and our Will-inspired craving for sensual pleasures, is therefore enshrined as the rarest of palliatives in our lives. Ultimately, reason has the potential to undermine our aesthetic sensibility owing to its tendency to

[abstract] from any given sensation, as being illogical and insignificant, a discordant and frivolous intruder, whatever word or gesture, sound or perfume cannot be fitted into the puzzle of a concept. But the essence of any new experience is contained precisely in this mysterious element that the vigilant will rejects as an anachronism. (*PTD*, 71-2)

#### The Ablation of Desire

Schopenhauer, when discussing the miseries of human existence, alludes to Tantalus as "a true portrait" of a life which is characterised by its "nameless and numberless afflictions" (*MRI*, 177). Beckett claims that we are "in the position of Tantalus, with this difference, that we allow ourselves to be tantalized" (*PTD*, 13). That view is of a piece with Schopenhauer's underlying vision of reality, along with its accompanying view of potential liberation through which we can "celebrate the Sabbath of the penal servitude of willing [wherein] the wheel of

Ixion stands still" (WWRI, 196). According to Schopenhauer, the essence of life is striving and willing, both of which are comparable to an "unquenchable thirst" and thus "need, lack, and hence pain" (WWRI, 312). By realising the futility of our actions, we may enjoy "the ablation of desire" (PTD, 18), but Schopenhauer does not consider such an achievement to be the outcome of rational deliberation. When, through bitter experience, we acknowledge craving as the underlying basis of suffering, we yearn for its cessation, or as the narrator of Worstward Ho (1983) puts it, we experience "Vain longing that vain longing go" (CIWS, 97). In such cases the essential prerequisite to an "ablation of desire" is an acceptance of the inevitability of pain in a world where lasting satisfaction is perpetually deferred. Marcel's agonised longing for the return of Albertine prompts him to acknowledge the need for a renunciation of such tortuous passions. He recognises that, "The farther the desire advances, the farther does true possession withdraw. So that if happiness or at least freedom from suffering can be found, it is not the satisfaction, but the gradual reduction, the eventual extinction of our desire that we must seek." <sup>109</sup> In Schopenhauerian terms, abstract reflection is powerless to deliver such insights; we can only realise the futility of insatiable longing having endured repeated experiences of the intense distress induced by a series of frustrated desires. Proust may evade potential accusations of didacticism insofar as characters such as Marcel are compelled to undergo experiences which ensure that his sense of the value of renunciation is grounded not in detached reasoning, but in a traumatically immanent engagement with the affective consequences of unsated need.

Act Without Words I (1957), in its stark presentation of a world hostile to human longing, and its depiction of an eventual termination of the indomitable striving which is the basis of human misery, is expansively open to a variety of philosophical readings. As the carafe of water descends into the man's field of vision, and as the tree returns with its temptation of shade, the protagonist, who "does not move" (CDW, 206), seems to assert his independence from the false allure of comfort. Such ambiguity rests with whether we read his inertia as a sign of his brokenness, or as an exaltation of the human spirit amidst desolate conditions. As Gontarski puts it, "the climactic ending of the mime may signify not a pathetic defeat, but a conscious rebellion, man's deliberate refusal to obey." However, a Schopenhauerian reading of the work would suggest that,

the will must be broken by the greatest personal suffering before its self-denial appears. We then see the man suddenly retire into himself, after he is brought to the verge of despair through all the stages of increasing affliction with the most violent resistance. We see him know himself and the world, change his whole nature, rise above himself and above all suffering, as if purified and sanctified by it, in inviolable peace, bliss, and sublimity, willingly renounce everything he formally desired with the greatest vehemence, and gladly welcome death. (*WWRI*, 392-3)

In Schopenhauerian terms, we could view the protagonist of Act Without Words I as having attained an attitude of resignation through a deeply personal realisation of the futility of effort. As Gontarski points out, it is all too easy to read this play as an ultimate statement of Beckett's pessimism, yet as we shall see, there are many instances in Beckett's oeuvre when characters are enlightened about the terrible nature of existence through suffering, without being thereby crushed by despair. In such instances anguish is instrumental in inspiring Beckett's characters towards states of consciousness which reveal the sheer inevitability of their desperate states. As subsequent chapters of this dissertation will reveal, regardless of their awareness of conceptual discourses which purportedly elucidate the basis of human woe, it is the intrinsically experiential nature of his protagonists' predicaments that prompts their rueful speculations. In such cases reason is powerless to induce equanimity regarding the reality of their ordeals. Schopenhauer considers the ephemeral nature of existence, coupled with the incessant frustrations of our desires, to be the true origin of our reflective inclinations: "In order that man may retain within himself an exalted frame of mind, may direct his thoughts from the temporal to the eternal, in other words the better consciousness may be stirred in him, pain, suffering and failure are as necessary to him as the load of ballast is to a ship" (MRI, 95). When Marcel is moved to analyse the nature of his experience philosophically, it is not through detached contemplation, but in the midst of personal crises that he attains his deepest insights into the basis of his afflictions. Such reflections are thereby invigorated by their foundations in lived reality. Accordingly, Proust's characters cannot be categorised as bloodless abstractions. Similarly, Beckett's protagonists are rarely afforded the luxury of dispassionate thought. Their realisations of the agonising mysteries of existence are usually prompted by existential encounters with the vanity of their hopes and the ubiquity of anguish.

## The Suffering of Being

According to Schopenhauer, "Tragedy is to be regarded, and is recognised, as the summit of poetic art" (*WWRI*, 252). However, quite apart from aesthetic considerations, the theological connotations of tragedy are of the utmost importance to Schopenhauer as "The true sense of the tragedy is the deeper insight that what the hero atones for is not his own particular sins,

but original sin, in other words, the guilt of existence itself" (*WWRI*, 254). Schopenhauer goes on to quote Calderón in support of his view that birth itself is an offence which necessitates atonement. Beckett uses the same quote from Calderón in articulating his conviction that, "Tragedy is the statement of an expiation . . . The tragic figure represents the expiation of original sin, of the eternal and original sin of him and all his 'socii malorum', the sin of having been born" (*PTD*, 67). This a clear echo of Schopenhauer's repeated allusions to the notion of Original Sin as signifying our basic ontological guilt. While the relevance of such a theme to Proust's work is extremely dubious, it is fascinating insofar as it permeates Beckett's own *oeuvre*. Beckett's reference to "socii malorum" can also be seen to evoke Schopenhauer's contentions regarding our basic kinship with others through our identity as afflicted beings: "the really proper address between one man and another should be, instead of *Sir*, *Monsieur*, and so on, *Leidensgefährte*, *socii malorum*, *compagnon de misères*, *my fellow-sufferer*" (*PPII*, 304).

The polysemic import of the issue of Original Sin within Beckett's work warrants close examination. Beckett's literary writings document attempts by characters to rationalise their various predicaments in terms of their postlapsarian identities, wherein "to be is to be guilty" (TNO, 21). The tribulations of Vladimir and Estragon prompts Vladimir to consider a potential means of alleviating their anguish: "Suppose we repented," in response to which Estragon asks, "Repented what?" Their unwillingness or inability to "go into the details" leads Estragon to suggest repentance for "being born" (CDW, 13). Beckett's obsessive use of such notions can be viewed from a number of perspectives, yet it is important to note the discrepancies between the specific doctrinal standards of the Judaeo-Christian account of humanity's primal transgression with which Beckett would have been familiar, and Schopenhauer's engagement with the concept of congenital sinfulness. In doing so we recognise why Beckett's employment of that theme is occasionally more in line with Schopenhauer's work than it is with his own Church of Ireland upbringing. The '1878 Catechism' of the Church of Ireland states that, "inward and spiritual grace" is "A death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness: for being by nature born in sin, and the children of wrath, we are hereby made the children of grace."111 In this sense, God's damnation of mankind is balanced by his offer of grace to those, who, by virtue of their fallenness, cannot attain salvation through personal initiative. The 'Articles of Religion' (1571), which have historically constituted the central teachings of the Church of Ireland, describe "Original or Birth Sin" as

The fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation.<sup>112</sup>

The article which follows, entitled 'Of Free Will,' describes humanity's reliance upon God in a typically Calvinist account of our innate depravity. Here the Fall is said to have deprived us of the ability to act as morally-disposed agents: "we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will." Schopenhauer admires those aspects of the Fall narrative which emphasise our condemnation to a life of suffering, without accepting them as a prelude to God's display of forgiveness and dispensation of grace. As he puts it, "the myth of the Fall of man . . . is the only thing in the Old Testament to which I can concede a metaphysical, although only allegorical truth; it is indeed this alone that reconciles me to the Old Testament. Thus our existence resembles nothing but the consequence of a false step and a guilty desire" (*WWRII*, 580). Schopenhauer's deterministic views of human behaviour align with those of the aforementioned theological depictions whereby something akin to grace is required to bring about mankind's deliverance from the ordeals of Will-driven actions: "necessity is the kingdom of nature; freedom is the kingdom of grace" (*WWRII*, 404).

Schopenhauer analyses the origins and import of existential agonies. He asserts that, "Life presents itself as a problem, a task to be worked out" (*WWRII*, 568). As his narration tentatively proceeds, evincing a notably Beckettian suspicion of masterplots, the Unnamable considers such a grim possibility: "I was given a pensum, at birth perhaps, as a punishment for being born perhaps, or for no particular reason" (*Un*, 21). Pothast notes that "task" is an inadequate translation of Schopenhauer's "*pensum*;" he asserts: "Task' certainly obliterates the aspect of slave labour which is present in '*pensum*." In *Proust* Beckett speaks about Proust's conception of the "'invisible reality' that damns the life of the body on earth as a pensum" (*PTD*, 93). The idea of Original Sin as described in Christian terms involves the depiction of God as a punitive deity, dispensing deserved hardship to humanity for its primordial disobedience. In Schopenhauerian terms, the Will is an "invisible reality" which condemns us to a life of all but permanent misery. At various points in Beckett's work the applicability of these conceptual narratives to the suffering of his protagonists is distinctly evident, yet as with the discernible scepticism inherent within the Unnamable's

aforementioned conjecture, Beckett's refusal to create characters who merely personify systematic ideas ensures the supreme exegetical value of the word "perhaps." While their inclination to investigate the sources of their woe is irrepressible, the invocation of theological or philosophical concepts by Beckett's characters invariably serves to frustrate and beguile. In such instances we note the allure of Schopenhauer's own depiction of how individual instances of suffering can be explained in relation to the overarching ways in which the Will presides over happenings within the phenomenal world. However, as expressed by the Unnamable, such notions are presented as potential delusions which preclude us from accepting the sheer contingency of earthly tribulations. Bereft of Schopenhauer's aspirations to offer a totalising vision of reality, as an artist Beckett was preeminently adept at depicting those intricacies of human affairs which seem to perennially elude comprehension.

Schopenhauer insists that life can be considered meaningful insofar as it is suffused with pain: "If suffering is not the first and immediate object of our life, then our existence is the most inexpedient and inappropriate thing in the world. For it is absurd to assume that the infinite pain, which everywhere abounds in the world and springs from the want and misery essential to life, could be purposeless and purely accidental" (PPII, 291). Within Beckett's oeuvre the notion that suffering possesses any metaphysical significance in the form of an ultimate, other-worldly reward is ruthlessly parodied. When Clov asks Hamm about his possible belief in a life to come, Hamm's rejoinder, "mine was always that" (CDW, 116), reveals more about the vanity of earthly hope than it does about the plausibility of an afterlife. The "intellectual justification of unhappiness" that Schopenhauer's work offered to Beckett provided him with a vision of suffering as - with the exception of cases where it could prove edifying in enabling a person to realise the futility of striving - an end in itself with no suggestion of future bliss, either theodical or otherwise. Thomas Hardy averred that many systems of thought were more preoccupied with reconciling the miseries of existence with optimistic dogmas than with acknowledging the tenebrous personal realities of pain as being an impediment to any acceptance of the ultimate value of our earthly ordeals. He admired Schopenhauer's determination to explain the underlying basis of the agonising experience of being, while denouncing those systems of thought which failed to accept its inherently tragic essence. The latter "start wrong: they cannot get away from a prepossession that the world must somehow have been made to be a comfortable place for man." <sup>115</sup> In Beckett's work, characters who have withstood suffering are often the most enlightened

regarding the true nature of human existence. Beckett considered Lucky to be "lucky to have no more expectations." <sup>116</sup>

According to Schopenhauer, "Every great pain whether bodily or mental, states what we deserve; for it could not come to us if we did not deserve it" (WWRII, 580); however, he also insists that suffering is "incapable of being philosophised away by any principles and syllogisms" (WWRI, 91). In my Introduction I described Beckett's feelings of horror upon hearing an account of human anguish which pointed to its Christological precedents. In Not I Mouth's chilling laugh at the notion of a merciful God who would inflict a harrowing fate upon a seemingly innocent child involves an inability to reconcile concepts of God's goodness with His vengeful inclinations. Nevertheless, Beckett's characters reveal the truth of Schopenhauer's claim, which was examined in my Introduction, that "people positively need an interpretation of life" (PPII, 325), such as that which Christianity provides. Lucky's torrent of Judaeo-Christian platitudes reveals his acquaintance with those theodical narratives that attempt to ease humanity's plight. Yet the dissonance between such concepts and the wretchedness of his own experience is disturbingly clear. Schopenhauer contends that, "the rational consciousness is really not capable of any consolation" (MRI, 119). Insofar as Beckett's characters merely compound their ordeals by their attempts to rationalise them in accordance with theological, psychological, or philosophical concepts, the veracity of Schopenhauer's claim is evident. In his unpublished 'Clare Street Notebook' Beckett speaks about the "monstrous quality which inseparably belongs to the incomprehensible, one could even say the boundless . . . When such an anxiety begins to grow a reason must quickly be found, as no one has the ability to live with it in its utter absence of reason." 117 However much the sufferings of Beckett's protagonists are exacerbated by their yearning for knowledge of the significance of their woe, such epistemic longings prove to be irresistible.

Schopenhauer provided Beckett with a vision of the world which evinced its wretchedness as being ineluctable, yet the starkness of this view is qualified by its recognition of the occasional capacity of sufferers to accept the true nature of existence and to modify their expectations accordingly. Many of the instances of distress that pervade Beckett's *oeuvre* align with Schopenhauer's contention that,

If we have acquired that habit [of acknowledging our guilt for existing], we shall adjust our expectations from life to suit the occasion and accordingly no longer regard as unexpected and

abnormal our troubles, vexations, sufferings, worries, and misery, great or small. On the contrary, we shall find such things to be quite in order, well knowing that here everyone is punished for his existence and indeed each in his own way. (*PPII*, 303)

Schopenhauer thereby dismisses notions about the purely arbitrary occurrence of suffering. This is the aspect of his thought which reveals clear affinities with a Low Church conception of the misery which pervades human life. Yet at other points in his work he stresses the need to recognise that, "this human world is the kingdom of chance and error, which rule without mercy in great things and small" (*WWRI*, 417). This apparent contradiction would constitute a cardinal flaw within a strictly analytic judgement of Schopenhauer's system, yet Beckett's *oeuvre* is, as we shall see, replete with instances of suffering which can be alternatively read as indicative of the contingent nature of pain or as manifestations of necessity. O'Hara believes that "Beckett's approval of Schopenhauer was surely a matter of sensed affinity rather than of reasoned conclusions or enraptured discipleship." O'Hara provides us with a plausible assessment of Beckett's attitude towards Schopenhauer which deepens our sense of the irrelevance of the strictly logical shortcomings of Schopenhauer's thought to its employment in Beckett's work. Beckett duly noted Mauthner's measured appraisal of Schopenhauer's philosophy with what one would suspect to be close agreement:

Schopenhauer became - leaving the weakness of his system aside - one of the greatest philosophical writers because - in contrast to Hegel - he put the world back in its rightful place, because he attempted to think perspicuously. One reads him therefore with the admiration with which one once read Plato. Whoever demands from philosophy no more than the highest conceivable perspicuity, the liveliest metaphorical representation of abstract concepts, must call him a tremendous thinker-poet. (TCD MS 10971/5/4)<sup>119</sup>

An appraisal of Schopenhauer as a "tremendous thinker-poet" might seem to ignore Schopenhauer's conviction that one could not be a poet and a philosopher simultaneously, yet the reference to the "weakness of his system" does not seem to be as damaging as one may be tempted to assume. While philosophy is often judged according to the criterion of logical consistency alone, Schopenhauer claimed that he "was never concerned about the harmony and agreement of [his] propositions" (*PPI*, 130). Beckett is not likely to have been perturbed by a philosophy which defies the norms of logic, especially in light of his own sense of the impotence of reason in human affairs.

Schopenhauer's assertion that, "My body and my will are one" (WWRI, 102) implies that our

status as embodied beings accounts for the frequency with which we feel entrapped by our somatic desires and hence why "determinism stands firm" (WWRII, 321). The Calvinist theology which underpins many doctrinal precepts of Low Church Christianity portrays our volitional weaknesses as being grounded in our carnal nature. Calvin's formulation of the primal causes of our fallenness, along with the consequences involved, can be related to many of the tortuous experiences that Beckett's characters endure: "Original sin . . . seems to be a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which first makes us liable to God's wrath, then also brings forth in us those works which scripture calls 'works of the flesh.'" In this sense, our corporeal longings and our inquisitorial thoughts about God's dispensation of punishment are prompted by the fragmentary nature of selfhood which, in the Beckettian world, is most notably endured by Belacqua and Murphy. Libidinous longing is, according to Schopenhauer, a "despotic demon" (MRIV, 74). Our wish to perpetuate the existence of humanity in a world so pervaded by suffering is therefore, in Schopenhauerian terms, contemptible. Relations between parents and their offspring in Beckett's oeuvre are often strained by a sense that children were condemned to life by their begetters. Schopenhauer, in claiming that the child must "atone" (MRI, 120) for the physical pleasure enjoyed by its parents asks, "who has contracted this debt?" and goes on to answer: "His begetter in the enjoyment of sensual pleasure. Therefore because the one has enjoyed this pleasure, the other must live, suffer, and die" (WWRII, 568). Hamm cries out against Nagg, his "accursed progenitor" (CDW, 96), who seems all too aware of the senseless nature of the pain that he has inflicted: "if it hadn't been me it would have been someone else. But that's no excuse" (CDW, 119). Schopenhauer argues that the intensity of our sexual impulses "teaches us that in this act is expressed the most decided affirmation of the will-to-live, pure and without further addition" (WWRI, 328). The Schopenhauerian aura of the predicaments of characters such as Belacqua and Murphy is, as we shall see, in no way confined to their carnal troubles; it is more thoroughly evinced by the terms of interpretation which each of those characters employ in their troubled reflections. In such cases one can recognise the essentially psychosomatic ordeals of the subject who is tormented by the associated demands of an insatiable Will and a perpetually inquisitive intellect.

At the root of our perplexities regarding self and world is the unfathomable enigma of our existence as beings which are comprised of antithetical tendencies of volition and intellection. Schopenhauer states, "Now the identity of the subject of willing with that of

knowing by virtue whereof (and indeed necessarily) the word "I" includes and indicates both, is the knot of the world (Weltknoten), and hence inexplicable" (FR, 211). As we shall see, Beckett's protagonists experience the mysteries of identity which Schopenhauer describes, however misled they are by dualistic ways of thought. Beckett's persistent engagement with notions of ontological guilt is fundamentally related to their attempts to explain and justify the tragic nature of life. His *oeuvre* contains numerous creative manipulations of the conception of human beings as irredeemably fallen creatures. In a conversation with Jack B. Yeats, Beckett was struck by Yeats's willingness to interpret anguish in relation to the fateful transgression of Adam and Eve: "He wanted a definition of cruelty, declaring that you could work back from cruelty to original sin. No doubt" (LI, 65). Beckett's fascination with such notions is difficult to reconcile with his quite explicit rejection of the simplistic pieties of his religious upbringing, yet the allure of Low Church Christianity's insistence upon the inevitable wretchedness of earthly life seems to have been irresistible to his authorial consciousness and is likely to have been an important factor in his profound esteem for Schopenhauer's views. Schopenhauer's work retains the bleakest elements of the Low Church doctrine of expiation while rejecting the notion that an omnipotent and infinitely compassionate deity could have inspired its development.

## The Impenetrable Without

Beckett's 'Recent Irish Poetry' (1934) proposes a loose classification between poets who create art in order to serve impersonal themes, and those poets who are willing to accept that there has occurred a "rupture in the lines of communication" (D, 70) between subject and object. The latter group are compelled to undergo the type of inner descent that Beckett referred to in *Proust* as the excavatory aspect of artistic composition, and that he commended Thomas MacGreevy for achieving in terms of the "endopsychic clarity" (D, 69) of his work. In this sense, the "work of art is neither created nor chosen, but discovered, uncovered, excavated, pre-existing within the artist, a law of his nature" (PTD, 84). Such a view of the creative process was abidingly held by Beckett. In a letter to Ethna MacCarthy, written on 10 January 1959, he described his creative experiences in terms which cohere with those employed in earlier critical writings: "My silly old body is here alone with the snow and the crows and the exercise-book that opens like a door and lets me far down into the now friendly dark." In Schopenhauerian terms, the artist perceives Ideas not as entities which subsist independently of his cognitive apparatus, but as the focal point of his aesthetic consciousness. The notion of art as involving an intrinsically inner vision which has been initially stimulated

by ordinary sensory experience clearly fascinated Beckett. In 'Enueg I' (1935) Beckett's allusion to Rimbaud's arctic flowers that "do not exist" (CPS, 8) can be read as signifying the supreme ontological reality of the imagined entities that we behold during periods of aesthetic bliss. Writing to MacGreevy on 18 October 1932, Beckett outlined the criteria by which he evaluated his own poems: "the three or four I like" emanated from "the burrow of the 'private life,' Alba & the long Enueg & Dortmunder & even Moly, do not and never did give me that impression of being construits. I cannot explain very well to myself what they have that distinguishes them from others" (LI, 134). The favour shown to such poems seems intimately bound up with their freedom from intellective comprehension, both in terms of their genesis and appreciation, but they are clearly the products of inner descent. Beckett spoke of the artistic creations of poets such as Homer, Dante, Racine, and occasionally Rimbaud as being dependent upon compositional processes which are based upon the "integrity of the eyelids coming down before the brain knows of grit in the wind" (LI, 135). He would later describe creative stirrings as involving "the frail sense of beginning life behind the eyes, that is the best of all experiences" (LI, 447). It is, as Lucien puts it in Dream, "des yeux clos [que] le le poème se fait" (DFW, 21). The following chapters of the present study will examine similar instances of Beckett's creative fascination with the artistic implications of Schopenhauerian idealism.

Beckett's fascination with idealism, even in its rather extreme Berkeleian form, led him to dismiss Johnson's refutation of Berkeley as "mièvre" (*LI*, 223). In a statement which aligns closely with Beckett's sense of the impossibility of penetrating beyond the subjective sphere of consciousness, Schopenhauer states:

An assumed objective absolute is at once besieged with the destructive questions Whence? and Why? before which it must give way and fall. It is different when we are immersed in the silent, though obscure, depths of the subject. But here, of course, we are threatened with the danger of falling into mysticism. We can, therefore, draw from this source only what is in fact true, accessible to each and all, and consequently undeniable. (*PPI*, 78)

Earlier in this chapter we noted Beckett's description of the compositional process as being a "mystical experience." It is precisely such questions as "whence" and "why" that are the special province of philosophy and other conceptual disciplines. Art cannot articulate insights into "an objective absolute;" its true point of origination is within the inner depths of the artist's consciousness, where, as a pure subject of knowing, he beholds the Idea that is

destined to be expressed by his work. In 'Neither' (1979) Beckett speaks of creative activity as a "siege laid again to the impenetrable without. Eye and hand fevering after the unself" (D, 152). The implicit futility of an artistic act that attempts to probe a reality which is permanently inaccessible to the perceptual capacities of the creator is thereby articulated. Schopenhauer underscores the necessity of introspective experience in the creation of genuine art in his assertion that the Ideas are "apprehended through pure contemplation" (WWRI, 184). In Proust, Beckett had already claimed that, "The only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent. The artist is active, but negatively, shrinking from the nullity of circumferential phenomena, drawn into the core of the eddy" (PTD, 65-6). Schopenhauer stresses the indivisible link between subject and object whereby all representations are, by definition, a composite of both. Transcendental Idealism, as formulated in the works of Kant and Schopenhauer, points to our inability to access in any direct way the self or that which lies beyond the self, owing to the fact that both partially occupy a realm which transcends the boundaries of space and time, those principles of individuation which serve to distinguish our world from the noumenal. Beckett's critical and creative writings pose problems of interpretation which no philosophical doctrine can exhaustively decipher. Yet rather than providing us with the means of "clapping solution on problem like a snuffer on a candle" (D, 92), the reading of Beckett's work in conjunction with that of Kant and Schopenhauer provides us with hermeneutic strategies which Beckett himself ostensibly employed.

In describing the poets of the Celtic Twilight as being dependent upon an "accredited theme" (D, 71) such as the exploits of Oisin, Cuchulain, or Maeve, Beckett can be seen to offer a Schopenhauerian denunciation of their compositional methods. Instead of undergoing that inner descent which will confront them with the "actual" (D, 71), which is the intrinsically apperceptive material of art, they submit to external demands in the form of "the conventional" (D, 71). Schopenhauer rails against artists who submit to the desires of the marketplace or the popular will: "They note what pleases and affects, make this clear to themselves, fix it in the concept, and hence in the abstract, and then imitate it openly or in disguise, with skill and intention. Like parasitic plants they suck their nourishment from the works of others; and like polyps, take on the colour of their nourishment" (WWRI, 235). In stressing that it is "the act and not the object of perception that matters" (D, 74), Beckett highlights the formal issues which pertain to the genesis of art. While Austin Clarke could, for a time, create works which engaged with "the drama of racial conscience," Beckett, not

being able to understand a phrase such as the "Irish people," or to assume that "it ever gave a fart in its corduroys for any form of art whatsoever" (*LI*, 599), seems to have shared Schopenhauer's pronounced distaste for what he describes as art of "political tendency which flirts with the momentary whims of the flattering and sugary populace" (*PPII*, 439). Such comments echo general Modernist suspicions about the capacity of the masses to appreciate artistic masterpieces, yet in interpreting their context, Schopenhauer's misanthropy is less relevant than his prevailing concern for aesthetic purity. Having asserted that, "The German Fatherland has not cultivated in me any *patriotism*" (*MRIV*, 323), Schopenhauer declared: "In my works one will look in vain for any consideration of the needs of the State and of any political tendency" (*MRIV*, 325). Beckett shared Schopenhauer's revulsion towards those who would submit to political proprieties and thereby render their creations subservient to utilitarian ideals. He clearly disdained the thinly-veiled political allegory that he witnessed in a "revival of Dervorgilla by the old poisse Gregory," a work which was "Vulgarly conceived & vulgarly written" (*LI*, 49).

Beckett's satirical depiction of Clarke through the figure of Austin Ticklepenny in *Murphy* points to that poet's submissive approach to artistic creation. While Ticklepenny's "breakdown had been due less to the pints than to the pentameters," his creative impulses are dictated by his "duty to Erin" (*M*, 57). Beckett's estimation of Clarke as man and poet might be called into question, yet Clarke's own writings underscore a certain validity to Beckett's denunciation of the nationalistic leanings of his work. In the notes appended to his *Later Poems* (1961), Clarke speaks of his earlier poetry, which relied upon revered icons of Irish myth and highlights its political implications. Here we learn that *Pilgrimage and Other Poems* (1928) "was written in exile, when the future of our new State seemed so hopeful that Irish writers could delay for a while in the past." Clarke's claim that one of the "aims of modernistic poetry" is "to make poetry utilitarian by using the general vocabulary and rhythms of prose, and by discussing in it topics of political, social and economic interest" can be seen to justify Beckett's suspicions regarding his authorial motives.

### The Ferocious Dilemma of Expression

While Schopenhauer's aesthetics exalt the artist as a benefactor of those individuals, however few, who are capable of an authentic interest in art, he also acknowledges the numerous impediments that artistic communication involves. The following passage highlights many issues which can illuminate some of Beckett's most seemingly inexplicable critical

#### statements:

Actually all truth and wisdom ultimately lie in *perception*; but unfortunately perception cannot be either retained or communicated. At the most the *objective* conditions for this can be presented to others purified and elucidated through the plastic and pictorial arts, and much more indirectly through poetry; but it rests on *subjective* conditions that are not at everyone's disposal, and not at anyone's at all times; in fact, such conditions in the higher degrees of perfection are the advantage and privilege of only the few. Only the poorest knowledge, abstract secondary knowledge, the concept, the mere shadow of knowledge proper, is unconditionally communicable. If perceptions were communicable, there would then be a communication worth the trouble, but in the end everyone must remain within his own skin and his own skull, and no man can help another. To enrich the concept from perception is the constant endeavour of poetry and philosophy. (*WWRII*, 74)

Beckett's sense of the seemingly insurmountable problems of artistic creation is revealed most notably in his *Three Dialogues* (1949). In their examination of Tal Coat, Duthuit and Beckett attempt to establish a definition of that painter's representation of nature. Duthuit contends that what Tal Coat "discovers, orders, transmits, is not in nature" (D, 138). Here Duthuit regards nature as empirically real and therefore as subsisting independently of perceiving subjects. Beckett asserts, "by nature, I mean here, like the naïvest realist, a composite of perceiver and perceived, not a datum, an experience" (D, 138). In Schopenhauerian terms, such a composite is described as follows: "When the Idea appears, subject and object can no longer be distinguished in it, because the Idea, the adequate objectivity of the will, the real world as representation, arises only when subject and object reciprocally fill and penetrate each other completely" (WWRI, 180). According to Kant and Schopenhauer, realists assume that there is a total distinction between the mind and what it experiences through sensory awareness, so that the existence of the world as it appears to us is not dependent upon the conditions of experience that are determined by the mental apparatus of a percipient. Schopenhauer regards Realism as "the philosophy of the subject who forgets to take account of himself' (WWRII, 13). However, Kant and Schopenhauer repeatedly insist that the reality of phenomenal objects is in no way undermined by their theories, provided that we accept that our perceptual experience essentially consists of an inextricable union between subject and object. Schopenhauer's term "representation" connotes an indissoluble link between subject and object, which is ordinarily associated with Will-inspired longings and egotistical interpretations, yet aesthetic experiences, engendered

by painting, sculpture, and literature, are based upon an intrinsic combination of the pure subject of knowing with the Idea.

Beckett advocates a rather bleak acceptance on the part of the artist and his public that, "there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express" (D, 139). Taken literally, these words would amount to an embittered farewell to artistic creation, yet one must remember that at the time of writing them Beckett was on the verge of creating at least five of the truly canonical works of Western literature. While he was, as we have noted, acutely aware of the expressive limitations of words, Schopenhauer described the artist's desire to articulate his insights as thoroughly imperative: "it happens with the same necessity with which a tree bears fruit" (PPII, 86). Malone, in stating, "I did not want to write but I had to resign myself to it in the end" (MD, 33), echoes a plaintive sentiment which imbued Beckett's own authorial history. Beckett's irrepressible drive to create survived the numerous rejections that his early works suffered at the hands of various publishers. Even if he could occasionally disavow his artistic impulses in statements such as, "I do not feel like spending the rest of my life writing books that no one will read. It is not as though I wanted to write them" (LI, 362), he was unable to resist the inexorable motives which engendered his "itch to write" (LI, 112). As Knowslon puts it, Beckett was "driven on by the compulsion to express that had always seemed more important than anything else in his life" (JK, 677). It is worth noting Beckett's satisfaction with poems such as 'Alba' (1931) which, on account of their status as "involuntary exonerations" (LI, 88), seemed inspired by a genuine aesthetic motives. In accordance with the same underlying criteria he would deride those poems of his which "did not represent a necessity" and were thereby merely "faculatif" (LI, 133).

In Schopenhauerian terms, the ultimate reality is Will. The visual artist is always involved in an uneasy compromise, being as he is unable to perceive beyond the realm of Ideas to communicate a vision of the Will itself. Masson is, according to Beckett, an artist who "seems literally skewered on the ferocious dilemma of expression" (*D*, 140). Caught between the ineluctable inclination to create and the realisation that his inspiring vision cannot yield directly communicable insights, the artist is, as Beckett puts it elsewhere, akin to the mystic in "submitting to the unintelligible." Bram van Velde was an artist who experienced what Beckett reveals to be the artist's basic predicament. He describes his task as

venturing to
express oneself
at all costs
in order to show
what cannot be
seen
to represent
what could not
be said. 126

Beckett's acute awareness of the type of quandaries that artists find themselves confronting is a common feature of his critical writings. His commitment to an "aesthetics of failure". has been seen as indicative of his relevance to postmodern discourse by scholars such as Cerrato, yet the consonance of his scepticism regarding the expressive potential of art with some of the cardinal principles of Schopenhauer's thought is no less apparent. This chapter has considered a number of Beckett's aesthetic views in relation to their alignment with Schopenhauer's thought and its Kantian foundations. Before turning to a consideration of how Beckett's creative works can be read in relation to some of the key Schopenhauerian concepts already discussed, I shall summarise the findings of this chapter in order to indicate the dominant themes of the rest of this dissertation.

Kant's insistence upon the architectonic nature of human reason highlights our seemingly unavoidable tendency to subsume even the most innocuous of personal experiences under grand conceptual narratives, such as those provided by religion and other systems of thought. In my examination of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* and *More Pricks Than Kicks* we shall see how those aspects of Low Church theology which most intrigued Schopenhauer provide a rather burdensome framework within which Belacqua interprets his apparently congenital predicaments. Tormented by Will-inspired yearnings, yet acutely aware of states of consciousness which are exempt from physical craving and intellective demands, Belacqua learns that personal ordeals are rarely amenable to alleviation by abstract reflections. In terms of Beckett's creative and critical methods, we have seen how he reproached artists such as Balzac and critics such as Feuillerat for their desire to conscript the lives of literary characters in the service of discursive ends. I intend to show how Beckett's creation of characters such as Belacqua and Murphy evades similar censure in spite of their highly allusive relationship to some of Western culture's most seminal ideas.

Schopenhauer's exaltation of art as that which affords temporary relief from our Will-governed thoughts and actions provides the context for my examination of the role of art in the lives of Beckett's protagonists. Characters such as Watt are driven by what could be aptly described, from a Schopenhauerian perspective, as epistemic yearnings, which are frustrated by their encounters with aspects of reality that are resistant to conceptual analysis. As we shall see in the Conclusion of this dissertation, Beckett's later works are permeated with themes which are very much of a piece with Schopenhauer's thought. In recognising his persistent engagement with issues which informed his earlier writings, such as the impotence of reason in the face of personal traumata; the means by which imagination is inspired by the experience of incapacitation and impending death; and the necessity of understanding one's existence as an atonement for some incomprehensible transgression, we will note how a comparative reading of the writings of Schopenhauer and Beckett reveals an intriguing variety of intertextual correlations.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 91.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> P. J. Murphy, 'Beckett and the Philosophers' in John Pilling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, p. 235.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski (eds.), *The Faber Companion to Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), p. 294.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Van Hulle and Nixon, Samuel Beckett's Library, p. 151.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, tr. Gary Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 66.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Sermons on Election and Reprobation*, tr. John Field (Pennsylvania: Old Paths Publications, 1996), p. 42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Kant, Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, p. 69.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, tr. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 6 n.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Kant, Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, p. 80.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Kant, Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings, p. 82.

Anne Atik, How It Was: A Memoir of Samuel Beckett (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), p.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Quoted in Nixon, Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937, p. 49.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Quoted in Atik, *How it Was*, p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Quoted in Knowlson, 'Beckett's First Encounters with Modern German (and Irish) Art', pp. 70-71.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Quoted in Nixon, Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937, p. 96.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Pothast, *The Metaphysical Vision*, p. 58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Thomas Hunkeler, 'Recent Beckett Criticism in Germany' in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, n. s. 19.2 (2010), p. 275.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Schopenhauer's terminology regarding subjective experience can lead to confusion given the subtle differences it contains according to its application to the various aspects of human experience that he explores. Ordinarily we judge objects in the world as desirable or repulsive, threatening or advantageous relative to our Will-induced perceptions. However, aesthetic experience temporarily suspends such egotistical perspectives and allows us to view entities objectively (i.e., without reference to our Will-governed volition). Such experiences are nevertheless subjective insofar as they occur entirely within the consciousness of the perceiving subject.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Knowlson and Knowlson (eds.), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, p. 145.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Helen Zimmern, Schopenhauer (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1932), p. 66.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> James Knowlson, 'Beckett and Seventeenth-Century Dutch and Flemish Art' in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, 21 (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), p. 27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Schopenhauer was keen to ensure that his readers would recognise "the difference between will [*Wille*] and conscious volition [*Willkür*]" (*PPII*, 166). Throughout this dissertation I will use the word "Will" to denote the thing-in-itself, in order to differentiate it from the individual acts of "will" which are its direct manifestations.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Quoted in Cartwright, Schopenhauer: A Biography, p. 395 n. 149.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Notes on Beckett' in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, n. s. 19.2 (2010), p. 159.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Nixon, Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937, p. 166.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> In line with Schopenhauer's infamous views I will regularly employ male pronouns to describe the activities of artists. Schopenhauer considers the capacity for genius to be exclusive to an extreme minority of men. According to this view women (and most men) are

incapable of experiencing the type of disinterested perception which engenders art.

- <sup>29</sup> Quoted in Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld (eds.), *Beckett in the Theatre: The Author as Practical Playwright and Director*, *Volume I* (New York: Riverrun Press, 1988), p. 230.
- <sup>30</sup> Knowlson and Knowlson (eds.), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, p. 188.
- <sup>31</sup> Gershon Weiler, *Mauthner's Critique of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 318.
- <sup>32</sup> Quoted in Feldman, *Beckett's Books*, p. 130.
- <sup>33</sup> R. F. Christian (ed.) *Tolstoy's Letters, Volume I: 1828-1879*, tr. R. F. Christian (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978), p. 221.
- <sup>34</sup> Cartwright, Schopenhauer: A Biography, p. x.
- <sup>35</sup> John G. Robertson, *A History of German Literature* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons Ltd., 1902), p. 478.
- <sup>36</sup> Quoted in Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 557.
- <sup>37</sup> Juliet, Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde, p. 16.
- <sup>38</sup> Hilde Hein, 'Schopenhauer and Platonic Ideas' in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 4 (1966), p. 144.
- <sup>39</sup> D. W. Hamlyn, *Schopenhauer* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 103.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.
- <sup>41</sup> Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, *Revised Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 239.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> Cheryl Foster, 'Schopenhauer and Aesthetic Recognition' in Dale Jacquette (ed.), *Schopenhauer, Philosophy, and the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 137.
- <sup>44</sup> Julian Young, 'The Standpoint of Eternity: Schopenhauer on Art' in *Kant-Studien*, 78 (1987), p. 434.
- <sup>45</sup> Atik, *How It Was*, p. 54.
- <sup>46</sup> Nixon, Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937, p. 62.
- <sup>47</sup> Declan J. Foley (ed.), *The Only Art of Jack B. Yeats: Letters & Essays* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2009), p. 30.
- <sup>48</sup> Quoted in Willard A. Palmer (ed.), *Mendelssohn: Songs Without Words* (California: Alfred Masterwork Company, 1978), p. 3.

Gontarski (ed.), On Beckett: Essays and Criticism (New York: Grove Press, 1986), p. 172.

- <sup>58</sup> C. G. Jung, *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature*, tr. R. F. C. Hull (London: Ark, 1984), p. 104.
- <sup>59</sup> Quoted in Angela Moorjani, 'En attendant Godot on Michael Polac's Entrée des auteurs' in Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui, 7 (Amsterdam: Rodopi,1998), p. 54.
- <sup>60</sup> Pothast, *The Metaphysical Vision*, p. 228.
- <sup>61</sup> According to E. F. J. Payne, Schopenhauer encountered Leopardi's work for the first time in 1858 (*MRIV*, 493).
- <sup>62</sup> Quoted in John Pilling, *A Companion to Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (Tallahassee: Journal of Beckett Studies Books, 2004), p. 116.
- <sup>63</sup> Giacomo Leopardi, *The Moral Essays*, tr. Patrick Creagh (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 8.
- <sup>64</sup> Quoted in Mark Nixon, 'Scraps of German: Samuel Beckett reading German Literature' in Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui, 16 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), p. 273.
- 65 Quoted in Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 483.
- <sup>66</sup> W. B. Yeats, *Letters to the New Island*, eds. George Bornstein and Hugh Witemeyer (New York: Macmillan), pp. 103-4.
- <sup>67</sup> S. E. Gontarski, Martha Fehsenfeld, and Dougald McMillan, 'Interview with Rachel Burrows, Dublin, Bloomsday, 1982' in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, o. s. 11 & 12 (1989), p. 5.
- <sup>68</sup> Knowlson and Knowlson (eds.), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, p. 53.
- <sup>69</sup> Quoted in Hilary Pyle, Jack B. Yeats: A Biography (London: André Deutsch, 1989), p. 104.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> John Wall, 'Murphy, Belacqua, Schopenhauer, and Descartes: Metaphysical Reflections on the Body' in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, n. s. 9.2 (Spring 2000), p. 92.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Knowlson and Knowlson (eds.), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, p. 200.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> McMillan and Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre*, p. 163.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Quoted in Clas Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting* (Abo: Abo Akademi, 1976), p. 103.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Roger Blin, 'Blin on Beckett: Interview by Tom Bishop', tr. James Knowlson in S. E.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (New York: The Modern Library, 1873), p. 111.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Quoted in Nixon, Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937, p. 185.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Büttner, Samuel Beckett's Novel Watt, p. 27 n. 50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Zurbrugg, Beckett and Proust, p. 108.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Juliet, *Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde*, p. 24.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Quoted in Büttner, Samuel Beckett's Novel Watt, p. 35 n. 69.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Quoted in Cartwright, *Schopenhauer: A Biography*, p. 361.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, tr. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 380.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Hugh Kenner, *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996), p. 109.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 426.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Quoted in Knowlson and Knowlson (eds.), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, p. 49.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Mark Nixon, 'Chronology of Beckett's Journey to Germany (Based on the German Diaries 1936-1937)' in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, n. s. 19.2 (2010), p. 253.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> Quoted in Nixon, Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937, p. 122.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> Knowlson and Knowlson (eds.), Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett, p. 309.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Quoted in Daniela Caselli, *Beckett's Dante's: Intertextuality in the Fiction and Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 86.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> Roger Shattuck, *Proust's Way: A Field Guide to In Search of Lost Time* (London: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 2000), p. 269.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> Frank Kermode, 'Beckett' in *Modern Essays* (London: Fontana, 1971), p. 205.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Quoted in Pilling, 'Beckett's Proust', p. 24.

<sup>88</sup> Nixon, Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937, p. 60.

<sup>89</sup> Leopardi, The Moral Essays, p. 96.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> Acheson, 'Beckett, Proust, and Schopenhauer', p. 173.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Pothast, *The Metaphysical Vision*, pp. 120-21.

<sup>93</sup> Magee, The Philosophy of Schopenhauer, p. 185.

<sup>94</sup> Knowlson claims that, while Beckett "was not temperamentally drawn to opera," he

<sup>&</sup>quot;relished" a performance of *The Marriage of Figaro*, which he attended in 1937 (JK, 253).

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Nixon, Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937, p. 140.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> Reported by George Steiner in *Heidegger* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978), p. 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> Knowlson and Knowlson (eds.), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, p. 134.

- <sup>98</sup> Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past, Volume I2: Time Regained*, tr. Stephen Hudson (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951), p. 271.
- <sup>99</sup> Knowlson and Knowlson (eds.), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, p. 254.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284.
- <sup>101</sup> Juliet, Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde, p. 39.
- <sup>102</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>103</sup> Prue Shaw (ed.), *The Letters of Giacomo Leopardi*, tr. Prue Shaw (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 1998), p. 69.
- <sup>104</sup> Juliet, Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde, p. 41.
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- <sup>106</sup> Katharine Worth, 'Beckett's Ghosts' in S. E. Wilmer (ed.), *Beckett in Dublin* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1992), p. 63.
- <sup>107</sup> Angela Moorjani, 'Mourning, Schopenhauer, and Beckett's Art of Shadows' in Lois Oppenheim and Marius Buning (eds.) *Beckett On and On* . . . (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), p. 92.
- <sup>108</sup> Pothast, *The Metaphysical Vision*, p. 233.
- <sup>109</sup> Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past, Volume 11: The Sweet Cheat Gone*, tr. C. K. Scott Moncrieff (Chatto & Windus, 1952), p. 46.
- <sup>110</sup> Stanley E. Gontarski, 'Birth Astride a Grave: Samuel Beckett's Act Without Words I' in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, o. s. 1 (Winter 1976), p. 38.
- <sup>111</sup> The Book of Common Prayer (Dublin: Columba Press, 2004), p. 769.
- <sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 780.
- <sup>113</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>114</sup> Pothast, *The Metaphysical Vision*, p. 91.
- <sup>115</sup> Quoted in Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1928* (Hamden: Archon, 1970), p. 179.
- <sup>116</sup> Quoted in Colin Duckworth, 'The Making of Godot' in Ruby Cohn (ed.), *Casebook on Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 95.
- <sup>117</sup> Quoted in Nixon, Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937, p. 47.
- <sup>118</sup> O'Hara, 'Beckett's Schopenhauerian Reading of Proust', p. 275.
- 119 Quoted in Feldman, Beckett's Books, pp. 139-140.
- <sup>120</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, *Volume I*, tr. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), p. 251.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> Quoted in James Knowlson, 'A Writer's Homes - A Writer's Life' in S. E. Gontarski (ed.), *A Companion to Samuel Beckett* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> Austin Clarke, *Later Poems* (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1961), p. 90.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>124</sup> Austin Clarke, *Poetry in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Colm O'Lochlainn, 1951), pp. 52-3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> Juliet, Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde, p. 32.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> Laura Cerrato, 'Postmodernism and Beckett's Aesthetics of Failure' in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, 2 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), p. 27.

# Chapter 2

# Torture by Thought and Trial by Living

In its extensive use of some of Western culture's most prominent philosophical and religious concepts, Dream of Fair to Middling Women might seem to contravene Schopenhauer's descriptions of the attributes of genuine art. Pilling's A Companion to Dream of Fair to Middling Women (2004) details a vast array of Dream's most recondite allusions, yet Pilling admits defeat in relation to many of Beckett's intertextual borrowings. Dream could therefore be seen to exemplify the "loutishness of learning" (CPS, 55) from which Beckett would seek to distance his art, yet as this chapter proposes to show, it is a novel which epitomises his ability to employ conceptual material in the service of aesthetically enriching ends. In a letter to MacGreevy, written on January 25 1931, Beckett bemoaned his inability to commence creative or scholarly work, while acknowledging that his previous "phrase-hunting" (LI, 62) might well have jeopardised such aspirations: "I have enough 'butin verbal' to strangle anything I am likely to want to say" (LI, 93). Such a despairing admission would seem to suggest that Beckett's mind was "stocked . . . and confused in a way that was opposed to its real interests" (DFW, 35). Given that Dream possesses an almost encyclopaedic range of references to some of the greatest artists and thinkers in Western culture, its overall aesthetic value may seem imperilled, especially in light of Schopenhauer's observation that, "Great erudition and sciolism are very detrimental to the ability to have a clear and vivid conception of the world of perception and consequently to be an original thinker and poet" (MRIII, 181). When, in 1954, Beckett offered advice to Raimbourg about the impediments which beset the genesis of a work, he stated: "Do not spend too much more time on culture & reading, these are traps." Perhaps memories of his experiences with *Dream* deepened his awareness of such "traps," yet while philosophical themes and terminology permeate *Dream*, the aesthetically fruitful tension between the experiential plight of Belacqua and the culturally-hallowed concepts that he invokes in order to comprehend his existence contribute to the endearing nature of a text of daunting erudition.

Schopenhauer avows that, "by virtue of his education a man says not what he himself thinks, but what others have thought and he has learnt" (*MRIV*, 24), while insisting that the measure of genuine art is rooted in what the artist "sees and feels" (*MRIV*, 46). In Chapter One I examined Schopenhauer's contention that, during artistic creation, concepts should be used merely as a means towards the realisation of aesthetic ends; in such contexts "abstract

concepts must be controlled by intuitive perception" (FR, 226). Insofar as Dream is suffused with an immense range of autobiographical material, its reliance on what Beckett saw and felt is abundantly evident, yet Beckett's disquiet at what he considered to be the more derivative aspects of *Dream* is clear. His acknowledgement that some of his early work "stinks of Joyce" (LI, 81) could suggest that aspects of *Dream*, such as its effusive wordplay, can be dismissed as slavish imitation. However, a more positive point of commonality between the writings of Joyce and Beckett is their insistence upon writing novels which accord primacy to self-inscription. Knowlson observes that, "Beckett . . . wrote himself into everything that he wrote . . . [he] never wrote a line that he had not lived." It is intriguing to note how Joyce's own practices mirrored central Schopenhauerian principles. Joyce told Arthur Power, "You must write what is in your blood and not what is in your brain." He went on to declare, "I always write about Dublin because if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of all the cities of the world. In the particular is contained the universal." Considerations of the ways in which the greatest art attains universality through its rootedness in the particular abound within Schopenhauer's writings and are epitomised in his observation that, "Always to see the universal in the particular is precisely the fundamental characteristic of genius" (WWRII, 379).

Dream can be read in conjunction with Schopenhauer's thought in a number of intriguingly suggestive ways. As Beckett's biographers have demonstrated, *Dream*'s characters and locations are based upon a host of readily identifiable models. Schopenhauer claims that, "Good novelists . . . base their characters on actual human beings of their acquaintance who serve as their models and whom they now idealize and complete in accordance with their own intentions" (PPII, 440). As we noted in the previous chapter, Schopenhauer's technical notion of idealization points to the ability of art to honour the concrete particularities of objects and people by enshrining characteristic traits as focal points of the artist's perceptual absorption in the world. Beckett's "embarrassed pain" over his satirical portrayals of people such as Rudmose-Brown and Peggy Sinclair in the figures of the Polar Bear and the Smeraldina would suggest that his creations were indispensably inspired by his associates. Schopenhauer's theory of Ideas entails that each Idea is a specific grade of the Will's objectification. While any given animal has characteristics which are common to those of its species and are thereby manifestations of an Idea which encompasses a multitude of animals, the character of a human being can be so intrinsically singular that it embodies an Idea in its own right. Schopenhauer contends that, "a human individual as such has, to a certain extent,

the dignity of an Idea of his own; and it is essential to the Idea of mankind that it manifest itself in individuals of characteristic significance" (*WWRI*, 225). Accordingly, if art is to fulfil its purely descriptive function, it must be capable of expressing the most uniquely specific qualities of individual people. Schopenhauer also argues that, "great artists . . . do not regard it as beneath their dignity to present with the greatest accuracy, earnestness, and care an individual who is not even outstanding, and to give down to the smallest detail a graphic description of all his peculiarities" (*PPI*, 421). In writing *Dream* Beckett may well have exaggerated the idiosyncratic aspects of various people with whom he was personally acquainted, yet following the publication of *More Pricks Than Kicks* he was painfully aware that the denizens of his literary worlds were all too likely to be recognised as unflattering portraits by those who had unwittingly inspired their creation.

Schopenhauer claims that, "the revelation of [man's] inner nature is the highest aim of art" (WWRI, 210); in accordance with that general aesthetic principle, "A novel will be of a loftier and nobler nature, the more of inner and the less of outer life it portrays" (PPII, 440). While Dream prioritises the depiction of Belacqua's "inner man, its hunger, darkness and silence" (DFW, 40), it also echoes some of Schopenhauer's most penetrating observations pertaining to the inescapably discordant nature of selfhood. Beckett's ability to interweave the most seemingly disparate intellectual and psychobiographical sources in the creation of a text is particularly complex in *Dream* where, as Pilling observes, "there is a narrative confusion between Bel as [Beckett's] alter ego, Bel as spin-off from Dante's Belacqua, and Bel as ideally distinct from either." As Schopenhauer observes, while the genuine artist "assimilates, transforms, and produces" works "from pure feeling . . . he is indeed educated and cultured by his predecessors and their works; but only by life and the world itself is he made directly productive through the impression of what is perceived; therefore the highest culture never interferes with originality" (WWRI, 235). As a polymath Schopenhauer was capable of drawing upon an immense range of authors in the development of his thought, yet he was clearly averse to any reliance upon learning as a purely intellectual endeavour. He was remarkably proficient in appraising and adapting the works of his predecessors in accordance with their relevance to his own experiential estimation of the world. Beckett, reflecting upon Schopenhauer's importance to Proust, noted that Proust admired Schopenhauer's writings for their "guarantee of wide reading - transformed" (LI, 43). By reading Dream in relation to such comments we can discern various problems with the dichotomous notion of the Beckettian Kehre which separates the middle and later works, which are imbued with

Beckett's declared intention to write about "the things I feel" (*GF*, 217), from the earlier writings, wherein the flaunting of learning seems nothing less than a principle of composition. In a conversation with Bair, Beckett spoke of his use of the Bible in a manner which can prove instructive to any investigation of the role of ideas in his art: "Like all literary devices, I use it where it suits me." For Schopenhauer, "Erudition is related to genius as are the notes to the text" (*MRIII*, 7); in processes of composition, a genuine artist will subordinate his learning to strictly aesthetic ends, which are determined more by his conative and affective inherence within the world than they are by detached contemplation. Throughout *Dream* intertextual traces are rarely free from ostensible autobiographical associations.

# Wide Reading - Transformed

As Schopenhauer notes, "the surroundings and events of our childhood are so deeply engraved on our memory, since as children we have only a few and these mainly intuitive, representations" (FR, 217). Self-inscription, as a practice which pervades Beckett's *oeuvre*, is present in the opening pages of *Dream* and is indicative of how the novel will assimilate Beckett's life and learning into a richly allusive aesthetic whole:

Behold Belacqua an overfed child pedalling, faster and faster, his mouth ajar and his nostrils dilated, down a frieze of Hawthorn after Findlater's van, faster and faster till he cruise alongside of the hoss, the black fat wet rump of the hoss. Whip him up, vanman, flickem, flapem, collop-wallop fat Sambo. (*DFW*, 1)

Pilling claims<sup>8</sup> that, even in such a concise excerpt, Beckett is at once alluding to his reading of Joyce's 'Ecce Puer' (1932), Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913), and Pierre Garnier's *Onanisme seul et à deux* (1880?). The mention of Findlater's van, a vehicle which Beckett would have regularly observed as a child, in conjunction with apparent references to such texts provides us with an early example of how *Dream* will synthesise memories of verifiable personages, scenes, and objects from Beckett's youth with material derived from his "notesnatching" (*DN*, xiii). In *Dream* the occasionally radical discrepancy between personal experience and the conceptual frameworks through which it is examined and described accounts for the more humorous aspects of the unfolding narrative. Schopenhauer writes of "a living knowledge expressing itself in deed and conduct alone" which is utterly distinct from "abstract knowledge expressing itself in words" (*WWRI*, 285). In spite of the perennial endeavours of philosophers and theologians, Schopenhauer argues that such "living

knowledge" can never be exhaustively reduced to conceptual discourse. If Beckett can be said to refute ideas within his art by means of irony and satire he does so by dramatizing the ultimate experiential implications of discursive systems upon characters who commonly endure what the narrator of *Dream* describes as "torture by thought and trial by living" (DFW, 45) when they invoke abstract ideas in order to illuminate or alleviate their predicaments. Such aspects of Beckett's art cohere with Schopenhauer's conviction that, human nature, being both "needy and perplexed" (WWRI, 411), is not amenable to improvement by means of analytic theorising or a reliance upon the master narratives of theology or philosophy. The impotence of discursive thought as a palliative in human affairs is inevitable, given that "Dogmas change and our knowledge is deceptive, but nature does not err; her action is sure and certain" (WWRI, 281). We learn that, for Belacqua, "in the umbra, the tunnel, when the mind went wombtomb, then it was real thought, real living . . . from which the mistral of desire had been withdrawn;" in such states his intellective cravings also cease: "He was not curious" (DFW, 45). When considering such experiences we may recall the congruence between the writings of Schopenhauer and Beckett in their estimations of what constitutes the "better consciousness" (MRI, 72) and the "real consciousness" (LI, 546) that was considered in Chapter One.

It is possible to read *Dream* as relying as much upon Beckett's affective predicaments as it does upon his artistic and intellectual interests, while the abundance of identifiable locales from Beckett's life in Ireland, France, and Germany deepens our awareness of the primacy of perceptual experience in his emerging creative practices. Knowlson has demonstrated that, at various points in his life, Beckett's reading was inextricably related to personal struggles. As I noted in my Introduction, it was during a bout of physical illness that Beckett's enthusiasm for Schopenhauer intensified, yet in *Dream* Belacqua's struggles with "hepatic colics" causes him to decline "the darkest passages of Schopenhauer" (DFW, 61). Such instances corroborate Pilling's claims regarding the absence of facile correlations between the life of Beckett and that of Belacqua or Bel, yet our awareness of Belacqua's familiarity with Schopenhauer's work provides many suggestive implications regarding his acquaintance with, and enthusiasm for, the less tenebrous passages of the philosopher's thought. Insofar as Dream documents the dissonance between what Beckett describes as the "particular affective evidential state" (PTD, 81) and abstract discourse, it is fascinating to note how Beckett's psychosomatic troubles had prompted MacGreevy to recommend a way of life based upon the quietist principles of Thomas à Kempis' work. In response, Beckett stressed his inability

to comprehend how his problems could be diminished by any "philosophical or ethical or Christlike imitative pentimenti" (*LI*, 259). However, prior to his reading of à Kempis, Beckett may have noted that, at various points in Schopenhauer's philosophy, involvement in the macrocosmic world is repeatedly evinced as inferior to introspective endeavours. Schopenhauer's own study of à Kempis led to his commendation of that monk as a cognate mind: "I think with Thomas à Kempis . . . [that] 'Whenever I was among men, I came back feeling less human'" (*MRIV*, 512). Schopenhauer's forthright admission that, "as I live mainly in the world of my thoughts, I do not like society and amusements" (*MRIV*, 503) reveals much about the isolationist tendencies which marked his personal life and which were, in part, the product of his low estimation of the moral and intellectual stature of human beings in general.

