

The Problem of Beckett in Postmodern American Literature

PhD in English Literature

Department of English Literature

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Declaration: I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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Abstract

In this thesis, I return to the unsettled ground of Beckett's influence over the emergence of postmodern fiction. Taking on board Peter Boxall's piercing assertion that 'one of the most significant of Beckett's legacies [...] is a conception of legacy itself,' (2009) I provide a narrative of inheritance in which the exhaustion of literary experiment glimpsed in Beckett provides a bequest that is simultaneously energising and enervating. In particular, I connect this to the strained relationship of Beckett regarding the U.S., enshrined in his statement that this is 'somehow not the right country for me.' (Knowlson, 1996) The first chapter details the practicalities of Beckett's U.S. migration via the Grove Press periodical *Evergreen Review*. Beckett's 16 (1957-1973) appearances in the American periodical serve as a core vehicle of the author's deracination, contextualising his publisher Barney Rosset's description of Beckett's 'nontogtherness.' The second chapter focuses on the work of Thomas Pynchon, in which Beckett's poetics of exhaustion is integrated alongside the vitalism of the popular Beat avant-garde staged in *Evergreen*. In particular, I argue that Beckett's influence intersects with the postmodern problem of hermeneutics, dramatized through shared images of ending, 'Zero,' and entropy. The final chapter reframes the Beckettian disjuncture against the work of Don DeLillo and the author's interrogation of 'this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture.' (Jameson, 1991) Framed by DeLillo as the 'last writer to shape the way we think and see,' (*Mao II*, 157) Beckett's presence is one of termination; at the same time, it discloses a means whereby fiction might 'extend into the world.' (Adelman, 2004) Alongside developments in DeLillo's spatial-poetics to a fiction set 'nowhere in particular,' I finally provide a view of Beckett's problematic bequest as one that is integrated into the fabric of the text over time.

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Introduction: 'Somehow Not The Right Country'

The story of Samuel Beckett's legacy in the United States is beset by a tentativeness and unease. Concluding the author's month-long (10 July - 6 August) trip to New York for the production of *Film* (1964), his authorized biographer James Knowlson quotes Beckett as having left on the remark: 'this is somehow not the right country for me.'¹ The friction of Beckett's American journey, unrepeated during the 60 years of his career as a published writer, serves as a template for the broader difficulties at work in the acculturation of Beckett in North America. Commissioned by Barney Rosset's Grove Press to kickstart the publisher's fledgling Evergreen Theatre, the script for *Film* was to be produced alongside works by fellow European dramatists Harold Pinter and Eugene Ionesco. Intended to capitalise on the period's increased enthusiasm for cross-media avant-garde experiment, Beckett's *Film*, however, was the only script to be produced for this ambitious project—the result being, in the author's terms, at best an 'interesting failure.'² From the anecdotal (Beckett's trip coinciding with 'one of the hottest most humid Julys on record'³) to the instrumental (omitting a day's worth of unusable material due to stroboscopic blurring, as well as an encounter with a phlegmatic Buster Keaton), the complications around the production of *Film* were compounded by the inexperience of Beckett and director Alan Schneider, with the latter having only a month to prepare for a medium in which he was a neophyte. Largely treated with ambivalence by Beckett critics, S.E. Gontarski ultimately writes of the rigidity and unsatisfactory nature of the American film in which 'what we are left with [...] is a string of unsolved problems.'⁴

Beckett's ill-fated experience in New York, nevertheless, rubs against a decade of profound impact over his work and reception. Bookended by successes at the 1961 International Publishers Prize and the 1969 Nobel Prize for Literature, the 60s, in the words of his British publisher John Calder, represent the 'heyday of Beckett's advanced creativity and his acceptance by the intelligentsia.'⁵ This is also, conversely, true of Beckett's trans-Atlantic reputation, undergirded by his American publisher, Grove Press. In this regard, the decade heralds the release of a number of significant collections: *Krapp's Last Tape and Other Dramatic Pieces* (1960), *Poems in English* (1961), and *Happy Days* (1961)—the latter representing a milestone as the first of Beckett's plays to mark its world premiere in New York (17 September, 1961). Equally important, and sometimes overlooked, is Grove's publication of Hugh Kenner's *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (1961), an engagingly written analysis that, as D. Wright aptly

¹ James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, (Bloomsbury: London, 1996), p. 525

² C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski, *The Faber Companion to Samuel Beckett*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), p. 195

³ Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, (Simon & Schuster: New York, 1978), p. 574

⁴ S.E. Gontarski, 'Film and Formal Integrity,' in *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives*, (Ohio State University Press: Columbus, 1983), p. 136

⁵ John Calder, *The Philosophy of Samuel Beckett*, (Riverrun: London, 2001), p. 11

observes, set 'the pattern of much future criticism.'⁶ Three years later, the successor to Beckett's post-war *Trilogy*, *How It Is* (1964) is marketed by Grove as being 'as seminal to the recasting of the novel as *Waiting for Godot* was in reshaping modern drama.'⁷ This is shortly followed by the republication of the *Trilogy* (originally published in 1958) under Grove's mass market Black Cat imprint (1965), drawing further attention to the availability of classic Beckett works in the U.S. Later in the decade, a line of volumes collecting Beckett's short prose and theatre—*Stories and Texts for Nothing* (1967), *Cascando and Other Short Dramatic Pieces* (1969)—culminate in the 16 volume *Collected Works of Samuel Beckett* (1970), a cornerstone of Beckett's career, reinforcing his status as an established writer, both in the U.S. and internationally. Together with this momentous collection, an abundance of critical writing is dedicated to Beckett at the close of the decade, embodied in the first full length bibliography of Beckett's works and criticism by Raymond Federman and John Fletcher (*Samuel Beckett: His Work and his Critics*, University of California Press, 1968). By the early 70s, Joseph Epstein writing half-facetiously on the publication of two new studies by A. Alvarez and Hugh Kenner states that 'if books about him [Beckett] continue, he will rank with Christ, Napoleon and Wagner.'⁸

At the same time, Beckett's anxious remark concerning the U.S. as 'somehow not the right country,' bedevils the question of an American context to his career. Situated at the heart of this period of apparent success, Beckett's statement at once betrays and withholds a tension in the field of the author's American story. By the same token, a tentative space is, nonetheless, disclosed for works that extend 'somehow on.' (my italics, *Worstward Ho*, p. 81) Where Beckett reveals a perspective on the U.S. as uneasily alien to himself (he would famously continue to describe the people as 'too strange'⁹), early audiences maintained a suspicion of work that seemed obscure and, at times, hostile. Among the most frequently cited examples of Beckett's American disconnect, the infamous premiere of *Waiting for Godot* in Miami (3 January, 1956) goes a long way in framing his initial ventures in the U.S. as characterised by 'mistakes, miscommunications and misunderstandings.'¹⁰ Staged at the recently opened Coconut Grove playhouse, producer Michael Myerberg's poor judgement in promising audiences 'the laugh hit of two continents,'¹¹ was exacerbated by his intention to turn *Godot* into a star-studded event, featuring Bert Lahr and Tom Ewell in leading roles. The play closed after two weeks, following poor audience reception, tension between Ewell and Lahr, and an atmosphere of increasing

⁶ D. Wright, 'A Short Guide to Samuel Beckett Studies,' in *Critical Survey*, Vol. 4, No. 4, (Summer, 1970), p. 214. Also see Ruby Cohn, *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut*, (Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, 1962) and Raymond Federman, *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction*, (California University Press: Berkeley, 1965)

⁷ Advertisement for *How It Is* by Samuel Beckett, in *Evergreen Review*, No. 32 (April-May, 1964)

⁸ Joseph Epstein, 'If Books About Him Continue, He Will Rank With Christ, Napoleon and Wagner,' *New York Times* (25 November, 1973) accessed 26 June, 2016, < <http://www.nytimes.com/1973/11/25/archives/if-books-about-him-continue-he-will-rank-with-christ-napoleon-and.html?mcubz=1>>

⁹ James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, (Bloomsbury: London, 1996), p. 525

¹⁰ Natka Bianchini, *Samuel Beckett's Theatre in America*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2015), p. 19

¹¹ Quoted in S.E. Gontarski, 'Beckett's Reception in the USA,' in *The International Reception of Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Mark Nixon, Matthew Feldman, (Continuum: London, 2009), p. 12

distrust between director Alan Schneider and Myerberg. However, this production casts a long shadow over Beckett's reputation in North America.¹² Lahr, who played Estragon (a role that he would reprise in the Broadway debut later that year), reflects on the absurdity of the production, quipping that 'playing *Waiting for Godot* in Miami was like doing *Giselle* at Roseland.'¹³ More telling, however, is a view of essential incompatibility between the pessimistic world-view of Beckett and American audiences; this is evident in an angry fan letter directed at Hollywood star Bert Lahr, in which, with honest disbelief, they ask 'how can a man, who has charmed the youth of America as the lion in *The Wizard of Oz*, appear in a play that is communistic, atheistic and existential?'¹⁴ In a striking turn, Beckett's play becomes a confused metonym for everything counter to the American mythos of youth, piety and cultural optimism. As a result, the Miami *Godot*, Gontarski writes, rendered 'the future of Beckett in the United States [...] something less than promising.'¹⁵

A general ambivalence persists in the critical reception to the play's Broadway opening (19 April, 1956), with positive and negative reviews alike finding *Godot* to be a play that resists clear judgement. This mode of nonunderstanding is foreshadowed in the first published review of Beckett's play in the U.S. by Howard Fertig. Reflecting on the play's English language debut in London (3 August, 1955), Fertig describes *Godot* as possessing 'that quality of all original works of art—the Mona Lisa smile that chides both enemies and friends.'¹⁶ In a negative variation on the same theme, Walter Kerr, writing for the *New York Herald Tribune*, admonishes the Broadway production which 'asking for a thousand readings, has none of its own to give.'¹⁷ A staunch critic of Beckett's theatrical output,¹⁸ Kerr concludes that Beckett's play offers 'a veil rather than a revelation. It wears a mask rather than a face.'¹⁹ This style of cultivated bafflement is perfected by *New York Times* theatre critic Brooks Atkinson, through a series of what one might describe as 'unreviews'—warning the reader 'don't expect this column to explain

¹² This is particularly true regarding the enduring association of Bert Lahr with the play: see John Lahr's article on his father's association with the Miami production, 'The Rise and Fall of Beckett's Bum: Bert Lahr in *Godot*,' in *Evergreen Review*, No. 70, (September, 1969), p. 29-32, 79-86; also see Alan Schneider's full account of the Miami production in 'Waiting for Beckett,' in *New York Times*, (17 November, 1985), later published as a chapter from Schneider's posthumous memoir *Entrances*, (Viking: New York, 1986), p. 221-239

¹³ Deidre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, (Simon & Schuster: New York, 1978), p. 459

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ S.E. Gontarski, 'Beckett's Reception in the USA,' in *The International Reception of Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Mark Nixon, Matthew Feldman, (Continuum: London, 2009), p. 12 – also see Gontarski's description of the production as a 'doomed venture from the start [...] Vacationing sun worshippers looking for easy diversion were not amused, despite the play's sure-fire headliner, Bert Lahr.'

¹⁶ Howard Fertig, 'Waiting for *Godot*,' in *The Village Voice Reader*, ed. by Daniel Wolf, Edwin Fancher, (Doubleday: New York, 1962), p. 67

¹⁷ Quoted in Walter Kerr, 'Stage View; The Love Between Beckett and Actors isn't Mutual,' in *New York Times*, (13 November, 1988), accessed 15 May, 2016, < <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/11/13/theater/stage-view-the-love-between-beckett-and-actors-isn-t-mutual.html?pagewanted=all>>

¹⁸ Walter Kerr would famously be announced as 'abstaining' after Beckett was awarded the 1961 Obies for Best Foreign Play (*Happy Days*)

¹⁹ Quoted in Eric Bentley 'Postscript 1967,' in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Raymond Federman, Lawrence Graver, (Routledge: London, 1979), p. 111

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* [...] It is a mystery wrapped in an enigma.²⁰ Atkinson's caution is once again repeated concerning the premiere of Beckett's *Endgame* (28 January, 1958): 'Don't expect this column to give a coherent account of what—if anything—happens.'²¹ Acknowledging the hermeneutic obstacle erected by Beckett's play, the response of *New Republic* critic Eric Bentley, nevertheless, stands out for its depth of insight. Throughout Bentley's review, responses are made to other notable critics of the Broadway production: including John Chapman of *The Daily News* (arguing that '*Godot* is merely a stunt'), Robert Coleman of *The Daily Mirror* ('Beckett appears to have absorbed some of [Joyce's] ability to make the simple complex') as well as Kerr's 'philistine' criticisms.²² In a moment of striking percipience, Bentley describes *Godot* as posing a '*problem* for our audiences.'²³ (my italics) The precise problem that he identifies is of 'a nausea' which 'American optimism drives [...] a little more deeply underground.'²⁴ Significantly, the disjunction that Bentley highlights is not figured as an essential split, whereby Beckett and American audiences are culturally irreconcilable, but an 'underground' existence, a latency, expressed by other means.

It is the 'problem' represented by Beckett's works that serves as the primary concern of this thesis, expressing simultaneously an American engagement as well as dissent. This marks a departure from the few existing critical accounts of Beckett and the U.S. In particular, by asserting the *problematic* nature of this exchange, one diverges from the telos elaborated in Natka Bianchini's *Samuel Beckett's Theatre in America* (2015). In Bianchini's study, the reader is led from the opening of *Godot* in Miami, through a 'series of firsts' in the 1960s (notably the premiere of *Happy Days* in New York and the 1964 production of *Film*), before arriving at what Bianchini describes as an 'American zenith' in the 1980s. In this regard, Bianchini defines Beckett's reputation in the U.S. as driven by a 'widening circle of acceptance and praise.'²⁵ While indebted to the invaluable research, offered by Bianchini, into Beckett's American reception, the following narrative will be characterised by friction, tension, deracination and distance. This also differs from the argument posed in Stephen John Dilks' controversial study *Samuel Beckett and the Literary Marketplace* (2011), where Beckett's complicity in creating a ubiquitous image of solitude—of an author 'damned to fame'—underpins the commercial history of Beckett, both in the U.S and elsewhere. Rather, Beckett's aforementioned statement of nonbelonging, rooted at the heart of the 60s, will be read through the multivalent aspects of Beckett's legacies, especially as they are revealed in the contested space of his writing. For this reason, the picture of the author's persistence into the U.S.

²⁰ Brooks Atkinson, 'Beckett's "Waiting for Godot,"' in *New York Times*, (20 April, 1956), accessed 15 June, 2014, <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/03/reviews/beckett-godot.html?mcubz=0>>

²¹ Brooks Atkinson, 'Beckett's "Endgame,"' in *New York Times*, (29 January, 1958), accessed 15 June, 2014, <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/03/reviews/beckett-endgame.html?mcubz=0>>

²² Eric Bentley, 'The Talent of Samuel Beckett,' in *Samuel Beckett: Waiting for Godot: a Casebook*, ed. by Ruby Cohn, (Macmillan: London, 1987), p. 59

²³ *Ibid*, p. 60

²⁴ *Ibid*

²⁵ Natka Bianchini, *Samuel Beckett's Theatre in America*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2015), p.13

will more closely echo the indeterminacies of *Watt*, (1953) racked (as the protagonist acknowledges concerning the elusive Mr Knott) by a 'fixity of mystery.' (198) While we will explore various approaches to the precise 'problem' of Beckett later in this introduction, one might initially draw on Watt's strange encounter with the Gall family of piano tuners for insight into the paradoxical motilities characteristic of Beckett's works. Highlighting the event's capacity to continue despite its apparent ending, Watt's thought process is revealed amid an unravelling sea of opposites: '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...' (59) By seeking to illuminate Beckett's position in America, this project will also be conducted with a view to the generative 'approaches' and 'separations' of the author's work, impacting upon his continued legacy in the world of American letters.

Before we consider a key narrative of Beckett's problematic legacy in the U.S., it is worth finally reflecting on the serious challenge posed by Beckett's works to those critics wishing to establish a coherent sense of identity or national belonging. As Beckett remarks in an early critical piece, the true work of art forbids a 'solution clapped on problem like a snuffer on a candle.'²⁶ The resistance of Beckett's works to clear notions of emplacement is redoubled in the 1934 essay on 'Recent Irish Poetry,' where Beckett tacitly expresses a sympathy of outlook with those artists aware of 'the space that intervenes between him and the world of objects.'²⁷ Nevertheless, following the major intervention by Eoin O'Brien in 1986's *The Beckett Country*, effort has been made to unearth a rootedness of place in Beckett's works, drawing on imbedded references to features of the South County Dublin landscape. Of the readings to emerge against the background of this academic moment, Sean Kennedy's theory of an Irish spectrality, whereby Beckett's exiled narratives confront a revenant Irishness, has been particularly influential. According to Kennedy, Beckett's connection to nation occurs as a moment of 'haunting, or failing to forget issuing in a continuing confrontation with loss.'²⁸ Predicated on a quintessentially modernist melancholy for place and nation, Beckett's Irishness ultimately clashes with the parallel American narrative to be enumerated hereafter. At this juncture one might remark on the only elected place-name featured in the title of a published Beckett work—1981's *Ohio Impromptu*. In the play's peculiar throwaway title, one finds evidence of the author's spontaneous, often clumsy, reconfiguration into an American sphere. Produced at the height of Beckett's so called 'American Zenith,' the play, like Beckett's *Film*, is the result of U.S. commission, this time as part of the Beckett Seminar at the Ohio State University celebrating the author's 75th birthday. Enacting a brief drama of separation and union,

²⁶ Samuel Beckett, 'Intercessions by Denis Devlin,' in *Disjecta*, ed. by Ruby Cohn, (Calder: London, 1983), p.92

²⁷ Samuel Beckett, 'Recent Irish Poetry,' in in *Disjecta*, ed. by Ruby Cohn, (Calder: London, 1983), p. 70

²⁸ Sean Kennedy, 'Does Beckett Studies require a Subject? Memory and Mourning in the Texts for Nothing,' in *Samuel Beckett: History, Memory, Archive*, ed. by Katherine Weiss, Sean Kennedy, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2009), p. 15

Ohio Impromptu illuminates the two factors upon which interventions in the U.S., in Beckett's lifetime, are predicated. Throughout the play two bowed figures, referred to simply as 'Reader' and 'Listener,' sit across a small table, the 'Reader' reading aloud from a book, the latter communicating only when to start and stop the recital. Casting largely identical figures on the stage, the 'Reader's' narrative details a man's displacement following the loss of a loved one—'relief he had hoped would flow from unfamiliarity. Unfamiliar room. Unfamiliar scene.' (445) Situated amid an abstract non-space, the former's narrative nevertheless evokes a Parisian habitation in the Isle of Swans; in this sense, conducting a migratory narrative flight, Beckett's play also restricts full identification with any given place. Elsewhere in the 'Reader's' story, a 'receding stream' is envisaged, experienced by the protagonist at the tip of the islet. Finding a poetic lure in this notable point of convergence, it is at this intersection of 'conflow' and 'flow' that the familiar and unfamiliar lose distinction (echoed in the identical figures of 'Reader' and 'Listener'). In this regard, *Ohio Impromptu* becomes a gentle allegory of Beckett's route into the U.S.—an act of misplacement that nonetheless conceals a receding channel back to the author's adopted Parisian domain.

'Unlikely, if not odd'—Beckett, Rosset and the American postmodern

Eluding spectral readings of cultural translatability in favour of Beckett's American deracination, an alternative narrative will now be considered. Following Beckett's early reception and emergence into an American 'heyday,' the author's oblique relationship with the development of American postmodern writing serves as an emblem of Beckett's uneasy legacy as one that is both resisted and accommodated. In this regard, Beckett's connection to the ambiguous label of the postmodern becomes a relation that, according to Andrea Oppo, is 'if nothing else, equivocal.'²⁹ This relation will be further considered later in the introduction. Before coming to that theoretical discussion however, it is important to emphasise the practical side of Beckett's relation to America and of his legacy within U.S. writing. Championing the author throughout his career, one must acknowledge the critical importance of Beckett's American publisher Barney Rosset in this narrative. From their initial exchange of letters in June 1953, the publisher set the ground for the profound influence he would cast over Beckett, prompting the author's well-known practice of self-translation, as well as suggesting the possibility of Beckett's return to writing in English—a 'withdrawal from a withdrawal.' (BR to SB, Feb 5th, 1954)³⁰ Beckett's longstanding connection with his publisher is reinforced in the author's dedication of his final prose text, 1989's *Stirrings Still*, to Rosset. Nevertheless, as Gontarski writes, 'the Rosset-Beckett match seemed, at the outset, unlikely, if not odd'—'a shy, bookish, taciturn artist with impeccable (if not nineteenth-century) manners, on the one hand, and a brash, volatile, street-smart American more comfortable in the jazz

²⁹ Andrea Oppo, *Philosophical Aesthetics and Samuel Beckett*, (Peter Lang AG: Bern, 2008), p. 183

³⁰ Barney Rosset, *Dear Mr. Beckett: The Samuel Beckett File*, (Opus: New York, 2017), p. 76

clubs of Chicago than any library or university.³¹ Born in 1922, the only child of a Chicagoan banker, Rosset's peripatetic early life—in which he attended the progressive Francis Parker School, served in the Army Signal Corps in China, and lived in Paris alongside abstract expressionist painter Joan Mitchell—lead him to purchase a small reprint house, Grove Press, in 1951 for \$3,000.³² Serving as Beckett's publisher, and later his theatrical agent in the U.S., Rosset would go on to build the Grove Press into one of the premiere publishing ventures of the 1960s.

Despite Rosset's famously slapdash approach to publishing and letters, the road to the publisher's first contact with Beckett is filtered conventionally through a matrix of old-guard modernism and American academia. Combined, the enthusiasms of Shakespeare and Company publisher Sylvia Beach and Rosset's drama professor at the New School, Wallace Fowlie, prompted him to write on 25th June, 1953 that 'what Grove Press needed most in the world was Samuel Beckett.'³³ However, as Rosset recalls in his unfinished memoir, his first encounter with the author was as one of Eugene Jolas' 'paramyths'³⁴ in the 1949 *Transition Workshop* anthology. At the heart of the Parisian avant-garde in the 1920s and 30s, the little magazine *transition* serves as a model of radical publishing to which Rosset would be consciously indebted. Publishing works by leading modernist figures such as Joyce, Kafka and Stein, the transformational modernism of Jolas' periodical is channeled by Rosset into a drive towards the availability of cheap avant-garde reading material, with the Grove Press servicing a rapidly evolving base of American readers. Reflecting this demand, Rosset, in his early exchanges with Beckett, is assiduous about priming the author for 'the American reader,' remarking on the tonal differences between Beckett's translated English text and its projected American audience. (BR to SB, 31 July, 1953)³⁵ Conscious of this problem, Beckett writes unpromisingly of *Molloy's* translatability; he states that the novel is 'bound to be quite [...] unamerican in rhythm and atmosphere and the mere substitution here and there of the American for the English term is hardly likely to improve matters, on the contrary.' (SB to BR, 1 September, 1953)³⁶ Problematized as a 'rhythm,' an 'atmosphere,' Beckett emphasises the tentative ground for the acculturation of his works in the U.S. Nevertheless, the eventual publication, in 1956, of the paperback edition of *Waiting for Godot* (printed as No. 33 in the Grove catalogue after the publisher's lucky number) represents a milestone in Beckett's career. Costing \$1, the cheap edition of

³¹ S.E. Gontarski, 'Within a Budding Grove: Publishing Beckett in America,' in *A Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by S.E. Gontarski, (Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester, 2010), p. 24

³² At the time of Rosset's purchase, the only titles on the Grove Press backlist were *The Confidence Man* by Herbert Melville, *Selected Writings of the Ingenious Aphra Behn*, and *English Verse by Richard Crashaw*.

³³ Barney Rosset, *Dear Mr. Beckett: The Samuel Beckett File*, (Opus: New York, 2017), p. 63

³⁴ Barney Rosset, *Rosset: My Life in Publishing and How I Fought Censorship*, (O/R: New York, 2016), p. 109

³⁵ Barney Rosset, *Dear Mr. Beckett: The Samuel Beckett File*, (Opus: New York, 2017), p. 67—in particular, Rosset objects to the use of the word 'bloody' in *Godot* and 'skivvy and 'cutty' (BR to SB, 4 August, 1953) in *Molloy*, p. 68

³⁶ 'Samuel Beckett and Barney Rosset, Letters [1953-1955]' in *The Grove Press Reader, 1951-2001*, ed. by S.E. Gontarski, (Grove: New York, 2001), p. 32

Godot would eventually be celebrated by Rosset as ‘the crown jewel of our publishing house.’³⁷ Loren Glass (whose scholarship, along with that of Gontarski, offers a cohesive and critical history of Grove Press) restates the importance of this ‘iconic *American* paperback,’ (my italics) having sold by the 2006 centenary ‘more than two million copies.’³⁸ Concerning this transition in the public mood, Rosset remarks in a prescient letter on the likelihood of an American readership for Beckett’s work; it is, Rosset states, ‘an underground of interest here, the kind of interest that slowly generates steam and has a lasting stock.’ (BR to SB, 20 October, 1955)³⁹ Reframing Bentley’s ‘underground’ of ‘nausea,’ the surfacing of Rosset’s popular literary ‘underground’ marks a new period of Beckett’s reception, enmeshed with the growing cultural and political ferment of the U.S. in the 1960s.

Further signs of this shift in Beckett’s American legacy appear in 1957 in which two politically important productions of *Godot* take place; a performance with an all-Black cast at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, New York (21 January, 1957), and a now-legendary rendition of Beckett’s play in San Quentin State Prison (19 November, 1957) directed by Herbert Blau,⁴⁰ both of which ‘associated the play with the American underclass.’⁴¹ Beckett’s well-documented⁴² embrace by the inmates of San Quentin, stands in stark contrast to the outrage over Bert Lahr’s association with a ‘communistic, atheistic and existential’ play. In each case, Beckett’s work is siphoned away from the mainstream and towards the eccentric, radical openings of the nascent American counterculture. On top of this, the 1958 off-Broadway opening of *Endgame* and the eventual world premiere of *Happy Days* in 1961, both staged at the Cherry Lane theatre, locate Beckett amid the nascent hip culture of Greenwich Village. Expedited through his American publisher, Rosset jokes of ‘being thought of as the village crank [...] because I have conducted this monotonous diatribe about off-Broadway.’ (BR to SB, Jan 27, 1956)⁴³ The copious attention paid to Beckett in the *Village Voice*, especially by drama columnist Jerry Tallmer and co-founder Norman Mailer, solidify this narrative, with the former declaring *Godot* ‘the dramatic event of my generation.’⁴⁴ Looking

³⁷ Barney Rosset, *Dear Mr. Beckett: The Samuel Beckett File*, (Opus: New York, 2017), p. 345

³⁸ Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013), p. 65

³⁹ Barney Rosset, *Dear Mr. Beckett: The Samuel Beckett File*, (Opus: New York, 2017), p. 89

⁴⁰ See Herbert Blau, *The Eye of Prey: Subversions of the Postmodern*, (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1987) ‘...from the earliest sitdowns on of quiet valour and waiting dissent—the energising passivity of which, the negative capability, was anticipated by *Waiting for Godot*, by no design whatsoever, but still, the most important political drama of the fifties.’ p. 5-6

⁴¹ S.E. Gontarski, ‘Beckett’s Reception in the USA,’ in *The International Reception of Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Mark Nixon, Matthew Feldman, (Continuum: London, 2009), p. 12

⁴² See in particular the oft-quoted introduction to Martin Esslin’s *The Theatre of the Absurd*, (Doubleday Anchor: New York, 1961)

⁴³ Quoted in S.E. Gontarski, ‘Within a Budding Grove: Publishing Beckett in America,’ in *A Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by S.E. Gontarski, (Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester, 2010), p. 27

⁴⁴ Jerry Tallmer, ‘Godot on Broadway,’ in *The Village Voice Reader*, ed. by Daniel Wolf, Edwin Fancher, (Doubleday: New York, 1962), p. 69

to 'jam the gears of creeping automatism,' to 'pursue absurdities in a cool and resistant world,'⁴⁵ Beckett's works are taken on by a young, predominantly male subculture: a 'secret group in America that is somehow vaguely uneasy about life in Peoria.'⁴⁶ In particular, the publication of letters between Beckett and his American director Alan Schneider in the *Village Voice* significantly reframe Beckett's intransigence—his inability to offer 'exegesis of any kind,'⁴⁷ together with author's response to the 'Miami fiasco'—with 'the vivifying air' of failure.⁴⁸ On *Godot*, Beckett writes 'if they did it my way they would empty the theatre.'⁴⁹ In this sense, the problem of Beckett is partially reclaimed through the construction of the author as an artist, not only impervious to failure, but for whom intractability is built into their artistic project.

Amid these cultural transformations, the debut publication of the *Evergreen Review* by Grove Press in 1957 represents a pivotal moment of Beckett's passage into America. Featuring two items by Beckett ('Dante and the Lobster' and poems from *Echo's Bones*), the in-house Grove periodical would serve as a decisive arm in the propagation of Beckett's works throughout the U.S. Over the periodical's 16 years of existence, 16 issues contain writing by Beckett, charting the entire spectrum of his production, including drama, short stories, poetry, a novel fragment, as well as the author's experiments for radio and television. Among these appearances, notable debut publications such as *Krapp's Last Tape* in No. 5 (Summer, 1958) mark the review as an instrumental outlet of Beckett's presence in the U.S. At the same time, *Evergreen Review* traces the rise of the political and social shifts of the following decade becoming at its height, Glass writes, 'the premiere underground magazine of the Sixties counterculture.'⁵⁰ Mirroring the development and diffusion of the youth movement as a political force, the Grove journal would transition from a trade paperback into a glossy commercial magazine by the summer of 1964. In response, the circulation of the review expands from 7,500 to 45,000, before soaring to over 200,000 by the close of the decade. Thus, for a nominally literary magazine, the *Evergreen Review* achieves an extraordinarily wide reach—a populist voice extending an invitation to readers to 'Join the Underground.' As mentioned in Chapter 1, this 'underground' was emboldened by Rosset's high-profile release of formerly 'obscene' texts, including the 1959 publications of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, followed by Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* in 1961 and William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* in 1962. Encouraging readers to revel in the freedoms won by Grove Press in court, the periodical's battle with

⁴⁵ Daniel Wolf, 'Forward (Onward and Upward),' in *The Village Voice Reader*, ed. by Daniel Wolf, Edwin Fancher, (Doubleday: New York, 1962), p. 5

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ 'Beckett's Letters on Endgame: Extracts from his Correspondence with Alan Schneider,' in *Village Voice* (19 March, 1958). Later republished in *Village Voice Reader*, ed. by Daniel Wolf, Edwin Fancher, (Doubleday: New York, 1962). Reference taken from 'On Endgame,' in *Disjecta*, ed. by Ruby Cohn, (Calder: London, 1983), p. 109

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 106

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013), p. 1

American censors curiously aligns with Beckett's own experience of censorship, especially in the UK and Republic of Ireland. In this regard, Gontarski⁵¹ points to the galvanizing effect of Beckett's *Molloy* over Rosset's cultivation of controversial texts. Testing the author's 'obscenities of form' (SB to BR, 25 June, 1953)⁵² against the strictures of the American postal censor, Beckett's work is reframed alongside the review's increasingly populist and playful avant-garde.