In *Proust* we read an account of human couples as "two separate . . . dynamisms related by no system of synchronization" (PTD, 17); such terms anticipate the categorisation of Belacqua and the Alba as "two separate non-synchronised processes" (DFW, 168). In Proust Beckett also reflects upon the "irremediable solitude to which every human being is condemned" (PTD, 46), thereby echoing Schopenhauer's assertion that, "What one man can be to another has very narrow limits; at the end everyone is, and remains, alone" (MRIV, 498). The alleged virtues of interpersonal distance constitute a shared theme in the writings of Schopenhauer and Beckett. While there is a compelling similarity between Schopenhauer's denigration of sociability and Beckett's own views as a young man, Beckett discovered his inability to sustain such a disengaged stance. His reading of à Kempis was thereby recognised to be of equivocal worth. While he garnered sentences from à Kempis such as "Glad going out & sorrowful coming home" (DN, 83), which provide intertextual traces within his work, in a more personal sense, Beckett's reading of à Kempis "went to confirm and reinforce [his] own way of living, a way of living that tried to be a solution and failed" and ultimately contributed to "isolationism that was not to prove very splendid" (LI, 257). Such sentences allow us to see the ways in which Belacqua's quietist ideals cohere with those which were once held by his creator, thereby foregrounding *Dream*'s associations between the most troubling personal experiences and erudition. However difficult such experiences may have been for Beckett in purely personal terms, his agreement with Schopenhauer's claims regarding the creatively fruitful consequences of personal distress may have enabled him to regard his affective and academic problems as material of instrumental importance for his creative aspirations. When, in 1937, Beckett spoke of the possibility of turning "dereliction,

profoundly felt, into literature" <sup>9</sup> it could be said that he had already achieved that feat in *Dream* and in *More Pricks*. On February 3 1931, Beckett told MacGreevy that he was "writing the German comedy in a ragged kind of way, on & off" (*LI*, 78). The traumata which seem to have informed the composition of *Dream* may be seen to render its early description as "the German comedy" inapposite, yet it is worth remembering that Beckett's *oeuvre* repeatedly explores the ways in which the harrowing and the risible aspects of human experience frequently coalesce.

While Beckett may have gained little in the way of personal sustenance from his reading of à Kempis, his inscriptions of passages from that writer's work into his notes and his subsequent citation of such passages in *Dream* attest to Beckett's convictions regarding the potential creative significance of à Kempis' ascetic precepts. "Notesnatching" provided Beckett with more than a mere diversion from a creative impasse. The allure of theological and philosophical doctrines which highlight the ultimate futility of worldly involvement must have been particularly irresistible to a young man who was entangled in fraught interpersonal relations. According to Pilling, for Beckett, the writing of *Dream* involved the "purging of a recent past and an even more recent present." Schopenhauer's contentions regarding artistic creation detail the artist's temporary emancipation from Will-induced problems, such as sexual longings and emotional distress. Being mindful of the personal and academic difficulties that Beckett faced during his writing of *Dream* can deepen our awareness of how the composition of that novel was no less dependent upon the troubling immediacies of his personal experience, than it was upon the abstractions of his growing erudition.

#### Not Just Material

Beckett's aversion to critical endeavours and his desire to express himself creatively were expressed in a letter, dated February 16 1931, which he wrote to Charles Prentice of Chatto & Windus, the company through which *Proust* would be published. In that letter Beckett told Prentice that he hoped to send him "something more genuine and direct" (*LI*, 67). Beckett's misgivings about his purely scholarly pursuits align with Schopenhauer's unfavourable portrayal of such activities. Schopenhauer states, "The great amount of the average scholar's work is *dead*, because all of it is known merely *in abstracto*" (*MRIII*, 110). As we have already seen, the role of critic was a particularly onerous one for Beckett. In a number of letters to MacGreevy Beckett voiced his reluctance to commit himself to an academic career. Having admitted that he felt "dissociated" from *Proust* as though it "did not belong" (*LI*, 65)

to him, Beckett declared: "I don't want to be a professor" (LI, 72). In Dream Beckett may allude to such reservations when he refers to "live cerebration that drew no wages [which involves] thoughts, free and unprofessional, non-salaried" (DFW, 45). With such statements in mind, it is interesting to note Schopenhauer's hostility towards those who consider philosophy and the arts as subjects from which one can make a profession. He asserts that those who work in academic settings reduce their subject to mere "lucrative and profitable professional wisdom" (MRIII, 396) thereby revealing their indifference to the type of disinterested enquiry that he consistently extols. Coupled with his awareness of the "grotesque comedy of lecturing" (LI, 53), which involved the absurdity of attempting to teach others what he himself allegedly did not know, 11 Beckett was evidently displeased at having written Proust, a book which he considered to be "without enchantment," and in which he "really wondered what [he] was talking about" (LI, 72). His terms of denigration amount to a Schopenhauerian aversion to the core pitfalls of exegetical writing: "It's too abstract because my head comes breaking every now & then through the epidermis for a breath of merely verbal enthusiasm. It has the plausibility of a pattern, a kind of flat syllogistic drift" (LI, 72). While writing *Proust*, Beckett was not entirely "at liberty to detach effect from cause" (*PTD*, 11), yet *Dream*, within which there is "not a trace . . . of the premises in the conclusion" (DFW, 161), persistently engages with Beckett's intense distaste for the composing or reading of literary works in accordance with analytical criteria.

Schopenhauer's insistence upon the perceptual basis of all genuine art is rooted in his contentions about the role of Platonic Ideas in artistic creation and appreciation. As we have noted, he argues that the artist is not restricted to the Ideas which he perceives at any given time; imagination allows him to "extend his horizon far beyond the reality of his personal experience, and enable[s] him to construct all the rest out of the little that has come into his own actual apperception, and thus to let almost all the scenes of life pass by within himself" (*WWRI*, 186). Accordingly, memory can assume a pivotal role within compositional practices. The abounding presence of autobiographical elements throughout Beckett's *oeuvre* has been comprehensively demonstrated by O'Brien and Knowlson. However, as Knowlson states, "Considering the relationship between a writer's life and his literary texts is a difficult task since it is only too easy to produce facile equivalences under the guise of revelations and to assume that the writer must always be speaking (with or without the 'I' form) with an autobiographical voice." It is precisely such overt reductionism that Schopenhauer deplored:

The public . . . shows much more interest in the subject-matter than in the form and for this reason is backward in higher culture. It shows this tendency most ludicrously in the case of poetical works, in that it carefully investigates the real events or the poet's personal circumstances that served as the occasion of such works. In fact, to the public such events and circumstances are ultimately of more interest than are the works themselves. Thus it reads more *about* Goethe than the poet's works, and studies more industriously the Faust legend than the poem *Faust*. (*PPII*, 507)

However, Schopenhauer also insists that art is ultimately enriched by its foundation in the deepest aspects of psychological and affective reality. When lecturing on Gide's *Les faux-monnayeurs* (1925) in 1931, Beckett noted: "relation between artist & material important - not just material" (TCD MIC 60/53). Beckett would subsequently tell Harvey that, "[w]ork doesn't depend on experience; it isn't a record of experience. But of course you must use it." By reading *Dream* in conjunction with Schopenhauer's aesthetics, we can recognise how the mere identification of correspondences between biography and literature is in no way semantically conclusive, especially given the intricate and nuanced ways in which Beckett forged art from a profoundly symbiotic combination of the most seemingly disparate intellectual and personal sources.

#### A Son of Adam

Beckett's insistence upon describing the troublesome lives of his characters with reference to Christian discourse epitomises the apparent incongruity between the consoling, depersonalised dicta of religion, and the uniquely particular problems of being. Schopenhauer's tendency to relate human sexuality to theological contexts is mirrored by the narrator of *Dream* as he portrays the life of a character whose sense of self is derived from, or at least enhanced by, his professed Adamic lineage. Schopenhauer's description of Adam as "the representative of the affirmation of life" (WWRI, 329) underscores his sense of humanity's congenital enslavement to carnal desire and serves as an ominous comment upon the feasibility of the ascetic aspirations of Belacqua. Belacqua, who broods "like a sick hen" (DFW, 190), is occasionally reminiscent of Dr. Nye in 'A Case in a Thousand' (1934), in being one of Beckett's "sad men" (CSP, 18). Schopenhauer commends those who possess a mournful disposition: "The mood proper to a man is a depressed one as is shown by the Pietists; for he finds himself in a world full of misery and distress from which there is no way out other than that of the infinitely difficult denial of his entire inner nature, an overcoming of the world" (MRIII, 657). In Schopenhauerian terms human life is beset by oppositional inclinations towards affirmation and renunciation. Belacqua resides within a world which is

riven by the competing claims of "temptation and knighthood" (*DFW*, 3) over which he can exert little control. Schopenhauer argues that, "it is always futile when we try sometimes to revive the pleasures or pains of the past; for the real and essential nature of both lies in the will" (*PPII*, 606). Belacqua's rueful reminiscences about the Smeraldina are, despite his diligent endeavours, unable to move him towards a "little teary ejaculation" (*DFW*, 4), but his troubles are at once contextualised and compounded by his recognition of the essentially postlapsarian nature of his predicaments: "his Smeraldinalgia was swallowed up immediately in the much greater affliction of being a son of Adam and cursed with an insubordinate mind" (*DFW*, 5). Schopenhauer claims that religion attempts to provide "a final account of the world in general" (*MRIII*, 491) within which the lives of individuals can be comprehensively interpreted. Belacqua's anguish, while being fundamentally affective, is not exclusively so, insofar as his discursive thoughts are strictly grounded in and governed by his conative afflictions. Schopenhauer argues that,

In all abstract employment of the mind, the will is also the ruler. According to its intentions, the will imparts direction to the employment of the mind, and also fixes the attention; therefore this is always associated with some exertion; but such exertion presupposes activity of the will. Therefore complete objectivity of consciousness does not occur with this kind of mental activity in the same way as it accompanies, as its condition, aesthetic contemplation. (WWRII, 369)

Western culture is permeated with narratives of renunciation which portray sexual desire as being the most pernicious impediment to other-worldly salvation, yet Schopenhauer's vision of human beings as enslaved to a combination of carnal craving and epistemic yearning is more apposite to an appreciation of Belacqua's plight.

Belacqua's inability to evoke the type of memories of the Smeraldina that would induce weeping is indicative of the deterministic processes to which his mind is invariably subject. Schopenhauer observes that,

The *train of our thoughts* is as strictly subject to the principle of sufficient reason in general as is the movement of bodies to the law of causality... The proof of [the] impossibility of calling forth an idea, without the occasion with which it is connected according to the *nexus idearum* and by the mere will, is furnished by all the cases where we vainly try to *recollect* something. (MRIII, 389)

We learn that, for Belacqua, "There had been no lull of any consequence between the breakdown of the love-ache and the onset of the pang. Indeed whatever little interspace there

was had been filled by an ergo, the two terms chained together beautifully" (*DFW*, 6). Belacqua's realisation of his identity as a "Son of Adam" is therefore elicited by experiential reality, not by abstruse reflection. Beckett's willingness to place a common human experience within a conceptual context which is deflated by the intrinsic bathos of the issues involved is encapsulated in such passages, yet they also serve as portentous intimations of future difficulties for his protagonists. For Schopenhauer, the Will "is the *prius* of knowledge" (*WWRII*, 293); hence our deepest insights into the nature of worldly existence remains rooted in our acquaintance with the various privations we endure as Will-governed subjects. He also contends that, "human consciousness and thinking are of necessity by their nature extremely *fragmentary* and . . . the theoretical or practical conclusion we reach by putting together such fragments will often be defective" (*MRIII*, 402). In *Dream* Beckett persistently exploits the tensions which exist between those philosophical and religious doctrines which attempt to impose order upon the most chaotic of human experiences and the immitigable problems which resist such neat systematic reductions.

In Schopenhauerian terms Belacqua's emotional turmoil is a direct manifestation of a thwarting of the Will, while his invocation of the Fall narrative as a framework within which to situate his experience is indicative of the intellect's seemingly irresistible need for structure. Given that "the concept obtains its action solely and directly from the *will*" (*MRIII*, 123), the unified nature of Belacqua's afflictions, whereby the "will-pricks" (*DFW*, 181) at once inspire pain and spur the intellect to comprehend the ultimate significance of that pain, is clear. This afflictive systematisation of experience is evinced in the description of Belacqua's "distress at being a son of Adam" (*DFW*, 6). Schopenhauer insists that the irreducibly particular nature of human crises resists accommodation within systematic frameworks because

All systems are sums that do not balance out; they leave a remainder . . . Such remainder consists in the fact that, if we logically draw conclusions from their propositions, the results do not fit, do not harmonise with the real world lying before us; on the contrary many aspects thereof remain quite inexplicable. (PPI, 67)

Such dissonance is repeatedly exploited by Beckett in his characters' futile attempts to comprehend their problems by means of analytic thought. Belacqua's confrontation with the wharfinger leads to his dejected retreat "on his ruined feet without indulgence, absolution or remission" (*DFW*, 8). This secularisation of Roman Catholic terminology adds to our sense

of Belacqua's doomed nature. Schopenhauer, in his assertion that the doctrine of the "Fall of Man" represents the "culminating point of Judaism" (PPI, 60), stresses the significance of the perpetually ruinous consequences of our primordial transgression. He contends that the lives of "true Christians" will be informed by an awareness of the status of this world as a "vale of tears" (PPI, 35). Belacqua, in his psychosomatically ruptured state, invokes such theological concepts in his attempts to comprehend the ultimate meaning of his difficulties, yet in doing so he invariably exacerbates his anguish. However, Belacqua's sufferings are also occasionally reminiscent of Schopenhauer's assertions regarding the positive aspects of pain. When we read that Belacqua was "crowned in gloom and he had a wonderful night" (DFW, 9), perplexities abound. However, when considered in relation to Schopenhauer's notions regarding "wholesome suffering [as] the panacea of our wretchedness" (MRIV, 117), we can view Belacqua's troubles as being instrumental to his quest for emancipation from the promptings of the Will. In this context the allusion to Julian of Norwich's dictum that, "Sin is behovable but all shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well" (DFW, 9) also reveals interesting Schopenhauerian implications. Belacqua's familiarity with emancipatory narratives is clear, yet such an acquaintance does not constitute what Schopenhauer describes in his reflections upon hagiography as "mere knowledge" (WWRI, 393), as Dream documents the ways in which they relate to Belacqua's experience of what Schopenhauer portrays as the edifying potential of "pain felt in one's own person" (WWRI, 393).

In Chapter One we observed how Schopenhauer, in dismissing the efficacy of purely abstract dicta in enabling us to liberate ourselves from the Will, emphasises the necessity for the Will to be broken by intense personal suffering before lasting deliverance can be attained. Schopenhauer points to the lives of saints and mystics as being instructive in this regard, but he dismisses notions of renunciation as a state of perpetual bliss:

We must not imagine that, after the denial of the will-to-live has once appeared through knowledge that has become a quieter of the will, such denial no longer wavers or falters, and that we can rest on it as on an inherited property. On the contrary it must always be achieved afresh by constant struggle. (WWRI, 391)

Julian's own commitment to a life as an anchoress is reputed to have been inspired by her experiences of illness and personal loss in accordance with which she recognised that, "this pain . . . purgeth and maketh us to know ourself." Such traumata, as prerequisites to lasting

emancipation from the Will, are intrinsic to Schopenhauer's ideas of sainthood. Belacqua's inability to achieve enduring freedom from worldly desire is all the more glaring given Julian's role as an exemplary predecessor.

As the narrative proceeds, *Dream* is still concerned with the abjuration of earthly involvement, despite both the facetious tone and the overt denial involved: "A low capital in the crypt of the Basilica Saint-Sernin in the most beautiful city of Toulouse is carved to represent a rat gnawing its way into a globe. The Dutch cheese of La Fontaine's fable of the catawampus that withdrew from the cares of this world? We think not" (DFW, 9). Belacqua's invocation of iconic images of St. Francis to illustrate how he will appear to the Smeraldina constitutes an early instance of his tendency to frame his experiences through aesthetic terms of reference. As we will note later in this chapter, painting is used throughout *Dream* as a means of precisely encapsulating a character's physical appearance, yet the allusion to "St. Francis skull-gazing" (DFW, 64) reminds us of central aspects of Belacqua's benighted sense of self. Schopenhauer argues that artistic depictions of the ascetic achievements of saints and mystics serve to inspire awe by their illustration of how the Will was silenced in the lives of such individuals. While paintings of renunciants are, by virtue of both their intrinsic aesthetic merits and their explicit subject matter, capable of inducing Will-free modes of consciousness, Schopenhauer laments his inability to convey the true significance of "a resigned and voluntarily expiating saint," as his discussion of such individuals is only "abstract and general, and therefore cold" (WWRI, 384). The futility of ekphrasis which, as the previous chapter demonstrated, is a core point of agreement between Schopenhauer and Beckett, is specifically evident in relation to portraits of those who have overcome the world. St. Francis, being as Schopenhauer puts it, "that true personification of asceticism" (WWRI, 384), can be seen as another inspirational figure to Belacqua, especially in his role as a reluctant traveller journeying towards the Smeraldina and her rapacious sexual demands. Given Schopenhauer's repeated observations about the utter subservience of reason to the Will, rationality is powerless to bring about emancipation from that noumenal reality which engenders our miseries: "a powerful control of the faculty of reason over directly felt suffering is seldom or never found" (WWRI, 315). However, reason aids us in our recognition of the insatiable nature of our Will-induced cravings only when we have endured agonising inner struggles. As Schopenhauer puts it, "the denial of the will is possible only under the unspeakable inner agonies which accompany the extinction and complete mortification of the will, as it is testified . . . by all quietists" (MRIII, 383).

Belacqua's tribulations are invariably caused by "the glare of the will and the hammer-strokes of the brain" (*DFW*, 121), while his ephemeral states of inner bliss led him to experience moments when "Eros was as null as Anteros" (*DFW*, 121). At such times he was "bogged in indolence, without identity, impervious alike to its pull and goading. The cities and forests and beings were also without identity, they were shadows, they exerted neither pull nor goad" (*DFW*, 121). Belacqua's indolent nature would seem to be an inevitable inheritance from his Dantean roots, yet it is also possible to view his non-volitional stasis as evidence of what Schopenhauer describes as "knowledge of the contradiction of the will-to-live with itself [which] can, through great misfortune and suffering, violently force itself on us and the vanity of all endeavour can be perceived" (*WWRI*, 394). The dualistic overtones of Schopenhauer's reflections are very much akin to Belacqua's experience of worldly tribulations and the quietist aspirations which pervade his thoughts:

It is incomprehensible how, when the eternal soul was banished into the body, it was torn from its former *sublime apathy*, drawn down into the pettiness of the earthly and so scattered through the body and the corporeal world that it forgot its former condition and participated in what from its former point of view was an infinitely small earthly existence, and so established itself in the latter that it limited its whole existence to it and filed it with it. <sup>15</sup>

Beckett's *Dream Notebook* is replete with statements from Augustine's work that purportedly elucidate many of the problems which Belacqua endures. As we shall see, its central precepts dominate those passages within Beckett's *oeuvre* which invoke Christian themes. Schopenhauer's belief that, "Augustinism with its doctrine of original sin and everything connected therewith is . . . the real Christianity" (*PPII*, 386), seems to have been shared by Beckett given the prevalence of the concept of ontological guilt throughout his *oeuvre*. While Beckett's avowed preference for the shape of Augustine's sentences over their theological significance prompted him to transcribe phrases such as "Amid the strife of his two wills he's in a strait" (*DN*, 22), Belacqua's professed identity as a son of Adam pervades *Dream* as an issue of profound thematic resonance.

Beckett's use of Judaeo-Christian concepts in *Dream* can be read as being accordant with Schopenhauer's estimation of the key teachings of that tradition. For Schopenhauer, "The doctrine of original sin (affirmation of the will) and of salvation (denial of the will) is really the great truth which constitutes the kernel of Christianity" (*WWRI*, 405). If we apply Schopenhauer's comments about the ruinous consequences of the Fall to Belacqua's

predicaments, various correlations can be readily discerned. Belacqua's sexual relations with the Smeraldina amount to "a gehenna of sweats and fiascos and tears and an absence of all douceness" (*DFW*, 19). Such experiences prompt Belacqua, who regards sexual desire itself to be "A great Devil, a fiend" (*DFW*, 173), to plead with the Smeraldina to be left to "my own penny death and my own penny rapture" (*DFW*, 19). The Semitic root of "gehenna" relates to the Biblical Valley of Hinnom, which is detailed in 2 Chronicles 28:3 as a place of sacrifice to Moloch, which Milton refers to as the very "Type of Hell." The Biblical knowledge which Beckett's characters possess does not provide an amelioration of their suffering, but it clarifies their testimonies as beings stricken by existence itself.

Schopenhauer's view of sexual craving as the most minatory impediment to Will-free states of mind is registered throughout his work. As "the focus of the will" (*WWRII*, 327) it is "a malevolent demon, striving to pervert, to confuse, and to overthrow everything" (*WWRII*, 534). Elsewhere, he claims that, "most men allow themselves to be seduced by a beautiful face" which, while it brings them various afflictions in the form of emotional distress and financial duties, ultimately leads to "hell and the devil" (*MRIV*, 504) through carnal pursuits.

As we shall note at a later point in this chapter, Belacqua's ability to view the female characters of *Dream* as objects of purely aesthetic attention is repeatedly undermined by their tendency to assume a more distinctly sexual allure. In this sense, they are reminiscent of Schopenhauer's reservations regarding those paintings and sculptures which, through sexual suggestiveness, "excite lustful feeling in the beholder;" in such cases "Purely aesthetic contemplation is at once abolished" (WWRI, 208). The "fatal occasion" (DFW, 3) on which Belacqua succumbed to the Smeraldina's ambivalent charms involved a recognition of her face as possessing an "unearthly radiance" and as being "more beautiful than stupid" (DFW, 3). At such a time she was "without limbs or paps in great stillness of body" (DFW, 23). Belacqua, having become enthralled by the iridescent charm of the Smeraldina's face which inspires pure aesthetic pleasure, falls prey to her more distinctly sexual attributes when he becomes "enmeshed" by the "suckers of saragasso" put forth by "the calm curds of her bosom" (DFW, 3). Schopenhauer quotes Petrarch's maxim that, "Whoever seeks peace and quiet, should avoid woman, the permanent workshop of troubles and disputes" (MRIV, 505) with conspicuous approval. Schopenhauer is adamant that reason, being utterly subordinate to the Will, cannot deliver us from sexual desire: "Against the mighty voice of nature reflection can do little" (WWRII, 281). Belacqua's "ways of peace and country of quiet" (DFW, 43) are deserted when he returns to the "glare of [the Smeraldina's] flesh" (DFW, 43). This tendency

to vacillate between renunciation and gratification is indicative of the identity he shares with Mr Beckett as an "anchorite on leave" and as a "dud mystic" (DFW, 186). Despite Belacqua's occasional experiences of states of consciousness which arise from a temporary cessation of libidinal longing, they are too fleeting to be compared with those of anchorites and mystics who are renowned for their ability to achieve a more enduring level of autonomy from physical desire.

The Smeraldina, "Looking babies in [Belacqua's] eyes" (DFW, 19) bedevils Belacqua's quietist aspirations. Beckett had transcribed Burton's phrase "looking babies in one anothers [sic] eyes" (DN, 128) into his *Dream Notebook*, yet in this context it is also interesting to note Schopenhauer's contention that, "in the meeting of the glances of love, the new individual is already being formed" (MRIII, 150-1). Belacqua's conscientious indifference towards the "charms of the mighty steaks and jug-dugs" (DFW, 136) of the Smeraldina deepens his deluded sense of self-mastery over his sensual identity. He is repelled by sexual intimacy, which amounts to being "pawed and slabbered on" (DFW, 107). However, the Alba occasionally exerts an irresistible power over him. In her company, the hapless Belacqua is overwhelmed by her sheer physical presence. His subjective turmoil is inscribed in apocalyptic terms: "Ark and mercy-seat have sunk, the Shekinah has fizzled out, the Cherubim are drowning" (DFW, 187). Belacqua's frantic enquiries about the Alba's choice of apparel are impelled by his fear regarding the possible visibility of her naked back. The profusion of similes which Belacqua employs in envisaging that sight, culminate in a shocking mention of "a cross-potent, pain and death, still death, a bird crucified on a wall" (DFW, 205). Belacqua, that "dirty low-church Protestant!" (DFW, 227), is not averse to betraying core elements of the Reformed tradition concerning the sole mediatorship of Christ. He praises the beneficent beings for his salvation from the tribulations of such a spectacle: "Praise be to God' said Belacqua 'and his blissful mother" (DFW, 206), yet his foreboding awareness of the Alba's corporeal prowess persists. She "had merely to unleash her eyes, she had merely to unseel them, and well she knew it, and she could have mercy on whom she would" (*DFW*, 208).

While for Schopenhauer, "copulation is [the devil's] currency" (*PPII*, 316), the hellish promptings of corporeal desires prevent Belacqua from enjoying

A beatitude of indolence that was smoother than oil and softer than a pumpkin, dead to the dark pangs

of the sons of Adam, asking nothing of the insubordinate mind [wherein he moves] with the shades of the dead and the dead-born and the unborn and the never-to-be-born, in a Limbo purged of desire. (DFW, 44)

# Within that state he experiences

[T]he mind at last its own asylum, disinterested, indifferent, its miserable erethisms and discriminations and futile sallies suppressed; the mind suddenly reprieved, ceasing to be an annex of the restless body, the glare of understanding switched off. The lids of the hard aching mind close, there is suddenly gloom in the mind; not sleep, not yet, nor dream, with its sweats and terrors, but a waking ultracerebral obscurity, thronged with grey angels; there is nothing of him left but the umbra of grave and womb. (*DFW*, 44)

In the following chapter I will discuss how "the umbra of grave and womb" accords with Schopenhauer's ideas regarding how the dissolution of self in will-less states relates to thanatic yearning. In the above passage the freedom that Belacqua enjoys involves not merely the cessation of carnal desires but the suspension of his intellective tendencies. As we have seen, Belacqua's susceptibility to female beauty is all too commonly compounded by "the glare of the understanding" which strives to contextualise the troubling cravings of the flesh. For Schopenhauer,

Absolute freedom consists simply in there being something not at all subject to the principle of sufficient reason as the principle of necessity . . . Therefore, as soon as we come to this . . . all explanation by means of reasons and consequents ceases . . . But on this account all understanding here ceases, because all our understanding rests on the principle of sufficient reason, since it consists in the mere application of this principle. (*WWRII*, 530)

In a statement which echoes such views, Beckett claimed that, "Only beyond speculation does man reach his Eden, that refuge where there is no more danger" (*LI*, 205). In considering states wherein a mind which enjoys an abeyance of intellection is "its own asylum" we are reminded of Schopenhauer's contention that, "in madness . . . the entire ability to think, i.e. to receive abstract motives, is paralysed" (*MRIV*, 235). Belacqua's realisation that "wombtomb" experiences, within which he is free from cerebration and physical lust, constitute "the real business, the Simon Pure of this frail life" (*DFW*, 45), is not developed by impersonal theorising but from intense intrapsychic struggles. Schopenhauer eschews any notion that we may voluntarily renounce the Will. Such insights elude Belacqua, despite his most strenuous and diligent efforts:

[T]he wretched Belacqua was not free and therefore could not at will go back into his heart, could not will and gain his enlargement from the gin-palace of willing. Convinced like a fool that it must be possible to induce at pleasure a state so desirable and necessary to himself he exhausted his ingenuity experimenting. He left no stone unturned. He trained his little brain to hold its breath, he made covenants of all kinds with his senses, he forced the lids of the little brain down against the flaring bricà-brac, in every imaginable way he flogged on his coenaesthesis to enwomb him, to exclude the bric-àbrac and expunge his consciousness. He learned how with his knuckles to press torrents of violet from his eyeballs, he lay in his skin on his belly on the bed, his face crushed grossly into the pillow, pressing down towards the bearings of the earth with all the pitiful weight of his inertia, for hours and hours, until he would begin and all things to descend ponderously and softly to lapse downwards through darkness, he and the bed and the room and the world. All for nothing. He was grotesque, wanting to "troglodyse" himself, worse than grotesque. It was impossible to switch off the inward glare, willfully to suppress the bureaucratic mind. It was stupid to imagine that he could be organized as Limbo and wombtomb, worse than stupid. When he tried to mechanise what was a dispensation he was guilty of a no less abominable confusion than when he tried to plunge through himself to a cloud, when, for his sorrow, he tried to do that. How could the will be abolished in its own tension? Or the mind appeared in paroxysms of disgust? (DFW, 123)

Such dedicated yet issueless endeavours to achieve lasting liberation from conational and cerebral inclinations remind us of Schopenhauer's claim that, in spite of the ultimate futility of such acts, "those who have once attained to denial of the will strive with all their might to keep to this path by self-imposed renunciations of every kind," yet "on earth no one can have lasting peace" (WWRI, 391). Schopenhauer was very much aware of the means by which his thought could lead to the question posed by Belacqua: "How could the will be abolished in its own tension?" The possibility of a voluntary renunciation of Will seems distinctly bewildering, yet Schopenhauer addresses the issue as follows: "Contrary to certain silly objections, I observe that the denial of the will-to-live does not in any way assert the annihilation of a substance, but the mere act of non-willing; that which hitherto willed no longer wills" (PPII, 312). The prospect of achieving will-lessness is, however, not contingent upon self-initiative whereby we can voluntarily liberate ourselves from Will in accordance with ethical or religious concepts regarding the virtues of renunciation. Belacqua endures wistful musings as he "remembers the pleasant gracious tunnel and cannot get back;" the narrator goes on to state that such a resumption of freedom is dependent upon "simply waiting until the thing happens" (DFW, 124). As we have observed, Schopenhauer employs the discourse of theology in order to emphasise our inability to achieve such emancipation through personal effort: "Necessity is the kingdom of nature; freedom is the kingdom of grace" (WWRI, 404). In what can be considered an elaboration of distinctly Pauline views,

# Schopenhauer asserts:

[O]ur state is originally and essentially an incurable one . . . we need *deliverance* from it . . . we ourselves belong essentially to evil, and are so firmly bound to it that our works according to law and precept, i.e., according to motives, can never satisfy justice or save us, but salvation is to be gained only through faith, in other words, through a changed way of knowledge. This faith can come only through grace, and hence as from without. This means that salvation is something quite foreign to our person, and points to a denial and surrender of this very person being necessary for salvation. Works, the observance of the law as such, can never justify, because they are always an action from motives. (WWRI, 407)

Such passages encapsulate Schopenhauer's view that we are utterly powerless to achieve emancipation from the Will regardless of how persuasive rational conclusions pertaining to the futility of striving might be. Accordingly, periods of Will-lessness are, to use Belacqua's word, a "dispensation." Schopenhauerian teleology can be understood in such statements as, "It is quite certain that life is really not given to us to be enjoyed, but to be overcome, to be got over" (*PPI*, 405). The indestructible nature of the Will ensures that life cannot be "got over" by suicide; rather than being a denial of the Will, the deliberate termination of one's own life is, in Schopenhauerian terms, a clear affirmation of the Will, wherein the individual craves to be free from suffering and thereby wills self-extermination. Schopenhauer contends that, in such a case, "the suicide . . . gives up by no means the will-to-live, but merely life since he destroys the individual phenomenon" (*WWRI*, 398). In *Dream* we learn that the "will and nill cannot suicide, they are not free to suicide. That is where the wretched Belacqua jumps the rails. And that is his wretchedness, that he seeks a means whereby the will and nill may be enabled to suicide and refuses to understand that they cannot do it, that they are not free to do it" (*DFW*, 124).

# The Better Consciousness

The narrative of *Dream* prioritises the concrete experience of Belacqua over the philosophical and religious discourses that it continually evokes. When we subject Belacqua's existential trials to a Schopenhauerian reading, we are apt to view his revulsion towards sexual desire as a rejection of the Will. However, Schopenhauer's notion of the Will as the fundamental source of our epistemic yearnings is no less pertinent to Belacqua's predicaments. Schopenhauer insists that, insofar as "it is the *will* that urges the power of knowledge to carry out its function" (*PPII*, 417), it leads the intellect towards "laborious effort and restless

activity" (*PPII*, 418). With such statements in mind, it is intriguing to note that Belacqua's "beatitude of indolence" is equally immune from the "glare of understanding" as it is from carnal longing. In his attempts to isolate himself from others, Belacqua is as keen to avoid the stimulation of his intellect as he is that of his body. His anguished experience of interpersonal engagement prefigures that of Murphy and is therefore liable to invite comparisons with authors such as à Kempis, especially in light of the abundance of references to that author which are to be found within Beckett's *Dream Notebook*. Belacqua's "instinct to make himself captive" (*DFW*, 43) leads him to throw up "a ring of earthworks; this to break not so much the flow of people and things to him as the ebb of him to people and things" (*DFW*, 43). We learn that Belacqua had "a great need . . . to pass, not to halt in the street, even when the man was nice" (*DFW*, 126).

Schopenhauer asserts that, "Sociability belongs with the dangerous, yes even pernicious inclinations since it makes us associate with creatures whose large majority is morally wicked and intellectually dull or perverted." In a statement which coheres with the isolationist tendencies of Belacqua as described in Dream and More Pricks and his aversion to what the latter text describes as "conversational nuisance" (MP, 6), Schopenhauer avers that, "every conversation as a rule leaves behind an unpleasant after-taste, a slight disturbance of one's inner peace" (MRIV, 512). We subsequently learn that Belacqua "desired rather vehemently to find himself alone in a room . . . banging and locking the door, extinguishing, and being at home to nobody" (DFW, 128). Liebert, "bursting with the very latest love and ideas (God forgive him, yes, ideas)" (DFW, 46), irks Belacqua in his attempts to "persuade" (DFW, 46) that connoisseur of inwardness and "elucidate" (DFW, 48) the works of poets such as Valéry, while the Syra-Cusa perturbs his serenity in her attempts to "titillate and arouse" (DFW, 48) him. Lucien's own conversational subjects are of a distinctly cerebral variety and include references to passages in Leibniz, and stories about "the grouch of Descartes against Galileo" (DFW, 47). Jean du Chas is also liable to imperil Belacqua's fleeting moments of release from volition and intellection. In the following passage we note how such blissful states are inherently linked to literary art and the means by which du Chas' discourse can inspire the rational modes of thought from which Belacqua aspires to be free:

Many a time had Belacqua, responding to the obscure need to verbalise a wombtombing or such like, murmured a syllable or two of incantation: "La sua bocca . . .", "Qui vive la pietà . . .", "Before morning you shall be here . . .", "Ange plein . . .", "Mais elle, viendra . . ." "Du bist so . . ." "La belle,

la...", only to have this filthy little hop-me-thumb Bartlett-in-the-box pop aloft with a hod of syllables, gash a glaring Caesarean in the nightfall of the ambiente, stitch and hemistich right left and centre the dying meditation, and drum the brain back into the counting-house. (*DFW*, 148)

In the manner of all reductive critics, du Chas possesses "an infallible instinct . . . for context" (*DFW*, 148) and is thereby incapable of accepting the type of existential impulses which prompt Belacqua to quote from figures such as Dante, Baudelaire, Mallarmé or to articulate his own creative vision. It is also interesting to note that Belacqua's attempts to articulate the nature of his mystical experiences refer to 'Alba' (1931) which, as one of Beckett's "involuntary exonerations" (*LI*, 88), emerged, as we have seen, from the "burrow of the 'private life'" (*LI*, 134). Schopenhauer, pointing to the sheer ineffability of such states, asserts that we are hindered by a "feeble tongue" (*WWRI*, 383) when we endeavour to bring the conceptual resources of language to bear on states of mind which transcend reason. Beckett had noted Augustine's advice for the Godly man who seeks the spiritual raptures of truth: "go back into your heart" (*DN*, 14). Belacqua associates his inner descent with Augustine's dictum: "If that is what is meant by going back into one's heart, could anything be better in this world or the next?" (*DFW*, 44) His propensity for relishing such "abdication of the daily mind" (*DFW*, 191) leads to his condemnation as "a penny maneen of a low-down low-church Protestant high-brow . . . hating the flesh . . . by definition" (*DFW*, 100).

While core traditions of Western thought, such as Platonism, Christianity, and Kantianism have attempted to highlight a dichotomy between reason and sensual desire, in Schopenhauerian terms, they are interrelated aspects of the Will's dominance over human affairs. Contrary to millennia of religious and philosophical teachings, Schopenhauer insists that the intellect is a mere instrument of the Will and is thereby powerless to achieve deliverance from the Will's presiding influence over human behaviour. Belacqua is driven by sexual longings which necessitate and defy rational analysis. It is only when Belacqua enjoys something akin to what Schopenhauer describes as the "better consciousness" that he is liberated from the various corporeal and intellectual exactions of the Will. Schopenhauer speaks of a "consciousness that lies beyond all experience and thus all reason, both theoretical and practical" (*MRI*, 23). His original notion of such a state of mind was not immediately bound up with the palliative aspects of art. He went on to note that it constitutes a "peace that is higher than all reason, that ocean-like calmness of the spirit . . . deep tranquillity" (*WWRI*, 411). However, it is clear that the temporary abolition of intellection is a

primary feature of both aesthetic experience and the "better consciousness." Schopenhauer's early ruminations about such experiences contain in nascent form many elements that would inform his later ideas about the Will-less states of mind that great art induces, yet when considered in relation to Beckett's work, Schopenhauer's early conceptions of modes of consciousness within which we could be free of "the storm of the passions" (*WWRI*, 385) and epistemic yearnings are remarkably pertinent to those passages of *Dream* which describe Belacqua's occasional periods of bliss. His emancipation from the "workaday glare" (*DFW*, 191) is markedly analogous to an intense aesthetic experience:

Plane of white music, warpless music expunging the tempest of emblems, calm womb of dawn whelping no sun, no lichen of sun-rising on its candid parapets, still flat white music, alb of timeless light. It is a blade before me, it is a sail of bleached silk on a shore . . . lamina of peace for my eyes and my brain slave of my eyes, pressing and pouring itself whiteness and music through blindness into the limp mind. (*DFW*, 182)

Schopenhauer claims that the "better consciousness lifts me into a world where there is no longer personality and causality or subject and object" (*MRI*, 44); such states of being are therefore akin to those which we enjoy when we lose ourselves in the aesthetic splendours of music. Similarly, Beckett's early poems and fiction occasionally articulate a yearning for oneness with a transcendent realm wherein individuality would be annulled. The protagonist of 'Assumption' (1929) "hungered to be irretrievably engulfed in the light of eternity, one with the birdless cloudless colourless skies, in infinite fulfilment" (*CSP*, 7). Such aspirations will be seen in subsequent chapters of this dissertation to recurrently tantalise the psyches of Beckett's afflicted characters. In *Dream* the Alba is explicitly identified as "white music" (*DFW*, 193); in her occasional role as an object of purely aesthetic interest to Belacqua it is instructive to note that she is related to an art form which Schopenhauer describes as "the panacea of all our sorrows" (*WWRI*, 262). By referring to what he considered to be the supreme expressive capacities of music, Beckett can be seen to evoke the reader's awareness of modes of consciousness which are as inscrutable as they are ineffable.

#### The Burden of Existence

In the words of Schopenhauer, "we, as the offspring of dissolute fathers, have come into the world already burdened with guilt and that, only because we have to be continually working off this debt, does our existence prove to be so wretched" (*PPII*, 301-2). Conceptions of ontological guilt are central to Belacqua's self-identity as his remorse for the efforts to which

Lucien is put on his behalf reveal: "I can only express my appreciation' said Belacqua by way of conclusion, as the taxi faded away into the gloaming, 'of your charming gesture by apologising for myself, by asking your pardon for the fact of myself" (*DFW*, 33). Schopenhauer contends that contrition does not, as is commonly thought, stem from regret over an act omitted or committed, but from a painful realisation of self, whereby our moral shortcomings reveal who we essentially are. His pronounced approval of the "fundamental principle, *Operari sequitur esse*" (*BM*, 122) can be seen in its widespread use throughout his ethical reflections. Elsewhere, he writes, "the prayer 'lead me not into temptation' means 'Let me not see who I am'" (*WWRI*, 367). The Smeraldina, baffled by Belacqua's indifference to sensual delights, shows much insight into his need to apply a "salve on the prurigo of living" (*DFW*, 181). As she ponders her curious blessings in having a dysfunctional lover, she is led to "wonder who I am to thank that you are born and that we met. I sopose I better not start trying to find out whose fault it is that you are born" (*DFW*, 58). In this sense she is deeply aware of Belacqua's evident distaste for the melancholy reality of existing as an Adamic man.

Schopenhauer's insistence upon the primacy of the Will over rationality in human affairs, wherein it manifests itself as a "mania" and "madness" (*MRIII*, 358), is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in his discussion of procreation as the process through which we are "necessarily doomed to live" (*MRIII*, 132). When we reflect upon the appalling nature of human existence, our desire to propagate should be regarded as antipathetic to reason and morals:

Let us for a moment imagine that the act of procreation were not a necessity or accompanied by intense pleasure, but a matter of pure rational deliberation; could then the human race really continue to exist? Would not everyone rather feel so much sympathy for the coming generation that he would prefer to spare it the burden of existence, or at any rate would not like to assume in cold blood the responsibility of imposing on it such a burden? (*PPII*, 300)

When Dan Rooney in *All That Fall* asks, "Did you ever wish to kill a child . . . Nip some young doom in the bud?" (*CDW*, 191) he displays his kinship with other Beckett characters who are averse to the perpetuation of life. Having expressed his view that, in crushing a child to death, he "would have been doing him a service," the narrator of 'The Expelled' (1977) declares, "Everyone is a parent, that is what keeps you from hoping" (*ECEF*, 8). Such desolate musings echo Schopenhauer's insistence that, "The continuous and perpetual

existence of the *human race* is merely a proof of its exuberance and wantonness" (*MRIV*, 349). It is also, as we have seen, indicative of the irremediably feeble nature of rationality which is unable to repress our procreative passions.

Belacqua's inability to harmonise corporeal lusts with the longings of the spirit reveals the antinomies of selfhood from which he incessantly suffers. Schopenhauer contends that our lives are "under the sway and even forced labour of that demon which hardly ever grants it an hour of freedom and is at the same time the direct or indirect author of almost every misfortune that befalls or threatens man" (PPI, 492). The Will-to-life constitutes what Schopenhauer considers to be the "natural man" (WWRI, 404-5) of Christianity. Belacqua aspires with Augustinian fervour to renounce his carnal dealings with the Smeraldina. He wishes to "slay his old man, to give, there and then, this love the slip" (DFW, 63). Beckett's use of Augustine's phrase, "I, inwardly pricked into anger in my chamber, slew my old man" (DN, 24) can be related to Schopenhauer's overt approval of such actions. Writing of the self which is "given up to pleasure and voluptuousness," he claims that it is necessary to "kill" (MRI, 124) that self. Given that "the body itself is only concrete willing" (WWRI, 175), our most immanent experiences are those which are engendered by affective and sensuous modes of being. The secondary nature of the intellect is based upon its entirely subservient role, wherein it is compelled to reduce experiential events to discursive frameworks. However, its capacity to probe the more disturbingly mysterious aspects of our lives is limited: "the intellect is a mere superficial force, essentially and everywhere touching only the outer shell, never the inner core of things" (PPI, 301). Interestingly, in an example of how Schopenhauer's convictions regarding the distinction between intuitive perception and abstract thought permeate his work, he claims that, "Our own experience may be regarded as the text, and reflection and knowledge as the commentary thereto" (PPI, 418). Just as genuine art is irreducible to any conceptual system, our most concrete experiences, being governed by the Will, are incapable of explication by theoretical means: "It is precisely because the subject of willing is given directly to our inner sense that the nature of willing itself allows of no further definition or description" (EFR, 53). At various points in Dream the irreducible complexities of Belacqua's character are emphasised whereby his opposition to systematic readings of his identity is notably resolute.

In my Introduction I referred to critics who are content to identify the conceptual systems that seem most applicable to the lives of Beckett's protagonists before ascribing didactic motives to Beckett's authorial strategies. In such readings Beckett's characters are often deprived of the type of passionate inwardness that constitutes their aesthetic rather than purely philosophical value. While the Mandarin's riposte to Belacqua acknowledges the young man's understanding of the fractured nature of identity, its aesthetic implications are equally noteworthy: "The reality of the individual, you had the cheek to inform me once, is an incoherent reality and must be expressed incoherently" (*DFW*, 101). If, as Schopenhauer puts it, "Consciousness is entirely fragmentary" (*MRIII*, 621), artistic depictions of the inner lives of human beings must resist the type of facile formal unities that could be said to constitute what the narrator terms "the gehenna of narratio recta" (*DFW*, 169). Belacqua pleads with the Alba to accept his singular traits and to forego attempts to categorise such foibles: "do not apply any system at me" (*DFW*, 190). While Belacqua's resistance to being systematically appraised is attributable to what he perceives to be the insoluble paradoxes of which his character is comprised, his capacity for perceptual enjoyment of people and artworks is lamentably limited by his propensity to rationalise.

#### **Sublime Illusions**

Belacqua, being "the cerebral type" (*DFW*, 164), attempts to discern a fundamental unity between the Smeraldina and the Syra-Cusa in a passage which resounds with Schopenhauerian echoes:

The most important thing is that I may, may I not, suppose that these two measures of discrete quantity could be coaxed into yielding a lowest common one of the most impassioning interest in the sense that in it might be expected to reside the quintessential kernel and pure embodiment of the occult force that holds me up, makes me wax pagan and static, the kernel of beauty if beauty it be, at least in this category (skirts). (*DFW*, 34)

According to Schopenhauer, insofar as all existing entities, organic and inorganic alike, share the Will as their ultimate substratum, the Will as an "occult force" is their "real and ultimate kernel" (*PPI*, 257). Schopenhauer contends that, "mankind according to its inner nature . . . is identical in all its phenomena and developments, and [is to be known] according to its Idea" (*WWRII*, 246). In Schopenhauerian terms Belacqua wishes to see "through the form of the phenomenon, the *principium individuationis*" (*WWRII*, 253) in order to apprehend the underlying unity which binds distinct entities. However, his attempts to do so by purely intellective means are thoroughly misguided. The narrator of *Dream* highlights Belacqua's inability to desist from attempts to rationalise such uniquely particular perceptual

experiences: "Unfortunate Belacqua, you miss our point the point: that beauty, in the final analysis, is not subject to categories, is beyond categories" (DFW, 35). Yet we have already learned that such insights had "occurred to poor Belacqua" (DFW, 34) without resulting in his ability to appreciate the individually specific aesthetic merits of the Smeraldina and those of the Syra-Cusa. Schopenhauer considers Kant's list of categories to be largely superfluous: "I demand that we throw away eleven of the categories, and retain only that of causality, but that we see that its activity is indeed the condition of empirical perception, this being not merely sensuous but intellectual" (WWRI, 448). While causality is an indispensable element of empirical perception, in judging what is "aesthetically right . . . we must proceed without the guidance of a rule" (MRIII, 425). Belacqua's interest in artistic experiences can clearly be seen in his willingness to spend money on "concerts, cinemas [and] theatres" (DFW, 37), but his devotion to aesthetic pleasures does not include opera: "never under any circumstances on opera" (DFW, 37). Although we are not frequently informed about Belacqua's specific reactions to the artworks that he encounters, his fondness for moments of disinterested pleasure could be seen as the basis of such enthusiasm. Belacqua might be all too inclined to categorise beauty, yet he "goggled like a fool" at Ewald Dülberg's "paullo-post-Expression of the Last Supper" (DFW, 77); such descriptions of his aesthetic reactions can be seen to provide an irreverent gloss upon the type of bafflement that Beckett described in *Proust* as typifying our enraptured responses to the irreducible perceptual glories of genuine art.

Schopenhauer repeatedly underscores causality to be the fundamental category of ordinary sensory processes, yet in moments of aesthetic contemplation, our minds are bereft of causal considerations. He claims that, "From what is seen the categories form concepts and through them we perceive and know all things in *relation* and hence also by means of the concept of *causality*" (*MRII*, 21). Schopenhauer insists that "the category of causality is forever and always asking *why*, and will do so for as long as the external world can be perceived and known by the mind that strives for unity" (*MRII*, 21). This accounts for the incessant troubles to which the human psyche is subject in its insatiable endeavours to render the inherently fragmented reality of experience amenable to explication by the master narratives of philosophy and religion. In a distinctly Schopenhauerian passage, Nietzsche speaks of

a profound illusion which first entered the world in the person of Socrates - the unshakeable belief that rational thought, guided by causality, can penetrate to the depths of being, and that it is capable not

only of knowing but even of correcting being. This sublime metaphysical illusion is an instinctual accompaniment to science, and repeatedly takes it to its limits.<sup>18</sup>

In attempting to subject beauty to comprehension by the conceptualising intellect Belacqua foregoes moments of blissful contemplation within which, as Beckett puts it elsewhere, "La tête est muette" (CPS, 115). The "sublime metaphysical illusion," as described by Nietzsche, is an endemic presence in the mind of Belacqua who seems unable to accept that beauty defies categorisation. While, for Schopenhauer, "causality is the great bond which holds together the scattered knowledge of experience and gives this some unity" (MRII, 21), he contends that our attempts to extend causality beyond our sensory acquaintance with the world in order to synthesise our emotional and cognitive experiences into grand conceptual narratives ensures perpetual frustration. The Mandarin's dismissal of Belacqua's tendency to "simplify and dramatise the whole thing with [his] literary mathematics" and his view that Belacqua's "type never accepts experience, nor the notion of experience" (DFW, 101) signifies Belacqua's inability to refrain from analytic reflections upon his sexual and aesthetic engagements with the female denizens of *Dream*. His creative potential is also diminished by his intellective ways. Having been accused by the Alba of writing poetry that is "'too clever" (DFW, 169), Belacqua is keen to express his awareness of his erstwhile shortcomings as an artist and of the ways in which his more recent work has been enriched through such insights: "Here the word is prolonged by the emotion instead of the emotion being gathered into and closed by the word" (DFW, 170). As we have already seen, one of Schopenhauer's primary aesthetic contentions is that, in genuine artworks, words, owing to their inherently conceptual nature, must be strictly subservient to the affective, imaginative, and perceptual elements of a writer's inspiring vision.

### **Irreducibly Complex**

Throughout *Dream* the narrator provides a metatextual commentary on the novel's compositional principles which evinces numerous affinities with Schopenhauer's aesthetics. We are promptly informed of the irreducibility of the Smeraldina to background circumstances:

The effect or concert of effects, unimportant as it seems to us and dull as ditchwater as we happen to know, that elicited the Smeraldina-Rima, shall not, for those and other reasons that need not be gone into, be stated. Milieu, race, family, structure, temperament, past and present and consequent and antecedent back to the first combination and the papas and mammas and paramours and cicisbei . . .

He goes on to state, "the background pushed up as a guarantee . . . that tires us" (DFW, 13). As we have seen, in his capacity as a lecturer, Beckett voiced his outright disdain for Balzac's creative procedures. It was Balzac's inclination to allow background details to be a "devouring thing" to the identity of his characters that most clearly irked Beckett, who, it will be remembered, in his approach to Racine's work, refused to "explain Andromaque by Troy." The narrator discloses the nature of his creative experiences in terms which remind the reader of Beckett's discussion of Proust's artistic practices. He speaks of "The tense passional intelligence, when arithmetic abates" which "twists through the stars of its creation in a network of loci that shall never be co-ordinate" (DFW, 16). In such passages language strains to encapsulate experiences which, in a Schopenhauerian sense, inherently defy expression. Here we are reminded of Beckett's claim in *Proust* that, "the attempt to communicate where no communication is possible is merely a simian vulgarity, or horribly comic" (PTD, 63). In the Schopenhauerian terminology of Proust, the bafflement that art induces is accompanied by ecstasy in a process whereby the pure subject of knowing is indissolubly linked to the Idea which is the perceptive focal point of his consciousness. In such states subject and object "are correlatives and are entirely merged in their being correlated" (MRII, 304). Those experiences are "endopsychic" in that they occur entirely within the enigmatic depths of the authorial consciousness. Descriptions of Belacqua's tribulations involve repeated references to artistic contexts, specifically the potential of creative experiences to free the subject from sensory engagement with the external world. The narrator of *Dream* describes such processes in terms which mirror key principles of Schopenhauer's thought:

The ecstatic mind, the mind achieving creation... rises to the shaftheads of its statement, its recondite relations of emergal, from a labour and a weariness of deep castings that brook no schema. The mind suddenly entombed, then active in an anger and a rhapsody of energy, in a scurrying and plunging towards exitus, such is the ultimate mode and factor of the creative integrity, its proton incommunicable; but there, insistent, invisible rat, fidgeting behind the astral incoherence of the art surface. (*DFW*, 16-17)

He is keen to point out that Belacqua is immune to such reflections: "Nothing whatever of the kind of course occupied his fetid head" (*DFW*, 17). In trying to persuade the Smeraldina that physical distance facilitates spiritual union, Belacqua claims that, "it was not when he . . . er .

.. held her ... but only when he sat down to himself in an approximate silence and had a vision on the strength of her or let fly a poem at her ... that he had her truly and totally, according to his God" (*DFW*, 25). If such passages are deemed to evince Belacqua's onanistic inclinations, it is interesting to juxtapose them with Schopenhauer's claim that the "inner strain" of reading "harms in the same way as onanism and generally any excitation of the genitals that arises through mere fantasy and without the influence of a naturally appropriate external stimulus, and that is more ravishing than the actual natural satisfaction of the sexual drive" (*VC*, 58-9). In recalling Belacqua's earlier inclination to write poems which are "too clever," the cerebral tendencies of a mind "stocked . . . and confused in a way that was opposed to its real interests" can be seen to preclude any sustained enjoyment of arational modes of creative activity which are, as the narrator puts it, "incommunicable" and which "brook no schema." The sheer futility of trying to describe the intrinsically ineffable nature of artistic creation is demonstrated by some of the most seemingly impenetrable passages of *Dream*. However, when viewed in relation to Schopenhauer's thought, they highlight Beckett's emerging interest in the unutterably mysterious nature of the creative act.

When speaking of Kafka, Beckett admitted to being "wary of disasters that let themselves be recorded like a statement of accounts" (LII, 465). In Dream Beckett shows a clear awareness that the author who concedes too much to form diminishes the extent to which his characters can be affected by the type of contingencies with which our world is thoroughly pervaded. Schopenhauer denounced Kant's obsession with systematic coherence. Kant "ruthlessly sacrificed truth to his love for architectonic symmetry" (MRII, 490). Murdoch observes that, "The strongest motive to philosophy is probably the same as the strongest motive to art: the desire to become the Demiurge and reorganise chaos in accordance with one's own excellent plan."20 If Beckett ever experienced such a motive, he clearly endeavoured to resist it. His undeviating commitment to presenting us with an artistic vision of the arbitrary realities of human experience underpins the sheer integrity of his art. Schopenhauer is adamant that "works of genius do not result from intention" (WWRII, 380). The author of genuine works cannot exert control over his compositional practices, which are the product of "a kind of instinctive necessity" (WWRII, 380), and are thereby bereft of "any admixture of deliberation and reflection" (WWRII, 409). The narrator of Dream admits to having once had the inclination to "fancy ourselves as the Cézanne . . . of the printed page, very strong on architectonics" (DFW, 178-9), yet his aspirations towards mastery of his material soon give way to professions of uncertainty and impotence when confronted with his "treacherous

theme" (DFW, 112). His early admission that, "we do not quite know where we are in this story" (DFW, 9), bespeaks the failure of his attempts to impose order. In a statement which underscores his purely descriptive role he asserts, "We strive to give the capital facts of his [Belacqua's] case . . . Facts, we cannot repeat it too often, let us have facts, plenty of facts" (DFW, 74). As we have seen, Schopenhauer stresses how genuine authors desist from partaking in the type of narratorial intervention which diminishes the reader's interpretative autonomy. The narrator of *Dream* is acutely aware of the limits of his influence over the novel's events. In Proust Beckett observed that, "No amount of voluntary manipulation can reconstitute in its integrity . . . the will [that] has - so to speak - buckled into incoherence" (PTD, 72). Later in the novel the narrator will solicit "the help of Apollo" (DFW, 112), who appears in his most Nietzschean guise as the arbiter of order, against "what threatens to [happen]" (DFW, 112). Likewise, when the narrator admits that Nemo "cannot be made, at least not by us, to stand for anything" (DFW, 10), his inability to coerce characters "who insist on being themselves" (DFW, 112) into line with symbolic or analogical pretexts is consonant with Schopenhauer's denunciation of authors who, in accordance with their systematic designs, create characters who are mere "personified conceptions" (WWRI, 239).

As we have seen, Beckett concurred with Schopenhauer's reservations regarding allegory wherein literary characters serve as mere illustrations of conventional concepts which are "exhausted by [their] definition" (*WWRI*, 169). Beckett can be seen to parody the creative procedures of the allegorical artist in the following paragraph:

Now the point is to be devoutly hoped that some at least of our characters can be cast for parts in a liŭliū. For example, John might be the Yellow Bell and the Smeraldina-Rima the Young Liū and the Syra-Cusa the Stifled Bell and the Mandarin the Ancient Purification and Belacqua himself the Beneficent Fecundity or the Imperfect, and so on. Then it would only be a question of juggling like Confucius on cubes of jade and playing a tune. (*DFW*, 10)

Nemo, "who will not for any consideration be condensed into a liŭ, who is not a note at all but the most regrettable simultaneity of notes" (DFW, 11) is another of Dream's intransigent personalities whose recalcitrant ways prompt the narrator to threaten a cessation of his activity: "We call the whole performance off, we call the book off, it tails off in a horrid manner . . . The music comes to pieces. The notes fly all over the place . . . all we can do . . . is to deploy a curtain of silence as rapidly as possible" (DFW, 112-13).

Schopenhauer and Beckett point to our habitual failings as consumers of art, which involve our seemingly irresistible tendency to situate artworks within theoretical frameworks. In the previous chapter we noted how Beckett's desire for us "to accept" his work mirrors Schopenhauer's arguments regarding the proprieties of our reactions to art and the inability of the author to offer explicative insights into his creations. Proust's explanations of his characters are "experimental and not demonstrative" (PTD, 87) and thereby abound with interpretative potentialities. The "not demonstrable" (DFW, 13) Smeraldina is no more amenable to placement within architectonic schemes than she is to reductive readings: "she has to be taken or left" (DFW, 13). The narrator's inability to articulate the essence of her identity is attributable to her seemingly inexhaustible selves: "the whole four of her and many another that have not been presented because they make us tired . . . spring - zeep! - apart" (DFW, 115). What Beckett describes as "the countless subjects that constitute the individual" (PTD, 19) prove deeply problematic for the narrator. Lucien is equally immune to the narrator's systematic intentions; in describing him as a "crucible of volatilisation (bravo!), an efflorescence at every moment, his contours in perpetual erosion . . . his whole person a stew of disruption and flux" (DFW, 116-17) the narrator provides further evidence of the protean nature of his characters' lives. Their tendency to "break up into a series" (DFW, 41) reveals the absurdity of the narrator's attempt to construct a coherent plot from the interrelating lives of such "disintegrating bric-à-brac" (DFW, 117). Ultimately, "They are no good from the builder's point of view, firstly because they will not suffer their systems to be absorbed in the cluster of a greater system, and . . . chiefly, because they themselves tend to disappear as systems" (DFW, 119).

Unlike Proust, who "is so absolutely the master of his form that he becomes its slave" (*LI*, 11), the narrator of *Dream* is not "absolute master" (*DFW*, 119) of his own material, yet his early pretensions towards narratorial omnipotence, wherein his work would constitute "a lovely Pythagorean chain-chant solo of cause and effect" (*DFW*, 10), are undermined by his increasing awareness of his characters' propensity to elude his systematic designs. He admits that "little by little Belacqua may be described, but not circumscribed; his terms stated, but not summed. And of course God's will be done should one description happen to cancel the next, or the terms appear crazily spaced" (*DFW*, 125). If the world is itself pervaded by dehiscence and disorder, the narrator's invocation of divine intent is yet another example of his desire to disclaim culpability for the unfolding events of the text over which his control seems to progressively diminish. His insistence upon establishing the formal and thematic

indeterminacies of *Dream* amounts to an apologia for ambiguity. A misquote from Dante serves to underscore his admission of defeat in the face of the incommunicable nature of Belacqua's tortuous entanglement with the Smeraldina: "*Da questo passo vinti ci concediamo* . . ." (*DFW*, 43). Belacqua's intransigence is perhaps more difficult for the narrator given his unwillingness to fulfil his pre-assigned role:

What is needed of course is a tuning fork, faithful unto death . . . to mix with the treacherous liūs and liūs and get a line on them . . . someone who could be always relied on for . . . the right squawk in the right place, just one pure permanent liū or liū . . . and all might yet be well. Just one, only one, tuningfork charlatan to move among the notes and size 'em up and steady 'em down and chain 'em together . . . and consolidate the entire article . . . We picked Belacqua for the job and now we find he is not able for it. (DFW, 125-6)

Likewise, Belacqua is no more willing to contribute to the thematic development of the novel than he is to assist the narrator in formal matters. If he had "any sense of his responsibilities as an epic liù he would favour us now with an incondite meditation on time. He has none and he does not" (*DFW*, 225).

With such instances in mind we can readily discern how Beckett's creative procedures were, from the outset of his writing career, cognate with Schopenhauer's aversion to allegory and epic literature, wherein characters exist as mere personifications of concepts; unlike such figures, there is "no real Belacqua" (DFW, 121); he "epitomized nothing" (DFW, 126). In his critique of the literary genres of epic and allegory Schopenhauer censures the necessity for "the aid and intervention of the concept and of the method of prudence, deliberation and intention" (MRIV, 70) on the part of the author. Beckett's stringent opposition to Balzac's "chloroformed world," within which characters reside as "clockwork cabbages" (DFW, 119-120), is evoked by the inability of the narrator to inflict his systematic designs upon the denizens of Dream, a novel in which characters such as the Alba are beheld "gliding ahead of schedule" (DFW, 151) across its textual terrain. Authors such as Balzac, who exalt formal and thematic unities, are antipathetic to Beckett as their writings fail to provide an authentic testament of the ineluctable disorder of earthly existence. Even those writers who would seem to share Beckett's occasionally sombre vision of the human lot do not evade reproach insofar as their compositional strategies present a conspicuously contrived view of human distress. Having read Theodore Francis Powys' Mr. Tasker's Gods (1924), Beckett told MacGreevy of his disappointment with that novel: "Such a fabricated darkness & painfully organised unified tragic completeness. The Hardy vice caricatured" (*LI*, 94). Likewise, in Beckett's view, Balzac imposed specious unities upon his literary realms: "In Balzac all reality is a determined, statistical entity, distorted, with total reality not respected." His writings, being a mere "distillation of Euclid" (*DFW*, 120), cannot engage with the fragmentary realities of human existence; a title such as *Scenes from Life* (*DFW*, 120) is thereby rendered risibly inapt. The narrator of *Dream*, having been compelled to renounce his earlier aspirations towards omnipotence, is keen to eschew such overtly Balzacian strategies: "The only unity in this story is, please God, an involuntary unity" (*DFW*, 133). He goes on to ask, "Can we measure them [*Dream*'s characters] once for all and do sums with them like those impostors that they call mathematicians?" and promptly replies, "We cannot. We can state them as a succession of terms, but we can't sum them and we can't define them" (*DFW*, 124).

In considering Beckett's views on Balzac, we become increasingly aware of why Schopenhauer's aesthetics proved to be eminently appealing to him. Schopenhauer's own sense of a correlation between the existential enigmas which beset human lives and the unutterable strangeness of aesthetic experience underscores the genuine author's inability to work in accordance with pre-conceived intent. The narrator of *Dream* derides Balzac's ability to "foresee and calculate" the "least vicissitude" (DFW, 119) of his material. Beckett's lectures revealed that he "hated Balzac . . . He hated what he called the snowball act, which means that you do something that has causes, causes, causes, causes so that it's all perfectly consistent."<sup>22</sup> Schopenhauer's contention that artistic creation operates without any reliance upon the logical imperatives of the principle of sufficient reason entails an outright dismissal of the role of causal sequence and consistency in artistic composition. Beckett commended Stendhal for achieving an "abolition of logical structure" (TCD MIC 60/97) in works such as Le Rouge et le noir (1830). Accordingly, Beckett considers Julien Sorel's self-awareness of his "irreducibly complex" (TCD MIC 60/101) identity to be an issue of prime aesthetic value. Schopenhauer claims that man's "true nature is an inner discord positively as long as he lives" (MRI, 123). Hence, in Schopenhauer's view, artistic depictions of human lives must take account of the fissures which permeate selfhood. In sharing such notions Beckett distances himself from Balzac whose "souci principal semble être toujours la parfait consequence du personage" (TCD MIC 60/21). Similarly, Beckett was fervently hostile towards the "enchaînement mécanique, fatal, de circonstances" (TCD MIC 60/40) that Balzac's novels propound.

Our sense of the metatextual irony of Belacqua's aversion to being systematically understood rests with our recognition that Beckett has written *Dream* while manipulating systematic thought for artistically expedient ends. Beckett's early approval of Flaubert's creative practices amounts to a formulation of aesthetic value. In Flaubert's work "Inner precision [is] contradictory. Confusion [is] irreducible" and in the "final analysis" the novel is "incoherent" (TCD MIC 60/95). In this sense, uncertainty and incoherence are lauded insofar as they form part of the very warp and woof of the textual fabric itself. *Dream* provides us with ample proof of Beckett's steadfast efforts to prevent his characters from being mere exemplifications of abstract dicta. Like Proust's creations and Lord Gall in 'Echo's Bones' "whose movements could not be forecast from one moment to another" (EB, 31), "they seem to obey an almost insane inward necessity" (PTD, 81); as multitudinous selves they invariably thwart "systematized interpretations" (DFW, 190). As we have observed, Schopenhauer considers the probing of the inner life to be the privilege and the prerogative of the novelist. Nevertheless, in acknowledging that, "We are a riddle to ourselves" (MRIV, 296), he was acutely mindful of the need for literature to admit the inherently incomprehensible aspects of selfhood by refusing to present protagonists which merely personify conceptual principles.

#### The Sublime Character

Belacqua's sensitivity to the limitations of linguistic expression leads him to consider French to be a more suitable artistic medium than English, given that the latter is the language in which he tends to "overdo" (*DFW*, 64) communication. While Beckett could later celebrate how French would enable him to write "without style" (quoted in *JK*, 357), Schopenhauer, lamenting his contemporaries' obsession with "word economy" (*PPII*, 530) and their associated use of "*pernicious Gallicisms*" (*PPII*, 529), dismisses French as "dull and colourless" (*PPII*, 528-9). It is intriguing to note that Schopenhauer and Beckett tend to agree about the fundamental attributes of French regardless of the glaring antipathy between their respective evaluations of that language. Schopenhauer's reservations about French were partially inspired by his conviction that all languages are intrinsically conceptual and are thereby deficient in their capacity to communicate the inherently perceptual inspiration that prompts the artist to create. Schopenhauer's exaltation of music as an art form which is utterly devoid of any conceptual associations leads him to highlight its ability to communicate the composer's insights into the world by comparing it to philosophical thought: "What in music is the 'pure phrase or movement' is in philosophy perfect clearness

in so far as it is the *conditio sine qua non*" (*PPI*, 11). In *Dream* Beckett refers to music as an "impassive statement of itself drawn across the strata and symbols" (*DFW*, 181), a depiction which encapsulates the expressive immediacy of that preeminent art form to which literature can merely aspire. If music is an "impassive statement of itself," it constitutes a supreme medium of articulation which defies verbal description. In this context and in light of those comments from *Dream*'s narrator which acknowledge his inability to "sum" or "define" his characters, it is instructive to consider the significance of Beckett's refusal to elucidate *Endgame*: "Hamm as stated, Clov as stated, together as stated in such a place, and in such a world, that's all I can manage, more than I could" (*Har*, 24). Insofar as they are akin to the Smeraldina in that they must be "taken or left" we recognise how Beckett's lifelong tendency to evade exegetical questions can be related to the aesthetic values that inspired his earliest creative practices, where "a statement and not a description" (*LI*, 134) represents the purest form of literary communication attainable.

In spite of the narrator's impressive linguistic repertoire, it is the visual arts and music which are repeatedly relied upon to achieve expressive precision. Beckett's familiarity with aesthetic framing techniques in Proust's work, whereby music and the visual arts are invoked to enhance the reader's appreciation of a character's physical, emotional, or psychological attributes may well have contributed to such instances in *Dream*, yet Schopenhauer's suspicions regarding the efficacy of language as an expressive medium are no less suggestively pertinent here. The narrator contemplates the possibility of arranging the Syra-Cusa and *Dream*'s other main female characters in accordance with musical standards: "We could chain her up with the Smeraldina-Rima and the little Alba, our capital divas, and make it look like a sonata, with recurrence of themes, key signatures, plagal finale and all" (*DFW*, 49). When attempting to describe the relations between Belacqua and the Alba, the narrator's use of musical allusions hints at his sense of the impotence of words. In order to gain a proper comprehension of the exact condition of those characters the reader is encouraged to consider Beethoven's work:

they were just pleasantly drunk. That is, we think, being more, becoming and unbecoming less, than usual. Not so far gone as to be rapt in that disgraceful apotheosis of immediacy from which yesterday and tomorrow are banished and the off dawn into the mire of coma taken; and yet at the same time less buttoned up in their cohesion, more Seventh Symphony and contrapanic-stuck than usual. (*DFW*, 188)

In this context it is also noteworthy that the narrator's artistic aspirations are informed by a

sense of the importance for his readers to overlook the words he will use in favour of the spaces and silences with which they will be interspersed:

The experience of my reader shall be between the phrases, in the silence, communicated by the intervals, not the terms, of the statement, between the flowers that cannot coexist, the antithetical (nothing so simple as antithetical) seasons of words, his experience shall be the menace, the miracle, the memory, of an unspeakable trajectory. (*DFW*, 138)

In my Introduction I referred to Beckett's notion of the evocative potential of the unsaid in painting and poetry where that which is communicated provides intimations of the incommunicable. The narrator's descriptive endeavours involve numerous suggestions of the deficiencies of language and aspirations towards the type of supreme expressive capacities of music:

I think of Beethofen . . . of his earlier compositions where into the body of the musical statement he incorporates a punctuation of dehiscence, flottements, the coherence gone to pieces, the continuity bitched to hell because the units of continuity have abdicated their unity, they have gone multiple, they fall apart, the notes fly about, a blizzard of electrons; and then vespertine compositions eaten away with terrible silences. (*DFW*, 139)

When considered in relation to Schopenhauer's aesthetics, such opaque descriptions can be seen to evince the inability of words, which are simply "the language of reason" (*WWRI*, 259), to convey anything of significance about music. As Schopenhauer subsequently puts it, "music is a language that [the] reasoning faculty does not understand" (*WWRI*, 260). The upshot of such a view is that words, as the products of reason, are intrinsically devoid of the ability to encapsulate the aesthetic experiences engendered by music. In terms which indicate why Schopenhauer considered music to be expressively superior to the other arts in communicating the authentic nature of existence, he refers to the "insoluble irrationalities" and the "discords essential to it" (*WWRI*, 266). When juxtaposed with the following passage, the above remarks suggest that Schopenhauer and Beckett agreed about the means by which Beethoven's work mirrors core features of our lived experience in the world:

[A] symphony of Beethoven presents us with the greatest confusion which yet has the most perfect order as its foundation; with the most vehement conflict which is transformed the next moment into the most beautiful harmony. It is *rerum concordia discors*, a true and complete picture of the nature of the world, which rolls on in the boundless confusion of innumerable forms, and maintains itself by constant destruction. (*WWRII*, 450)

The narrator's sense of the necessity for literature to strive to emulate conditions most commonly achieved by music is redolent of Schopenhauer's own vision of music as embodying the ultimate standards of artistic expression. When, in 1937, Beckett spoke of his desire for "a literature of the unword," which would in essence constitute an "assault against words in the name of beauty" (D, 173), he pointed to the exemplary nature of Beethoven's work, where "through whole pages we can perceive nothing but a path of sounds suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence" (D, 172). Beckett's effusive comments about music may seem to be impenetrably strange, yet their affinities with Schopenhauer's aesthetics are both demonstrable and illuminating. Schopenhauer asserts that, "in the explanation of this wonderful art [music], the concept shows its inadequacy and limits" (WWRI, 260), because that which "is not abstract cannot be communicated" (WWRI, 370). Accordingly, to speak about the aesthetic properties of music is to transgress the bounds of the intelligible and the effable. Belacqua's notion of the Alba's ideal role as one who would "remain quite useless and beautiful, like the very best music that could be had" (DFW, 193) contrasts markedly with his later concerns about the visibility of her back and the narrator's description of her being "dressed insidiously up to the nines" (DFW, 207). As we have seen, Beckett's notion of uselessness as the hallmark of supreme art converges with that of Schopenhauer. Here the Alba has been aestheticized into an ideal figure upon whom Belacqua may bestow disinterested attention. In such a capacity she can provide "copy for his wombtomb" (*DFW*, 175).

At various points in *Dream* physical descriptions of characters rely upon the world of the visual arts as a means of conveying the precise appearances of the figures in question. In such instances language may be seen to adopt a subordinate role where similarities may be shown but not said. In the following passage Schopenhauer explains why painting is so immensely effective as an expressive medium: "a *picture* [can] bring us more easily than does something actual and real to the apprehension of a (Platonic) Idea . . . whereby the picture stands nearer to the Idea than does reality" (*PPII*, 421). The narrator relies upon poetry, music, and sculpture to convey an image of the Syra-Cusa's body: "The sinewy fetlock sprang, Brancusi bird, from the shod foot, blue arch of veins and small bones, rose like a Lied to the firm wrist of the reins, the Bilitis breasts" (*DFW*, 33). Similarly, we read that the Pyrotechnist "caressed an unshaven Gioconda smile" (*DFW*, 96), with Leonardo's masterpiece evoked to enhance our imaginative apprehension of that character, just as our attempts to visualise "Lucien's features bloom" (*DFW*, 116) can be aided by thinking of "Rembrandt's portrait of his

brother" (DFW, 116). Our impression of the Alba is also clarified by her resemblances to El Greco's work. Her eyes are "as big and black as El Greco painted, with a couple of good wet slaps from his laden brush, in the Burial of the Count of Orgaz the debauched eyes of his son or was it his mistress?" (DFW, 174) Likewise, descriptions of the Frica's appearance abound with allusions to the visual arts: she is "quite Sistine . . . so *frescosa*, from the waist up . . . a positive gem of Quattrocento" (DFW, 216). The abundance of such instances may be seen to signify the intensity of Beckett's concern with the penury of purely linguistic depictions. On July 3 1937 Beckett informed Hone that he had been reading Schopenhauer's infamous reflections on the defining characteristics of females (LI, 509). Whether Beckett was familiar with Schopenhauer's notorious views on women prior to that is a matter of conjecture, but the presentation of female characters in *Dream* evinces intriguing correspondences with Schopenhauer's misogynistic musings. In yet another repudiation of notions regarding the efficacy of reason in human affairs, Schopenhauer asserts that, "Only the male intellect, clouded by the sexual impulse, could call the undersized, narrow-shouldered, broad-hipped, and short-legged sex the fair sex; for in this impulse is to be found its whole beauty. The female sex could be more aptly called the unaesthetic" (PPII, 619). In Dream we learn that the Smeraldina's

body was all wrong, the peacock's claws . . . definitely all wrong. Poppata, big breech, Botticelli thighs, knock knees, ankles all fat nodules, wobbly, mammose, slobbery-blubbery, bubbubbubbub, a real button-bursting Weib, ripe. Then perched aloft on top of this porpoise prism, the loveliest little pale cameo of a birdface he ever clapped his blazing blue eyes on. By God but he often thought she was the living spit of the Madonna Lucrezia del Fede. (*DFW*, 15)

While "the truly tremendous bowel" (*DFW*, 43) of the Smeraldina's hips repels Belacqua, it was when the she appeared at her most ethereal, "without limbs or paps in a great stillness of body . . . casting no shade, herself shade" (*DFW*, 23), that he became enthralled by her.

However, such alluring stasis is inordinately transient. We learn that "it was only a question of seconds before she would surge up at him, blithe and buxom and young and lusty" (*DFW*, 23). Such behaviour induces "a poor anger that rises when the stillness is broken . . . the poor anger of the world that life cannot be still" (*DFW*, 24). The afflictive presence of the Smeraldina proves inimical to Belacqua's desire for introspective absorption. *Dream* thereby anticipates *Quad* (1984) in conveying a vision of what Beckett referred to as "the constant agitation of man's existence." Schopenhauer's idyllic visions of the imperturbable serenity of Will-lessness are described with reference to the perpetual tumult which harrows our lives:

"In contrast to the eternal *restless movement* which is the strangest characteristic of this world and of all its beings . . . there must yet be an existence in *eternal quiescence* . . . denial of the will-to-live will be an affirmation of that existence" (*MRIV*, 263). The Smeraldina's ambivalent qualities are mirrored in Schopenhauer's own reflections upon the conflicting capacities of women to charm and repel. Schopenhauer describes "the sublime character" as an individual who can "perceive the beauty of women without hankering after them" (*WWRI*, 206). While he considers our notions of the bodily appeal of women to be a primary example of our enslavement to the Will, he acknowledges that, "No object transports us so rapidly into purely aesthetic contemplation as the most beautiful human countenance and form, at the sight of which we are instantly seized by an inexpressible satisfaction and lifted above ourselves and all that torments us" (*WWRI*, 221). In various instances Belacqua can be seen to revel in the possibility of such enraptured and distinctly asexual experiences. Throughout *Dream* the carnal threat that female characters pose is attenuated by their capacity to serve as objects of dispassionate contemplation.

Belacqua's dealings with an unnamed "proper lady" (*DFW*, 11) also involve fascinating thematic parallels with those passages from Beckett's theoretical and critical writings which align most clearly with Schopenhauer's aesthetics. In the following passage we note how Belacqua's imagination thrives when it is freed from the need to engage with material reality, specifically the corporeal exertions of sensual desire:

The real presence was a pest because it did not give the imagination a break. Without going as far as Stendhal, who said - or repeated after somebody - that the best music (what did he know about music anyway?) was the music that became inaudible after a few bars, we do declare and maintain stiffly (at least for the purposes of this paragraph) that the object that becomes invisible before your eyes is, so to speak, the brightest and best. This is not to suggest that the lady in question did that. We simply mean that at the time we are referring to she was not an object at all, no, not an object in any sense of the word . . . what it boils down to in the end is this: that he did not want to be slavered and slobbered on by her. (*DFW*, 12)

As we have seen, in Schopenhauer's aesthetics, the sensory experience that initiates blissful contemplation is superseded by the Ideal image that we behold inwardly which is atemporal and aspatial and is thereby liberated from the physical object such as the book, painting, or sculpture which induced our rapt state of attention. In a purely material sense, therefore, such objects can be said to have become "invisible." Accordingly, the inspired percipience

occurring within the mind's eye is akin to the experience of artist whose imaginative gifts are symbiotically linked with his sensory capacities in his apprehension of that which is ontologically independent of pure sensory reality. When we subsequently read of "the cute little Saint Matthew Angel that I swear Van Ryn never saw the day he painted" (*DFW*, 138), we recall *Dream*'s earlier statements regarding the disappearance of the "real presence" as being a prerequisite to imaginative autonomy.

The central female characters of *Dream* are capable of eliciting disinterested appreciation from Belacqua but such experiences are inherently tenuous given their potential to appear as more sexually than aesthetically alluring. The Smeraldina's troublesome presence is clearly alleviated by Belacqua's fondness for art. When staying with her family, Belacqua's "absorption in a Vasari he had found in his host's library and the latest pictures hanging on his host's wall and the ineffectual darts he was liable to make at the piano at any hour of the day or night" (DFW, 76) provide relief from the "usual fiascos and semi-fiascos" (DFW, 76) that constitute his sexual relations with the Smeraldina. Belacqua's reactions to Vasari's work and the paintings which adorn the Mandarin's wall suggest a Schopenhauerian recognition of art's potential to provide temporary liberation from the tumultuous aspects of physical desire. His sense of exasperation towards Vasari's writings can also be seen to echo many of Beckett's own remarks about the inanity of artistic commentaries which seek to impose exegetical coherence upon their focus of study. Vasari is all too keen to offer a seemingly unquestionable account of the creative motives of his chosen subjects. His brief summary of the vacillating fortunes of the arts from the Classical period to the beginnings of the Renaissance, imbued as it is with teleological significance, whereby Cimabue, "destined to take the first steps in restoring the art of painting to its earlier stature," is guided by "providence" clearly irks Belacqua, who "wondered why, so little did it matter" (DFW, 77). Belacqua's creator deplored any attempt to rationalise such historical developments. In his German Diaries Beckett states:

I say I am not interested in a "unification" of the historical chaos any more than I am in the "clarification" of the individual chaos, + still less in the anthropomorphisation of the inhuman necessities that provoke the chaos. What I want is the straws, flotsam, etc., names, dates, births + deaths, because that is all I can know . . . I say the background + the causes are an inhuman + incomprehensible machinery + venture to wonder what kind of appetite it is that can be appeased by the modern animism that consists in rationalising them. Rationalism is the last form of animism. Whereas the pure incoherence of times + men + places is at least amusing. (Quoted in *JK*, 244)

The mention of "straws and flotsam" in the above passage is a strikingly lucid metaphorical assertion of Beckett's sense of the perennially shifting and chaotically contingent nature of human experience which is impervious to the ordering categories of intellection.

As we have observed, Schopenhauer considers coherence to be a cardinal criterion of philosophy. He speaks of the "complete unity and agreement of [the] fundamental ideas" of his own work which give a "favourable indication of its truth" (PPI, 129). We have noted that, in contrast to philosophy, Schopenhauer claims that art must not be subservient to concepts of thematic or formal unity. In a particularly arresting statement, Beckett proclaimed his suspicions regarding the falsifying effects of form: "I don't know any form that doesn't shit on being in the most unbearable manner. Excuse my language."<sup>25</sup> If a literary work constitutes an authentic testament of human experience, its characters should not be readily susceptible to systematic readings which reduce their identities to those of allegorical puppets. We have seen how Beckett expressed disguiet at the ways in which literary art could falsify experience in its attempts to encapsulate quotidian reality in the abstract medium of words. According to Beckett, "If you really get down to the disaster, the slightest eloquence becomes unbearable. Whatever is said is so far from experience." 26 Dream, replete as it is with recondite references and gratuitous wordplay, cannot entirely evade censure when considered in relation to Beckett's later critical pronouncements. However, this chapter has attempted to show that, in relation to Schopenhauer's stringent criteria of aesthetic value, it is by no means worthy of outright dismissal as a dispensable apprentice work.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Quoted in Van Hulle and Nixon, Samuel Beckett's Library, p. xvii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Knowlson, 'Samuel Beckett: The Intricate Web of Life and Work', p. 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Quoted in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce, New and Revised Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 505.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Quoted in Mark Nixon, 'Between Art-world and Life-world: Beckett's *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*' in Ulrika Maude and Matthew Feldman (eds.), *Beckett and Phenomenology* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 100.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Pilling, A Companion to Dream, p. 84.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Quoted in Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Pilling, A Companion to Dream, pp. 16-17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Quoted in Nixon, Samuel Beckett's German Diaries1936-1937, p. 58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Pilling, Beckett before Godot, p. 62.

Schopenhauer was also scathing in his attitude to the pretensions of academics who, through "constant lecturing and the writing of books" (*BM*, 72), do not have sufficient time to master their subjects and are thereby bereft of genuine knowledge of what they attempt to teach. In support of such views, Schopenhauer quotes Diderot's *Le neveu de Rameau* (1763), a book with which Beckett was also familiar, in order to illustrate the absurdity of such situations: "And do you think that these teachers will understand the branches of learning in which they give instruction? Nonsense, my dear sir, nonsense. If they possessed enough knowledge to instruct in them, they would not teach them.' 'And why?' 'Because they would have spent their lives in studying them'" (*BM*, 73).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> James Knowlson, 'Foreword' in Eoin O'Brien, *The Beckett Country: Samuel Beckett's Ireland* (London: Faber and Faber/Black Cat Press, 1986), p. xiv.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Quoted in Knowlson and Knowlson (eds.), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, p. 137.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Quoted in William Ralph Inge, *Christian Mysticism: The Bampton Lectures* (London: Methuen, 1899), p. 208.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Quoted in Safranski, Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy, p. 93.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, I.405 in H. C. Beeching (ed.), *The Poetical Works of John Milton* (London: Oxford University Press, 1908), p. 191.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Quoted in Hübscher, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer in its Intellectual Context*, p. 311.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, tr. Shaun Whiteside (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Quoted in Knowlson and Knowlson (eds.), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, p. 309.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter Conradi (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1999), pp. 446-7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Quoted in Gontarski, Fehsenfeld, and McMillan, 'Interview with Rachel Burrows', p. 15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Quoted in James Knowlson, 'A Portrait of Beckett' in John Haynes and James Knowlson, Images of Beckett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, *Volume I*, tr. George Bull (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 49.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Quoted in Knowlson and Knowlson (eds.), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, p. 136.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Quoted in Harvey, Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic, p. 249.

## Chapter 3

# **This Strange World**

In More Pricks Than Kicks the existential predicaments of Belacqua repeatedly engender reflections upon some of the most "shabby mysteries" (MP, 174) of being. In numerous ways the Belacqua of *More Pricks* develops a personal realisation of the veracity of Schopenhauer's contention that, "this human world is the kingdom of chance and error, which rule without mercy in great things and small" (WWRI, 417). However, Belacqua occasionally entertains the thought that the realm in which he resides is governed by necessitarian forces. Schopenhauer's own irreconcilable views on the issues of contingency and determinism are revealed when we juxtapose his aforementioned view of the world as a realm of sheer arbitrariness with this question: "What would become of this world if necessity did not permeate all things and hold them together, but especially if it did not preside over the generation of individuals? A monster, a rubbish heap, a caricature without sense and significance - the work of true and utter chance" (FW, 55). When Beckett reflected upon his admiration for Schopenhauer's work his "entire indifference to the apriori forms of verification" ensured that his recognition of the systematic inconsistencies to be found in Schopenhauer's thought would not diminish his overall appreciation as Schopenhauer's "generalisation shows fewer cracks than most generalisations" (LI, 550). Beckett's recognition that Schopenhauer's lifelong and rigorous musings upon the nature of reality yielded irresolvable conceptual discrepancies may have constituted further evidence of the incapacity of reason to comprehend or alleviate the perennial problems of human existence.

Following his reading of Cassirer's biography of Kant in the Spring of 1938, Beckett wrote "short stories antinomial" in his 'Whoroscope Notebook.' In that work Cassirer describes the "poignancy" of "the antinomy between freedom and causality." Schopenhauer offers a basically Kantian definition of an antinomy as a contradiction generated by rationality which is "not to be avoided or solved" (WWRI, 29). Accordingly, our experience of intellective dissonance, whereby we are confronted with the equipollence of competing conclusions, mirrors the existential chaos of human affairs in its resistance to definitive solutions.

Contingencies ranging from the humorous to the horrific pervade the pages of More Pricks and include instances as diverse as a child's accidental death owing to her "childish fever" (MP, 34) to return home; a humourist's sarcastic gesture of charity, whereby a penny's failure to resound signifies the risible failure of human intent: "the joke was lost" (MP, 126); and

Belacqua's eventual demise owing to medical ineptitude: "they had clean forgotten to auscultate him" (MP, 164). However, Belacqua's providential deliverance from amatory involvement is an event which serves to suggest the presence of a determinative agency in the world of More Pricks. When Belacqua absconds from Winnie in order to enjoy the putative pleasures of self-absorption "the benevolence of the First Cause appears beyond dispute" (MP, 24). Yet, it can also be said that a "malignant destiny" (MP, 160) is an intermittent influence within the realm described by the text. While the narrator of *More Pricks* is not quite as forthcoming in acknowledging his lack of control over unfolding events as the narrator of *Dream*, his ceding of mastery to adventitious happenings could be seen as a recognisably Beckettian move. Beckett's inscription of thematic contingencies into a work perpetuates semantic indeterminacies in a way which, as Schopenhauer would put it, "always leave[s] something over for the reader to think" (WWRII, 408). Insights acquired from an acquaintance with the arbitrary nature of existence can, in Schopenhauerian terms, lead to the realisation that the life of the mind "lifts a man above the mutations of fortune." In the previous chapter I noted how Beckett's early authorial strategies were rendered explicit by the various metatextual comments provided in *Dream*. In that novel Beckett's Schopenhauerian denunciations of authors who are willing to overlook the inherent chaos of human affairs by imposing thematic or formal unities bespeaks a commitment to art which accepts the irrepressible discord which pervades self and world. Pilling, on the basis of his meticulous study of Beckett's early compositional concerns, notes "a tendency to privilege disaggregation and disunity throughout" More Pricks. Accordingly, the text can be seen to emulate and extend the narrative procedures of Dream. Yet given that More Pricks depicts a world which abounds with tortuous contingencies, the absence of textual unities is no mere formal device. Despite the overtly episodic nature of the collection, it is worth noting that a comparative reading of Belacqua's exploits is encouraged. In judging Belacqua's intricate being we are referred by the narrator to his propensities as "evinced in previous misadventures" (MP, 82). Similarly, the narrator of 'Echo's Bones' invites the reader to compare Mick Doyle's apparent magnanimity, having been spat upon by Belacqua, with that of the vagabond's reaction in 'Walking Out' to "the blue bitch's affront" (EB, 38).

In July 1934 an anonymous reviewer of *More Pricks* noted that "the implicit effect of satire" to be found in the text was achieved by Beckett's decision to embellish "the commonplace with a wealth of observation and sometimes erudition" (*GF*, 43). In Chapter Two we noted how, in composing *Dream*, Beckett managed to synthesise autobiography and learning in a

number of aesthetically enriching ways. In its obsessive depictions of "the commonplace," *More Pricks* coheres with Schopenhauer's observation that the literary artist is called upon not so much to "narrate great events, but to make interesting those that are trifling" (*PPII*, 440). *More Pricks* abounds with descriptions of "little encounters and contretemps" (*MP*, 127) which amount to "the little things that are so important" (*MP*, 132), insofar as seemingly mundane events can generate the most profoundly oblique enigmas. Beckett's notion of the interrogative nature of art, whereby it "raises questions that it does not attempt to answer" (*GF*, 220) was examined in Chapter One in relation to its affinities with salient principles of Schopenhauer's aesthetics. While in approaching *Dream* the reader was required to decipher allusive references to seminal developments in the history of art and ideas, at various points in *More Pricks* Beckett openly flaunts improprieties of logical inference by means of a distinctly disjunctive narrative. Sentences such as, "Though he [Mr bboggs] might be only able to afford a safety-bicycle he was nevertheless a man of few words" (*MP*, 85), can be seen to exalt the alogical.

This chapter will explore a variety of ways in which More Pricks serves to posit the type of aesthetic, ethical, epistemological, and theological questions that Schopenhauer considers to be the mutual focus of philosophy and art and which Dostoevsky referred to as "accursed," 5 owing to their ineluctable yet unanswerable nature. Schopenhauer states, "Not merely philosophy but also the fine arts work at bottom towards the solution of the problem of existence" (WWRII, 406); he later elaborated upon that observation by stressing that, "The problem of existence is very great and very close to us; this existence that is dubious, questionable, tormented, fleeting, and dream-like" (PPII, 499). In a collection where "Doubt, Despair and Scrounging" (MP, 43) are thematic constants, the alignment of "the darkest passages of Schopenhauer" (DFW, 61) with Beckett's art is compellingly clear. Contrary to his namesake in *Dream*, the Belacqua that we encounter in *More Pricks* is not inclined to employ ponderous conceptual discourse in his engagement with the multifarious mysteries of existence. Accordingly, More Pricks is not as overtly infused with erudite allusions as Dream happens to be, yet the existential predicaments of Belacqua repeatedly provoke learned meditations upon some of the most recondite aspects of life. In 'Dante and the Lobster' Belacqua's intellectual exertions, coupled with his experiential acquaintance with earthly sufferings, confront him with the impotence of reason through the inscrutability of woe.

## **The Accursed Questions**

Schopenhauer describes the "reasoning faculty's constant demand for an account" (MRI, 429) in ways which illuminate the epistemic plight of Belacqua. Belacqua yearns for understanding in the midst of the wretchedness which he confronts in literature and the world; accordingly, he is frequently beset by what Schopenhauer terms the "unfathomable and ever-disquieting riddle" (WWRII, 171) of an existence within which we are overwhelmed by "the monstrous, unspeakable evil, the dreadful, heart-rending misery in the world" (WN, 142). Schopenhauer recognises that our attempt to rationally comprehend the lamentable nature of being is an exercise in futility: "it is indeed an insoluble problem, since even the most perfect philosophy will always contain an unexplained element" (WWRII, 579). Within Beckett's literary realms the mere observation of suffering is enough to inspire otiose reflections upon its origins and import. Such endeavours are, however, invariably fruitless. As Kroll puts it, "Belacqua demonstrates his inability to learn from his most significant confrontation with an absurd universe." Schopenhauer's reflections upon our insatiable yet issueless tendency to strive for an understanding of our calamitous yet unintelligible experiences can be seen to exemplify the predicaments of the Belacqua of More Pricks. He states:

The ephemeral generations of human beings arise and pass away in quick succession, whilst the individuals, beset with anxiety, want, and pain, dance into the arms of death. They never weary of asking what is the matter with them and what is the meaning of the whole tragi-comic farce. They cry to heaven for an answer, but it remains silent. Of the many hard and deplorable things in the fate of man, not the least is that we exist without knowing whence, whither, and to what purpose. (*PPII*, 361)

Schopenhauer's decidedly negative - and admittedly contentious - views of Dante's work underscore the poet's "studied and even effected paucity of words" (*PPII*, 443) and his "barren and tedious scholasticism" (*PPII*, 444). Such antagonism aligns with his steadfast view that genuine literary artists "do not speak after a systematic investigation, but human nature lies open to their penetrating insight; and so their utterances hit directly on the truth" (*FW*, 78). Schopenhauer also questions Dante's authorial motives in a way which suggests that his rationalisation of infernal torments in accordance with paradigm conceptions of divine justice led to his inability to empathise with those who had incurred God's purportedly warranted wrath: "One cannot help thinking that Dante had at the back of his mind a secret satire on this pretty world order, otherwise it would need a quite peculiar taste to delight in painting revolting absurdities and never-ending scenes of execution" (*PPII*, 443). In a

chillingly austere statement, replete with overtones of brute necessity, Dante's Virgil claims that to query God's motives is futile: "Where will and power are one" questioning must cease, yet within his work divine punishment is judiciously apportioned to individuals who understand the basis of their afflictions. By contrast, Beckett's protagonists endure misfortunes which seem capriciously bestowed by unintelligible yet omnipresent forces. Unlike Dante, whose "movements of compassion in hell" are, according to Signorina Ottolenghi, "rare" (*MP*, 11) and condemned as impious, Belacqua's sensitivity to suffering cannot be appeased by means of deontological reflection. His rigidly academic ruminations upon Dante's text are notably antipathetic to the type of intuitive absorption that Schopenhauer considers to be the concomitant boon of genuine art as they merely generate a plethora of tedious questions:

[P]art two, the demonstration, was so dense that Belacqua could not make head or tail of it. The disproof, the reproof, that was patent. But then came the proof, a rapid shorthand of the real facts, and Belacqua was bogged indeed. Bored also, impatient to get on to Piccarda. Still he pored over the enigma, he would not concede himself conquered, he would understand at least the meanings of the words, the order in which they were spoken and the nature of the satisfaction that they conferred on the misinformed poet. (MP, 3)

Throughout *More Pricks* semantic potentialities abound; in the above passage the reader is required to ponder why Dante is a "misinformed poet." In such instances, bereft of any conclusive ideas regarding the elided material, the reader may, when faced with such an "impenetrable passage," endure "the itch of [a] mean quodlibet" (*MP*, 3).

The strain of Belacqua's cognitional trials intensifies his need to evade "the incontinent bosthoons of his own class, itching to pass on a big idea" (*MP*, 8-9), yet following his reading of Dante, his mind is imbued with irrepressible curiosity. He is moved to question the fate of one who endures something akin to what Schopenhauer describes as God's "studied cruelty" (*PPII*, 442):

For the tiller of the field the thing was simple, he had it from his mother. The spots were Cain with his truss of thorns, dispossessed, cursed from the earth, fugitive and vagabond. The moon was that countenance fallen and branded, seared with the first stigma of God's pity, that an outcast might not die quickly. It was a mix-up in the mind of the tiller, but that did not matter. It had been good enough for his mother, it was good enough for him. (*MP*, 11-12)

'Dante and the Lobster' is imbued with references to the inexplicable nature of earthly torments; from the disgruntled grocer who, "instead of simply washing his hands like Pilate, flung out his arms in a wild crucified gesture of supplication" (*MP*, 7), to the more serious questions posed by the respective ordeals of a horse, a condemned murderer, and a lobster. Cohn claims that, "the theme" of 'Dante and the Lobster' is "the impossibility of reconciling divine justice and mercy in this world." Schopenhauer's stance on the theodical enigmas posed by the type of sublunary miseries which permeate 'Dante and the Lobster' is characteristically stark: "If we contemplate the world that presents itself as a meeting place of beings that torture one another and soon die, and imagine that a God had produced it out of nothing, we are bound to say that he gave himself a strange pleasure that was not in the least kind and good-natured" (*MRIV*, 103).

Schopenhauer's depiction of reason as the "source of all error" (*MRI*, 46) leads him to dismiss its value in ethical affairs. As part of his overall demotion of rationality from its status as an oracular repository of ultimate truths to a mere instrument of our volitional desires, Schopenhauer affirms that, "in *practical* philosophy no wisdom is brought to light from mere abstract concepts" (*WWRII*, 84). He goes on to state, "All genuine virtue proceeds from the immediate and *intuitive* knowledge of the metaphysical identity of all beings . . . But it is not on this account the result of a special pre-eminence of intellect; on the contrary, even the feeblest intellect is sufficient to see through the *principium individuationis*" (*WWRII*, 600-601). As Belacqua observes the man who sits upon a stricken horse, the bewildering spectacle prompts him to contemplate its purport: "I know, thought Belacqua, that that is considered the right thing to do. But why?" (*MP*, 13) Having beheld such a mystifying scene, his thoughts about the complexities of Dante's art move from frivolous queries about the presence of a pun to an anguished contemplation of God's most baffling ways:

Why not piety and pity both, even down below? Why not mercy and Godliness together? A little mercy in the stress of sacrifice, a little mercy to rejoice against judgement. He thought of Jonah and the gourd and the pity of a jealous God on Nineveh. And poor McCabe would get it in the neck at dawn. What was he doing now, how was he feeling? (MP, 13)

Belacqua is not quite "crazed with compassion" (*EB*, 21) here but the move from reflections upon a conceptual aporia to a more empathetic consideration of McCabe's situation is rich in Schopenhauerian connotations. Schopenhauer, confuting all attempts to base ethics upon a set of systematic principles or religious precepts, notes that "sympathy and pure love are

expressed in Italian by the same word, pietà" (WWRI, 376). He argues that the ineptitude of concepts within art is paralleled by their barrenness within the sphere of moral agency: "We should . . . be just as foolish to expect that our moral systems and ethics would create virtuous, noble, and holy men, as that our aesthetics would produce poets, painters and musicians" (WWRI, 271). Reason is, therefore, just as redundant in aesthetic matters as it is in ethical affairs. In line with Eastern traditions, Schopenhauer exalts compassion as the key principle of ethical behaviour as it allows us to realise our affinity with others, a recognition which inspires us to work towards an alleviation of their suffering. Cerebration aids our consideration of the means of acting ethically and our speculation about the beneficial aspects of doing so, but in the latter sense rationality is inimical to the type of selfless fellow-feeling which, in Schopenhauer's view, is an indispensable motivation to authentic ethical deeds. However, Belacqua's empathy for McCabe is not as unequivocally commendable as we may think, as it is based upon an inexplicable attachment to life which, as we will see later in this chapter, foils suicidal intent. Schopenhauer avers, "The infinite fear of the man to be executed and the spectator's sympathy corresponding thereto, as generally the boundless compassion for the dying and indeed for the dead, are an audible and naïve declaration of nature that death is a great evil; and it would be the only time that she lied" (MRIV, 298).

In a letter to Morris Sinclair, composed on May 5 1934, Beckett articulated his own musings upon the edifying aspects of capital punishment. Having asserted the primacy of emotional perspectives in such cases, they culminated in a rejection of the type of speculative endeavours which characterise Belacqua's troubled thoughts:

There is after all an almost never-failing joy, namely the thought of those millions who are less fortunate than I, or ought to be. What a feast that is! But as it becomes clear as soon as one reflects a bit on the matter that no relationship between suffering and feeling is to be found, then even that joy begins to look deceptive. If, for example, I read in the paper that poor Mr. So-and-so is to be executed early in the morning, before I get out of bed, and immediately start to congratulate myself that I do not have to spend such a night, I deceive myself in as much as I compare two circumstances instead of two emotions. And it is highly probable that the man condemned to death is less afraid than I. At least he knows exactly what is at stake and exactly what he has to attend to, and that is a greater comfort than one is generally inclined to believe. So great that many sick people become criminals solely in order to limit their fear and gain that comfort. Only beyond speculation does man reach his Eden, that refuge where there is no more danger, or rather one which is determined and which one can bring into focus. (*LI*, 204-5)

While the first line of the above passage could be read as an acerbic gloss upon Schopenhauer's view that, "The most effective consolation in any misfortune or suffering is to look at others who are even more unfortunate than we; and this everyone can do. But what then is the result for the whole of humanity?" (*PPII*, 292), the final line reveals Beckett's characteristic aversion to theorising about human predicaments. Scholastic notions about the systematic legitimacy of divine justice are evinced as disconcertingly oblique when applied to Belacqua's confrontation with literary and worldly suffering. By contrast, Belacqua's impassioned meditations allow him to focus on the terrifying particularity of McCabe's plight.

Harvey reports that, when the young Beckett was told about a sermon within which a preacher had expostulated about the infernal torments to which the reprobate are damned, he promptly informed the auditor - a maid, who was employed by his family - that, "hell is now." Similarly, Schopenhauer contends that this world is "a hell, surpassing that of Dante" (WWRII, 578). In the Bible we read numerous references to hell as a place to which the wicked will necessarily descend. In Numbers 16:30 we learn that, "the earth will open her mouth . . . and they [will] go down quick into the pit," while in Matthew 11:23 we are told that Capernaum will be "brought down to hell." With such ominous prophecies in mind, the journey of Belacqua and his aunt "down into the bowels of the earth" (MP, 13) can be seen to portend a hellish deed. Belacqua's appalled realisation of the lobster's impending doom invokes the horrors of Golgotha: "'Christ!' . . . 'it's alive," when he observes the writhing creature "exposed cruciform on the oilcloth" (MP, 13). Schopenhauer's reverence for Christianity was, as I noted in my Introduction, due to his unwavering, yet clearly contestable view of its status as a pessimistic religion. Having observed that optimism is "absolutely foreign to Christianity proper" (WWRII, 168), he was keen to point out that, "in general the cross, an instrument of suffering, not of doing, is very appropriately the symbol of the Christian religion" (WWRII, 636). Throughout Beckett's creative writings suffering is repeatedly associated with Christological contexts. Harvey claims<sup>11</sup> that Beckett's horrified reaction to the callous reductionism practised by a preacher who attempted to justify earthly miseries in accordance with the precedent of Christ's agonising end inspired the poem entitled 'Ooftish' (1938). That text informs us that the wide variety of physical and psychological torments with which we are afflicted, "the whole misery diagnosed undiagnosed misdiagnosed . . . all boils down to blood of lamb" (CPS, 59). If, however, the shedding of the "blood of lamb" is perceived from a Schopenhauerian perspective as a

senseless act, wherein a man was compelled to endure unspeakable pain, Christ can be seen as an archetypal representation of the plight of mankind.

The role of humanity in the persecution and destruction of animals seems to have intensified Schopenhauer's misanthropic tendencies. In one of his more memorable indictments of cruelty he claims, "It might truly be said that men are the devils of this earth and animals the tortured souls" (PPII, 371). He goes on to assert that, "the slow torture to death of . . . animals demands an expiation from eternal justice" (PPII, 425). Such an ultimate reckoning is, according to Schopenhauer, eminently desirable given that we reside in a "world of constantly needy creatures who continue for a time merely by devouring one another, pass their existence in anxiety and want, and often endure terrible afflictions, until they at last fall into the arms of death" (WWRII, 349). The precarious pilgrimage of Belacqua's lobster towards its inevitable end aligns with Schopenhauer's despairing vision: "In the depths of the sea it had crept into the cruel pot. For hours, in the midst of its enemies, it had breathed secretly. It had survived the French-woman's cat and his witless clutch. Now it was going alive into scalding water. It had to" (MP, 14). Belacqua's horrified reaction to the imminent boiling of the lobster recalls the condemnation of Cain to a prolonged period of punishment: "it's a quick death, God help us all. It is not" (MP, 14). In a text where God is shown to be a stern arbiter of immutable justice, such beseeching, however colloquial, seems truly inane. Given that Beckett was tempted to change the line to "Like Hell it is," 12 the thematic focus of the story's ending resounds with theological import. Beckett's authorial consciousness was abidingly pervaded with theodical discourse. In Come and Go (1967) the recurring theme of God's capacity to assuage the cryptic ailments of Vi, Ru, and Flo is revealed in their haunting pleas: "God grant not . . . God forbid . . . Please God not" (CDW, 354-5). Those respective petitions seem poignantly vain. Such instances exemplify Becket's enduring vision of ineluctable pain which is perhaps most plaintively expressed in a profoundly resonant line from 'Malacoda' (1935), within which the advent of an "undertaker's man" will soon herald the need for the bidding of final farewells: "must it be it must be" (CPS, 21). Like 'Dante and the Lobster,' 'Malacoda,' a poem which, as Knowlson confirms (JK, 222), was indelibly informed by the funerary arrangements which followed the death of Beckett's father, ends with a pitiful negation of comfort which repudiates the consoling prospect that the termination of earthly life is a mere prelude to a journey beyond this vale of woe: "all aboard all souls / half-mast aye aye / nay" (CPS, 21).

## **Splendid Incoherence**

Belacqua's detachment from the supposed pleasures of postnatal life entails a need for vigilance against women who query his narcissistic pursuits. His susceptibility to pastoral beauty enables him to enjoy temporary deliverance from his amatory afflictions, yet the aesthetic glories of nature are of ambivalent worth. The "sad and serious" (MP, 18) Belacqua can appreciate the scenic splendours of a region like Fingal which is a "land of sanctuary" (MP, 18), yet he is aware that, in such a place, "much has been suffered in secret, especially by women'" (MP, 18). He perceives aspects of Fingal that transcend ordinary sensory experience; they are also distinctly ineffable: "If [Winnie] closed her eyes she might see something. He would drop the subject, he would not try to communicate Fingal, he would lock it up in his mind" (MP, 19). Schopenhauer describes a form of experience which "is too spiritual to be given directly to the senses; it must be born in the beholder's imagination" (WWRII, 408). In 'What a Misfortune' Belacqua is described as a "poet" (MP, 122) who has a penchant for "polyglot splendours" (MP, 121). However, in 'Fingal,' bereft of any inclination to encapsulate his vision in verbal terms, Belacqua decides to cherish the incommunicable. He does, however, resort to theological discourse when he endeavours to describe the experiences that the presence of ruins in the midst of fields readily affords: "That' said Belacqua 'is where I have sursum corda" (MP, 21). Beckett's disdainful mention of "analogymongers" (D, 19) was directed towards those who possess an irrepressible tendency to subsume the immediately perceptual within a comparative context. Like his namesake in *Dream*, who felt compelled to overlook the specific qualities of individual females owing to his fondness for rigid categorisation, Belacqua, by voicing his enthusiastic recognition of similarities between a crenelated wall and the "moving" spectacle of "the colour of the brick in the old mill at Feltrim" (MP, 22) incurs a narratorial rebuke: "who shall silence them at last?" (MP, 22) When we learn that, "Landscapes were of interest to Belacqua only in so far as they furnished him with a pretext for a long face" (MP, 23), our image of his solemn demeanour deepens our sense of his inability to overlook the more disturbing truths about natural scenes which are not merely repositories of aesthetic splendour but abodes of human woe.

In his 'Philosophy Notes' Beckett mentions "irreconcilable dualism" which involves "the world of sense clogging the world of reason" (TCD MS 10967/84). In stressing how art contains "rhetorical question less the rhetoric" (D, 91) Beckett pointed to an element of art with which his writings are suffused. In what amounts to a Beckettian version of a rhetorical

question, Beckett asks, "What is the possible rationale of a world of phenomena existing only to be got rid of?" (TCD MS 10967/84) One suspects that the absence of a "rationale" to such a view contributed to its attraction for a writer so fervently at odds with the factitious dogmas of intellectual history. Schopenhauer's astringent portrayal of the unbridgeable divisions of human identity is expressed in terms of perpetual conflict, yet it deviates from Platonic, Christian, and Cartesian precedents in its assertion of the inability of reason to emancipate us from corporeal influence. He asks: "Has there ever been a man in complete accord with himself? Nay, is not the very thought a paradox?" He goes on to claim that, "The desire of philosophers that man should attain complete accord is impossible and self-contradictory. For as man, inner discord is his lot." Belacqua is contemptuous of physicality and readily indulges in considerations regarding the duality of his identity. In 'Fingal' he revels in thoughts of his ruptured self: "he scoffed at the idea of a sequitur from his body to his mind" (MP, 22).

Kroll observes that, "Although Belacqua eventually gives up on literal death as a means of spiritual fulfilment, his conception of mystic experience remains tinged with the timelessness and obscurity of death." Kroll thereby highlights an issue which inevitably arises as we try to fathom the significance of Belacqua's "wombtomb" experiences. Schopenhauer, in a description of our yearning for liberation from the abounding miseries of being, speaks of our hopeful intimations of a state of consciousness which can be attained if we can die to the world. In such cases moments of mystical release prefigure the annihilation of the self in death. He writes:

From time to time, everyone will perhaps feel in his heart of hearts a consciousness that an entirely different kind of existence would really suit him rather than this one which is so unspeakably wretched, temporal, transient, individual, and preoccupied with nothing but misery and distress. On such an occasion, he then thinks that death might lead him back to that other existence. (*PPII*, 275)

He also makes an explicit link between ascetic denial and self-extinction which is couched in terms which compare renunciation with personal annihilation: "through any . . . denial of the will-to-live that is carried out, an act of affirmation [occurs] whereby the individual came into existence is really extinguished again" (*MRIV*, 364). Belacqua's pre-natal memories evoke images of a sanctuary from which he has been banished by birth: "I want very much to be back in the caul, on my back in the dark for ever" (*MP*, 22). In *Dream* Belacqua evinced a clear relish for "wombtomb" experiences - those states of consciousness within which

epistemic and conative cravings cease. In his notes on Otto Rank's *The Trauma of* Birth (1929), Beckett recorded Rank's idea that "every pleasure has as its final aim the reestablishment of intrauterine pleasure" (TCD MS 10971/8/34). When juxtaposed with Beckett's own alleged memories of his experience as a foetus, wherein he felt "trapped . . . imprisoned . . . in pain but . . . unable to do anything about it" (quoted in *JK*, 177), the maternal womb as a realm of intrauterine bliss seems far less relevant to Belacqua's emancipatory desires than Schopenhauer's idea of death as amounting to an "extinction and end of the individual" (*WWRI*, 283), a return to "the womb of nature" (*WWRII*, 609) and the "peace of blessed nothingness" (*WWRII*, 640), from whence we came. Schopenhauer observes that a person who has endured tribulations arising from the antinomial aspirations of a divided self is liable to exclaim, "I wish I had been left in the peace of the all-sufficient nothing" (*WWRII*, 580).

Beckett's notion of birth as signifying a commencement of exile from a tolerable mode of being and an entry into a life pervaded by ubiquitous afflictions was an indelible aspect of his authorial consciousness. In his earliest writings "the umbra of grave and womb" (DFW, 44) denotes a vision of freedom which exalts the mystical raptures of a form of personal extinction. In A Piece of Monologue (1979) the Speaker states, "Birth was the death of him" (CDW, 425) thereby reminding us of the numerous instances in Beckett's oeuvre where the prospect of the annihilation of self seems an eminently alluring prospect. Schopenhauer's scathing attitude towards solipsism is epitomised in his view that, as a philosophical doctrine, it needs "not so much a refutation as a cure," yet in accepting how circumscribed our rational capacities are, he acknowledges that it "can never be refuted by proofs" (WWRI, 104). Marcoulesco claims that, "Schopenhauer . . . hated solipsism, and thought that all its representatives belong in the nuthouse." <sup>16</sup> Schopenhauer was more ambivalent in his views of solipsism than Marcoulesco suggests, as he also wrote, "It is strange that even theoretical egoism, although per accidens as it were, is right in the end when it maintains that 'apart from me nothing exists" (MRIV, 48). The solipsistic tendencies of protagonists such as Belacqua and Murphy reveal Beckett's fascination with the aesthetic implications of what Schopenhauer describes as "theoretical egoism." Despite Schopenhauer's insistence upon providing a comprehensive account of human experience, his awareness of our epistemic limits prompted his admission that, "human nature has depths, obscurities, and intricacies, whose elucidation and unfolding are of the very greatest difficulty" (WWRI, 402). In such instances, Schopenhauer highlights the various ways in which reason is unable to

comprehend or solve problems which arise from the concrete specificities of quotidian existence. Beckett's notion of the radical unintelligibility of human character clearly inspired his creative impulses throughout his authorial life. In proclaiming, "We don't know what our own personality is or what our being is" he evinced his agreement with Schopenhauer, who pointed to the futility of all attempts to rationally comprehend the deepest aspects of selfhood: "our own inner being is a riddle to us, in other words, to our intellect" (*WWRII*, 499).

In a statement which can be seen to exemplify the aesthetic possibilities afforded by fundamental psychological experiences, Schopenhauer notes: "A human being is the possibility of many contradictions." The irreducible complexities of Belacqua's personality in 'Ding-Dong' are apparent: "he was an incoherent person and content to remain so" (MP, 32). When Belacqua resolves to pursue a peripatetic life he is perplexed about the means by which he arrived at such intentions: "the best thing he had to do was to move constantly from place to place. He did not know how this conclusion had been gained" (MP, 31); he was, as the narrator puts it, "impelled by some force that he did not care to gainsay" (MP, 32). Schopenhauer argues that human character is thoroughly resistant to analysis: it is "inborn, unchangeable, and incapable of further explanation" (BM, 197). Moreover, our attempts to probe the unfathomable reality of selfhood lead to us becoming lost in "a bottomless void; we find ourselves like a hollow glass globe, from the emptiness of which a voice speaks. But the cause of this voice is not to be found in the globe, and since we want to comprehend ourselves, we grasp with a shudder nothing but a wavering and unstable phantom" (WWRI, 278 n. 5). Belacqua's hapless attempts to elucidate his mysterious modes of being are described as follows:

He lived a Beethoven pause, he said, whatever he meant by that. In his anxiety to explain himself he was liable to come to grief. Nay, this anxiety in itself, or so at least it seemed to me, constituted a break-down of the self-sufficiency which he never wearied of arrogating to himself, a sorry collapse of my little internus homo, and alone sufficient to give him away as an inept ape of his own shadow. (*MP*, 32)

Yet again we note how language is eschewed by Beckett in favour of the expressive supremacy of the "perfectly inexplicable" (*PTD*, 92) art of music when dealing with the ineffable strangeness of selfhood. Here what we have seen Schopenhauer refer to as the "insoluble irrationalities" (*WWRI*, 266) of music mirror the inscrutable intricacies of

Belacqua's being. In 'What a Misfortune' Hairy is sufficiently inarticulate to deliver an apt description of the mysteries of Belacqua's inner life when he reflects "with splendid incoherence on the contradiction involved in the idea of a happy Belacqua and on the impertinence of desiring that he should derogate into such an anomaly" (MP, 124). In recognising such an "anomaly," he can be seen to concur with Schopenhauer's view that, "odd and rare men are rarely happy" (MRI, 436). Belacqua's distressing need to "explain himself' ensures that, like his namesake in *Dream*, he endures "torture by thought" (*DFW*, 45), but he also revels in his inability to bring reason to bear upon his inscrutable foibles: "All this and much more he laboured to make clear. He seemed to derive considerable satisfaction from his failure to do so" (MP, 36). Schopenhauer notes that it can be "delightful for us to see ... our faculty of reason ... convicted of inadequacy" (WWRII, 98), yet Belacqua's deficiencies have a tendency to exasperate others, such as Thelma bboggs. She accuses him of acting "beastly" but she recognises that he is governed by an unknowable "devil" (MP, 122) that motivates his singular ways. The ghostly Belacqua of 'Echo's Bones,' who does not "care to look into motive" (EB, 30), seems equally cognisant and appreciative of the peculiarities of human character.