Crucially, the *Evergreen Review* offers a material consistency to Beckett's deracination into the explosive milieu of the American sixties. At the same time, the translation of Beckett into this context is one that is not devoid of problems. In spite of his 'underground' audience, Beckett's uniquely intractable works frequently clash with the prevailing philosophy of the period—anticipated in Norman Mailer's⁵³ famous 1957 essay 'The White Negro' in which 'movement is always to be preferred to inaction.' 'In motion,' Mailer writes, 'man has a chance, his body is warm, his instincts are quick...'⁵⁴ Mirroring this tension, Rosset's gentle reprimand of his star author who 'wasn't left enough'⁵⁵ is telling. For a participatory culture increasingly requiring one to 'tune in,' Beckett's works project ambivalence rather than engagement, inertia rather than energy, opacity rather than openness. This abrasion of influence is significantly played out in the fabric of the *Evergreen Review*. Situating itself at the centre of several embryonic American avant-grades, including the Beat movement, and Don Allen's celebrated *schools* of American poetry,⁵⁶ the Grove journal also heralds the import of a post-war European avant-gardism—a flight-path through which Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet and Alain Robbe-Grillet, arrive in the American fabric. With Beckett at the forefront, Rosset terms the author's relation with his American avant-gardes as one of 'nontogetherness'⁵⁷—at once passing into the pages of the magazine, while retaining an air of impersonality. In Chapter 1, the obstinate 'nontogetherness' of Beckett will be unpacked alongside parallel developments in American letters at the heart of the U.S. counterculture. Drawing from a pre-existing continental avant-garde, the critical cachet of these writers is drawn into

⁵¹ S.E. Gontarski, 'Art and Commodity: Beckett's Commerce with Grove Press,' in *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Mark Nixon, (The British Library Publishing Division: London, 2011)—'Rosset was tentative about the publication of Beckett's novels, especially *Molloy*, which he would use finally to test the limits of censorship in America. Cautioned by Beckett and on the advice of his legal staff, Rosset published *Molloy* exclusively in hard cover, its distribution restricted to New York City bookshops that had requested it...' p. 141

⁵² *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1941-1956*, ed. by Dan Gunn, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2011), p. 385

⁵³ Mailer would notably dismiss *Waiting for Godot* as 'a poem to impotence,' retracting this criticism in a rare display of humility—'...because "Waiting for Godot" is a play about impotence rather than an ode to it, and while its view of life is indeed hopeless, it is an art work, and therefore, I believe, a good.' Norman Mailer, *Advertisements for Myself*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1992), p. 320

⁵⁴ Quoted in J. Michael Lennon, *Norman Mailer: A Double Life*, (Simon & Schuster: New York, 2013), p. 220

⁵⁵ Barney Rosset, *Dear Mr. Beckett: The Samuel Beckett File*, (Opus: New York, 2017), p. 221

⁵⁶ New York School, Black Mountain School, and San Francisco Renaissance, as represented in *The New American Poetry 1945-1960*, ed. by Donald Allen, (Grove: New York, 1960)

⁵⁷ Barney Rosset, *Dear Mr. Beckett: The Samuel Beckett File*, (Opus: New York, 2017), p. 228

what Glass in the subtitle to his important study labels ‘the incorporation of the avant-garde.’⁵⁸ Co-opting the radical energies of the 1960s, the *Evergreen Review* operates at the frontier of this transformation, jettisoning any veneer of stately high modernism and becoming increasingly reliant on titillation and commercial advertisers. In this way, the review becomes a vehicle of both assimilation and diffusion in Beckett’s American legacy. Marking the intersection of the popular and the avant-garde, it also significantly places Beckett at the starting-point for what Nicholas Zurbrugg describes as a ‘pubescent postmodernism.’⁵⁹ In this manner, the trans-Atlantic flight of Beckett into the Grove periodical serves as a tentative moment of reconfiguration, from the ‘paramyths’ of modernism to the ludic postmodern fabric of the magazine.

With Beckett simultaneously absent and implanted into the heart of the literary 60s, the author’s legacy continues to manifest as one entangled with the advent of postmodern literature in the U.S.

Significantly, this transition is both rooted and in excess of the influence of *Evergreen Review*. As Glass reminds us, the late publication of John Kennedy O’Toole’s best seller *A Confederacy of Dunces* (1980) caps a persistent dialogue between the Grove canon and the sensibility of postmodern fiction.⁶⁰

Moreover, Gilbert Sorrentino’s post as an editor at Grove Press (1965-1970) reinforces this connection, providing a key contribution to American postmodernism with 1979’s *Mulligan Stew*. Elsewhere, Robert Coover—a frequent contributor to *Evergreen Review* and leading postmodern author—describes Grove Press as a catalytic influence on a new period of experiment in U.S. fiction. Citing Grove and New Directions as two of the few U.S. publishers putting out interesting literature, Coover names ‘Borges, Nabokov and Beckett’ as ‘underground icons,’ ‘a kind of recognition code’⁶¹ for readers and writers alike. Also noteworthy is the full print of Edward Albee’s *Zoo Story* in No. 12 (March-April, 1960) of *Evergreen Review*, relocating the double-talk of Beckett’s pseudo-couple to the absurd encounter and sudden violence of the author’s New York habitus.⁶² For Albee, Beckett and the European theatre are

⁵⁸ Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013)

⁵⁹ Nicolas Zurbrugg, “‘Within a Budding Grove’: Pubescent Postmodernism and the Early *Evergreen Review*,” in *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, No. 10, (Fall, 1990)

⁶⁰ Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013), p. 214

⁶¹ Robert Coover, ‘Preface,’ in John Hawkes, *The Lime Twig, Second Skin, Travesty*, (Penguin: London, 1996), p. xi. Also see Robert Coover, ‘The Last Quixote: Marginal Notes on the Gospel According to Samuel Beckett,’ *New American Review*, No. 11, (1971). In this revelatory essay, Coover recalls discovering Beckett as a student: ‘His is a secret text for initiates: rebellious, blasphemous, romantic [...], intransigently nihilistic, raucously scatological, a glimpse [...] into the living death of the bourgeois dreamworld [...]. Though serious [...], he turns his “wild beast of earnestness” loose on the grand “Where now? Who now?...Questions, hypotheses, call them that” of the student’s dark passage, and makes them seem pretty funny, terrible maybe, too terrible for the silly Billy Graham world, but funny.’ p. 135

⁶² Albee’s *Zoo Story* would also go on to premiere in the U.S. alongside Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape* at the Provincetown Playhouse (14 January, 1960)

redeemed as 'free-swinging, bold, iconoclastic and often wildly, wildly funny.'⁶³ Thus, we might argue, the 'laugh riot' of the Miami misfire is recast as a dissenting gesture, indicative of a new strain of American writing. In his influential anthology *Black Humour* (1969), Bruce Jay Friedman describes this laughter as 'a nervousness, a tempo, a near hysterical new beat in the air.'⁶⁴ Including a short play by Albee ('The Sandbox'), fiction by John Barth, James Purdy and Kurt Vonnegut, the anthology opens with a memorable excerpt from Thomas Pynchon's debut novel *V* (1963). Outlining in excruciating detail the application of local anaesthetic and cosmetic surgery to one of his characters, Pynchon would become one of the preeminent voices of a literary postmodernism, embodying tropes of the absurd, irony, surrealism and black humour. As we will see in Chapter 2, the famously reticent author would nonetheless identify as a reader of the *Evergreen Review*, highlighting No. 1 as an 'eye opener' (an issue book-ended with items by Beckett), eliciting an 'expansion of possibilities.' (*Slow Learner*, p. 7) As a lightning rod for Beckett's migration into the postmodern literary fabric, Pynchon's example marks the imbedded dislocation of this readerly encounter, the ramifications of which will be unpacked later in this thesis.

Along with Friedman's 'black humour,' the period is marked by the profusion of categories to describe this new sensibility in U.S. fiction: against labels such as metafiction (William H. Gass), literature of exhaustion (John Barth), post-contemporary/disruptivist (Jerome Klinkowitz), and surfiction (Raymond Federman), postmodernism has retained a curious sticking power. While Irving Howe is generally considered the first to introduce the term *postmodernism* into the field of American fiction, describing the fatigue of the high modernist project,⁶⁵ both Leslie Fiedler and Ihab Hassan provide the category with much of its contemporary resonance. In this regard, Fiedler's hypothesis marks a further challenge to the authority of elite high modernism—calling to 'cross the border, close the gap'⁶⁶ with pop culture. However, Hassan's famously apocalyptic reading of postmodernism identifies a contradictory mode tending towards deconstruction, immanence and irony. Regarding the incongruities of the postmodern, Hassan evokes the subsequent crossing of 'pop and silence, or mass culture and deconstruction, or Superman and Godot.'⁶⁷ Placing Beckett uneasily in this universe of disparate commercial and non-commercial forms, a sense of the author is revealed *at work* in the postmodern landscape. Alongside this, Beckett serves an instructive precursor for Charles Harris, concerning the problem of reference articulated in early American postmodernism. Addressing a series of novels published throughout the

⁶³ Edward Albee, 'Which Theatre is the Absurd One?' in *New York Times*, (February 25, 1962), accessed on 4 August, 2016, <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/08/15/specials/albee-absurd.html?mcubz=0>>

⁶⁴ Quoted in Tracy Daugherty, *Hiding Man: A Biography of Donald Barthelme*, (St Martin's Press: New York, 2009) p. 201

⁶⁵ See Irving Howe, 'Mass Culture and Postmodern Fiction,' in *Partisan Review* (Summer, 1959)

⁶⁶ Leslie Fiedler, *Cross the Border, Close the Gap*, (Stein and Day: New York, 1972)

⁶⁷ Ihab Hassan, *Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*, (Ohio State University Press: Columbus, 1988), p. 86

60s, Harris designates the ‘American absurd’ as a category describing the world as having been overcome with fiction. In particular, Harris argues, novels of American absurdity address the author of literary fiction’s incapacity ‘to portray absurdity effectively in a world which already accepts absurdity as a basic premise.’⁶⁸ Here, Harris draws heavily from Philip Roth’s warning in the 1961 essay ‘Writing American Fiction,’ regarding ‘the actuality’ that is ‘continually outdoing our talents.’⁶⁹ While Roth focuses on the increasingly mediated terrain of American public life, exemplified in the wake of the first televised presidential debate, an acceleration of unreality proceeding with the 1963 Kennedy assassination⁷⁰ and the spectacle of the first televised war in Vietnam contribute to the problem of reference upheld in American postmodern fiction. As such, if Beckett’s works were rendered antagonistic to American conservative mores in the 1950s then the increasing ‘unreality’ of the American terrain into the following decade ostensibly aligns with a world locked, as Malone states, into a ‘thousand absurd postures.’ (220) During these texts, the threat of solipsism reemerges as a common motif—to the extent that, by the end of the 60s, Joyce Carol Oates offers her lament for a situation in which ‘for many years our most promising writers have lined up obediently behind Nabokov, Beckett and Borges, to file through a doorway marked THIS WAY OUT.’⁷¹ The oppositional view offered by Oates highlights a striking division in the developing aesthetics of postmodernism: between authors who interrogate the problem of representation and sequestered fictions privileging formal invention over the articulation of worldly problems. Among those responsible, she highlights the work of Beckett as falling short of this engagement.⁷² The fraught matter of Beckett’s worldliness as it relates to the postmodern will be explored in more depth in Chapter 3. In the mean-time, we will consider the theoretical ground of postmodernism along with its implications for providing models of a Beckettian legacy.

Post-modernism, Post-Beckett?

In his important study *Postmodern Fiction* (1987) Brian McHale argues that ‘nothing about this term [“postmodernist”] is *unproblematic*.’⁷³ (my italics) Offering a brief survey of the disparate claims over what it means to be a postmodern writer (from Barth’s literatures of ‘exhaustion’ and ‘replenishment,’

⁶⁸ Charles Harris, *Contemporary American Novelists of the Absurd*, (College and University Press: New Haven, 1971), p. 19

⁶⁹ Quoted in Charles Harris, *Contemporary American Novelists of the Absurd*, (College and University Press: New Haven, 1971), p. 18

⁷⁰ Larry McCaffrey notably marks the assassination as the event in which postmodernism was ‘ushered in—at least in the United States—since that was the day that symbolically signaled the end of a certain kind of optimism and naiveté in our collective unconsciousness.’ Larry McCaffrey, *Postmodern Fiction: A Bio-Bibliographical Guide*, (Greenwood: New York, 1986), p. xii

⁷¹ Joyce Carol Oates, ‘Whose Side Are You On?’ in *New York Times*, (4 June, 1972), accessed on 14 August 2015, <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/09/21/reviews/oates-side.html?mcubz=0>>

⁷² *Ibid.*, ‘As for Beckett, yes, he is brilliant, yes, as Chekhov is brilliant, but he is lazy beyond any of Chekhov’s inert characters: He has not bothered to force his imaginative vision into the world, where it might be finally experienced.’

⁷³ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, (Methuen: New York, 1977), p. 3

to Lyotard's 'postmodern condition'), McHale signals the inevitable difficulty for postmodernism to stand as a coherent program in its own right—let alone a movement rooted to a certain place, or of a necessarily American inclination. It is the unsatisfactory nature of the term that John Barth identifies, quipping that postmodernism's 'anti-climactic' quality emerges from its 'feebly following a very hard act to follow.'⁷⁴ Simply naming what it is not, this adds to a further critical problem; this is voiced by Steven Connor, ventriloquizing Helmet Lethen, in which 'the postmodern situation created the possibility to see modernism as a closed and rather rigid entity. If one wants to deconstruct, one has to homogenize one's subject first so that it becomes deconstructible.'⁷⁵ Necessarily positing a relationship with modernism, assumptions of an immanent 'enemy'⁷⁶ reveal a troublesome kernel which postmodernism is somehow forever exceeding and unable to exorcise. It is, thus, that the postmodern has so forcefully withheld definition in place of a vigorous assertion of belatedness, a situation *since* or *after*. Indeed, it is the prefix 'post,' McHale avers, that 'has most bothered people' about the term: 'if "modern" means "pertaining to the present," then "post-modern" can only mean "pertaining to the future," and in that case what could postmodernist fiction be except fiction that has not yet been written?'⁷⁷

At this point we might return to the question Beckett's corpus—in particular, the critical body that has built behind the conception of the author as inhabiting a zone of transit, dramatizing an uncanny moment *between* the modern and the postmodern canon. It is within this space that one is apt to find generative tensions concerning the legacy of Beckett's Janus-faced work. In this regard, critics have argued for a third approach to the modern-postmodern binary, the most popular of which is a view of Beckett as an exemplary late modernist.⁷⁸ Citing Beckett's oft-quoted German letter to Axel Kaun, H. Porter Abbott argues of Beckett's essentially belated commitment to modernism, signalling the author's interrogation of the modernist ironies of Joyce and Stein.⁷⁹ Furthermore, in an attempt to historicise this transitional phase, Fredric Jameson names Beckett, alongside Vladimir Nabakov, Charles Olson, and Louis Zukovsky, as authors 'who had the misfortune to span two eras and the luck to find a time capsule

⁷⁴ Quoted in Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, (Methuen: New York, 1977), p. 3

⁷⁵ Quoted in Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*, (Blackwell: London, 1997) p. 113

⁷⁶ Here I am using Hassan's term. This is articulated as part of the critic's first 'conceptual problem' regarding postmodernism: 'The word postmodernism sounds not only awkward, uncouth; it evokes what it wishes to surpass or suppress, modernism itself. The term thus contains its enemy within, as the terms romanticism and classicism, baroque and rococo, do not.' Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*, (Ohio State University Press: Columbus, 1987), p. 87

⁷⁷ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, (Methuen: New York, 1977), p. 7

⁷⁸ This category is introduced by Alan Wilde who argues that 'late modernism interposes a space of transition, a necessary bridge between more spacious and self-conscious experimental movements.' Quoted in Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars*, (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1999), p. 11

⁷⁹ See H. Porter Abbott, 'Late Modernism: Samuel Beckett and the Art of the Oeuvre,' in *Around the Absurd: Essays on Modern and Post-modern Drama*, ed. Enoch Brater and Ruby Cohn, (University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 1990), p. 73-96

of isolation or exile in which to spin out unseasonable forms.⁸⁰ These arguments of ‘lateness’ translate onto Beckett’s texts themselves, frequently considered as dramatizing the internment of the grand modernist projects of aesthetic autonomy and mastery. Neither leaving the domain of modernism nor marking a clean entrance into the postmodern, we are reminded once again of Watt’s intractable ‘approaches’ and ‘separations.’ For McHale, Beckett straddles this divide, bridging the epistemological dominant of modernism and the ontological focus of the postmodern.⁸¹ Attempting a narrative of ‘historical consequentiality,’⁸² McHale significantly identifies ‘the transition from modernist to postmodernist poetics in the course of his [Beckett’s] trilogy of novels of the early 1950s.’ Beginning with the ontological blurring of Moran and Molloy where ‘we might say, modernist poetics begins to *hemorrhage*, to leak away,’⁸³ one arrives at the *The Unnamable* in which Beckett’s text is caught up ‘constructing, revising, deconstructing, abolishing, and reconstructing his characters [...] and their worlds, apparently at will.’⁸⁴ In this way, Beckett disrupts the clear dichotomy of a postmodernism concerned with the post-cognitive project of world-building and a modernism troubled by the vagaries of interpretation. In other words, if there is nothing ‘unproblematic’ about the postmodern, then Beckett’s works serve as a prime case study for that which remains uneasy and ill-defined about postmodernism as a catch-all term. For this reason, McHale reserves the term ‘limit modernist,’ bringing Beckett into implicit union with Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* (1962) and Carlos Fuentes’ *Change of Skin* (1967). Nevertheless, the question remains as to how this transitory, interstitial quality insinuates into the terrain of the post-Beckett. It is here that we might find inspiration for what will henceforward be described as a *bequest* on Beckett’s part—traceable to processes at work in the author’s corpus, while denoting a means by which he is received in the field of the postmodern.

So far, we have touched on the ‘unseasonable’ character of Beckett marking neither an ending nor a fresh beginning against the modernism-postmodern binary. As evidenced by *The Unnamable*, Beckett’s texts have a proclivity for existence at the ‘threshold’—speaking both before ‘my story,’ which is also, at once, ‘done already.’ (474) From here, certain difficulties around the potential legacy building of writers after Beckett will be addressed, unsettled by virtue of works which are paradoxically un-ended and yet to arrive. On this topic, Peter Boxall provides one of the most acute and engaging accounts of the 20th Century inheritances of Beckett’s writing in 2009’s *Since Beckett: Writing in the Wake of Modernism*. In particular, Boxall’s study is perceptive in arguing that ‘one of the most significant of Beckett’s legacies

⁸⁰ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Verso: London, 1991), p. 305

⁸¹ McHale elaborates on ‘typical’ modernist questions: ‘What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?’ And postmodern: ‘What is a world?; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?’ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, (Methuen: New York, 1977), p. 12

⁸² Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, (Methuen: New York, 1977), p. 8

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 13

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14

[...] is a conception of legacy itself.⁸⁵ This is clarified in his opening remarks, concerning the author's writing as embodying 'at once a poetics of exhaustion, and a poetics of persistence.'⁸⁶ Perhaps more than any other contemporary critic of Beckett's works, Boxall remains attuned to the uniquely problematical aspects of Beckett's legacy, a bequest that is coded in the Beckettian text's dual directedness. For Boxall, this is epitomized in the final words of 1953's *The Unnamable*: 'You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on.' In this light, one might read the second person 'you' as a sly challenge to the author writing after Beckett. Impelled to exceed the literary dead end represented by *The Unnamable*, one must also reckon with the Beckettian text's capacity to 'go on' regardless. As such, Boxall argues, 'any attempt to understand or to inherit Samuel Beckett's legacy has to reckon at the outset with this contradiction between a writing which continues to go on, and a writing which is unable to go on.'⁸⁷ The impasse staged in Beckett's work, between a moment of ending and regeneration, will be a vital component in rethinking Beckett's legacy over the course of this thesis, including explicit and implicit conversations with Beckettian tropes enumerated hereafter.

Simultaneously ending and going on, such a reading of Beckett's textual legacies troubles the foundational chronology upheld in narratives of literary succession. To this end, Boxall's influential reading follows in a lineage of critical accounts regarding the unique temporality posited in Beckett's prose and theatrical texts. In a significant essay on Beckett's curious relation to the postmodern, Russell Smith argues that Beckettian time, governed by the logic of ending, nonetheless embodies a converse tendency towards regeneration and plenitude. This double-bind elicits 'simultaneously a longing to end and an imperative to go on [...] By ending repeatedly, they fail to end definitively.'⁸⁸ As such, Smith acknowledges the tense relationship between Beckettian temporality and glaciated postmodern timelessness. Defined largely by Fredric Jameson's epochal 'crisis of historicity,' Smith points to an obstinacy in the Beckettian text, a continued stirring in the heart of Jameson's historical impasse. Where Smith instead chooses to ally Beckett with the sublime temporalities offered by Jean-Francois Lyotard,⁸⁹ this project will instead ally more closely with the strategy employed by Boxall who, conceiving of a mode of passage prefigured in Beckett's writing, establishes an untimely pocket of influence that radically insinuates into the fabric of post-Beckett authors. At the same time, Boxall is critical of a prevailing reading of Beckett as an author stripped of history, insulated in imaginary cylinders, rotundas

⁸⁵ Peter Boxall, *Since Beckett: Contemporary Writing in the Wake of Modernism*, (Continuum: New York, 2009), p. 16

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Russell Smith, 'Beckett's Endlessness: Rewriting Modernity and the Postmodern Sublime,' *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 14, After Beckett, (2004), p. 405

⁸⁹ In particular, Lyotard's famous inversion of modernism and postmodernism, grounded in the French theorist's statement that postmodernism 'is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant.' Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (Les Editions de Minuit: Paris, 1979), p. 79

or the solipsistic entrapment of narrative 'in a head.' In response, he identifies the 'stuttering tendency for time to slow down' in Beckett's work, 'to enter into a kind of slow arrested duration, that characterizes the persistence of Beckett's writing, its singular capacity to live on after the conditions that allow it to come into being have passed away.'⁹⁰ As such, the temporality of Beckett and his status amid the ambiguous markers of the modern and postmodern is experienced as a moment held in abeyance, a prolonged terminus that itself impinges on the postmodern stasis of history. In this regard, it is worth acknowledging the indebtedness of Boxall's reading to the fraught historicism of Theodor Adorno's seminal work 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*.' Marking a significant attempt at historicising the 'organised meaninglessness'⁹¹ of Beckett's play, Adorno's reading provides the ground for Boxall's subsequent account of writing after Beckett. Crucially, for Adorno, Beckett's *Endgame* performs the drying up of the historical, an inability after the Second World War⁹² to conceive of historical time. For this reason, Beckett's play stands as the ideal aesthetic sepulchre for a critical modernism, locating traces of its historical obsolescence through an extreme formal self-consciousness. While Boxall's Beckett is inflected by the historical lens of Adorno, he nonetheless exceeds the German theorist's materialist diagnosis of historical stasis, revivifying Beckett through the dilatory potential of his slow time. As Clov remarks in *Endgame*, despite the inertia of the 'corpsed' (106) world in which they find themselves, 'something is taking its course.' (107) In this manner, the retrenchment of Adorno's modernist poetics, for Boxall, is transformed through the conduit of Beckett's open-ended (an appropriately Beckettian double bind) works, allowing a residuum of the transformative modernism of Joyce and Proust to achieve a kind of posthumous persistence.

It is in this spirit, for Boxall, that Beckett keeps 'the pale ghost of modernism alive,'⁹³ extending its wake into the temporal uncertainties of the postmodern. To this extent, the author resists the fantasy of a clean break between epochs, but rather bespeaks an internal split within the fabric of postmodernism. At this point, we will briefly introduce two instructive bequests, for whom Beckett's influence will be developed later in this thesis. In particular, Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo— named by David Cowart as the 'mythic cousins of American postmodernism'⁹⁴—offer productive avenues for a conception of Beckett's work as representing an internal difficulty, a literary problem, over American postmodern fiction. Perhaps fittingly, given the dissenting nature of Beckett's legacy explored so far, both authors

⁹⁰ Peter Boxall, *Since Beckett: Contemporary Writing in the Wake of Modernism*, (Continuum: New York, 2009), p. 2

⁹¹ Theodor Adorno, 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*,' in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. by Brian O'Connor, (John Wiley & Sons: Hoboken, 2000), p. 322

⁹² 'In *Endgame* a historical moment is revealed [...] After the Second World War everything is destroyed, even resurrected culture, without knowing it; humanity vegetates along, crawling, after events which even the survivors cannot really survive, on a pile of ruins which even renders futile self-reflection of one's own battered state.' Theodor Adorno, 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*,' in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. by Brian O'Connor, (John Wiley & Sons: Hoboken, 2000), p. 323

⁹³ Peter Boxall, *Since Beckett: Contemporary Writing in the Wake of Modernism*, (Continuum: New York, 2009), p. 8

⁹⁴ David Cowart, *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language*, (University of Georgia Press: Athens, 2002), p. 7

demonstrate a maximalist tendency towards packed narrative structures. This clashes with the abiding view of Beckett's 'lessness' and the deathly composure of the author's later works. Indeed, where Beckett's *The Unnamable* identifies as a 'wordless thing in an empty space,' (336) the tenor of Pynchon's narratives requires one (as the author testifies in one of the many songs, blasting throughout his novels) to 'jettison all of those problems,/and keep it hysterically loud.' (*Gravity's Rainbow*, 470) Nevertheless, like Beckett, Pynchon's work, for McHale, initially emerges out of an interstitial 'limit modernism' where we see the epistemological modus of modernist poetics 'develop a hemorrhage, not yet fatal but dangerous.'⁹⁵ In McHale's example, this transition is traceable to the author's debut novel *V* (1963), in which the conspiratorial minded Herbert Stencil practices a 'forcible dislocation of personality into a past he doesn't remember and has no right in.' (58) Filling the lacunae left by the uncertain death of his father Sidney Stencil, Stencil the younger embellishes the elder's journals with what the author scathingly describes as 'impersonation and dream.' (63) Searching for information into the mysterious 'V,' Stencil's quest intersects with historical moments of crisis, in Cairo, Florence, South-West Africa and during the Axis bombing of the Island of Malta. In this way, Pynchon's novel orbit around moments of historical liminality, spanning the century, providing a catalogue of its salient possibilities as well as its notable injustices. As we will see, this trope is significantly illustrated in the pre-Potsdam European Zone of *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), marking a decentred habitus of 'great frontierless streaming.' (549) A quintessential example of the inexhaustible in postmodern writing, the vast heteroglossic maze at the heart of Pynchon's novel also presents a significant obstacle to the standard practice of literary *reading*. 'In fated acceleration, red-shifting, fleeing the Center,' (519) the post-war Zone—in addition to Stencil's troublesome journals—frames the vanguard of literary experiment as an encounter with hermeneutic uncertainty.