Belacqua's general aversion to intellection inspires his flights from learned musing: "Was it not from sitting still among his ideas, other people's ideas, that he had come away? What would he not give now to get on the move again! Away from ideas!" (MP, 33) Given his view that ideas are "the medium and element of care" (MRIV, 126), Schopenhauer asks: when our mind "is really only the playground of other people's ideas; and when these finally depart, what remains?" (PPII, 554) While Schopenhauer offers voluminous advice regarding suitable reading matter, he extols the virtues of thought which is stimulated by lived experience, through which, he avers, we forge the deepest insight into the nature of reality. Accordingly, books should be judged upon their ability to provide an authentic commentary upon our existential rootedness in the world. Given the afflictions that Belacqua endures through reasoning with his own and other people's ideas, his susceptibility to aesthetic pleasures seems to afford temporary respite from rational reflection and carnal duties. His dealings with the hatless seller of celestial seats evince his refined sensibility and the uses to which his penchant for polyglot splendours can be applied:

Brimful of light and serene, serenissime, [her face] bore no trace of suffering, and in this alone it might be said to be a notable face. Yet like tormented faces that he had seen, like the face in the National Gallery in Merrion Square by the Master of Tired Eyes, it seemed to have come a long way and subtend an infinitely narrow angle of affliction, as eyes focus a star. The features were null, only luminous, impassive and secure, petrified in radiance, or words to that effect, for the reader is requested to take note that this sweet style is Belacqua's. (MP, 38)

That vision of brooding intensity, within which a lamentable life history is movingly depicted, is lambent with Schopenhauerian insights regarding the expressive capacities of painting. Belacqua's claims regarding the woman's appearance parallel Schopenhauer's own considerations of the capacity of art to impart aesthetic splendour to suffering subjects: "Life is *never* beautiful, but only the pictures of it, namely in the transfiguring mirror of art" (*WWRII*, 374). In comparison with the difficulties that Belacqua has with rationalising and verbalising the idiosyncrasies of his inner being, his recognition of a resemblance between a masterpiece of visual portraiture and the facial features of the "gentlewoman of the people" (*MP*, 37) lead to oddly assured pronouncements about her life. Schopenhauer notes the unsurpassed nature of the affective and psychological depths to which visual portraits can penetrate. He contends that, "The real character of the mind, appearing in emotion, passion, alternations of knowing and willing, which can be depicted only by the expression of the face and countenance, is pre-eminently the province of *painting*" (*WWRI*, 225-6).

#### **Burning Illogicality**

Murray's claim that characters such as Belacqua and Murphy "aim for Nirvana and miss" underscores the comic elements of lives which are doomed to fall short of abiding liberation. Those who query Hamm's assertion that there is "no cure" (*CDW*, 125) for earthly existence, could point to the rarity of suicide in Beckett's *oeuvre*. According to Vivien Mercier, "One is left wondering why so few of Beckett's characters carry their distaste for life to its logical conclusion in self-destruction." Logical conclusions are not, however, known for their efficacy over the lives of Beckett's protagonists. Beckett's markedly low estimation of the power of rationality and his attraction to what he called the "burning illogicality" of mystics such as Meister Eckhart and St. John of the Cross, which "consumes all our filthy logic" was evident from the outset of his authorial career. His commendation of mysticism accords with that of Schopenhauer who lauds its "contempt for all the very strong objections of the faculty of reason" (*MRIII*, 377). 'Love and Lethe' depicts Belacqua's attempt to flee the world in the company of his baffled yet compliant lover. This is a story within which reason abjectly fails to justify such an act. Ruby's afflictions seem innumerable: "she was neurasthenic on top of everything else" (*MP*, 79), while her experiential odyssey has

"reduced her temper, naturally romantic and idealistic in the highest degree, to an almost atomic despair" (*MP*, 81). Her "incurable disorder" (*MP*, 82) will, she has been assured, herald an imminent demise, yet she maintains a remarkable degree of equanimity when faced with such a prospect; she can be seen to have attained what Schopenhauer describes as "purification through suffering" (*WWRI*, 394). Schopenhauer contends that those who "suffer from incurable disease or from inconsolable grief, have the return into the womb of nature as the last resource that is often open to them as a matter of course" (*WWRII*, 469). However, he firmly objects to suicide:

Whoever loves life and affirms it, but abhors its torments, and in particular can no longer endure the hard lot that has fallen to just him, cannot hope for deliverance from death, and cannot save himself through suicide. Only by a false illusion does the cool shade of Orcus allure him as a haven of rest. The earth rolls on from day into night; the individual dies; but the sun itself burns without intermission, an eternal noon. Life is certain to the will-to-live; the form of life is the endless present; it matters not how individuals, the phenomena of the idea, arise and pass away in time, like fleeting dreams. Therefore suicide already appears to us to be a vain and foolish action. (*WWRI*, 281)

Rather than being the outcome of a logically-deduced conclusion regarding the unbearable yet inescapable nature of earthly torments, suicide is, according to Schopenhauer, yet another example of the ways in which reason is overruled by conative yearning. Owing to our assumption that death delivers a total extinction of our entire being, self-destruction is ordinarily actuated by a delusion.

Ruby's aptitude for renunciation has been developed through embittered existential realisations rather than detached reflection. For her, "The grapes of love, set aside as abject in the days of hot blood, turned sour as soon as she discovered a zest for them. As formerly she had recoiled into herself because she would not, so now she did because she could not, except that in her retreat the hope that used to solace her was dead" (*MP*, 81-2). The narrator's descriptive strategies take a familiar Beckettian turn in his spurning of verbal description in favour of pictorial allusion. He states: "Those who are in the least curious to know what she looked like at the time in which we have chosen to cull her we venture to refer to the Magdalene in the Perugino Pietà in the National Gallery of Dublin, always bearing in mind that the hair of our heroine is black and not ginger" (*MP*, 81). Similarly, in 'What a Misfortune,' the appearance of Thelma's hand achieves descriptive particularity by its resemblance to a "Dürer cartoon" (*MP*, 131), while the group who are gathered at the

bboggs' house evoke images of a "Benozzo fresco" (MP, 132) in the mind of Walter. Later, in 'Draff,' Velasquez's Lances (1634-5) will be called upon to capture the precise spatial relations of the Smeraldina and Hairy who are positioned at the sides of Belacqua's corpse, which rests there, "like the keys between nations" (MP, 171). The narrator's greatest demand upon the reader's acquaintance with the visual arts is made when he describes the mountains, framed by "the anti-dazzle" windscreen, through which Smerry and Hairy drive following Belacqua's funeral, as "not unlike the picture by Paul Henry" (MP, 180). In the last instance, wherein the narrator withholds the picture's identity, ambiguity perpetuates thought in a peculiarly Beckettian fashion.

Belacqua's habitual indifference to Ruby's sexual charms does not prevent him from treating her as an object of aesthetic allure from which he can experience contemplative "raptures with great complacency at a safe remove" (MP, 82). The "long-distance paramour" (MP, 82) is nevertheless "doomed" (MP, 79) to display "common or garden incontinence" (MP, 82) when he eventually succumbs to the vestiges of carnal desire which seem to triumph over thanatic yearning. As Schopenhauer puts it, sexual longing "is the desire that constitutes even the very nature of man. In conflict with it, no motive is so strong as to be certain of victory" (WWRII, 512-3). Such a view can be seen as an upshot of his earlier claim that, "To believe that knowledge really and radically determines the will is like believing that the lantern a man carries at night is the primum mobile of his steps" (WWRII, 223). Freud acknowledged "the large extent to which psycho-analysis coincides with the philosophy of Schopenhauer."<sup>22</sup> Prior to becoming acquainted with Freud's work, Beckett's reading of Schopenhauer would have familiarised him with the notion that existential enigmas regularly emanate from the impenetrably profound recesses of the psyche. According to Feldman, "in demonstrating that consciousness may not be the totality of 'mental reality', Leibniz . . . may well be the link between Beckett's philosophical and psychological readings."<sup>23</sup> Schopenhauer is another plausible candidate for providing such a link. In a salient anticipation of Freud, Schopenhauer contends that we are often unutterably surprised at the resolutions that we form in conducting our lives. This is in line with his view that our behaviour is frequently governed by sources which lie inexpressibly deep within the labyrinthine realm of the self. He asserts, "Judgements, sudden flashes of thought, resolves, rise from those depths unexpectedly and to our own astonishment . . . Consciousness is the mere surface of our mind, and of this, as of the globe, we do not know the interior but only the crust" (WWRII, 136). Such observations underpin his later claim that, "a man's conduct essentially and on the whole is not guided by

his reasoning faculty and by the resolutions thereof" (PPII, 231). He considers the abounding complexities of the subconscious to be akin to the inscrutable forces which govern causal events within the phenomenal world. He adamantly affirms the "inadequacy of physics to give us the ultimate explanation of things" (WWRII, 174). Van Hulle and Nixon report that Beckett "marked a long passage on physics and metaphysics" in Julius Frauenstädt's Introduction to the German edition of Schopenhauer's works that Beckett sent home from Germany on 4 November 1936, which describes how "the advances in physics are merely an accumulation of our knowledge of phenomena, not of that which is manifested in them."24 Whether Beckett was aware of such elements in Schopenhauer's thought prior to that underscoring may remain a purely speculative matter. However, in his lectures on Racine, Beckett showed a particular interest in how "all his characters evolve beneath the conscious in the shadow of the 'infraconscient.'"<sup>25</sup> Belacqua's inability to explain himself results in his "apparent gratuity of conduct" which may be "likened to the laws of nature," as it is generated by motives that are "subliminal to the point of defying expression" (MP, 82). The narrator's attempts to fathom Belacqua's suicidal intent are ultimately frustrated: "How he had formed this resolution to destroy himself we are quite unable to discover" (MP, 82). Despite the unaccountable nature of his desires, Belacqua deploys his formidable erudition in his attempts to convince Ruby of the logical soundness of their planned departure:

He was able to pelt her there and then with the best that diligent enquiry could provide: Greek and Roman reasons, Sturm and Drang reasons, reasons metaphysical, aesthetic, erotic, anterotic and chemical, Empedocles of Agrigentum and John of the Cross reasons, in short all but the true reasons, which did not exist, at least not for the purposes of conversation. (MP, 83)

In Schopenhauerian terms, the above passage could be seen to describe how the "lifeless concept" is pitted against the "living desire" (*MRI*, 58). Schopenhauer argues that the "attachment [to life] can be founded only in its own *subject*. But it is not founded in the *intellect*, it is no result of reflection, and generally is not a matter of choice; on the contrary, this willing of life is something that is taken for granted" (*WWRI*, 239-40).

Schopenhauer asserts that we can view our life as "a uselessly disturbing episode in the blissful repose of nothingness" (*PPII*, 299); such a mournful view clearly coheres with the reflections of a number of Beckett's protagonists. Thanatos maintains a conspicuous presence within Beckett's *oeuvre*. While in *All That Fall* Mrs Rooney longs to be "in atoms" (*CDW*, 177), and Krapp in *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) recalls a state of mind wherein he was "burning"

to be gone" (CDW, 222), A in Rough for Theatre I (1977) asserts that his reason for not allowing himself to die is itself an endemic part of his terrible plight: "I'm not unhappy enough. [Pause.] That was always my unhap, unhappy, but not unhappy enough" (CDW, 229). A reminds us of the protagonist of 'Assumption' who is similarly condemned to a life which is irrationally averse to death. Here the narrator refers to "the unreasonable tenacity with which he shrunk from dissolution" (CSP, 6). Such instances echo Kafka's claim that, "logic is doubtless unshakable, but it cannot withstand a man who wants to go on living." 26 Schopenhauer's frank dismissal of the option of suicide is based upon a set of arguments which are cogently formulated, yet as we have seen, he was forthright in his views regarding the ability of the artist to explore those areas of life which are intrinsically impervious to such neat analytical conclusions. Calder reports that Beckett's opposition to suicide was more revelatory of his compassionate impulses than it was of his rational standpoint: "Beckett talked much of suicide, but never seriously contemplated it as an immediate course of action [because] it can leave a great mess for others."<sup>27</sup> It is worth remembering that Beckett's knowledge of the life and work of Samuel Johnson would also have acquainted him with an individual who saw life as a "progress from want to want, not from enjoyment to enjoyment,"28 yet as Boswell goes on to report, Johnson held on to "life with an eagerness at which many have wondered."<sup>29</sup> Inscribed in Schopenhauer's copy of Boswell's *Life of Dr.* Johnson (1791) is the following withering critique:

This Dr. Johnson is a true pattern of that old fashioned, truism-dealing, commonplace, narrow-minded set of pedants, which, 80 years ago, had reached its height in Engld. Above all, mind, that bigotry is an infallible sign of a narrow-limited [sic] understanding. And Johnson was as bigoted as an old woman.<sup>30</sup>

In spite of the consonance of their views regarding the irremediable craving which governs ordinary human existence, Johnson was, to Schopenhauer's mind, slavishly subservient to the hypocritical mores of a society governed by a duplicitous clergy. He also reproached Johnson for the "dullness" of his criticisms of Shakespeare's lack of poetic justice; such comments reveal Johnson's "entire misconception of tragedy . . . and of the nature of the world" (*WWRI*, 253). Johnson was, according to Schopenhauer, unable to approve of literature which describes the harrowing infliction of suffering upon the supposedly innocent. However, in spite of his aversion to *poetic* justice it is interesting to note that Schopenhauer offers a view of pain which can be seen as evidence of *metaphysical* justice: "If we could lay all the misery of the world in one pan of the scales, and all its guilt in the other, the pointer would certainly

show them to be in equilibrium" (*WWRI*, 352). One suspects that Johnson's puerile refutation of Berkeley would have been no more endearing to Schopenhauer than it was to Beckett, who, we will recall, dismissed it as "mièvre" (*LI*, 223).

According to Schopenhauer, "Men are puppets which are not drawn by external threads, but driven by an inner clockwork" (MRIII, 579). The deterministic overtones of the arrival of Belacqua and Ruby at their proposed scene of dissolution are ominously clear. We learn that, "Like fantoccini controlled by a single wire they flung themselves down on the western slope of heath. From now on till the end there is something very secco and Punch and Judy about their proceedings" (MP, 87). In 'Draff' the narrator's assertion that "bodies don't matter" (MP, 167) serves as a prelude to a grotesquely elaborate description of the Smeraldina's corpulence; it is also redolent of the almost inviolable nature of Belacqua's indifference to the purely sexual allure of female form. However, Belacqua's uncharacteristic sensitivity to Ruby's bare legs portends difficulties: "If you would put back your skirt' said Belacqua violently, 'now that you have done walking, you would make things easier for me'" (MP, 88). Schopenhauer's castigations of sexual desire describe how "it has an unfavourable influence on the most important affairs" upon which it "does not hesitate to intrude with its trash" (WWRII, 533). Belacqua and Ruby fail to emancipate themselves from the world as the story culminates with a host of inchoate possibilities:

'The finger of God' whispered Belacqua. Who shall judge of his conduct at this crux? Is it to be condemned as wholly despicable? Is it not possible that he was gallantly trying to spare the young woman embarrassment? Was it tact or concupiscence or the white feather or an accident or what? We state the facts. We do not presume to determine their significance. (MP, 91)

In succumbing to lust, the couple is inexorably governed by what Schopenhauer considers to be the pre-eminent power of carnal longing which exerts its omnipotent rule: "a great turmoil of life-blood sprang up in the breasts of our two young felons, so that they came together in inevitable nuptial" (*MP*, 91). The narrator's refusal to assign significance to the events involved bespeaks the impossibility of categorical appraisals of the intricacies of the human condition. In presenting the reader with an abundance of vexing questions through his abnegation of interpretative duties, the narrator's practices can be seen to be of a piece with Schopenhauer's insistent opposition to semantic closure in aesthetic affairs.

## An Old and Dear Enigma

In 'Walking Out' Belacqua's sensitivity to the grandeur of pastoral scenes is reminiscent of his appreciation of natural beauty in 'Fingal.' As he traversed Boss Croker's gallops, he "paused, not so much in order to rest as to have the scene soak through him" and "took in the scene, in a sightless passionate kind of way" (MP, 95). We recall the narrator of Dream stating that, "the object that becomes invisible before your eyes is, so to speak, the brightest and best" (DFW, 12). In Schopenhauerian terms, during periods of intense perceptual absorption, the subject of knowing and the Idea are more inextricably interfused than the perceiving subject is with the perceived object during ordinary sensory experience. In the former case the object is thereby no longer distinguishable as an entity subsisting without the mind. The narrator goes on to describe the bliss which scenic beauty inspires in the mind of Belacqua: "proof, if proof be needed, that [he] was rather elated than distressed, appears in his taking his weight off the stick and moving forward" (MP, 96). Racked by amatory tribulations owing to his inability to persuade Lucy of the mutual advantages to be enjoyed from their procurement of a cicisbeo, "a plantation of larches nearly brought tears to the eyes of Belacqua" (MP, 87). O'Brien notes that, "The larch tree was to remain a favourite tree [of Beckett's], perhaps, if only because it was the one tree that was readily identified in childhood."31

Once again, Beckett's practise of self-inscription is evident in his description of the effect that larches have upon Belacqua's sensibility. We learn of the reasons for Belacqua's specific attachment: "This country lad, he could not tell an oak from an elm. Larches however he knew from having climbed them as a little fat boy, and a young plantation of these, of a very poignant reseda, caught his eye now on the hillside. Poignant and assuasive at once, the effect it had upon him as he advanced was prodigious" (*MP*, 96). Belacqua's need to be free from his distressing carnal duties towards Lucy is thereby momentarily eased. Such temporary emancipation is seen by Schopenhauer as a rare yet bountiful release: "when we are more than usually disturbed by some want, the sudden recollection of past and distant scenes flits across our minds like a lost paradise" (*WWRI*, 198). The affective intensity of such experiences is attributable to the array of feelings involved. Recollection may induce bliss, yet the "paradise" has been "lost." Beckett, in a letter to MacGreevy, written on 8 November 1931, observed that, "walking, the mind has a most pleasant and melancholy limpness, is a carrefour of memories, memories of childhood mostly, moulin à larmes" (*LI*, 93). In my Introduction I noted how, as young men, Schopenhauer and Beckett were precociously

attuned to the suffering in their midst. Given the centrality of depictions of woe throughout their writings, such intense sensitivity was truly formative. It will be recalled that Schopenhauer explicitly alluded to the similarities between his growing awareness of the ubiquity of earthly miseries and that of the Buddha. One of the numerous aspects of consonance between Schopenhauer's thought and Buddhism involves the notion that our acquaintance with the supreme realities of existence develops not primarily as a result of detached reasoning but in accordance with our direct engagement with the immanent traumata of being. In considering the intertextual significance of such ideas in 'Walking Out,' it is instructive to recall Beckett's claim that suffering "opens a window on the real" (PTD, 28). As the narrator of *More Pricks* describes the lamentable plight of the "complete downand-out" who "beat his tool against the vessel in his anxiety" while perusing his work with a "sad face" (MP, 97), we recall Belacqua's conflicting attitudes towards Fingal and its environs, which are at once realms of aesthetic splendour and ethical horror, and which therefore accord with Schopenhauer's claim that, "There are on earth some really beautiful landscapes; but in them human affairs and figures are everywhere in a bad way, and so one must not dwell on them" (PPII, 647). Belacqua's dealings with the "tinker" (MP, 98) are described in terms which correspond with Schopenhauer's reflections on the privileges to be attained through encounters with the destitute. Schopenhauer observes that, "we feel on seeing any very unfortunate person an esteem akin to that which virtue and nobility of character force from us; at the same time, our own fortunate condition seems like a reproach" (WWRI, 397). As he views the "vagabond" (MP, 101), Belacqua, "the wretched bourgeois," feels a "paroxysm of shame for his capon belly" (MP, 97). The narrator, elaborating upon the qualities of the down-and-out, informs us of the "instinctive nobility of this splendid creature . . . this real man at last" (MP, 98), who, in affecting Belacqua with a sense of his inherent dignity, is reminiscent of the "gentlewoman of the people" in 'Ding-Dong.'

Lucy appears as a woman who, by virtue of her "entrancing" and "quite perfect" physical attributes (MP, 99), can impede Belacqua from his indulgence in the type of "private experiences" (MP, 100), about which women are, "as a rule" (MP, 100), sceptical. His insistent efforts to be rid of her corporeal demands and his associated "anxieties" (MP, 96) remind us of the sexual tribulations of his namesake in Dream: "He thought if only his wife would consent to take a cicisbeo how pleasant everything would be all round . . . Time and again he had urged her to establish their married life on the solid basis of a cuckoldry" (MP, 96). Schopenhauer notes that, among the "many evils" that marriage entails, the fact that the

bond ends by "making one a cuckold" (MRIV, 504) is particularly lamentable. Mr bboggs in 'What a Misfortune' is spared the "trouble" (MP, 114) of chamber-work owing to Walter Draffin's role as a cuckold; Belacqua can merely aspire to securing such an enviable arrangement. In his efforts to persuade Lucy of the merits of "living with him like a music while being the wife in body of another" and in his "fugues into 'sursum corda' and 'private experience," the "so spiritual" (MP, 101) Belacqua demonstrates his determination to pursue the type of experiences which will render her presence, with which he is ordinarily "vexed" (MP, 98), tolerable. Insofar as she can be enjoyed as an object of purely aesthetic desire, Lucy, like the other female characters in *More Pricks*, confronts the unfathomable complexities of Belacqua's identity whereby she must judge between her conflicting ideas of him as being "the old and dear enigma" or "this patent cad" (MP, 102). An "adverse fate" (MP, 101) proves ultimately favourable to Belacqua's aspirations to elude Lucy's attempted categorisation of his protean self. Following her accident, the stillness of her body is more permanently assured than that of the Smeraldina or Zaborovna Privet. We learn that, "They sit up to all hours playing the gramophone, An die Musik is a great favourite with them both, he finds in her big eyes better worlds than this" (MP, 105). In his discussion of those artistic depictions which feature saints, mystics, and other renunciants who have overcome the Will, Schopenhauer observes: "In their countenances, especially in their eyes, we see the expression, the reflection, of the most perfect knowledge [that] has become a quieter of all willing." They have achieved "abolition of the will and with it of the whole inner being of this world, and hence salvation" (WWRI, 233). When considered in relation to Schopenhauer's later claim that, music "exalts our minds and seems to speak of worlds different from and better than ours" (WWRII, 457), Belacqua's deliverance seems truly blissful, set as he is amidst a profusion of mutually complimentary aesthetic delights. Unsurprisingly, given Lucy's mercifully ethereal role as a portal to transcendent visions, Belacqua "tended to be sorry for himself when she died" (MP, 109).

Schopenhauer directs close attention to situations wherein "the miseries of life can very easily increase to such an extent - and this happens every day - that death, which is otherwise feared more than everything is eagerly resorted to" (*WWRI*, 325). The commendable serenity with which some individuals embrace their deaths signifies that they have achieved enlightenment regarding the true nature of earthly existence, not through rational reflection but through their own irremediable plight. Such people are exemplars of realisation in that they have passed through what Schopenhauer terms "a process of purification, the purifying

lye of which is pain" (*WWRII*, 639). Having endured "the cruellest extremes of hope and despair" (*MP*, 109), Lucy passes away "in a tranquillity of acquiescence that was the admiration of her friends and no small comfort to Belacqua himself" (*MP*, 109). Schopenhauer claims that when we witness the death of someone who has achieved a "desirable deliverance after long, grave, and incurable sufferings" we can be "seized with sympathy over the whole lot of mankind" (*WWRI*, 377) who remain within this perilous world. The bereaved Belacqua can be seen to corroborate Schopenhauer's claim, given that [his] "small stock of pity [was] devoted entirely to the living, by which is not meant this or that particular unfortunate, but the nameless multitude of the current quick, life . . . in the abstract" (*MP*, 109).

## **Defunctus**

In a statement which reminds us of Beckett's own abilities to creatively adapt sentences which he had garnered from the most diverse sources, Belacqua reveals the means by which a line from Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) illuminates his predicaments:

He had underlined, as quite a callow boy, a phrase in Hardy's *Tess*, won by dint of cogging in the Synod: *When grief ceases to be speculative, sleep sees her opportunity*. He had manipulated that sentence for many years now, emending its terms, as joy for grief, to answer his occasions, even calling upon it to bear the strain of certain applications for which he feared it had not been intended, and still it held good through it all. (*MP*, 151)

Hardy is justifiably included in the pantheon of literary artists who were profoundly attracted to the philosophy of Schopenhauer. His eschewal of intentionality is very much in line with Schopenhauer's reflections upon the necessity for the literary artist to provide the reader with interpretative autonomy and with his ideas regarding the writer's lack of intellective control over his material. Schopenhauer's arguments regarding the subconscious motives which preside over the creative process prefigure Hardy's admission that, "there can be more in a book than the author consciously puts there." At the core of Schopenhauer's discussions regarding human identity is the notion that, however extreme the vicissitudes of life happen to be, human character is inherently unchangeable. Rather than being an abstract insight derived through intellection, "the unalterability of character" is realised through experiential ordeals; it is a "felt conviction" (*FW*, 54). Rationality is utterly incapable of amending behaviour: "notwithstanding all his resolutions and reflections he does not change his conduct . . . from the beginning to the end of his life he must bear the same character that he himself

condemns, and as it were, must play to the end the part he has taken upon himself (WWRI, 114). An entry in Beckett's 'Clare Street Notebook' reveals Beckett's own enthusiasm for such ideas. He describes "the self-awareness whose voice serenely asserts: - This is who you are, this is what you will remain. As you have been previously is how you will always be."33 Similarly, in Godot, Vladimir notes that, "One is what one is . . . The essential doesn't change" (CDW, 22). In 'Yellow' Belacqua's fears regarding his impending surgery lead to an acknowledgement of the futility of trying to "cure himself, to frighten or laugh himself out of his weakness" - all were "to no avail" (MP, 152). Belacqua's eventual acceptance of his invariable self encourages the reader to ponder the undisclosed intertext contained within the following passage: "He would grow tired and say to himself: I am what I am. That was the end of all his meditations and endeavours: I am what I am. He had read the phrase somewhere and liked it and made it his own" (MP, 152). It has been claimed that Schopenhauer's use of the Sanskrit phrase, "tat tvam asi" - this living thing art thou - (WWRI, 220), "underlies" <sup>34</sup> Belacqua's "I am what I am." However, Schopenhauer employs that principle with specific reference to his fundamental view that genuine ethical behaviour stems from a recognition of the underlying metaphysical unity of all sentient beings. He states, "Whoever is able to declare this to himself with clear knowledge and firm inward conviction about every creature with whom he comes into contact, is certain of all virtue and bliss, and is on the direct path to salvation" (WWRI, 374). Belacqua's thoughts in 'Yellow' are far more preoccupied with his own sense of self than they are with an altruistic concern for others. They could perhaps be aptly described as instances of what Beckett called "selfreferring quietism" (LI, 257) in his admission of his former solipsistic tendencies.

As we noted in Chapter One, Schopenhauer argues that our inability to reduce genuine literature to a conclusive conceptual reading precludes it from being used as a repository of stable didactic meanings. Belacqua's adaptive assimilation of his learning aligns with Schopenhauerian ideas about the edification to be achieved when we engage with texts as active readers who evaluate works in accordance with their capacity to enrich the basic insights that we have acquired from lived experience. Belacqua's aversion towards attempts at self-definition and his exasperation with his immutable identity is clear: "He did not pause to consider himself in this matter, the light that the coming ordeal [of his surgery] would shed on his irrevocable self, because he really was tired of that old bastardo . . . It did not matter about him, he was what he was" (MP, 153). His failure to achieve enduring emancipation

through a cultivation of his inner life bespeaks the essential ignominy of his existence as it ebbs towards its close:

Even if he lived in his mind as much as was his boast. Then he need not be at all this pains to make himself ready... But he was an indolent bourgeois poltroon, very talented up to a point, but not fitted for private life in the best and brightest sense, in the sense to which he referred when he bragged of how he furnished his mind and lived there. (MP, 153)

Accordingly, in his fundamental aspirations Belacqua could be seen to concur with Schopenhauer's assertion that, "great mental culture gradually causes us to find entertainment almost entirely in books and no longer in people" (PPII, 560). Schopenhauer's exaltation of self-immurement coheres with that of Belacqua: "My hope and belief is that this better (supersensuous) consciousness will become my only one" (MRI, 44). A distinctly personal wish would, in time, become a core precept of his mature thought: "A man of intellect, when entirely alone, has excellent entertainment in his own thoughts and fancies" (PPI, 319). By closing his eyes, "The posterns of the mind . . . [which] were safer closed," Belacqua attains greater seclusion within his psyche, which "was the last ditch when all was said and done" (MP, 153). Schopenhauer describes those periods of self-absorption which elevated him above worldly concerns: "My greatest enjoyments are those of my own mind to which, for me, no others are comparable, whatever they might be. Therefore if I possess myself, I have everything, having the main-point: but if I do not possess myself, I have nothing, whatever other things I might possess" (MRIV, 97). Belacqua, who clearly aspires to experience such states, inhabits a liminal zone wherein self-mastery proves to be thoroughly elusive. Like the Mr Beckett of *Dream* he can be viewed as a "borderman" (*DFW*, 186), neither totally at one with the world nor entirely immune to its reputed charms: "He could no more go back into his heart . . . than he could keep out of it altogether" (MP, 154).

Belacqua's confinement to a hospital bed, whereon he rests in a state which is akin to a wombtomb experience "on his back in this the darkest hour" (*MP*, 151), would seem to afford him the privilege of physical stasis from which he could indulge his subjectivist ways. As we have noticed, his mind is admirably "furnished" with an extensive array of bookish wisdom, yet as he conducts his introspective search for a "suitable engine of destruction" (*MP*, 154), he is confronted with the likely futility of his efforts: "In a less tight corner he might have been content to barricade his mind against the idea [of his impending surgery]. But this was at best a slipshod method, since the idea, how blatant an enemy soever and

despite the strictest guard, was almost certain to sidle in sooner or later under the skirts of a friend, and then the game was up" (*MP*, 154). When Belacqua finds eventual solace in literary memory the cited text is expansively open to hermeneutic possibilities in its engagement with a theme of mutual interest for Schopenhauer and Beckett - the congruence of the risible with the afflictive. In its indeterminacy the passage from Donne is precluded from "clapping solution on problem like a snuffer on a candle" (*D*, 92) and is thereby faithful to the intricacies of life as presented by Belacqua's situation:

At this crucial point the good God came to his assistance with a phrase from a paradox of Donne: *Now among our wise men, I doubt not but many would be found, who would laugh at Heraclitus weeping, none which would weep at Democritus laughing.* This was a Godsend and no error. Not the phrase as a judgement, but its terms, the extremes of wisdom that it tendered to Belacqua. (*MP*, 155)

Schopenhauer's attraction to literature was informed by strict evaluative criteria. He states: "only in so far as it gives material for thinking does it increase our insight" (*WWRII*, 80). His conviction that we reside in a world which is pervaded by impenetrable mysteries accounts for his unwavering enthusiasm for writings which honour the enigmatic nature of existence by refusing to offer facile answers to bewildering questions. Belacqua's appreciation for the "extremes of wisdom" offered by Donne is indicative of his interest in literature which is amenable to manipulation by virtue of its wide semantic range.

Donne's paradox equips Belacqua with a means by which he can engage with his fate. However, Belacqua's decision to "arm his mind with laughter" to aid his entry into the "torture chamber" (*MP*, 156) leads to the recognition that "there were limits to Democritus" (*MP*, 160) and his eventual descent into sobbing: "Laugh! How he did laugh, to be sure. Till he cried" (*MP*, 163). In 'Echo's Bones' Belacqua will evoke such episodes in the mind of the reader as he attempts to persuade Lord Gall of the merits of being able to "titter affliction out of existence" (*EB*, 25). His vacillations between moods of mirth and sorrow are indicative of Schopenhauer's contention that, "Our own bitter laughter when the terrible truth by which firmly cherished expectations are shown to be delusive reveals itself to us, is the vivid expression of the discovery now made of the incongruity of the thoughts entertained by us in our foolish confidence in men or in fate, and the reality unveiled" (*WWRII*, 99). Belacqua's lamentations over the severity imposed on his "little bump of amativeness" (*MP*, 160) portends greater woe as he muses upon the pious parson who met his end with an uncharacteristically blasphemous exclamation owing to human error. His undue faith

regarding the gentleness and care of the medical staff approaches its fatal consequence as death divests him of deceit, just as it will cure Belacqua of the "naïveté" of his belief that he will perceive "the girls, Lucy especially, hallowed and transfigured beyond the veil" (*MP*, 172). A "timeless mock" (*MP*, 173) on the dead Belacqua's face is beheld by those who perhaps still harbour similarly ludicrous hopes; in this sense, it prefigures the parson's delivery of the words "earth to earth" in being a "contemptuous reproach to all the living" (*MP*, 176).

In a letter to MacGreevy, from August (?) 1930, Beckett wrote: "Schopenhauer says defunctus is a beautiful word - as long as one does not suicide. He might be right" (*LI*, 36). We can refer to Socrates and Montaigne to illuminate our sense of how Belacqua's emancipatory tendencies, wherein he disengages his mind from corporeal affairs, foreshadow his death, yet Beckett's acquaintance with Schopenhauer's arguments regarding renunciation as being preferable to suicide are no less germane to the issue involved. Payne's translation of defunctus is, "One who has finished with the business of life" (*PPII*, 300 n. 4). Given Belacqua's supreme indifference to what we ordinarily assume to be earthly pleasures, he could be seen to have been "dying all his life" (*MP*, 168); accordingly, his classification as a "defunct crusader" is eminently apt. In this context it is noteworthy that Schopenhauer considers our sight of a corpse to be one of sublime edification:

In the presence of every person who has died, we feel something akin to the awe that is forced from us by great suffering; in fact, every case of death presents itself to a certain extent as a kind of apotheosis or canonization. Therefore we do not contemplate the corpse of even the most insignificant person without awe, and indeed, strange as the remark may sound in this place, the guard gets under arms in the presence of every corpse. (*WWRII*, 636-7)

Hairy "had his work cut out to tear himself away [from the deceased Belacqua]. For he could not throw off the impression that he was letting slip a rare occasion to feel something really stupendous, something that nobody had ever felt before" (MP, 172). The awe-inspiring nature of the scene defies rational comprehension and leaves "his brain quite prostrate and suppliant before this first fact of its experience" (MP, 172). Hairy goes on to develop a typically Beckettian talent for stripping the tenets of eschatological discourse of consolatory import in his transformation of hallowed ideas into terms which merely evince the facts of worldly misery: "O Anthrax . . . where is thy pustule" . . . 'O G. P. I. . . . where are thy rats?" (MP, 177)

When the narrator describes the coffined Belacqua, "grinning up at the lid at last" (MP, 175), we recall his life as a failed quest for self-dissolution. However, Schopenhauer points out that those who are unable to secure deliverance from Will-inspired trials in life achieve blissful deliverance through personal extinction: "The entire cessation of the life-process must be a wonderful relief for its driving force. Perhaps this is partly responsible for the look of sweet contentment on the faces of most of the dead. In general, the moment of dying may be similar to that of waking from a heavy nightmare" (WWRI, 469). As Knowlson observes (JK, 171), the evocative lyricism of the graveyard scene from 'Draff' is inextricably linked to Beckett's life experience, specifically the harrowing death of his beloved father. As I noted in Chapter One, Schopenhauer's contention that, "inner affliction is the womb" (WWRII, 390) of genuine art, echoed Beckett's developing view that personal devastation could be channeled in such a way as to infuse art with experiential insight. The emotional desolation that Beckett faced in the aftermath of Bill Beckett's passing was etched deep into his son's creative consciousness. The following passage suggests that Beckett's interest in ideas regarding the correlations between personal traumata and artistic productivity could not have remained a mere intellectual matter as he endeavoured to transmute the tenebrous horrors of bereavement into the irradiating qualities of literary art:

In the cemetery the light was failing, the sea moonstone washing the countless toes turned up, the mountains swarthy Uccello behind the headstones. The loveliest little lap of earth you ever saw. Hairy shifted the roof of planks from off the brand-new pit and went down, down, down the narrow steps carefully not removed by the groundsman. His head came to rest below the surface of the earth . . . (T)he pair of them between them, she feeding him from above, upholstered the grave: the floor with moss and fern, the walls with the verdure outstanding . . . (W)hen they had done, all was lush, green and most sweet smelling. (MP, 173)

As revealed in a letter to MacGreevy, dated July 25 1933 (TCD MS 10402), the "labour of love, painful duty" (*MP*, 173) which Hairy completes was based upon a similar grave-dressing task carried out by Beckett with the help of his mother. In the above passage we again note how Beckett's allusion to the world of the visual arts through the name of Uccello is no mere display of learning as it is intimately interwoven with the plaintive immediacies of a lived life.

## **Stupefying Dilemmas**

In 'Echo's Bones' Belacqua, in his resurrected state, poses questions which were central to his existence as a corporeal being. He "wondered if his lifeless condition were not all a dream and if on the whole he had not been a great deal deader before than after his formal departure, so to speak, from among the quick" (*EB*, 3). Ironically, in his purely spiritual state, Belacqua is assailed by questions from which his "private experiences" as an embodied being offered occasional relief. With reference to his own basic conception of ontological guilt and life as a process of expiation, Schopenhauer quotes Calderón's line that Beckett himself used in *Proust (PTD*, 67): "For man's greatest offence / Is that he has been born'" (*WWRI*, 254). Elsewhere, in developing such ideas, he asks, "How could man give himself airs? For him conception is already guilt, birth the punishment, life hard labour, and death his doom" (*PPII*, 202 n. 1). In the following passage, Belacqua, imbued as he is with a "sense of sin" (*EB*, 19), casts a retrospective glance over his earthly life:

No one was more willing than himself to admit that his definite individual existence had in some curious way been an injustice and that this tedious process of extinction, its protracted faults of old error was the atonement imposed on every upstart into animal spirits, each in the order of time. But this did not make things any more pleasant or easy to bear. (*EB*, 3)

Accordingly, Belacqua expresses views which are redolent of Schopenhauer's idea that, "guilt and merit attach not to [man's] individual acts, but to his true nature and being" (*PPII*, 236). Understandably, Belacqua's own sense of the plausibility of such an association does not serve to diminish his afflictions. In Schopenhauerian terms death entails deliverance from the penitential nature of being:

Far from bearing the character of a gift, human existence has entirely the character of a contracted debt. The calling in of this debt appears in the shape of the urgent needs, tormenting desires, and endless misery brought about through that existence. As a rule, the whole lifetime is used for paying off this debt, yet in this way only the interest is cleared off. Repayment of the capital takes place through death. (*WWRII*, 580)

In 'Echo's Bones' Belacqua's use of words such as "atonement" are permeated with numerous discursive connotations, yet they do not make things "more pleasant or easy to bear." Just as his corporeal demise has not amounted to an annihilation of self, such rational endeavours fail to appease the mournful musings of Belacqua's mind. Schopenhauer contends that, "To have always in mind a sure compass for guiding us in life and enabling us

always to view this in the right light without ever going astray, nothing is more suitable than to accustom ourselves to regard this world as a place of penance" (PPII, 302). Belacqua's inability to remain within his heart signified the ephemerality of his "private experiences;" now, in his post-mortem state, he is compelled to interpret his existence as an "atonement" and "expiation" (EB, 4). Such a contextualisation of his being at once illuminates and compounds his plight, but the narrator is quick to dismiss the value of attempting to understand Belacqua in purely conceptual terms. Belacqua is no more amenable to definition as a spirit than he was as an embodied being who "lived . . . on and off" (EB, 6). We are informed that, "These predicates do not cover him, no number of them could. If, as a dense tissue of corporeal hereditaments-ha!-he was predicateless, how much more so then as spook?" (EB, 4) Zaborovna's realisation of Belacqua's spectral state is achieved when she notices the absence of a shadow from "This body that did not intercept the light" (EB, 7). She thereby evokes memories of Belacqua's "numerous wives and admirers" (EB, 39) to whom his aversion to physical pleasures was almost invariably perplexing. Zaborovna weeps for a "corpse in torment" (EB, 8) whose present afflictions are no more intelligible than those of his past: "I know no more than I did" (EB, 10). The narrator moves temporarily from a discussion which has revealed much about the inescapable nature of human suffering to describe the arrival of a cow who bears all the hallmarks of a denizen of the earth in her bodily decrepitude and lamentable fecundity: "A long black cylindrical Galloway cow, in her heyday a kind and quick feeder, now obviously seriously ill with rinderpest, red water and contagious abortion, staggered out of the ground fog, collapsed and slipped calf. It was all over in a flash" (EB, 10). The cow dies "with her four legs indicting the firmament" (EB, 10). In a world where even a smile can appear "crucified" (EB, 12), Belacqua and Zaborovna seem oblivious to the gruesome spectacle of the cow's poignant end as their moment of unlikely coupling approaches. The narrator's description of Zaborovna's eventual entrapping of Belacqua is replete not only with allusions to the pursuit of quarry, but with references to the deceitful propensities of women:

[Zaborovna] foamed into a bawdy akimbo that treed, cigar and all, her interlocutor. Poor fellow, there he was petrified, back on the fence. And Zaborovna, one minute the picture of exuberant continence, the next this Gorgon! Truly there is no accounting for some people. Women in particular seem most mutable, houses of infamous possibilities . . . But these women, positively it was scarcely an exaggeration to say that the four and twenty letters made no more and no more capricious variety of words in as many languages than they, their jigsaw souls, foisted on them that they might be damned, diversity of moods. (*EB*, 13)

Schopenhauer asserts that in amatory affairs it is often the case that, "the male sex must be subdued and taken captive" (PPI, 367); he later avows that, "just as nature has armed the lion with claws and teeth, the elephant and boar with tusks the bull with horns . . . she endowed women with the art of dissimulation" (PPII, 617). Belacqua's troubled dealings with Zaborovna could also be seen as indicative of his inability to comprehend the ineffably amorphous nature of her "jigsaw" soul. Following his encounter with Zaborovna, Belacqua is requested to tell Lord Gall what he knows about the "disorder" (EB, 15) of love. Belacqua's aptitude for amorous pursuits is, as we have repeatedly seen, severely limited. Throughout More Pricks his enthusiasm for introspective pleasures is continually undermined by his amatory affairs. Schopenhauer's recognition of the inherently cynical nature of his critique of all forms of love which were not directed towards an alleviation of the multitudinous sufferings of sentient beings was clearly informed by a sense of the pitiful impotence of rationality in our lives. He states, "However much my metaphysics of love may displease the very persons who are ensuared in this passion, yet if rational considerations in general could avail anything against it, the fundamental truth I reveal, would more than anything else, necessarily enable one to overcome it" (WWRII, 557).

Lord Gall's evaluation of love as a "disorder" is more readily understandable given his selfdeprecating tendencies which echo those Augustinian concepts of which Schopenhauer eagerly approved: "sometimes I look on myself as utterly odious, I imprecate the hour I was got'" (EB, 20). What Schopenhauer describes as "the guilt of existence itself" (WWRI, 254) in his description of what the tragic hero is called upon to expiate is clearly felt by Lord Gall who afflicts Belacqua by his "tragic and oppressive presence" (EB, 24) and who scoffs at Belacqua's employment of theological discourse in his attempts to alleviate his considerable troubles. Gall excoriates Belacqua's Augustinian views: "'Christian' said Lord Gall with indescribable asperity 'bleeding science'" (EB, 25). Belacqua's response, "'On the contrary. . . these were the first self-supporting steps of thought in the west'" (EB, 25) is considered by Nixon to allude to "the well-known image of the ladder of knowledge, first used by the Ancient Greek sceptic Sextus Empiricus in Against the Logicians." Nixon continues, "Beckett rediscovered the idea in his reading of Fritz Mauthner and Ludwig Wittgenstein" (EB, 87-8). Given the interest that both Mauthner and Wittgenstein had in Schopenhauer's thought, it is worth considering Schopenhauer's own use of the ladder image owing to his emphasis on its value as an illustration of the type of learning which involves adaptive assimilation of textual matter:

[F]or the man who studies to gain *insight*, books and studies are merely rungs on the ladder on which he climbs to the summit of knowledge. As soon as a rung has raised him one step, he leaves it behind. On the other hand, the many who study in order to fill their memory do not use the rungs of the ladder for climbing, but take them off and load themselves with them to take away, rejoicing at the increasing weight of the burden. They remain below forever, because they bear what should have borne them. (*WWRII*, 80)

Schopenhauer's use of the ladder image is illustrative of what Mauthner identifies as the metaphorical richness of his thought. Lord Gall, bereft of the type of experiential appreciation of Augustinian doctrines which Belacqua has developed through life and death, is understandably aghast at Belacqua's attempt to reduce his predicaments to a systematic solution. Belacqua promptly disclaims culpability for the thoughts he has expressed: "We have our faults, but ideas is not one of them" (*EB*, 26).

Belacqua's disavowal of the processes of ratiocination which have governed much of his dialogue with Lord Gall, in which he is led to "divide, multiply, contract, enlarge, order, disarrange, or in any other way image in the mind by thinking," is based upon his unwillingness to engage with "mysteries that I do not care to pry into" (EB, 30). Such "deference" to conceptual enigmas precludes him from expressing the reasons "why Kant was not a cow" (EB, 30). However, he is content to irreverently deploy the abstruse riches of Augustinian terminology in his evasion of employment: "'I am no longer for sale . . . 'being now incorruptible, not to mention uninjurable, while my margin of changeability is of the narrowest" (EB, 31). As Lord Gall puts it, "for one who does not care to pry into mysteries . . . [Belacqua] show[s] great enterprise'" (EB, 34). Belacqua's attempts to categorise the scene he beholds as he sits upon his tombstone where, "the moon [is] shining, the sea tossing in her sleep and sighing, and the mountains observing their Attic vigil in the background" (EB, 36) are equally fervent. However, his antithetical summation of the view as "classicoromantic" (EB, 36) exposes the inability of conceptual discourse to accommodate perceptual splendours within rigidly categorical terms. The appearance of the "submarine of souls" is equally beyond his intellective capacities, but the narrator is keen to stress the intrinsic inexplicability of the vessel's arrival and departure: "The significance of this apparition was what he could not fathom. No, nor anyone else either" (EB, 37). Belacqua's bewilderment at the sight of the submarine is merely one aspect of his general predisposition towards experiences which at once necessitate and thwart rational comprehension: "'As amber attracts chaff... so my mind all the stupefying dilemmas" (EB, 40). He is similarly baffled by the

inequity of his position: "Now is not the whole thing rather peculiar? I who was always quiet as a mouse, doing nothing, saying nothing, my mind a Limbo of the most musical processes, to be treated now as though I had been on the committee" (EB, 40). In Belacqua's reflections upon the "disparity between merit and requital" (EB, 41) we are reminded of his tortured ruminations in 'Dante and the Lobster.' As we attempt to fathom the state of consciousness which Belacqua terms "Limbo" we are yet again encouraged to compare that state with "most musical processes." As we have noted, in Schopenhauerian terms music is akin to the phenomenal world and its inhabitants in its capacity to defy reason. Associated with Schopenhauer's contentions regarding original sin as the basis of all our woes is his damning indictment of those who harbour delusions pertaining to notions of one's due. He argues, "only a dull, insipid, optimistic, Protestant-rationalistic, or really Jewish view of the world will make the demand for poetic justice, and find its own satisfaction in that of the demand" (WWRI, 254). Belacqua's despondency regarding the lack of a correlation between his occasional successes in disengaging himself from earthly concerns and his resurrection to a state wherein he is no less tormented by rationality and the corporeal needs of others is indicative of his deluded assumptions of fairness.

The somewhat perplexing possibility that Belacqua could have had the "'pleasure to nip [his life] in the wombbud" (*EB*, 41) seems more plausibly connected with his "wombtomb" experiences than it is with memories of his intrauterine life. Our own curiosity to decipher Belacqua's notion that his failure to terminate his pre-natal existence amounted to a "derogation" is swiftly rebuked. In asking "from what" our attempts to elucidate such "buckled discourse" (*EB*, 44) are unavailing. Belacqua asks, "Who but an imbecile can care from what? Isn't derogation in the abstract good enough" (*EB*, 41). Yet again the narrator, in exhibiting "un metier qui insinue plus qu'il n'affirme" (*D*, 130), has ensured the reader's interpretative autonomy. Belacqua's relatively intelligible articulation of the nature of his ills and the occasional relief he attained from them is rich in affinities with central precepts of Schopenhauer's thought. The fact that such reflections emanate from the subconscious recesses of his self may account for their intriguing lucidity, free as they are from the distorting effects of reason:

[S]omething inside Belacqua said for him: 'Sometimes he feels as though this old wound of his life had no intention of healing' . . . 'he has tried everything' said the voice 'from fresh air and early hours to irony and great art' . . . When he came back the voice admitted that great art had proved a great boon

while it lasted. 'But he couldn't stand the pace' it sighed, 'the counter irritation proved something terrific.' (*EB*, 43)

As we have seen, Schopenhauer considers aesthetic contemplation to be a mode of sentience within which our intellective and conative tendencies cease; it is therefore "the most blissful that we experience" (*WWRI*, 390), but it stands in such sharp contrast to our habitual modes of consciousness that, upon its cessation, "the magic is at an end . . . and we are again abandoned to all our woe" (*WWRI*, 198). Belacqua's agonising transition from states of consciousness arising from his immersion in great art to his ordinarily troubled mindset, being such a potent "counter irritation," bespeaks at once the supreme value of aesthetic contemplation and the hellish nature of ordinary sentience. While art has been instrumental in aiding Belacqua's quests for subjective freedom, his recommendation of "perfect quiet and darkness" (*EB*, 44) as a panacea for Mick's ills, which include "increasing physical disabilities" (*EB*, 48), reminds us of his alternative methods of emancipation, which involve his efforts to "reintegrate the matrix" via "prenatal velleities" (*EB*, 46).

Schopenhauer's somewhat idiosyncratic reading of Dante is evidence of a propensity he shared with Beckett to make literature "his own" in accordance with experiential criteria. To Schopenhauer's mind, "this divina commedia" (PPII, 144) of earthly existence could be properly evaluated when we observe the common lot of humanity in terms of its universal ills. Art which properly engages with such inescapable realities will be, both formally and thematically, a testament to the ways in which life eludes rigid categorisation. It is the privilege of an artist such as Beckett, who was avowedly indifferent to criteria of logical consistency, to create aesthetic virtues from philosophical vices in his portrayal of a world which both demands and defies systematic interpretations. In his conversation with Driver, Beckett explicitly pointed to the basis of his view of the imponderable nature of existence. He stated, "If life and death did not both present themselves to us, there would be no inscrutability. If there were only darkness, all would be clear. It is because there is not only darkness but also light that our situation becomes inexplicable" (GF, 220). Beckett's sense of the puzzling nature of existence was very much of a piece with Schopenhauer's own enthrallment to the tortuous enigmas of being. Schopenhauer contends that, "it is the knowledge of death, and therewith the consideration of the suffering and misery of life, that give the strongest impulse to philosophical reflection and metaphysical explanations of the world" (WWRII, 161). For Schopenhauer and Beckett the irreducibly particular nature of the

problems posed by a life framed by finitude constitutes an ultimate negation of all grand narratives or systems which attempt to impose coherence upon the intrinsically chaotic. Pilling notes that 'Echo's Bones' is "in no sense a culmination of [More Pricks], the tensions within which could never have been resolved by some final 'statement." This chapter has attempted to show that such "tensions" are, when considered from a Schopenhauerian perspective, aesthetically enriching. Bereft of a "final 'statement'" More Pricks and 'Echo's Bones' are resistant to exegetical closure. Residing in a realm which necessitates and resists comprehension, Belacqua foreshadows Murphy's quest for autonomy from the pretensions of reason. As we move from a text which interrogates the existential relevance of literary and theological discourse to one within which the conceptual resources of philosophy and psychology are brought to bear upon a consciousness permeated with insights about the limits of conceptual thought, we become increasingly aware that, "It's a strange world" (EB, 26).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Quoted in John Pilling, Samuel Beckett's More Pricks Than Kicks: In a Strait of Two Wills (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Kant's Life and Thought*, tr. James Haden (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 249.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Quoted in Zimmern, Schopenhauer, p. 96.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Pilling, Samuel Beckett's More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Quoted in Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 848.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Jeri L. Kroll, 'The Surd as Inadmissible Evidence: The Case of Attorney-General v. Henry McCabe' *in Journal of Beckett Studies*, o. s. 2 (1977), p. 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Henry Francis Cary (tr.), *The Vision of Dante or Hell, Purgatory and Paradise* (London: Oxford University Press, 1910), p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 45.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Harvey, Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic, p. 99.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> The Holy Bible: Authorised Version (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1999), p. 190, p.16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Harvey, Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic, p. 156.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> As reported by Ruby Cohn in Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, p. 391 n. 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Quoted in Zimmern, Schopenhauer, p. 60.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

- <sup>15</sup> Jeri L. Kroll, 'Belacqua as Artist and Lover: What a Misfortune' in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, o. s. 3 (Summer 1978), p. 16.
- <sup>16</sup> Ileana Marcoulesco, 'Beckett and the Temptation of Solipsism' in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, o. s. 11 & 12 (1989), p. 63.
- <sup>17</sup> Knowlson and Knowlson (eds.), *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, p. 134.
- <sup>18</sup> Quoted in Zimmern, Schopenhauer, p. 61.
- <sup>19</sup> Christopher Murray, 'Introduction' in Christopher Murray (ed.), *Samuel Beckett: 100 Years* (Dublin: New Island, 2006), p. 3.
- <sup>20</sup> Vivian Mercier, *Beckett/Beckett* (London: Souvenir Press, 1990), p. 238.
- <sup>21</sup> Juliet, Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde, p. 41.
- <sup>22</sup> Sigmund Freud, *An Autobiographical Study* in James Strachey (ed.), *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, *Volume XX (1925-1926)*, tr. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1959), p. 59.
- <sup>23</sup> Feldman, Beckett's Books, p. 97.
- <sup>24</sup> Van Hulle and Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library*, p. 145.
- <sup>25</sup> Knowlson and Knowlson (eds.) *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett*, p. 313.
- <sup>26</sup> Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, tr. Willa and Edwin Muir (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 250.
- <sup>27</sup> Calder, *The Philosophy of Samuel Beckett*, p. 131.
- <sup>28</sup> James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, *Volume 1*, ed. G. B. Hill, and Rev. L. F. Powell (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 53.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 394.
- <sup>30</sup> Quoted in Patrick Bridgwater, *Arthur Schopenhauer's English Schooling* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 361.
- <sup>31</sup> Eoin O'Brien, *The Beckett Country: Samuel Beckett's Ireland* (London: Faber and Faber/Black Cat Press, 1986), p. 5.
- <sup>32</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Personal Writings*, ed. Harold Orel (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 36.
- <sup>33</sup> Quoted in Nixon, Samuel Beckett's German Diaries, p. 171.
- <sup>34</sup> Ackerley and Gontarski (eds.), *The Faber Companion to Samuel Beckett*, p. 514.
- <sup>35</sup> Pilling, Samuel Beckett's More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 101.

# Chapter 4

# **Antinomies of Unmarried Love**

Ackerley has noted that, to Beckett's mind, the writings of à Kempis and Geulincx "were reconciled in their renunciation of the will and affirmation of humility." Ackerley's notion of "secular quietism" provides us with a means of understanding Beckett's stance on writings which are overtly reliant upon elements of the sacred; it is also, as this chapter will endeavour to reveal, beneficial in aiding our attempts to contextualise Schopenhauer's own views upon the themes which were of common concern to à Kempis and Geulincx. The writings of Schopenhauer differ from those of such thinkers, not only in terms of their arguments regarding the ways in which we can renounce volitional cravings, but also in their dismissal of the efficacy of abstract virtues such as humility. Much of this chapter will be focussed upon showing how Beckett's reading of Schopenhauer acquainted him with the type of quietist themes to which he would later be attracted in the works of à Kempis and Geulincx. As this chapter proceeds I will note how some aspects of Geulincx's philosophy can be seen to cohere with Schopenhauer's thought, but I also wish to reveal how Beckett's creative interrogation of the value of rationality is more distinctly Schopenhauerian than Geulingian.

In the words of Knowlson, "a great passage in Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* provided Beckett with a basis for quietism" (*JK*, 216). Beckett expressed his views regarding the foundational significance of Mann's novel as follows: "There's a good passage in *Buddenbrooks* where Mann speaks of happiness, success etc., as analogous with light from a star, its foyer abolished when it most bright, and that brightness its own knell. So please God it is with unhappiness, if it can be bright, and with the bells rung in the distant heart . . . It's a basis for quietism anyhow, if basis be needed" (quoted in *JK*, 746 n. 11). Mann acknowledged the formative contribution that his reading of Schopenhauer made to the writing of *Buddenbrooks* (1901) in thoroughly effusive terms. In Hamilton's *The Brothers Mann* (1978) we learn, through an interweaving of biographical commentary and Mann's own words, the impact that his study of Schopenhauer had upon the overall development of his novel:

'[T]he hour came that made me read, and I read day and night, as perhaps one reads only once in a lifetime.' It was a 'spiritual experience of absolutely first rank and unforgettable in kind', and it gave rise to serious thoughts of suicide - morbidity which was subtly transferred to the primary figure of

Buddenbrooks . . . 'I lay stretched all day on the curiously shaped chair or sofa reading the World as Will and Idea. Lonely undisciplined youth, yearning for both life and death - how it swallowed the magical potion of this metaphysics . . . And what a stroke of fortune that I did not have to contain such an experience but had an immediate opportunity of expressing it, of showing my gratitude: a chance to give it a poetic rendering!'<sup>3</sup>

It is intriguing to consider that a passage from a novel that Beckett so obviously admired was itself informed by the type of rapturous experiences that Mann enjoyed as he immersed himself in Schopenhauer's thought and attempted to bring Buddenbrooks to its completion. We have already seen how a "yearning for both life and death" imbues the life of Belacqua in Dream and More Pricks in his pursuit of experiences which would "slay his old man" (DFW, 63); and how such endeavours entail that he was "dying all his life" (MP, 168). The quietist elements of Schopenhauer's thought were no less impressive to Wagner than they were to Mann and Beckett. As his appreciation for Schopenhauer intensified, Wagner realised that some of his deepest personal and creative intuitions had been articulated in rigorous conceptual terms by Schopenhauer's philosophy. In a letter to August Röckel, written on August 23 1856, Wagner describes how, through his engagement with Schopenhauer's thought, he had viewed the world in "all its conceivable phases;" in doing so, he "thereby recognised its nothingness." Schopenhauer was keen to point out "the unexampled agreement of [his] philosophy with quietism;" he appeals to such consonance as a means of verifying the value of his work: "this very agreement [is] a proof of its sole accuracy and truth" (WWRII, 615). The validity of Schopenhauer's insistence upon the parallels between his writings and those of the quietists can be appreciated when we consider that passages such as the following constitute a *summa* of Schopenhauerian themes:

Whoever has fully accepted the teaching of my philosophy and thus knows that our whole existence is something which had better not have been, and to deny and reject which is the highest wisdom, will not cherish great expectations of anything or any condition; he will not ardently aspire to anything in the world, nor will be complain very much if he fails in any undertaking. (*PPI*, 409)

Such sentiments reverberate through Schopenhauer's work; they also evince affinities with some of the central thematic concerns of *Murphy*. When compared with Belacqua's quest for disengagement from the world, Murphy's inner experiences are more overtly akin to states of negation than renunciation. However, given the incontestable presence of Geulingian ideas in *Murphy*, a consideration of the thematic parallels and differences between the works of à

Kempis, Geulincx, and Schopenhauer will enable us to appreciate how Murphy's quest for emancipation can be usefully contextualised.