As such, it is through the lens of reading that Beckett emerges as a productive textual interlocutor for Pynchon. Remarking on the significant experience reading the debut issue of the *Evergreen Review*, (an issue book-ended by Beckett's works) Chapter 2 will present the possibility of a Beckettian resonance in Pynchon's profuse works. Siphoned through the chaotic fabric of Rosset's periodical, it will be argued that Beckett's intractable presence troubles the expansionist, playful and kinetic works representing the review's Beat inflected avant-garde. In the figure of Pynchon, these tendencies are inherited and worked out in novels ideally attuned to categories of hybridity and ambiguity. Moreover, published throughout the 60s and 70s, the motif of inheritance emerges as a distinct thematic investment in Pynchon's early texts of readerly difficulty. During the most famous of these novels, Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) unpacks the estate of distant lover Pierce Inverarity, leading to evidence of the mysterious 'Trystero'—a postal conspiracy expanding out into a web of paranoid connections. These include cigarettes made of human charcoal, a Jacobean play, a neo-reactionary group, and by the end of

⁹⁵ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, (Methuen: New York, 1977), p. 21

the novel, it appears, America itself. Above all, the indelible ‘muted post-horn’ of the underground W.A.S.T.E (‘We Await Silent Trystero’s Empire’) system, encountered by Oedipa, shines a light on the question of legacy as it is represented in Pynchon’s text. Through its deferral, the revelation of legacy in Pynchon is one of both figurative and literal ‘waste’—through the energy lost to searching, and what the author, in a later novel, would describe as ‘the tickwise passage of time in one direction only and no going back.’ (*Against the Day*, 514) In this way, Pynchon provides a tentative counter-model to the temporal suspension Boxall imputes to Beckett. Rather, Beckett and Pynchon meet as twin authors of the ‘entropic,’⁹⁶ demonstrating a mutual concern for the irrevocable inscription of loss and failure in the inevitable passage of time. A thermodynamic measure of unavailable energy for work in a closed system, the presence of entropy in the authors’ respective poetics will be a constitutive aspect of Chapter 2. Through a parallel investment in the metaphor of Maxwell’s Demon, both Beckett and Pynchon equate the figure of entropy with the poles of order, disorder and a fraught hermeneutic process. Nevertheless, where Beckett’s fictions are drenched in what Moran describes as ‘the inertia of things,’ (134) Pynchon unpacks the modalities of recoverability amid a world running ‘afoul of the inanimate.’ (270) In this manner, John P. Harrington asserts the metaphorical resonance of entropy over both author’s works—a generative reading precisely because of their ‘dramatic contrasts.’⁹⁷

Marking a silent passage through the channel of the *Evergreen Review*, the model of Beckettian resonance employed in relation to Pynchon’s works, is nevertheless grounded in the overview of Beckett’s persistence provided in Chapter 1. Emerging at the precipice of the American 60s, the Grove review arises as a parallel force in the sphere of American letters: advertising Pynchon’s works, and mirroring many of the countercultural concerns of the American author. At the same time, the *Evergreen Review* serves a committed vehicle for Beckett in the U.S., bringing his works into proximity with a nascent wave of American postmodernism. By using Rosset’s term of ‘nontogtherness’ to describe Beckett’s relation to his fellow writers, one finds a key precedent for the tension and oppositional flavour of Beckett’s place within Pynchon’s fictional schema. Given the models of legacy at stake, Beckett’s works, thus, appear oblique to modes of aesthetic similarity and difference that frequently govern the question of inheritance. Nor do they, in this case, rest easily in the quasi-Freudian psychodrama enumerated by Harold Bloom’s competitive ‘swerve.’ A closer approximation to the problematics of legacy might come in Julia Kristeva’s concept of ‘abjection,’ as that which is simultaneously lost and yet disturbs the constituted body. In this metaphor, one might argue of the Beckettian bequest as that which ‘looms,’ a precursor who ‘lies there, quite close, but [...] cannot be

⁹⁶ See David Porush, ‘Cybernetic Fiction and Postmodern Science,’ in *New Literary History*, Vol. 20, No. 2, (Winter, 1989), p. 373-396

⁹⁷ John P. Harrington, ‘Pynchon, Beckett and Entropy: Uses of Metaphor,’ in *The Missouri Review*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (Summer 1982), p. 129

assimilated.⁹⁸ Indeed, throughout Chapter 2, one finds that in spite of their many excesses, a strange substancelessness is nonetheless perceptible in Pynchon's writing—an emptiness that expresses itself most clearly in the figure of the author himself. Largely unknown and unseen (discounting a handful of photos from the author's navy years), the absence of any written or recorded interviews is compounded by the author's well-known aversion to publicity. On this topic, Tony Tanner remarks, 'even the eremitic Samuel Beckett is comparatively more known, more seen.'⁹⁹ In this regard, Boxall refers to the 'profuse emptiness'¹⁰⁰ frequently overlooked concerning Beckett's 20th Century legacies. Reframing Adorno's historically mediated view of Beckett's work and its grounding in the ruins of post-war Europe, Beckett's bequest instead comes to resonate with Jameson's description of 'something grim and impending within the polluted sunshine of the shopping mall—some older, European-style sense of doom and crisis.'¹⁰¹ In this manner, we find ourselves reading Beckett both within and against the 'empty blue sky' (*The Crying of Lot 49*, 100) illustrated in Pynchon's work. Indeed, in the altogether distant world of post-war American writing—a country largely insulated from many of the horrors inflicted on the European continent during the Second World War—this distance necessarily impacts upon the passage of Beckett's work as one more productively conceived as an afterimage, a structured absence.

The impossibility of Beckett's writing within the contemporary American sphere is restated by Don DeLillo who represents the key figure of Chapter 3. Like Pynchon, DeLillo responds to the post-war reality of a vastly expanded media landscape, apprehending the modes of thanatos and violence inscribed within the structures of American-led technology and progress. In particular, 1972's *End Zone* exploits the mythos of American football as a closed system in which 'madness' nonetheless 'leaks out' (4). Throughout the novel, protagonist Gary Harkness exemplifies an ascetic impulse that runs throughout DeLillo's corpus, investing in 'simplicity, repetition, solitude, starkness, discipline upon discipline.' (30) The figure of the singular man, alienated from his milieu, appears as one of the overarching motifs of DeLillo's works—interrogating the vulnerable place of Pynchon-esque (and Beckettian) absence in postmodern America. At once insulated and affecting the world, DeLillo's protagonists—described in the 1988 novel *Libra* as 'Men in small rooms. Men reading and waiting, struggling with secret and feverish ideas' (41)—interrogate the possibility of living outside the 'rush of endless streaming images' (*Mao II*, 158) by which the postmodern is increasingly defined. Against the postmodern entropics of Pynchon's reader unfriendly texts, DeLillo serves as an author for whom the postmodern reemerges as a significant cultural form, symptomatic of American global empire. At this notable intersection, Boxall points to Beckett's works as presenting suitable counter-texts for DeLillo,

⁹⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (Columbia University Press: New York, 1982), p.1

⁹⁹ Tony Tanner, *Thomas Pynchon*, (Methuen: London, 1982), p. 20

¹⁰⁰ Peter Boxall, "'There's No Lack of Void": Waste and Abundance in Beckett and DeLillo,' in *SubStance*, Vol. 37, No. 2, (2008), p. 62

¹⁰¹ Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno: Or, the Persistence of the Dialectic*, (Verso: London, 1990), p. 248

staging 'the end of an entire range of cultural and literary possibilities.'¹⁰² At the same time, Boxall reaffirms the aforementioned model of Beckett's legacy as one that paradoxically expresses itself in termination. As Beckett writes in *Molloy*, the author's work retreats before 'a world at end, in spite of appearances.' (39) In this way, DeLillo argues, building on the discourse of finality about Beckett's work, the author stands as 'the last writer whose work extends into the world.'¹⁰³ The uncertain success of Beckett as an author whose work 'extends' into a form of oblique worldliness will be unpacked at length in Chapter 3. Nevertheless, writing at the historical limit, Boxall points to Beckett's exhaustive and regenerative texts as offering a renewed possibility in DeLillo's narratives of historical endedness—'stirring from the field of the possible.' ('Three Dialogues,' 139) Embedded in this situation are the tensions with which our discussion began, measuring the difficulties of the postmodern against the speculative temporality of the post-Beckett. Indeed, this notion of Beckett's finality is echoed by DeLillo 1991's *Mao II* in which the author frames Beckett's presence in the field of culture as 'the last writer to shape the way we think and see.' (157) Mirroring Anthony Cronin's famous claim of Beckett as 'the last modernist,'¹⁰⁴ the degree to which the author's works represent the end of the line, or apprehend a new stylistic mode in the face of ending, is recast in the tension between modernist transformation and postmodern glaciation staged in DeLillo's writing. As such, throughout Chapter 3, the younger author will perform a partial reclamation of the disruptive countercultural possibilities through which Beckett is tendentially filtered in *Evergreen Review*. At the same time, by marking his bequest as a moment of finality in the text, DeLillo, like Pynchon, registers Beckett's ongoing presence as a textual problem in the fabric of his works. The transition of Beckett's flight into the U.S. will also be filtered through the development of a critical theory of global American hegemony. Thus, through parallel changes in DeLillo's fiction towards sparseness and spatial abstraction, Beckett's bequest finally overlaps with the increasingly diffuse boundaries of American fiction and influence.

Overture: The Problem of Beckett in Postmodern American Fiction

Despite its exclusion from the epicentre of scholarship on Beckett, the author's relation to the postmodern remains unsettled ground. As we have seen, 'the modernist/postmodernist turf war,' as H. Porter Abbot memorably describes it, results in a conception of Beckett as a 'categorical rift, giving the lie to categories.'¹⁰⁵ As such, it will be argued that the uncertain extent of Beckett's modernism or postmodernism present certain theoretical difficulties in framing the question of the author's 20th Century influence. This is particularly potent concerning Beckett's relationship with the literary wing of

¹⁰² Peter Boxall, *Since Beckett: Contemporary Writing in the Wake of Modernism*, (Continuum: New York, 2009), p. 2

¹⁰³ Gary Adelman, 'Beckett's Readers: A Commentary and Symposium,' *Michigan Quarterly Review*, (Vol. 53, No. 1: Winter, 2004), accessed 3 December 2015, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?cc=mqr;c=mqr;c=mqrarchive;idno=act2080.0043.108;rgn=main;view=text;xc=1;g=mqrg>>

¹⁰⁴ Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, (HarperCollins: Glasgow, 1996)

¹⁰⁵ H. Porter Abbot, *Beckett Writing Beckett*, (Cornell University Press: New York), p. 23

American postmodernism. As one of its chief stylists, Donald Barthelme points to Beckett as a significant 'problem' for his own works. While acknowledging his overwhelming influence, Barthelme also admits to writing 'in opposition to Beckett.'¹⁰⁶ The precise meaning of this dynamic is left open by Barthelme; nevertheless, the association of Beckett and literary 'problems' is one that—as we will see—endures through Barthelme's criticism, fiction and interviews. It is this 'problem'—in which efforts to overcome Beckett are mingled with his apparent persistence—that we will explore more broadly in relation to Beckett's legacy in post-modern American fiction. This will be informed, in part, through structural tensions posited in Beckett's own works between the end of the literary and its capacity to go on in spite. Perhaps more powerfully than any other critic, Peter Boxall has articulated the tensions shaping Beckett's textual legacies, pointing to the 'blankly aporetic' conclusion of *The Unnamable* as a 'signature moment.'¹⁰⁷ As such, the 'problem' of Beckettian legacy over American postmodern writing is prefigured in Beckett's own efforts to surpass the post-war *Trilogy*, in which one follows the disintegration of subject and voice into a 'churn of words.' (*The Unnamable*, 353)

These distempers between a writer at an end, while simultaneously going on, register particularly strongly in the experimental fiction of the U.S. in the 1960s and 70s. Embodying what Jerome Klinkowitz describes as a 'radical disruption'¹⁰⁸ of play, metafiction, absurdity, and black humour, the key progenitors of American postmodernism stage a proliferation of responses to Beckett's 'old aporetics.' (*Malone Dies*, 205) Presenting an alternative to the hegemonic realism of American fiction after the Second World War, the passage of Beckett into the shared lexicon of postmodern writing is exemplified by Ronald Sukenick in his epochal short story, 'The Death of the Novel.' (1969) In the author's wildly fragmented text, Beckett's influence manifests as both a 'medium' of expression and, significantly, an obstacle to composition: 'We're at a séance. You the participants, I the medium in face of the total blank nothingness of uncreation./I can't go on./ Go on.' (53) Channelling the final words of *The Unnamable*, Beckett's influence is thematised, by Sukenick, as a contradictory moment of possibility and occlusion. Elsewhere, Boxall highlights the later postmodernism of Don DeLillo in which Beckett withholds the final embers of transformative modernist aesthetics. More generally, Boxall writes, 'this orthodox view of Beckett as an end point, as the writer who presides over the death of the 20th Century has had to accommodate an opposite sense that Beckett is becoming a well spring, a fertile breeding ground.' Against the immediate criti-fictional¹⁰⁹ milieu of American postmodernism as a late 60's literary phenomenon, this article will focus on the 'fertile' vision emerging from the 'problem' of Beckett

¹⁰⁶ 'Donald Barthelme Interviewed by George Plimpton', 1984, video, Kuht Houston Productions, viewed 3 January, 2016, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjokr7W1ixk>>

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Jerome Klinkowitz, *Literary Disruptions: The Making of a Post-Contemporary American Fiction*, (University of Illinois Press: Chicago, 1981), p. 2

¹⁰⁹ Here I am drawing on Raymond Federman's term—See Raymond Federman, *Critifiction: Postmodern Essays*, (State University of New York Press: Albany, 1993)

articulated by Barthelme. Providing a variation on this encounter, the fiction and criticism of John Barth will also offer a striking opportunity for rethinking Beckett's postmodern legacy as one informed by the predicament as to how one 'goes on' from the inextricable 'silence' of literature glimpsed in Beckett.

Situated between the Academy and the literary avant-garde,¹¹⁰ Barth and Barthelme both contribute to the theoretical rubric of postmodern fiction. As such, one finds Beckett's pivotal bequest rooted in the salient aesthetic debates of the period. Notably, Barth's seminal essay, 'The Literature of Exhaustion,' (first published in 1967 in *The Atlantic*) provides a template for postmodern writing as the re-orchestration of exhausted material.¹¹¹ Beset by the 'used-upness of certain forms, the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities,'¹¹² Barth's manifesto for a literature of revivifying irony, foregrounds the question of legacy as a constitutive aspect of the writer's aesthetic self-consciousness. 'The question,' Barth writes, 'seems to me to be how to succeed not even Joyce and Kafka, but those who succeeded Joyce and Kafka.'¹¹³ Enumerating a trinity of authors responsive to the 'exhaustion' of new methods of storytelling, Barth singles out Beckett, Borges and Nabokov as evidence of a 'technically up-to-date'¹¹⁴ literature. In this regard, the author suggestively mirrors the poetics of exhaustion in Boxall's model of Beckettian legacy (perhaps more than any other author Barth contributes to postmodernism as a phenomenon divided by the twin poles of exhaustion and replenishment¹¹⁵). At the same time, Barth observes a forked path in his explication of literary antecedents. Where Borges is upheld as an exemplar of 'aesthetic victory' in which the author confronts 'an intellectual dead end and employs it against itself,'¹¹⁶ Beckett is admonished for his work having turned 'virtually mute.'¹¹⁷ It is this unsettling silence that offers the vehicle through which Barth understands Beckett's influence upon his own work. In response, Barth characterises his own baroque postmodern constructions as a 'shore against that silence Beckett speaks of.'¹¹⁸ One finds the same fascination for Beckettian 'silence' in the stories of the *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968) volume, published a year after the 1967 essay, indicating a working through of its core ideas. The story 'Title' will figure as a case study for this problematic relation, in which the

¹¹⁰ From 1965-1973, Barth would teach at University at Buffalo, SUNY, while Barthelme served at the University of Houston from 1983 until his death in 1989

¹¹¹ Describing this 'famous essay,' Gerhard Hoffmann in his compendious study of postmodern American fiction describes the aesthetic argument as a 'transfer of the used-up, the conventional and the fixed into ever new, non-stereotyped, and flexible imaginary configurations.'—Gerhard Hoffman, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: Concepts and Strategies of Postmodern American Fiction*, (Rodopi: New York, 2005), p. 61

¹¹² John Barth, 'The Literature of Exhaustion' in *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction*, (Johns Hopkins University Press: London, 1988), p. 64

¹¹³ John Barth, 'The Literature of Exhaustion' in *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction*, (Johns Hopkins University Press: London, 1988), p. 67

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p, 67

¹¹⁵ See John Barth's 1980 revision 'The Literature of Replenishment,' published in *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction*, (Johns Hopkins University Press: London, 1988), p. 193-207

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69-70

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 68

¹¹⁸ 'A Dialogue: John Barth and John Hawkes', in *Anything Can Happen* ed. by Tom LeClair and Larry McCaffery (University of Illinois Press: Chicago, 1998), p. 15

'Silence. General anesthesia. Self-extinction' (110) synonymous with Beckett, is included in the fabric of the text even as it is rejected as unviable.

Barth's treatment of Beckett resonates with the 'problem' posed by Donald Barthelme. In both cases, Beckett's influence is torn between moments of aesthetic resistance and complicity. Nevertheless, as Deidre Bair notes in her 1978 biography on Beckett, Barthelme holds his own small place in the publishing history of Beckett in the U.S. As co-founder of the New York periodical *Fiction*, Barthelme was the first to publish Beckett's short text 'The Lost Ones' (much to the chagrin of the author's long-time American publisher Barney Rosset).¹¹⁹ At the same time, Barthelme subtly diverges from the model of literary influence set up by Barth. Where Beckett unsettles Barth's theory of 'exhaustion,' Barthelme situates his own fiction as being 'overwhelmed by Beckett.'¹²⁰ This is evidenced, in part, through Barthelme's faith in the short story form embodying something of the 'lessness' of Beckett's works. Sometimes misleadingly taken as a mission statement of the younger author's eccentric works, one short text nevertheless features the clarion call, 'fragments are the only form I trust.' ('See the Moon, *Sixty Stories*, 91) Furthermore, in the essay 'Not Knowing' (1987) Barthelme reimagines the role of the literary artist as one defined by 'problems,' quoting heavily from Beckett's 'Three Dialogues' with art critic George Duthuit: "Nothing to paint and nothing to paint with," [...] The more serious the artist, the more problems he takes into account and the more considerations limit his possible initiatives.'¹²¹ Where Barthelme echoes Beckett's dictum of the artist as a 'non-knower, a non-caner,'¹²² Barthelme finds a creative freedom in the liberation from notions of 'what' and 'how,' affirming 'prohibitions, roads that may not be taken.'¹²³ Through this gesture, Barthelme's 'problem' comes to engage with the aesthetic impasse pronounced by Beckett himself—through which there is simultaneously 'nothing to express' and an 'obligation' to continue. This significantly departs from the 'shore' erected by Barth against Beckettian silence. While Barthelme conceives of his writing 'in opposition to Beckett,' the affirmation of 'prohibition' is reframed as a positive stimulus revivifying the literary act. A prime example of this can be found in the short story 'Nothing: A Preliminary Account,' (1973) where Beckett's Krapp shows up amongst the various informational effluvia constituting the text. While reaching for an adequate summation of 'nothing' through examples of what nothing is not, the narrator performs a particularly stark version of the disavowal of Beckett while carrying his influence forward in the space of the text. In this way, Beckett represents both an obstacle and a writerly model for Barthelme. Unlike the

¹¹⁹ Deidre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, (Simon & Schuster: New York, 1978), p. 523

¹²⁰ 'Interview with Charles Ruas and Judith Sherman' in *Not Knowing: The Essays and Interviews of Donald Barthelme* (Counterpoint: Berkeley, 1997), p. 226

¹²¹ Donald Barthelme, 'Not Knowing', in *Not Knowing: The Essays and Interviews of Donald Barthelme* (Counterpoint: Berkeley, 1997), p. 4

¹²² James Knowlson, *Images of Beckett*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2003), p. 30

¹²³ Donald Barthelme, 'Not Knowing', in *Not Knowing: The Essays and Interviews of Donald Barthelme* (Counterpoint: Berkeley, 1997), p. 12

threat of Beckettian 'silence' in Barth, Beckett offers a renewal of possibility as a significant 'problem' over Barthelme's works.

The extent to which the modalities of Beckett's legacy can be traced to tensions between ending and going on dramatized in his work will now be briefly considered. In particular, we will explore the ways in which Beckett's works paradoxically take upon themselves a notion of writing *after Beckett*. This will inform the ways in which the author persists into the postmodern works of Barth and Barthelme—where the eradication of Beckettian traces also sees him continue to exert a profound influence. The short fragments comprising the *Texts for Nothing* (1955) will be treated as among the most striking examples of Beckett's writing in this regard. Composed in the wake of *The Unnamable*, the *Texts* exemplify Beckett's tendency towards a suspended form of narrativity, haunted by the impasse of its predecessor and yet continuing to 'go on' regardless. As Beckett would state in an oft-cited interview, the final passages of *The Unnamable*—notably the admission 'I can't go on. I'll go on.'—result 'in a situation I can't extricate myself from.'¹²⁴ In this sense, the short fragments comprising the *Texts for Nothing* take as their immediate situation the aesthetic dilemma posed in the earlier novel. 'Text 1' begins: Suddenly, no, at last, long last, I couldn't any more, I couldn't go on. Someone said, You can't stay here. I couldn't stay there and I couldn't go on' (100). In this disarming opening, the speaker both responds to and mimics the voice of *The Unnamable*. The disavowal 'I couldn't,' followed by the indeterminate pronoun 'someone,' places the first of Beckett's fragmentary texts firmly in remembrance of the previous novel's impasse, reflecting on its implications over possibility to 'say nothing again.' (124) At the same time, the *Texts* repeat the contradictory expression of 'nothing to express' epitomised in *The Unnamable*. In this way, the speaker of the first 'Text' avers, 'Nothing like breathing your last to put new life in you,' (103) thereby exceeding while hearkening back to its precursor text. Where 'the search to put an end to things enables the discourse to continue,' (*The Unnamable*, 229) so Beckett's writing appears locked in a gesture leading both forwards and backwards.

Whether the *Texts for Nothing* mark a pivotal moment of aesthetic development or merely the 'grisly afterbirth'¹²⁵ of *The Unnamable*, the internalisation of disavowed material within the work blurs the distinction between successive and ancestral texts. As we will see, this tension presents unique difficulties for writers – particularly postmodern American writers— seeking to follow or supersede the precedent set by Beckett. Throughout the 13 brief 'Texts,' references to the gamut of Beckett's 'moribunds'—'Pozzo,' 'Vulgar Molloy' and 'Common Malone'—coalesce with images anticipating future

¹²⁴ Israel Shenker, 'An Interview with Beckett' (1956), in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, ed. By Raymond Federman and Lawrence Graver, (Routledge: London 1979), p.149

¹²⁵ Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist* (London: Flamingo, 1996), p. 402

texts such as *How it is* (1961), as well as glimpses of spectral autobiography, common to the late prose. On top of this, these pieces appear curiously attuned to the transitory process between texts; the voice of 'Text 6' inquires, 'how are the intervals filled between these apparitions?' (122) while simultaneously betraying the spectral passage between different markers of Beckett's career. For S.E. Gontarski, the marginality and incompleteness of Beckett's post-Unnamable prose, present a progression by the author into 'fragments...shards, aperçus of a continuous unfolding narrative.'¹²⁶ No longer stories or nouvelles but mere texts. In this regard, these 'fragments,' Gontarski states, dramatise a 'major leap from modernism to postmodernism'— a transformation characterised by the subject's migration from 'interior voices to exterior voices, from internality to externality.'¹²⁷ Gontarski's designation of a voice of externality in the *Texts* is striking, suggestive of a move beyond the nominally localised utterances of *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, or the 'bottled' voice of *The Unnamable* (anticipating 1957's *Endgame*). Rather, the *Texts* represent a sequence of interstitial voices, whose oblique relation to any 'body' or 'head' ('no flesh anywhere' (113)) also distances them from the 'stories' voiced in the earlier novels. In place of character or telos, glimpsed throughout the *Trilogy*, we get a postmodern distillation of Beckett's 'universe become provisional.'¹²⁸ As the deracinated voice of 'Text 5' declares: 'it's a game, it's getting to be a game.' (120)

Significantly, the postmodern voice that Gontarski imputes to the *Texts* reconnects Beckett's works back to the question of his fraught legacies. Defined by its 'externality,' the narrative voice of Beckett's *Texts* is one necessarily engaged in the question of inheritance. Voiced by 'someone,' these pieces offer a powerful insight into the tonalities of writing after Beckett. For some critics, however, Beckett's works have long flirted with elements of postmodernism. Jeffrey Nealon's controversial study foregrounds the textual 'game' of *Waiting for Godot* and its embodiment of the notion of postmodern 'free play.' Here, Nealon opposes the 'modern language games'¹²⁹ played by Gogo and Didi—still in thrall to 'the grand Narrative of *Godot*,' even in its suspension— to Lucky's torrent of language: 'a transgression and disruption of the limits of the ultimate meta-game—Western metaphysics, the language game of truth.'¹³⁰ Drawing rather loosely on the precepts of Wittgenstein, Nealon's critical touchstones are otherwise typically postmodern: Lyotard, Derrida, Jameson. In this manner, Beckett's perceived postmodernism is articulated through the lens of post-structuralist theory.¹³¹ This is echoed in a number

¹²⁶ S.E. Gontarski, 'From Unabandoned Works: Samuel Beckett's Short Prose', in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989* (Grove Press: New York, 1995), p.xxv

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Samuel Beckett, 'The Capital of the Ruins', in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989* (Grove Press: New York, 1995), p. 278

¹²⁹ Jeffrey Nealon, 'Samuel Beckett and the Postmodern: Language Games, Play and *Waiting for Godot*' in *Waiting for Godot and Endgame: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. by Steven Connor (Macmillan: London, 1992), p. 46

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47

¹³¹ Andrew Kennedy teases out a number of productive difficulties and fallacies in Nealon's argument. Primarily, the preunderstanding 'that there is some kind of total or final cleavage between the modernist "metaphysical

of influential theoretical monographs by Beckett scholars (see Connor, Tresize, Brienza, Dowd). At the same time, these models for a postmodern Beckett do not necessarily account for the complexities of his legacy, or for what Boxall describes as Beckett's 'endless failure to end.'¹³² Richard Begam in his perceptive 1996 study *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity* offers a welcome variation, in this regard, reading Beckett's proximity with the postmodern without establishing an essential critical identity over Beckett's prose. Retaining a productive distance from the category of the postmodern, Begam puts forward a 'différential conception of postmodernism [...] implicated in what it opposes [...] marked by an internal split or différance.'¹³³ This framework may take us a bit further along Gontarski's 'leap,' concerning the convolved 'games' of the *Texts for Nothing*.

As we have seen, Beckett's *Texts* provide an instructive frame of reference for thinking about writing in the author's wake. By identifying the categories of externality and internal-opposition, in relation to Beckett's narrators, the possibility of going on is defined through an obstructive encounter with a literary precursor. Moving forward, the productive tension of Beckett's writing also resonates in 'Text 6,' along the poles of silence and sound. This reinforces the punning significance of Beckett's title: the 'Text for Nothing' also redolent of the measure for nothing, a musical silence used by conductors to set the orchestra's tempo. Bemoaning a 'pell-mell babel of silence and words,' (125) Beckett's narrator—a 'thing' that 'has no end'—finds significance in the 'silence that is not silence.' Appealing to the postmodern turn in the literature of the sixties, Ihab Hassan, long considered a liminal figure in the passage from modernism to postmodernism, marks Beckett's 'literature of silence' as a 'force of evasion, or absence,' but where 'the same force, moving up to the trunk and foliage, bursts into a great babel of noises.'¹³⁴ Well-established in the study of Beckett's relation to the postmodern, Hassan's precondition of 'silence' out of which an 'opposite' fiction (using Begam's term), both 'loud' and 'various'¹³⁵ emerges, brings us closer to the postmodern legacies that underwrite this article. Defined against a non-referential 'nothingness,' the play of signifiers in Beckett's short texts continue into a kind of posthumous after life—manifest in what Boxall describes as a 'nothingness that has significance and value.'¹³⁶ As such, the author's internally divided fictions allow Beckett to inhabit a space that is both one of ending and renewal.

rigidities" [...] and the postmodern celebrators of multiplicity' and that 'Beckett can thus be placed simply in the second camp.' Andrew Kennedy, 'Beckett and the Modern/Postmodern Debate' in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, Vol 6, (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 258

¹³² Peter Boxall, *Since Beckett: Contemporary Writing in the Wake of Modernism* (Continuum: New York, 2009), p. 8

¹³³ Richard Begam, *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1996), p. 6

¹³⁴ Ihab Hassan, 'The Literature of Silence', *The Postmodern Turn* (Ohio State University Press: Cleveland, 1988), p.3

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.11

¹³⁶ Peter Boxall, 'Nothing of Value: Reading Beckett's Negativity', in *Beckett and Nothing*, ed. by Danuela Caselli (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2010), p. 29

Beckett's paradoxical journey towards a 'babel' of sound through a process of progressive diminishment, shapes the digestion of a Beckettian influence in John Barth. Like Beckett, Barth's works frequently situate themselves at a point of slippage between noise and silence. As we will see, for Barth this evocation of a literary nothingness is intimately tied with Beckett's difficult gifts. Illustrating the complexities of Barth's style, Beverly Gross cites the apparently endless narrative circumlocutions and virtuoso flourishes, deliberately set up in order to 'proclaim inanity.'¹³⁷ For critics, both sympathetic and hostile, this amounts to Barth's 'core' of 'nihilism.'¹³⁸ In this regard, 1960's *The Sot Weed Factor* (an elaborate trans-Atlantic picaresque, whose literary influences ostensibly reside amongst 18th C pioneers of the novel rather than Barth's contemporaries) is a prime example of the dialogue between fictional abundance and nothingness staged in Barth's fiction. For example, the author's 'apology' to the reader concludes the 800 page epic with 'three blue-chip replies arranged in order of decreasing relevancy.' (782) While such overt garrulousness appears distant from the spare world of Beckett, a thick layer of self-deprecating irony, and the often paralysing convolutions of Barth's games (the 'Publisher's Disclaimer' introducing the narrative of *Giles Goat Boy*) also place his fiction oblique to what Beckett describes as the 'apotheosis' of the word represented by Joyce. This crossroads, between Beckett and Joyce, is reflected in Barth's characterisation of the 'via negativa' of Beckett—against the 'via affirmativa'¹³⁹ of Joyce's ebullient prose. These contradictory aesthetic strains significantly inform the logic of inheritance paramount for Barth. It is within this nexus, that we perceive Beckett's influence as a cipher of irreversible retreat and silence—orchestrated into the fabric of Barth's more overtly Joycean fictions.

The concrete problems this poses for Barth and the efficacy of the post-war avant-garde, will, now be further explored. Indeed, for Barth, the terminal condition of the writer's task in mid-century American fiction comes heavily to bear on the possibility of future literary avant-gardes. As we have already seen, Barth's influential essay, 'The Literature of Exhaustion,' offers an early invocation of postmodern literary aesthetics, trapped between a desiccated realist tradition and the impossibility of conceiving new writerly styles. Read against the 'apocalyptic ambience'¹⁴⁰ of the 1960's, Barth highlights Beckett and Borges as providing archetypal fictions of creative impasse:

One of the modern things about these two writers is that in an age of ultimacies and "final solutions"—at least *felt* ultimacies, in everything from weaponry to theology, the celebrated

¹³⁷ Beverly Gross, 'The Anti-Novels of John Barth', in *Chicago Review*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Nov., 1968), p. 99

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 95

¹³⁹ John Barth, 'A Few Words About Minimalism' in *The New York Times*, (December 28th, 1986)

¹⁴⁰ John Barth, 'The Literature of Exhaustion' in *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction*, (Johns Hopkins University Press: London, 1988), p. 72

dehumanization of society, and the history of the novel—their work in separate ways reflects and deals with ultimacy.¹⁴¹

Establishing the paradoxical ground for a ‘modern’ text, Barth draws a connection between the social upheavals of the period and various examples of ‘ultimacy.’ Describing both the historical foundation as well as the literary innovations of his privileged writers, the preponderance of ‘felt ultimacies,’ Barth continues, require new methods of storytelling through which the privation of stories and ways of telling them are transposed into fiction’s ‘material and means.’¹⁴² It is easy to draw on comparable metaphors levelled at Beckett as not only the product but a commentator on the kind of cultural benightedness that Barth invokes: Hugh Kenner writes of Beckett’s ‘atom age prose’¹⁴³ while, decades later M.M. Brewer identifies a ‘nuclear telos’¹⁴⁴ at work in the novels of the *Trilogy*. Nevertheless, such a legacy poses a number of striking problems: how does one adequately receive these writers whose mutual trait is one of ‘ultimacy?’ Further still, where does Beckett—whose reputation, as we have already established, is synonymous with a text of self-extinction—belong in this nexus?

For Barth, the answer is in a newly ironised attitude towards the orchestration and arrangement of prior material: creating ‘novels which imitate the form of the Novel, by an author who imitates the role of Author.’¹⁴⁵ This leads to a point of divergence between Beckett and Borges,¹⁴⁶ providing separate maps to the problem of ‘exhaustion.’ Drawing on ‘Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote’ as a case study, Barth upholds Borges (whose fictional writer sets out to re-create the actual *Don Quixote* in its 17th C Spanish) as the archetype of the author who makes imaginative writing out of the failure to conceive of original texts. However, Barth is altogether more ambivalent concerning Beckett’s parallel legacy. Instead, he sketches a ‘theoretical course’ for Beckett’s writing, in which:

Language after all consists of silence as well as sound, and mime is still communication...but by the language of action. But the language of action consists of rest as well as movement, and so in the context of Beckett’s progress, immobile, silent figures still aren’t altogether ultimate. How about an empty, silent stage, then, or blank pages [...] But dramatic communication consists of the absence as well as the presence of actors...and so even that would be imperfectly ultimate in Beckett’s case. Nothing at all, then, I suppose; but Nothingness is necessarily and inextricably

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 71

¹⁴³ Hugh Kenner, ‘Beckett Translating Beckett: *Comment C’est*’ in *Delos: A Journal of Translation*, 5(1970) p. 195

¹⁴⁴ Maria Minich Brewer, ‘Samuel Beckett: Postmodern Narrative and Nuclear Telos’ in *boundary 2*, Vol. 15, No. 1/2 (Autumn, 1986 – Winter, 1987), p. 29

¹⁴⁵ John Barth, ‘The Literature of Exhaustion’ in *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction*, (Johns Hopkins University Press: London, 1988), p. 72

¹⁴⁶ Anthony Cordingley suggestively cites Barth’s essay as a seminal text regarding this literary dyad, pointing out that Beckett and Borges have ‘often been coupled as exemplars and pioneers of postmodern fiction.’ Anthony Cordingley, ‘Keeping their Distance: Beckett and Borges Writing After Joyce’, in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd’hui*, Vol. 14 (2003), p. 131

the background against which Being, et cetera. For Beckett at this point in his career, to cease to create altogether would be fairly meaningful: his crowning work, his “last word.” What a convenient corner to paint yourself into! “And now I shall finish,” the valet Arsene says in *Watt*, “and you will hear my voice no more.” Only the silence *Molloy* speaks of, “of which the universe is made.”

After which, I add on behalf of the rest of us, it might be conceivable to rediscover validly the artifices of language and literature—such far-out notions as grammar, punctuation...even characterization. Even *plot!*—if one goes about it in the right way, aware of what one’s predecessors have been up to.¹⁴⁷

In this example, Barth expresses hostility to the complete dismantling of ‘artifices of languages and literature.’ This is unsurprising given the increasingly a-syntactical breakdown of Beckett’s fiction during the 1960’s. Nevertheless, Barth’s criticism of Beckett’s valediction to form is, here, not above criticism.¹⁴⁸ The status of an ‘imperfect ultimacy’ is particularly ambiguous— particularly in light of Barth’s praise for Borges’ own ‘imperfect’ endings. Nevertheless, this ‘theoretical course’ concerning Beckett is one to which Barth frequently returns as a case study. The marriage of Beckett’s writing to the idea of ‘silence’ and the injunction to speak one’s ‘last words’—along with the invocation of *Molloy*— is echoed in a telling exchange between Barth and novelist John Hawkes at the University of Cincinnati. In the following excerpt Hawkes addresses that which he considers ‘frightening’ about Barth’s otherwise effusive works:

Hawkes: For me John Barth’s fiction has the enormous power it does partly because it is always positing nothingness, because it is so ‘created’ that it also insists on that which is vacant...out of the nothingness that is our context you create the fabulous. Do you want to talk about that?

Barth: I’m going to agree with it and not talk about it. We remember Beckett: ‘that silence out of which the universe is made.’ Plot and perhaps over-ingeniousness are a shore against that silence Beckett speaks of.¹⁴⁹

The ‘positing’ of ‘nothingness,’ as we have seen, mirrors the positive expression of ‘silence’ in Beckett’s *Texts*, obfuscating any clean opposition to Beckett under the pretence of his aesthetic dead ends. This double bind brings one back to the nature of Beckett’s simultaneously self-extinguishing and self-perpetuating text—treading a tightrope between sound and ‘silence.’ In this regard, the determined

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 68

¹⁴⁸ Here Brian McHale argues that we need to ‘look more sceptically at Barth’s choices of representative writers of exhaustion and replenishment.’ Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*, (Routledge: London, 1992), p. 554

¹⁴⁹ ‘A Dialogue: John Barth and John Hawkes’, in *Anything Can Happen* ed. by Tom LeClair and Larry McCaffery (University of Illinois Press: Chicago, 1998), p. 15

evasion on Barth's part, is telling—evidence of a Beckettian influence that is to be 'shore[d] against.' The 'apparition' of Beckett, looming over the younger author, leaves open the possibility that 'plot' and 'over-ingeniousness' are, in Eliot's parlance, a defence against the 'ruins' of Beckett's lexicon. At the same time, Beckett's disruption of Barth's 'rediscovery' of syntax and form, nonetheless raises a further question: what shape would the insistence on an ironic 'awareness' of Beckett come to take in Barth's framework?

Here one may turn to the *Lost in the Funhouse* collection: a volume of short stories that, as we have previously stated, echo many of the theoretical concerns of the 'Literature of Exhaustion' essay. Indeed, the simultaneously rich and fragile situation for literary experimentation is restated as the primary condition out of which Barth's texts emerge: 'vigorous avant-gardism in all the arts, together with dire predictions not only of the death of the novel but of the moribundity of the print medium in the electronic global village.' (viii) In this regard, the wider spectrum of Barth's output, including non-print experiments also bear mention; in particular, Beckett's Krapp haunts the proviso that 'Autobiography' be performed 'for monophonic tape and visible but silent author.' (xi) The aforementioned externality of Beckett's voices speaks to the shared sites of aesthetic conflict into which his work is drawn; for Barth, the problem of the writer writing of the 'self-composed' text reinforces the distance between the silence of the author and the inconceivable (as the post-natal metaphor is developed), autonomic text. 'I am its father' Barth writes; 'its mother is the recording machine.' (203) More striking, is a comparable set up that Beckett considered for adapting the *Texts for Nothing*:

Curtain up on speechless author (A) still or moving or alternately. Silence broken by recorded voice (V) speaking opening of text. A takes over. Breaks down. V again. A again. So on. Till text completed piecemeal. Then spoken through, more or less hesitantly, by A alone.¹⁵⁰

The disunity of voice and presence elicits what Richard W. Noland regards as an example of 'comic nihilism.'¹⁵¹ As a consequence, the text curses both the impassivity of its 'father' and the lack of control over its own medium to 'compose' itself. Nevertheless, while Beckett's formal inventiveness casts a long shadow over the resolutely experimental Barth, the confrontation with Beckettian 'silence' remains an intractable one. The story 'Title' is notable, in this regard, for its attempt 'to do something about the present mess.' (111) Throughout this brief text, the narrator pastiches Beckett's self-conscious, 'unnamable' voice; opening the story Barth's sentence announces: 'Beginning: in the middle, past the middle, nearer three-quarters done, waiting for the end. Consider how dreadful so far...' (105) In this example, Barth appears to draw on Sukenick's 'mediumistic' Beckett, passing into the form rather than

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in S.E. Gontarski, 'From Unabandoned Works: Samuel Beckett's Short Prose', in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989* (Grove Press: New York, 1995), p. xvi

¹⁵¹ Richard W. Noland, 'John Barth and the Novel of Comic Nihilism' in *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Autumn, 1966), p. 240

the content of expression. Furthermore, if ‘nothing is more real than nothing’ for Beckett, reproducing Democritus, Barth appends the questions: ‘can nothing be made meaningful?’; ‘What’s new? Nothing.’ (105) Indeed, for the quarrelsome narrator of ‘Title,’ the injunction is for the writer to ‘fill in the blank.’ Against this injunction, Barth’s text offers a fragmentary account of the ‘possibilities’ for writing fiction ‘in this dehuman, exhausted, ultimate adjective hour’ (107); the Borgesian line ‘to turn ultimacy against itself to make something new and valid, the essence whereof would be the impossibility of making something new’ (109) is ultimately upheld. However, this is one of four possibilities outlined over the course of the text. The first three possibilities—‘rejuvenation,’ the novelty of the ‘vigorous new,’ and the ironised statement of ‘ultimacy’—are, nevertheless, troubled by the suggestion of a ‘fourth possibility’: ‘Silence. There’s a fourth possibility, I suppose. Silence. General anesthesia. Self-extinction. Silence.’ The manner in which ‘silence’ is made to compete with the other possibilities for Barth is, in the words of Beverly Gross, a revelation of ‘temperament...and method.’¹⁵² This is finally extrapolated, by Gross, onto Barth’s earlier and more overtly maximal novels: texts which are ‘so noisy, so exuberant...and which ultimately come down to expressions of weariness, defeat and disgust.’¹⁵³

We will now explore the ‘problem’ of Beckett as declared by Donald Barthelme. The ‘problem,’ it will be argued, goes the furthest distance in framing the younger author’s textual encounter with Beckett as one of both concord and resistance. While the ‘silence’ previously bemoaned by Barth offers a view into this bequest, Barthelme is less ambivalent in treating Beckett as an immense obstacle who, nonetheless, withholds the possibility of literary renewal. This is intimated in the introduction to 2008’s collection of Barthelme’s interviews and essays: *Not Knowing*. Penned coincidentally by John Barth, he recalls ‘an apprentice writer in [his] Johns Hopkins workshop’ asking a visiting Barthelme “‘how come you write the way you do?’” Without missing a beat, Donald replied, “‘Because Samuel Beckett was already writing the way *he* does.”’¹⁵⁴ In this sense, the legacy of Beckett, for Barthelme, is redoubled as one locked between affirmation and disavowal. Firstly, however, it worth noting a number of motifs that situate Barthelme recognisably in the wake of Beckett’s terminal fictions. Like Beckett, and Barth in turn, a compulsion to accommodate the ‘mess’ of language—or render surfaces ‘messy’¹⁵⁵—impels Barthelme’s fascination for the incorporation of a cultural sediment: cliché, jargon and what he refers to in the 1967 novel *Snow White* as ‘dreck.’ At the same time, Barthelme (like Barth) also demonstrates an idiosyncratic attitude to

¹⁵² Beverly Gross, ‘The Anti-Novels of John Barth’, in *Chicago Review*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Nov., 1968), p.108

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ John Barth, ‘Introduction’, in *Not Knowing: The Essays and Interviews of Donald Barthelme* (Counterpoint: Berkeley, 1997), p. xi

¹⁵⁵ Donald Barthelme, ‘Not Knowing’, in *Not Knowing: The Essays and Interviews of Donald Barthelme* (Counterpoint: Berkeley, 1997), p. 21

literary influence and inheritance.¹⁵⁶ For Barthelme, there resides an anxiety of influence even in the supplanting of dead fathers. This is memorably portrayed in the 1975 novel of the same name—*The Dead Father*. Throughout the text, the patricidal act fails to entirely exorcise the father's name and its influence over his progeny. 'Having it both ways is a thing I like,' (15) the undead father quips as he is dragged by his children—'ahead [of them]'¹⁵⁷—to his burial spot, over the course of the novel. As David Gates states Beckett is similarly upheld as a 'dead father'¹⁵⁸ of the period, illuminating the terminal influence exerted by his works.

Largely in response to these difficulties, Barthelme stresses the importance of literary problems as a vivifying stimulus for postmodern American literature. In particular, Barthelme writes, 'if I am slightly more sanguine [...] about postmodernism, however dubious about the term itself [...] it's because I locate it in relation to a series of problems, and feel that the problems are durable ones.'¹⁵⁹ At the same time, Barthelme stresses the status of Beckett as the 'largest problem for me.'¹⁶⁰ This places the legacy of Beckett in a significant, albeit oblique relation to the development of Barthelme's literary postmodernism. The specific nature of a Beckettian 'problem,' is neatly espoused in a televised interview with *Paris Review* editor George Plimpton. Questioned about the unique style of his writing, Barthelme responds:

In some measure... I think it was a reaction to Beckett's publication in the early 50s... although he'd been writing of course since the 30s...so when I read Beckett I said this is beautiful, wonderful stuff which does not mean that you can then sit down and write like Beckett because you have to write in some sense in opposition to Beckett, as Beckett wrote in opposition to Joyce. Beckett's test was to do something that was not Joyce; and my test on a much lower level of course is to do something that is not Beckett.

Like Barth, Barthelme establishes a precedent for the category of the writerly 'problem' through Beckett's difficulty surpassing the literary achievements of Joyce. In this regard, he teasingly suggests of an equivalence between not-writing-Joyce and not-writing-Beckett. The notion of 'opposition' and the opposite is an intriguing aspect of Barthelme's response to Plimpton, resonating with Begam's account of a self-divided postmodernism. In turn, the writerly opposite is a category that impacts Beckett's prose fiction, on the path to the 'revelation' of a counter-narrative to Joyce. Up to the *Nouvelles* and the

¹⁵⁶ See 'Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel,' 'The Death of Edward Lear' and 'At the Tolstoy Museum' for further examples of this aspect of Barthelme's writing

¹⁵⁷ 'An Interview with Donald Barthelme', in *Anything Can Happen* ed. by Tom LeClair and Larry McCaffery (University of Illinois Press: Chicago, 1998), p. 41

¹⁵⁸ David Gates, 'Introduction', in *Donald Barthelme: Sixty Stories*, (Penguin: London, 1982), p.xviii

¹⁵⁹ Donald Barthelme, 'Not Knowing', in *Not Knowing: The Essays and Interviews of Donald Barthelme* (Counterpoint: Berkeley, 1997), p.14

¹⁶⁰ 'Interview with Charles Ruas and Judith Sherman' in *Not Knowing: The Essays and Interviews of Donald Barthelme* (Counterpoint: Berkeley, 1997), p. 227

notable shift to writing in French, it is easy to see a working through of Joyce's influence. In the collection *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934) and in *Murphy* (1938), the linguistic acrobatics of Joyce are formally employed as both 'medium' and bridge to other writerly possibilities. As such, the embedded 'Belacqua fantasy' (*Murphy*, 48), for example, serves as an antithesis to the proliferative Joycean elements worked through in Beckett's early work. Ultimately, Beckett's critical response, in opposition to the mastery exhibited by Joyce, leads his own fiction towards 'not knowing and not-perceiving, the whole world of incompleteness.'¹⁶¹ This does not escape Barthelme, particularly in the aforementioned essay 'Not Knowing.' Appropriating Beckett's category, Barthelme once again voices the necessity of literary problems. The need for problems, arguing with the limits and possibilities of one's medium, is thus paired with a Beckettian obstinacy: "Nothing to paint and nothing to paint with..." As such, where Barth 'shore[s]' against the 'silence' of Beckett's fiction as a key component of his legacy, Barthelme appeals to the tensions grounded Beckett's own aesthetic pronouncements. In this way, Beckett is situated in relation to Barthelme's postmodern practice as the prototypical 'non-knower'; 'We can quarrel with the world constructively,' Barthelme writes, and 'no one alive has quarrelled with the world more extensively or splendidly than Beckett.'¹⁶²

Far from Barth's poetics of 'exhaustion,' Barthelme reimagines the process of writing as an open field of spontaneous composition. Underpinned by the author's 'not knowing,' the text is reinvigorated through its encounter with problems and literary obstacles. In this regard, Barthelme states: 'writing is a process of dealing with not-knowing, a *forcing* of what and how.'¹⁶³ Unlike Beckett, however, Barthelme's critical writing is convinced of the deeply affirmative nature of this literary experiment, resulting in 'the combinatorial agility of words, the exponential generation of meaning.'¹⁶⁴ This ludic energy is evidenced in Barthelme's short fiction: particularly, the short story 'Sentence.' (1970) In Barthelme's text, a self-composing sentence, 'moving at a certain pace down the page,' retains a strain of knockabout comedy as it 'falls out of the mind,' 'smudges' any semblance of plot, and passes 'through the mind more or less.' (110) Like Barth's 'Title,' passages integrate Beckett's *The Unnamable* as a likely medium; in place of Beckett's 'vice-existers,' (317) the sentence accumulates 'riders.' (112) While Beckett's 'unnamable' voice is expressive of the automotive text in pursuit of its own ending, the architecture of Barthelme's sentence, though a 'disappointment,' becomes 'a structure to be treasured for its weakness, as opposed to the strength of stones.' (118)

A further point of divergence is announced through Barthelme's insistence on literary 'style.' This contrasts with Beckett's well-documented endeavour to write consciously 'without style.' For

¹⁶¹ Quoted by 'Lawrence Shainberg 'Exorcising Beckett', in *The Paris Review*, No. 104 (Fall, 1987)

¹⁶² Donald Barthelme, 'Not Knowing', in *Not Knowing: The Essays and Interviews of Donald Barthelme* (Counterpoint: Berkeley, 1997), p. 24

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21

Barthelme, however, style is an instrumental factor of his innovatory practice. In this manner, 'the question of what becomes a question of how.'¹⁶⁵ This is complicated, however, as the author concludes his appeal towards style by ventriloquizing Beckett:

Style enables us to speak, to imagine again. Beckett speaks of "the long sonata of the dead"—where on earth did the word *sonata* come from, imposing as it does an orderly, even exalted design upon the most disorderly, distressing phenomenon known to us? The fact is not challenged, but understood, momentarily, in a new way. It's our good fortune to be able to imagine alternative realities, other possibilities.¹⁶⁶

In an act of critical mis-location, Barthelme places Beckett into the process and problematics of style in postmodern writing. Providing an injunction to 'imagine again,' Beckett presents both a literary impasse while demonstrating 'alternative realities, other possibilities.' If 'style enables us to speak' then, Barthelme argues, it is through the frame of literary style that the lexicon of disorder and distress, from which Beckett's works are initially drawn, can be made 'orderly' thereafter. This tension between the author's intractability and Barthelme's imposition' of an order over Beckett's postmodern legacy is echoed in an interview in which he reiterates the Beckettian 'problem.' 'Because of the enormous pull of his style,' he continues, 'I am certainly not the only writer who has been enormously influenced by Beckett and thus wants to stay at arm's length.'¹⁶⁷

The short text 'Nothing: A Preliminary Account' is an instructive example of the author experimenting with form whilst integrating a sufficient ironic distance from Beckett's influence—keeping him 'at arm's length.' Similar to many of Barthelme's texts, 'Nothing...' takes as its point of departure a central innovatory conceit: in this case, the story as list. Feigning to define 'nothing' by virtue of what it is not, the text echoes Barthelme's model for not-writing Beckett. Amid Barthelme's apophatic affirmations, Beckett's Krapp makes a cameo appearance, along with what Francis Gillen aptly describes as the 'canned happenings, sensations, reactions, and general noise'¹⁶⁸ of Barthelme's writing. Among the abortive examples given, Barthelme writes: 'death is not nothing and the cheering sections of consciousness [...] are not nothing nor are holders of the contrary view ("Burning to be gone," says Beckett's Krapp, into his Sony).' (242) In this way, Beckett is smuggled into the text, according to what the writer is *not* intending to accomplish. And yet, while 'only the list' the narrator proclaims, 'can present us with nothing itself, pinned, finally,' (241) the existence of the list must be acceded to:

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24

¹⁶⁷ 'Interview with Charles Ruas and Judith Sherman' in *Not Knowing: The Essays and Interviews of Donald Barthelme* (Counterpoint: Berkeley, 1997), p. 227

¹⁶⁸ Francis Gillen, 'Donald Barthelme's City: A Guide', *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 18 (1972), p. 37.

...and even if we were able, with much labor to exhaust the possibilities, get it all inscribed, name everything nothing is not, down to the last rogue atom, the one that rolled behind the door, and had thoughtfully included ourselves, the makers of the list, on the list—the list itself would remain. Who's got a match? (241)

Exhausting the possibilities for what 'nothing' is not, the list is, nevertheless, made to persist. Falling short of its object, Barthelme's giddy textual performance nevertheless affirms the narrative inadequacy that 'keeps us waiting (forever).' (241) 'How joyous' the narrator concludes, that 'try as we may, we cannot do other than fail and fail absolutely and that the task will remain always before us [...]' (242) By taking on Beckett's 'contrary view,' the rebuttal—'not nothing'—humorously propels Barthelme's short text forward, continuing, as it does, to harbour a Beckettian desire: 'Burning to be gone.' As such, the admission that 'we cannot do other than fail' serves as both a vigorous renewal and a riposte to Beckett's obligation to 'fail as no other dare fail.'¹⁶⁹ In spite of itself, Barthelme's text satisfies the demands of the opposite, to write 'against' Beckett's terminal bequest. Thus, Barthelme's writing reframes the impact of Beckett's work away from the stultifying silence glimpsed by Barth, and towards the possibility of a dynamic literary praxis of 'not knowing.'

As we have seen, John Barth and Donald Barthelme engage with Beckett as a variously problematic influence over their own literary projects. In a striking turn, both authors draw from Beckett's trove of images, representing narrative ending and 'not knowing,' to articulate his difficult relationship to their works. Where Barth offers, in part, a flight away from the literary 'silence' epitomised by Beckett, Barthelme treats Beckett as an imaginary interlocutor—both exemplary and adversarial—'in opposition' to whom he finds creative freedom. The persistence of Beckett beyond the postmodern in American letters, speaks to the durability of the legacies enumerated here. Consciously indebted to the works of Barth and Barthelme—as well as Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo (to be explored later in Chapters 2 and 3)—David Foster Wallace offers a body of post-postmodern writing in which the 'problem' of Beckett takes on new shades of meaning. We will return to Wallace in the conclusion to this thesis. Nevertheless, both within and beyond the sphere of American postmodernism, Beckett's paradoxical legacies continue to serve as a wellspring of creative possibility.

¹⁶⁹ Samuel Beckett and George Duthuit, 'Three Dialogues', in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (Calder: London, 1983), p. 145

Chapter 1: Beckett and the *Evergreen Review*: 'Nontogtherness' in the Counterculture

From the late 60s, a discourse around Beckett's problematic gifts for the possibility of a revived U.S. literary avant-garde takes shape. In the previous 'Overture' we began to address the nature of this problem, denoting a Beckettian bequest locked between tendencies of exhaustion and persistence. It is, however, important to establish a material ground for Beckett's ambivalent passage into the 'mish mash'¹⁷⁰ of American culture up to this point. As such, this chapter will pay closer attention to the dissemination of Beckett in the U.S. and the various—occasionally clumsy—channels through which he is brought into step with emergent waves of innovative American writing. For this reason, we will momentarily turn away from discussions staged by postmodern authors, to the instrumental role of Barney Rosset's Grove Press in the publication and promotion of Beckett's works.

The Grove in-house journal *Evergreen Review*¹⁷¹ offers a valuable insight into the diverse ecosystem into which Beckett is deracinated. Published between 1957 and 1973, the *E.R.* presents a shifting viewpoint of Rosset's literary proclivities—at once preceding and overlapping with the postmodern efflorescence of experimental fiction. Published alongside his Parisian compatriots Ionesco and Alain Robbe-Grillet, Beckett would also find himself in peculiar consort with the leading lights of the Beat movement, the new poetic schools of Donald Allen's 'postmoderns,'¹⁷² as well as early output by postmodern authors. Across 16 issues, Beckett's appearances in the *E.R.*, thus, bring the author into an asymptotic relation with the parallel course of American writing—an ambivalence grounded in Rosset's description of Beckett's 'nontogtherness.' As we will see over the course of this chapter, Rosset's admission of Beckett's simultaneous distance and proximity is dramatized throughout the many issues of *E.R.*, constituting a polymorphous fabric of erotica, European late modernism, Americana, and countercultural polemic. At the same time, the invaluable scholarship of Loren Glass and S.E. Gontarski (as well as autobiographical writings by Grove editor Richard Seaver and Rosset himself), provide a clear picture of Beckett as a guiding presence in Rosset's diverse enterprise. In his famously unfinished memoir, Rosset describes the English translation of *Waiting for Godot* (released by Grove Press in 1954) as 'the most important single book we were ever to publish.'¹⁷³

Beckett's indisputable importance over the Grove Press (and Rosset personally) inevitably passes into the pages of *E.R.* Appearing in both its debut publication (No. 1, 1957) as well as the final issue of its initial run (No. 96, Spring 1973), the Grove review covers the entire spectrum of Beckett's production:

¹⁷⁰ Here I am using Barney Rosset's description in a letter to Beckett on the publication of his works (BR to SB, October 25th 1955)—Barney Rosset, *Dear Mr. Beckett: Letters from the Publisher: The Samuel Beckett File*, (Opus: New York, 2017), p. 91

¹⁷¹ Hereafter referred to as *E.R.*, for the sake of brevity and to distinguish from the 'Evergreen Books' imprint.

¹⁷² Strikingly, used as the title for a revised edition (1982) of Allen's seminal *The New American Poetry: 1945-1960* originally published by Grove Press in 1960.

¹⁷³ Barney Rosset, *Rosset: My Life in Publishing and How I Fought Censorship*, (O/R: New York, 2016), p. 156

featuring drama, short stories, poetry, a novel fragment, as well as experiments for radio and television. For this reason, the *E.R* stands as an occasionally overlooked but instrumental channel into the peculiarities of Beckett's American lineage, encompassing both marginalia as well significant publications in the Beckettian corpus (e.g. the international debut of *Krapp's Last Tape* in No. 5, Summer 1958). Nevertheless, by privileging the *E.R* in this chapter, a special insight can be gleaned into the simultaneously strange and familiar company that Beckett's texts would keep therein. Highlighted, as a result, is what Rosset denotes as the 'strangeness' and 'incomprehensible'¹⁷⁴ qualities of Beckett's writing. This same combination of occlusion and indubitable value marks 'the problem' previously articulated in conjunction with Beckett and the postmodern stylings of Barth and Barthelme. As such, the stable of authors published by Rosset—and loosely arranged in the carnivalesque spread of *E.R*—will provide a general backdrop for the more individualised responses to Beckett's work that we will explore in subsequent chapters. Passing through the tremulous years of the 1960s, up to the exhaustion of countercultural possibility (heavily documented by the review at the end of the decade), the framing of Beckett in the *E.R* as an author of 'nontogtherness' (while indisputably a part of its shared vocabulary) marks a foundational relationship in the eventual encounter between Beckett and postmodern writing.

Much of this chapter will, hereby, consist of close analyses of Beckett's 16 appearances in the *E.R*; progressing chronologically from 1957's No. 1 to 1973's No. 96. However, given the fact that this thesis also concerns the development of an American literary tendency, Beckett's appearances will be equally weighted against the literary milieu of each issue. While this programmatic method of enquiry is unique to the chapter, close readings of each issue open onto a wider array of categories that will inflect Beckett's postmodern legacy—in particular, the bequest with Thomas Pynchon examined in chapter 2. In this manner, the motifs explored in relation to the *E.R*, such as the valency of reading, the possibility of the political avant-garde and the relationship between the 'high seriousness' of modernism against an ironic and breezy postmodernism, undergird the terms of engagement taken up in subsequent chapters.

Before we begin to unpack the individual issues of *E.R*, we will firstly introduce the periodical and Grove Press as instrumental actors in the ecosystem of American letters in the post-war U.S. Central to the operations of both, Barney Rosset emerges as an unlikely disseminator of Beckett's works, located firmly in the burgeoning hip scene of New York's Greenwich Village community. As Gontarski notes, the extroverted and combative Rosset made for an improbable supporter of the shy and cautious Irishman.¹⁷⁵ Where Rosset's high standing in the New York publishing world is depicted as having been

¹⁷⁴ Barney Rosset, *Dear Mr. Beckett: The Samuel Beckett File*, (Opus: New York, 2017), p. 222

¹⁷⁵ See S.E. Gontarski, 'Within a Budding Grove: Publishing Beckett in America,' in *A Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by S.E. Gontarski, (Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester, 2010), p. 24

sunk by the publisher's notoriously 'iron whim,'¹⁷⁶ a contrasting picture of Beckett as a man of protestant reserve and an author 'damned to fame' predominates in critical and biographical writing. As we will see, the peculiarity of this pairing is returned to on a number of occasions, throughout interviews with the American publisher. At the same time, Rosset, along with British publisher John Calder and Jerome Lindon of Les Éditions de Minuit, served as crucial nodes in the professional (and personal) network central to bringing Beckett's works to prominence in the post-war period. From their initial exchange of letters in 1953, up to the end of the author's life, the close friendship between Beckett and Rosset is well established. While Beckett's close allegiance to his publishers is well established, as Everett Frost recalls, Beckett exhibited a particular warmth towards 'my American rogue.'¹⁷⁷ On top of this, like Calder and Lindon, Rosset's vocation was undergirded by a profound sense of the political, through which he developed a dedication to the publication of theretofore unpublishable novels. Centring on three battles for the publication of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, Rosset's opposition to literary censorship became central to the identity of Grove Press as a publishing venture. Mirroring Calder's free speech advocacy in the UK, Rosset's First Amendment absolutism is reflected in an interview with the Italian interviewer Giangiacomo Feltrinelli: 'I feel that personally there hasn't been a word written or uttered that shouldn't be published, singly or in multiples.'¹⁷⁸ Redoubled by his taste for transgressive works, often depicting explicit acts of sexual deviancy, Grove Press becomes synonymous with Rosset the publisher, an 'extension'¹⁷⁹ of his various proclivities. To this end, Beckett's place as a significant Grove author, operates within an invisible field of meaning through which Rosset's enthusiasms impact the activities of the publishing house as a result.