# The Brydell of Reason

Beckett's initial engagement with Geulincx's thought was through Windelband's *A History of Philosophy*, a text which indelibly shaped Beckett's 1930s 'Philosophy Notes.' Given that his early familiarity with Geulincx's thought stemmed from a secondary source which provides a necessarily brief account of the philosopher's ideas, it was demonstrably limited. By consulting Windelband's text we learn that Geulincx was one of the "chief representatives" of Occasionalism and that he contributed toward "a transformation of the Cartesian method into the *Euclidean line of proof.*" Windelband notes his view of "finite bodies and minds as only 'limitations,' *praecisiones* of the universal infinite body and the divine mind" and his "full development" of the notion of God's causal role in earthly affairs. Windelband also explores Geulingian ideas such as the analogy of "the two clocks;" that "the mind cannot be the cause of the bodily movements;" and that man has "nothing to do in the outer world." Tucker advises us to be mindful of a key chronological issue in our attempts to evaluate the role of Geulingian thought in *Murphy*:

Beckett researched Geulincx while already well on with the composition of *Murphy*, too late to use the research to drive larger aspects of the narrative throughout the novel, such that any influence of the research earlier in the novel than Chapter 9 would largely be a matter of extensive revising and redrafting which in turn appears unlikely.<sup>12</sup>

While Geulincx's philosophy was an important discovery for Beckett, he had, as we have seen, familiarised himself with Schopenhauer's thought prior to his reading of Geulincx. Cohn contends that, "Murphy is the most Geulincxian of [Beckett's] works," yet when considering the sources of Beckett's fascination with quietism and his incorporation of its tenets into his composition of Murphy, it is important to consider how Schopenhauer had already provided Beckett with an array of arguments regarding the futility of worldly involvement. While Beckett's study of the works of à Kempis and Geulincx could have led to a ratification of those views of Schopenhauer with which he was already acquainted, there is a clear divergence between Schopenhauer and such thinkers in their views of the influence of rationality over human affairs. In stressing the radical originality of his notions of the primacy of the Will over reason, Schopenhauer states:

The fundamental feature of my teaching, placing it in opposition to all that have ever yet existed, is the total separation of the will from knowledge. All philosophers prior to me regarded these two as inseparable; indeed they looked upon the will as conditioned by, even often as a mere function of, knowledge, which is, according to them, the fundamental substance of our spiritual being. (WN, 35)

Christian thinkers such as à Kempis, whose adversarial meditations upon sensuality culminate with a laudatory description of the man who has attained autonomy from the promptings of our lower nature through the "iugement of right reson," foreshadows Geulincx's positive appraisal of the repressive capacities of rationality. Beckett's notes on Geulincx contain many entries pertaining to the philosopher's consistent approbation of reason. Geulincx claims that, "He who serves Reason is a slave to no-one, but rather is on that account completely free." Geulincx venerates rational thought as an image of the divine within us; accordingly, the exercise of that faculty is synonymous with piety and virtue. Beckett maintained a lifelong opposition to such exorbitant claims about the potential of pure intellection. As we have already noted, he claimed that the Encyclopaedists gave "reason a responsibility which it simply can't bear, it's too weak."

Geulinex was taken to task by Schopenhauer because his overweening faith in reason ensured that he "rejected Plato's cardinal virtues and put forward diligentia, obedientia, justitia, and humilitas; obviously a bad selection" (PPII, 204). To recognise the pronounced antipathy between the views of Geulinex and those of Schopenhauer regarding rationality it is instructive to consider Beckett's summaries of Geulinex's arguments regarding the links between reason and virtue. In Beckett's notes we read: "Diligence is listening to Reason;" 17 "Obedience is an exercise of Reason;" 18 "Justice is the fair application of Reason;" 19 and "Humility is a disregard for oneself out of a love of God and Reason." Beckett also transcribed Geulinex's contention that, "The virtuous man does what he wishes only in the sense that he wishes nothing but what Reason dictates."<sup>21</sup> In the previous chapter we observed how Schopenhauer refuted notions of rationality as the basis of ethical behaviour. Schopenhauer also points out that, "Reasonable and vicious are quite consistent with each other, in fact, only through their union are great and far-reaching crimes possible" (BM, 83). He goes on to ask, "how can pure reason be practical? To explain this, all human reason is inadequate and all effort and work are spent in vain" (BM, 102). While à Kempis differs from Schopenhauer in his assertion of the ability of "the brydell of reason" to "refrayne" the "sensuall partes," 22 glaring divergences between the respective evaluations of reason that Geulinex and Schopenhauer propound can also be discerned. Here it is instructive to

juxtapose Geulincx's description of rationality as a "sacred oracle" which is encountered via "a withdrawal of the mind (no matter what its current business) into itself, into its innermost sanctum" with Schopenhauer's dismissal of reason as a source from which "doubt and error have appeared in the theoretical, care and remorse in the practical" (*WWRI*, 35) modes of life. In this context it is worth recalling that, while Beckett, in his reluctant provision of exegetical principles, stressed the validity of "points of departure" such as "the 'Naught is more real . . . and the 'Ubi nihil vales . . .," he insisted that, "neither [are] very rational" (*D*, 113). Their weakness as purely abstract principles seems to have underpinned their importance as aesthetically expedient devices in Beckett's work - a fact that can be ascertained by an estimation of their efficacy over the life of Murphy.

#### The Imponderables of Personality

In *Murphy* the narrator's continual interweaving of references to chance and fate imbues the evolving narrative with numerous tensions; it can also be seen to parallel Schopenhauer's conflicting conclusions regarding the respective roles of determinism and contingency as causal foundations of earthly events. As I revealed in Chapter One, Schopenhauer's observations regarding the epistemological aspects of human existence reveal clear correlations with his aesthetic criteria. He states:

Fatalism or rather determinism, entirely carried out, would make of the world a puppet show with puppets pulled on wires for the amusement of we know not whom and in accordance with a plan previously thought out. As the motives are obviously such wires, there is for this fatalism no remedy other than the knowledge that the existence itself of things is from a free will, for their doing and acting are necessitated on the assumption of their existence and the motives. - To rescue freedom from fate or chance, it must be shifted from the action into the existence. (MRIII, 685)

From the above passage we can discern how Schopenhauer's discussion of fatalism and determinism echoes his indictment of art which is produced in accordance with pre-conceived intentions. He also makes an explicit link between the enigmatic necessitarian forces which govern planetary motion and the abiding concerns of the arts: "The world lives and moves because it *must* and here it repeats the strange spectacle which art is never tired of repeating" (*MRIV*, 19). Van Hulle and Nixon report that Beckett highlighted a section of his German edition of Schopenhauer's writings which deals with the "absurdity" of assuming the freedom of the will. While it would be difficult to assign a specific date to Beckett's underscoring of that passage, Schopenhauer's meticulous examination of our cherished yet

deluded notions of freedom resembles Beckett's treatment of such themes in *Murphy*. Schopenhauer contends that,

If we consider his [man's] actions *objectively* i.e., from without, we recognise apodictically that, like the actions of every being in nature, they must be subject to the law of causality in all its strictness. *Subjectively*, on the other hand, everyone feels that he always does only what he *wills*. But this means merely that his actions are the pure manifestation of his very own essence. (*FW*, 88)

Schopenhauer argues that human behaviour results with strict necessity from motives acting upon our immutable character. As embodied beings we are not free owing to our intrinsic subservience to the forces which govern all events within the phenomenal world, but we are also manifestations of the Will, which lies entirely outside the bounds of causal influence. Such ideas are most succinctly expressed in Schopenhauer's claim that, "The will . . . has a metaphysical *freedom*, but not an empirical freedom. The intelligible character is free, the empirical is necessitated" (*MRIV*, 19). Our traditional notion of free will is bitingly repudiated by Schopenhauer as being a "crazy fable" (*MRIV*, 145). As physical entities we are no less subject to natural laws than other objects: "the will proclaims itself just as directly in the fall of a stone as in the action of a man" (*WWRII*, 299); hence the "*semblance*" of freedom that we enjoy is an "illusion" (*MRIV*, 220).

In 'Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . Joyce' Beckett proclaims that, "History . . . is not the result of Fate or Chance . . . but the result of a Necessity that is not Fate, of a Liberty that is not Chance (compare Dante's 'yoke of liberty')" (D, 22). Similarly, the opening words of Murphy evince the perennial enigmas of freedom and determinism and the illusory nature of Murphy's pretensions: "The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new. Murphy sat out of it, as though he were free, in a mew in West Brompton" (M, 3). In a statement which resounds with Schopenhauerian connotations, Beckett claimed that, "Murphy has no freedom of choice, i.e., he is not free to act against his inclination" (quoted in JK, 247). Schopenhauer makes a profoundly insightful distinction between our capacity to do what we will and our capacity to will what we will; while he affirms the first possibility, he denies the latter: "You can do what you will, but at any given moment of your life you can will only one definite thing and nothing else but this one thing" (FW, 21). In his Trinity lectures Beckett pondered the ways in which an author could address the profound aesthetic challenges presented by the antinomies of freedom and determinism. In speaking about Racine he observed that, "The artist himself was changing all the time and his material was constantly

in a state of flux, hence you had to do something to organise the mess, but not make puppets and set them in motion."<sup>25</sup> While the narrator will go on to inform us that Murphy, unlike the other characters in the novel, "is not a puppet" (M, 78), the text repeatedly reveals a variety of tensions between what could be described as his "eleutheromania" (M, 82) and his rootedness in a world which is governed by ubiquitous necessities. Having already faced the task of writing fiction within which the autonomy of characters from exhaustive definition and control is enshrined as a key compositional principle, in writing Murphy Beckett was yet again confronted with the intractable dilemmas of narration. In the previous chapter we noted how  $More\ Pricks$  and 'Echo's Bones' are pervaded by happenings which could be variously attributed to contingency or fate and that, accordingly, such indeterminacies augment our interpretative choices. At various points in Murphy we are reminded of such issues by a narrator who is shown to be distinctly unreliable on even the most basic of issues: "The next day was Saturday (if our reckoning is correct)" (M, 94).

Murphy revels in the gulf between his subjective identity and its objective surroundings but the hypothetical nature of his freedom posits many questions. Sensory data, emanating oppressively from "the big world" (M, 6), distracts him from the bountiful experience of inner descent:

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 . . . it was not until his body was appeared that he could come alive in his mind . . . And life in his mind gave him pleasure, such pleasure that pleasure was not the word. (M, 3-4)

According to Schopenhauer, "this body itself is only concrete willing, objectivity of will" (*WWRI*, 175). Geulincx and Schopenhauer differ radically in their conceptions of causality and consequentially regarding the means by which we can achieve freedom from the afflictions associated with embodiment. In his 'Philosophy Notes' Beckett summarises Geulincx's Occasionalist ideas as follows: "The ultimate 'cause' for causal connection between stimuli and sensations, purpose and action, is God. This is <u>Occasionalism</u>" (TCD MS 10967/189). Geulincx stresses that, as a soul within a body, "I am a mere spectator of a machine whose workings I can neither adjust nor readjust." Schopenhauer would agree with the elements of impotence described therein but his idea of the Will as the presiding governor of human affairs leaves no room for a benevolent arbiter of bodily movements. While being the source of all motion, "the will is also the origin of the evil of the world" (*MRIV*, 115). For

Schopenhauer, willing is not in any way attributable to a choice which directs corporeal behaviour. He argues:

The act of will and the action of the body are not two different states objectively known, connected by the bond of causality; they do not stand in the relation of cause and effect; but are one and the same thing . . . The action of the body is nothing but the act of will objectified . . . Resolutions of the will relating to the future are mere deliberations of reason about what will be willed at some time, not real acts of will. (*WWRI*, 100)

It is in accordance with such claims that Schopenhauer can be seen to avoid the problems which arise from what he considers to be the "false distinction" (*MRIV*, 233) of mind-body dualism and its associated causal dynamics. The requirement for Murphy to restrain his body is, from a Schopenhauerian perspective, tantamount to a quietening of the Will.

Given Beckett's interest in Geulincx and other thinkers, such as à Kempis and Descartes whose works glorify God's interventionist rule, it is instructive to note the extent of Beckett's deviation from their views. The bewildering dissonances of selfhood intrigued Beckett throughout his artistic career. He clearly recognised the ludicrous aspects of traditional approaches to discussions of our divided identities. As we noted in the Chapter Three, he questioned the "rationale" (TCD MS 10967/84) of a world of sensory delights which should be abolished by the dictates of reason. Schopenhauer's critique of all systems which exalt rationality as an instrument by means of which we can attain ultimate insights into and complete mastery over our condition was clearly more compelling to Beckett's mind. Beckett, in his depiction of the esoteric mastery of Neary, engages with such issues to notable comic effect:

Murphy had lately studied under a man in Cork called Neary. This man, at that time, could stop his heart more or less whenever he liked and keep it stopped, within reasonable limits, for as long as he liked . . . Murphy's purpose in going to sit at Neary's feet was not to develop the Neary heart, which he thought would quickly prove fatal to a man of his temper, but simply to invest his own with a little of what Neary, at that time a Pythagorean, called the Apmonia. For Murphy had such an irrational heart that no physician could get to the root of it. (M, 4)

Mays contends that, "Neary is a Trinity philosopher named H. S. Macran, a great Hegelian." McDowell and Webb claim that Macran "fell under the spell of Hegel, whose philosophy soon became with him a positive obsession." Without sharing the categorical

assurance of Mays, it is interesting to consider the possibility of Neary having an extratextual basis in a figure who propounded what Schopenhauer describes as the "senseless sham wisdom of Hegel" (*WWRI*, 427). Neary's overwhelming craving for Miss Counihan is comparable to the idiosyncrasies of Murphy's heart in its subversion of reason. Bereft of a requital of his affections for Miss Counihan, Neary loses his preternatural intellective abilities: "The power to stop his heart had deserted him" (*M*, 37). Murphy's confidence in Neary's talents is based upon his convictions regarding the capacity of mind to deliver him from the incompatible passions of his divided self. Schopenhauer, in a passage which is echoed by the experiential realities of Murphy's life, notes how we can be tantalised by the prospect of autonomy which is presented by a mind ordinarily racked by the demands of Will:

(T)he will, when its servant, the *intellect*, is unable to produce the thing desired, compels this servant at any rate to picture this thing to it, and generally to undertake the role of comforter, to pacify its lord and master, as a nurse does a child, with fairy-tales, and to deck these out so that they obtain an appearance of verisimilitude. Here the intellect is bound to do violence to its own nature, which is aimed at truth, since it is compelled, contrary to its own laws, to regard as true things that are neither true nor probable, and often scarcely possible, merely in order to pacify, soothe, and send to sleep for a while the restless and unmanageable *will*. We clearly see here who is master and who is servant. (*WWRI*, 216-7)

Neary's attempts to name Murphy's bizarre affliction are as futile as his endeavours to comprehend it: "When he got tired of calling it the Apmonia he called it the Isonomy. When he got sick of the sound of Isonomy he called it the Attunement. But he might call it what he liked, into Murphy's heart it would not enter. Neary could not blend the opposites in Murphy's heart" (M, 4). Neary is similarly limited in his efforts to quell the infernal aspects of corporeal desire. His helpless enslavement to his afflictive yearnings, coupled with his assumption of Murphy's seeming immunity from such visceral promptings, acquires a fascinating theological resonance: "The love that lifts up its eyes,' said Neary, 'being in torment; that craves for the tip of her little finger, dipped in lacquer, to cool its tongue - is foreign to you, Murphy, I take it" (M, 5). As we identify the above allusion to the story of Dives and Lazarus, which describes the condemnation of a sinner to an eternity of immitigable pain, we are reminded of Beckett's Schopenhauerian inclinations to emphasise the hellish aspects of amatory passions and to portray common human experiences through terms of reference which demonstrate the wrathful nature of God. Later in this novel we learn

that Neary's "relation towards [Miss Counihan] had been that post-mortem of Dives to Lazarus, except that there was no Father Abraham to put in a good word for him" (M, 33). Beckett's employment of Biblical narratives dispenses with the comforting implications contained therein. While it is a critical truism to note the irony of such instances, it is interesting to recognise the apposite quality of their widespread presence in writings which focus so insistently upon the travails of being. Neary's assumption that Murphy's "conarium has shrunk to nothing" (M, 6) may tempt the reader to approve of the applicability of Cartesian discourse to Murphy's renunciatory quests, yet when examining Murphy's situation, the basic mind-body dualism that Descartes formulated is of distinctly lesser value as a hermeneutic device, than Schopenhauer's more refined account of the abounding intricacies of human identity. Schopenhauer opposed Descartes' "assertion that places a man's inner nature in a *soul* that is originally a knowing, indeed really an abstract thinking entity, and only in consequence thereof a willing entity" because in accordance with such a view "The will was even regarded as an act of thought" (WWRI, 292). He commended Spinoza for opposing the Cartesian idea of dualism and for his "great superiority" (PPI, 45) in showing that, "The thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance" (PPI, 45 n. 25).

In a statement which provides an aptly despairing commentary upon Murphy's troubles with Celia, Schopenhauer claims, "The female sex demands and expects from the male everything that it desires and needs; the male demands of the female firstly and directly only one thing" (MRIII, 522). Among the various impediments to Murphy's realisation of inward serenity, Celia looms menacingly: "The part of him that he hated craved for Celia, the part that he loved shrivelled up at the thought of her" (M, 7). Celia's inability to account for her attraction to Murphy reminds us of Belacqua's onerous attempts to reveal the sources of his inexplicable ways: "Celia now came to that part of her relation [with Murphy] which she rather despaired of explaining to Mr. Kelly, because she did not properly understand it herself' (M, 14). Schopenhauer asserts that in such cases, where behaviour has essentially emanated from the Will, "the intellect acts here like a strange witness; it attempts to investigate it and is afraid of being deceived, and actually this is often the case" (MRIV, 211). In Murphy Celia has, however, discovered someone who has a profound "respect for the imponderables of personality" (M, 15). Similarly, in his efforts to justify his unwillingness to seek gainful employment, Murphy's explanatory efforts founder: "Sometimes Murphy would begin to make a point, sometimes he may have even finished making one, it was hard to say"

(*M*, 16). When read in conjunction with Schopenhauer's view that, "we are often unable to give any account of the origin of our deepest thoughts; they are the offspring of our mysterious inner being" (*WWRI*, 136), Murphy's communicative tribulations can be seen as indicative of reason's incapacity to comprehend and the inability of words to express the intricacies of individuality.

In the previous chapter of the present study we noted how Belacqua's enthusiasm for experiences which involve self-dissolution are remarkably akin to Schopenhauer's idea of life emerging from nothingness to endure a brief and precarious odyssey before death heralds a return to the womb of nature. Murphy, "addicted [as] he was to the dark" (M, 19) is adept at "apperceiving himself into a glorious grave" (M, 15). Our sense of Murphy's kinship with Belacqua deepens when we learn that, "Murphy never wore a hat, the memories it awoke of the caul were too poignant, especially when he had to take it off" (M, 48). Murphy does not share Augustine's zealous revulsion towards astrologers which resounds with Old Testament strictures: "I rejected the lying divinations and impious dotages of the astrologers." Augustine's focus upon the irrational and sinful principles of astrology prefigures Geulincx's arguments about the essential unity of reason and virtue. Murphy's abominable assumptions about the propitious aspects of celestial motion absolve him of the need for personal initiative in a way which anticipates his enthusiasm for his conditions of employment at the Magdalene Mental Mercyseat. Schopenhauer's examination of the range of ways in which we are driven by irrational motives leads to his censure of astrological thought:

Astrology furnishes a splendid proof of the contemptible *subjectivity* of men in consequence whereof they refer everything to themselves and from every idea at once go back to themselves. Astrology refers the course of celestial bodies to the miserable ego; it also establishes a connection between the comets in heaven and the squabbles and rascalities on earth. (*PPI*, 450)

Murphy's reluctance to assume responsibility for the financial demands of his life with Celia is ascribed to star charts which inform him of "metaphysical considerations, in whose gloom it appeared that the night had come in which no Murphy could work" (M, 16). While his passivity is largely inspired by his aversion to the unbearable thought of societal engagement, his illusory hopes are promptly revealed in his assumption that "Providence will provide" as he encounters "The imperturbable negligence of Providence" (M, 16). Murphy's star chart provides him with an apt confirmation of the legitimacy of his sense of self in ways which corroborate Schopenhauer's notion of the "contemptible *subjectivity* of men." His endurance

of bodily ills is alleviated in a manner which supposedly adds credence to his sense of the power of celestial influence. We learn that, "He suffered much with his feet, and his neck was not altogether free of pain. This filled him with satisfaction. It confirmed the diagram and reduced by just so much the danger of Bright's disease, Grave's disease, strangury and fits" (*M*, 49). A summation of the chart's central points bespeaks its allure to Murphy's temperament:

At time of Birth of this Native . . . his highest attributes being Soul, Emotion, Clairaudience and Silence. Few minds are better concocted than this native's. The Moon twenty-three degrees of the Serpent promotes great Magical ability of the eye, to which the lunatic would easily succumb. Avoid exhaustion by speech. Intense Love nature prominent, rarely suspicioning the Nasty, with inclinations to Purity. When sensuality rules there is danger of fits . . . There has been persons of this description known to have expressed a wish to be in two places at a time . . . Should avoid drugs and resort to Harmony . . . Success terminating in the height of Glory . . . may injure Native's prospects. (M, 23)

If we compare the above passage with Schopenhauer's ideas regarding the antinomial elements of human identity we recognise correlations which can illuminate our understanding of Murphy's predicaments. Schopenhauer asks,

How indeed could a man be satisfied, so long as he has not acquired perfect *unity* of his true nature? For as long as two voices speak in him by turns, for so long must what is right for one voice make the other dissatisfied and so one of the voices must always complain. But has a man ever been wholly in harmony with himself? Indeed is it conceivable without contradiction? (*MRI*, 101)

Schopenhauer considers worldly engagement and its associated attachments to be a primary cause of our ineradicable sense of dissatisfaction. Riven by conflicting desires, we are powerless to exert control over our discordant aspirations. Murphy endures "perpetual worry" (M, 49) owing to his acknowledgement of the dissonance which exists between his quietist aspirations and his imperturbable confidence in the dictates of astrological influence. The narrator notes that, for this "poorly starred native" (M, 49), the reader will recognise that, "there seems to be a certain disharmony between the only two canons in which [he] can feel the least confidence" (M, 50).

The narrator's invocation of the names of Ixion and Tantalus in his consideration of Murphy's refusal to seek employment echoes Schopenhauer's esteem for classical characters which, as we saw in Chapter One, signify the innumerable and unceasing miseries which

pervade our lives. Critics such as Pothast have been content to highlight the presence of a Schopenhauerian trace in Beckett's work, such as Murphy's analogous relationship with Ixion and Tantalus,<sup>30</sup> without affording due consideration to the means by which Beckett manipulates such material. Murphy asserts a basic affinity with such doomed individuals yet he creatively appropriates the myths which describe their ineluctable fates in his view that they are not entirely circumscribed by their punishments: "Was Ixion under any contract to keep his wheel in nice running order? Had any provision been made for Tantalus to eat salt?" (MP, 16) Given Schopenhauer's assertion that, "the subject of willing is constantly lying on the revolving wheel of Ixion . . . and is the eternally thirsting Tantalus" (WWRI, 196), Murphy's emancipatory efforts can be instructively related to Schopenhauer's vision of liberation. Having portrayed the tribulations which perennially arise from quotidian modes of consciousness, Schopenhauer attempts to depict the nature of freedom which is enjoyed by those who experience a quieting of conation:

When . . . an external cause or inward disposition suddenly raises us out of the endless stream of willing, and snatches knowledge from the thraldom of the will, the attention is now no longer directed to the motives of willing, but comprehends things free from their relation to the will . . . Then all at once the peace always sought but always escaping us on that first path of willing, comes to us of its own accord, and all is well with us. (*WWRI*, 196)

Schopenhauer argues that our belief in any form of supernatural guidance is revelatory of both the impotence of reason and the omnipresence of Will in our lives: "it has sprung not from knowledge but from the will . . . it is merely the offspring of our miserable condition" (MRIII, 356). In his reluctant submission to Celia's desire for him to seek work, Murphy entrusts himself to cosmic guidance: "the only system outside his own in which he felt the least confidence, [was] that of the heavenly bodies" (M, 16).

Schopenhauer's aversion to astrology was not based upon its deterministic vision of human affairs. At the core of his own thought is a conception of human life as being ruthlessly presided over by the relentless dominance of Will: "at his birth, the entire course of a man's life is already irrevocably determined in all its details . . . We should bear in mind this great and certain truth when we contemplate and assess the course of our life, our actions and our sufferings" (*MRIV*, 361). Schopenhauer's deviation from astrological thought rests, in part, upon his insistence upon the sheer unintelligibility of human destiny. As Celia embarks upon her journey to secure Murphy's horoscope with her indispensable knowledge of the "year and

date of the unhappy event" (M, 16), we discern overtones of Schopenhauer's notion of ontological guilt, which, as we have seen, has a tendency to portend doom for Beckett's protagonists. When Mr. Kelly describes Celia's involvement with Murphy as "an intercourse that must prove fatal" (M, 18) we sense that the inexorable unfolding of fate in the "big world" will impart great narratorial impetus to the portrayal of Murphy's introspective endeavours and his insistence upon heeding the advice proffered by a "fake jossy's sixpenny writ" (M, 19). Celia's own willingness to accede to the vagaries of chance is evident in her employment of her "devil's finger" (M, 20) to determine an outcome of a coin toss and her subsequent entry to or departure from Murphy's room, yet the diabolic counterpart to the "finger of God" (MP, 91), which was operative in More Pricks, may suggest the presence of a more malignant power in the dictation of her actions. Her momentary stasis as an auditor of the "appalling sound" (M, 20) which issues from Murphy's room signifies her eminently Beckettian plight of being in a "strait of two wills" (MP, 50). Murphy's liberation was fortuitously enacted when "the omen of the coin was overruled" (M, 20). His ignominious fall is merely one accident in the novel which will serve to perpetuate a host of aesthetically resplendent determinative contingencies which are remarkably redolent of what Schopenhauer strikingly describes as "chance personified as fate" (WWRI, 385).

In previous chapters of this dissertation we noted correlations between Schopenhauer's contentions regarding the essential inalterability of character and the tendency of Beckett's protagonists to appeal to the immutable nature of their identities as a means of justifying or explaining their enigmatic ways. The Belacqua of *Dream* and *More Pricks* was seen to rely upon such tactics in his interpersonal dealings, yet we also noted that, in underscoring the inexplicable motives of his protagonists, Beckett, by means of ironic distancing and irreverent quips adapted discursive thought for aesthetic ends, thereby exalting the polysemic potentialities of his characters' thoughts and deeds. In *Murphy* Beckett's engagement with such ideas is more in line with what Schopenhauer considers to be the illusions which are endemic aspects of self-estimation:

[A] human being always does only what he wills, and yet he necessarily does it. This is owing to the fact that he already *is* what he wills, for from what he is all that he ever does follows of necessity. If we consider his actions *objectively* i.e., from without, we recognise apodictically that, like the actions of every being in nature, they must be subject to the law of causality in all its strictness. *Subjectively*, on the other hand, everyone feels that he always does only what he *wills*. But this means merely that his actions are the pure manifestation of his very own essence. (*FW*, 88)

Murphy has recourse to ideas regarding the irremediable qualities of selfhood as he accuses Celia of not loving the person that he actually is in her assumptions regarding the individual that he could potentially be: "What do you love?' said Murphy. 'Me as I am. You can want what does not exist, you can't love it.' This came well from Murphy. 'Then why are you all out to change me? So that you won't have to love me" (M, 25). According to Schopenhauer, "to ask [a man] whether he could will otherwise than as he does is tantamount to asking him whether he could be different from what he himself is" (FW, 18). We later learn that Celia's "efforts to make a man of him had made him more than ever Murphy; and how by insisting on trying to change him she had lost him" (M, 119). Murphy's worst suspicions about the nature of the "mercantile gehenna" (M, 27), having been confirmed by his brief job-seeking exploits, intensify his emancipatory desires. Celia also speaks with Schopenhauerian insight in her statement, "I am what I do" (M, 26), thereby eliciting a qualifying rejoinder from Murphy: "No . . . You do what you are, you do a fraction of what you are, you suffer a dreazy ooze of your being into doing" (M, 26). The waitress named Vera will later be described in terms which encapsulate the essence of her being as a strictly behavioural phenomenon: "She was a willing little bit of sweated labour . . . essentially a waitress" (M, 54). Such interpretations of the correlations between ontology and identity parallel Schopenhauer's claim that, "Since I will according as I am, I must therefore be according as I will" (WN, 141).

Ackerley notes<sup>31</sup> the Schopenhauerian connotations of such themes, yet he attributes the intertextual source to the citation of "tat twam asi" in Beckett's 'Whoroscope Notebook.' However, as I noted in the previous chapter of the present study, Schopenhauer uses that Sanskrit phrase as means of highlighting what occurs when we act on the basis of compassion by discerning the underlying unity between ourselves and others. Murphy's appeal to the inviolable nature of his identity constitutes an apologia for self rather than an altruistic recognition of Celia's understandable qualms. Murphy, like the Belacqua of More Pricks, is lamentably inept in his attempts to defend the mysterious motives which guide his unknowable self: "It was not his habit to make cases out for himself. An atheist chipping the deity was not more senseless than Murphy defending his courses of inaction" (M, 26). Such endeavours contrast glaringly with the stoical equanimity which seems to define his better self: "To die fighting was the perfect antithesis of his whole practice, faith and intention" (M, 26). In Chapter Three Schopenhauer's arguments regarding the futility of all attempts to probe the wellsprings of our behaviour were seen to possess clear affinities with Belacqua's

abject striving towards self-explication. The failure of Murphy and Celia to achieve mutual understanding is expressed by the narrator in terms which reveal characteristic Beckettian concerns about the inefficacy of language. Celia "felt, as she felt so often with Murphy, spattered with words that went dead as soon as they sounded; each word obliterated before it had time to make sense, by the word that came next; so that in the end she did not know what had been said. It was like difficult music heard for the first time" (M, 28). In our original experiences of dramatic works such as *Play* and *Not I*, we, as perplexed auditors, attain some insight into Celia's communicative predicaments with Murphy. The narrator's analogy between language and music is noteworthy owing to its implication that our initial perplexities when faced with complex musical form will, in time, diminish. In Chapter One I examined Schopenhauer's claim that rationality is thoroughly redundant in our encounters with the pre-eminent aesthetic glories of music, a fact which accounts for our experience of blissful incomprehension and our reliance upon the Da capo. Schopenhauer consistently affirms the unavoidable complications of linguistic expression: "just as every means, every machine, at the same time burdens and obstructs, so does language" (WWRII, 66-7). In those instances where he is moved to offer elucidations of his singular ways, Murphy, having been advised to "Avoid exhaustion by speech" (M, 23), seems doomed.

#### This Life Disease

In a passage which serves to provide a pertinent commentary upon Murphy's insatiable desire to divest himself of his tumultuous interactions with the "big world" Schopenhauer asserts, "An individual life has borne its whole fruit when a man withdraws from it without any longer cherishing a desire for it and its pleasures; when he is cured of the disease which manifested itself as a life" (*MRIII*, 641). In a rendering of Chamfort's maxims into English, Beckett wrote of "this life disease" (*CPS*, 200). The conception of life as a "disease" is shared by Wylie who, in a statement which is suffused with ominous implications for Murphy's renunciatory efforts notes, "the syndrome known as life is too diffuse to admit of palliation. For each symptom that is eased, another is made worse. The horse leech's daughter is a closed system. Her quantum of wantum cannot vary" (*M*, 38). The Biblical allusion that Wylie employs emphasises the essential irony of invoking an interpretative principle which is derived from an ostensibly coherent narrative about negated fulfilment, to illuminate the fragmentary reality of life and its insatiable cravings. In Proverbs 30:15-16, unfulfillable longing is symbolised by "The grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not it is enough." Ancient wisdom comprises a body of thought

which has a tendency to confirm rather than ease the direful states of Beckett's protagonists. Moreover, in the above example, Wylie's attempt to comfort Neary is far more likely to antagonise him when we consider the mention of a "barren womb." Such sterility prevents the sorrows that existence inflicts upon characters such as Neary who has already "cursed, first the day in which he was born, then - in a bold flash-back - the night in which he was conceived" (M, 31). Similarly, Murphy's birth, having been described as an "unhappy event," prefigures Mr Tyler who, in *All that Fall*, along with his imprecations against God and man, offers a sardonic gloss upon Job's plaintive cries as he curses the "wet Saturday afternoon of [his] conception" (CDW, 175).

Schopenhauer's insistent claims about the sheer impotence of rationality are founded upon his sense of the implacable influence of the Will which "always strives, because striving is its sole nature, to which no attained goal can put an end. Such striving is therefore incapable of final satisfaction; it can be checked only by hindrance, but in itself it goes on forever" (WWRI, 308). His later peculiarly quantitative characterisation of man as "concrete willing" through and through . . . a concretion of a thousand wants and needs" (WWRI, 312) can therefore be seen as unduly conservative. The rapidity with which satiety wanes is thematically evident throughout Murphy. Murphy's attempt to relive the pleasure induced by sitting is a case in point, as we learn that the exquisite sensations afforded by his initial descent on to a seat were uniquely particular and thereby unrepeatable: "The second sit was. . . a great disappointment" (M, 52). Tucker is right in claiming that Coffey's notion of "undesire" is usefully applicable to Murphy's "failure . . . to undo his desires" but as we have seen, Beckett's fascination with the possibility of an "ablation of desire" (PTD, 18) is more readily attributable to his interest in Schopenhauer. Following his early engagement with Schopenhauer's thought, Wittgenstein was equally intrigued by the idea that "not wanting is the only good."34

Neary, being utterly enslaved by his impassioned yearnings for Miss Counihan, is offered insights from Wylie which are consonant with Schopenhauer's contentions regarding the futility of striving and the ephemeral reality of satisfaction: "I am to infer,' said Neary,' correct me if I'm wrong that the possession - *Deus det!* - of angel Counihan will create an aching void to the same amount." 'Humanity is a well with two buckets,' said Wylie, 'one going down to be filled, the other coming up to be emptied" (*M*, 39). Neary's philosophical studies have not enabled him to master his affective afflictions; he is acutely aware of the

limitations of discursive solutions to predicaments which originate through concrete experiences. In a way reminiscent of Lord Gall's dismissal of Belacqua's Augustinian discourse, which was intended to alleviate Gall's tragic existence, Neary repudiates the unavailingly abstract nature of Wylie's advice: "Should you happen at any time,' said Neary, to feel like derogating from the general to the particular, remember I am here, and on the alert" (M, 39). Such notions echo Schopenhauer's view that, "the concept cannot reach down to the endless variety and diversity of the concrete and does not suffice to grasp and comprehend it" (MRIV, 70). Neary's developing sense of the sheer inefficacy of abstract thought when confronted with the turmoil of his emotional ensnarement in the world foreshadows his later acceptance of the irreducible disorder of being: "Life is all rather irregular" (M, 169).

For Schopenhauer, "[the Will] alone is the real human being; the intellect is merely its organ, its outwardly directed antennae, i.e., the medium of the effect on it through motives" (FW, 90). Neary's painful recognition of the discrepancy between his affective torments and the impersonal discourse which Wylie employs in his attempts to rationalise his tribulations, amounts to a deeply experiential realisation of Schopenhauer's view that, "concepts are not what is essential. On the contrary, this, the *fond* and content of all our knowledge, the true substance of this, lies in the intuitive interpretation of the world which can be gained simply from ourselves" (MRIII, 44). Such statements enhance our sense of the radical isolationism to which we are subject, given that we are all driven by forces which transcend the capacities upon which we rely to comprehend and articulate our innermost experiences. Celia's agonised response to the death of the "old boy" frustrates Murphy's attempts to assure her of the "unutterable benefits that would accrue, were already accruing, to [him] from his demise" (M, 86). In Schopenhauerian terms, emotional traumata render us impervious to rational consolations: "every disturbance of the will, and with it of the organism, must disturb or paralyse the function of the brain" (WWRII, 216). The narrator is perplexed by Celia's reaction: "It is hard to say why she was, and remained, so profoundly distressed" (M, 87). The abundance of instances in Beckett's early fiction where a narrator will admit to the difficulties involved in probing the intricacies of a character's inner life undermines our most cherished assumptions regarding the intelligibility of existence.

In Beckett's literary worlds, even the most hallowed abstract discourse is less a "heal-all" (*M*, 39) than a means by which a source of pitiful craving can be described in terms which are

ordinarily reserved for evincing attributes of the divine. Miss Counihan's bust, as an object of Neary's desire, is accordingly depicted as being "All centre and no circumference" (M, 40). Wylie's efforts on Neary's behalf are, however, motivated by grounds which clearly baffle him. Wylie, being "unable to control" himself in his need to assist Neary, "was absorbed in the problem of what it was, in the predicaments of men like Neary, that carried him so far out of his government" (M, 41). The involuntariness of such aid is as remarkable as its inscrutable occurrence. Such behaviour is certainly reminiscent of what Schopenhauer describes as "the concrete case to which compassion at once appeals without any further mediation of ideas" (BM, 183). It is in such arational cases, when we are confronted by a propensity to act in accordance with unknown motives, that Schopenhauer claims we are confronted by "the great mystery of ethics" (BM, 212). As Neary and Wylie converse about Murphy and attempt to find an apt means to define his most salient qualities, specifically those which seem to be so irresistible to Miss Counihan, an uncharacteristically auspicious tone of confidence is displayed by the narrator in his admission that, "There seemed to be, for once, a right word" for describing Murphy's most winsome attributes. However, the choice of "surgical" is promptly observed to be "not quite the right word" (M, 41). As we have seen in Dream and More Pricks, Beckett's narrators are acutely aware of the various expressive restrictions imposed by the nature of language. In passages where reason has been shown to be distinctly inadequate as a faculty for comprehending the uniquely particular aspects of human experience, language is equally limited. In a letter to Mary Manning Howe, written on 11 July 1937, Beckett defined his idea of "Logoclasm" as involving "ruptured writing" which allows "the void to protrude, like a hernia" (LI, 521). In a text where notions of nothingness are markedly favourable, human identity seems sufficiently numinous to defy expression.

Murphy, in his encounters with "the antinomies of unmarried love" (M, 43), enjoys moments of apparent pleasure with Celia. In defiance of verbal paraphrase, such instances are referred to through a repertoire of terms that evoke the world of music; which, as we have seen, is an art that Beckett considered to involve an indissoluble link between meaning and being. We learn that, "June to October, leaving out the blockade, their nights were . . . serenade, nocturne and albada" (M, 49). A difference between Schopenhauer and Beckett may be seen to arise in Beckett's use of an analogy between the Will-induced pleasures of sex and the enraptured and distinctly ethereal enjoyment that Schopenhauer considers to be typical of our absorption in the aesthetic splendours of music. However, as we have noted, Beckett was highly adept at manipulating philosophical ideas as a means by which he, like Belacqua,

made his reading "his own." If we consider Schopenhauer's contention that, "music is the language of feeling and passion, just as words are the language of reason" (WWRI, 259), Beckett's analogy may seem less radically at variance with Schopenhauer's views than we may tend to assume. Bloom observes that, "If a creative interpretation is . . . necessarily a misrepresentation, we must accept this apparent absurdity."<sup>35</sup> In Chapter One I noted how Beckett's apparent misreading of Schopenhauer's discussion of music had perpetuated errors in critical responses to his work. Given Beckett's claim that music is "the idea itself" (PTD, 92), music would have been seen by him as being bound up with the phenomenal world in a similar, if more exalted way, than the other arts. Such a view is incompatible with Schopenhauer's basic tenets but it can be related to notable tensions in Schopenhauer's own writings. Having argued that, "we could just as well call the world embodied music as embodied will" (WWRI, 262-3), he goes on to state that, "the sexual impulse is the focus of the will" (WWRII, 237). Such statements may suggest deep-lying conceptual confusions at the core of Schopenhauer's work, but it is instructive to remember that, in his examination of how the Will manifests itself in music and sexual pleasure, he is employing language to express that which transcends the bounds of the effable. As Schopenhauer puts it, "music expresses in an exceedingly universal language . . . with the greatest distinctness and truth, the inner being, the in-itself, of the world, which we think of under the concept of will" (WWRI, 264). Music is thereby inextricably associated with the metaphysical reality which ordinarily dominates our lives and subjects us to perpetual miseries. Somewhat bizarrely, as the preeminent art form, it is also capable of temporarily emancipating us from our volitional tribulations.

Murphy's fear of contact with the threatening alterity of the "mercantile gehenna" reveals his ascetic bent. We recall that sexual congress was referred to by Belacqua in Dream as a "gehenna of sweats and fiascos and tears" (DFW, 19). The Biblical knowledge which Beckett's characters possess does not offer an amelioration of their suffering, but it clarifies their testimonies as beings who are stricken by existence itself. Murphy's alienation from worldly employment is driven by his desire to be free of those "lecherous tyrants the moneybags" (M, 49), yet such commendable immaterialism is rendered irrelevant by his yearning to sustain his life of sexual joys with Celia. The prospect of "no more music" (M, 50) is truly determinative as he embarks upon his reluctant peregrinations in search of employment. Murphy's submission to sexual desire and its associated demands can be seen as a betrayal of the quietist principles that purportedly inform his life as an inward man. His strenuous

encounters with characters such as Ticklepenny and Rosie Dew serve to intensify his libidinous longings: "it had been a trying day for Murphy in the body and he was more than usually impatient for the music to begin" (M, 67-8). Beckett's creative employment of tenets of à Kempis' thought can be readily identified in his early work, such as his use of the phrase "Seldom we come home without hurting of conscience" (DN, 81) in Dream (DFW, 118). When we place that statement in its relevant textual context we note its relevance to Murphy's onerous situation. In the words of à Kempis, "The desires of sensualite drawen to walking aboute; but whan bhe houre is passed, what comeb bereof but grucching of conscience & dispersion of herte! A glad goinge oute ofte times bringeb furbe a sorful comyng home."<sup>36</sup> Such maxims were incorporated into Murphy to describe the experiences of even relatively minor characters such as Rosie Dew, who must venture forth into a truly minatory realm: "She had not left home more gladly than she now returned sadly. It was often the way" (M, 66). Beckett's prior reading of Schopenhauer would have acquainted him with quietist ideas which are conspicuously akin to those of à Kempis and which are notably pertinent to the dilemmas which arise for Murphy owing to his subservience to lustful yearning. Schopenhauer's ability to manipulate a biblical text in accordance with his own experiential criteria is revealed in a passage which coheres with central thematic issues in Murphy:

Ecclesiastes 7:11 says: 'Wisdom is good with an inheritance; and by it there is profit to them that see the sun.' Whoever has been granted this lot through the favour of nature and fate will be anxious and careful to see that the inner source of his happiness remains accessible to him and for this the conditions are independence and leisure. And so he will gladly purchase these at the price of moderation and thrift, the more so as he is not, like others, dependent on the external sources of pleasure. Thus he will not be led astray by the prospects of office, money, favour, and approbation of the world into surrendering himself in order to conform to the sordid designs or bad taste of people . . . It is a great folly to lose the *inner* man in order to gain the *outer*. (*PPI*, 334)

Celia's "sordid designs or bad taste" may well prompt Murphy to betray his deepest inner aspirations as a "seedy solipsist" (M, 51), but his conflicting inclinations can be seen in his very posture: "he had been content to expose himself vaguely in aloof able-bodied postures on the fringes of the better attended slave-markets" (M, 50). The narrator brings a range of diverse literary and philosophical ideas to bear on Murphy's forlorn state within which he craves rest:

At this moment Murphy would willingly have waived his expectation of Antepurgatory for five minutes in his chair, renounced the lee of Belacqua's rock and his embryonal repose, looking down at dawn across the reeds to the trembling of the austral sea and the sun obliquing to the north as it rose, immune from expiation until he should have dreamed it all through again, with the downright dreaming of an infant, from the spermarium to the crematorium. He thought so highly of this post-mortem situation, its advantages were present in such detail to his mind, that he actually hoped he might live to be old. Then he would have a long time lying there dreaming, watching the dayspring run through its zodiac, before the toil up the hill to Paradise. The gradient was outrageous, one in less than one. God grant no godly chandler would shorten his time with a good prayer. This was his Belacqua fantasy and perhaps the most highly systematised of the whole collection. It belonged to those that lay just beyond the frontiers of suffering, it was the first landscape of freedom. (*M*, 51)

As we have seen, Beckett's narrators strive to convey the nature of modes of consciousness within which affective, volitional, and rational states have ceased. Murphy's experience of such transient autonomy is described in terms which signify a negation of the "big world." For such deliverance, "Any old turf would do, on which he might lie down, cease to take notice and enter the landscapes where there were no chandlers and no exclusive residential cancers, but only himself improved out of all knowledge" (M, 51). Such modes of being entail "The freedom of indifference, the indifference of freedom, the will dust in the dust of its object, the act a handful of sand let fall" (M, 67). At those points when Murphy "disconnected his mind from the gross importunities of sensation and reflection and composed himself on the hollow of his back for the torpor he had been craving to enter" (M, 67) his total immunity from the common ontological categories of Western thought, which reduce human identity to the dualistic predicates of body and soul, is clear. Such states constitute an extirpation of the world:

Nothing can stop me now, was his last thought before he lapsed into consciousness, and nothing will stop me. In effect, nothing did turn up to stop him and he slipped away, from the pensums and prizes, from Celia, chandlers, public highways etc, from Celia, buses, public gardens, etc, to where there were no pensums and no prizes, but only Murphy himself, improved out of all knowledge. (*M*, 67)

The specifics of such a description are very much of a piece with Schopenhauer's reflections upon the way in which renunciation can temporarily nullify the abundant perils of quotidian existence; in such a state there is "No will: no representation, no world" (*WWRI*, 411), hence "for those in whom the will has turned and denied itself, this very real world of ours with all its suns and galaxies, is - nothing" (*WWRI*, 412). He notes that, "such a state cannot be called knowledge, since it no longer has the form of subject and object" (*WWRI*, 410). Interestingly,

when describing the effect that Murphy's acquisition of a job of even modest pecuniary gains would have upon Celia, the narrator states that such a development "could not fail to annihilate, for a time at least, the visible universe for his beloved" (*M*, 43).

In Chapter One we saw how Beckett's use of the word "pensum" in Proust correlates with Schopenhauer's notion of life as a task which must be "worked out" (WWRII, 568). We also noted that Schopenhauer's notion of the "better consciousness" involves a state wherein we transcend the epistemic aspects of ordinary subject-object awareness. When we consider Murphy "improved out of all knowledge" we encounter conceptual limits in our attempts to grasp the intrinsic nature of a mental state that lies entirely beyond the confines of the knowable. In Schopenhauer's philosophy "the subject knows itself only as a willer, not as a knower" because "there is no knowledge of knowing, since this would require that the subject separated itself from knowing and yet knew that knowing; and this is impossible" (FR, 208). Elsewhere, Schopenhauer avers that, "for us who are the phenomenon of willing, this denial [of Will] is a passing over into nothing" (PPII, 312). Beckett's narrators struggle to convey what seem to be the supremely real yet entirely inexplicable states of mind which Belacqua and Murphy enjoy in their periods of abstention from intellective or conative activities. In his 'Philosophy Notes' Beckett inscribed propositions from Gorgias' philosophy which argue that, "1. Nothing exists. 2. If it did, it could not be known. 3. If it could be known, it could not be communicated" (TCD MS 10967/48). Such insights anticipate those precepts of Schopenhauer's thought which assert the incommunicable realities of negation which are experienced by the renunciant.

As a denizen of the "big world" Murphy readily reverts to systematic terms of reference, even in the midst of the most mundane affairs. His studious approach to his purchase of tea and biscuits is informed by an impressive array of references to pioneers of psychological schools. We learn that, "Murphy had some faith in the Külpe school. Marbe and Bühler might be deceived, even Watt was only human, but how could Ach be wrong?" (M, 52) Murphy's divergent attitudes to discursive thought, whereby he can entrust his observations and decisions to the central concepts of psychological theorists, while deriding their attempts to fathom the enigmatic ways of the mentally disturbed, is indicative of his thoroughly incoherent self. When considered in relation to Schopenhauer's observations regarding the limitations of conceptual thinking in general, the apparent inconsistencies of Murphy's ideas can be understood by considering the means by which his moments of liberation from the

world emancipate him from the habitual modes of intellection through which he comprehends even the most innocuous of happenings. In the following passage Schopenhauer reveals the intrinsic limitations of rational thinking:

[A]Il science in the real sense, by which I understand systematic knowledge under the guidance of the principle of sufficient reason, can never reach a final goal or give an entirely satisfactory explanation. It never aims at the inmost nature of the world; it can never get beyond the representation; on the contrary, it really tells us nothing more than the relation of one representation to another. (WWRI, 28)

Murphy's capacity to be "overcome" (*M*, 62) by reasoning processes is revealed in his attempts to fathom the range of permutations which are open to him in his choice of biscuits. As he ponders the loss of his lunch to the voracious Nelly, the narrator states, "Wylie in Murphy's place might have consoled himself with the thought that the park was a closed system in which there could be no loss of appetite; Neary with the unction of an *Ipse dixit*" (*M*, 65). However, abstract ideas about the inherent insatiability of hunger or the irrefutable pronouncements of authority would be of negligible value to the "inconsolable" (*M*, 65) Murphy.

# Peace That is Higher Than All Reason

In *Murphy* the ideas of philosophers such as Pythagoras, <sup>37</sup> Spinoza, and Geulincx are verifiably present owing to Beckett's explicit use and adaptation of their arguments. Any attempt to detect Schopenhauerian traces within its pages is likely to prove a more challenging task, specifically in Chapter Six, in which the abounding intricacies of Murphy's mind are the subject of markedly oblique prose. Beckett's impious paraphrase of Spinoza's assertion relating to how "God loves himself with an infinite intellectual love" integrates many of the core issues of rationalism and theism which dominate his work. As I noted in Chapter One, Schopenhauer's insistence upon the subject-dependent nature of reality entails that our perceptions of the world are mediated by the specific limitations and capacities of our cognitive apparatus. He states, "the object, because it always exists only in relation to a subject, is dependent thereon, is conditioned thereby, and is therefore mere phenomenon that does not exist in itself, does not exist unconditionally" (*WWRI*, 434); hence "In every microcosm lies the macrocosm, and the latter contains nothing more than is contained in the former" (*WWRII*, 443). Murphy's mind is described in terms which echo what Schopenhauer reluctantly acknowledged to be the intimate parallels between Solipsism and Transcendental

Idealism, but the narrator is keen to point out Murphy's opposition to pure Idealism in terms which remind us of Kant's determined efforts to distance himself from Berkeley's views:

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 actually present as virtual, or actual, or virtual rising into actual, or actual falling into virtual, in the universe inside it. This did not involve Murphy in the idealist tar. There was the mental fact and the physical fact, equally real if not equally pleasant. (M, 69)

Murphy's psychosomatic perplexities are described in terms which cohere with Schopenhauer's views on one of the most perennially incomprehensible aspects of our lives. We read, "Thus Murphy found himself split in two, a body and a mind. They had intercourse apparently, otherwise he could not have known that they had anything in common. But he felt his mind to be bodytight and did not understand through what channel the intercourse was effected nor how the two experiences came to overlap" (M, 70). Earlier in this chapter I noted Schopenhauer's conception of bodily activity as a concrete expression of Will. In a statement which serves to aid our appreciation of Murphy's bewilderment regarding the duality of his identity, Schopenhauer avers, "Now the identity of the subject of willing with that of knowing by virtue whereof (and indeed necessarily) the word "I" includes and indicates both, is the knot of the world (Weltknoten), and hence inexplicable" (FR, 211). Murphy's strict delineation between his psychic and corporeal attributes does not diminish his sense of powerlessness in his attempts to establish control over his burdensome physicality. His disavowal of metaphysical speculation can be viewed as being founded upon his distinctly personal realisation of the incapacity of reason to comprehend the complexities involved.

The narrator reveals that, "Murphy was content to accept this partial congruence of his mind with the world of his body as due to some such process of supernatural determination. The problem was of little interest" (M, 70). We learn that, "The development of what looked like collusion between such utter strangers remained to Murphy as unintelligible as telekinesis or the Leyden Jar, and of as little interest" (M, 71). From a Schopenhauerian perspective, the intractability of such enigmas is rooted in the metaphysics of Will. Reason, being strictly confined to an understanding of the phenomenal world, is powerless to fathom the impenetrable mysteries of self-identity. Murphy cherishes the primacy of his personal experience in a way which eschews a need for exhaustive explanation of the intrapersonal

conundrums that he seems determined to honour. Once again we note how the value of abstract discourse is related to its capacity to correspond with the facts of personal experience. The narrator affirms, "Any solution would do that did not clash with the feeling, growing stronger as Murphy grew older, that his mind was a closed system, subject to no principle of change but its own, self-sufficient and impermeable to the vicissitudes of the body" (M, 70). The narrator, in a comment which elucidates Beckett's own authorial procedures when incorporating discursive thought into texts which focus so insistently upon the problems generated by lived experience states: "Of infinitely more interest than how this came to be so was the manner in which it might be exploited" (M, 70). In a letter written to MacGreevy on 19 September 1936, Beckett revealed that he had been afforded a "glimpse of Spinoza as a solution & a salvation" (LI, 371); he does not specify why he needed such a "solution & a salvation" but given that such words were expressed at a time when he was beset with personal and creative crises, it is not difficult to find grounds for speculation. Whether the underlying issue was personal or purely aesthetic, it was unlikely to be a subject of detached curiosity.

According to Schopenhauer, "composure consists in the silence of the will;" he proceeds to argue that, "composure is the condition of presence of mind, and the two are closely related; they are rare, and exist always only in a limited degree" (WWRII, 215). Those who can experience such states enjoy "peace that is higher than all reason" (WWRI, 411). Murphy's fleeting enjoyment of inward serenity is overtly linked to the imperative of corporeal stillness: "motion in this world depended on rest in the world outside" (M, 70). Beckett's notion of the "real consciousness" was examined in Chapter One as a state of mind devoid of analytical inclinations and was thereby shown to align with Schopenhauer's views about the "better consciousness." Schopenhauer contends that, owing to the intellect being a mere "function of the body" (WWRII, 214), ordinary consciousness is "the medium of pain, locus dolorum" (MRIII, 578) because of our incessant need for a comprehension of our existential predicaments. We learn that, "Murphy could think and know after a fashion with his body up (so to speak) and about, with a kind of mental tic douloureux sufficient for his parody of rational behaviour. But that was not what he understood by consciousness" (M, 71). The explicit analogy to physical pain contained in those lines deepens our insight into the nature of states of mind which are governed by embodiment. As Murphy "lapsed in body he felt himself coming alive in mind, set free to move among its treasures" (M, 71). While recognising Murphy's confidence in psychological systems and acknowledging his status as a

"one time amateur theological student" (M, 88), we note salient differences between his inner experiences and those of Belacqua. In Dream and More Pricks Belacqua's enjoyment of subjective bliss reveals his patently bookish bent whereby his decision to "furnish" (MP, 153) his mind can be associated with his enthusiasm for introspective pursuits. As a formidably erudite man who advocated the necessity of a synthesis between learning and experiential insight in the forging of philosophy and art, Schopenhauer was critical of the ultimate value of reading which is not actively evaluated in accordance with our basic existential engagement with the world. He argues that, "To read means to allow someone else to conduct our thoughts in leading-strings. The great majority of books merely serve to show how many blind paths there are" (MRIII, 42). Elsewhere, he affirms that, "Other people's ideas that are read are excreted excrement" (MRIV, 290). Murphy is clearly conversant with the world of learning, but when we encounter him he is a "strict non-reader" (M, 103); he must, therefore, derive his inner pleasures from his own imaginative resources in the depths of an "autological darkness" (LI, 368 n. 8). Beckett uses such Geulingian terms which refer to thoughts "concerning myself", that stem from an acceptance of personal impotence and ignorance and our dependence upon God.

The narrator's account of the three zones of Murphy's psychic existence is remarkably free from overtly learned allusions. In the first zone "the whole physical fiasco" (M, 71) is transmuted into an abode of fantasy wherein Murphy enjoys immense retributive freedom. We read, "Here the kick that the physical Murphy received, the mental Murphy gave. It was the same kick, but corrected as to direction. Here the chandlers were available for slow depilation, Miss Carridge for rape by Ticklepenny, and so on" (M, 71). The sadistic nature of such contrived scenarios can be related to Schopenhauer's notion, that, the "liveliness" of "repulsive ideas . . . springs from a powerful imagination." He develops that view by arguing that "the more a man has within himself, the less does he need from without and also the less other people can be to him" (PPI, 330). Imaginative freedom is, in Schopenhauerian terms, a rare form of release from the ever-present conative and intellective demands of Will; such experiences are entirely dependent upon our autonomy from interpersonal involvement: "The man who does not like loneliness also does not really like freedom; for when a man is not alone (and has no peace and quiet), he is not free" (MRIV, 118). The second zone of Murphy's mind is described as a place of "contemplation" within which the "Belacqua bliss and others scarcely less precise can be enjoyed" (M, 71). The narrator's circumspect approach in describing this realm is notably devoid of the bizarre terminology which was

employed to depict Belacqua's womb-tomb experiences in *Dream*. However, both approaches suggest the inherently indescribable nature of all states of consciousness which are devoid of intellective tendencies. In his reflections upon those who can enter into states which are "beyond the will and the knowledge related to it" (*WWRI*, 202) Schopenhauer stresses the futility of attempting to express the essentially inexpressible nature of modes of consciousness which have been enjoyed by renunciants: "The inner experience out of which, or at least from which, they all speak is . . . such as cannot be repeated and thus put to the test by the rest of us" (*MRIII*, 384-5).