Nevertheless, the principle focus of this chapter will be the Grove review. While it might be tempting to treat *E.R* as a para-text of Rosset's primary publishing concern, an effort will be made to read the periodical as a literary object aptly reflecting the diverse and parallel concerns of the publisher. Where David R. Shumway writes of Grove's 'postmodern mix of heterogenous political radicalism, avant-garde aesthetics, and explicit and "deviant" sexuality,'¹⁸⁰ it will also be the understanding of this chapter that *E.R* serves as the most apt illustration of the whirlwind of various forms into which Beckett is deracinated. Starting as a small 3,000-copy quarterly paperback, the review begins modestly. Sold for \$1, the *E.R* is listed alongside Grove's other paperbacks at the time, reinforcing the slippage between

¹⁷⁶ Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013), p. 5

¹⁷⁷ Quoted in *Dear Mr. Beckett – Letters from the Publisher: The Samuel Beckett File*, (Opus: New York, 2017), p. 28

¹⁷⁸ Quoted in S.E. Gontarski, 'Within a Budding Grove,' *A Companion to SB* ed by Gontarski p. 29

¹⁷⁹ 'Introduction: The Life and Times of Grove Press' in *The Grove Press Reader 1951-2001*, ed. by S.E. Gontarski (Grove Press: New York, 2001), p. xiv

¹⁸⁰ David R. Shumway, 'Countercultures,' in *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*, ed. by Brian McHale, (Cambridge University Press: Cleveland, 2016), p. 116

the periodical and Grove's main line of affordable paperbacks. However, by the end of the 1960s, *E.R* would be running at a circulation of 200,000 with over 250,000 subscribers, changing from a quarterly to a bi-monthly (No. 10, Nov-Dec 1959), and finally a monthly publication (No. 51, Feb 1968). Boosting subscribers through a highly effective marketing campaign to 'Join the Underground,' a significant overlap is cultivated between *E.R*'s mass readership and the popular counterculture of the decade—trumpeting the 'Underground Generation,' in 1966, to 'come alive!'¹⁸¹ As such, despite sharing many of the same authors with Calder in the UK, the former remains a relatively marginal figure where Rosset's reputation rises throughout the 1960s. A 'hip capitalist,'¹⁸² according to his detractors, Rosset's successes defending and promoting confrontational literature—turning many into countercultural best sellers—marks a fusion between the Francophile avant-gardism of Beckett, Grillet and Genet and the populist imperative towards access and readability. This is notably reflected in the shape and content of the *E.R*. With No. 32 (June-July, 1964), the change in format towards a full-scale (8½" x 11") glossy magazine marries avant-garde aesthetics, erotic content, and radical political commentary. Eschewing the high seriousness of the *Paris Review*, and the long standing *Partisan Review*, the *E.R* by the middle of the decade comes to more closely resemble the titillation of *Playboy*. Generating publicity from controversy (No. 32 would memorably be declared 'obscene' by the district attorney of Nassau County for its inclusion of erotic photographs), the *E.R* witnesses a breakdown between aesthetic transgression and commerce. For this reason, Loren Glass states in the definitive *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde* (2013), the popularity of the *E.R* and its advance into a commercial format lead it to become 'the premiere underground magazine of the Sixties counterculture.'¹⁸³

Moreover, developing over 16 years¹⁸⁴ *E.R* would demonstrate a surprising longevity. Through its various iterations, the Grove review would challenge T.S. Eliot's dictum that literary reviews 'should not only be little but short lived.'¹⁸⁵ In a rare interview, co-editor Donald Allen points to his initial vision of the review as a 'little anthology of interesting reading': 'more than a magazine—a kind of quarterly-sized magazine that would have a longer shelf life than the ordinary magazine.'¹⁸⁶ At the same time, the *E.R* would adopt a curious nostalgia for the heyday of modernist little magazines of the 20s and 30s. As

¹⁸¹ Quoted in Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013), p. 115

¹⁸² Barney Rosset, *Dear Mr. Beckett: Letters from the Publisher: The Samuel Beckett File*, (Opus: New York, 2017), p. 182

¹⁸³ Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013), p. 1

¹⁸⁴ Revivals of *E.R* would subsequently take place in 1984, 1998, and 2017. See 'Conclusion: Beckett "Redescending": The Bequest After Postmodernism.'

¹⁸⁵ T.S. Eliot to Karl Shapiro, (1950) quoted in Eric Bulson, *Little Magazine, World Form*, (Columbia University Press: New York, 2017)

¹⁸⁶ 'Don Allen: Grove's First Editor,' in *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 'Grove Press Number,' Vol X, No. 3, (Fall, 1990), p. 133

Grove editor and postmodern novelist Gilbert Sorrentino states, Rosset's publishing concerns successfully captured 'the spirit of a little magazine or small press.'¹⁸⁷ As we will see later in this chapter, the connection between *E.R* and the prehistory of modernist little magazines is one that haunts the review throughout its first volume. The debut issue of *E.R* (No. 1, 1957) serves as an exemplar of this nostalgic impulse. For a review that would later be sold as 'the most vigorous' American magazine and 'a new literary force,' (No. 8, Spring 1959) the publication of criticism concerning the proto-modernism of Buchner, Lawrence, as well as writing by Sartre and Micheaux reveals certain tensions in the reconfiguration of the avant-garde. Bookending the issue, it is here that Beckett also makes his debut appearance. Reflecting the same broad lack of contemporaneity, the early short story 'Dante and the Lobster' and selected poems from the *Echo's Bones* collection ostensibly refer back to a bygone age of modernist publishing. This is compounded by the linkage of 'Dante...' with its prehistory in Edward Titus' *This Quarter* (Winter 1932)—bypassing the text's subsequent publication by Chatto & Windus in the *More Pricks Than Kicks* collection (1934). As we will soon discuss, the expatriate publications *This Quarter*, as well as Eugene Jolas' *transition*, continue to impress on the tone and shape of early *E.R*. With Beckett as a central presence, Rosset's review is situated between a recidivist European modernism and a burgeoning postmodern impulse.

If Beckett retains, as Boxall states, the 'ghost' of modernism, then he also appears strangely assimilable into the American fabric of the magazine. Nevertheless, while Gontarski and Glass have provided a wealth of incisive scholarship into the relationship between Beckett and Grove Press, comparably little has been written about the author's protracted relationship with *E.R* as a distinct line of flight. In particular, the Grove review provides a useful para-history of Beckett in the U.S., traced from issue to issue. This includes forthcoming publications by Grove Press (*Endgame* (1958), *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable: Three Novels* (1959), *How it is* (1964) and *Stories and Texts for Nothing* (1967)); noteworthy performances in the U.S. (1960's *Krapp/Zoo* co-production with Edward Albee, the international debut of *Happy Days* in New York (1961), and Jessica Tandy's famous performance of *Not I* at the Lincoln Centre in 1972); also striking are citations of Beckett's work on television (the WNTA broadcast of *Godot* in 1960, as well as *Eh Joe* on WNDT-TV, 1967), bringing the Beckettian wasteland into American homes. Furthermore, as the venue for the premiere publication of *Krapp's Last Tape* in No. 5 (Summer, 1958), one cannot ignore the *E.R* as a critical component in the international dissemination of Beckett. The effort to 'pickle' (BR to SB, March 28th 1958)¹⁸⁸ Beckett's play in the *E.R*, capitalises on a period bemoaned by the author as racked by the 'ventilation of private documents' (SB

¹⁸⁷ Gilbert Sorrentino, 'The Novelist as Editor: An Interview with S.E. Gontarski,' in *The Grove Press Reader 1951-2001*, ed. by S.E. Gontarski, (Grove Press: New York, 2001), p. 102

¹⁸⁸ Barney Rosset, *Dear Mr. Beckett: Letters from the Publisher: The Samuel Beckett File*, (Opus: New York, 2017), p. 140

to BR, January 8th, 1958).¹⁸⁹ Published in between the appearance of letters concerning the off-Broadway premiere of *Endgame* (*Village Voice*, 19 March, 1958), and Alan Schneider's recollections of working with Beckett in Miami (*Chelsea Review*, Autumn, 1958), No. 5 embodies the 'getting known' lamented by Krapp. This wave of interest is echoed by Rosset who writes 'both Alan [Schneider] and my EVREV (sic) co-editor [Donald Allen] are krapping their hands in joy over Krapp.' (BR to SB, March 28th, 1958)¹⁹⁰ As such, not only does the Grove review bring Beckett into proximity with a burgeoning American counterculture—a 'seedbed'¹⁹¹ of later postmodern aesthetics—it also marks a sizeable impact over the propagation of significant Beckett works.

Nevertheless, by paying attention to the wider spectrum on offer in the *E.R.*, one finds productive difficulties that forbid any simple reading of an 'American Beckett.' In this regard, No. 5 also offers an important glimpse of the heterogeneity of which *E.R.* would become famous. In the pages of this issue one perceives an investment in late modernist writing, cultural criticism, in addition to several important manifestos of the European avant-garde and American poetics. Thus, Roland Barthes' essay on the New Novel of Alain Robbe-Grillet, precedes a reprint of Artaud's 'No More Masterpieces,' concluding the issue. These articles rub up against aesthetic pronouncements by Charles Olson ('Human Universe') and Jack Kerouac ('Essentials of Spontaneous Prose') positioning the *E.R.* within a site of trans-Atlantic debate. On top of this, the contiguity of pieces by Karl Jaspers on 'The Atom Bomb and the Future of Man,' as well as a reflection by Edgar Morin on the mythology of James Dean, find Beckett uneasily transposed into the politico-cultural centre of America in the late 50s. Advertised on the back cover of the issue alongside the Jaspers essay, the placement of *Krapp's Last Tape* in the Grove review opens onto the author's storied, but ill-defined identity as a post-nuclear playwright.¹⁹² For this reason, we will be focusing equally on the company Beckett keeps in the *E.R.* This challenges the rigid distinction between the perceived high seriousness of European modernism and the ironic playfulness of the American postmodern highlighted by Leslie Fiedler in *Cross the Border, Close the Gap* (1972). In particular, Fiedler points to the essential rejection of European modernism in the shift to the postmodern—a move from its 'arty and serious' heritage enshrined in the 'rigidities of academic avant-garde.'¹⁹³ Instead, the review's carnivalesque variety is palpable in a description of the review offered by Ken Jordan—in which 'Timothy Leary, Abbie Hoffman, and the Fugs shared pages with Kerouac, Mailer,

¹⁸⁹*The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1957-1965*, ed. by Dan Gunn, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2014), p. 92

¹⁹⁰ Barney Rosset, *Dear Mr. Beckett: Letters from the Publisher: The Samuel Beckett File*, (Opus: New York, 2017), p. 140

¹⁹¹ David R. Shumway, 'Countercultures,' in *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*, ed. by Brian McHale, (Cambridge University Press: Cleveland, 2016), p. 112

¹⁹² This topic is unpacked at greater length in Chapter 3

¹⁹³ Leslie Fiedler, *Cross the Border, Close the Gap*, (Stein and Day: New York, 1972), p. 5

Beckett, and Burroughs, and essays propounding psychedelia and Black Power.¹⁹⁴ Thus, while Beckett's *Krapp* is 'pickled' as a dispatch of European experimental drama, the *E.R* also serves as a moment of misplacement, a deracination of the author from the disillusioned modernism of post-war Paris, to the ludic postmodern fabric of the magazine. This enacts what Walter Benjamin terms the mechanical decentring of the art object through reproduction— losing its 'presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.'¹⁹⁵ The presence of Beckett, out of place, will serve as an important motif to be explored throughout this chapter.

As we have established, to read Beckett's place in the *E.R* one must also take heed of the review's more heterogeneous qualities. This will serve as an instructive glimpse into the ludic milieu in which Beckett is implanted. Of particular note is the *E.R's* fusion of European late modernism with the nascent Beat movement. As we will see, this is crucial to chapter 2 in which we will trace Beckett's bequest through the postmodern and post-Beat novels of Thomas Pynchon. This cleavage is demonstrated in the first two issues of the Grove review. As already mentioned, No. 1 offers a distinct European focus, bringing together the work of Beckett, Sartre and essays on Lawrence and Buchner. In No. 2 (1957), however, a special issue on the 'San-Francisco Scene,' celebrates the poetic vitality of emerging voices, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, in addition to proto-Beat authors, Henry Miller and Kenneth Rexroth. Unearthing what Rexroth describes as the 'disaffiliated' (15) quality of 'The San-Francisco Scene,' No. 2 would also feature the early publication of Allen Ginsberg's epoch-defining 'Howl.' For many commentators, the merging of these aesthetic poles would mark the *E.R's* 'greatest achievement'— bringing the Theatre of the Absurd together with the Beats, as 'two columns of attack forces in the effort to transform the culture.'¹⁹⁶ Implicating the tensions of Beckett's modernism within the later American avant-garde, however, Rosset reinforces Beckett's distance from the countercultural frisson of Ginsberg, Kerouac and Burroughs:

William Burroughs was a writer he particularly didn't understand. There is a famous anecdote about a meeting between Burroughs and Beckett, which took place in Maurice Girodias's restaurant. I remember sitting next to Sam, while Burroughs, who worshiped Beckett, was explaining to him how you do cut-ups. Beckett said to Bill, That's not writing, that's plumbing. Allen Ginsberg and Burroughs were very unusual in the sense that they understood that Beckett

¹⁹⁴ Ken Jordan, 'Introduction,' in *Evergreen Review Reader: 1957-1966*, (Arcade: New York, 1994), p. xi

¹⁹⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, (Schocken Books: New York, 1969), p. 3

¹⁹⁶ Ken Jordan, 'Introduction,' in *Evergreen Review Reader: 1957-1966*, (Arcade: New York, 1994), p. xi

was important at that time. They wanted him, almost desperately, to recognize them, and he just didn't seem to connect. It wasn't dislike, it was just ... nontogetherness.¹⁹⁷

In the above excerpt, Rosset astutely frames Beckett's trans-Atlantic 'connection' as a communicative break—not outright rejection, but 'nontogetherness.' This uneasy combination of connection and disconnection is also felt in Burroughs' essay on 'Beckett and Proust,' in which he recalls the same meeting at Girodias' restaurant, while addressing a subsequent encounter with Beckett in Berlin. Organised by their mutual British publisher John Calder, the two authors are once again brought together through a commercial 'intermediary.'¹⁹⁸ Along with Ginsberg and Susan Sontag, Burroughs points to a similar uneasiness in their meeting: 'Beckett was polite and articulate. It was, however, apparent to me at least that he had not the slightest interest in any of us, nor the slightest desire ever to see any of us again.'¹⁹⁹ Mirroring Beckett's put-down of the cut-up technique, Burroughs offers his own criticism of Beckett's writing as 'inhuman.'²⁰⁰ While upholding the concern for time and memory in Proust, Burroughs goes on to question the lack of verisimilitude in Beckett; 'he is perhaps the purest writer who has ever written. There is nothing there but the writing itself.'²⁰¹ Ultimately, Burroughs connects his departure from Beckett stylistically to the encounter in Berlin, asserting both geographical and aesthetic 'nontogetherness': 'Beckett closes off whole areas of experience. These areas simply don't interest him. Like our Berlin visit.'²⁰²

As a significant dyad of the avant-garde, represented in the *E.R.*, Beckett and Burroughs mark the drift between late modernism, early postmodernism and the increasingly populist identity of the review. While Beckett appears in 16 issues of the *E.R.*, Burroughs is published in 13, with the two authors brought together in No. 22 (Jan-Feb, 1962) and No. 34 (Nov-Dec, 1964). Moreover, Burroughs' debut in No. 11 (Jan-Feb, 1960) with the autobiographical 'Deposition: Testimony Concerning a Sickness,' paves the way for the publication of an excerpt from his controversial novel *Naked Lunch* a year later in No. 16 (Jan-Feb, 1961). For Loren Glass, *Naked Lunch* plays a significant role in recalibrating the 'vulgar' mode of modernism into a commercial postmodern format. 'Vulgar modernism,' as Glass states, is central to the 'transitional location of modernism in the 1960s,'²⁰³ impacting the commercial viability of transgressive literature. This category will be explored at greater length later in the chapter. Nevertheless, the controversy surrounding Burroughs' text appears at the head of three high profile

¹⁹⁷ 'Barney Rosset: The Art of Publishing, No. 2,' in *The Paris Review*, No. 145, (Winter, 1997), accessed on 14 April, 2016, <<https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1187/barney-rosset-the-art-of-publishing-no-2-barney-rosset>>

¹⁹⁸ William Burroughs, 'Beckett and Proust,' in *The Adding Machine: Selected Essays*, (Arcade: New York, 1985), p. 182

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 183

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 185

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013), p. 123

obscenity cases, financed and fought by Rosset; beginning with the publication of the unexpurgated edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1959, Rosset would spend much of the 60s defending Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, in addition to Burroughs' controversial novel. Significantly, each of the three works would go on to top the *New York Times* Bestseller List, mythologised through the *E.R.*, in which transcripts from their respective obscenity trials would be published.²⁰⁴ The degree to which the review would become synonymous with Rosset's reputation for perverse and pornographic publications was memorably visualised on the front cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* (Jan 25, 1969). In this cartoon, Rosset is depicted emerging from the sewer with scattered copies of the *E.R.* lying about the manhole; the headline reads 'dirty publications for fun and profit.'²⁰⁵ On this point, S.E. Gontarski refers to Rosset's primarily 'broad based avant-gardism,'²⁰⁶ grounded in Rosset's overarching objective to publish the unpublishable. Similarly, for Glass, the Grove project 'did not rely on any coherent theory or philosophy of the avant-garde' but 'inherited in a fundamental commitment to expanding the distribution of and access to what were understood to be avant-garde texts in the United States.'²⁰⁷ The avant-garde is, hereby, reframed as a broad expansion of discourse, underpinned by Rosset's efforts at re-assimilating the cultural outside within the boundaries of 60s capitalist culture. As the title of Glass' study suggests, it is 'the incorporation of the avant-garde' for which *E.R.* and Grove became renowned.

If Burroughs marks the transition into a commercially viable and 'vulgar' aesthetic, then Beckett's 'nontogtherness' betokens the resultant friction of avant-gardism fashioned within the commercial Grove project. It is this intractable recoil, typified in Beckett's association with Rosset's enterprise, that serves as an important iteration of what we have broadly defined as 'the problem' of Beckett in this thesis. Nevertheless, as this chapter will endeavour to prove, the binary between the withdrawing modernist and the celebratory and commodified postmodernist is far from rigid. The mutually enlightening presence of Burroughs and Beckett, for instance will be observed in No. 22 (Jan-Feb, 1962). Moreover, highlighting the two authors as 'elders'²⁰⁸ (using Maurice Girodias' description of Beckett and Burroughs) of a 'pubescent postmodernism,' Nicholas Zurbrugg traces their presence from Grove Press to the *Merlin* collective in Paris. Inspired by Sylvia Beach's publication of *Ulysses* and the radical output of Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes*, *Merlin*, established by Richard Seaver, Alexander Trocchi, Austryn Wainhouse and Christopher Logue would serve as a 'prehistory of Grove Press and the *E.R.*'²⁰⁹ While

²⁰⁴ 'Court Opinion on the Postal Ban of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*' in No. 9 (Summer, 1959), 'Miller's *Tropic* on Trial' in No. 25 (March-April, 1962), 'The Boston Trial of *Naked Lunch*' in No. 36 (June, 1965)

²⁰⁵ Quoted in

²⁰⁶ S.E. Gontarski, 'Introduction: The Life and Times of Grove Press,' in *The Grove Press Reader 1951-2001*, ed. by S.E. Gontarski, (Grove Press: New York, 2001), p. xiv

²⁰⁷ Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013), p. 12

²⁰⁸ Nicholas Zurbrugg, "'Within a Budding Grove'" Pubescent Postmodernism and the Early *Evergreen Review*, in *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 'Grove Press Number,' Vol X, No. 3, (Fall, 1990), p. 155

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 154

Seaver's later role as managing editor of *E.R* from No. 9 (Summer, 1959) marks a clear connection between the two periodicals, both Beckett and Burroughs also follow a migratory path from Girodias to Rosset in the late 50s and 60s. Financed over time by Maurice Girodias' Olympia Press, the *Merlin* group would, like Rosset, endeavour to publish controversial and often neglected texts. The backlist established by the 'Olympia/*Merlin* nexus' (including the debut publication of Beckett's *Watt* in 1953) represent, as Glass argues, 'the last incarnation of that symptomatic convergence of modernism and obscenity.'²¹⁰ Haunting Zurbrugg's analysis, however, is the significance of inter-war little magazines for which, as we already mentioned, there is a curious nostalgia in the *E.R*. This is particularly pointed concerning Beckett's legacy. In a moment of striking intersection, it is in the anthology *Transition Workshop* that Rosset first encounters Beckett as one of Eugene Jolas' 'paramyths' (in the company of Kay Boyle, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, Franz Kafka and Gertrude Stein). Moreover, it is Jolas' publication, in particular, that echoes over numerous interviews with Rosset, and filters into the combative—and yet unerringly populist—attitude towards reading in *E.R*. In the 'Revolution of the Word' manifesto (*transition* 16-17, 1929), Jolas announces the 'metamorphosis of reality' through the 'disint[egration] of the primal matter of words'; in this regard, the publisher encourages that the 'plain reader be damned.' The dedication in *transition* to unfettered aesthetic reinvention is subsequently reimagined in an advertisement for *E.R*'s Book Club—defined against 'seller oriented book clubs' of 'mass membership.' (No. 47, June 1967) *E.R*'s readers are, thus, characterised as 'literate, adventurous individuals who refuse to be forced into a mold.' Spearheaded by Rosset and the Grove Press, insight into this campaign for adventurous reading will be developed later in the chapter. Drawing on late-modernist figures such as Beckett, Robbe-Grillet, Genet and Ionesco, the publisher would exploit the modernist credentials of many of his European authors to expand the market for avant-garde literature.

Through the 16 year-long association between Beckett and *E.R*, the author appears behind many different frames. Highlighting the erotic undertones of Beckett's writing (No. 39, Jan-Feb, 1966), while also exhibiting 'unabandoned' works (including a surprisingly thorough investment in Beckett's radio texts), Beckett the author appears less as a static presence than a 'changing, growing, swaying, marvellous organism, always in a state of transformation.'²¹¹ At the same time, through the Grove review, one bears witness to the canonization of Beckett as an internationally significant author. By 1970, following Beckett's Nobel Prize success the previous year, the 13 volume Grove edition of the *Collected Works of Samuel Beckett* is advertised in *E.R* (No. 80, July 1970) as 'the most astonishing body of work in modern literature.' (12) With the review hitting economic and political trouble due, in part, to the Women's Liberation uprising of April that year, the reification of Beckett as an exceptional presence

²¹⁰ Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013), p. 20

²¹¹ Barney Rosset, *Dear Mr. Beckett: The Samuel Beckett File*, (Opus: New York, 2017), p. 418

is nonetheless highlighted. Reflecting on this period in the history of the press, Seaver, in his memoir of publishing in Paris and New York, invokes Beckett as Grove's 'North star.'²¹² He goes on to acknowledge the importance of Beckett as a navigational influence over the press and the magazine. Far from the postmodern carnival of the 60s review, the Beckettian 'North Star,' elevated above the flux of finance and fortune, carries with it echoes of modernist exceptionalism. At the same time, Beckett's decentring in the following account provides a radically different picture. Indeed, the most salient images of *E.R* become that of a populist avant-gardism, galvanizing the shape of American postmodernism in the late 60s. For this reason, the governing category of Beckett's passage will, instead, be one of 'nontogtherness,' articulating the simultaneously alien and familiar company in which Beckett finds himself. This overview of Beckett and the *E.R* is enumerated in five sections, according to different periods in the history of the review; the coalescence in No. 1-5 of European late modernism and Don Allen's 'new academy' of American poets, framed by reference to 'the future'; the equation of reading and emancipatory politics from No. 9; a reflection on Glass' term 'vulgar modernism' and its anticipation in the review between 1962-1963; the catalysing effect of *E.R* over a populist literary underground, centred on the periodical's reinvention from No. 32; and finally the downturn of *E.R* and Grove in the 1970s, foreshadowing the explicit investment and afterlife of the review concerning postmodern fiction.

'...in the future'

The inaugural issues of the *E.R* provide an embryonic view into the editorial tensions that would become increasingly stark as the magazine grew in readership and cultural status. Engaged in the repatriation of European late modernism—through Beckett, as well as Francophone authors Alain Robbe-Grillet and Eugene Ionesco—the review also serves as a platform for home-grown U.S. avant-gardes. This is affirmed by Loren Glass, arguing that Grove Press, and subsequently the *E.R*, became 'a conduit through which the cultural capital of European late modernism flowed into the United States, ballasting the emergence of an indigenous American avant-garde.'²¹³ While the first volume of *E.R* generally maintains a judicious balance between these parties, a marked European focus is nonetheless perceptible in No. 1 (1957). Featuring prestige publications of established voices in the Western canon—from Jean Paul Sartre, to essays on Georg Buchner and D.H. Lawrence—the issue siphons off a European literary heritage, before arriving at the late modernist experiments of Micheaux and Beckett. At the same time, the eclecticism for which *E.R* would become known can be glimpsed at, with European literature brushing against fiction by American writer James Purdy, as well as a long interview on Mississippi jazz by Baby Dodds. *E.R*'s patronage of new and experimental American voices is exemplified in the following

²¹² Richard Seaver, *The Tender Hour of Twilight, Paris in the 50s, New York in the 60s: A Memoir of Publishing's Golden Age*, (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux: New York, 2012), p. 432

²¹³ Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013), p. 16

issue (No. 2, (1958)), a highly celebrated special number on the poetry of the San-Francisco school. Curated by *E.R* co-editor Don Allen, this issue foreground his vision of a ‘new Academy’²¹⁴ of American poetry, laying the groundwork for the aesthetic and socio-political radicalism cultivated heavily by the *E.R* in the following decade. Displaying Kenneth Rexroth’s ‘confession of faith in the New Generation’ proudly on the back cover, No. 2 is also significant in heralding the importance of the Beat poets for the fledgling review, described as ‘a young group in the process of creating a new American culture.’ In this way, a *futurity* of perspective in the Grove journal competes with the cultural capital of the European tradition. The most pointed example, during the early years of *E.R*, is issue No. 5 (Summer, 1958), in which pronouncements on possible futures of literary writing find ample representation; with a proliferation of manifestos from Jack Kerouac, Antonin Artaud and Charles Olson, both the ‘new American’ and ‘established European’ frames begin to blur, with contemporary ideas juxtaposed against the repurposing of previous literary criticism. As the stage directions for Beckett’s 1958 play *Krapp’s Last Tape* suggest (printed for the first time in No. 5), the review positions itself as having a foothold ‘in the future’; however, reflecting the set-up for Beckett’s play, this stance of future-directedness also entails a hearkening back to previous forms—in the case of *E.R*, previous iterations of both radical literature and publishing. Indeed, from the first issue, the association of Beckett with the golden age of little magazines reinforces Rosset’s project as a partial continuation of the work of modernist impresarios, and American expatriates, Edward Titus and Eugene Jolas (as argued in the introduction to this chapter). Tied with the work of Beckett, the legacy of European modernism crosses over in these initial issues, simultaneously foreshadowing the emergent carnivalesque to which *E.R* would be drawn by the 1960s.

Vol. 1, No. 1 (1957)

The first example of Beckett’s flight into the *E.R* is unique for the publication of *two* items— the early short story ‘Dante and the Lobster’ as well as poems from 1935’s *Echo’s Bones* collection. The second and final items respectively, the presence of Beckett offers a bookend to the inaugural issue of the Grove periodical. Published in 1957, No. 1 occurs a year after Grove editions of *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*, as well as the ambivalent success of Herbert Berghof’s Broadway production of *Waiting for Godot*, attracting a new generation of ‘intellectuals.’²¹⁵ Nevertheless, little reference to Beckett’s contemporaneity is made in the pages of No. 1. While the back cover lauds ‘the famous author of *Waiting for Godot*,’ Beckett’s introduction in the contributors’ listings is minimal: stating simply that ‘he was born in Dublin, lives in Paris and writes in French.’ Most striking, however, is the review’s treatment

²¹⁴ ‘Barney Rosset: The Art of Publishing, No. 2,’ in *The Paris Review*, No. 145, (Winter, 1997), accessed on 14 April, 2016, <<https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1187/barney-rosset-the-art-of-publishing-no-2-barney-rosset>>

²¹⁵ This was instigated by Myerberg himself, who as producer of the Broadway production marketed the performance towards the Beatnik community and away from the possibility of its mainstream appeal. Myerberg would famously call for ‘70,000 Intellectuals’ to support Beckett’s ‘plotless play.’ Quoted in Stephen John Dilks, *Samuel Beckett in the Literary Marketplace*, (Syracuse University Press: New York, 2011), p. 58

of the short story 'Dante...'—bypassing the collection's publication by Chatto & Windus in 1934, the listings call back to the appearance of 'Dante and the Lobster' in Edward Titus' *This Quarter* in 1930. Pointing to Beckett's heritage in the modernist little magazines of the 20s and 30s, a connection is drawn between *E.R* and a wider history of specifically American expatriate periodicals. In 'Dante...' the strong register of black comedy, along with the author's hostility towards the reader as 'skimmer,' resonates with Jolas' hostility to the 'plain reader' in the 'Revolution of the Word' manifesto. Indeed, Beckett's laconic protagonist, Belacqua, ironizes the readerly encounter as he runs 'his brain against this impenetrable passage' in Dante's 'first of the canti in the moon.' Passing over the contemporary relevance of Beckett's work, the initial publication of the author is hereby enmeshed with the *E.R*'s early appropriation of the 'golden age' of transformative modernism.

However, if Beckett represents a token of the halcyon days of modernist little magazines, the balance between entertainment and obscurity in *E.R* provides a glimpse at the postmodern eclecticism to come. Printed at the back of the issue, 'Dante...' and *Echo's Bones* are characterised as a 'hilarious short story' and 'a group of unusual poems.' This focus on Beckett's humour has a storied connection to the author's American context (see Introduction: 'Somehow...') and is important within the emergent category of the postmodern. Staging a confluence between the 'hilarious' and 'unusual,' it is precisely that (as Leslie Fiedler argues) Beckett 'finds it hard to escape being (what some of his readers choose to ignore) compulsively and hilariously funny' that continues to impress on readers and critics. This tentative balance between radical form and abject humour is compounded in the publication of Henri Michaux's *Miserable Miracle*, appearing immediately after Beckett's short story in No. 1. A further dispatch from *transition*, the second chapter of Michaux's autobiographical novel follows the Belgian writer's richly recorded experiments under the influence of mescaline. Through formal experimentation—including a constant para-text along the margin, as well as interpolated sketches—Michaux illustrates an exploration 'by means of words, signs, drawings...observing the grotesque, glittering, hyperbolic spectacles staged by the drug.' (37) As a platform for the emerging psychedelic movement in the 1960s, Michaux is one in a line of contributors to link chemical experiment with new literary forms. This reaches a climax in the late 60s with *E.R*'s continued patronage of the Beats as well as later proponents of 'cosmic consciousness' such as Timothy Leary, as well as the Youth International Party of Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman.

Opening the issue, however, the republication of Jean Paul Sartre's 'After Budapest' (first appearing in *Paris Express*, Nov 9th, 1956), marks the investment of *E.R* in the political realities of the post-war period. Expressing 'anguish' (5) at the violent reaction by the Soviet Union in response to the popular unrest of the Hungarian Uprising, Sartre provides a caustic repudiation of socialism as a 'Soviet-imported product.' (8) Rather, the French philosopher proposes the prospect of 'a sort of popular front,' a claim leading to an early invocation of a speculative 'new left.' (20) For Sartre, such a diverse political

movement would encompass ‘workers and small business men as well as intellectuals.’ (21) In this regard, identifying as an ‘entrepreneur’ in support of the avant-garde (‘we’re responsible to ourselves, our creative people and our pocketbooks’²¹⁶) Rosset serves an extreme example of Sartre’s political concept. As indicated by Sartre’s essay, the exploration of literary avant-gardes in *E.R.*, is one that occurs in the same space as a new kind of political commitment. An aesthetic and political hybrid, this formation would be tested by the increasingly commercial exigencies of the review into the next decade.

Crucially, the radical politics and aesthetics of *E.R.* intersect over the issue of censorship—a cause, during the late 50s and 60s, at which Rosset would place himself in the centre. In particular, the inclusion of Mark Schorer’s essay on the three versions of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (later serving as the introduction to the controversial unexpurgated edition published by Grove in 1959) looks forward to the legal battles involved in its publication. Despite Rosset’s personal ambivalence towards the novel, Schorer makes the intellectual case for the novel’s literary significance, expediting Grove’s capacity to publish the more explicit works in the 60s of Henry Miller and William Burroughs. This casts a light on Rosset’s pragmatism with D.H. Lawrence ‘easier to present as “literature” in the courts.’²¹⁷ As a strategic vehicle for the more prolonged obscenity cases fought by the press, the *E.R.* provides Rosset with a further venue (later issues often indulging in the sensational depiction of sex and profanity) in which to respond to controversy, usually inspired by the primary publishing concerns at Grove in the first place.

Receiving and transmitting the social and political controversies of the period, *E.R.* becomes an ideal mouthpiece for the Movement of the mid-60s—a facet of the review’s history prefaced in an early short story by James Purdy (‘Cutting Edge’). Foreshadowing the stylistic mutations in 60s youth culture, Purdy’s story details the return of a young artist from New York to his family home in Florida, recounting his family’s shock and disturbance over their son’s growth of a beard. However, appearing in close proximity to Michael Hamburger’s meditation on the significance of the work of Buchner, No. 1 is situated in an ambivalent space between traditionalism and an emergent aesthetic. This is also perceptible through Brooklyn photographer Harold Feinstein’s gallery of photographs, providing both an honest document of the war in Korea, while heralding the nascent cultural shifts of the 60s; of particular note, is Feinstein’s photograph of a young attractive Korean girl, emblazoned on the front cover of the issue. Finally, the publication of Larry Gara’s interview with Baby Dodds prefaces a prolonged investment in jazz over the course of the *E.R.* Throughout the interview Dodds inducts the reader into the melting pot of New Orleans jazz, tracing his education in the terms of various types of drum-hit, introducing a different kind of experimental lexicon. In this way, No. 1 stands out for its diversity of

²¹⁶ Barney Rosset, ‘On Publishing,’ in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Vol. 10, No. 3, (Fall, 1990), p. 58

²¹⁷ ‘Barney Rosset: The Art of Publishing, No. 2,’ in *The Paris Review*, No. 145, (Winter, 1997), accessed on 14 April, 2016, <<https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1187/barney-rosset-the-art-of-publishing-no-2-barney-rosset>>

content, while partially conflating the history of modernist publishing with indigenous expressions of American experimentalism. ‘Neither backward nor forward’ (24) as Belacqua remarks in ‘Dante and the Lobster,’ capturing the sensibility of the magazine’s debut issue.

Vol. 1, No. 3 (1957)

Appearing slightly over a year after Jackson Pollock’s death in August 1956, the front cover of No. 3, featuring a photograph of Pollock by German photographer Hans Namuth, partakes in the posthumous myth-building of the abstract expressionist as the quintessential American avant-gardist. Despite the sepulchral introduction by Clement Greenberg, Namuth’s portfolio, printed in the body of the issue, is striking for its demystification of the artist’s method, providing images of Pollock’s ‘drip painting’ in action. Sustaining the aura of Pollock’s aesthetic individualism, Namuth’s contribution is nonetheless exemplary of the self-conscious way in which *E.R* offered itself as a palatable introduction to the avant-gardes— inviting readers into the artist’s studio. The abstract canvases of Pollock and Franz Kline would also heavily impact Roy Kuhlman’s designs for Grove’s line of *Evergreen Originals*, introduced the following year. With abstract art decorating the front covers of affordable editions of the Marquis de Sade, Alain Robbe-Grillet, as well as Beckett’s mid-century *Trilogy*, the bequest of American abstract expressionism plays a role in further repositioning the European avant-garde in a uniquely American light.²¹⁸

On top of this, publications by O’Hara, Gregory Corso and Gary Snyder in No. 3 demonstrate the influence of *E.R* co-editor, Donald Allen,²¹⁹ as an instrumental presence in the review’s early evocations of American poetics. Following the breakout issue on ‘The San-Francisco Scene’ in No. 2 (1957), No. 3 anticipates the momentous publication of *The New American Poetry: 1945-1960* (1960), edited by Allen—a book, described by Rosset as ‘the standard, the landmark book [...] It taught poetry to a whole generation of young kids.’²²⁰ In this regard, the publication of three poems by O’Hara in No.3 (‘Why I am Not a Painter,’ ‘A Step Away from Them,’ ‘On Rachmanninoff’s Birthday’) demonstrate a responsiveness to the literary wing of the New York School as well as its painters.²²¹ Moreover, texts by Gregory Corso

²¹⁸ Also see William Barrett, ‘Real Love Abides,’ in *New York Times*, (16 September 1956), accessed 15 June, 2015, <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/03/reviews/beckett-malone.html>>—Barrett compares Beckett’s prose to what ‘abstract painters have been doing—emptying the canvas of all recognizable forms, yet keeping a surface that is visually exciting.’

²¹⁹ For Rosset, Allen’s history teaching English at Berkeley during the war contributed to his enduring legacy over *E.R*: ‘Don was quite academic. He made people like Frank O’Hara and Kerouac and Ferlinghetti academic. I mean he made it possible for the academy to accept them...’—‘Barney Rosset: The Art of Publishing, No. 2’ in *The Paris Review*, No. 145 (Winter, 1997), accessed on 14 April, 2016, <<https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1187/barney-rosset-the-art-of-publishing-no-2-barney-rosset>>

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ S.E. Gontarski, ‘Don Allen: Grove’s First Editor,’ in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Vol. 10, No. 3, (Fall, 1990)—Gontarski points to Allen’s tenure at *E.R* as a catalysing influence over the subsequent anthology, through which he ‘got acquainted’ with its major poets, p. 135

(‘Amnesia in Memphis,’ ‘This Was My Meal,’ ‘Poets Hitchhiking on the Highway’) together with Gary Snyder’s ode to the Zen life in ‘Letter from Kyoto,’ foreground the alternative lifestyles of the Beats prior to their canonisation as forerunners of the Hippie movement. At the same time, the republication of poems by established American modernist William Carlos Williams provides further evidence of *E.R.*’s early ambivalence, between an established modernist tradition and an efflorescence of youthful poetics. While Allen’s influence wanes after the initial two volumes, his ‘new academy’ continues to influence *E.R.*’s investment in the new generation of post-war poets.

No. 3 is also notable for its continuation of the project marked in the inaugural issue, providing a cross-section of experimental European works. Presented as a ‘prose fragment by the author of *Waiting for Godot*,’ Beckett’s ‘From an Abandoned Work’ traces the memories of an unnamed and neurotic protagonist in an uninterrupted dramatic monologue. Incapable of going either forwards or backwards, a narrative impasse, once again, looms over Beckett’s text, proposing a ‘long unbroken time without before or after, light or dark, from or towards.’ (91) Indeed, like the duo of Beckett pieces in No. 1, his contribution to No. 3 appears locked between a state of futurity and retrospection. A minor ‘fragment,’ Beckett’s piece would, nonetheless, pass into the lexicon of the periodical with No. 14’s (September-October, 1960) revelation of an ‘Unabandoned Work.’ Furthermore, while the prose piece harks back to 1954-55, it also anticipates the notable publication of *Krapp’s Last Tape* in No. 5. Leading to Beckett’s composition of the ‘Magee Monologue’ (later renamed as *Krapp...*), Patrick Magee’s reading of *Molloy* and the aforementioned ‘abandoned’ piece for the BBC mark an important meeting between author and a soon to be favoured actor, resulting in the creation of a key Beckett text. At the same time, one reads Beckett, in No. 3, alongside the publication of contemporaries in French drama. Indeed, the cross-pollination of Beckett’s text with appearances of Ionesco’s short story ‘The Photograph of the Colonel’ and Georges Arnaud’s play *Sweet Confessions*, casts the representation of European writing as an assemblage of 20th Century violence. In this way, No. 3 passes through Beckett’s ‘violent’ (85) protagonist, as well as the metaphysical ‘cruelty, without reason and without mercy’ (132) of Ionesco’s murderer, and the vulgarity of judicial misbehaviour by Arnaud’s Inspectors. This is exemplified in the stand-out publication of No. 3: Albert Camus’ ‘Reflection on the Guillotine.’ Throughout his essay, the Franco-Algerian philosopher offers a thorough and systematic denunciation of capital punishment, hinging on the ‘paradoxical attitude’ (20) of a culture that would argue in favour of the guillotine as deterrent, but would conceal the ‘obscenity’ of the matter from public view. Above all, for Camus, the ‘regularisation’ of violence through state sanctioned murder stifles all compassion, destroying ‘the only indisputable human community there is, the community in the face of death.’ (44)

This violent register carries forth into the first major literary manifesto published in the pages of the *E.R.* In Alain Robbe-Grillet’s ‘A Fresh Start for Fiction’ (included alongside the author’s *Three Reflected Visions*) the ‘stammering, new born work will always be regarded as a monster.’ (99) It is to the visual

arts that Grillet looks for direction concerning fiction's 'fresh start'—a corrective to the novel's 'stagnation' and 'lassitude.' In particular, the cinema, Robbe-Grillet argues, has the kinetic potential to 'draw us out of our interior comfort [...] with a *violence* that one would seek in vain in the corresponding text.' (101) (my italics) As such, the author opposes assumptions of literary depth to the fragmented mirrors and reflective pools one finds in his own experimental works. The first of many pronouncements on the future of writing in *E.R.*, the pairing of Robbe-Grillet's fiction, free from 'the old myth of depth' (103), and Beckett's narrative disturbances also glimpse at a literary pairing repeated in subsequent issues of the Grove review.

Vol. 2, No. 5 (Summer, 1958)

From dire pronouncements on the future of atomic warfare to cultural criticism on the legacy of James Dean, the impressive scope of No. 5 stands as a highpoint in the history of *E.R.* While Michael Rumaker's 'Exit 3' casts back to his appearance in No. 2 ('The Desert'), William Eastlake's 'Portrait of an Artist with Twenty-six Horses' marks the first of a number of appearances by the author in the Grove review. Another important debut finds self-styled 'Grove Author' John Rechy appearing for the first ('Mardis Gras') of many contributions to *E.R.* Further still, the publication of a chapter from Nigerian author Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* ('The Animal that Died but his Eyes still Alive') demonstrates an early example of what would develop into a significant investment, by the periodical, in literature from the African continent.²²² Moreover, on the back page of No. 5 the drama of *E.R.*'s dual focus as aesthete and critic of the contemporary is played out. Prominently advertising the exclusive publication of *Krapp's Last Tape*, ('A new monodrama by the author of *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*') Beckett's play is placed alongside German philosopher Karl Jaspers' 'The Atom Bomb and the Future of Man' as the principle attractions of the issue. Playing into the post-nuclear body of understanding around Beckett's theatre, this arrangement is also revelatory of Rosset's attitude towards the critical function of what John Oakes labels Grove's 'combat publishing.'²²³ Set during 'a late evening in the future,' (13) the re-contextualisation of Beckett's play redoubles the central concern for futurity in the early *E.R.*, while highlighting the range of socio-cultural possibilities apparent at the turning-point of the 50s into the turbulent 60s.

At the same time, the debut publication, world-wide, of Beckett's famous one act play stands alone as one of the major peaks in the author's overlapping history with the *E.R.* As previously discussed, the publication of *Krapp* in the review occurs at a propitious moment in Beckett's growing celebrity—

²²² In addition to *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Grove would publish a number of Tutuola's works: *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, *The Brave African Huntress*. Most famously, Rosset's press would disseminate the politically volatile works of Franz Fanon, including both *Black Skin White Masks*, and *Wretched of the Earth*

²²³ John Oakes, 'Barney Rosset and the Art of Combat Publishing,' in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Vol. 10, No. 3, (Fall, 1990)

particularly among New York 'intellectuals.' The appearance of Beckett's play— 'with such precipitation' (Beckett to Mary Manning-Howe, 10th April 1958) on Rosset's part— prefaces the rush by both the publisher and Schneider to bring *Krapp* to the American stage, capitalising on a growing interest in the Franco-Irish author. This would materialise two years later with the 1960 *Zoo/Krapp* co-production, staging work by Beckett and Edward Albee at the Provincetown Playhouse in New York. Surely reinforced by the gritty New York milieu of Albee's explosive play, critical responses to Beckett's 'monodrama' similarly present the text as evidence of a generation's antipathy to conservative American norms. 'Thank God for off-Broadway's non-conformism'²²⁴ announces the *Village Voice*; while Brooks Atkinson notes that 'both Mr. Beckett and Mr. Albee write on the assumption that the human condition is stupid and ludicrous.'²²⁵ As such, the publication of *Krapp* marks a decisive intervention in Beckett's American legacy, shining a light on the review as a key component in Rosset's initial promise 'to do what we can to make your work known in this country.' (BR to SB, 25 June, 1953)²²⁶

Featured alongside Beckett's play, Karl Jaspers marks a different kind of 'new development' (37) in the American culture. In 'The Atom Bomb and the Future of Man,' the German-Swiss philosopher denounces the production of nuclear weapons as that which 'confronts mankind with the possibility of its own destruction.' (37) Throughout the article, Jaspers enumerates the 'present situation' with regard to the atom bomb, highlighting the numerous obstacles to mutual control and disarmament. Like Camus' invective on the guillotine in No. 3, Jaspers' appeal to the collective reaches toward a sense of community forged under the shadow of death—in this case, 'the shadow of a great disaster.' (45) In particular, Jaspers calls for sober-mindedness and rational thought as a prerequisite for nuclear disarmament; namely, that 'we should cease taking life as a great adventure that ends in death, thus enhancing the attractiveness of the extraordinary and stimulating the will to power and domination.' (49)

However, a very different argument is proposed in Edgar Morin's retrospective essay, 'The Case of James Dean'— advertised prominently on the front cover of the issue. Reading the legacy of Dean through the lens of the young movie star as 'mythological hero,' (5) Morin aligns the popularity of the James Dean 'cult' with the rise of 'the new message of adolescence.' (6) In a key moment of Morin's essay, he argues that 'it is only recently that adolescence has become conscious of itself,' thereby positioning *E.R* as a vehicle of this new aesthetic and political frame. In stark opposition to Jasper's admonishments, Dean's legacy is one of an active, authentic life in which 'living means risking death.' (9)

²²⁴ Jerry Tallmer, 'From the Archives...The Voice Reviews Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*, and Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, 1960,' in *The Village Voice*, (8 July, 2009), accessed May 5, 2017, <<https://www.villagevoice.com/2009/07/08/from-the-archives-the-voice-reviews-edward-albees-the-zoo-story-and-samuel-becketts-krapps-last-tape-1960/>>

²²⁵ Brooks Atkinson, 'Theatre: A Double-Bill Off-Broadway,' in *New York Times*, (15 January, 1960), accessed February 17 2017, <<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/99/08/15/specials/albee-off.html>>

²²⁶ Barney Rosset, *Dear Mr. Beckett: The Samuel Beckett File*, (Opus: New York, 2017), p. 63

Furthermore, as has already been suggested, the focus on youth and immediacy exemplified in Morin's critique of Dean, heavily inflects the representation of U.S. poetics in *E.R.* No. 5 is no exception, with Jack Kerouac's 'Essentials of Spontaneous Prose' (the first of four literary prescriptions published in the issue), providing a list of instructions concerning the retention of 'the purity of speech' in writing. In an oft-quoted passage, Kerouac compares the measures of sound and silence in 'spontaneous prose' to the 'blowing' (72) of a jazz musician—a bid, similarly, to compose 'without consciousness.' (73) This concern for the spontaneity of the spoken word enters the American academy in Charles Olson's 'Human Universe,' and its exploration both of language as 'discrimination (logos) and of shout (tongue).' (88) The spirit of these essays carries over into a broad cross-section of voices in No. 5, from the San Francisco Renaissance (Philip Whalen), the Black Mountain School (Edward Dorn, Robert Creeley) to the New York School (Kenneth Koch)—each of which would, significantly, be included in Allen's 'new Academy' in the 1960 anthology *New American Poetry 1945-60*.

More than any issue of *E.R.* up to this point, No. 5 celebrates the review's hybrid focus, split between its European and American avant-gardes. Often this results in a palpable friction between items; for instance, Roland Barthes' essay on the New Novel of Robbe-Grillet jettisons any notion of the 'purity of speech' for a literature in which 'the function of language is not a raid on the absolute, a violation of the abyss, but a progression of names over a surface.' (114) Barthes takes up Robbe-Grillet's concern for the cinematic gaze in the earlier essay featured in No. 3, stating the effect on the object to be 'a certain optical resistance.' (114) In a striking observation, Barthes makes explicit a constellation of influence between Heidegger, Robbe-Grillet and Beckett; quoting Robbe-Grillet on the German philosopher, Barthes writes that "'the human condition [...] is to be there" [...] Robbe-Grillet himself has quoted this remark apropos of *Waiting for Godot* and it applies no less to his own objects.' (115) As such, one must not ignore *E.R.*'s importance in creating new arrangements of influence and aesthetics, redrawing the contextual boundaries of its contributors. Concluding No.5, the republication of Antonin Artaud's 'No More Masterpieces,' (in advance of the 1958 publication of *The Theatre and its Double* as an *Evergreen Book*) marks a suggestive point of crossover between the combative ethos of the review's American and European writers. In particular, in Artaud's incendiary essay, one must 'break apart' to 'begin afresh.' (150) Underwriting the call for a new *mass* theatre rooted in physicality and 'cruelty,' Artaud finds a new resonance amid the anarchic contributions of *E.R.*'s American avant-garde. In this way, No. 5 marks a vital point in establishing what Loren Glass describes as the 'signal achievement'²²⁷ of Grove and *E.R.*, bringing the avant-garde to a mass readership.

The Freedom to Read...The Right to Insubordination

²²⁷Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013), p. 3

The first major transition in the history of *E.R* occurs between the height of late modernist commitment in No. 5 and Richard Seaver's arrival as managing editor in No. 9 (Summer, 1959). Both reflecting and impacting upon the increased readership of the review (running at a circulation of over 7,500, up to 25,000 in 1964 with the change in format), the switch to bimonthly publication in No. 8 (Spring, 1959), together with the introduction of advertising in No. 7 (Winter, 1959) mark a break from the *E.R* of the late 50s. Distinct from the aesthetic elitism of *transition* and the world of *E.R*'s (often short lived) modernist forbears, both the review and Rosset would begin to emphasise a network of cheap, readily available reading material. This is further highlighted by the discourse around reading—and the reader—prevalent in the pages of *E.R* itself. In particular, the predominance of advertising for Book Clubs ('The Book Find Club,' 'The French Book Guild'), as well as other periodicals ('The Hudson Review,' 'Big Table,' 'Encounter') capitalise upon a growing interest in, often challenging, modernist texts. This reaches a zenith with the emergence of the 'quality paperback' as a momentous post-war publishing phenomenon. Referring to the publication of original avant-garde works in cheap paperback editions,²²⁸ Rosset's widening stable of authors are subsumed into a broader drive towards the availability of radical literature. In this way, a sense of unmediated access to the cutting edge of literary invention insinuates into the advertising copy of *E.R*—exemplified in a full page advertisement in No. 7, in which the avant-garde authors enshrined in the review's first volume (Beckett, Robbe-Grillet, Kerouac, Ionesco, among others) appear listed on a placard stated, simply, as 'Coming.' (205)

During this period, Beckett continues to appear in select issues of the *E.R*—while haunting others, through secondary reference, translation and adaptation. In the case of No.7's celebrated 'Eye of Mexico' issue, a number of the author's translations were used to fill its pages; at the same time, the issue mirrors the growing critical literature on Beckett through the inclusion of Maurice Blanchot's seminal 'Who Speaks in the Works of Samuel Beckett?' It is into this nexus that Beckett impacts upon the shifting lineaments of the *E.R* avant-garde as an increasingly reader-centric phenomenon. Indeed, the striking use of Beckett's face on the front cover of the 1958 Grove catalogue reinforces the author's stern visage as a significant part of the Grove iconography and as an exemplar of the publisher's 'quality' backlist. Above all, the 'Freedom to Read'—lifted from Henry Miller's clarion call in No. 9 (Summer, 1959)—is assumed as a slogan of the review and the publisher at large. 'The freedom to read' would be echoed at the close of Grove's first censorship battle over the unexpurgated *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (see No. 9, 'Court Opinion on the Postal Ban on *Lady Chatterley's Lover*'); in addition, it would be issued in support of Chicago Judge Samuel B. Epstein's ruling against the censorship of Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*—passing onto the front cover of *E.R* in No. 25 (July-August, 1962). In this manner, from the late 50s into

²²⁸ As Glass argues, this phenomenon was kick-started by the publisher Doubleday and their successful Anchor Books imprint. Feeding into this trend, Grove Press would introduce its own line of *Evergreen Originals*. Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013), p. 16

the early years of the 60s, the readerly avant-garde of *E.R* is steadily framed as one of individualised dissent and personal choice, marked equally by the steady availability of formerly 'obscene' texts.

Vol 3, No. 9 (Summer, 1959)

After the significant issues of No. 5 and No. 7, No.9 quickly marks a further turning point in the production of the *E.R*, heralding a shift towards the increasingly titillating and commercial output to follow. While the issue continues to invest in the European avant-garde and Allen's 'new academy,' (with poems by Philip Whalen, Gregory Corso, John Wieners, Frank O'Hara and Gary Snyder) this new direction is perceptible in a photo-essay on Indian erotic art by novelist Mulk Raj Anand, whose images of the erotic sculpture of Konarak also appear on the front cover of the issue. Anand's essay aptly demonstrates *E.R*'s tendency to exploit the mandate of world literature as a means of criticising the repression of the erotic in Western bourgeois society. Anand writes how 'the vast forces based on the atom bomb [...] are oriented towards barbarism in such a manner that anxiety neuroses about the danger threatening us and the concern for survival lead to love inadequacy, through which sex is considered as a much-overrated pastime.' (172) In this manner, while No. 9 points to a widening of the review's capacity to encompass international literary perspectives, the reader also glimpses the eroticism of the commercial iteration of the *E.R* to come. This is further reinforced through the presence of the new *E.R* Managing editor Richard Seaver, nominally replacing Don Allen as the guiding vision behind the review. A dispatch from the radical English-language periodical, *Merlin* (active in Paris between 1952-54), Seaver's influence brings with it a marriage of the formal European avant-garde and the erotic tendencies of the little magazine. Publishing its contributing authors in close association with Maurice Girodias' infamous Olympia Press, Seaver is subsequently involved in the alliance of the avant-garde with the production of Olympia's series of 'dirty books.' This prehistory points forward to the later sensationalism of *E.R*, recast in the heart of the post-war avant-garde.

With Seaver at the helm of the review, the publication of 'Text 1' from Beckett's *Texts for Nothing* prefaces a series of translations of Beckett's post-war French prose in collaboration with the editor.²²⁹ An early critic of Beckett, one finds Seaver's pronouncement of an author who 'defies all criticism' reflected back in the centreless utterances of 'Text 1.' Resonating with the heteroglossic elements of the *E.R* itself, the Beckett-*E.R* crossover in No. 9 invites comparison with Zurbrugg's identification of a latent postmodern impulse in the early issues of the review. At the same time, the appearance of Beckett's text emerges out of a professional and creative frustration. Originally to be published in *Esquire* to Beckett's amusement, the events leading to the appearance of 'Text 1' follow an increasing concern on

²²⁹ Although the Grove edition of *Stories and Texts for Nothing* would not be published until 1967.

the author's part for the 'professionalism and self-exploitation' (SB to BR, 20 November, 1958)²³⁰ of the literary business. On top of this, the difficulty of writing anything new after the various impasses of the *Texts* and *The Unnamable*, loom heavily in Beckett's correspondence. To Rosset, Beckett equates the difficulty writing new material with the retreat into the translation of the *Texts*²³¹; four months later, to Alan Schneider, he bemoans that 'there will be no theatre or radio from me now until I have done something that goes on from *The Unnamable* and the *Texts for Nothing* or decided there is no going on from there.' (3 March, 1959)²³² Following No. 9, 8 translated items appear in the *E.R.*, 3 of which are co-translated with Seaver. As such, while Seaver is active in the translation of Beckett into an American context, it is also worth bearing in mind a notion of *E.R.* equally as an outlet for loose ends, excerpts from whatever the author happened to be translating at the time.

Far from the 'toil' of the posthumous voice in 'Text 1', the high drama of Grove's publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (February, 1959) dominates much of No. 9. Opening the issue with Henry Miller's 'Defence of the Freedom to Read'—a statement in support of the publication of *Sexus* in Norway—*E.R.* introduces a formulation that would thereafter be used to publish *Tropic of Cancer* in 1961. Miller's belief concerning the 'freedom [...] to read what is bad for one as well as what is good for one' (19) echoes Rosset's 1959 statement of intent around 'complete freedom of expression.'²³³ A different strategy, however, is adopted in Grove's appeal over the publication of Lawrence's novel—dissimulating cultivation and respectability through its diverse publications. Printed in its entirety, the evidence provided in the 'Court Opinion on the Postal Ban on *Lady Chatterley's Lover*'—a 'historic' and 'an important milestone in the struggle against censorship'—hinges on the 'literary merit' of the text. Disputing the New York Postal Service's judgement of the novel as 'obscene,' the case brought by Grove and The Reader's Subscription (book society and co-plaintiff in disseminating copies of Lawrence's text), was buttressed by 'expert testimony' (from Alfred Kazin and Malcolm Cowley), bearing witness to Lawrence's unchallenged status as a 'master of English literature, widely read and increasingly in the curricula of major universities.'²³⁴ Hanging on the established respectability of Lawrence as a literary author, Rosset would subsequently benefit from the Grove Press' standing as 'a respectable publisher with a good list which includes a number of distinguished writers and serious works.' (49) Perhaps more strategically, Seaver points to *Lady Chatterley* as the 'ideal choice' or Trojan horse for the more objectionable content of Miller and Burroughs. By fighting for Lawrence, Rosset would establish a

²³⁰ *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1957-1965*, ed. by Dan Gunn, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2014), p. 177

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 209

²³³ 'Barney Rosset: The Art of Publishing, No. 2,' in *The Paris Review*, No. 145, (Winter, 1997), accessed on 14 April, 2016, <<https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1187/barney-rosset-the-art-of-publishing-no-2-barney-rosset>>

²³⁴ Richard Seaver, *The Tender Hour of Twilight*, (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux: New York, 2012), p. 260

defensive strategy centred on social and literary merit, reinforced by expert interpretation and Grove's role as a respectable operation.

On top of this, No. 9 features a long essay by Jerry Tallmer (the first article of a regular column on the New York theatrical world) regarding the Weill-Brecht ballet, *The Seven Deadly Sins*. As co-founder (alongside Norman Mailer) of the *Village Voice* newspaper, Tallmer was instrumental in publicising early Beckett performances in the East Village hip community. Elsewhere in No. 9, a review of Laurence Lipton's early study of the Beats, *The Holy Barbarians*, is featured. Alongside this, the issue also hearkens back to previous numbers with the publication of stories by Patsy Southgate ('Artie') and Michael Rumaker ('The Pipe'). Perhaps the most striking point of continuity is the appearance of Alain Robbe-Grillet's essay, 'Old Values and the New Novel (Nature, Humanism and Tragedy),' in which the author echoes arguments proposed in No. 3 and No. 5. Responding to critics of 'A Fresh Start for Fiction,' (see No. 3) Robbe-Grillet bemoans the 'tenacious fidelity' to the 'old myths' of depth and humanism (98) exhibited by his contemporaries; for the author, 'man looks out at the world and the world does not return his glance.' (105) This reaches a critical-peak with the author's interrogation of the modern fascination with tragedy. In Robbe-Grillet's formulation, the notion of tragedy serves as a means of 'recuperating' the split between subject and object—highlighting, in a provocative turn, both Camus' and Sartre's adherence to this false notion. As such, No. 9 further reinforces the dialogue, cultivated in the *E.R.*, between the proponents of post-war experiment staged across the initial issues of the review.

Vol. 3, No. 10 (November-December, 1959)

Despite the austere front cover by Polish artist Henryk Musiałowicz, No. 10 continues to look ahead to future developments in style and content—notably, the increasingly visual package of post-1964 *E.R.* This is clearly manifest in the first appearance of many by controversial French cartoonist Siné; the artist's cheeky minimalist sketches perfectly encapsulate the sly provocations of the early review, while foreshadowing the more overt anti-authoritarianism of its later iteration. In addition, the Evergreen Gallery (a fixture from No. 8), including photo-essays and portfolios of visual art, further highlights the overlap between text and image in the pages of the Grove review. Indeed, in No. 10, advertising for a new line of Evergreen Gallery Books promises the reader access to 'The Living Movements in Painting and Sculpture,' repackaged in both cheap paperback editions (\$1.95) and a more expensive cloth-bound edition (\$3.95). Not only can one glimpse the 'iron whim' of Rosset's culturally voracious approach in action, but also early signs of the publisher's more impecunious forays into film in the mid-60s. The consequences of this aesthetic sea-change are manifold for *E.R.*—amongst them, the numerous publications, in the review, by *New York Times* art critic Dore Ashton. Moreover, while Beckett played an important role in Rosset's pivot to the production and distribution of cinematic works (through the commission of 1964's *Film*), he also shadows the new line of *Evergreen* art books. Despite being tasked

with translating an early critical reflection on Bram van Velde ('Pientres de l'empement') for inclusion in a short Grove edition on the Dutch artist, Beckett's translation would not appear in the 1960 Grove edition. Nevertheless, the inclusion of Beckett's pronouncements on van Velde in the author's 'Three Dialogues' with Georges Duthuit find Beckett at work in the increasingly visual-orientated fabric of review.