The central characteristic of the first two zones is Murphy's sense of liberation: "In both these zones of his private world Murphy felt sovereign and free, in the one to requite himself, in the other to move as he pleased from one unparalleled beatitude to another there was no rival initiative" (M, 72). As the narrator moves on to a description of the third zone and the completion of his "painful duty" (M, 72), his choice of terms exemplifies the incommunicable reality of such a state:

The third, the dark was a flux of forms, a perpetual coming together and falling asunder of forms. The light contained in the docile elements of a new manifold, the world of the body broken up into the pieces of a toy; the half light, states of peace. But the dark neither elements nor states, nothing but forms becoming and crumbling into the fragments of a new becoming, without love or hate or any intelligible principle of change. Here there was nothing but commotion and the pure forms of commotion. Here he was not free, but a mote in the dark of absolute freedom. He did not move, he was a point in the ceaseless unconditioned generation and passing away of line. (*M*, 72)

In a letter that I cited in Chapter One, Beckett claims that, "The real consciousness is the chaos, a grey commotion of mind, with no premises or conclusions or problems or solutions or cases or judgements" (*LI*, 546). It thereby excludes the inferential proprieties of reason. As the reader struggles to impart significance to such notions he may derive solace from Schopenhauer's contention that, language, being "a tool of concepts and nothing else" (*EFR*, 37), cannot articulate the deepest human experiences, particularly those which relate to our unavoidably antinomial conclusions regarding determinism and contingency. Murphy is an inhabitant of a world which proves irreducible to definitive conclusions regarding its governance by fate or chance. A seeming contingency, such as Murphy's encounter with Ticklepenny, can be one upon "which so much unhinges" (*M*, 73). Murphy's occasional periods of freedom from the "big world" are themselves described in ways which suggest

clear limits to such autonomy. In the third zone Murphy experiences a rather odd form of compatibilism where "in the dark, in its will-lessness [he is] a mote in its absolute freedom" (M, 72). Schopenhauer observes that,

[A]t the moment when, torn from the will, we have given ourselves up to pure, will-less knowing, we have stepped into another world, so to speak, where everything that moves our will, and thus violently agitates us, no longer exists. This liberation of knowledge lifts us as wholly and completely above all this as do sleep and dreams. Happiness and unhappiness have vanished; we are no longer the individual; that is forgotten. (*WWRI*, 197-8)

In such states we are exempt from the modes of intellection and volition which ordinarily dominate consciousness. Murphy's capacity to exercise his "magical eye" (M, 100) in those periods of will-lessness could be viewed as being accordant with Schopenhauer's contention that the pure subject of knowing becomes, in complete detachment from the conative and intellective demands of Will, "the clear eye of the world" (WWRI, 186). When Murphy is questioned by Ticklepenny about the nature of his experiences of the "magical eye," through which he achieves a "real alienation" (M, 121), his failed attempt to respond involves a dissolution of meaning itself. We learn that, "before the imperfect phrase had time to come the question crumbled away in its own absurdity, the absurdity of saddling such a person with the rationalist prurit" (M, 120). Schopenhauer considers the type of inner experiences which Murphy enjoys to be revelatory of our limited powers of comprehension and description. In endeavouring to articulate such states of consciousness, which are "beyond the will and the knowledge related to it" (WWRI, 202), we are impeded by a "feeble tongue" (WWRI, 383).

### The Post-Golgothan Kitty

Murphy, like Dream and More Pricks, contextualises numerous aspects of its developing narrative with reference to the death of Christ. God, in His tendency to "blast" (M, 7) Celia is oppressively present from the beginning of the novel. As we have seen, Schopenhauer's appraisal of the hermeneutic power of Christian discourse focuses on what he regards to be the senseless miseries to which we are invariably subjected; accordingly, he approves of the fact that "an instrument of torture is the symbol of Christianity" (PPII, 348). As she beholds the bizarre spectacle of the grounded Murphy, Celia acknowledges the inexplicable nature of the scene and therefore "loses no time in idle speculation," but the figure of Christ as the supreme archetype of arational suffering is evoked as we imagine the bloodied Murphy "turning the other cheek to the dust" and lying "fully prostrate in the crucified position,

heaving" (M, 20). Schopenhauer regards Job less as a comforting paragon of the virtues of enduring faith than as an illustration of "the vanity and emptiness of human existence" (PPII, 525). Murphy is not inclined to ponder the intricacies of post-lapsarian dogmas which are articulated in questions such as "how can he be clean that is born of woman?" (Job 25:4) or the New Testament proclamation, "he which is filthy, let him be filthy still", (Revelation 22:11), but the inclusion of such references enhances our awareness of Beckett's Biblical obsessions, which inspired Pilling to call him a "God-haunted man." Like Neary, Murphy has imbibed the tenets of a wide range of conceptual discourse. As a "theological student he had used to lie awake night after night with Bishop Bouvier's Supplementum ad Tractatum de Matrimonio under his pillow" (M, 47). Given Murphy's later existential tribulations, references to Job as an exemplar of one who is haunted by the questions which are engendered by personal anguish warrant close scrutiny, as does the allusion to his meditations upon "Christ's parthian shaft: it is finished" (M, 47), which denotes the Messiah's deliverance from his earthly afflictions. Thoughts of the cessation of Christ's misery can merely goad Murphy, who continues to endure his wretchedness. Celia's existence is equally amenable to comparison with Christ. In her rivalry with Miss Counihan she is specified as being "One of the innumerable small retail redeemers . . . lodging her pennyworth of pique in the postgolgothan kitty'" (M, 144). This dismissive attitude towards one of Beckett's most attractive characters enhances our sense of the dissonance between religious discourse and the genuine feelings that Celia, above all characters in Murphy, seems capable of experiencing.

The fate of condemned prisoners at Pentonville Prison evokes thoughts of Friday "day of execution, love and fast" (M, 90). Later in the novel a description of another abode of confinement will be contextualised with reference to a God who reigns over its inhabitants with characteristic stringency: "man proposed, but God disposed, even in the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat" (M, 147). God presides over the tormented residents of that institution, bequeathing the mercies of easeful rest in a typically arbitrary fashion, aided by the malice of Bom, from "whom they were liable to get hell at night" (M, 148). Yet it is not merely the propensities of wicked men with which the patients are afflicted: "Those that slept did so in the frozen attitudes of Herculaneum, as though sleep had pounced upon them like an act of God. And those that did not by the obvious grace of the same authority" (M, 149). Such tortured souls are subject to the mysterious whims of a supreme being who can allow or unleash pyroclastic flows to decimate towns. Murphy's interaction with Mr Endon is explicitly described in Christological terms, from the image of his eye, which contains a

"filigree of veins like the Lord's Prayer on a toenail" (M, 156), to Murphy's perception of himself being "stigmatised in those eyes that did not see him" (M, 156). With oblivion impending, Murphy's thoughts include a vision of Christ at a point of utter powerlessness, which is His typical Beckettian guise: "he saw the clenched fists and rigid upturned face of the Child in a Geovanni Bellini Circumcision, waiting to feel the knife' (M, 157). The terror which such paintings convey problematizes the sanctity of such an exalted ritual of initiation and its inspiring dogmas. When viewing such works our perceptual and affective engagement may engender a sense of horror which must cede to a systematically-informed acceptance of God's will. Murphy abounds with characters who endure their wretched lives within Christological contexts. The Mercyseat is described by a narrator who is keen to disclaim the apparent symbolic significance of his chosen terms. He states, "To adopt for a moment as a purely descriptive convenience the terms and orientation of church architecture, the layout of the wards was that of nave and transepts, with nothing east of the crossing" (M, 105). Here we may be reminded of Beckett's discussion of Joyce's use of ideas "as a structural convenience - or inconvenience" (D, 22) and Beckett's later disavowal of the truth value of Berkeley's thought in Film. In recalling Schopenhauer's reflections upon the cross as indicative of the centrality of suffering in the lives of those who cannot fathom the basis of their woe, its symbolic pertinence to the happenings within the Mercyseat is evident. We later read of Murphy "walking round and round at the foot of the cross" (M, 147).

Miss Counihan, whose name, as Ackerley points out, <sup>43</sup> is reminiscent of Voltaire's Counégonde, who is a devout proponent of Leibniz's theodical ideas, resents Celia's involvement with Murphy. The narrator's mention of "hardened optimists" (*M*, 174) later in the novel re-invokes a possible Leibnizian context, given the occasional theodical overtones of the text. Schopenhauer argues that, "the optimism of Leibniz conflicts with the obvious misery of existence" (*WWRII*, 184); he is damning in his attitude to what Beckett describes as "hardened optimists." He declares:

*Optimism*, where it is not merely the thoughtless talk of those who harbour nothing but words under their shallow foreheads, seems to me to be not merely an absurd, but also a really *wicked*, way of thinking, a bitter mockery of the unspeakable sufferings of mankind. Let no one imagine that the Christian teaching is favourable to optimism; on the contrary, in the Gospel world and evil are used almost as synonymous expressions. (*WWRI*, 326)

Ultimately, Schopenhauer could not "assign to [Leibniz's] *Théodicée*, that methodical and broad development of optimism, in such a capacity, any other merit than that it later gave rise to the immortal *Candide* of the great Voltaire" (*WWRII*, 582). Having posed the question which appears in *Dream*, "What would Leibnitz say?" (*DFW*, 179), we can refer to Beckett's summary of key concepts from that philosopher's work, wherein he claims, "optimism arises from presupposition of metaphysical necessity of evil . . . Above all reality hovers fate prescribed by logic" (TCD MS 10967/212). In recalling Beckett's horrified reaction to the rationalisation of miseries offered by Christian preachers, one suspects that Beckett was no more favourable to Leibniz's insipid theodical arguments, yet in *Murphy* Leibnizian concepts are treated less with righteous disdain than with aesthetically enriching irony. In such cases Beckett's willingness to refrain from dogmatic dismissals bespeaks his recognition of the value of authorial detachment.

# A Place of Unique Delights

A remarkable correlation between the lives of Schopenhauer and Beckett can be seen in their shared fascination with the condition of the mentally ill. Cartwright reports that Schopenhauer "frequently visited the 'melancholy ward' of the Berlin Charité to observe its inmates."44 In a letter to MacGreevy, dated 22 September 1935, Beckett described one of his visits to the hospital at which his friend, Geoffrey Thompson, worked. He writes, "I was down at Bedlam this day week and went round the wards for the first time, with scarcely any sense of horror, though I saw everything, from mild depression to profound dementia" (LI, 277). Both writers would go on to inscribe their memories of such visits into their works. The thematic similarities between their observations of psychological disturbances highlight their shared antipathy to conventional assumptions about the inmates they encountered. Among what Schopenhauer classifies as "universally popular errors" is the notion that, "Those who are mad are extremely unfortunate" (PPII, 60). Elsewhere, Schopenhauer asserts that the insane "enjoy often the most blissful composure, even a very saintly frame of mind, and almost all enjoy a general serenity and contentedness" (MRI, 95). The concurrence of such ideas with Murphy's own attitudes amounts to a salient affinity. The narrator of Murphy speaks about the "pretentious fear of going mad" (M, 58), which Neary and Ticklepenny mutually endure, yet as the narrator comments, "To those in fear of losing it, reason stuck like a bur. And to those in hope . . .?" (M, 60)

Upon his commencement of work at the Magdalene Mental Mercyseat, Murphy is required to become "a creature without initiative" (M, 100). Most of the patients of the Mercyseat, despite their subjection to "therapeutic vexations" (M, 101), seemingly enjoy the blissful quiescence to which Murphy aspires, given his impression of their "self-immersed indifference to the contingencies of the contingent world which he had chosen for himself as the only felicity and achieved so seldom" (M, 106). They induce feelings of "respect and unworthiness" in Murphy owing to their identity as "a race of people that he had long since despaired of finding" (M, 106). The patients' habitation of an alogical realm ensures Murphy's profound reverence which is itself based upon an element of incomprehension regarding the ultimate benefits to be obtained from the company of such kindred beings. Schopenhauer argues that, "We often do not know what we desire . . . For years we can have a desire without admitting it to ourselves or even letting it come to clear consciousness, because the intellect is not to know anything about it" (WWRII, 210). As an employee at the Mercyseat, Murphy "hoped for better things, without exactly knowing why or what things or in what way better" (M, 107). His antipathy to the pretentious categorisations to which the denizens of the Mercyseat are subject is eloquent of his sceptical attitude towards systematic approaches to supposed human ills. In the following passage we are reminded of Dr Nye's baffling coronary ailment in 'A Case in a Thousand' which exists "for no reason known to the medical profession" (CSP, 18-19):

Every hour in the wards should increase, together with his esteem for the patients, his loathing of the textbook attitude towards them, the complacent scientific conceptualism that made contact with outer reality the index of mental well-being. Every hour did. The nature of outer reality remained obscure. The men, women and children of science would seem to have as many ways of kneeling to their facts as any other body of illuminati. (M, 111)

Schopenhauer attributes the "strangeness of human character" to the fact that "the roots of all its qualities lie too deep for us to determine" (*PPII*, 587-8). The mention of 'illuminati' highlights an interesting link between those who propound and idolise abstract views about psychological distress and Christian communities such as the members of the early church to whom that name was given following their baptismal ceremonies: the Alumbrados in Spain, the Guérinets in France, and the more renowned Rosicrucians, who adopted that title in their attempts to systematically elucidate human enigmas. As we have noted, Beckett's esteem for Christianity fell short of embracing its overarching justifications of suffering and its solemn,

yet vapid declarations of hope; its appeal for him relied upon its depiction of the sombre consequences of being.

In All That Fall Mrs Rooney's "lifelong preoccupation with horses' buttocks" (CDW, 195) defy rationalisation. Murphy's animosity towards scientific approaches to mental illness is due to his "experience as a physical and rational being [which] obliged him to call sanctuary what the psychiatrists called exile and to think of the patients not as banished from a system of benefits but as escaped from a colossal fiasco" (M, 112). Schopenhauer reports that, during his "frequent visits to lunatic asylums," he discovered "individual subjects endowed with unmistakably great gifts" (WWRI, 191); he goes on to claim that madness "involves separation of the intellect from the will" (WWRII, 387). As we have already noted, Schopenhauer's classification of the mind as being ordinarily a mere "instrument belonging to the phenomenon of the will" (WWRI, 292) serves to differentiate normal psychic states from those Will-less modes of consciousness which can be viewed as a refuge from the tumultuous experiences we undergo as embodied beings in a material world. Murphy personally experiences such a distinction: "his mind functioned not as an instrument but as a place . . . [of] unique delights" (M, 112). In expressing such views regarding the psychic bliss to be enjoyed during periods of emancipation, Murphy can be seen to anticipate the speaker of the poem 'bon bon il est un pays' (1955) who claims, "il est un pays / où l'oubli où pèse l'oubli doucement sur les mondes innommés / là la tête on la tait la tête est muette / et on sait non on ne sait rien" (CPS, 115). Being "of the little world," Murphy exalts the supremacy of inwardness, owing to the mind's role as a repository of "beatific idols" (M, 112), which he beholds when immured in realms of subjective rapture. Schopenhauer employs literature to corroborate his own vision of consciousness as a "camera obscura in which the macrocosm exhibits itself" by quoting the following lines from Goethe: "He feels he holds a little world / Brooding in his brain, / That it begins to act and live, / That it from itself he fain would give" (WWRII, 281-2).

Having described Murphy's principled estrangement from "the occasions of fiasco" (*M*, 112) which pervade the "big world," the narrator invokes a key tenet of the philosophy of Geulinex: "*Ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis*" (*M*, 112). The upshot of such a core dictum is, as Beckett, quoting Windelband, <sup>45</sup> puts it in his 'Philosophy Notes,' "man has nothing to do in [the] outer world" (TCD MS 10967/189.1). As the narrator informs us, such precepts as

"where you are worth nothing, there you should want nothing" are not, as purely rational ideas, sufficient to solve Murphy's existential quandaries:

[I]t was not enough to want nothing where he was worth nothing, nor even to take the further step of renouncing all that lay outside the intellectual love in which he alone could love himself, because there alone he was lovable. It had not been enough and showed no signs of being enough. These dispositions and others ancillary, pressing every available means (e.g. the rocking-chair) into their service, could sway the issue in the desired direction, but not clinch it. It continued to divide him, as witness his deplorable susceptibility to Celia, ginger, and so on. The means of clinching it were lacking. (M, 112)

The above passage reveals that the abstract precepts of Geulinex's thought cannot restrain Murphy from succumbing to appetitive cravings. It thereby reminds us of Schopenhauer's insistence that, "where it is a question of the worth or worthlessness of existence, of salvation or damnation, not the dead concepts of philosophy decide the matter, but the innermost nature of man himself' (WWRI, 271). Schopenhauer contends that, "the dogmas that [a person's] faculty of reason had accepted" are irrelevant to the success of renunciation as it is only "the complete knowledge of its own inner being [that] has become for it the quieter of all willing" (WWRI, 383). Geulinex's admonitions to those who grow weary of earthly trials seem futile when applied to the phenomenological woes of Murphy who is an "unredeemed split self" (M, 117) as they require a reform of one's life by rational means alone. However, the narrator suggests that the opportunity for Murphy to "clinch" the insights offered by Geulinex may happen not by means of detached contemplation but "in the service of the Clinch clan" (M, 112). The presence of those who are, like Murphy's mind, "a Matrix of surds . . . [M]issiles without provenance or target, caught up in a tumult of non-Newtonian motion" (M, 72) seems to have temporarily delivered Murphy from "big world" concerns. Ticklepenny notes that Murphy had a "great look of [the patient] Clarke," whom we are told, had been in a "katatonic stupor" for three weeks repeating the phrase: "Mr. Endon is very superior" (M, 121). Clarke's mantra of reverence for Endon is here reminiscent of an apprentice monk's awed obeisance to a meditation master. Yet when Murphy peers into Endon's eyes, the image of himself contained therein is "horribly reduced, obscured and distorted" (M, 156); his ultimate inability to benefit from Endon's exemplary being seems thereby confirmed.

Throughout this dissertation I have mentioned examples of Schopenhauer's insistence that renunciation of the world cannot be achieved by means of intellection. Such liberation is the product of embittered experiential realisations of the futility of striving. It is clearly Murphy's

hope that he can attain freedom amidst "all those lives immured in mind" (M, 113). As the narrator asks, "What more vigorous filip could be given to the wallows of one bogged in the big world than the example of life to all appearances inalienably realised in the little?" (M, 113) Surrounded by paradigmatic figures who are assumed by Murphy to have achieved enduring autonomy through their estrangement from rationality, Murphy revels in their company as "he [felt] in them what he would be" (M, 115), but "nothing less than a slap-up psychosis," such as that purportedly enjoyed by the patients, "could consummate his life's strike" (M, 115). His unprecedented success with the inmates of the Mercyseat deepens his attachment to personal independence: "The more his own system closed round him, the less he could tolerate it being subordinated to any other" (M, 114). In a text which consistently problematizes our assumptions regarding the mutual exclusivity of determinism and chance Murphy's acknowledgment of a correspondence between his life and the motion of celestial entities is qualified by his assertion of hermeneutic autonomy. We learn that such correlations will be read in accordance with "his meaning" (M, 115); we thereby recall Schopenhauer's assertion regarding the allure of astrology as constituting clear proof of the "contemptible subjectivity of men" who cannot abjure egotistical interpretations.

Geulinex and Schopenhauer shared a marked esteem for quietism. In Murphy we note how the eponymous character's failure to justify his bemusing modes of being is part of his overall realisation of what Schopenhauer describes as, "the vanity and futility of the whole of striving and effort" (WWRI, 385). As a young man of eighteen, Schopenhauer had already recognised that, "There is nothing serious in life, because the dust is not worth the trouble." 46 Given Hardy's attraction to the philosophy of Schopenhauer, it is interesting to note his views regarding how Tess developed her own awareness of the essential nature of earthly existence through the plaintive particularities of lived experience. In her case personal insight "rises to the point where the vanity of all effort is manifest." It is remarkable that such themes were of common concern to writers such as Hardy, Mann, and Beckett, who shared a verifiable enthusiasm for Schopenhauer's thought. In a statement which encourages us to be mindful of the ways in which our miseries are caused by false assumptions about that which is within our control Schopenhauer notes, "The constant need, now gravely oppressing and then violently agitating man's heart (will), keeps him in a permanent state of fearing and hoping, whereas the things about which he hopes and fears are not in his power" (PPI, 117). Such assertions cohere with Geulingian notions such as that transcribed by Beckett into his 'Philosophy Notes:' "It is clear to all men that the summation of Ethics is contained in this

saying: wherein you have no power, therein you should not will, or in other words, do nothing in vain." Geulinex contends that a consultation with the "oracle of reason" through an inspection of self leads to the attainment of wisdom.

In contrast to Geulinex, Schopenhauer refutes the role of reason in achieving such realisations: "our insight and our belief are not in our power, do not depend on us; we regard them as an event which is as little in our power as are the affairs of the external world" (MRIV, 212). Accordingly, Geulinex's admonitions are, as we have seen, ineffectual, when applied to the phenomenological woes of Murphy whose faltering efforts to attain deliverance from the loathsome "big world" find little sustenance in the abstractions of a Godly philosopher. The rational wisdom enshrined in abstract epigrams which emphasise the futility of effort pale in comparison with the insights to be attained through "vicarious autology" (M, 118) in the presence of one who seems to have achieved that to which Murphy deeply aspires. Prior to beginning his work at the Mercyseat Murphy disposes of those objects which may once have been his portals to better worlds: "His books, his pictures, his postcards, his musical scores and instruments" (M, 118). Yet Murphy's rocking-chair, that "aid to the life of the mind" (M, 118) is retained and motivates Murphy's brief return to Brewery Road. In an entry in his German diaries, dated 18 January 1937, Beckett described the "figure of Murphy in the chair, surrender to the thongs of self, a simple materialisation of self-bondage, acceptance of which is the fundamental unheroic."49 The sense of resignation alluded to by Beckett suggests that Murphy's aspirations towards psychic freedom are rooted in his acute awareness of the inextricable bonds between his identity and his embodiment. Schopenhauer's notion of the body as "an object among objects" (WWRI, 176) is fundamentally associated with his views regarding the sheer materiality of those aspects of selfhood which are the most direct manifestations of Will. As we have seen, Schopenhauer recognises two ways in which we can enjoy emancipation from Will-inspired thoughts and deeds. In the creation or consumption of genuine art we may enjoy temporary liberation from volition and intellection, yet more enduring periods of emancipation can only be experienced by those whose will is broken by the perpetual dissatisfaction to be encountered through worldly pursuits.

Schopenhauer speculated about the consequences of a capacity whereby we could voluntarily achieve a cessation of breathing; that would be "a splendid example of the power of rational willing, whose motives are concepts (practical reason), over merely sensuously motivated

willing" (*MRI*, 517). Having examined a number of opinions regarding respiration which argue for or against its existence as a consciously controlled phenomenon, Schopenhauer states: "we must class it ultimately with the manifestations of will following on motive." He goes on to claim that, "a man might abstain from breathing altogether and freely suffocate . . . the moment some other motive influenced the will so powerfully that it overcame the pressing need for air" (*WWRI*, 116). We learn of Endon's prowess as a potential practitioner of apnoea in a passage which serves to undermine the pretensions of medical science:

Suicide by apnoea has often been tried, notably by the condemned to death. In vain. It is a physiological impossibility. But the Mercy-Seat was not disposed to take unnecessary chances. Mr Endon had insisted that if he did it at all, it would be by apnoea, and not otherwise. He said his voice would not hear of any other method. But Dr Killecrankie, the Outer Hebridean R. M. S., had some experience of the schizoid voice. It was not like a real voice, one minute it said one thing and the next minute something different. Nor was he entirely satisfied as to the physiological impossibility of suicide by apnoea. Dr. Killecrankie had been too often had by the resources of organic matter ever again to draw the Canutian line. (*M*, 116)

In Chapter Three we saw how Schopenhauer dismissed the potential of the natural sciences to provide an exhaustive description of reality. He was particularly insistent upon our inability to understand the underlying aspects of psychodynamic forces. He states that they "cannot be explained by anything immanent. Perhaps someone after me will shed light on this abyss" (MRIV, 222). The narrator's dogmatic disavowal of apnoea is notably presumptuous when compared with Killecrankie's more enlightened scepticism. As an "envious outsider" (M, 116), who is patently contemptuous of textbook approaches to mental illness, Murphy observes the "bizarrerie of [Endon's] attitudes" (M, 116) with all due reverence. In Proust Beckett invokes Schopenhauer's ideas regarding the kinship between genius and insanity: "a pure act of understanding [is] will-less, the 'amabilis insania' and the 'holder Wahnsinn'" (PTD, 91). Such lines can be considered as a direct reference to Schopenhauer's acknowledgement of eminent precursors who shared his view: "even poetic inspiration has been called a kind of madness; amabilis insania, as Horace calls it (Odes, iii, 4); and in the introduction to *Oberon* Wieland speaks of 'amiable madness'" (WWRI, 190). While Endon could not be viewed as a "genius" in a purely creative sense, his attributes are comparable to those of a renunciant. Just as various females were capable of inspiring moments of disinterested contemplation in the mind of Belacqua, Endon's being, operating as it does in accordance with an "amental pattern" (M, 154) and with seeming immunity to

physical influence in having the "good fortune not to be at the mercy of the hand, whether another's or his own" (M, 155), is capable of evoking a feeling "no less than bliss" (M, 150) in Murphy. Murphy's experience of nothingness is itself prompted by a perception of Endon which, from its initial lucidity, diminishes into formlessness:

Mr. Endon's finery persisted for a little in an after-image and 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. Not the numb peace of their own suspension, but the positive peace that comes when the somethings give way, or simply add up, to the Nothing, than which in the guffaw of the Abderite naught is more real. Time did not cease, that would be asking too much, but the wheel of rounds and pauses did. (*M*, 153-4)

In the above passage, the narrator, in wilful defiance of rigid semantic categories, suggests the inherent futility of trying to describe the forms of consciousness which Endon's presence induces in Murphy's mind. Beckett's 'Philosophy Notes' include transcriptions of Democritus' key precepts "Naught is more real than nothing" (TCD MS 10967/75) and "truth is in the depths" (TCD MS 10967/78.1). Beckett's interest in the Pre-Socratics acquainted him with the concept of negation which Democritus developed, yet as we have noted, his reading of Schopenhauer would have familiarised him with a philosophy which argues that supreme realisation and resignation are to be achieved in recognising that the world is, owing to its intrinsic ephemerality, "nothing" (WWRI, 412). In Chapter One I showed how Beckett's notion of the "endopsychic" (D, 69) was employed in his commendation of MacGreevy's work for its reliance upon an inner vision which was the perceptive focal point of the poet's creative consciousness. In this context it is noteworthy that in Greek "endon" signifies "within." Endon, as an object which has, to use descriptive terms from *Dream*, become "invisible" before Murphy's eyes, has inspired an "endopsychic" vision of "the accidentless One-and-Only, conveniently called Nothing" (M, 154) which seems distinctly palliative. As we have seen, Beckett's summary of Schopenhauer's ideas in his 'Philosophy Notes' contains the phrase "absolute unreason of objectless will" (TCD MS 10967/252.1), which suggests that periods of emancipation involve a suspension of the basic sensory experience which has initiated such states. According to Schopenhauer, "That man has great power of imagination whose cerebral activity in intuitive perception is strong enough not to be always in need of sense stimulation in order to become active" (PPII, 604). In the 'Whoroscope Notebook' Beckett considers "the physical failure which is the metaphysical achievement, in so far as it narrows the physical field (petites perceptions) & constitutes an increase in the

apperceived."<sup>50</sup> Murphy's admiration for Endon and his co-residents of the Mercyseat can be usefully related to what Schopenhauer describes as the edifying effects of observing a man who has overcome the world:

[H]owever poor, cheerless and full of privation his state may be when looked at from outside, [it] is full of inner cheerfulness and true heavenly peace . . . an unshakable peace that we cannot behold without the greatest longing . . . Nothing can distress or alarm him anymore; nothing can any longer move him; for he has cut all the thousand threads of willing which hold us bound to the world. (*WWRI*, 389-90)

Murphy marvels at the "languor in which [Endon] passed his days" enjoying a "psychosis so limpid and imperturbable that Murphy felt drawn to it as Narcissus to his fountain" (M, 116). Endon's detachment from worldly engagement is so advanced that chess is described as his "one frivolity" (M, 117). When Endon's existence is compared with that of the erstwhile proponent of rationalism, Neary, who, "doomed to hope unending . . . scratches himself out of one itch into the next" (M, 125-6), his exemplary influence over Murphy is instructively contextualised. However, bereft of the alleged privilege of a total psychotic breakdown, Murphy is ultimately compelled to face the "unintelligible gulf" (M, 149) which separates him from the inmates of the Mercyseat. Murphy is thereby reminiscent of a Proustian character in that he realises how "we are alone. We cannot know and we cannot be known" (PTD, 66). As Beckett puts it, "Friendship, according to Proust, is the negation of that irremediable solitude to which every human being is condemned" (PTD, 63); it is "tantamount to a sacrifice of that only real and incommunicable essence of oneself" (PTD, 65). The narrator's prompt qualification of Murphy's relationship to Endon echoes such sentiments: "Mr. Endon had recognised the feel of his friend's eye upon him and made his preparations accordingly. Friend's eye? Say rather, Murphy's eye . . . Mr. Endon would have been less than Mr. Endon if he had known what it was to have a friend" (M, 150). It is, after all, Endon's self-immersed indifference to the world and its inhabitants which is an object of supreme veneration to Murphy, yet he fails to appreciate the wisdom of à Kempis which Beckett had noted: "To desire no comfort from any creature is a sign of great purity" (DN, 85). Similarly, Schopenhauer argues that, "the more a man has in himself, the less can others be to him" (PPI, 421). Murphy's decision to return to Celia to face "the music" (M, 157) is, from a Schopenhauerian perspective, indicative of the rarity of lasting emancipation, yet while this could be seen as evidence that, "all things hobble together for the only possible" (M, 141), the nature of Murphy's death, through the influence of "excellent gas, superfine chaos" (M, 158) is the most definitive sign that he resided in what Schopenhauer describes as a "world governed by chance and error" (WWRI, 379) and died as a result of a "classical case of misadventure" (M,164).

Ackerley points to Murphy's "thorough grounding in the observed particulars of London, past and present."51 In Chapter Two I examined Beckett's ability to synthesise his erudition with his perceptual experiences in the forging of art which derives numerous details from extratextual realities in the form of verifiable people and places. While the characters of Murphy are less recognisably dependent upon real life models than those of Dream and More *Pricks*, we readily note the wealth of topographical precision to be discerned within the pages of the novel. In transmuting such material into textual form Beckett was repeatedly faced with the restrictive nature of language. While his letters to MacGreevy describe issues such as his developing "gerontophilia" and the "seizure" of the "old boy" (LI, 274) which would prove formative in the writing of the novel, Beckett made a number of comments which reveal just how onerous the task of composition happened to be. The following passage typifies such sentiments: "I have been forcing myself to keep at the book, & it crawls forward. I have done about 9000 words. It is poor stuff & I have no interest in it" (LI, 277). The despairing nature of such revelations contrasts markedly with his experience of rapt attention which was induced by the trajectory of the kites that he witnessed in Kensington Gardens: "I was really rooted to the spot yesterday, unable to go away and wondering what was keeping me" (LI, 274). The intense perceptual absorption experienced by Beckett stimulated aspirations for future compositions: "My next old man, or old young man, not of the big world but of the little world, must be a kite-flyer. So absolutely disinterested, like a poem" (LI, 274). The association between Beckett's description of his enthralled observation of the aforementioned kites and his creative desires is apt to remind us of one of Schopenhauer's core claims about the captivating qualities of aesthetic experience. He writes that, whether elicited by perceptions of the world or of art, "What might . . . be called the finest part of life, its purest joy, just because it lifts us out of real existence, and transforms us into disinterested spectators of it, is pure knowledge which remains foreign to all willing, pleasure in the beautiful, genuine delight in art" (WWRI, 314).

In *Murphy* as in *More Pricks* the "contingencies of the contingent world" exert a strangely determinative influence. Beckett's willingness to create art which inspires questions relating to the deepest and most abiding philosophical mysteries was evident from the outset of his writing career. In 1956 he told Hobson, "I take no sides. I am interested in the shape of ideas

even if I do not believe them."52 Beckett's capacity to employ conceptual discourse as an aesthetically expedient device should be understood with reference to his professed indifference to the truth values of its associated propositions. Schopenhauer underscores the means by which art is misused by those who wish to express their philosophical allegiances through their work, "to wish to communicate [a concept] through a work of art is a very useless indirect course; in fact, it belongs to that playing with the means of art without knowledge of the end" (WWRII, 409). In a masterful inversion of such practices Beckett manages to play with ideas as a means to purely creative ends. As Murphy concludes, we encounter an "enraptured" Mr. Kelly, who is attempting to measure the point at which "seen and unseen met" (M, 174). In a novel which has engaged so insistently with aspects of human experience which perennially engender bafflement, the mysterious trajectory of Kelly's kite is rich in metaphorical connotations. We learn that Kelly's calculation would be "an unscientific observation, so many and so fitful were the imponderables involved" (M, 174). As we saw in Chapter One, Beckett's notion of "baffled ecstasy" (PTD, 76) is remarkably similar to those aspects of Schopenhauer's thought which insist upon the ways in which our most enriching experiences are invariably the most arational and ineffable. Given Beckett's own absorption in the scene of kite-flyers that I referred to earlier in this chapter, his own sense of temporary "enchantment" (PTD, 23) revealed the overwhelming intensity of the experience involved.

As one of the most eminent early readers of *Murphy*, Dylan Thomas claimed that the novel "fails in its purpose because the minds and the bodies of these characters are almost utterly without relation to each other" (*GF*, 47). Thomas seemed to be privy to Beckett's intentions in a way that few critics or readers would claim to be today. While this chapter has eschewed any pretensions to describe "the purpose" of *Murphy* it has underscored how a Schopenhauerian conception of the inextricable links between body and mind enhances our understanding of the miseries of various characters in the novel, primarily those of the titular protagonist himself. Belacqua and Murphy are driven by a longing to abstain from involvement in a world which proves disturbingly resistant to their "eleutheromania." While they are harried by desires which evince their vestigial susceptibility to the sexual allure of females and the need to be free from intellective states of consciousness, Watt is, as we shall see, governed by an issueless epistemophilia which afflicts his existence in a world suffused with tortuous complexities.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Chris Ackerley, 'Samuel Beckett and Thomas à Kempis: The Roots of Quietism' in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, 12 (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002), p. 87.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 81.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Nigel Hamilton, *The Brothers Mann* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1978), p. 63.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (tr. and eds.), *The Selected Letters of Richard Wagner* (London: Dent, 1987), p. 358.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Wilhelm Windelband, A History of Philosophy with Special Reference to the Formation and Development of its Problems and Conceptions, Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged, tr. James H. Tufts (London: Macmillan, 1914), p. 379.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 395.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 410 n. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 415.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ihid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 417.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 417 n. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> David Tucker, *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx: Tracing a Literary Fantasia* (London: Continuum, 2012), pp. 56-7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Ruby Cohn, 'A Note on Beckett, Dante, and Geulincx' in *Comparative Literature*, 12.1 (Winter 1960), pp. 93-4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *The Earliest English Translation of the First Three Books of the "De Imitatione Christi"*, ed. John K. Ingram (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Turner and Co., 1893), p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Arnold Geulinex, *Ethics (With Samuel Beckett's Notes)*, tr. Martin Wilson (Leiden: Brill Publications, 2006), p. 323.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Quoted in Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld (eds.), *Beckett in the Theatre: The Author as Playwright and Director, Volume I* (New York: Riverrun Press, 1988), p. 230.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Geulincx, Ethics, p. 320.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 326.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> à Kempis, *The Earliest English Translation of the First Three Books of the "De Imitatione Christi"*, p. 169.

- <sup>25</sup> As reported by Rachel Burrows in Gontarski, Fehsenfeld, and McMillan, 'Interview with Rachel Burrows, Dublin, Bloomsday, 1982', p. 7.
- <sup>26</sup> Geulinex, Ethics, p. 333.
- <sup>27</sup> J. C. C. Mays, 'Young Beckett's Irish Roots' in *Irish University Review*, 14.1 (Spring 1984), p. 23.
- <sup>28</sup> R. B. McDowell and D. A. Webb, *Trinity College Dublin 1592-1952: An Academic History* (Dublin: Trinity College Dublin Press, 2004), p. 459.
- <sup>29</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, tr. E. B. Pusey (London: Everyman's Library, 1907), p. 125.
- <sup>30</sup> Pothast, *The Metaphysical Vision*, p. 147.
- <sup>31</sup> C. J. Ackerley, *Demented Particulars: The Annotated Murphy* (Tallahassee: Journal of Beckett Studies Books, 2004), p. 65.
- <sup>32</sup> The Holy Bible, p. 741.
- <sup>33</sup> Tucker, Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx, p. 68.
- <sup>34</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks: 1914-1916*, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961), p. 77e.
- <sup>35</sup> Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 43.
- <sup>36</sup> à Kempis, *The Earliest English Translation of the First Three Books of the "De Imitatione Christi"*, p. 25.
- <sup>37</sup> Feldman, on the basis of his meticulous study of Beckett's 'Philosophy Notes,' has claimed that "the most demonstrably important system invoked in *Murphy* is that of Pythagoras." (Feldman, *Beckett's Books*, p. 68)
- <sup>38</sup> Quoted in Ackerley, Demented Particulars: The Annotated Murphy, p. 116.
- <sup>39</sup> Arnold Geulincx, *Metaphysics*, tr. Martin Wilson (Cambridgeshire: Christoffel Press, 1999), p. 29.
- <sup>40</sup> The Holy Bible, p. 622.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.
- <sup>42</sup> Pilling, Samuel Beckett, p. 1.
- <sup>43</sup> Ackerley, Demented Particulars: The Annotated Murphy, p. 36.
- <sup>44</sup> Cartwright, Schopenhauer: A Biography, p. 178.
- <sup>45</sup> Windelband, *A History of Philosophy*, p. 417 n. 2.
- <sup>46</sup> Cartwright, Schopenhauer: A Biography, p. 107.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Geulinex, *Ethics*, p. 19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Van Hulle and Nixon, Samuel Beckett's Library, p. 149.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Literary Notebooks*, *Volume II*, ed. Lennart A. Björk (London: Macmillan, 1985), p. 29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Geulinex, *Ethics*, p. 319.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Quoted in Nixon, Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937, p. 97.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Quoted in Caselli, *Beckett's Dantes*, p. 82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Ackerley, Demented Particulars: The Annotated Murphy, p. 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Quoted in Harold Hobson, 'Samuel Beckett: Dramatist of the Year' in *International Theatre Annual*, 1 (London: John Calder, 1956), p. 153.

# Chapter 5

# **Lacerated With Curiosity**

Between concluding Murphy in June 1936 and commencing Watt in February 1941, Beckett, having purchased a German edition of the philosopher's writings during his travels in Germany, reimmersed himself in Schopenhauer's work. In a letter written to MacGreevy on 21 September 1937, Beckett stated, "I always knew he was one of the ones that mattered most to me, and it is a pleasure more real than any pleasure for a long time to begin to understand now why it is so" (LI, 550). Proust had been written at a time when Beckett had begun to acquaint himself with Schopenhauer's philosophy; by the time that he read Schopenhauer's philosophy in German his authorial experiences had directly acquainted him with some of the cardinal issues of Schopenhauer's aesthetics. In writing Dream, More Pricks, 'Echo's Bones,' and Murphy he had developed core insights into the nature of artistic creation, which, given the evidence of critical statements made in texts such as 'An Imaginative Work' (1936), the 'German Letter' (1937), 'Intercessions by Denis Devlin' (1938), and 'Les deux besoins' (1983) served to corroborate key aspects of Schopenhauer's thought. As Beckett said of Jack B. Yeats, "He has been through it and so he knows" (D, 90). Some of the critical observations made by Beckett during the period 1936-1941 are rich in Schopenhauerian connotations. In 'An Imaginative Work' Beckett commends the "discontinuity" which stems "from the same respect for the mobility and autonomy of the imagined world (a world of the same order if not so intense as the 'ideal real' of Prowst, so obnoxious to the continuity girls)" (D, 90) to be found in *The Amaranthers* (1936) by Jack B. Yeats. Here his tentative invocation of the notion of "the ideal real" is suggestive of the Schopenhauerian context of his terms of judgement, recalling as it does terminology first employed in *Proust*. Beckett's claim that, in *The Amaranthers*, "There is no allegory, that glorious double-entry, with every credit in the said account a debit in the meant, and inversely" (D, 90) can also be seen to align with Schopenhauer's evaluative criteria. In Chapter One I noted that Beckett's opposition to allegorical representation is consonant with Schopenhauer's view that, "through the allegory a concept is always to be signified" (WWRI, 237).

Beckett's review of Devlin's *Intercessions* was clearly composed in a way which enabled him to write about what he would later describe as his own "obsessive concerns" (*LII*, 473), one of which being his refusal to purvey facile solutions to problems which arise from our

perennial confrontation with aesthetic and existential enigmas. He rails against those who cannot accept that genuine art mirrors existence in its defiance of definitive interpretations. They are reminiscent of "Davus and the morbid dread of sphinxes" in seeking for "solution clapped on problem like a snuffer on a candle" (D, 92). Over the course of this chapter I will examine Watt's "Davus complex (morbid dread of sphinges)" (W, 220) in relation to his incessant yet futile attempts to comprehend the baffling nature of his experience. Given the variety of afflictions he endures while doing so, it is instructive to consider his perilous endeavours in relation to Schopenhauer's foreboding comments about those who are sensitive to the irreducible enigmas of being. They find themselves "stepping up once more to the ancient sphinx with another attempt at solving its eternal riddle, at the risk of falling headlong into the dark abyss of oblivion whither so many have already gone" (PPI, 165).

#### Words Fail Us

In the 'German Letter,' written to Axel Kaun on 9 July 1937, Beckett's commitment to the intrinsic value of literary creation engenders an impassioned assertion: "where literature is concerned, a thing is either worth it or not worth it. And if we absolutely must earn money, we do it elsewhere" (LI, 517). Schopenhauer denounced authors who, in writing for pecuniary aims, carry out "a cunning and low, but not unprofitable, trick which literary men, bread-and-butter writers, and scribblers have succeeded in playing on the good taste and true culture of the age" (PPII, 557). In Chapter One I examined correlations between the views of Schopenhauer and Beckett regarding the ways in which our ordinarily illusive modes of perception underpin our benighted sense of reality. When considering Beckett's evaluation of English as a "language which appears to [him] as a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get to those things (or the nothingness) lying behind it" (LI, 518) we recall numerous instances whereby his early narrators struggle to express that which characters such as Belacqua and Murphy experience in their moments of freedom from quotidian states of consciousness. In Murphy's case, his entry into what could be described as a "void place a spacious nothing" (M, 60), proved to be particularly troublesome for a narrator whose attempts to depict such realms led to semantic dissolution. In an ardent exhortation, Beckett asserted, "To drill one hole after another into it [language] until that which lurks behind, be it something or nothing, starts seeping through - I cannot imagine a higher goal for today's writer" (LI, 518).

According to Lernout, "the reading of Mauthner's *Kritik* at the most confirmed an attitude to language and literature in Beckett that was already firmly entrenched: there does not seem to be a fundamental break in Beckett's poetics in 1938." Throughout this dissertation I have shown how Schopenhauer's enduring esteem for literature was nevertheless tempered by his views of its inextricably conceptual associations with words. Schopenhauer's own sense of the relative communicative potential of the arts led him to emphasise the gulf between visual and verbal representations: "let us contemplate, either in nature or through the medium of art, a beautiful and mobile countenance full of expression, what a much deeper insight into the essence of man, indeed of nature generally, is given by this than by all the words and abstractions they express!" (*PPII*, 421) Beckett's ruminations upon the expressive limitations of words and his enthusiasm for a "literature of the non-word" (*LI*, 520) would undoubtedly have been affected by what Knowlson describes as his "artistic pilgrimage" through Germany between 1936 and 1937, which seems to have deepened his sense of the superiority of painting over literature.

In the essay entitled 'Les Deux Besoins' we note Beckett's distinct sense of dissatisfaction with his efforts to write about art. Cohn perceptively notes that the essay "is at once a retreat from and an advance upon the Kaun letter - as well as a harbinger of the novel Watt."3 Having acknowledged the artist's "Besoin d'avoir besoin" (D, 55), Beckett admits the futility of elaboration: "Falsifions davantage" (D, 56). He goes on to describe the experiences of the creator and the genesis of art: "l'être qui est besoin et la nécessité où il est de l'être, enfer d'irraison d'où s'élève le cri à blanc, la série de questions pures, l'œuvre" (D, 56). 'Les Deux Besoins' is unquestionably a difficult text to elucidate but when it is read in conjunction with Beckett's earlier critical reflections the recognition of thematic echoes enables the reader to contextualise the work in relation to Beckett's profound unease with writings which seek to clarify processes of creation and appreciation which are essentially incomprehensible and ineffable. The essay concludes with a characteristic tone of self-indictment but we also encounter a reiteration of Beckett's commitment to the alogical nature of aesthetic matters: "Rien ne ressemble moins au procès créateur que ces convulsions de vermisseau enragé, propulsé en spasmes de jugement vers une pourriture d'élection. Car aux enthymemes de l'art ce sont les conclusions qui manquent et non pas les prémisses" (D, 57). As Beckett travelled through Germany and immersed himself in the contemplation of visual artworks his appreciation of the means by which painting developed ever more sophisticated expressive techniques seems to have enhanced his desire for literature to be reformed. Having concluded

Murphy, Beckett was, as he told MacGreevy, "very tired of it & words generally" (LI, 345). He would soon go on to write 'Cascando' (1936), a poem which endeavours to articulate feelings which seem to have inspired Beckett's creative impulses, but with merely "stale words," which constitute an "unalterable whey" (CPS, 57), at his disposal, he faced insurmountable problems. In a text which asks, "is it not better abort than be barren" (CPS, 57) the value of the compositional enterprise is thereby scrutinised. It is interesting to note that Schopenhauer considered the history of literature to be "for the most part the catalogue of a cabinet of abortions" (PPII, 563); Beckett would later describe some of his own work as "abortions" (Har, 384). In Chapter One I explored Beckett's despairing view of the literary process, whereby the author's vision is "degraded to paper" (LI, 533); Beckett used such terms in relation to his own abortive efforts to produce a dramatic scenario from Johnson's troubled relationship with Mrs Thrale. We observed how literary works are never "properly born" (CDW, 217) insofar as the conceptual nature of verbal communication diminishes the perceptual purity of the writer's inspiring vision. It is in accordance with such views that we can contextualise an entry in Beckett's German Diaries from March 1937 which mentions "a dissonance... that the word cannot express."<sup>4</sup>

#### Knowlson claims that Beckett's

[T]hree main occupations during what was to be his final year in Ireland - his interpretation of Jack Yeats's painting, his immersion in the philosophy of Schopenhauer, and his study of the life of Johnson - all derive . . . from [his] personal obsessions: with the isolation of man from nature and man from man; with a reduction in the role of human will; and with solitude, illness and death. (*JK*, 271)

Such issues would undoubtedly have captivated his attention, but it is fascinating to ponder the aesthetic implications of such a combination of concerns. A passage from the '*Watt* Notebooks' provides us with what seems to be a deeply autobiographical account of Beckett's activities in Germany:

Watt... reaped the rewards of the many weary hours... spent walking up and down in private and public collections, and turning the pages of illustrated catalogues, and in putting in an appearance at exhibitions, and in [dropping?] in on painters in their studios, and in turning the pages of works of critics of art, and in listening to the noise of the conversation of lovers of art.<sup>5</sup>

Beckett's convictions regarding the expressive deficiencies of language were most likely deepened by such a prolonged and intense engagement with the visual arts; accordingly, his

desire to conduct "An assault against words in the name of beauty" (*D*, 173) was surely intensified by his sojourn in Germany. By recognising that such a task was prompted "*in the name of beauty*" we can offer a qualified assent to Banville's claim that Beckett's work constitutes "first and foremost a critique of language." If we are to avoid the reductive implications contained in Banville's contention, it is important to recall Beckett's oft-professed insistence upon the arational nature of his authorial impulses. Without doing so, it is all too easy to assume that his concerns are comparable to writers such as Mauthner and Wittgenstein and that his theoretical interests dictated his creative procedures. On 13 December 1936 Beckett claimed that his journey to Germany had been "a failure" and proceeded to describe his creative impasse. He attempts to articulate the nature of his difficulties but eventually resigns himself to a state of incomprehension which warrants an apologia for the inexplicable:

I can't imagine anything worse than the mental marasmus, in which I totter & sweat for months. It has turned out indeed to be a journey <u>from</u>, and not <u>to</u>, as I knew it was, before I began it. I can't begin to make it clear to you. I haven't the energy to make it clear to myself. An instinctive respect at least, for what is real & therefore has not in its nature to be clear. Then when somehow this goes over into words, one is called an obscurantist. The classifiers are the obscurantists. (*LI*, 397)

Beckett's sense of the inherent intricacies of experiential reality and his deepening insights into the inevitable ways in which, as Mrs Williams from *Human Wishes* (1980) puts it, "words fail us" (*D*, 160), can be seen as thematically central in *Watt*.

Before turning to a consideration of how the aforementioned issues can be brought to bear upon that novel it is worth noting the remarkable consonance between the views of Schopenhauer and Beckett regarding the radical unintelligibility of existence. Schopenhauer repudiates our overweening confidence in rationality. He states, "That 'the faculty of reason alone is called upon to do away with all errors' is Kant's error" (*MRII*, 314). As his writing of *Watt* proceeded, Beckett is likely to have been struck by the lamentable impotence of reason in its enduring agon with the nefarious forces which govern our behaviour. Residing in a wartorn France, surrounded by heart-rending evidence of the failure of reason to prevent humanity from embarking upon yet another prolonged course of self-destruction, the circumstances within which *Watt* was written may well have contributed to the novel's relative lack of identifiable allusions to intellectual and artistic history. When the narrator of *Dream* asks, "did I do well to leave my notes at home?" (*DFW*, 71), he refers to a choice

which Beckett himself did not have as he fled from an increasingly unsafe Paris. Bereft of the type of scholarly apparatus with which he clearly engaged in the writing of *Dream*, *More* Pricks, 'Echo's Bones,' and Murphy Beckett was inevitably more dependent upon the resources of memory and imagination in the writing of Watt than he was in the composition of his previous fiction, but as Ackerley shows, the novel draws upon sections of texts which Beckett seems to have thoroughly internalised, such as Rank's *The Trauma of Birth* (1929). Watt's decision to sit with his back to the engine while travelling to Mr Knott's house can be related to what Ackerley describes as the "bizarre" links between departure and maternal separation that Rank discusses. This dissertation has observed numerous examples of Beckett's attraction to the "bizarre" elements of systematic thought which, in attempting to reduce human eccentricities to conceptual comprehension, engender ludicrous yet polysemic conclusions. Beckett claimed that, "Watt was written as it came without pre-established plan"8 and as a means of getting "away from war and occupation."9 Wartime necessities would undoubtedly have prevented Beckett from organising his material in accordance with methodical intent but it is worth recalling that Beckett's prior authorial procedures were markedly informed by his aversion to such deliberate narratorial mastery. Schopenhauer was vehemently opposed to those who "sit down on a fixed plan [and] write page after page of their book." Inevitably, such works are "tedious and shallow" (MRIV, 272). Given Watt's insistent probing of the limitations of intellection, epistemic constraints constitute not merely the novel's thematic focal points, but foundational elements of the processes in accordance with which it was composed.

### Nothing is Known

As a novel which examines the consequences of our existence not so much as inheritors, but as victims of Enlightenment ideals about the value of reason, *Watt* can be considered in relation to some of Schopenhauer's key epistemological claims. He insists that our Willdriven lives are ordinarily immune to the blissful aspects of a purely perceptual engagement with the world. The following passage encapsulates such notions:

In the immediate perception of the world and of life, we consider things as a rule merely in their relations, and consequently according to their relative, not their absolute, essence and existence. For example, we regard houses, ships, machines and the like with the idea of their purpose and their suitability therefor; human beings with the idea of their relation to us, if they have any and then of their relation to one another, whether in their present actions or according to their position and vocation, perhaps judging their fitness for it, and so on. We can pursue such a consideration of the relations more

or less to the most distant links of their concatenation . . . In most cases and as a rule, everyone is abandoned to this method of consideration; I believe even that most people are incapable of any other. (WWRII, 372)

In exceptional cases we attain deliverance from such rigidly instrumental modes of thought and enjoy disinterested contemplation. Although great works of art facilitate our experience of such states, our everyday observations of the most seemingly innocuous events can also inspire periods of perceptual absorption: "aesthetic pleasure is essentially one and the same, whether it be called forth by a work of art, or directly by the contemplation of nature and of life" (*WWRI*, 195). As we noted in Chapter One, such experiences are blissfully mystifying owing to the temporary suspension of our intellective capacities which results in our inability to reduce sensory reality to distinct conceptual terms. Schopenhauer argues that, in such cases, "perceptive knowledge . . . is a constant disturbance and falsification of our system of ideas" (*MRIII*, 562).

The appearance of Watt as an unidentifiable object leads Tetty and Goff to speculate about his identity, but Hackett experiences sheer bafflement when confronted with his numinous presence:

Mr Hackett did not know when he had been more intrigued, nay, he did not know when he had been so intrigued. He did not know either what it was that so intrigued him. What is it that so intrigues me, he said, whom even the extraordinary, even the supernatural, intrigue so seldom, and so little. Here there is nothing in the least unusual, that I can see, and yet I burn with curiosity, and with wonder. The sensation is not disagreeable, I must say, and yet I do not think I could bear it for more than twenty minutes or half an hour. (*W*, 11-12)

In reading the above passage we may recall affinities between the views of Schopenhauer and Beckett regarding our inability to refrain from our instinctual attempts to reduce perceived reality to conceptual frameworks. In my examination of the Schopenhauerian elements of *Proust* I noted Beckett's fascination with such states of incomprehension and his contention that they are as ephemeral as they are rare. Hackett's strange enjoyment of the more bountiful aspects of insatiable curiosity will, as the novel progresses, place Watt's irrepressible need to rationally comprehend his world in truly stark contrast. Hackett also introduces questions of contingency into the novel, which, as we have seen in previous chapters, were of primary importance to Beckett's creative procedures. He envisages a scenario wherein Watt would think, "If only Mr Nixon had accepted my four and fourpence that night, and I had turned

back, instead of going on" (W, 12). Having considered a plethora of questions which are generated by Watt's inscrutable ways, Hackett considers the possibility that Watt was content to succumb to external determinants: "Too fearful to assume himself the onus of a decision . . . he refers it to the frigid machinery of a time-space relation" (W, 15). If we interpret that statement in relation to Schopenhauer's view that the "world in space and time proclaim[s] itself as nothing but causality" (WWRI, 14), we can read Watt's alleged choice to submit to spatiotemporal governance as less a solution to our queries regarding his imponderable ways than an indication of his journey as an intrinsically bewildering phenomenon. At this point Watt's behaviour is no more intelligible than his being; as Mr Nixon puts it, "nothing is known" (W, 16).

In Watt's encounter with Mr Spiro abstract discourse is set against the chaos of his tortured psyche. Spiro proceeds to bring his rigorous theological learning to bear upon dilemmas engendered by a rat's ingestion of a "consecrated wafer" (W, 22) by quoting from esteemed thinkers such as Saint Bonaventura, Peter Lombard, Alexander of Hales, and Suarez. Watt remains oblivious to the glorious achievements of that learned pantheon of Church Fathers. He "heard nothing of this, because of other voices, singing, crying, stating, murmuring, things unintelligible, in his ear" (W, 22). The voice of rational theology fails to penetrate the pandemonium of Watt's mind: "sometimes he understood nothing, as now" (W, 23). Spiro's intellective methods can be seen as a paradigmatic example of Cartesian rationalism in his subjection of complexities to analysis which is carried out "in an orderly way" (W, 20). Watt's imperviousness to Spiro's discourse precedes an experience which suggests that he is capable of enjoying an entirely arational awareness. In light of his later obsessions with rationalising the enigmatic qualities of Knott's house and person, it is interesting to note how his consciousness as an auditor of a "mixed choir" (W, 26) that sings with "great distinctness" (W, 26) songs which may perplex the reader is devoid of intellective propensities.

## **Supreme Suffering**

When we consider Lady McCann's encounter with Watt, which involves the casting of a stone and its divinely-ordained trajectory, the irreverent nature of the description can dissuade us from exploring the fascinating theological upshot of its occurrence: "And it is to be supposed that God, always favourable to the McCanns of ?, guided her hand" (W, 25). Here the narrator assures us that Watt had enjoyed a "providential escape" (W, 25). Watt's irenic stance evinces his unflinching acceptance of anguish: "Watt, faithful to his rule, took

no more notice of this aggression than if it had been an accident" (W, 25). Mr. Nixon's earlier observations about Watt being "incapable . . . of telling an untruth" (W, 12) and that "a milder more inoffensive creature does not exist. He would literally turn the other cheek . . . if he had the energy" (W, 14) imply that Watt's Christ-like behaviour personifies ethical power, yet his affinities with Christ owe as much to his tribulations as his admirable conduct. His magnanimity also reminds us of Schopenhauer's view of the behavioural signs of an insusceptibility to Will, whereby the sufferer of wrongs will endure "every injury, every ignominy, every outrage . . . with inexhaustible patience and gentleness" (WWRI, 382). However, owing to his utter subservience to epistemic yearning, Watt cannot be viewed as a paragon of renunciation. The ambivalence of God's assistance of Lady McCann's actions rests with our uncertainty as to whether or not His intervention prevented Watt from receiving a grave wound. Such comic instances acquire greater significance because of their thematic congruence with deeper issues. The mention of Watt's "red sudarium," in explicitly evoking thoughts of the anecdotal cloth with which Veronica wiped Christ's face, adds greater credence to the role of Watt as a suffering servant as he proceeds "on his way, or in his station, like a victim of mere mischance" (W, 25). Watt's equanimity was developed through recurrent subjections to suffering: "it was an attitude become, with frequent repetition, so part of his being, that there was no . . . room for resentment at a spit in the eye" (W, 25). Once again we note how Beckett's protagonists derive more insights from an experiential engagement with the world than they do from abstract reflections.

If, at this point in the novel, we consider Watt's qualities of honesty and placidity to be redolent of those of a saint, it is interesting to relate them to Schopenhauer's notion that "virtue and holiness do not result from reflection" (*WWRI*, 58) but from "knowledge [that] is purified and enhanced by suffering itself" (*WWRI*, 253). As we may recall, for Schopenhauer the senseless nature of Christ's agonies were indicative of his existence as an archetype of humanity as he "stands before us with perfect virtue, holiness, and sublimity, yet in a state of supreme suffering" (*WWRI*, 91). Schopenhauer is even more explicit about Christ's role as a peerless exemplar in claiming that, "Through suffering a man is chastened and sanctified, in other words is liberated from the will-to-live. In this sense the cross is the symbol of the Christian religion" (*MRIII*, 642). Arsene's parting statement contains ominous Christological overtones which inform Watt of "The long blue days for his head, for his side, and the little paths for his feet" (*W*, 32). Watt later appears in a disturbingly Christ-like guise: his "face was bloody, his hand also, and thorns were in his scalp. (His resemblance, at that moment, to

the Christ believed by Bosch, then hanging in Trafalgar Square, was so striking, that I remarked it" (W, 136). Later in the novel, Watt's inability to attain certainty regarding the identity of an "incomprehensible staffage" (W, 196), evokes images of stigmata: "his nails pricked his palms" (W, 196). Arsene is also presented as a character who has acquired dubious insights through existential anguish rather than detached reflection. Ackerley points to 10 the biblical overtones of Arsene's admission that he is "imbued" with "useless wisdom so dearly won . . . from the crown of [his] head to the soles of [his] feet" (W, 53). Here we are reminded of Job 2:7, where we learn that the Lord "smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown." By recalling Schopenhauer's reading of Job as an archetypal depiction of the "vanity" (PPII, 525) of human lives, Arsene's issueless endeavours to articulate experiential insights which have been agonisingly attained are intriguingly contextualised.