The publication, in No. 10, of Beckett's radio-play *Embers* marks the second debut appearance by the author in *E.R* after *Krapp* in No. 5. However, the inclusion of the author's texts for radio in the Grove periodical (see No. 27 and No. 30) belies a broader neglect in the U.S. Despite calls to erect a full theatrical production in America, it wasn't until 1986 that Beckett's seminal *All that Fall* would be broadcast²³⁵ for American listeners. Furthermore, U.S. premieres of *Embers*, *Words and Music*, *Cascando*, and *Rough for Radio II*, were only debuted shortly before Beckett's death in December 1989, as part of the month long festival of Beckett's radio works in New York. This places the *E.R* in a curious position as the initial vehicle of these difficult works, preceding their assimilation into the American cultural sphere. If we are to follow Mel Gussow's notion that, on the page, Beckett's works for radio lose their 'aural tapestry,'²³⁶ the impracticality of their publication in the pages of *E.R* tells us more about Beckett's stature for the literary review than the contents themselves. As such, for all its intractability, the appearance of *Embers* in No. 10 demonstrates the allure of Beckett as both artist and image, occasionally outstripping the content of the pieces themselves. This coincides with an increasing hype for the forthcoming publication—highlighted in the contributors' listings—of the three-in-one edition of Beckett's post-war *Trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable*. The same edition would be advertised prominently at the back of No. 11 (January-February, 1960), using Brassai's photograph of Beckett and promotional blurbs from Hugh Kenner and William Barret (celebrating 'the most remarkable writer since 1945'). Unlike previous *Evergreen* editions of Beckett's work featuring Kuhlman's Klinean, abstract designs, the use of Brassai's portrait for the cover of the three novels inaugurates what Gontarski labels the 'cultural icon'²³⁷ of Beckett the author. Focusing solely on the admonishing gaze of the author, Beckett in Brassai's photograph appears—as in the author's radio plays—to emerge 'out of the dark.' While Stephen John Dilks demonstrates the enduring significance of the Brassai photograph (exploited for, amongst other purposes, the 1958 Grove catalogue, advertising for 1967's *Stories and Texts for Nothing*,²³⁸ and Schneider's correspondence with Beckett in *No Author Better Served* (2000)) a more interesting tension can be found in the peculiar substancelessness of

²³⁵ celebration of the author's 80th Birthday;

²³⁶ Mel Gussow, 'A Mind's Eye View of Beckett's World,' in *New York Times*, (2 April, 1989), accessed on 23 July, 2016, <<http://www.nytimes.com/1989/04/02/theater/a-mind-s-eye-view-of-beckett-s-world.html>>

²³⁷ S. E. Gontarski, 'Foreword,' in Stephen John Dilks, *Samuel Beckett in the Literary Marketplace*, (Syracuse University Press: New York, 2011), p. xvi

²³⁸ Stephen John Dilks, *Samuel Beckett in the Literary Marketplace*, (Syracuse University Press: New York, 2011), p. 62

Beckett's dealings with *E.R.* This is exemplified in the review's inclusion of the author's radio texts. At the same time, the author is integrated into the visual sphere of the New York art world—through Brassai and Grove's art books—existing in both close proximity and at a distance from the American fabric. Highlighting the image of Beckett, the deferral of the pieces for radio nonetheless reveals the persistent tension of the author's trans-Atlantic flight into *E.R.*

Following No. 3 and No. 5, the literary duo of Beckett and Alain Robbe-Grillet also carries through into No. 10. In Bruce Morrisette's essay on Alain Robbe-Grillet—'New Structure in the Novel: *Jealousy* by Alain Robbe-Grillet'—Morrisette offers a developed account of Robbe-Grillet's innovations in narrative point-of-view. In particular, the 'absent I' in Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy* provides a novelistic approach in which 'the structure dominates everything.' (104) In a striking moment, Beckett's status as a critical touchstone is also invoked by Morrisette; in this case, the meticulous visual field of Robbe-Grillet's fiction is set against the 'verbal chaos' (179) of the issueless voice in Beckett's *The Unnamable*. Far from the denaturing of the Beckettian narrator, Morrisette challenges the notion of Robbe-Grillet's 'anti-humanism': 'how can they [the critics] [...] accuse a novel of turning against or away from man when it follows from page to page each of his steps, describing only what he does, what he sees, or what he imagines.' (100) Situating his reading in the context of previous pieces by and about Robbe-Grillet in *E.R.*, the essay concludes with a striking remark on the nature of the 'literary masterpiece.' As to whether *Jealousy* resembles a novelistic 'development' or 'dead end,' Morrisette points to the 'unforeseen sequels' (170) emerging in response to Robbe-Grillet's experiments with form. This touches on a broader point with regard to the flight of European writing into the pages of the American *E.R.* The cross-pollination of influence and style represented in the pages of the review galvanise such 'unforeseen' intersections of influence, into which Beckett is also drawn: 'But this is what a masterpiece is,' Morrisette remarks: 'an end that is also a beginning.' (190)

As in No. 9, the topic of censorship continues to predominate; particularly in the reprinting of an editorial from the *Minneapolis Star*, straightforwardly titled 'Censorship is Wrong.' As the concluding piece of No. 10, the writer challenges the notion that 'smutty or violent literature turns juveniles into delinquents.' Citing a Brown University study into the psychology behind this 'bit of social folklore,' the writer makes a striking case for 'bad reading' (192)—neutralising potentially aberrant behaviours. A further echo of the 'freedom' proposed in No. 9, this is juxtaposed with an excerpt from Henry Miller's *Nexus*. Quoting from Nikolai Gogol, Miller defends the literary representation of the 'wretched' (68) in his autobiographical fictions, defending the work of the writer who properly engages with the world outside the academy. As a counterpart to Beckett's 'verbal chaos,' Miller's writer as explorer articulates the 'chaos' of phenomenal experience in the dense tissue of the work; ultimately, he claims, 'the mark of the poet is everywhere, in everything' and 'to distill thought until it hangs in the alembic of a poem, revealing not a speck, not a shadow, not a vaporous breath of the "impurities" from which it was

decocted, that for me is a meaningless, worthless pursuit.' (80) This disdain for the genteelism and artifice of academized poetry is also voiced in Ginsberg's 'Notes on Finally Recording Howl.' Invoking 'ghostly Academies, in limbo, screeching about form,' Ginsberg nevertheless indulges in the explication of the techniques at work in the poetic line of *Howl*; concluding the essay, the poet launches an 'attack' on academic criticism produced by 'ignorant, frightened bores.' More than any issue up to this point, No.10 anticipates the extent of *E.R*'s capacious avant-garde, crossing domains of literature and visual art through registers of high minded provocation and puerility.

Vol. 4, No. 14 (September-October, 1960)

The cover image of No. 14, cautioning the reader to 'Report Obscene Mail to Your Postmaster,' brings the publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* back into the foreground of the *E.R*. A year after the Grove edition of Lawrence's novel first appeared and roughly ten months after it was first challenged by the Post Office Department, the court of appeal signed into law Judge Bryan's decision on the 'literary' validity of the novel in March 1960. This is celebrated irreverently by the inclusion of Circuit Judge Clark's statement regarding 'the case of Grove vs. Christenberry' [New York Postmaster]: 'to determine whether a work of art or literature is obscene has little, if anything, to do with the expedition or efficiency with which the mails are dispatched.' (2) This attitude of gleeful provocation is also prominent in the advertising in No. 14—issuing a loud warning with Robert W Haney's *Comstockery in America*, while also advertising Oscar Brand's volume *Bawdy Songs and Backroom Ballads* ('rollicking, rowdy, superbly sophisticated...') This is closely juxtaposed with the latest challenging *Evergreen Original*: in this case, a full-page advertisement for Alexander Trocchi's *Cain's Book* (an 'Explosive Novel' with a further recommendation by Beckett: 'it seems to me of the highest order' (6); excerpted in previous issues of *E.R* (No. 4 and No. 8), Trocchi's novel 'explores the inner world of a drug addict with harrowing insight.' (6) As such, while Rosset's censorship battles were fought in court, centring around a handful of high profile novels, the pages of *E.R* point to an altogether more diffuse ecosystem. In this manner, the polyphony of challenging and provocative texts, either included or advertised in the review, also point to a developing aesthetic and voice in *E.R*, seasoned with an increasingly self-ironising attitude of play and irreverence.

As the first published excerpt of the English translation of Beckett's seventh novel *Comment C'est*, the appearance of 'from an unabandoned work' in No. 14 curiously predates the publication a year later of the full French text (with the completed Grove translation appearing in 1964). Taken from what would later become the novel's opening, its vision of life amidst the mud and 'filth' reflects, through a certain lens, the provocations of the *E.R* project as a whole. Perhaps more striking is the designation of an 'unabandoned' text, exhumed in the pages of the review. This is symptomatic of an emergent discourse of 'completeness' concerning Beckett's cumulative appearances in the *E.R*. Advertising the author's *Three Novels* as the 'complete' Beckett experience (No. 11), this would be fully realised in the *Collected*

Works published at the end of the 60s (see No. 80). No. 14 develops this theme, highlighting the singularity and rarity of the author's work, promising an unmediated access wherein the text has been successfully 'unabandoned'—rescued from the brink of the void. Moreover, in the contributor's listings, the issue draws attention to the looming significance of Beckett's American context—in particular, the author's presence off-Broadway. Pointing to the ongoing double-bill of *Krapp's Last Tape* and Edward Albee's *Zoo Story* at the Provincetown Playhouse, the event, in the words of Brooks Atkinson, forces the spectator to 'examine the squalor off-Broadway.'²³⁹ Marking both the passage and broad acceptance of Beckett within the world of New York experimental theatre, the production would win both Beckett and Albee 'Distinguished Play' awards at the year's Obies. This celebratory note is anticipated in the *Village Voice*, with Jerry Tallmer declaring 'the first full realization in America of a work by Samuel Beckett.'²⁴⁰ As such, beyond the publication of marginalia and translations, the review serves as a useful document through which to measure the shifting elements of Beckett's American story. On top of this, the same pieces of miscellany that frequently find their way into *E.R* are reconfigured in light of Beckett's 'unabandoned' successor to the *Three Novels* of the 1950s.

Also by Tallmer, No.14 includes a commentary on Bert Stern's documentary *Jazz on a Summer's Day*—concerning the author's experience at the Newport Jazz Festival. Concluding with a reflection on the predominantly 'beatnik' clientele of the festival, Tallmer praises Stern's film for embodying the movement's youthful exuberance. A more protracted analysis of the mutations of American jazz is presented in Martin Williams' meditation on the legacy of Charlie Parker. Williams' regular column—'Jazz: The LP Catalogue'—provides a pointed example of the popular avant-gardism promoted by the *E.R*. Celebrating Parker as 'the great modernist in jazz,' (151) Williams highlights the degree to which the *E.R* owed a debt to the popular modernisms of the period, in addition to the twilight of literary modernism. The tension between popular appeal and the academic lexicon of *the literary*, is also felt in No. 14's treatment of American poetics. Published four months prior to the release of the issue, Donald Allen's seminal volume *New American Poetry 1945-60* is advertised as the 'first comprehensive anthology of the new poetic voices since World War II.' (11) Indeed, the publication of poems by Edward Dorn and Philip Whalen demonstrate the persistence of Allen's legacy, well beyond his departure from the *E.R*. The reprint of a brief reflection on Beat poet Gregory Corso, (another of Allen's 'new voices') declares the beatniks as 'here to stay,' marking early shades of what would, later in the decade, metamorphose into the American counterculture. Couched in the language of 'beats' and 'squares,' the writer comments on Corso's 'successful tour of American universities,' (153) blurring the distinction between Allen's 'New Academy' and the anarchic, anti-academic poetics celebrated by Corso and much

²³⁹ Brooks Atkinson, 'Theatre: A Double Bill off Broadway,' in *New York Times*, (15 January, 1960), accessed 14 May, 2016, <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/08/15/specials/albee-off.html>>

²⁴⁰ Natka Bianchini, *Samuel Beckett's Theatre in America*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2015), p. 59

of the Beat movement. Detailing its rise to prominence ('people are getting hooked on poetry [...] it's like dope' (154)) Corso ironically thanks the popular media coverage of magazines '*Time, Life, Fortune, Sports Illustrated*' instead of the 'literary magazines' that tried 'to put us down.' (153) In this way, the *E.R* implicitly defines itself as opposed to the elitism of most 'literary magazines,' while simultaneously identifying as a respected home to the growth of post-war American poetics.

On top of this, No.14 marks a development in *E.R*'s role as a venue for world literature. While Yasar Kemal's short story, 'The Baby,' presents a realistic portrayal of life in a Turkish village, *Kanjicho: A Kabuki Play* offers an accessible introduction to the world of Noh theatre. Including full page visual reproductions of the actors' stylised *mei*, the stage directions offer a reader friendly account of Noh aesthetics, illuminating the dance, music and stage arrangement of the play. However, *E.R*'s investment in the art of the far East is also deconstructed; in particular, an acrimonious letter by Joseph Campbell regarding the publication, in No. 9, of Mulk Raj Anand's photo essay on Indian erotic art, decries the author's ulterior motive in the essay, criticising Western (and particularly American) values. The inclusion, by the editors of *E.R*, of readerly outrage at the review was to become an increasingly common part of the periodical (especially after the seizure of No. 32); in this instance, however, the innocence of Grove's investment in non-Western art forms is dismantled, both reconciling what Anand labels 'diatribes' by the western intelligentsia, while appropriating 'the Dark Gods' in service of *E.R*'s attack on bourgeois culture.

Vol. 4, No. 15 (Nov-Dec, 1960)

Opening No. 15, the publication, in full, of 'The Declaration Concerning the Right of Insubordination in the Algerian War,' marks a significant intersection between *E.R*'s aesthetic avant-gardism and the alignment of a radical political commitment. The Declaration of the 121 (named after the number of 'signers') calls for solidarity with those in the Algerian National Liberation Front rallying for Independence from French colonial rule, promoting 'insubordination' against the 'fundamental abuse' of the French state. In particular, the declaration highlights the use of torture suffered by Algerian dissidents as well as the intimidation tactics employed against those publically critical of De Gaulle's interventions. Drafted by French editor, critic and experimental novelist Maurice Blanchot, the vanguard of Parisian literary culture is well represented: Jean Paul Sartre, Simone De Beauvoir, Arthur Adamov, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Andre Breton, as well as Beckett actors Jean Martin, Roger Blin and his French publisher Jerome Lindon are listed as signers to the Declaration. Indeed, Beckett's presence is left as merely a haunting presence, withholding public support due to his expatriate status and the risk of deportation.²⁴¹ Nevertheless, as Knowlson has faithfully documented, Beckett remained deeply sympathetic to the cause of Algerian independence, and to the subsequent turbulence endured by

²⁴¹ James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, (Bloomsbury: London, 1996), p. 440-441

friends and acquaintances. To Irish dramatist Aidan Higgins (who was to appear alongside Beckett in *E.R.*, No. 30, May-June, 1963), Beckett writes of Lindon as under ‘permanent personal danger’²⁴² due to the public, humanitarian stance taken by the publisher—along with Blin and Martin—towards the French colony and state violence.

The publication of the French manifesto also reveals the degree to which the actions of Grove and the *E.R.* draw on a wider moment of dissident publishing; bringing literary artists into the space otherwise occupied by political commentators. A precedent for this can be found in Seaver’s role translating Henri Alleg’s *La Question* for American publisher George Brazillier. A radical exposé of the French Republic’s complicity in the use of torture, Alleg’s text would be the one for which Lindon would garner the most controversy. However, where Lindon risked personal danger, the text went on to become a *New York Times* bestseller for Brazillier and Seaver. Seaver’s eventual defection to Grove points to a broad coalescence between the commercial success of Alleg’s politically incendiary text and Grove’s commitment towards a ‘freedom to read.’ This would manifest most clearly in a number of heavily marketed *Evergreen* texts, advertised in the pages of the *E.R.* For example, the English translation of Janheinz Jahn’s *Muntu: African Culture and the Western World*, published by Grove in 1961, drew heavily on Franz Fanon’s radical critique of the Algerian War. Likewise, Fanon would be posthumously published by Rosset later in the decade, with *Wretched of the Earth* appearing in 1963 and *Black Skin, White Masks* in 1967. Nevertheless, combining both a radical political and literary sensibility, the Declaration of the 121 exemplifies the political style of the *E.R.*, as it touches on ‘the vital problems of freedom, conscience and human dignity’ and thus ‘merits wider dissemination.’ (1) The ‘spontaneous awakening’ glimpsed in the ‘Declaration,’ herald the new politics of individuality enshrined in the New Left, following the 1962 Port Huron Statement. Like its young grassroots base, the *E.R.* would openly embody a politics of improvisation and participation, tailoring praxis to ‘a new situation.’

Following the Declaration of the 121, the publication of ‘The End,’ co-translated by Beckett and Seaver, reinforces the former’s ghostly presence over the anti-imperialist document. As such, the distinction between the vanguard of post-war literature and the ‘awakening’ of a new political radicalism is once again blurred in melting pot of the review. This also marks the beginning of *E.R.’s* engagement with Beckett’s first efforts towards writing in French (followed by ‘The Expelled’ in No. 22 and ‘The Calmative’ in No. 47). However, Seaver’s connection to ‘The End’ also reaches back to the prehistory of the Grove periodical, and the managing editor’s association with the *Merlin* group (an English translation of ‘La Fin’ appearing in *Merlin* No. 3). In this case, while Beckett’s appearance in No. 15 may stand as a further example of the siphoning of Parisian experimentalism, undergirding much of *E.R.’s* avant-garde credentials, the project of re-translation (including the author’s revisions) that occurred between 1958

²⁴² *Ibid.* p. 441

and the story's publication at the end of 1960, vindicate Gontarski's claim that editions of Beckett's texts in the *E.R* often were 'some of the most important (and most accurate) printings of his work.'²⁴³ As we shall see by No. 34, this standard of editorial accuracy situates the *E.R* in a striking position with regard to the often intractable problems of Beckett's manuscript materials. Another important aspect of No. 15 is the issue's mention of the future commercial broadcast of *Godot* on American television (eventually airing on W-NTA on 3rd April, 1961). Directed by Alan Schneider and starring Alvin Epstein (Vladimir) and Zero Mostel (Estragon), this production is memorable as an early example of the American tendency to resituate the sparse milieu of Beckett's theatre. Set against a rolling vista of hills and valleys, Jonathan Kalb dismisses the production as a 'cartoon' of Beckett's play. At the same time, its status as 'Play of the Week' points to a tentative broadening of Beckett's appeal among U.S. audiences. Picking up the threads of comedy and obscurity highlighted in No. 1, Rosset's introduction to the broadcast highlights both the comic aspect of the play as well as its openness to interpretation ('there have been almost as many interpretations of *Godot* as there have been members of the audience'). Moving away from the disgust and confusion attached to Beckett's play in the previous decade, one finds in Rosset's recommendation an example of *Godot* being praised for its 'universal qualities...both tragic and *certainly* comic.' (my italics)

One finds Beckett's inspiration picked up by Spanish playwright Fernando Arrabal, whose violent one-acter, 'Picnic on the Battlefield,' is published in No. 15 alongside an absurd interview and a short essay by Genevieve Serreau ('A New Comic Style'). In the contributor's listings, Arrabal's 'literary heroes' are described as 'Beckett, Kafka, St. Teresa of Avila, de Sade and W.C. Fields' (20). Indeed, Beckett's correspondence with Arrabal is well established, particularly his public letter in defence of the author's accusations of blasphemy in 1967. However, in Serreau's essay, the Beckett analogy is tested; taking account of Arrabal's inheritance from more diverse media, such as the early slapstick of Charlie Chaplin, the essay finds the retention of hope in Arrabal to be all but silenced in Beckett's dramas. While Arrabal's plays had yet to be performed anywhere outside Paris, English translations of two Arrabal texts ('The Two Executioners'; 'The Automobile Cemetery') would be published by Grove later that year. In 'Picnic on the Battlefield,' one finds a distillation of the revelatory disjunctions apparent in much of Arrabal's writing. This radical commitment, sheltering underneath Arrabal's baroque absurdism, is further hinted at in a footnote to the interview, whereby the playwright reveals his conception of the poet as 'terrorist or provocateur.' (74) In this statement, elements of Arrabal's 'panic man' can be glimpsed, underwriting his revolutionary politics further into his career.

The line between the poetic and political is further blurred in the concluding publication of LeRoi Jones' meditation on the Cuban revolution: 'Cuba Libre.' Jones' piece opens with a trip arranged by the Fair

²⁴³ S.E. Gontarski, 'Art and Commodity: Beckett's Commerce with Grove Press,' in *Publishing Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Mark Nixon, (The British Library Publishing Division: London, 2011), p. 143

Play for Cuba Committee (garnering a full page advertisement in No. 15) for a group of African-American poets to visit Sierra Maestra, with a view to attend the mass rally marking the anniversary of Fidel Castro's drive against the U.S.-backed Batista government. In light of *E.R.*'s deliberate assault on academic modernism, and the boundary between literary and political discourse, Jones offers a number of acerbic observations regarding the role for a prospective radical poetics. In particular, Jones considers the limited extent to which Cuba's revolutionary moment translates into the growing dissident community in the U.S, warning against the danger of 'a bland revolution': 'people [...] who grow beards and will not participate in politics.' This, he remarks, in a pessimistic conclusion, appears to be the only foreseeable alternative to 'the filth of vested interest.' As such, Jones' article foreshadows the flattening in the aesthetics of *E.R.*, between the post war literary and political avant-gardes, in which public engagement became coterminous with the cultural capital of private reading.

'Vulgar modernism'

After the comparatively clean victory, upon appeal, of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the ongoing and expensive campaigns financed by Rosset to publish Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* become a permanent backdrop to the activities of *E.R.* from 1961-1966. Appearing as a 'special supplement' in No. 23 (March-April, 1962), the publication of the transcript from the Chicago trial in defence of Miller, offers readers the full statement by Chicago Judge Samuel B. Epstein against the censorship of Miller. This is mirrored in Grove's aforementioned 'Statement in Support of the Freedom to Read,' dominating the front cover of No. 25, in which freedom of expression under the First Amendment is equated with the consumption of controversial literature. In the same manner, the *E.R.* serves as a vehicle for Burroughs' transgressive opus; first appearing as an excerpt in No. 16 (January-February, 1961), the transcript from the Boston trial features heavily in No. 36, following in-step with the review's treatment of Miller and Lawrence. The immediate consequences for the *E.R.*, during this period, can be found in the marked rise in explicitly erotic and violent content found in its pages—a turn that Loren Glass defines broadly as Grove's patronage of a 'vulgar modernism.'²⁴⁴ Through an increasingly promiscuous and titillating approach to avant-gardism in all its forms, Glass ties 'vulgar modernism' to the efficacy of Grove's censorship battles. Defending Lawrence and Miller under the banner of their 'social value,' Rosset nevertheless capitalised on the spectacular publicity generated from their respective trials, both in *E.R.* and elsewhere, turning these 'obscene' works into bestsellers. In this way, the transitional location of 'vulgar modernism,' between the institutions of high modernism and populist appeal, points to the reconfiguration of modernism in the 60s and the review's development of a postmodern aesthetic as we will see later in this chapter. While this tendency is exemplified, Glass suggests, in the commercial renewal of No. 32, issues of the review published during

²⁴⁴ Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013), p. 120

the early years of the 60s anticipate this transition. In particular, appearances by French writers Andre Pieyre de Mandiargues and Pierre Klossowski, reinforce the Francophone pedigree of Rosset's canon, while providing stark examples of an experimental late modernism grounded in the violently erotic. *E.R.*'s increasingly lurid eroticism is also clear in the advertising included in its pages— an example of the periodical's unique strategy of advertisement as editorial. Featuring promotional images for the *Kamasutra* and a volume on *Exploratory Sexology*, the Grove periodical reinvents itself as a provocative force in the fight for sexual liberation, turning what the editors would later term the 'underground' into an increasing popular and profitable enterprise. Above all, this turn towards the 'vulgar' reveals resonances between *E.R.*'s authors that might otherwise go unnoticed. In particular, the destitute milieu of Beckett's 'The Expelled' (No. 22), read in close proximity to an excerpt from Burroughs' *Nova Express* offers special insights into the mutual dereliction shared by both authors. In this sense, the tentative outline of a route whereby a formalist modernism might pass into the sensational eroticism of the 60s becomes apparent.

Vol. 6, No. 22 (January-February, 1962)

The front cover photo for No. 22, by Greenwich Village photographer Paula Horn, foreshadows the erotic impetus of the *E.R.* in the mid-60s. Depicting a noticeboard covered with advertisements for 'Young Models,' the issue projects an image of gritty and exploited sexuality. Nevertheless, the stark human collateral of Horn's photos would be swiftly jettisoned by the Penthouse-style models decorating later issues. Elsewhere, No. 22 presents a cross-section of erotic experience; explored in the publication of Indian writer Anand Lall's short story 'The Snake,' in addition to Andre Pieyre de Mandiargues' 'The Diamond.' In both instances, an external object becomes a fetish, upon which their respective protagonists project their sexual desires. Where Lall's narrator is overcome with 'love' for the titular 'snake,' the lapidary's daughter in Mandiargues' text finds in the diamond 'a degree of virginity and purity which by its very excess may waken dread.' (69) Rather than succumbing to the commercialised sexuality which would come to define the *E.R.* of the late-60s, these texts debate the transformative qualities of an increasingly explicit eroticism, merging the poles of modernist exploration with that of a radical sexual awakening.

This overriding eroticism is transposed onto a concern for *underground* ways of living, featured in the publication of Horn's 'London Portfolio.' While less salacious than the front cover, Horn's particular fascination with Hyde Park's Speakers' Corner reinforces the review's allegiance with dissenting and marginalised (both political and sexual) voices. No. 22 also marks the first publication in *E.R.* of Pablo Neruda (a prominent author for the Grove Press), with the inclusion of three poems together with a poignant reflection on growing up in rural Temuco, Chile ('A Pinecone, A Toy Sheep'). Charting the formative experiences of the artist as a young man, Neruda expounds upon a mounting political awareness of the 'social struggle [...] the causes of the just against the cruel, the weak against the all-

powerful.’ (31) Resonating with the broader implications of the *E.R* project, Neruda leaves the reader with an image of the poet, in the world, as political agitator.

Opening the issue, however, Beckett’s ‘The Expelled’ shines a different light on what Neruda describes as the ‘wilderness and waste’ (28) of being in the world. Throughout the text, the reader follows the author’s nameless protagonist through a number of scenes in which he is ejected from his dwellings, left to contend with the authorities, deracinated from any stable category of ‘home.’ Nevertheless, the indelible image of the ‘expelled’ narrator coming to rest in the gutter aligns with No. 22’s central concern for life outside the prescriptions of respectability, impinging on the naïve comforts of bourgeois existence. In the contributor’s listings, the editors draw attention to the ascension of Beckett’s work to national prominence with the world premiere of *Happy Days*. Opening at the Cherry Lane theatre in New York, (17 September, 1961) *Happy Days* became Beckett’s first American world premiere, enacting a decisive break from the Broadway circuit to the nascent off-Broadway scene. However, as Bianchini documents, Beckett’s premiere met a lukewarm reception from critics and was largely dismissed by audiences. Like the fate of ‘The Expelled’—published five years later in 1967’s *Stories and Texts for Nothing*—the premiere of *Happy Days* marks the beginning of a process that would be fully realised later on in the author’s American connection. As Howard Taubman, writing for the *New York Times* puts it, *Happy Days* ‘haunt[s] the inner ear,’²⁴⁵ pointing to the continued renaissance of Beckett’s influence within the U.S. fabric.

A further mainstay of the *E.R* stable, No. 22 features two items by William Burroughs: including a brief introduction to *Naked Lunch*, *The Soft Machine* and *Nova Express*, and an ‘episode’ from the cut-up novel *Nova Express* (misprinted as *Novia Experess*) prior to its full publication by Grove in 1964. This marks the fourth appearance of Burroughs in the *E.R*, beginning with the infamous ‘Deposition: Testimony Concerning a Sickness’ (No. 11, 1960) later used as an introduction to the Grove edition of *Naked Lunch* (1966). A frequent contributor to the *E.R*, the review would publish Burroughs’ comments on Ahmed Yacoubi’s *Night Before Thinking* (No. 20, 1961), as well as a demonstration of the cut-up method²⁴⁶ (No. 32, 1964). In this way, *E.R* was an important publicity vehicle for Burroughs’ wild and fragmentary texts—more extreme in its graphic depiction of violence, sex and drug abuse than the two flagship ‘obscene’ texts by Lawrence and Miller published up to this point. Reflective of this point, Burroughs writes in the preface to *Nova Express*: ‘I am mapping an imaginary universe. A dark universe of wounded galaxies and novia [sic] conspiracies where obscenity is coldly used as a total weapon.’ (99) The following excerpt from Burroughs’ text provides a visceral experience of the author’s cut-up strategies: or as he describes it, the word ‘broken, pounded, twisted, exploded in smoke.’ (106)

²⁴⁵ Howard Taubman, ‘Beckett’s Happy Days,’ in *New York Times*, (18 September, 1961), accessed on 10 April, 2015, <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/03/reviews/beckett-days.html>>

²⁴⁶ Also demonstrated in Brion Gysin’s ‘Cut Ups Self Explained’ in the same issue.