#### A Hell of Unreason

In his approach towards the moonlit silhouette of Knott's house, Watt feels "awe" (W, 29) as he prepares to enter a "enfer d'irraison" (D, 56) which at once inspires and confounds rational thought. In examining Watt's experience it is interesting to consider Schopenhauer's contentions regarding the means by which we are oppressed by epistemic craving. He states, "As long as the understanding follows the causal law and seeks the causes of the objects considered, it does not contemplate; the Why allows it no rest" (MRIII, 50n. ‡). The narrator's insistence upon demonstrating Watt's ignorance seems, at times, proportional to Watt's desire to know. We learn that Watt was "never never to know how the back door came to be opened" (W, 30). The words "never to know" or "never know" (W, 31) serve as a leitmotif of Watt's present and future afflictions. While Beckett's previous narrators were compelled to admit defeat in their attempts to comprehend or describe the inner lives of characters such as Belacqua and Murphy, the narrator of *Watt* frequently alludes to the mysteries of his unfolding plot by his repeated employment of words such as "obscure reasons" (W, 19); "perhaps" (W, 19); "reasons that are not known" (W, 55); "for reasons that remain obscure" (W, 98); "for some reason" (W, 207); "her reasons for doing this were not known" (W, 208), which can be said to underpin the text's various indeterminacies. In this sense, the narrator of Watt is sufficiently nescient to deepen our sense of the irreducible enigmas with which he is beset. Residing in a world devoid of determinable significance, Watt is assailed by the "sounds meaning nothing... that demand nothing, ordain nothing, explain nothing, propound nothing" (W, 32) that he will continually hear as he serves Mr Knott in the midst of

"the being of nothing" (W, 32). The world is "a wonder to him and will remain so" (W, 33). Arsene's portentous vision of Watt's impending experiences contain an important qualification of his initial view of the means by which Watt will attain awareness of his situation: "And he knows this. No. Let us remain calm. He feels it" (W, 33). Watt's inability to desist from rationalisation falsifies Arsene's prediction insofar as his cognitive obsessions seem to preclude affective realisation.

Schopenhauer is adamant that "our greatest sufferings do not lie in the present as representations of perception or as immediate feeling, but in our faculty of reason as abstract concepts, tormenting thoughts" (WWRI, 298). Watt, being unable to endure the "horrors of disinterested endeavour" (W, 33), is immune to the type of emotional and perceptual experiences that Arsene so comprehensively enumerates, specifically his mention of the "slip" (W, 35) which, as a perception of the utmost intensity, proved eminently incomprehensible:

[M]y personal system was so distended at the period of which I speak that the distinction between what was inside it and what was outside it was not at all easy to draw. Everything that happened inside it, and at the same time everything that happened outside it. I trust I make myself plain. I did not, need I add, see the thing happen, nor hear it, but I perceived it with a perception so sensuous that in comparison the impressions of a man buried alive in Lisbon on Lisbon's great day seem a frigid and artificial construction of the understanding . . . I felt I had been transported without my having remarked it, to some quite different yard, and to some quite different season, in an unfamiliar country. (W, 35-6)

Arsene's inability to comprehend such an irreducibly particular experience leads to the use of a disturbing analogy which is replete with anti-theodical connotations. Here the deeply enigmatic nature of an ill-defined sensation is compared to one of the greatest controversies in Western thought. Beckett's fascination with the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 is evinced by his references to that disaster in the poem 'ainsi a-t-on beau' (1946) and in his essay 'La Peinture des van Velde, ou: le monde et le pantalon' (1945-1946). The critical acumen of figures such as Voltaire, Diderot, and Kant was brought to bear upon an event which seemed to violate Leibnizian notions of the immaculate constitution of this supposedly pre-eminent world. Voltaire's scornful attitude towards those who would attempt to explicate this appalling disaster in rational terms held obvious appeal for Beckett. In his 'Sottisier Notebook' Beckett transcribed the following lines from the poem 'La Dést. de Lisbonne'

(1756) which expresses Voltaire's exasperation with such thinkers: "Tristes calculateurs des misères humaines / Ne me consolez point, vous aigrissez mes peines." 12

As we have noted in previous chapters, Beckett's early fiction repeatedly engages with themes such as the incessant cravings to which we are subject as embodied and rational beings. While Belacqua and Murphy were all too susceptible to residual desires of the flesh, Watt seems to have achieved a degree of quiescence in carnal matters to which they could merely aspire. In this sense, he "was not a woman's man" (W, 118), in spite of having "at least two well defined romances in the course of his celibate" (W, 119) and the occasional twinge of longing to consummate his relations with Mrs Gorman having been "more than half inclined to do so" (W, 121). Arsene is clearly immune to Beckett's distinctly Schopenhauerian stance on the virtues of renunciation but the following excerpt from his "short statement" (W, 31) serves to underscore Watt's relative indifference to appetitive pleasures:

[I]t is useless not to seek, not to want, for when you cease to seek you start to find, and when you cease to want, then life begins to ram her fish and chips down your gullet until you puke, and then the puke down your gullet until you puke the puke, and then the puked puke until you like it. The glutton castaway, the drunkard in the desert, the lecher in prison, they are the happy ones. To hunger, thirst, lust, every day afresh and every day in vain, after the old prog, the old booze, the old whores, that's the nearest we'll get to felicity. (*W*, 36)

We have already noted how, in a Schopenhauerian sense, insatiable craving serves to forestall ennui. Arsene's tale of Mary, the maid whose appetite "knew no remission" (W, 43), is one of Beckett's most overtly Schopenhauerian depictions of a Will-governed character. As Schopenhauer contends, "absence of all aim, of all limits, belongs to the essential nature of the will in itself, which is an endless striving" (WWRI, 164). Watt's enviable indifference to gluttonous pursuits is tempered by our recognition that his longing to know is ordinarily irrepressible. We are, according to Schopenhauer, both "needy and perplexed" (WWRI, 411) and therefore at the combined mercy of volitional and intellective yearning. Watt is prevented from realising the truth of Schopenhauer's view that, "Peace, serenity, and bliss dwell only where there are no Where and no When" (PPII, 45 n. \*). We learn that he

found it strange to think, of these little changes, of scene, the little gains, the little losses, the thing brought, the thing removed, the light given, the light taken, and all the vain offerings to the hour, strange to think of all these little things that cluster round the comings, and the stayings, and the goings,

that he would know nothing of them, nothing of what they had been, as long as he lived, nothing of when they came, of how they came, and how it was then, compared with before, nothing of how long they stayed, of how they stayed, and what difference that made, nothing of when they went, of how they went, and how it was then, compared with before, before they came, before they went. (W, 31)

In the above passage the incantatory aura of the word "nothing" signifies the sheer extent of Watt's ignorance and sounds a plaintively foreboding note about his future troubles. His eventual acceptance that "a nothing had happened" comes "too late" (W, 66). In his efforts to name his predecessors and describe their physical attributes, Arsene's strenuous attempts to achieve clarity are couched in terms which undermine the value of his enterprise. His account

seems certain, if any reliance is to be placed on oral tradition as handed down by word of mouth from one fleeting generation to the next, or, as is more usual, to the next but one. This, if it does not prove beyond all manner of doubt that all those of whom all trace is lost not one was a body quite different from us. (W, 51)

The narrator will subsequently assure us that all he knows "on the subject of Mr Knott, and of all that touched Mr Knott, and on the subject of Watt, and of all that touched Watt, came from Watt, and from Watt alone" (W, 107). He also admits that "It is so difficult with a long story, like the story that Watt told, even when one is most careful to note down all at the time, in one's little notebook, not to leave out some of the things that were told, and not to foist in other things that were never told, never never told at all" (W, 108). Throughout the novel we are reminded of the narrator's questionable reliability in ways which mirror Schopenhauerian suspicions about the possibility of narratorial fidelity. Schopenhauer observes that, "every fact is necessarily distorted through further narration. The second narrator has communicated concepts which he has abstracted from the picture of his imagination, and from these a third narrator again sketches for himself a picture or image differing still more widely, which he now converts in turn into concepts, and so the process goes on" (WWRII, 67). Our abilities to recollect are also impeded by rationality. Memory, as a mere "function of the intellect" (MRIV, 123), has a tendency to falsify the chaotic contingencies of lived experience; it can merely provide "a coherent reminiscence which is mediated by the abstract concepts of the faculty of reason" (MRIV, 70). Given Watt's considerable shortcomings as an observer which arise from "on the one hand the exiguity of the material propounded to his senses, and on the other the decay of these" (W, 172), semantic uncertainties are tightly interwoven into the

formal and thematic fabric of the text. Schopenhauer's general scepticism about the expressive efficacy of language relates to his more general view of rationality as a "distorting-mirror" (MRIII, 487). Watt refers to tales which are "ill told, ill heard, and more than half forgotten" (W, 61); in considering how Watt contains themes which persistently focus upon the implications of the impotence of reason in the lives of its characters, it is interesting to recognise how language is similarly indicted. Arsene's recognition that "what we know partakes in no small measure of the nature of what has so happily been called the unutterable or ineffable, so that any attempt to utter or eff it is doomed to fail, doomed, doomed to fail" (W, 52-3) alerts us to the status Watt as a novel which persistently foregrounds the inadequacies of linguistic expression. In recalling Schopenhauer's assertion that, "words are the language of reason" (WWRI, 259), we are yet again reminded of the variety of instances in the writings of Schopenhauer and those of Beckett which point to experiences that are as unintelligible as they are indescribable.

## **Indeterminable Purport**

According to Schopenhauer, "the understanding is in itself irrational" (*WWRI*, 25); he goes on to claim that, "The understanding has one function alone, namely immediate knowledge of the relation of cause and effect; and the perception of the actual world . . . Reason also has one function, the formation of the concept" (*WWRI*, 38-9). As Watt commences work for Knott we are informed of his awareness of a distinction between a "real reason" and that which is "merely the reason offered to the understanding" (*W*, 55). His inability to impart significance to the world in which he resides is, in part, attributable to his enduring awareness of such a distinction. When we consider Schopenhauer's view that, "By nature man tries to explain to himself everything, attributes a meaning to everything" (*MRIV*, 64) Watt's epistemic plight seems ineluctable. Our hermeneutical obsessions cannot, according to Schopenhauer, be appeased, because "we cannot understand and grasp a single thing, even the simplest and smallest, through and through, but in everything there is something left over that remains entirely inexplicable to us" (*WWRII*, 287). The "principal incident" (*W*, 59) of Watt's initial experiences of employment at Knott's house - the visit of the Galls - engenders grievous difficulties:

[The event] continued to unfold, in Watt's head, from beginning to end, over and over again, the complex connexions of its lights and shadows, the passing from silence to sound and from sound to silence, the stillness before the movement and the stillness after, the quickenings and retardings, the

approaches and the separations, all the shifting detail of its march and ordinance, according to the irrevocable caprice of its taking place. It resembled them in the vigour which it developed a purely plastic content, and gradually lost, in the nice processes of its light, its sound, its impacts and its rhythm, all meaning even the most literal. (*W*, 60)

We have noted how Schopenhauer considers reason to be utterly incapable of ascribing ultimate significance to phenomenal events; he is adamant that, "on the path of the representation we can never get beyond the representation" (*WWRI*, 502). Watt is painfully attuned to the type of enigmas which Schopenhauer considers to be ubiquitous in even the most mundane of human affairs. We learn that, "The fragility of the outer meaning had a bad effect on Watt, for it caused him to seek for another, for some meaning of what had passed, in the image of how it had passed" (*W*, 60). Watt, who had not "executed an interpretation since the age of fourteen or fifteen, and who had lived, miserably it is true, among face values all his adult life" (*W*, 60) seems, upon entering Knott's house, to have lost his erstwhile capacity to accept the unique specificities of perceptual experience. In the past, "whatever it was Watt saw, with the first look, that was enough for Watt, that had always been enough for Watt. And he had experienced literally nothing, since the age of fourteen, or fifteen, of which he was not content in retrospect to say, That is what happened then" (*W*, 60).

The narrator provides us with an indication of how Watt's predicaments will be governed by interpretative yearnings which may elude satiation: "This need remained with Watt, this need not always satisfied, during the greater part of his stay in Mr Knott's house. For the incidents of the Galls father and son was followed by others of a similar kind, incidents that is to say of great formal brilliance and indeterminable purport" (W, 61). The events that baffle Watt are described in terms which accentuate their inevitable occurrence, given the nature of Watt and the domain of Knott:

Watt could not accept them for what they perhaps were, the simple games that time plays with space, now with these toys, and now with those, but was obliged because of his particular character to enquire into what they meant, oh not into what they really meant, his character was not so peculiar as all that, but into what they might be induced to mean. (W, 61)

The language of the above passage is suggestive of the themes of spatiotemporal boundedness with which the discourse of Transcendental Idealism is thoroughly pervaded. In a particularly striking description of Kant's epistemology, Schopenhauer states: "With Kant it looked as if the nature of things played at hide-and-seek with us" (*MRIII*, 487). The world in

which Watt moves is no more explicable than his own bewildering ways. There is a distinct note of futility in the narrator's quest to inform the reader of the impediments that must be faced in comprehending and portraying the mystifying predilections of such a singular being:

But what was this pursuit of meaning in this indifference to meaning? And to what did it tend? These are delicate questions. For when Watt at last spoke of his time, it was a time long past, and of which his recollections were, in a sense, perhaps less clear than he would have wished, though too clear for his liking, in another. Add to this the notorious difficulty of recapturing, at will, modes of feeling peculiar to a certain time, and to a certain place, and perhaps also to a certain state of the health, when the time is past, and the place left, and the body struggling with quite a new situation. Add to this the obscurity of Watt's communications, the rapidity of his utterance and the eccentricities of his syntax, as elsewhere recorded. Add to this the material conditions in which these communications were made. Add to this the scant aptitude to receive of him to whom they were proposed. Add to this the scant aptitude to give of him to whom they were committed. And some idea will perhaps be obtained of the difficulties experienced in formulating, not only such matters as those here in question, but the entire body of Watt's experience, from the moment of his entering Mr Knott's establishment to the moment of his leaving it. (W, 62)

Given its overt bearing on the type of aesthetic issues which I have explored in previous chapters, Schopenhauer's despairing vision of the sheer inscrutability of character is not merely of ethical significance. Watt's inability to communicate the discomfiting intricacies of his inner life presents the narrator with insuperable challenges. Schopenhauer's notions of the irremediable solitude to which we are subject focus on the incommunicable aspects of selfhood. In this context we are reminded of Beckett's claim that, "We cannot know and we cannot be known" (*PTD*, 66). Despite his insistent efforts to provide a comprehensive account of human experience, Schopenhauer admits to sheer bewilderment when faced with the various inexplicable phenomena which beset subjectivity; it "has depths, obscurities, and intricacies, whose elucidation and unfolding are of the very greatest difficulty" (*WWRI*, 402).

## **Unintelligible Intricacies**

Schopenhauer highlights the various ways in which reason is unable to comprehend or solve problems which arise out of the "contrasting confusion of the phenomena of this world" because they are suffused with "innumerable contradictions" (*WWRII*, 185). Beckett's commendation of Cézanne's painting was, in part, based upon its ability to convey a vision of the world as an "unintelligible arrangement of atoms" (*LI*, 223). While the greatest art can

admit the unutterable strangeness of the world, characters such as Watt cannot refrain from their attempts to render earthly affairs amenable to comprehension. Watt suffers from the

nothing that had happened, with all the clarity and solidity of something . . . it revisited him in such a way that he was forced to submit to it all over again, to hear the same sounds, see the same lights, touch the same surfaces and so on, as when they first involved him in their unintelligible intricacies. If he had been able to accept it, then perhaps it would not have revisited him, and this would have been a great saving of vexation, to put it mildly. But he could not accept it, could not bear it. (W, 63)

The imponderable nature of the Galls' visit is thereby allied to the intensity with which it was experienced as an overwhelming sensory phenomenon which has been seared into Watt's memory. From a Schopenhauerian perspective, Watt's problems are generated by his assumption that rational analysis can yield a more authentic vision of reality. As we have observed, Schopenhauer and Beckett were cognate minds in their estimation of the distorting influence of reason. Schopenhauer contends that, "to understand anything really and truly, it is necessary for us to grasp it in intuitive perception" (PPII, 48). With the aid of his technical notion of Ideas Schopenhauer can consistently argue for the primacy of perceptual experience within aesthetic contexts while agreeing with Plato that the world which we ordinarily perceive is, by virtue of its inherent transience, illusory: "the world as representation is constantly becoming nothing" (MRIV, 113). He goes on to claim that, "all that passes away has in fact never truly existed" (MRIV, 394). In discussing the "nothingness and mere delusiveness of the principium individuationis (WWRI, 366), Schopenhauer observes that, "Every nothing is thought of as such only in relation to something else; it presupposes this relation" (WWRI, 409). Schopenhauer's ontological reflections about the phenomenal world insist upon its fleetingness. Given that language "forces the infinitely shaded, mobile, and modifiable idea into certain rigid, permanent forms, and by fixing the idea it at the same time fetters it" (WWRII, 66), it falsifies the reality which it attempts to represent.

The narrator struggles with comparable restrictions as he endeavours to convey some sense of Watt's tribulations: "the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something" (W, 64), thereby echoing Schopenhauer's claim that, "an absolute nothing is not even conceivable." Schopenhauer goes on to note that the concept of nothing is a mere "word-combination; it is an example of the unthinkable" (WWRI, 409). Such statements can be seen to align with his contentions regarding the means by which mystical realisation is both inscrutable and unutterable because it negates the world. Schopenhauer describes how

any attempt to convey the reality of modes of consciousness which are exempt from Will-inspired epistemic or sexual desire is doomed to perpetual frustration. In such instances even a magisterial prose stylist such as Schopenhauer is compelled to confront his limits. In our endeavours to express modes of consciousness which defy comprehension and articulation we habitually employ words such as "ecstasy, rapture, illumination, union with God and so on. But such a state cannot be called knowledge, since it no longer has the form of subject and object; moreover, it is accessible only to one's own experience that cannot be further communicated" (*WWRI*, 410).

In Chapter Three I considered Schopenhauer's views regarding the "reasoning faculty's constant demand for an account" (MRI, 429). Elsewhere, Schopenhauer contends that, it is almost "as if our intellect were intentionally designed to lead us into error" (WWRII, 286). We learn that, in being beset by "meticulous phantoms . . . to explain had always been to exorcise, for Watt" (W, 64). The notion that Watt is bedevilled by his insatiable epistemic cravings corresponds with Schopenhauer's view that, "it really looks as if a demon had mischievously obstructed from us all further knowledge in order to gloat over our embarrassment" (PPII, 95). Unlike the Cartesian postulate of a malevolent being who strives to prevent us from attaining indubitable knowledge, Schopenhauer's reference to the demonic is not merely a thought experiment which serves to aid our eventual acceptance of a benevolent God who can be relied upon as a guarantor of the reliability of perceptive and intellective knowledge. Given Schopenhauer's vision of a metaphysical Will which is fundamentally evil, his claim that, "without our noticing it, our intellect is infected and poisoned by the will" (PPII, 66) signifies what he considers to be our irremediably benighted state in purely rational affairs. The rarity of Watt's successes in "foisting a meaning . . . where no meaning appeared" (W, 64) reveals his regular subjection to incidents that "resisted all Watt's efforts to saddle them with meaning, and a formula, so that he could neither think of them, nor speak of them, but only suffer them when they recurred" (W, 65). While Schopenhauer acknowledges that, "The supposition constantly made by us a priori that all things have a reason is precisely what justifies our asking why at every turn" (EFR, 3), his recognition of reason's inability to deliver answers to such questions contributes to his bleak vision of the human lot. We learn that Watt would not have thought or spoken of the incidents which caused him anguish "if he had not been under the absolute necessity of doing so" (W, 65).

Given Watt's inability to render his experiences amenable to conceptual understanding, his linguistic difficulties seem, from a Schopenhauerian standpoint, inevitable. His "need of semantic succour was at times so great that he would set to trying names on things, and on himself, almost as a woman hats" (W, 68). In explaining how perceptual knowledge is undermined by our tendency to rationalise our sensory experiences, Schopenhauer argues that, "all abstraction consists in mere thinking away, the farther we continue it, the less we have left" (WWRII, 64). The more readily we can encapsulate something in words, the more impoverished we are in terms of genuine comprehension: "we have a thorough understanding of things only in so far as we are capable of representing them to ourselves in purely distinct perceptions without the aid of words" (WWRII, 71). The narrator's querying of Watt's observational capacities suggests the foreclosure of empirical avenues to reality: "what kind of witness was Watt, weak now of eye, hard of hearing, and with even the more intimate senses greatly below par? A needy witness an imperfect witness" (W, 175). Watt's compulsion to name objects can be viewed, from a Schopenhauerian standpoint, as an endemic attribute of his craving to rationally comprehend them. When we consider Schopenhauer's claim that, "the learning of a language consists in our linking together a concept and a word for all time, so that this word occurs to us always simultaneously with this concept, and this concept with this word" (WWRII, 134), Watt's troubles with selfdefinition can be intriguingly contextualised:

As for himself, though he could no longer call it a man, as he had used to do, with the intuition that he was perhaps not talking nonsense, yet he could not imagine what else to call it, if not a man. But Watt's imagination had never been a lively one. So he continued to think of himself as a man, as his mother had taught him, when she said, There's a good little man, or, there's a bonny little man, or, there's a clever little man. But for all the relief that this afforded him, he might just as well have thought of himself as a box, or an urn. (W, 69)

Similarly, Watt's inability to adequately conceptualise his world may be related to his desire for semantic closure:

Watt would have been glad to hear Erskine's voice, wrapping up safe in words the kitchen space, the extraordinary newel-lamp, the stairs that were never the same and of which even the number of steps seemed to vary from day to day, and from night to morning, and many other things in the house, and the bushes without and other garden growths, that so often prevented Watt from taking the air, even on the finest day, so that he grew pale and constipated. (W, 69)

Assailed by the inordinate unintelligibility of self and world, Watt endures the incessant demands of reason which is, as Schopenhauer avers, a "strict, untiring, and most troublesome governess" (*WWRII*, 98). In Chapter One I examined Beckett's discussion of habit in *Proust* in relation to its affinities with core dicta of Schopenhauer's aesthetics. We noted how Schopenhauer and Beckett were interested in the means by which our capacity for perceptual enjoyment of the world is impaired by our insistence upon contextualising sensory data in accordance with conceptual modes of thought. We are reminded of such notions in reading that, "the clouds seen from Mr Knott's premises were not quite the clouds that Watt was used to, and Watt had a great experience of clouds, and could distinguish the various sorts, the cirrhus, the stratus, the cumulus and the various other sorts, at a glance" (*W*, 69). The defamiliarising nature of the realm of Mr Knott is evinced in such unbearable disjunctions between Watt's repertoire of concepts and percepts which prove inassimilable to discursive frameworks.

Watt's longing for a situation wherein "things appear, and himself appear, in their ancient guise, and consent to be named, with the time-honoured names, and forgotten" (W, 70) can be related to Schopenhauer's views regarding the means by which we attempt to bind a word to a concept "for all time." However, we recognise the futility of such a task insofar as the ephemeral phenomena of the world defy stable definition and are thereby "unspeakable" (W, 71). Watt, in spite of his standing as a "very fair linguist" (W, 180), is tenaciously attached to referential fallacies of semantic permanence even if his experiential awareness of the irreducible nature of perception proves abidingly troublesome: "This constant tension of some of his most noble faculties tired Watt greatly" (W, 71). Conversely, Watt's fleeting moments of serenity are induced by those rare experiences in which he successfully brings reason to bear upon the mysterious happenings at Knott's house: "once Watt had grasped, in its complexity, the mechanism of this [dog feeding] arrangement . . . it interested him no more, and he enjoyed a comparative peace of mind in this connexion . . . he had turned little by little a disturbance into words, he had made a pillow of old words for a head" (W, 99). Watt's ambivalent attitude towards words, whereby "he did not know what to think of them, from one year's end to the next, whether to think poorly of them, or highly of them, or with indifference" (W, 106), is attributable to their tendency to serve all too rarely as receptacles of reliable signification as he engages in "Thinking . . . in search of rest" (W, 116). The narrator subsequently considers the possibility that Watt's strange syntactical constructions are

indicative of a more serious conceptual confusion: "there was perhaps more than a reversal of discourse . . . the thought was perhaps inverted" (W, 141).

Schopenhauer extols Kant for underscoring the deep-lying sources of human ignorance owing to his overthrow of age-old notions about the potentialities of reason: "The very fact that there is something incomprehensible, that this pitiable nature of the understanding and of its concepts is limited, conditioned and finally fallacious; this certainly is Kant's great gift" (MRII, 401). We have seen how Schopenhauer's arguments regarding the value of aesthetic experience specify the ways in which rational modes of thought are temporarily suspended during those moments in which we become perceptually absorbed in the world or in art. Schopenhauer argues that, "a man can have the greatest susceptibility to artistic beauty . . . without his being in a position to give an abstract and really philosophical account of the nature of the beautiful and of art" (WWRI, 240). As Watt stands in rapt attention before Erskine's picture, he encounters both the inscrutability of the artist's technique and the sheer ontological primacy of the perceptual: "How the effect of perspective was obtained Watt did not know. But it was obtained. By what means the illusion of movement in space, and it almost seemed in time, was given, Watt could not say. But it was given" (W, 109). His attempt to draw conclusions regarding the spatial proprieties of the circle inspires fretful speculation:

[H]e wondered what the artist had intended to represent (Watt knew nothing about painting), a circle and its centre in search of each other, or a circle and its centre in search of a centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and its centre in search of its centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of its centre and its circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of its centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of its centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre and its circle respectively, in boundless space, in endless time . . . Watt's eyes filled with tears that he could not stem, and they flowed down his fluted cheeks unchecked, in a steady flow, refreshing him greatly. (W, 110)

The above passage describes the defeat of reason in its attempts to arrive at a complete series of permutations which would definitively elucidate the painting's subject matter and the artist's motives; it is notably reminiscent of "the comedy of an exhaustive enumeration" (*PTD*, 92) that Beckett refers to in *Proust*. Watt may not quite enjoy the "baffled ecstasy" (*PTD*, 76) that Beckett refers to in his discussion of Marcel's perceptual pleasures, but his tears signify another instance of bewilderment in the face of a reality which cannot be

apprehended through intellective principles of thought. When confronted with the profusion of perceptual riches contained within art, Schopenhauer notes that, rationalism "is as false as it is shallow" (*MRIV*, 298). Memories of his experience with the painting stimulate "prolonged and irksome meditations" (*W*, 111) in Watt's tortured psyche. In contrast to Arthur, who, in telling his story, was, as we recall, "transported far from Mr Knott's premises, of which, of the mysteries of which, of the fixity of which, Arthur had sometimes more, than he could bear" (*W*, 171), art may be seen to compound Watt's difficulties in its expression of irreducible visions of reality. However, the strangely irresistible allure of the impenetrable enigmas associated with Knott's residence motivates Arthur's "desire to return, to Mr Knott's house, to its mysteries, to its fixity. For he had been absent longer from them, than he could bear" (*W*, 172).

The narrator provides us with an account of the nature of Watt's distressing processes of ratiocination: "There were times when Watt could reason rapidly, almost as rapidly as Mr Nackybal. And there were other times when his thought moved with such extreme slowness that it seemed not to move at all, but to be at a standstill. And yet it moved, like Galileo's cradle. Watt was greatly worried by this disparity. And indeed it contained cause for worry" (W, 112). Such aspects of Watt's experience mirror Schopenhauer's view that, as the products of a faculty which is incapable of comprehending or alleviating the enigmas with which we are beset, concepts are "the medium of . . . seriousness and sorrow" (MRIV, 70). Schopenhauer contends that, "the intellect is originally a hireling engaged on a laborious task and kept busy and in constant demand from morning till night;" consequentially, in its strenuous attempts to decipher the problems which perennially arise within human experience, it is a "hard-driven drudge" (PPII, 68). While Watt is prey to "numberless suppositions" during his stay at Knott's dwelling, his notion of the immutable nature of the place is the only one to be "confirmed, or for that matter infirmed, by events" (W, 112). He resides within what the narrator of 'First Love' (1973) describes as a "hell of unknowing" (ECEF, 77) within which "there seemed no measure between what [he] could understand, and what he could not . . . between what he deemed certain, and what seemed doubtful" (W, 112-3). Events such as his taking of a phone call compel intellective attention, yet "Cracks soon appeared in his formulation" of the identity of the caller but "Watt was too tired to repair it. Watt dared not tire himself further" (W, 127). In his painstaking endeavours to comprehend the workings of Knott's establishment, Watt "felt the absurdity of those things, on the one hand, and the necessity of those others, on the other (for it is rare that the feeling

of absurdity is not followed by the feeling of necessity)" (W, 113-4). Watt is thereby overwhelmed by occurrences which seem both ineluctable and senseless. In such circumstances "the notion of the arbitrary could only survive as the notion of a preestablished arbitrary" (W, 114). Watt can be seen to follow Dream, More Pricks, 'Echo's Bones,' and Murphy in its engagement with the aesthetically energising implications of the antinomies of freedom where, to use Arthur's splendidly ambiguous words, incidents occur "as chance would have it, or some other agency" (W, 170).

In depicting the perplexing happenings that afflict his characters' lives, Beckett was remarkably content "to abuse a nice distinction" (M, 153-4), such as that between contingency and necessity. It is the privilege of the artist to deride the risibly rigid categories within which thinkers have attempted to accommodate the inherently chaotic and utterly irreducible realities of the quotidian. Schopenhauer claims that man is in "uncertainty about everything except his own need and misery" (WWRI, 312). Yet, as we have seen, he considers the perpetual frustration of our epistemic and volitional desires to be capable of enlightening us regarding the ultimate nature of existence. In such cases, "knowledge is purified and enhanced by suffering itself" (WWRI, 253). As Watt grows increasingly weary, our awareness of the futile nature of his intellective endeavours is progressively enhanced, but the narrator poses questions pertaining to the potential edification accrued by such seemingly desolate experiential insights:

What had he learnt? Nothing. What did he know of Mr Knott? Nothing. Of his anxiety to improve, of his anxiety to understand, of his anxiety to get well, what remained? Nothing. But was not that something? He saw himself then, so little, so poor. And now, littler, poorer. Was not that something? So sick, so alone. And now. Sicker, aloner. Was not that something? (*W*, 127)

In such passages Beckett manages to infuse his descriptions of Watt's epistemic plight with undertones of a genuinely poignant nature. In a novel which focuses so insistently upon the ludicrous pretensions of rationality the ability of art to engage with even the most recondite of themes in a sympathetic and affectively enriched way is thereby movingly apparent.

# The Vague Abyss

God's whimsical dispensation of retribution is a thematic constant in Beckett's writings, yet while God may transcend the discursive categories of human understanding, it seems that we can attain intimacy with Him by emulating His destructive tendencies towards defenceless

and trusting beings. Watt and Sam, in their friendship with rats, assert their Adamic identities by exercising their sadistic dominion:

Birds of every kind abounded, and these it was our delight to pursue, with stones and clods of earth. Robins, in particular, thanks to their confidingness, we destroyed in great numbers. And larks' nests, laden with eggs still warm from the mother's breast, we ground into fragments under our feet, with peculiar satisfaction, at the appropriate season, of the year . . . We would sit down in the midst of them, and give them to eat, out of our hands, a nice fat frog, or a baby thrush. Or seizing suddenly a plump young rat, resting in our bosom after its repast, we would feed it to its mother, or its father, or its brother, or its sister, or to some less fortunate relative. It was on these occasions, we agreed, after an exchange of views, that we came nearest to God. (*W*, 133)

In reading the above passage we may recall Schopenhauer's reflection that, "this world could not be the work of an all-bountiful, infinitely good being but rather of a devil who had summoned into existence creatures in order to gloat over the sight of their anguish and agony" (MRIV, 119). Watt's consciousness is devoid of definitive answers, but it is indelibly marked with a chilling reminder of God's retaliatory acts which ensured mass annihilation: "Gomorrha . . . he articulated with great deliberation" (W, 133). Likewise, among Knott's "solitary dactylic ejaculations of extraordinary vigour," heard by Watt's "ailing ears" (W, 181), is the name Habbakuk. This Old Testament prophet requires an explanation of the true nature of sin in a world where the wicked prosper, often at the expense of the Godly. When, in Habbakuk 2:4, God replies by stressing the fleeting nature of such triumphs and that "the just shall live by his faith" with confidence that all will be ultimately held to account, Habbakuk can rejoice in his role as the bearer of good news. No such assurances soothe Watt's afflicted psyche. In 'Dortmunder' (1935) Habbakuk appears in the company of Schopenhauer. While both figures addressed the origins and significance of suffering, Schopenhauer's anti-theodical stance is antithetical to the assured faith of the Old Testament prophet. A novel which foregrounds what Arsene describes as "the coming and being and going in purposelessness" (W, 49) can be seen to oppose the comforting masterplots of religious discourse.

Theodical ideas were, as we have recognised, distasteful to Schopenhauer and Beckett, yet we have also seen how their shared views regarding the impotence of reason enabled them to appreciate those aspects of religious experience which accord primacy to moments of realisation which are resistant to comprehension and expression. Schopenhauer notes that,

"the mystic starts from his inner individual experience . . . But of this nothing is communicable except mere statements which we are to accept on his word: he cannot convince" (MRIII, 378). Watt's experience of a state which, like his viewing of Erskine's painting, is immune to rational categorisation, achieves utterance in lines which may at once bewilder and allure: "Of nought. To the Source. To the teacher. To the temple. To him I brought this emptied heart. These emptied hands. This mind ignoring. This body homeless. To love him my little reviled. My little rejected to have him. My little to learn him forgot.

Abandoned my little to find him" (W, 142). Such words seem permeated with allusions to the mystic's overwhelming desire to achieve unity with God through ascetic principles of self-effacement.

As his 'Philosophy Notes' reveal, Beckett was aware of the ancient Sceptical idea of happiness being "only possible in a non-committed condition of suspense, suspension of judgement, reserve of opinion. Only possible happiness ataraxy" (TCD MS 10967/122). We learn that,

Never with relief, never with regret, did [Watt] leave [Knott] at night, or in the morning come to him again. This ataraxy covered the entire house-room, the pleasure garden, the vegetable garden and of course Arthur. So that when the time came for Watt to depart, he walked to the gate with the utmost serenity. But he was no sooner in the public road than he burst into tears. He stood there, he remembered, with bowed head. (W, 180)

As with those experiences of transitory respite enjoyed by Belacqua and Murphy, such relief is utterly ephemeral as reason promptly reasserts its dominance over Watt's restless mind. Confronted by the nebulous appearance of a figure in the vicinity of the train station, Watt "did not desire conversation, he did not desire company, he did not desire consolation, he felt no wish for an erection, no, all he desired was to have this uncertainty removed . . . He did not know why he cared, what it was coming along the road. He did not know whether this was a good thing or a bad thing" (W, 196). The narrator elaborates upon the precise nature of Watt's intellective thoughts:

Watt's concern, deep as it appeared, was not after all with what the figure was, in reality, but with what the figure appeared to be, in reality. For since when were Watt's concerns with what things were, in reality? But he was forever falling into this old error, this error of the old days when, lacerated with curiosity, in the midst of substance shadowy, he stumbled. This was very mortifying to Watt. (W, 196)

Watt's attempts to arrive at definitive solutions to the innumerable mysteries with which he is assailed lead to an anguished recognition of his miserably benighted state. The radical ignorance which torments Watt is, in Schopenhauerian terms, distinctly self-perpetuating. Schopenhauer claims that, "We cannot understand the world, but when we ponder over it we become more and more ensnared in insoluble riddles" (*MRIII*, 659). Our attempts to alleviate such states of nescience merely show that our epistemic plight is more severe than we initially assumed.

Watt's various experiences of the impotence of reason do not enable him to rid himself of his epistemic yearnings. The lines from Hölderlin's 'Hyperion's Schiksalslied' (1789) that are evoked in his mind provide an apt commentary upon his inexorable odyssey towards insanity. Hamburger's translation underscores elements of the poem which are intriguingly consonant with Schopenhauer's thought: "we are fated to find no foothold, no rest, / And suffering mortals / Dwindle and fall / Headlong from one / Hour to the next, / Hurled like water / From ledge to ledge / Downward for years to the vague abyss." Our sense that Watt's rational processes are not capable of yielding the type of insights that will soothe his agitated psyche can be seen to be confirmed in the lines from Farquhar's The Beaux Stratagem (1707) which follow those from Hölderlin: "always musing . . . . . never thinks" (W, 207). Having met with so many instances of the disquieting effects of rationality throughout the novel, the reader is apt to admire the serene absorption which characterises Mr Gorman's perceptual immersion in the world. The narrator presents a movingly evocative depiction of "Mr Gorman looking straight before him, at nothing in particular, though the sky falling to the hills, and the hills falling to the plain, made as pretty a picture, in the early morning light, as a man could hope to meet with, in a day's march" (W, 214). The austere simplicity and radiant imagery of the language used to describe Gorman's enraptured gaze complements the profoundly suggestive resonance of the phrase "at nothing in particular." Given the novel's persistent engagement with the enigmas which are engendered by issues of being and nothingness, in such lines aesthetic splendour can be seen to coalesce with cognitive depth in a typically Beckettian fashion.

We have noted a variety of ways in which a Schopenhauerian reading of Beckett's characters as "needy and perplexed" beings undermines our most cherished judgements regarding the capacities of reason. I commenced this chapter by examining Beckett's aesthetic preoccupations in relation to his renewed engagement with Schopenhauer's thought

following his acquisition of a German edition of the philosopher's works. As the novel concludes with 'Addenda' that emphasise key affinities between the writings of Schopenhauer and those of Beckett the reader encounters questions which evoke numerous quintessentially Beckettian concerns: "who may tell the tale / of the old man? / weigh absence in a scale? / mete want with a span? / the sum assess / of the world's woes? / nothingness / in words enclose?" (W, 215) Here we are reminded of the difficulties faced by the narrator of *Dream* as he confronted Lucien's "unfolding and flowering into nothingness" (DFW, 117). At various points throughout this dissertation I have specified what Schopenhauer considered to be the divergent methods with which philosophy and literature address issues of mutual concern. Given the "unspeakable disorder" (W, 154) of the world and "the soundless tumult of the inner lamentation" (W, 187), the labyrinthine intricacies of human affairs are intrinsically resistant to rigid categories of systematic comprehension. As I noted in my Introduction, Schopenhauer and Beckett endured prolonged periods within which their works were devoid of public recognition. Beckett's direct citation of Schopenhauer's acerbic comment upon his experience of such indifference - "zitto! zitto! dass nur das Publikum nichts merke!" (W, 217) was, as Ackerley points out, related to his sense of "a conspiracy of silence against Schoper." Pilling claims that, "Watt cleared away the last residue of Beckett's flimsy hopes that he might one day find an audience;"16 he certainly did not possess the abrasive confidence of Schopenhauer who could interpret the neglect to which he was subjected as being indicative of the worthlessness of his age: "I can only console myself with the fact that I am not the man of my times" (WN, 91). His reading of Leopardi provided him with further proof of the nature of the world in which he resided: "I think and act . . . according to Leopardi's maxims . . . 'The world is a league of scoundrels against good men and of the base-minded against the noble-minded" (MRIV, 492-3). In what can only be considered as a pure conjecture about Beckett's potential speculation regarding his status in posterity, the Watt of Mercier and Camier asserts: "I am not widely known . . . true, but I shall be, one day" (MC, 91). Beckett may not have been as confident as Schopenhauer was about the inevitability of his work's eventual success, but he told Reavey that Watt "has its place in the series, as will perhaps appear in time" (LII, 55).

In a statement which highlights aesthetic issues with which Beckett was engaged from the outset of his career as a novelist, Cohn contends that, "*Watt* attempted the impossible: at once to be faithful to interrupted, unpremeditated writing and to impose some order on that writing." Such an irresolvable tension can be seen as one of the core difficulties that Beckett

faced as an author who was committed to communicating his vision of the multitudinous contingencies of being. His sense of unease regarding the extent to which Kafka's formal practices seemed unaffected by his thematic concerns was considered in Chapter One in relation to his abiding sense of the challenges that confronted his own work. The "second picture in Erskine's room" that is described in the 'Addenda' presents us with a vision of the artistic process as involving a "difficult birth" (*CDW*, 84), wherein a pianist experiences "anguish, concentration, strain, transport and self-abandon" (*W*, 219-20) in his attempts to express. Such terms possess notable Schopenhauerian connotations. In his aesthetic reflections Schopenhauer describes a range of states to which the artist is subject. He discusses the "brooding absorption" (*WWRII*, 389) and "inner affliction" (*WWRII*, 390) of such an individual who knows what it is "to be quit of oneself" (*PPII*, 416). A sense of "transport" is achieved by an enjoyment of "The inexpressible depth of all music, by virtue of which it floats past us as a paradise quite familiar and yet eternally remote (*WWRI*, 264). On August 6 1953 Beckett told Con Leventhal that, "Watt is having a difficult birth but is expected out into the dark of day next week" (*LII*, 395).

Given Beckett's fear, expressed in the 'German Letter,' that literature might "remain behind in the old lazy ways that have so long ago been abandoned by music and painting" (D, 172), a consideration of a visual representation of a musician struggling towards expression reminds us of the nature of Beckett's aesthetic concerns. Yet, as the novel concludes with an explicit narratorial injunction - "no symbols where none intended" (W, 223), the reader is encouraged to consider the principles which informed the composition of the text. Schopenhauer's excoriating dismissal of symbolism as a "degenerate kind of allegory" (WWRI, 239) which is based upon a "stipulated agreement," the significance of which is "lost in the course of time and . . . becomes dumb" (WWRI, 242), underscores his commitment to art as a repository of atemporal insights about the nature of existence. With such comments in mind it is interesting to note Beckett's repudiation of the hermeneutic value of symbolism in relation to Godot: "If there are obscurities of detail their elucidation will never be in terms of a system of symbols" (LII, 610). In the letter to Kaun referred to earlier in this chapter, Beckett writes that in "the forest of symbols which aren't any, the little birds of interpretation, which isn't any, are never silent" (D, 172). Beckett's sense of the exegetical barrenness of symbolism accords with his professed antipathy to analogy. As reductive instruments they are indispensable to the perpetual efforts by critics to identify, by conceptual means, the import of artworks. When considering Watt's own lamentably insistent desire to comprehend the abounding mysteries

with which he is beset, we are reminded of critics who are equally determined to decipher art in accordance with neat theoretical frameworks. They are likely to endure what Arsene describes as "successive excoriations of the understanding" (W, 39). In Chapter One I examined correlations between the views of Schopenhauer and Beckett about our inability to resist our conceptualising tendencies. In the following passage Schopenhauer expresses views which are just as pertinent to our aesthetic experiences as they are to our existential affairs:

Perception by itself is enough; therefore what has sprung purely from it and has remained true to it, like the genuine work of art, can never be false, nor can it be refuted through any passing of time, for it gives us not opinion, but the thing itself. With abstract knowledge, with the faculty of reason, doubt and error have appeared in the theoretical, care and remorse in the practical. (WWRI, 35)

An inability to absorb oneself in the perceptual riches of art and life may result from "the horrors of disinterested endeavour" (W, 33). Unable to enjoy sensory splendours for their own sake, we insist upon subjecting the aesthetic glories of art and life to the semantically reductive dictates of reason. Yet, in engaging with Beckett's *oeuvre*, we are continually confronted with passages and scenes which abound in interpretative possibilities.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Geert Lernout, 'James Joyce and Fritz Mauthner and Samuel Beckett' in Friedhelm Rathjen (ed.), *In Principle, Beckett is Joyce* (Edinburgh: Split Pea Press, 1994), p. 22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> James Knowlson, 'Beckett in the Musée Condé 1934' in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, n. s. 11.1 (2002), p. 74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Cohn, A Beckett Canon, p. 98.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Quoted in Mark Nixon, 'Writing "I": Samuel Beckett's German Diaries' in Dirk Van Hulle (ed.), *Beckett the European* (Tallahassee: Journal of Beckett Studies Books, 2005), p. 20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Quoted in David Hayman, 'Beckett's *Watt*: The Art Historical Trace' in Van Hulle (ed.), *Beckett the European*, pp. 100-101

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> John Banville, 'Beckett's Last Words' in Murray (ed.), *Samuel Beckett: 100 Years*, pp. 130-31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> C. J. Ackerley, *Obscure Locks, Simple Keys: The Annotated Watt* (Tallahassee: Journal of Beckett Studies Books, 2005), p. 42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Quoted in Büttner, Samuel Beckett's Novel Watt, p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Quoted in John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), p. 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Ackerley, *Obscure Locks, Simple Keys*, p. 85.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> The Holy Bible: Authorised Version, p. 605.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Quoted in Ackerley and Gontarski (eds.), *The Faber Companion to Samuel Beckett*, p. 321.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> The Holy Bible: Authorised Version, p. 1006.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, tr. Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil Press Poetry Ltd., 2008), p. 121.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Quoted in Ackerley, Obscure Locks, Simple Keys, p. 211.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Pilling, Beckett before Godot, p. 185.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Cohn, A Beckett Canon, p. 112.

#### Conclusion

# **Words Inane / Thought Inane**

Beckett told Juliet that the transition from the stylistic exuberance of his early prose, with its abundance of erudite allusions to abstract thought, to the more inflected references to seminal concepts in his middle and later writings, was based upon an erosion of his early faith in the products of intellection: "until that moment I used to think I could trust knowledge, that I needed to be intellectually equipped. Then everything collapsed." Such an admission amounts to an intrinsically personal realisation of Schopenhauer's view that the artist "does not need to acquire great knowledge and learning, as is the case with the philosopher" (*PPII*, 429). Yet the question of how Beckett's learning could best serve his creative purposes seems to have become an increasingly urgent one as his authorial practices matured. Beckett's sense of disquiet regarding his erudition tempts us to seek for a rigid delineation between his early and later works. However, in emphasising the misguided nature of such an endeavour, some of the most distinguished voices in Beckett studies have recognised the imperative to "abuse a nice distinction" (*M*, 153-4). According to Knowlson,

The image of Beckett undergoing a conversion like St Paul on the road to Damascus can too easily distort our view of his development as a writer. As critics have shown, some of his late themes are already deeply embedded in the earlier work, particularly his interest in Democritus' idea that 'nothing is more real than nothing' and the quietistic impulse within his work. (*JK*, 353)

Such issues endured as core aspects of Beckett's literary concerns, yet as I propose to show, a brief survey of Beckett's middle and later works also evinces numerous correspondences with his earlier writings in their consistent probing of the inadequacies of reason and language. Following the death of the director's father on 12 November 1963, Beckett told Alan Schneider that, "for the likes of us there is no ease for the heart to be had from words or reason" (*Har*, 142). The sentiments expressed therein were the product of sustained experiential insights which Beckett had acquired through his personal and creative confrontations with the inherent deficiencies of reason and words. Having attempted to alleviate his mother's distress following the death of a beloved family pet, Beckett noted, "it was very hard work indeed getting her to take a reasonable view of what oneself could not take a reasonable view of' (*LI*, 487). While personal traumata proved impervious to reason, Beckett also acknowledged the futility of subjecting his intellectual enthusiasms to rational

scrutiny: "I have been reading Geulincx in T. C. D., without knowing why exactly. Perhaps because the text is so hard to come by. But that is rationalisation." In the same letter Beckett goes on to state that the "sub specie aeternitatis" vision that Geulincx's work proffers is "the only excuse for remaining alive" (*LI*, 318-9). In reading such lines we are yet again reminded of Beckett's tendency to read philosophy in accordance with deep existential impulses rather than from detached analytical perspectives. Throughout this dissertation I have explored the variety of ways in which Beckett interrogated disjunctions between the immanently chaotic realities of lived experience and the purportedly definitive solutions which intellection can yield. In his Schiller-Theater production notebook on *Godot* Beckett entitled one section, "Doubts, Confusions." In that play, as in so much of Beckett's *oeuvre*, characters are bewildered by enigmas which defy rational solutions. Schopenhauer, having argued that, "a powerful control of the faculty of reason over directly felt suffering is seldom or never found" (*WWRI*, 315), was acutely aware of the preposterous pretensions of "metaphysical systems where nothing is certain except the headaches they cost" (*PPII*, 343).

Beckett's derisive attitude to those who seek definitive meanings from his works was clear: "If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin" (D, 109). Schopenhauer recognised that the intrinsically conative and affective nature of lived experience eludes comprehension within conceptual frameworks. Accordingly, reason "is bound to remain imperfect, a mere quadam prodire tenus, and always to leave many problems unsolved (MRIII, 659-60). Beckett's fascination with the consequences of mankind's obsession with reducing the abounding contingencies of quotidian experience to discursive interpretations endured beyond the composition of Watt. The remaining sections of the present study will provide a necessarily brief examination of the ways in which some of the works which succeeded Watt echo Beckett's earlier texts in evincing numerous affinities with a variety of Schopenhauer's most salient views regarding the inefficacy of rationality in art and life. In selecting texts for my exploration of the development of Beckett's late prose I have endeavoured to focus on those writings which evince the primacy of imagination over reason in order to contextualise Beckett's move towards linguistic minimalism in relation to Schopenhauer's thought. While such issues warrant closer and more comprehensive attention than can be provided within this Conclusion, my presiding aim here is to offer both a retrospective commentary upon the preceding chapters through comparative readings and to reveal how Beckett's enduring attitudes towards reason can be viewed in accordance with their purely aesthetic implications.

#### This Absurd Life

In Eleutheria (1995) the Glazier's exasperated reaction to Victor's baffling modes of being prompts impassioned queries: "There have to be reasons, for Christ's sake! Why has he renounced everything? Why this absurd life? Why agree to die? Reasons! Jesus himself had his reasons. No matter what he does, we must know more or less why . . . Who do you think you are dealing with? Aesthetes?" (El, 112) The Glazier's recognition that aesthetes would be indifferent to interpretative closure regarding the perplexing nature of Victor's life places the tortured questionings of Beckett's characters in sharp perspective. Throughout Beckett's oeuvre thematic issues arise which allude to some of the most intractable problems in the history of ideas. However, while such instances are redolent of the canonical epistemological, ethical, and metaphysical conclusions of a wide array of renowned thinkers, in reading Beckett's works we recognise how such traditions are exploited by Beckett for distinctly aesthetic ends. Having explored Proust's principles of composition, whereby his alogical creative strategies serve to bestow an aura of autonomy upon his protagonists, Beckett's writing of *Dream* occurred at a time when he was clearly mindful of such exemplary Proustian precedents. We have noted how Schopenhauer's arguments regarding the inalterability of character in no way diminished his abiding sense of the inexplicable "abyss" (MRIV, 222) of selfhood. He contends that human behaviour would be readily predictable if we were privy to the innermost workings of the psyche, yet we are permanently debarred from attaining such insights.

The narrator's companion in 'The End' (1954) appeals to the dictates of determinism in an eschewal of culpability: "A policeman stopped us and accused us of disturbing the peace. My friend replied that we were as nature had made us, the boys too were as nature had made them. It was inevitable, under these conditions, that the peace should be disturbed from time to time" (*ECEF*, 46). The ironic tone of such passages may be seen to constitute an irreverent gloss upon perennial debates regarding freedom and necessity, yet they also contain overtones of the predicaments that Beckett faced as a writer who, from the outset of his authorial life, sought to desist from overt manipulations of his characters. The narrator may be governed by inexorable forces yet his classification by the "orator" as a "crucified bastard!" (*ECEF*, 52) contextualises his life in relation to the type of Christological themes which appear in Beckett's earlier writings. In asserting the identity of Jesus as a paragon of unmerited woe, Schopenhauer contends that to designate him as being "the most rational of all men, would be called a very unworthy and even a blasphemous way of speaking" (*WWRI*,

515). As we have seen, in Beckett's early writings, the cloud of unknowing which bedims his literary landscapes and mindscapes impels a constant need within his characters to seek epistemic and affective solace from discursive thought. Yet, in its failure to appease such yearning, reason merely compounds their calamitous states. In 'The Expelled' (1962) the narrator conducts a futile search for a solution to his predicaments, yet he promptly acknowledges that, "we may reason on to our heart's content, the fog won't lift" (*ECEF*, 7). In Chapter One I noted the ways in which Beckett's suspicions regarding the communicative efficacy of words mirrors Schopenhauer's insistence that, as a mere tool of reason, language is intrinsically incapable of expressing aspects of experience which transcend conceptual understanding. The perpetual dissatisfaction to which the narrator of 'First Love' (1973) is subjected in his compositional efforts is clear: "My other writings are no sooner dry than they revolt me" (*ECEF*, 62). His carnal afflictions are reminiscent of those which Belacqua endures in *Dream* as both characters are deprived of sustained release from the oppressive aspects of self and world:

What mattered to me in my dispeopled kingdom, that in regard to which the disposition of my carcass was the merest and most futile of accidents, was supineness in the mind, the dulling of the self and of that residue of execrable frippery known as the non-self and even the world, for short. But man is still today, at the age of twenty-five, at the mercy of an erection. (*ECEF*, 66)

The voiding of identity described therein encompasses both subjective and objective spheres, yet such states of being are grievously transitory. In Chapter Four I examined Murphy's attainments of inner freedom in relation to Schopenhauer's claim that a successful denial of Will "abolishes the world" (*MRIV*, 286). We learn that, in the throes of concupiscence, "one is no longer oneself... and it is painful to be no longer oneself, even more painful if possible than when one is ... What goes by the name of love is banishment" (*ECEF*, 66-7). Schopenhauer portrays selfhood as being ordinarily riven between moments of emancipation, wherein we can enjoy transient liberation from volitional activity, and sexual propensities which ensnare us in a world of insatiable craving. In the following passage Schopenhauer's depiction of such intrapsychic dissonance achieves memorable clarity: "man is simultaneously impetuous and dark impulse of willing (indicated by the pole of the genitals as its focal point), and eternal, free, serene subject of pure knowing (indicated by the pole of the brain" (*WWRI*, 203). In stressing the sheer futility of all attempts to repress libidinal longing by rational means, he goes on to claim that, "the genitals are subject merely to the will, and not at all to knowledge" (*WWRI*, 330). The narrator of 'First Love' is also

reminiscent of Watt insofar as he is ordinarily burdened by epistemic afflictions: "I lived of course in doubt, on doubt" (*ECEF*, 72). In Schopenhauerian terms, rationality is denounced not only for its inefficacy in practical affairs, whereby it fails to exert control over our lamentable lives, but for its role as a source of ineluctable yet insoluble mysteries.

### **Inexplicable Forces**

Beckett's deeply felt sense of the need to bear witness to a mystifying world, coupled with his incisive awareness of the inability of language to aid such a task, contributed to his tenacious engagement with issues which I have identified as thematic constants in his early work. His metatextual commentaries were, as we have observed, a salient feature of his early procedures as a novelist. Mercier and Camier foregrounds the narratorial impediments with which it contends. Qualms initially arise regarding the mimetic fidelity of the developing narrative: "What stink of artifice" (MC, 4). Accordingly, we are alerted to Beckett's compunctions regarding the means by which language is an inherently inadequate medium of expression. We are then informed that, "Certain things shall never be known for sure" (MC, 5); such a profession of ignorance is, however, hermeneutically expansive. From the beginning of this dissertation I have underscored various correlations between the views of Schopenhauer and Beckett regarding our radical and irremediable ignorance. I have noted how Schopenhauer's insistence upon the sheer ineptitude of reason can be related to his contentions regarding aesthetic experience as a palliative phenomenon which, in part, results from its resistance of intellection. Bereft of definitive answers, we are ordinarily prone to endure incessant ruminations upon the anguish of being: "not that the world exists, but that it is such a miserable world, is . . . the problem that never lets us rest" (MRIV, 286 n. †). Mercier is moved to ponder "the horror of existence, confusedly" (MC, 16). Given such a tendency, annihilation allures: "Oh but to cease!" (MC, 24) Such sentiments thereby anticipate Mercier's description of "our blessed sense of nothing, nothing to be done, nothing to be said" (MC, 71).

As in *More Pricks* and *Murphy* the antinomial influences of contingency and determinism permeate the unfolding narrative in *Mercier and Camier*. In the following passage the association between unfathomable necessity and human cruelty is sufficiently portentous to attenuate the humorous tone:

Let us toss our umbrella, said Mercier. It will fall in a certain way, according to laws of which we know

nothing. Then all we have to do is press forward in the designated direction. The umbrella answered, Left! It resembled a great wounded bird, a great bird of ill omen shot down by hunters and awaiting quivering the coup de grâce. (MC, 18)

In their slaying of the noble bird the hunters therein described seem intent upon defying a baleful destiny. The inability of reason to probe the underlying nature of the forces which govern earthly incidents is a core element of Schopenhauer's arguments regarding the delusions which we perpetually harbour owing to our steadfast attachment to notions of freedom and moral agency. Schopenhauer states, "however much the course of things appears to be purely accidental, it is nevertheless not so; on the contrary, everything is already determined in advance" (*MRIV*, 124). However, he is adamant that we are utterly incapable of probing the underlying principles which determine sequences of events within the phenomenal world: "even the most perfect etiological explanation of the whole of nature would never be more in reality than a record of inexplicable forces" (*WWRI*, 98). Such immitigable nescience underpins the unpredictability of worldly happenings. In asserting that "necessity has her whims" (*MC*, 33) Camier imparts comedy to the plight of beings who reside within a universe, governed by deterministic forces, which seem to occasionally yield to the influences of chance.

The present study has examined numerous instances in Beckett's work where theological discourse is interrogated as a as a purported repository of consolation. Schopenhauer adamantly denies that Christianity is, in its origins or import, to be judged by its rational significance. The following passage encapsulates Schopenhauer's notions regarding the affective basis of religious beliefs:

[C]onstant fearing and hoping, cause [man] to hypostasize personal beings on whom everything depends. Of such it may now be assumed that, like other persons, they will be susceptible to entreaty and flattery, service and gift, and will therefore be more tractable than the rigid necessity, the inexorable and unfeeling forces of nature, and the mysterious powers of the course of the world. (*PPI*, 117)

The tortuous enigmas of existence are thereby designated as a source of faith, yet, as we have noted, the works of Schopenhauer and Beckett continually attest to the potential of theological concepts to merely intensify our bafflement amidst the mysteries which arise from the unique specificities of experiential reality. The presence of a wrathful deity in *Mercier and Camier* serves to pose questions of theodical significance as the occurrence of

inclement weather engenders mournful reflections upon the justice of the protagonists' woes. Having learned that, "This was the moment chosen by the rain, acting on behalf of the universal malignity, to come down in buckets" (MC, 19), we witness an act of rebellion which serves to contextualise Mercier's miseries: "lifting to the sky his convulsed and streaming face, he said, As for thee, fuck thee . . . Is it our little omniomni you are trying to abuse? said Camier. You should know better. It's he on the contrary fucks thee. Omniomni, the all-unfuckable" (MC, 19). Their insubordination towards a punitive God inspires anguished realisations: "What have we done to God? he [Mercier] said. Denied him, said Camier. Don't tell me he is all that rancorous, said Mercier" (MC, 61). The "chronic amaze" (MC, 49) which afflicts the minds of the two characters occasionally moves beyond the purely personal to encompass the abysmal ubiquity of earthly torments. As Mercier puts it, "thought strays, spirit unalloyed, among those who have no refuge, the unable, the accursed, the weak, the unfortunate" (MC, 71). Mercier and Camier cannot abstain from contemplating the basis of suffering owing to their repeated encounters with the tribulations of life. According to Schopenhauer, it is not abstract reflections but our experiential acquaintance with the immanent realities of "wickedness, evil, and death that qualify and intensify philosophical astonishment" (WWRII, 172). As an instrument by which resignation may be achieved, the recondite discourse of expiatory worldviews is suggestively evoked by Mercier but swiftly dismissed by his companion: "Shall we fritter away what little is left of us in the tedium of flight and dreams of deliverance? Do you not inkle, like me, how you might adjust yourself to this preposterous penalty and placidly await the executioner, come to ratify you? No, said Camier" (MC, 73).

#### The Blessed Pus of Reason

In Chapter One I explored Schopenhauer's assertions pertaining to the perplexing necessity with which art is created and his view of suffering as being an inherently penitential phenomenon. He states, "if man is regarded as a being whose existence is a punishment and an atonement, then he is already seen in a more correct light" (*WWRII*, 580). The impulses which govern Molloy's narration are presented as ineluctable: "Saying is inventing. Wrong, very rightly wrong. You invent nothing, you think you are inventing, you think you are escaping, and all you do is stammer out your lesson, the remnants of a pensum one day got by heart and long forgotten" (*Mo*, 29). Molloy's "pensum" prefigures Moran's view of his own narratorial imperatives as a "penance" (*Mo*, 138). Molloy's admission of his own passivity in such experiences is reminiscent of Schopenhauer's reflections upon the artist's lack of

conscious control over his material. As we have seen, from the outset of his authorial career Beckett engaged the with antinomies of freedom and determinism, not as abstract concepts which have informed some of the most abstruse reflections of eminent thinkers, but as fundamental existential predicaments which arise from our immanence within an unintelligible world.

Given Beckett's aversion towards the type of "clockwork cabbages" (DFW, 120) that traverse Balzac's literary landscapes, he was keenly aware of the need to find some way of imparting autonomy to his protagonists. In the process of telling his story Molloy is aware of the means by which his life engenders questions which at once demand and defy comprehension. He reflects upon "All the things you would do gladly, oh without enthusiasm, but gladly, all the things there seems no reason for your not doing, and that you do not do! Can it be we are not free? It might be worth looking into" (Mo, 34). Such enigmas can be seen to anticipate his later acknowledgement that, "There are things from time to time, in spite of everything, that impose themselves on the understanding with the force of axioms, for unknown reasons" (Mo, 60). However, he is acutely aware of how problems present themselves in such a way as to reveal the futility of intellection: "But these are reasonings, based on analysis" (Mo, 64). Similarly, Moran decries the difficulties wrought by "the falsetto of reason" (Mo, 111). He clearly recognises the unquestionable nature of the indeterminable impulses which ruthlessly preside over his existence and of the enduring perplexities which will continue to harry mankind when those who seem most preoccupied with addressing such issues will cease to be: "what I was doing I was doing neither for Molloy, who mattered nothing to me, nor for myself of whom I despaired, but on behalf of a cause which, while having need of us to be accomplished, was in its essence anonymous, and would subsist, haunting the minds of men, when its miserable artisans should be no more" (Mo, 119). Schopenhauer argues that the "existence and the nature of the world . . . [is] a riddle whose solution torments mankind without intermission" (MRIV, 285). We have noted how his views regarding the means by which philosophy and art engage with that riddle prefigure Beckett's own description of the artist as one who "brings light, as only the great dare to bring light, to the issueless predicament of existence" (D, 97). Without classing Moran's endeavours as specifically artistic, parallels between his relations with Molloy and those of an artist with his characters can be readily discerned. It is interesting to compare Moran's diligence as a "faithful servant" to a "cause that is not [his]" (Mo, 137) with the Schopenhauerian notion of the artist as a selfless servant, whose genius "belongs to the whole of mankind" (WWRII, 390). Such a man

may enjoy periods of creative bliss but he is also condemned to a life of occasionally harrowing isolation. In his study of Schopenhauer, Thomas Mann describes such tribulations as "the stigmata of genius."<sup>3</sup>

As Malone's life ebbs to its close he enjoys visions of release which are ostensibly associated with aesthetic frames of reference:

It is such a night as Kaspar David Friedrich loved, tempestuous and bright. That name that comes back to me, those names. The clouds scud, tattered by the wind, across a limpid ground. If I had the patience to wait I would see the moon. But I have not. Now that I have looked I hear the wind. I close my eyes and it mingles with my breath. Words and images run riot in my head, pursuing, flying, clashing, merging, endlessly. But beyond this tumult there is a great calm, and a great indifference, never really to be troubled by anything again. (MD, 23-4)

Malone's intimation of a state of imperturbable serenity is enhanced by his prior experience of the type of subjective agitation to which Beckett's protagonists are frequently prone. His juxtaposed descriptions of tranquillity and distress and his invocations of the qualities of Friedrich's work remind us of Schopenhauer's view that,

The *punctum saliens* of every beautiful work, every great and profound thought, is an entirely objective perception. But such a perception is absolutely conditioned by a complete silencing of the will . . . With the disappearance of willing from consciousness, the individuality is really abolished also, and with it its suffering and sorrow. (*WWRII*, 371)

In Chapter Two we noted how Belacqua's tumultuous relations with females are momentarily alleviated through his intermittent ability to perceive the characters in question as objects of purely aesthetic attraction. In such cases allusions to the traditions of painting and sculpture enable the narrator of *Dream* to suggest the momentary ease which Belacqua temporarily enjoys. In describing the expressive potential of painting, Schopenhauer explicitly refers to the means by which it affords relief to our ordinarily troubled minds:

[S]ince the painter lets us see the things through his eyes, we here obtain at the same time a sympathetic and reflected feeling of the profound spiritual peace and the complete silence of the will, which were necessary for plunging knowledge so deeply into those inanimate objects, and for comprehending them with such affection, in other words with such a degree of objectivity. (*WWRI*, 218-9)

Malone asserts that the harrowing nature of Macmann's thoughts results from his incessant efforts to contextualise his experience in accordance with concepts of retribution: "truth to tell the ideas of guilt and punishment were confused together in his mind, as those of cause and effect so often are in the minds of those who continue to think. And it was often in fear and trembling that he suffered, saying, This will cost me dear" (MD, 67-8). As Schopenhauer puts it, causality is "the understanding's sole form of knowledge" (WWRI, 490); accordingly, our minds are beset by questions relating to the ultimate basis and significance of our afflictions. However, as Schopenhauer also notes, "we simply cannot imagine anything objectively of which no 'why' could be further demanded" (WWRI, 483). In Schopenhauerian terms, our subjection to a life of perpetual questioning is ensured by our inability to grasp that "the understanding is destined solely for practical and not at all for speculative purposes" (FW, 83). Here, in spite of his choice of terminology, Schopenhauer is not alluding to Kantian conceptions of morality, but to the most basic biological requirements of our existence. Having noted the predicaments of a character such as Macmann, who is "ill-fitted for pure reason" (MD, 71), Malone asserts how his purely descriptive function maintains precedence over his rationalising tendencies: "I must state the facts, without trying to understand, to the end" (MD, 77). Insofar as Malone is compelled to articulate that which exceeds his comprehension he reminds us of Schopenhauer's notion of the artist as one who "cannot give an account of his actions" because his work proceeds "unconsciously, indeed instinctively" (WWRI, 235).

The Unnamable's sense of the unavoidable yet futile imperatives of narration is revealed at a point when his communication has barely commenced: "I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak" (U, 1). Throughout this dissertation we have recognised how Beckett's narrators face a variety of impediments in their attempts to "utter or eff" that which transcends comprehension and articulation; such efforts are "doomed to fail, doomed, doomed to fail" (W, 53). While Belacqua was seen to plea with the Alba "not [to] apply any system" (DFW, 190) in her attempts to comprehend his singular ways, the Unnamable observes that, "The thing to avoid, I don't know why, is the spirit of system" (U, 2). Unlike Dream, which overtly invokes the conceptual repertoires of disciplines such as theology and philosophy, The Unnamable (1958) is more nuanced in its use of systematic thought. However, the eponymous character endures what he describes as a "Deplorable mania, when something happens, to inquire what" (U, 6), thereby reminding us of Watt, who, like Belacqua, undergoes "torture by thought" (DFW, 45). Nevertheless, he enjoys intimations of

a state of deliverance which transcends the troublesome categories of identity and which is equally resistant to language, wherein he would be "admitted to that peace where he neither is, nor is not, and where the language dies that permits of such expressions" (*U*, 48). Beckett's protagonists strive to express their experience or anticipations of such liminal states of being which are intrinsically "unthinkable unspeakable" (*U*, 48). In his arguments relating to "The fundamental and original irrationality of our true nature" (*PPI*, 441) Schopenhauer stresses the inability of intellection to probe the labyrinthine complexities of our inner lives, specifically those experiences whereby we are fleetingly liberated from conative and cognitive governance by the Will. To compare Belacqua's womb-tomb descriptions, which are portrayed through effusive yet ineffectual word play, with the Unnamable's linguistically austere visions of emancipation is to be reminded of Schopenhauer's insistence upon the inherently inscrutable and unutterable essence of such states of being. Schopenhauer admits the impossibility of directly conceptualising such modes of consciousness: "We, however, who consistently occupy the standpoint of philosophy, must be satisfied here with negative knowledge" (*WWRI*, 410).

The Unnamable's terms of self-interpretation are also reminiscent of those of Belacqua insofar as they rely upon elements of theological discourse which simply perpetuate further conundrums within his tormented psyche: "I too must contribute my little convulsion, mewl, howl, gasp and rattle, loving my neighbour and blessed with reason. But what is the right manner, I don't know" (U, 48-9). Such painstaking psychodynamics involve further references to religious contexts which the narrator explicitly compares with the insatiability of his epistemic craving: "I've stopped praying for anything. No no, I'm still a suppliant. I'll get over it, between now and the last voyage, on this leaden sea. It's like the other madness, the mad wish to know, to remember, one's transgressions" (U, 50). In my second and third chapters I related Beckett's engagement with the perennial perplexities arising from our place in a world which seems at once beset by agonising contingencies and relentless necessity to core tensions within Schopenhauer's thought. Among the numerous issues with which the mind of the Unnamable must contend, the antinomies of autonomy and necessity are the subject of his foreboding premonitions: "The problem of liberty too, as sure as fate, will come up for my consideration at the pre-established moment" (U, 51). Akin to an incurable discharge, "the blessed pus of reason" (U, 68) continues to plague the Unnamable, yet his awareness of the issueless nature of ratiocination cannot prevent him from affording "concessions to the spirit of geometry" (U, 74). Schopenhauer contends that humanity

"ponders in vain why it was called into existence for such great suffering, whose cause and guilt it does not perceive" (WWRI, 354). The Unnamable is forthright in his assertion of his identity as a benighted sufferer of inscrutable torments: "I expiate vilely, like a pig, dumb, uncomprehending" (U, 84-5). In my examination of *Dream*, *More Pricks*, 'Echo's Bones,' and Murphy I examined correlations between Beckett's engagement with emancipatory states of being which herald a dissolution of self and Schopenhauer's contentions regarding death as involving a return to the womb of nature, that abode of nothingness, from whence we came. The Unnamable's troubles engender irrepressible thoughts regarding birth as a banishment and death as a deliverance which remind us of the renunciatory quests of Belacqua and Murphy: "it's too difficult, too difficult, for one bereft of purpose, not to look forward to his end, and bereft of all reason to exist, back to a time he did not" (U, 102). According to Schopenhauer, "Awakened to life out of the night of unconsciousness, the will finds itself as an individual in an endless and boundless world, among innumerable individuals, all striving, suffering, and erring; and, as if through a troubled dream, it hurries back to the old unconsciousness" (WWRII, 573). The Unnamable considers that his deplorable existence is "perhaps a dream, all a dream" yet, as with most questions pertaining to his being, he is ignorant of its nature or significance: "I don't know" (U, 134). As the text culminates in a crescendo of frantic questioning and qualified assertions, imponderables abound.

## **Words and Music**

According to Schopenhauer, "If suitable music is set to some scene, action, event, or environment, it discloses their most secret meaning and is their most accurate and distinct commentary. But in return for solving so many riddles, it furnishes us with a new one, namely the relation of its language to the language of reason" (*MRIII*, 29). Having already noted how words are, for Schopenhauer, "the language of reason" (*WWRI*, 259), it is interesting to consider one of Beckett's most explicit interrogations of the communicative potentialities of words and music. In *Words and Music* (1962) we discern Beckett's enduring concern with questions regarding the respective capacities of art forms which are required to engage with some of the abiding themes of human existence in order to act as "comforts" (*CDW*, 287) and "balms" (*CDW*, 289) to a man whose name implies an existence ebbing towards its end. If Croak is facing impending annihilation, art may well be experienced in its Schopenhauerian guise as a preeminent source of palliation. In witnessing Words' ponderous pursuits of precise definition we are reminded of the impediments to be encountered

throughout Beckett's *oeuvre* as language strives to encapsulate what is most essential about the perennial preoccupations of humanity. Here the convoluted syntax bespeaks the futility of effort in an ostensibly reflexive commentary on the medium in which Words is compelled to express: "Sloth is of all passions the most powerful passion and indeed no passion is more powerful than the passion of sloth, this is the mode in which the mind is most affected and indeed . . . in no mode is the mind more affected than in this" (*CDW*, 287). The turgid analytic discourse which immediately succeeds those lines is notably devoid of aesthetic qualities yet the play also contains passages which abound in lyrically evocative elements: "The face in the ashes / That old starlight / On the earth again" (*CDW*, 291). Croak's anguished response to his artistically induced recollection of Lily may be seen to signify his failure to enjoy art with the type of impersonal absorption that Schopenhauer considers the basis of "the removal of the entire possibility of suffering" (*PPII*, 415) that aesthetic experience involves.

Schopenhauer observes that music "says so much to the heart, whereas to the head it has nothing direct to say" (PPII, 430). Within Cascando (1963) imperatives of narration suggest a possible cessation of the need for utterance should Voice succeed in communicating the story which will enable him to "finish . . . then rest" (CDW, 297). In this play music and language occasionally combine in in order to convey the tribulations of a character named Woburn. While we have already observed how Schopenhauer and Beckett are cognate minds in relation to their opinions regarding the supremacy of music over other art forms, it is interesting to read Cascando in relation to Schopenhauer's contention that although music "is self-sufficient and needs no assistance, it may be associated with and adapted to words, or even to an action produced through intuitive perception so that our intuitively perceiving and reflecting intellect, which does not like to be completely idle, may yet obtain an easy and analogous occupation" (PPII, 432). When playing in unison with the enunciations of Voice music serves to convey intimations of easeful states of nothingness wherein there will be "no more stories . . . no more words" (CDW, 299). Narratorial precision is embellished by the accompanying endeavours of Music as Voice moves from tales which are "all false" to what is purportedly "the right one" (CDW, 301). In Chapter One I noted how Beckett articulated views which underscore the capacity of music to probe aspects of experiential reality to which words are unable to penetrate. Similarly, the recurrence of the stage direction *Silence* in Cascando has intriguing aesthetic implications. In Chapter Two we noted how Beckett considered silences in music and literature to be realms from which art may achieve its most

profound expressive value. In a play which invokes incisive questions about the ability of art to provide insights into the travails of existence periods of silence punctuate the linguistic and musical texture of the work in ways which expand the respective creative repertoires of words and music themselves.

#### Living and Bewildered

In Chapter Two I highlighted how the narrator of *Dream* is confronted by characters who consistently resist his architectonic designs. Beckett's refusal to create what Schopenhauer describes as "personified conceptions" (WWRI, 239) can be seen to have inspired the multifarious indeterminacies of his protagonists' identities. Such an anti-essentialist approach may be considered to prefigure the ways in which the "living and bewildered" (TNO, 17) narrators of Texts for Nothing seem to subsist on thresholds of disintegration, devoid as they are of any stable or determinable foundations of selfhood. While Beckett's early narrators are compelled to admit defeat in their attempts to fathom the baffling lives of characters such as Belacqua and Murphy, the narrator of 'Text 1' is required to acknowledge the peculiar motives which inspire his own mysterious ways: "What possessed you to come? unanswerable, so that I answered. To change, or, It's not me, or, Chance, or again, To see, or again, years of great sun, Fate" (TNO, 4). In a statement which resonates with profound significance for a consideration of Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauer's thought, Gardiner once judged the upshot of Schopenhauer's writings to entail that, "the end of philosophy is silence." Beckett told Juliet that, "writing has led me to silence." In lamenting the inability of language to adequately convey some of the deepest experiences that we are capable of enjoying, such as periods of mystical realisation of the intrinsic nothingness of reality or aesthetic contemplation, Schopenhauer's appeal to figures such as Beckett and Wittgenstein can be readily appreciated. To read the aspirations and failures of Beckett's later narrators in conjunction with the early Wittgensteinian submission to silence is to be reminded of the centrality of Schopenhauerian themes of the unutterable in their own nascent art and thought. Yet it is precisely where Beckett's later narrators feel unable to speak that their compulsion to express seems to intensify.

The narrator of 'Text 4,' having confessed to "know nothing" (*TNO*, 17), encapsulates the Schopenhauerian misgivings which Beckett endured in his encounters with the abounding problems of creation:

He protests he doesn't reason and does nothing but reason, crooked, as if that could improve matters. He thinks words fail him, he thinks because words fail him he's on his way to my speechlessness, to being speechless with my speechlessness, he would like it to be my fault that words fail him, of course words fail him . . . he reasons, wide of the mark. (*TNO*, 17)

The onerous communicative impediments described therein remind us of the regularity with which Beckett's narrators are invariably mindful of the problematic nature of their intellective tendencies. Similarly, in 'Text 5,' the narrator enunciates his experience of "The voice of reason" which subjects him to an apparently irresolvable impasse: "better advised to take a little turn, the way you manoeuvre a tin soldier. And no doubt it's the same voice that answers that I can't" (TNO, 21). The unintelligible predilections of the supreme judge are no more amenable to comprehension than the narrator's life "in the dock" (TNO, 21), given his inclination to offer "strange indulgences" (TNO, 23). Schopenhauer was undecided regarding the proper analogical designation of the world; he opted for classifying it as a realm which defies neat metaphysical predicates: "it is purgatory; it is hell" (PPII, 368). In 'Text 6' theological discourse is employed to specify the narrator's former situation in "Purgatory, in Hell too" (TNO, 27). His anxiety to encapsulate the precise nature of his experience is a presiding issue, yet he conceives of a situation wherein language will enable him to utter the seemingly unutterable: "what is it, this unnamable thing that I name and name and never wear out, and I call that words. It's because I haven't hit on the right ones, the killers, haven't yet heaved them up from the heart-burning glut of words" (TNO, 27-8). However, 'Text 8' underscores the narrator's sense of the need to proceed with his task without succumbing to the allure of logical proprieties: "I say no matter what . . . without reason, no matter what, without reason . . . I don't know what all that means, day and night, earth and sky, begging and imploring . . . that looks like a contradiction, it may be for all I know . . . The mistake I make is to try and think" (TNO, 34). Here we may recall the attempts by the protagonists of Godot to still their cognitive tendencies. In resigning himself to his role as a "ventriloquist's dummy" (TNO, 34) he asserts his identity as one who is actuated by motives that are as unfathomable as they are inexorable.

The insuperable problems of narration are also faced in 'Text 10' where language serves to undermine its own expressive pretensions:

No, no souls, or bodies, or birth, or life, or death, you've got to go on without any of that junk, that's all dead with words, with excess of words, they can say nothing else, they say there is nothing else, that

here it's that and nothing else, but they won't say it eternally, they'll find some other nonsense, no matter what. (TNO, 42)

As I have noted at various points throughout this dissertation, Beckett's abiding view of the ineptitude of language in its attempts to depict the unique specificities of human affairs is consonant with Schopenhauer's contention that "language is related merely to thought as such, and hence to the abstract concepts" (WWRI, 480). Accordingly, no artist "can be wholly serious over what he writes, for he knows rather that the best cannot be said" (MRII, 437). In this sense, the writer who is aware of the intrinsic deficiencies of his medium is destined to endure profound misgivings in relation to the disquieting disjunction between his inspiring vision and its degradation through its expression in the completed work. In 'Text 11' we encounter a narrator who is imbued with despair regarding the feasibility and value of the enterprise upon which he has embarked: "Name, no, nothing is namable, tell, no, nothing can be told, what then, I don't know, I shouldn't have begun" (TNO, 45). If we couple Schopenhauer's notion of the penury of linguistic signification with his insistence upon the inescapable necessities of creation, we recognise its pertinence to a core Beckettian dilemma, whereby narrators are overwhelmed by reservations about the irremediably burdensome nature of their roles as beings who are at once comprised of and subservient to the afflictions imposed by "vile words" (TNO, 45). As we have noted, Schopenhauer contends that, "Words and *concepts* will always be *barren* and *dry*, for this is their nature" (MRIII, 24). The chaotically dynamic nature of existence is thereby destined to elude adequate expression. The narrator of 'Text 12' concludes his plaintive ruminations upon the essential value of his endeavours with the statement, "nothing ever as much as begun, nothing ever but nothing and never, nothing ever but lifeless words" (TNO, 50).

In the final 'Text' we learn that a voice that failed to portray the essence of the narrator's being "had so much to say in vain" (*TNO*, 52). In my exploration of *Murphy* and *Watt* I considered the relevance of Schopenhauer's notion of nothingness as an object of supreme yet incommunicable wisdom, whereby a renunciation of Will constitutes a negation of self and world. In Beckett's work the specifically aesthetic implications of such achievements are considered in terms which suggest the relief to be achieved by a cessation of narratorial duties: "Is it possible, is that the possible thing at last, the extinction of this black nothing and its impossible shades, the end of the farce of making and the silencing of silence" (*TNO*, 52). We may recall Schopenhauer's portrayal of the "peace of blessed nothingness" (*WWRII*, 640)

as we consider the narrator's depiction of a state of being which is utterly bereft of the torments to which he is invariably exposed: "[he] wonders what has become of the wish to know, it is gone, the heart is gone, the head is gone, no one feels anything, asks anything, seeks anything, says anything, hears anything, there is only silence" (*TNO*, 53). In this context we are also reminded of Victor in *Eleutheria* who "left" himself "By being the least possible. By not moving, not thinking, not dreaming, not speaking, not listening, not perceiving, not knowing, not wishing, not being able, and so on. I believed that was where my prisons lay" (*El*, 149). In his detachment from what would be considered the basic ontological categories of identity Victor can be seen to have achieved a liminal state of being which does not entail total annihilation. As *Texts for Nothing* concludes with a mutually effacing series of affirmations and negations, acknowledgements of ignorance and impotence are enshrined as the most authentic testament of being in a world where the capacity to know or express seems permanently foreclosed: "there is silence and there is not silence, there is no one and there is someone, nothing prevents anything" (*TNO*, 53).

### **Great Confusion No Knowing**

When reading *How It Is* in conjunction with Schopenhauer's thought it is instructive to consider one of the most succinct passages in all of Schopenhauer's writings which abounds in themes which are discussed more extensively throughout his work. It emphasises the nefarious ethical consequences of the delusions which blight our lives:

[S]eeking enhanced well-being in *one* of its phenomena, it [the Will] produces great suffering in *another*. Thus in the fierceness and intensity of its desire it buries its teeth in its own flesh, not knowing that it always injures only itself, revealing in this form through the medium of individuation the conflict with itself which it bears in its inner nature. Tormentor and tormented are one. The former is mistaken in thinking he does not share the torment, the latter in thinking he does not share the guilt. If the eyes of both were opened, the inflicter of the suffering would recognise that he lives in everything that suffers pain in the whole wide world, and, if endowed with the faculty of reason, ponders in vain over why it was called into existence for such great suffering, whose cause and guilt it does not perceive. (WWRI, 354)

How It Is portrays a realm which is remarkably redolent of that grim Schopenhauerian vision: "one half of us [are] tormentors in perpetuity victims in perpetuity the other" (HII, 124). Pim's attempts to comprehend the significance of his afflictions are expressed as entirely justified yet inherently futile: "what is required of me that I am tormented thus" (HII, 54); "what is required of me now what is the meaning of this new torment" (HII, 58). Such

questions echo the bafflement of the tormentor who finds himself enmired in a world which is likely to bemuse the reader as much as it perplexes the narrator, yet we are encouraged to refrain from idle speculation: "how I got here no question not known . . . whence the sack and me if it's me no question impossible too weak no importance" (*HII*, 4). The novel is faithful to its title insofar as it prioritises description and eschews narratorial explanations of its notably oblique subjects. If we concur with Schopenhauer's view that the literary artist "repeats and adumbrates rather than judges" (*MRIV*, 249) and thereby share his enthusiasm for works which afford interpretative autonomy, our readings of some of Beckett's more challenging texts such as *How It Is* can embrace their imaginative richness and their defiance of facile conceptualisation.

Uncertainty punctuates *How It Is* in such a thorough way as to render the phrase "something wrong there" (HII, 5) a leitmotif. The constant repetition of doubt regarding the narrator's "ill said" attempts to communicate the "ill recaptured" (HII, 15) leads to an admission that something is "very wrong" (HII, 100) in the narratorial process. The disconcerting nature of the text can be in part attributed to a familiar Beckettian concern in the form of deterministic and contingent influences which seem to vie for precedence in their governance of the narrator's activities: "here confused reckonings to the effect that I can't have deviated more than a second or so from the direction imparted to me one day one night at the inconceivable outset by chance by necessity by a little of each" (HII, 33). Emerging from incomprehensible beginnings, while being entirely subservient to antithetical yet irresistible forces, he endures "great confusion no knowing" (HII, 68). Words are shown to be complicit in compounding the narrator's difficulties: "words my truant guides with you strange journeys" (HII, 80). Given Schopenhauer's view that, "words are the language of reason," expressive limitations result from the constitutional defects of rationality itself. When we recognise the afflictions which arise owing to the role of reason as a faculty which is perpetually inclined to pose aporetic dilemmas, imagination can be seen to alleviate such onerous aspects of intellection. We learn, "that would be the saddest imagination on the decline" (HII, 90). Inhabiting a mysterious realm which defies satisfactory utterance, the characters of How It Is are compelled to endure "all these strangenesses" (HII, 17) which are equally liable to inspire passages of moving imaginative lucidity as they are to resist conceptual comprehension.

In Chapter One I explored how Schopenhauer's resolute opposition to reason as a faculty through which art is to be produced or understood contrasts with his consistent approbation of

imagination as an indispensable element of creation and appreciation. He states, "[O]nly by virtue of imagination can genius . . . draw fresh nourishment from the primary source of all knowledge, perception" (WWRII, 379). In Beckett's work imagination serves to alleviate the psychic stresses which are engendered by the relentless demands of rationality. Inscrutable motives govern narratorial impulses in 'The Image' (1990): "I don't know why I abide by these stories of animals I abide by them" (CSP, 166). Beckett's late prose works continually allude to the incomprehensible provenance of their subjects. In 'Faux Départs 4' (1965) we are dissuaded from enquiring into that which lies beyond the known or knowable: "Imagine light. No visible source" (TNO, 70). For narrator and reader alike it could be said that, "Fancy is his only hope" (TNO, 74) insofar as reason is devoid of the ability to impart significance to the profusion of enigmatic images which are generated by such texts. In 'Lessness' (1970) the departure of rationality heralds a terse description of amorphous entities: "light of reason all gone from mind. Scattered ruins ash grey all sides true refuge long last issueless" (TNO, 130). In 'neither' (1977) we also note evocations of some of the central thematic concerns of Beckett's earlier work. Here staccato utterances are eloquent of a characteristic Beckettian hesitancy as the narrator enunciates expressive impediments. Moving "from impenetrable self to impenetrable unself by way of neither" his tale reaches an "unspeakable home" (TNO, 167). If we consider Schopenhauer's assertions that, "the knowing subject cannot know itself" (PPII, 46) and that, "on the path of the representation we can never get beyond the representation; it is a closed whole" (WWRI, 502), we discern that the artist confronts ignorance as an endemic aspect of his condition as an incomprehensible denizen of an inscrutable world.

#### Reason-Ridden

In *Company* the figure who, in a posture reminiscent of Belacqua's womb-tomb episodes, rests "on his back in the dark," must renounce any desire to investigate the veracity of what he hears: "Only a small part of what is said can be verified" (*CIWS*, 3). We read, "he cannot but sometimes wonder if it is indeed to and of him the voice is speaking" (*CIWS*, 4). Such a seemingly insidious voice is itself governed by motives which are a mere matter of conjecture. In inundating its auditor with beguiling questions, it may have no other intention than to "kindle in his mind this faint uncertainty and embarrassment" (*CIWS*, 4) and to "plague one in need of silence" (*CIWS*, 5). Rationality cannot diminish his bewilderment: "with what reason remains he reasons and reasons ill" (*CIWS*, 6). Amidst passages that are pervaded with uncertainty, which emanates from the narrator's issueless queries, we find

some of the most moving examples of self-inscription in all of Beckett's *oeuvre*. Knowlson avers that, "*Company* comes closer to autobiography than anything Beckett had written since *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* in 1931-2" (*JK*, 651). The text's reference to geographical locales with which Beckett had attained an intimate perceptual familiarity in youth, such as Connolly's Stores, the Ballyogan Road, and Croker's Acres, reveals the enduring importance of experiential material to Beckett's compositional strategies. In *Company* Beckett's use of such autobiographical elements serves to relieve the confusing contrarieties which seem an inevitable outcome of reason's incursion upon the developing narrative.

In their exclusion of the intrusive and fruitless questioning with which the narrator is ordinarily afflicted, those moments of release within which his psyche is a repository of sensory images may enhance our sense that, "The lower the order of mental activity the better the company" (CIWS, 7). As in Beckett's earlier texts, the torments which threaten to overwhelm a character enhance the allure of inexistence: "Oh never to have been!" (CIWS, 12) Devoid of visual data, the narrator's mind ruminates upon the significance of its situation: "the eye closes and freed from the pore the mind inquires, What does this mean? What finally does this mean that at first sight seemed clear? Till the mind closes as it were" (CIWS, 14). A bountiful cessation of intellection is revealed to be mournfully ephemeral given the auditor's continued subjection to "Unformulable gropings of the mind. Unstillable" (CIWS, 14). The voice's protean predicates of identity prompts questions which are as unavoidable as they are unanswerable and which culminate in a suggestion that the ultimate focus of interrogation is both unintelligible and unutterable:

Who asks, Whose voice asking this? And answers, His soever who devises it all. In the same dark as his creature or in another. For company. Who asks in the end, Who asks? And in the end answers as above? And adds long after to himself, Unless another still. Nowhere to be found. Nowhere to be sought. The unthinkable last of all. Unnamable. (*CIWS*, 15)

Such self-perpetuating questions lead the narrator to ask, "What kind of imagination is this so reason-ridden?" (CIWS, 21) Chapter One of the present study revealed Schopenhauer's arguments regarding the means by which the creation or enjoyment of art could be imperilled by intellection. In phrases such as "Quick imagine" (CIWS, 21) the voice strives to attain relief from the incessant enquiries which it is moved to formulate. I have examined the Schopenhauerian overtones of those elements of Beckett's work, such as Murphy's enraptured perception of Endon, which depict the supreme reality of an inner vision which

has been detached from its sensory origins. Such instances reveal the ways in which time affords an imaginative enrichment of an originally sensory reality: "You lie in the dark with closed eyes and see the scene. As you could not at the time. The dark cope of sky. The dazzling land. You at a standstill in the midst" (CIWS, 24). The juxtaposition of intensely vivid sources of imaginative beauty with the tortured reflections which intermittently assail the auditor can be seen to cohere with Schopenhauer's arguments regarding the means by which we may attain fleeting emancipation from the oppressively incessant processes of rationality. In the following passage we are reminded of the auditor's temporary periods of release from his common predicaments: "Mental activity of a low order. Rare flickers of reasoning of no avail. Hope and despair and suchlike barely felt. How current situation arrived at unclear" (CIWS, 29). The disinterested nature of such modes of sentience seems a concomitant aspect of the cessation of reasoning therein described. Similarly, in *Ohio Impromptu*, we read of an experience within which cognition has been stilled, where consciousness consists of unfathomable states: "Thoughts, no, not thoughts, profounds of mind" (CDW, 448).

Incomprehension and ineffability are invariably associated in Beckett's literary worlds in a way which coheres with Schopenhauer's contentions regarding the inability of words to convey that which transcends rational comprehension. Such issues are also seen to coalesce in Company: "Since he cannot think he will give up trying. Is there anything to add to this esquisse? His unnamability" (CIWS, 30). The reader is encouraged to consider the plight of the listener as one who is ordinarily prone to endure cerebration upon hearing the voice: "Would it be reasonable to imagine the hearer as mentally quite inert? Except when he hears" (CIWS, 33). We discern the auditor's susceptibility to intellection as we attempt to understand the implications of a scenario wherein he would be deprived of key parts of his sensory engagement with his world: "What if not sound could set his mind in motion? Sight?" (CIWS, 33) The role of rationality in impeding imaginative freedom is underscored as the text proceeds: "So while in the same breath deploring a fancy so reason-ridden and observing how revocable its flights he could not but answer finally no he could not. Could not conceivably create" (CIWS, 35). Under such adverse conditions the narrator's experiences mirror those of the reader as he moves from passages imbued with burdensome questions to richly evocative lyrical depictions. Such transitions lead to prose which is infused with qualities of immediacy and simplicity: "A strand. Evening. Light dying. Soon none left to die. No. No such thing then as no light. Died on to dawn and never died. You stand with your back to the wash. No

sound but its. Ever fainter as it slowly ebbs. Till it slowly flows again" (*CIWS*, 35). Given the tribulations faced by speaker and auditor alike, the prospect of resignation and quiescence prompts inevitable queries: "Why crawl at all? Why not just lie in the dark with closed eyes and give up? Give up all" (*CIWS*, 36). Such passages remind us of the centrality of renunciatory themes throughout Beckett's *oeuvre*, whereby the futility of striving is based on insights derived from the most harrowing aspects of quotidian experience. However, as we have repeatedly witnessed, lasting emancipation eludes Beckett's protagonists.

In Company isolation becomes unendurable:

[L]ittle by little as he lies the craving for company revives. In which to escape from his own. The need to hear that voice again. If only saying again You are on your back in the dark. Or if only, You first saw the light and cried at the close of the day when in darkness Christ cried and died. (CIWS, 36)

Emerging into a world pervaded by suffering and death, the auditor's birth occurs on a truly inauspicious date. In postulating the presence of others to whom the voices might be directed, the hearer becomes aware of the futility of such seemingly irrepressible reflections: "you find yourself imagining you are not alone while knowing full well that nothing has occurred to make this possible. The process continues none the less lapped as it were in its meaninglessness" (CIWS, 40-41). A text which has engaged so persistently with the incapacities of reason concludes with an acknowledgement of the failure of words, the spuriousness of the preceding narration, and the merciful encroachment of quietude: "you hear how words are coming to an end. With every inane word a little nearer to the last. And how the fable too . . . and how better in the end labour lost and silence" (CIWS, 42). Ill Seen Ill Said (1981) contains some of the most hauntingly evocative imagery to be found in all of Beckett's work. However, the text is punctuated by hesitancy which arises from situations in which the narrator is loath to transgress interrogative bounds: "Diameter. Careful. Say one furlong" (CIWS, 46); "She forgets. Are they always the same? Do they see her? Enough" (CIWS, 47). Where speculation proves unavailing, communication is itself scrutinised; language is thereby indicted as an instrument of falsification: "what is the wrong word" (CIWS, 46). Throughout Ill Seen Ill Said reasons are not so much "as yet obscure" (CIWS, 47) as perpetually deferred, as descriptive imperatives take precedence over analytic certainties. When the narrator is moved to voice more general reflections, self-censure ensues: "To think there is still life in this age. Gently gently" (CIWS, 48). While in Company a "reason-ridden" fancy pervades the unfolding narrative, in Ill Seen Ill Said "Imagination at

wit's end spreads its sad wings" (*CIWS*, 51) to sustain a narrative which foregrounds that which resists rational comprehension. Having described a boot nail, "which in defiance of reason . . . prevails" (*CIWS*, 52), the narrator eerily encapsulates some of the most profound questions regarding the ontological status of an overwhelmingly vivid imaginary being:

Already all confusion. Things and imaginings. As of always. Confusion amounting to nothing. Despite precautions. If only she could be pure figment. Unalloyed. This old so dying woman. So dead. In the madhouse of the skull and nowhere else. Where no more precautions to be taken. No precautions possible. Cooped up there with the rest. Hovel and stones. The lot. And the eye. How simple all then. If only all could be pure figment. Neither be nor been nor by any shift to be. Gently gently. On. Careful. (CIWS, 53)

The spectral creature described therein can be seen to possess a reality which belies her fictional identity. Schopenhauer avers that, "The man gifted with imagination is able, so to speak, to call up spirits revealing to him at the right time truths that the bare reality of things exhibits only feebly, rarely, and often at the wrong time" (*WWRII*, 379). As we have seen, Schopenhauer argues that our ordinary modes of consciousness act as a veil which deprives us from attaining access to those numinous realms which are readily accessible via aesthetic experience and mystical realisation. In his exaltation of imagination as a preeminent faculty of artistic creation Schopenhauer enshrines its supremacy over reason as a vehicle of insight. *Ill Seen Ill Said* engages with the abiding enigmas of literary composition by employing a narrator who depicts a character who thoroughly eludes his inquisitorial tendencies. A familiar Beckettian theme emerges as we read of affinities between an imaginary scenario which is enlivened through a cessation of seeing and the suspension of rational thought:

Having no need of light to see the eye makes haste. Before night falls. So it is. So itself belies. Then glutted - then torpid under its lid makes way for unreason . . . What then if not her do they ring around? In their ring whence she disappears unhindered. Hence they let her disappear. Instead of disappearing in her company. So the unreasoning goes. (CIWS, 55)

Assailed by ceaseless questions regarding the woman's intriguingly repetitive pursuits, the narrator contemplates the only tolerable means by which he can apprehend her traversing her chosen path to the mysterious abode of stones: "Not possible any longer except as figment. 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 . . . Close it for good this filthy eye of flesh. What forbids? Careful" (*CIWS*, 59) Bereft of the capacity to exert such

voluntary control, he is unable to still his inquiring tendencies. He asks: "Was it ever over and done with questions? . . . With not being able not to want to know. With not being able. No. Never" (CIWS, 64). Contrary to such afflictive states of mind we learn of a mode of consciousness wherein the narrator proceeds "Unseeing. As if dazed by what seen beneath the lids" (CIWS, 65). Ill Seen Ill Said raises fundamental questions regarding the legitimacy of the distinctions which have been traditionally formulated throughout the history of ideas pertaining to the relationship between mind and world. At the core of the text we discern the impenetrable enigmas arising from "the confusion between the real and - how say its contrary? No matter. That old tandem. Such now the confusion between them once so twain. And such the farrago from eye to mind. For to make sad sense of it may. No matter now. Such equal liars both. Real and - how ill say its contrary? The counter poison" (CIWS, 65-6). Here epistemic puzzles proliferate in a mind which attempts to eschew the recondite terms of abstract discourse in favour of austerely precise prose. Given Schopenhauer's claim that, we are "above all restricted to our own consciousness and that the world is given to us only as representation or mental picture" (PPI, 4), differentiating between the real and the ideal is a process which must occur entirely within the confines of subjectivity. Schopenhauer goes on to note that, "The contrast between idealism and realism concerns what is known, the object" (PPI, 14 n. \*). Designating the problem as "the axis on which the whole of modern philosophy turns" (PPI, 15), it is also, as we recognised in Chapter One, a foundational element of his development of Kant's insights in aesthetic matters.

The inevitable diminution which occurs when a literary artist attempts to express what Beckett terms his "inspired perception (identification of subject and object)" (*PTD*, 84) is, in Schopenhauerian terms, attributable to the fact that, "the transition from the Idea to the concept is always a descent" (*WWRI*, 238). Beckett's enduring sense of the impediments which blight artistic composition is evident in his texts' recurrent engagement with the various factors which inhibit narration. In phrases such as, "what is the wrong word" (*CIWS*, 68) and "doubt certain - then despair certain" (*CIWS*, 69) *Ill Seen Ill Said* persistently conveys the grievous difficulties involved for its narrator. In relating Schopenhauer's exploration of the ineludible problems of narration to *Watt*, I emphasised why narratorial reliability is, in both Schopenhauerian and Beckettian terms, decidedly unattainable. *Ill Seen Ill Said* underscores how our cognitive, sensory, and linguistic faculties conspire against faithful expression: "The mind betrays the treacherous eyes and the treacherous word their treacheries" (*CIWS*, 70). The final pages of *Ill Seen Ill Said* engage with issues which recur

with striking regularity in Beckett's oeuvre. The words "on the way to inexistence" (CIWS, 74) signify not merely the impending cessation of a narrative but an annihilation of an existence which has been burdened with unachievable narratorial demands. As we ponder the plight of the narrator, we are required to imagine "the nail. Unimpaired. All set to serve again. Like unto its glorious ancestors. At the place of the skull. One April afternoon. Deposition done" (CIWS, 76). The minatory tone of those lines can be contrasted with Murphy's overtly facetious meditations upon "Christ's parthian shaft: it is finished" (M, 47). When contextualised in relation to Christ's agonies, the predicaments with which the narrator contends serve to remind us of our place upon an "Unspeakable globe. Unbearable" (CIWS, 77). Such words may easily be misconstrued as amounting to an unequivocally bleak Beckettian indictment of earthly existence, yet the word "unspeakable" compels attention not merely as a term of derision but as a reminder of the sheer disjunction between the expressive potential of language and the immanent traumata of being. The concluding words of the text may evoke memories of *Dream* where Belacqua's efforts to liberate himself from his affective and epistemic troubles were seen to be futile. His reliance upon a "dispensation" (DFW, 123) was, in Chapter Two, related to the Schopenhauerian conception of "grace" (WWRI, 404). In ending with the words, "Grace to breathe that void. Know happiness" (CIWS, 78) Ill Seen Ill Said suggests that, while ultimate emancipation may only be achieved through annihilation, the narrator cannot achieve such liberation through his own initiative.

Worstward Ho (1983) resonates with the aforementioned themes, evincing explicit anxieties about the indefeasible distortions which mar narration. Schopenhauer dismisses the notion that "language is directly related to perception" as a "great error" (WWRI, 480). In this sense, mimetic fidelity is continually undermined because processes of composition involve a filtering of the unique particularities of perceptual experience through the inordinately abstract medium of words. The narrator of Worstward Ho acknowledges that whatever he manages to say is ultimately "Missaid" (CIWS, 81). In this text images emanate from inscrutable sources within a mind which is determined to give utterance to experiences which defy comprehension. Here, in language which evokes those endopsychic creative states which fascinated Beckett in Proust, imagination prospers when physical sight is seemingly renounced: "It stands. See in the dim void how at last it stands. In the dim light source unknown. Before the downcast eyes. Clenched eyes. Staring eyes. Clenched staring eyes . . . . Somehow standing" (CIWS, 83). In reading Worstward Ho the reader is informed of the futility of attempting to contextualise images in accordance with any known precedents. As

we have noted at various points in this study Beckett was intrigued by the means by which art eludes the type of comparative categorisation upon which analytic approaches rely. The following passage encourages the reader to desist from subjecting its imagery to intellective queries: "The dim. Far and wide the same. High and low. Unchanging. Say now unchanging. Whence no knowing. No saying. Say only such a dim light as never" (CIWS, 86). However, words tantalise by their occasional tendency to offer a semblance of referential fidelity: "How almost true they sometimes almost ring!" (CIWS, 88) The narrator's resolute endeavours to express realities which incessantly mystify lead to a recognition of his dependence upon "worsening words" (CIWS, 92). An inevitable disjunction between the imaginary beings and events which appear and their encapsulation in woefully inadequate words suggests a realisation of the need for equanimity: "The so-said dim. The so-said shades. The so-said seat and germ of all. Enough to know no knowing. No knowing what it is the words it secretes say. No saying. No saying what it all is they somehow say" (CIWS, 94). Amidst prose which is so reflexively revealing of its own inanity the intermittent descriptions of the old man and child which appear, disappear and reappear, sustain the imaginative allure of the text. "The twain. The hands. Held holding hands" (CIWS, 95) serve to intrigue by providing an aesthetically enriching counterpoint to passages which may otherwise seem unbearably ponderous. The description of the old woman who is "Stooped . . . in that old graveyard" over gravestones marked by the ravages of time which have ensured "Names gone and when to when" (CIWS, 102) is equally likely to deepen the reader's awareness of the fragility of words and the tenuous nature of identity, where memorial signs, effaced by age, cannot serve to report even the most basic facts of human existence.

While Beckett's magisterial imagery in earlier texts serves to accentuate the limits of reason, the aspatial and atemporal descriptions within *Worstward Ho* engender ethereal visions of a "Beyondless. Thenceless there. Thitherless there. Thenceless thitherless there" (*CIWS*, 83). Jung describes Schopenhauer's conception of "sanctity" as a "mystic-aesthetic ideal." In this sense, ethics and aesthetics are inextricably linked insofar as those who enjoy visions which transcend ordinary modes of consciousness apprehend that which evades both comprehension and expression. The narrator voices reservations regarding the feasibility of his task: "The void. How try say? How try fail? No try no fail. Say only -" (*CIWS*, 86). In reading those passages in *Watt* which are concerned with the unutterable in conjunction with Schopenhauer's thought I noted how Schopenhauer derided our attempts to assign significance to such states by invoking terms such as "God," "rapture," and "ecstasy."

Beckett acknowledged that Rilke was occasionally capable of producing work of "a high order" but he derided the poet's attempts to classify the inscrutable wellsprings or "fidgets" which inspired his work. He asks, "why call the fidgets God, Ego, Orpheus and the rest?" (*D*, 67) *Worstward Ho* strives to rid itself of the conventional connotations of words such as "void" which seem to be inadequate approximations of the amorphous and nebulous visions that it attempts to describe. Here "the so-said void. The so-missaid" (*CIWS*, 91) seems woefully inane. The narrator's linguistic repertoire is avowedly deficient: "Worsening words whose unknown. Whence unknown. At all costs unknown" (*CIWS*, 93). Uttering vain words at the behest of such unfathomable impulses, where all that is "Said is missaid" (*CIWS*, 97), the persecuted narrator's "gnawing to be naught" (*CIWS*, 103) bespeaks blissful intimations of oblivion.

## All is Strange

Gontarski notes that, in his later works, Beckett "managed to turn apparent limitations, impasses, rejections into aesthetic triumphs." We have recognised some of the ways in which such seeming obstacles ordinarily arise owing to the means by which Beckett's narrators are compelled to confront the inadequacies of reason and language. Gontarski's notion of Beckett's "aesthetic triumphs" could be seen as indicative of his ability to create art which attains its value from its relentless probing of those aspects of human experience which are irreducible to rational modes of thought. As we have noted at various points in earlier chapters of this dissertation Beckett's narrators are faced with protagonists whose thoughts and deeds elude definition; their unknowable motives underpin the formal and thematic ambiguities which pervade Beckett's texts. The word "perhaps" is thereby infused with an immense range of connotative implications. In Stirrings Still (1988) we detect quintessentially Beckettian concerns with the mysterious nature of human motivation: "Why he did not crane out to see what lay beneath was perhaps because the window was not made to open or because he could or would not open it. Perhaps he knew only too well what lay beneath and did not wish to see it again" (CIWS, 107). Such hypotheses serve to underscore the intrinsic uncertainties that characterise Beckett's interrogative approach to artistic creation. The world of Stirrings Still is a "strange place" (CIWS, 108) in both epistemic and aesthetic terms. Beckett's consummate ability to immerse the reader in the enigmatic world of his texts is often most apparent when we share the protagonist's bafflement. Time cannot diminish such pervasive indeterminacies: "Of their whenceabouts that is of clock and cries the same was true that is no more to be determined now as was only natural then" (CIWS,

111-112). The protagonist is relentless in his search to reveal the basis of his ignorance yet his ailing reason is ill equipped to aid his "disarray" (*CIWS*, 112). His introspective pursuits are equally unavailing, yet his eventual renunciation heralds a cessation of epistemic yearning and its associated woes whereby he is "Unknowing and what is more [has] no wish to know nor indeed any wish of any kind nor therefore any sorrow" (*CIWS*, 113). Alas such serenity is undermined by his anguished experiences of the strokes and cries which continuously imperil his incurious bliss. *Stirrings Still* also interrogates the efficacy of reason in a mind beset with doubts regarding the value of intellection:

As one in his right mind when at last out again he knew not how he was not long out again when he began to wonder if he was in his right mind. For could one not in his right mind be reasonably said to wonder if he was in his right mind and bring what is more his remains of reason to bear on this perplexity in the way he must be said to do if he is to be said at all? It was therefore in the guise of a more or less reasonable being that he emerged at last he knew not how. (CIWS, 111)

The narrator soon confronts expressive restrictions whereby a "missing word" (*CIWS*, 114) inspires grave misgivings about the feasibility of his task. Having endured quintessentially Beckettian struggles with comprehension and utterance, the narrator aspires towards dissolution: "oh to end. No matter how no matter where. Time and grief and self so-called. Oh all to end" (*CIWS*, 115). Schopenhauer's opposition to suicide did not alter his view that, "Death is the great opportunity no longer to be I. Happy he who seizes it" (*MRIV*, 148). Schopenhauer thereby echoes Geulincx's own professed enthusiasm for death that Beckett had noted: "nothing is more valuable than death, the exit from this world; I cannot delay . . . and neither do I want to" (TCD MS 10971/6/25). While an extended consideration of such issues lies beyond the scope of this Conclusion, the aforementioned examples reveal the extent to which Beckett's work continued to evince the challenges of creation whereby characters are required to articulate that which is as unintelligible as it is ineffable.

Beckett's repeated immersion in Schopenhauer's work has been noted by a number of critics. Pothast states, "There can be little doubt that Beckett's interest in Schopenhauer was a lifelong intellectual commitment." Pilling reports that, in the last decade of his life, Beckett was still referring to Schopenhauer in "such terms as 'wonderful' and 'extraordinary," while Feldman asserts that, in encountering Schopenhauer, Beckett had met a "lifelong love." Schopenhauer concluded his final work with a profession of ignorance. He states, "If only we were capable of understanding the conjuring trick whereby this [the emanation of life

from, and its return to, a single source] is done, all would be clear" (*PPII*, 497). For Schopenhauer, genuine philosophy and art are motivated by a sense of enthrallment to the innumerable mysteries with which our lives are pervaded. Beckett's own work culminated with a statement of ignorance that constitutes an honest testament to the alluring yet indescribable enigmas of being. The "folly" of asking "what is the word" (*CPS*, 229) in a world where language is entirely bereft of the capacity to transcend its conceptual underpinnings can be seen to have haunted Beckett's creative strategies from the outset of his literary life.

In his *Dream Notebook* Beckett transcribed the following lines from Tennyson's 'The Poet's Mind' (1830): "Vex not thou the poet's mind / With thy shallow wit / Vex not thou the poet's mind / For thou canst not fathom it" (*DN*, 168). This dissertation has endeavoured to heed the sentiments expressed by Tennyson by showing the immense range of alignments between the writings of Schopenhauer and those of Beckett regarding the inscrutable nature of artistic creation. In claiming "here all is strange" (*CDW*, 155) Winnie, in *Happy Days*, utters a statement which is readily applicable to Beckett's *oeuvre*. Insofar as Beckett's work honours the irremediable perplexities of being it challenges our seemingly implacable desire to rationalise. Between July 1979 and December 1980 Beckett transcribed a number of quotations from Schopenhauer's work into his 'Sottisier Notebook.' His enduring fascination with Schopenhauer's philosophy prompted him to record a sentence which had informed his composition of *Proust* almost fifty years earlier: "Life is a pensum to be worked off: in this sense defunctus is a fine expression." Beckett's own irrepressible need to create, coupled with his anguished realisations of the penury of language, may have deepened his appreciation of Schopenhauer's estimation of life as an intrinsically penitential phenomenon.

Beckett noted Mauthner's view that, "it is beyond our intellect to speak or think about reason or language" (TCD MS 10971/5/3). It was clearly not beyond Beckett's genius to create art which incessantly probes the limitations of reason and language, even if such intrepid efforts merely revealed "Words inane / Thought Inane." In 1961 Beckett was untypically forthright in declaring that, art would be produced wherein, "The form and the chaos remain separate. The latter is not reduced to the former" (*GF*, 219). The twofold focus of this study has, through a serious of comparative readings, examined the extent to which Schopenhauer and Beckett were cognate minds in relation to their views regarding the impotence of rationality in life and art. Beckett's protagonists are debarred from entering a state of incurious

ignorance or a Keatsian state of Negative Capability, wherein they would be "capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." In the following excerpt from her memoir of Beckett, Atik reports his distinctly enthusiastic approval of Negative Capability:

We didn't talk about or read from [Keats's] letters until the 1970s, when I first read them. I mentioned the 'Negative Capability' passage to Sam, who of course had read it when he studied Keats; when I came to 'when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' he became tense with attention, suddenly sitting bolt upright as though pierced by an electric current, and asked me to read it again at the table, and repeated excitedly, 'irritable reaching after fact and reason - that's it, capable of being in uncertainties'. He didn't have to explain why he found this so important; the link to his own work was so obvious. <sup>16</sup>

Beckett's *oeuvre* is replete with instances of his characters' tortuous inability to attain relief from their inquisitorial impulses. In this sense, the Beckettian affliction of "chronic amaze" is a clear antithesis of the Keatsian bliss of Negative Capability. Beckett's protagonists suffer because the afflictive enigmas which assail their lives resist rational consolation. The pure immanence of their personal anguish remains irreducibly aloof from conceptual analysis. The authenticity of Beckett's writings may be judged in relation to the deep integrity of his artistic testament and its freedom from rational dogmas or discursive artifice, which by attempting to impose intelligibility, simply distorts. It is only when we are liberated from our own reductive obsessions that we can appreciate the abounding imaginative and perceptual qualities to be found throughout Beckett's *oeuvre*. Schopenhauer and Beckett were firmly opposed to those who offer unduly neat solutions to the problems which beset our lives. They were also deeply antagonistic to those who sought to treat artworks as mere receptacles of ideas which could be exhaustively deciphered by intellective means. Beckett's animus against such execrable reductionism undermines common assumptions about his use of some of the most seminal ideas in Western culture. His art derives much of its aesthetic strength from his depiction of the antinomies of selfhood which afflict the lives of his protagonists and which are irreducible to the overarching neatness of the discursive frameworks that they repeatedly invoke. Beckett considered art to be the "sun, moon and stars of the mind, the whole mind" (D, 94). As polymaths, Schopenhauer and Beckett were profoundly adept at bringing the immensity of their learning to bear upon their experiential engagement with the world. In this sense, they shared a remarkable ability to synthesise the abstractions of their erudition with

the immediacies of quotidian experience in their respective visions of how a world suffused with unspeakable darkness can be temporarily irradiated by the splendours of art.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Juliet, Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde, p. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Quoted in James Knowlson, 'Introduction' in *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett: Waiting for Godot*, eds. Dougald McMillan and James Knowlson (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), p. xx.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Mann, 'Schopenhauer', p. 400.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Patrick Gardiner, 'Schopenhauer, Arthur' in Paul Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (London: Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1967), p. 331.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Juliet, Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde, p. 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> C. G. Jung, 'On Spiritualistic Phenomena' in R. F. C. Hull (ed.), *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Volume XVIII, tr. R. F. C. Hull (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 294.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> S. E. Gontarski, 'Introduction From Unabandoned Works: Samuel Beckett's Short Prose' in S. E. Gontarski (ed.), *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989* (New York: Grove Press, 1995), p. xv.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Quoted in Feldman, *Beckett's Books*, p. 136.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Pothast, *The Metaphysical Vision*, p. 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Pilling, Samuel Beckett, p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Matthew Feldman, 'Philosophy' in Anthony Uhlmann (ed.), *Samuel Beckett in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 304.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Quoted in Nixon, Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937, p. 54.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Quoted in Feldman, Beckett's Books, p. 137.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Quoted in Linda Ben-Zvi, 'Fritz Mauthner for Company' in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, o. s. 9 (1984), p. 66.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> John Keats, *Letters of John Keats*, ed. Robert Gittings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Atik, *How It Was*, pp. 70-71.

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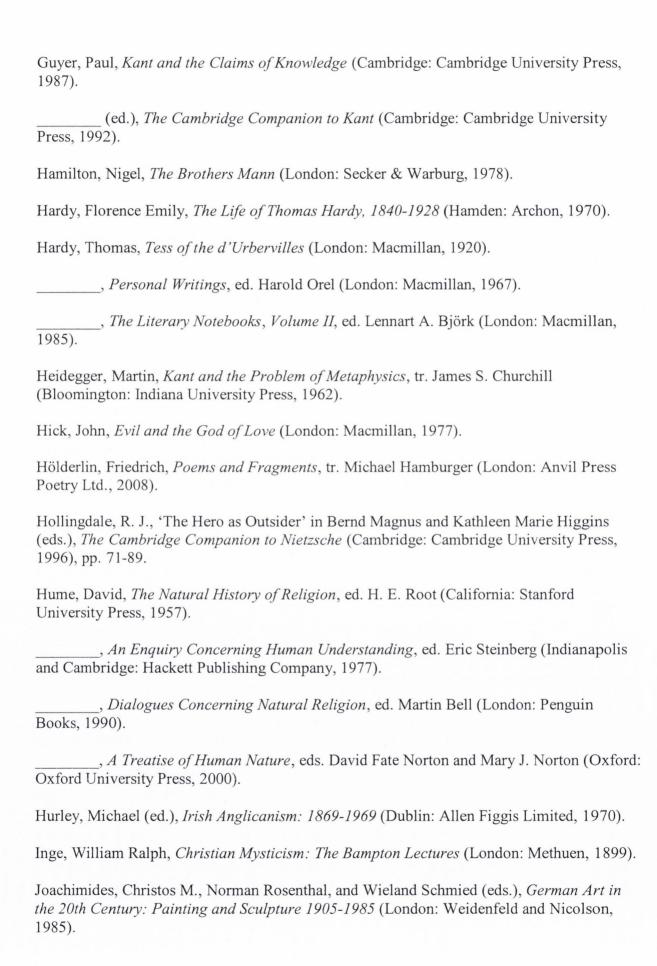
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