Alongside Burroughs' writing, E.S. Sheldon's review of the novel ('The Cannibal Feast') is included in the issue as a fascinating para-text to these difficult pieces. With Burroughs' first two novels having either fallen out of print in the case of 1953's pseudonymous *Junky* or simply left unpublished in the case of *Queer* (published for the first time in 1985), Sheldon lauds *Naked Lunch* as 'one of the most impressive American literary debuts of the past century.' (110) Throughout the review, the text's graphic appeal is emphasised, provocatively described as 'a book calculated to scare the shit out of any one old enough to read it.' (110) In particular, Sheldon's evocation of a literature wedded to the 'underground' (112) resonates with the uneasy double-vision of the *E.R* as a venue for both radical experiments in form and the obscene. Indeed, perhaps the most significant aspect of No. 22 is the striking comparison unearthed between Beckett's 'expelled' narrators and Burroughs' opiate-addled characters—into whom the author proposes to 'vanish.' (99) Confronting a world 'where there are no roads, where you wander freely,' ('The Expelled,' 40), a fascinating encounter between the fading world of Beckett's late modernism and Burroughs' specifically Beat concern for life on the margins is staged. As an exemplary dyad of the *E.R*, Beckett and Burroughs illuminate the tensions of the review in this early 60s passage of time, concerning its liminal modernist sensibilities and its flirtation with the sensational postmodernism of the periodical's later incarnation.

Vol. 6, No. 27 (November-December, 1962)

Prefacing the sexually explicit sketches featured in No. 47 ('Ungerer's Girls'), French illustrator Tomi Ungerer's design for the cover of No. 27 appears amongst a wealth of visual art decorating the issue. The diversity of production, from the Siné inspired Canadian A.G. Sens' doodles, to R.O Blechman's minimalist sketches ('Cold War'), to the rich detail of Paul Flora's line drawings ('Flora in Venice') serve as a striking counterpoint to the essays, poems and short stories of the *E.R*. The slap-dash contributions of Sens and Siné, in particular, (appearing in a wide number of issues) offer a distillation of the irreverent spirit of the *E.R* project as such, foreshadowing the full colour productions of the review into the second half of the decade. This sense of puerile exuberance translates into Robert Coover's 'Dinner with the King of England,' in which an ambassador from the U.S. falls prey to the author's increasingly kinetic pratfalls. As a long-standing author of the Grove review, the entertainingly absurd fictions of Coover vindicate Lee Konstantinou's connection between the review and the postmodern 'cool'²⁴⁷ of literature emerging in the post-Beat sixties. Defined by its caustic irony, cynicism and carefree approach to bizarre erotic couplings, Coover's writing exemplifies *E.R*'s concrete bequest over postmodern fiction as a phenomenon developing alongside and in the wake of the Grove periodical.

²⁴⁷ See Lee Konstantinou, *Cool Characters, Irony and American Fiction*, (Harvard University Press: Massachusetts, 2016)

Marking a further English language debut, the publication in No. 27 of Beckett's *Words and Music*, solidifies the *E.R* as a curious outlet for the author's writing for radio. Similar to No. 10, with the publication of *Embers*, the appearance of Beckett's radio in the *E.R* (and the deferred realisation of their performance in the 1980s) exemplifies the degree to which the author's reputation had come to exceed the impact of singular texts. Commissioned by the BBC Third Programme, the radically experimental *Words and Music* explores the connection between different aural registers: 'Words,' 'Music,' and 'Croak.' Throughout the text, it is left unclear as to whether these 'characters' constitute aspects of a single consciousness or represent distinct stage presences. Captured in the intermediate position of 'Croak,' however, the piece is revelatory concerning the process of abstraction through which words become 'fundamental sounds' (SB to AS, 29 December, 1957).²⁴⁸ One also finds echoes of Beckett implicated in the issue's representation of American poetics. Poems by frequent contributor Lawrence Ferlinghetti ('The Man Who Rode Away') as well as W.S. Merwin ('We Continue') both express a desire for the possibility and freedom expressed in the American landscape—a desire ultimately impaired by the decay and exhaustion of the open terrain.²⁴⁹ Both extending and deconstructing the clarion call of the Beat movement towards a ceaseless mobility, the American road contracts into the emptied road of *Godot*, and the 'wastes of being'²⁵⁰ explored in Beckett's drama.

Elsewhere in No. 27, the publication of Irish author Patrick Boyle's 'Go Away Old Man, Go Away'—in 'his first appearance in the U.S.' (95)—tells the story of a farmer's violent outburst, overcome by jealousy and resentment over his wife's suspected infidelity. The poles of sex and violence also manifest in Carroll Arnett's 'La Dene and the Minotaur.' In Arnett's story, an interracial affair ends in a violent encounter between the spurned husband and the protagonist's sister. This composite of sex and violence (carried forth from No. 22) is combined with a potent surrealism in Montenegro writer Miodrag Bulatović's 'The Lovers' as well as an excerpt from Pierre Klossowski's controversial novel *Roberte Ce Soir* (published in translation by Grove the following year, along with *La Révocation de l'édit de Nantes*). Both texts channel the publisher's turn towards literary vulgarity while drawing on clear modernist influences. Evoking Kafka and Sade, Bulatović's wretched protagonist muses on his own life, and those of the other café-dwellers, often with considerable disdain for the painters and aesthetes that he encounters. Containing an epigraph from *Job VII 5-6*, concerning the corruptibility of existence, the text concludes with a shocking act of necrophilia by the protagonist, following the murder of his lover. In Klossowski's hallucinatory excerpt, Roberte, an informant for the fictional 'Censorship Council,' experiences masochistic fantasies in which she is sexually violated by a hunchback and giant in

²⁴⁸ *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1957-1965*, ed. by Dan Gunn, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2014), p. 82

²⁴⁹ See Chapter 2 for a more complete rendering of this theme

²⁵⁰ Here I draw on a prominent advertisement for David I. Grossvogel's *Four Playwrights and a Postscript*, on Beckett, Genet, Ionesco and Brecht (28)

punishment for her silencing of an 'ignoble work.' (76) During this act of sexual assault, the writer – through the voices of Roberte's violators—questions the validity of her supposed 'dual nature' along with the 'silence' of Roberte's body. Framed as a liberation of the flesh, Klossowski's text provides an extreme and deeply troubling example of the kind of 'vulgar modernism' fashioned by *E.R.* Simultaneously experimental, with a strong foothold in the academy, Klossowski's 'vulgar' text embodies the review's shift towards the aesthetics of transgression and (often violent) eroticism.

Vol. 7, No. 30 (May-June, 1963)

If the history of *E.R.* during the early 60s is one of competing erotic and political impulses, the latter nevertheless comes out on top in No. 30. In the compulsive rant of Mack Sheldon Thomas' 'I'm Not Complaining,' the author writes with acid humour about the absurdity and the numbing routine of the American prison system. Drawing from his 22 year sentence in a Texas jail for a narcotics offense (a connection that is made explicit in the contributor's listings), his inclusion in a number of issues of the Grove review reinforces its patronage of typically marginal literary voices. However, both the erotic and straightforwardly political once again coalesce in a short piece by illiterate Moroccan story-teller Driss Ben Hamid Charhadi ('The Whores'). Championed by proto-Beat author and translator Paul Bowles, Charhadi tape recorded his first autobiographical novel, *A Life Full of Holes* before it was transcribed by Bowles into English.²⁵¹ Moreover, in 'The Whores,' the author details the fraught attempts of a young man looking for work; at the same time, he is bedevilled by the sinister presence of a prostitute with whom the protagonist meets earlier in the text. Considered together, the publication of texts by Charhadi and Thomas highlight the means by which *E.R.* cultivated itself as a prime venue for the literary outsider.

The most notable item in No. 30, however, is a 'Book-Length Supplement' from Russian author Fyodor Abramov: *The New Life: A Day on a Collective Farm*. Framed as offering the reader a 'new and startling look into the state of mind of Russia's young generation,' (2) Abramov's novella also reveals Grove's complicated relationship with the 'Soviet-style' communism bemoaned by Sartre in No. 1. Centring on the story of Anany Yegorovich Mysovsky—an 'active drudge' (6) on a collective farm—Mysovsky's attempts to boost morale clash hopelessly with the rulings passed down from central committee. Indeed, from the memorable opening—'splosh-sh, splosh-sh, splosh-sh' (5)—Abramov evokes an image of devastated, rain-sodden landscapes, devoid of hope. Puzzled at the increasing rate of absenteeism, Mysovsky encounters apathy wrought from the erosion of party spirit, alcoholism, made-up illnesses ('the virus gripe [...] it sits inside you and doesn't show' (22)) and the spread of private landholdings among the farm's inhabitants. Throughout its existence, *E.R.* accommodated many dissenting Russian voices. Perhaps the most important of these is the publication of Yevgeny Yevtushenko's famous poem

²⁵¹ Grove Press would publish the novel, 'recorded and translated by Paul Bowles,' in 1964

'Babi Yaar,' memorialising the Soviet massacre of Ukrainian Jews. On top of this, Boris Pasternak's Nobel prize-winning novel, *Doctor Zhivago*, is advertised frequently in the pages of the review. As such, in response to the *E.R*'s perceived anti-Soviet stance, the Grove journal was removed from the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow—attracting an 'amused, irritated and flattered' (224) editorial remark at the end of No. 9. Nevertheless, the *E.R* would not be above martialling the prevailing anti-Russian mood in the U.S. as a provocation to the very ideals of 'American freedom' that the review had been enlisted to represent. In particular, the inclusion of Soviet propaganda posters in later issues of the *E.R* indicates the promiscuous and improvisatory leftism germinating in the pages of the Grove journal. Overall, the special publication of Abramov's novella betrays, in stark terms, the ideological split between the stultifying orthodoxies of the Soviets and a younger, sexually awakened vision of political commitment to which the *E.R* would increasingly tailor its content.

The salient rhetoric of rebellion and renewal also passes over into the noteworthy advertisements of No. 30. While David Ossman's *The Sullen Art* provides a key to 'the literary rebellion of recent years,' (8) a long running campaign for G.R. Scott's *Banned Books* (9) mirrors the social reality of Grove and their continuing efforts towards the publication of formerly illicit literature. This is measured against a promotion for 1963's significant literary releases: advertising Henry Miller's *Black Spring* ('the concluding volume in the world famous forbidden trilogy' (8)) and John Rechy's *City of Night* ('one of the most important novels Grove Press has ever published' (10)), the increasingly marketable status of Grove's list of transgressive titles is highlighted. In particular, however, a full-page advertisement for Thomas Pynchon's debut novel, *V*, embodies *E.R*'s oblique stance towards a literature of the academy—hailing it as a 'remarkable' novelistic achievement, while it 'flouts the canons of the novel, thumbs its nose at normal disciplines...' (5) As one of the primary narratives of Chapter 2, this tonal ambivalence significantly affects attitudes towards the function of reading—both in Pynchon's work, and as an important legacy of the Grove review.

Innovations in the world of British and Irish theatre are also well represented in No. 30. Opening the main body of the issue, an excerpt from Shelagh Delaney's memoir (*Sweetly Sings the Donkey*) resonates with a short monologue from Irish author Aidan Higgins ('Sign and Ground') included shortly thereafter. Beckett's presence in No. 30, one feels, is filtered into this tendency, marking a temporary shift from his status as a Parisian author alongside Robbe-Grillet, Ionesco and Genet. Following the appearance of 'Words and Music' in No. 27, the publication of Beckett's second fully 'radiophonic' text, 'Cascando,' further explores the use of music as an independent character in the author's works. The contributor's listings point to its forthcoming transmission by French Radio (6 October, 1964) —a broadcast that, as Knowlson remarks, would be mired in disorganisation and technical problems. Moreover, as the titular piece of the 1969 volume *Cascando and Other Dramatic Pieces*, No. 30 also anticipates the publisher's collection of a number of pieces by the author included in *E.R* throughout the 60s: including *Words and*

Music, Play, Eh Joe, as well as the screenplay for *Film*. Perhaps the most striking collision between Beckett and the aesthetic of the review however, is the arrangement of the author's text alongside illustrations from frequent contributors Paul Flora and A.G. Sens—the latter of whom comically echoes *Godot* in his depiction of a man in a bowler hat, planting a tree only to hang himself from it. Demonstrating the degree to which Beckett's contributions had become part of the shared vocabulary of *E.R.*, No. 30 also casts its view forward to the more decorative productions of later issues.

Finally, 1963 was a pivotal year for the Civil Rights movement in America, reaching a climactic point with the March on Washington (28 August, 1963). Anticipatory glimpses of this essential moment in U.S. political history can be found in New York photographer Bob Adelman's portfolio and cover image: documenting desegregation rallies, Southern voter drives, and the often violent response these actions garnered. In a particularly alarming image of the racist underbelly of the American South, a protestor—clad with a swastika armband—is depicted as part of an anti-CORE and NAACP demonstration. Concluding the issue, John Schultz's harrowing insight into the 'bureaucratic machine' (102) of the America-Mexico border ('Border Crossing') details the political hostility and intimidation encountered by the author following the end of a writing trip in Mexico. Despite their legal re-entry, Shultz describes an American border official's suspicion of the left-wing literature being brought back into the U.S.—including volumes of Marx and Engels, as well as Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, for which Grove was busy fighting court battles across the country. Drawing from his experience at the border, Schultz's essay concludes with a pessimistic account of 'the customs face' encountered day after day in the U.S.: 'a face solidly formed with righteousness, whole and well-fixed with machined health and machined obedience to righteous feelings.' (111) Revealing American 'health' and 'righteousness' as something artificial—as machinic—Shultz echoes the review's youthful stance, against both Soviet rigidities and American bureaucracy. By the middle of the decade, this sensibility would pass into the energies of the New Left. As such, *E.R.* increasingly positions itself as both literary magazine and witness to a new culture emerging in the U.S.

Postmodernism, or the Populist Underground

Arguably the most storied issue of the *E.R.*, one cannot ignore the significance of No. 32 (April-May, 1964) as a profound landmark in the development of the Grove periodical. Upon its publication *E.R.* underwent a marked change in format, from the trade paperback of previous issues to a full-sized 'glossy' magazine (8½" x 11")—acquiring, as Beverly Gross aptly remarks, 'the same dimension as *Ramparts* and *Playboy*, which indeed it seems to be a cross between.'²⁵² Prior to the release of the sensational new *E.R.*, Business Manager Fred Jordan writes to the review's subscribers, promising

²⁵² Beverly Gross, 'Culture and Anarchy: Whatever Happened to Lit Magazines?' in *The Antioch Review*, Vol. 29, No. 1, (Spring, 1969), p. 45

'drawings, collages and many beautiful photographs (in colour as well) to add to its new visual excitement.'²⁵³ This turn towards the visual brings *E.R.*'s stable of authors into step with a new technicolour production of erotic photographs, comic strips, and (in a move important for Rosset) commentary on film. It is into this nexus that the review transposes Beckett, interlayered with new stories, drama, advertising and critical work.²⁵⁴ Indeed, in No. 32, a full-page advertisement for Beckett's sixth novel, *How it is*, capitalises on the author's 'ultimate,' 'radically different' achievement. Also highlighted is Beckett's canonization as a prize-winning author (jointly awarded the '\$10,000 International Publisher's Prize'), and the critical standard set by *Godot* ('a book as seminal to the recasting of the novel as *Waiting for Godot* was in shaping the modern theatre'). Once again, Beckett's face is displayed prominently as a visual embodiment of *E.R.*'s serious avant-garde credentials—a precedent curiously in keeping with the magazine's new commitment to 'visual excitement.'

Also recalibrated in the material and aesthetic transition of No. 32 are the publisher's long-standing ties to literary obscenity. In this regard, the issue was notable insofar as it marked the first time that *E.R.* became an object of censorship in its own right. On April 24th 21,000 bound and unbound copies of the magazine were seized from a Nassau County printers, charged with the circulation of 'obscene, indecent and pornographic magazines.'²⁵⁵ Among the chief offending materials, erotic prints by photographer Emil J. Cadoo were of particular notoriety: cited in the affidavit as portraying 'nude human forms, possibly male and female, but reputed [...] to be two females, and that the forms portrayed various poses and positions indicat[ed] sexual relations.'²⁵⁶ As such, the renewal of *E.R.* in No. 32 relocates Grove's commitment to *literary* obscenity to the new visual possibilities of the magazine—a connection, as Loren Glass argues, of a significantly 'homosocial' tendency. Following Cadoo's photographs, an influx of images dealing primarily in the nude female body become common in the pages of the review, designed to both titillate and provoke. The blithe eroticism of the magazine reveals a further transformation in the character of the *E.R.*, in tandem with its dramatic reinvention from a meta-text of the Grove project to a stature of cultural prominence. Moving further still from the modernism of the inter-war little magazines, No. 32 exemplifies the degree to which the review's purported avant-gardism (subsumed under a generalized oppositional stance) is tested and reimagined under the influence of its increasingly seductive package. The transformation of *E.R.* into what will hereafter be considered an important postmodern artefact will, thus, merit a brief preliminary comment.

²⁵³ Quoted in Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013), p. 123

²⁵⁴ Notably, Jan Kott's '*King Lear or Endgame*,' appearing in No. 33 (Aug-Sep, 1964)

²⁵⁵ Quoted in Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013), p. 124

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

In this regard, Nicholas Zubrugg describes the magazine as a ‘monument to the creative energy, enthusiasm and solidarity propelling the experiments of mainstream postmodern writers.’²⁵⁷ The characterisation of the magazine as a postmodern artefact is apt. The multiplicity of voices, on both sides of the Atlantic, together with the increasingly decorative formatting, texts flanked on every side by glossy images, and the ironic acknowledgement of the magazine-as-commodity, reveal a postmodern object *avant-la-lettre*. Perhaps the most iconic reflection of this transformation from little review, to postmodern magazine, was the abbreviation of its title simply to *Evergreen*. At once a consolidation and a fracturing of the *E.R* brand, the free-floating signifier of *Evergreen* would appear on the magazine, the imprint of *Evergreen* paperbacks, the *Evergreen Gallery*, in addition to the Evergreen Theatre, and Rosset’s investment in *Evergreen* film. This is exemplary, as Seaver notes, of the publishing house, by 1966, beginning ‘to look like a multipronged media company.’²⁵⁸ The same year saw a rise in profitability for Grove, with the success of Eric Berne’s *Games People Play*, the rise in circulation of the magazine from 35,000 to 120,000, and Grove’s flotation on the New York Stock Exchange. One of the more storied arms of *E.R*’s postmodern avant-garde, the *Evergreen Club* would also be established in 1966. Through Grove’s new book club, the publisher would push a number of titillating titles (including *The Complete Sade*, *The Olympia Reader*, and Pauline Reage’s *The Story of O*), as well as more populist items like the aforementioned *Games People Play* and Wayland Young’s *Eros Denied: Sex in Western Society*. The drive for ‘adult’ readers, became a ubiquitous invitation to ‘Join the Underground’ in 1967. *E.R*’s appeal to readers as ‘free thinking’ individuals and potential members of a countercultural movement, tied together the poles of anti-censorship, and ‘vulgar modernism’ into a popular postmodern package.

Vol. 8, No. 34 (Nov-Dec, 1964)

No. 34 is inescapably defined (as was No. 33) by the seizure of No. 32, for the printing of ‘obscene, indecent and pornographic’ images. The provocative decision to re-print offending items by Cadoo in the following two issues of *E.R* —this time in colour—is also reflected in the nudity of Phillippe Halsman’s front cover. In both cases, Halsman’s and Cadoo’s images are gently rendered and aestheticized in a manner distinct from the stark nudity of the monthly iteration of the review beginning with No. 51 (February, 1968). The controversy of No. 32 also passes into the letters addressed to the editor; in this section, accounts of ‘medieval censorship’ (10) by the Naussau-County District Attorney are juxtaposed with readerly concerns over the validity of Paul Roche’s tribute to Kennedy in the same issue (an honour for which Beckett had been approached by Goddard Lieberon in February, 1964²⁵⁹). Letters also extend to the reputation of the review itself: ranging from the laudatory (‘one of the finest

²⁵⁷ Nicolas Zurbrugg, “‘Within a Budding Grove’: Pubescent Postmodernism and the Early *Evergreen Review*,” in *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, No. 10, (Fall, 1990), p. 151

²⁵⁸ Richard Seaver, *The Tender Hour of Twilight*, (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux: New York, 2012), p. 367

²⁵⁹ *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1957-1965*, ed. by Dan Gunn, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2014), p. 587

magazines published today' (10)) to the hostile ('what an innocent name for such a trashy magazine!' (96)). In both cases, the shadow of No. 32 marks a major turning point for the magazine, building a national stature predicated equally on its literary reputation as well as its pariah status amongst a segment of the American public.

The capitalism of controversy—whereby Grove would manipulate the transgressive reputation of a text to sell more books—is similarly at work in the lead item of No. 34: Hubert Selby Jr's 'The Queen is Dead.' Featured in close proximity to an advertisement for *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (from which the story would become the opening text) the text is brought into line with the Grove backlist of controversial bestsellers ('the most exciting discovery since *City of Night*'). And yet, despite criticism for the separate appearance of an earlier short story ('Tralala') in 1961, Grove's publication of Selby's gritty collection would not be affected by any drawn out legal campaign in the manner of Miller or Burroughs. This effectively vindicates the successes of Grove and *E.R* in transforming transgressive texts into readily available commodities.²⁶⁰ Also included in the issue, Burroughs offers reflections on the burgeoning drug-scene in a short essay entitled 'Points of Distinction Between Sedative and Consciousness Expanding Drugs.' Included as part of an anthology of essays published by Putnam (*LSD: the Consciousness Expanding Drug*) Burroughs calls for more nuanced thinking around the word 'drug' as a 'generic term.' (72) Professing the benefits of 'consciousness expanding drugs,' (73) (LSD, cannabis and mescaline), the author's statement that these chemical agents are 'very useful to the artist,' strikingly equates experiments in literary form with the shifts in consciousness 'otherwise [...] inaccessible.' (74) The permeable boundary between modernist avant-gardism and the lineaments of American counterculture is, thus, articulated in Burroughs claim that psychedelics provide 'a key to the creative process,' to be emulated through 'textual cut-ups and fold-ins.' (74)

The appearance of Beckett's *Play* in No. 34 represents an often overlooked but significant publication in the Beckett corpus, marking the first edition to incorporate the author's revisions following the play's debut performance at the Ulmer-Theatre in Germany, and rehearsals for the Paris and London productions. As Gontarski argues, it is the 'most accurate and complete text of *Play* available.'²⁶¹ Moreover, the challenges concerning the staging of *Play* are well known in Beckett studies, posing a number of significant problems for the author. In particular, the piece presented difficulties regarding the shape of the urns in which Beckett's actors would be contained, the practical application of the interrogating light, as well as the *da capo*, calling to 'Repeat play exactly.' Each of these come to bear on subsequent revisions of the text, reflected in the publication in No. 34. In this regard, Business Manager Fred Jordan's call for Beckett's play to be published—'in extenso'—marks the review as a venue

²⁶⁰ By comparison, *Last Exit to Brooklyn* would appear in an *Evergreen* edition two years before it would be litigated in UK court in 1966

²⁶¹ S.E. Gontarski, 'Beckett's *Play*, in extenso,' in *Modern Drama*, Vol. 42, No. 3, (Fall 1999), p. 450

curiously attuned to the practical demands of Beckett's writing. Having modified the *da capo*, during French rehearsals, in order to accommodate a 'weakening' of speech and light, *E.R* excises 'exactly' from the Faber text's imperative to 'repeat play *exactly*'; in addition, stage-directions concerning lighting are modified, removing 'not quite' from the Faber text's 'response to light is *not quite* immediate.' While the *E.R* edition of Beckett's play is unique for its accuracy, this would curiously not be the edition of the text to make it into book form in 1969's *Cascando and Other Dramatic Pieces* (reprinting from the revised Faber edition). Nevertheless, the publication of *Play* in No. 34 marks a significant point of intersection between venue and content. Stated by Gontarski: *Play* results in 'a break from the hegemony of modernist textuality [...] and a move closer to the indeterminacy we more often associate with postmodernist textuality.'²⁶² As such, the postmodern metamorphosis of *E.R*— embodied in the shift in format and the increasing regularity with which it was published— became an outlet ideally suited for the problem of revision and Beckett's theatre.

In addition to the question of textual accuracy, one finds the altogether more impalpable suggestion of Beckett's presence in subsequent publications by Aidan Higgins ('Black Blood: A South African Diary') and Jack Gelber ('Neal vs. Jimmy the Fag'). The former relates Higgins' impressionistic travels through South Africa, during which time, in a school auditorium, he chances upon 'two battered bowler hats and a skeleton tree in its final leaf—stage props from a past production of *Waiting for Godot*' (32). In Gelber's brief narrative, Neal, fresh from a stint in jail, visits an acquaintance's house in order to contact his wife to make a devastating confession. Where Higgins' travelogue chances on the aftermath of a Beckett performance, the author assumes a more haunting influence over Gelber. In particular, the concluding moment of stasis ('Outside Neal Fraser did not move for a moment but held his breath. Inside Jimmy the Fag and Audrey did not move but breathed a sigh of relief' (61)) locates a Beckettian miasma in the cool, Beat-inflected setting of Gelber's New York tenement.

Finally, in accordance with the new format of *E.R*, the subject of the erotic is also explored through items by George Bataille ('Madame Edwarda') and Susan Sontag ('Against Interpretation'). Following the narrator's encounter with the titular Madame Edwarda—'God figured as a public whore' (66)—sexually explicit content noticeably disrupts the form of the text, decentring the protagonist and Edwarda who, together, succumb to a delirium wrought through the experience of an intense sexual ecstasy. In the seminal 'Against Interpretation,' an 'erotics of art' (93) serves as a necessary obstacle for the work of interpretation. Sontag's essay has itself been the object of much hermeneutic work; nevertheless, the marriage of countercultural language (through which 'interpretation makes art manageable, conformable' (78)) to the changing shape of the post-war American academy places Sontag's essay in a suggestive position to the 1965 popular movement. In particular, Beckett is marked as having 'attracted

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 442

interpreters like leeches,' (78) presenting an opaque text that perversely encourages a more vigorous reaching towards depth models of understanding. In this manner, Beckett's work is unimaginatively 'read as a statement about modern man's alienation from meaning or from God, or as an allegory of psychopathology' (78); by contrast, Sontag repositions the avant-garde as 'motivated by a flight from interpretation.' (79) Conceiving an 'erotics' as fundamentally irreconcilable with the mechanical work of interpretation, Sontag's essay reconfigures the relations between academy, *E.R*-style eroticism and popular iconoclasm at the precipice of the counterculture.

Vol. 10, No. 39 (Jan-Feb, 1966)

The reputation of the *E.R* as an 'Adult' magazine is negotiated in No. 39, presented simultaneously as a mark of distinction and an incursion on the realm of good taste. In a double page advertisement for the review²⁶³ and the newly introduced *Evergreen Club* (amassing a membership of 75,000 by the end of the year), *E.R* is marketed 'for adults only.' Following the publication of the Massachusetts court decision on *Naked Lunch* in No. 36, as well as the novel's appearance in a mass-market paperback edition (June, 1965), the framing of *E.R* as an 'adult' venture occurs at the end of the major censorship battles of the 60s. As such, the 'adults' to which the magazine speaks are characterised as those wishing 'to share in the new freedoms that book and magazine publishers are winning in courts.' Advertising the discounted Grove titles and subscription service of the *Evergreen Club*, the campaigns fought over Lawrence, and Miller are nonetheless highlighted—announcing that 'the literary scene has never been the same since 1959' (the year Grove published *Lady Chatterley's Lover*). The symbiosis between new writing and new reading is hereby established, in which the fresh availability of explicit material is tied to 'the growth of a new generation of readers' who 'at the same time freed a new batch of contemporary writers.' Above all, one can perceive the rapid mythologizing, by Grove and *E.R* of its own reputation and legacy. In this light, the publisher's prized authors are trumpeted: significantly, 'an obscure Irish born playwright by the name of Samuel Beckett' who 'ushered in a new epoch in drama with *Waiting for Godot*' when 'Grove brought him and his work to America.' The broader flight of European literature into the pages of *E.R* (also represented by Robbe-Grillet and the New Novel as well as Pinter and the vanguard of British dramatists) is, thus, stated as a notable influence over the 'new crop' of American writers. At the same time, the imbedded tension of *E.R*'s popular avant-gardism is foregrounded. In the very logic of the advertisement itself, the 'adult' audience cultivated by *E.R*, restrictive in its appeal to a maturity of taste, also retains an explicit populism. The fact that Grove books are those 'seller oriented book clubs can't offer to their mass membership'—and those that 'many bookstores are still too timid to sell'—is offset against *E.R*'s vigorous promotion of the avant-garde and the promise of 'important price advantages' to members of the *Evergreen Club*.

²⁶³ All subsequent quotations pertaining to the *Evergreen Club* in this section are taken from the aforementioned promotion which is printed on the inside cover and opposing page of No. 39.

The category of the 'adult' reader is, nevertheless, tested throughout No. 39. Concerning the brand of popular opposition offered by the underground student Movement of the mid-60s, essayist and frequent contributor Nat Hentoff ('We Shall Overcome—When?') warns against 'the tentacles of co-optation.' (101) Indeed, the ambivalence of *E.R* as an agent of political efficacy would come under increasing strain in the latter half of the decade. While the magazine would vigorously promote its allegiance to the 'underground generation,' it would also be involved in the repackaging of the same dissenting voices under the commercial banner of 'adult' reading. This compound of popular provocation is immediately clear in *E.R*'s cultivation of the comic strip during this period. Illustrated by French cartoonist Sine, the front cover of No. 39 (depicting a ballet dancer pirouetting without underwear before a shocked audience) perfectly demonstrates the magazine's preference for mischief over serious political engagement. This is further emphasized in the sensational publication of Jean-Claude Forest's erotic comic *Barbarella*. Introduced in the previous two issues, (for which it also provided the cover art), the titular heroine became a symbol of the masculine-skewing vision of sexual revolution propagated by Grove. Moreover, *Barbarella* would appear in *E.R* two years before the 1968 film adaptation, in which Forest's bleach-blond heroine would famously be portrayed by Jane Fonda. While the comic itself offers an amalgamation of popular science fiction tropes and soft-core eroticism, the role of Seaver as translator of Forest's French text awkwardly brings the cartoon into the broader stable of avant-garde art cultivated by the review. In this manner, *Barbarella* is used to bolster the cutting-edge reputation of *E.R*, framed as the 'French comic strip *for adults* that's too grown up for France.' (my italics) And yet, the branding of an 'adult' comic strip is challenged even within the pages of No. 39. This arises in the appearance of Michael O'Donoghue's and Frank Springer's *The Adventures of Phoebe Zeit-Geist*, a racier American analogue to the French scantily-clad heroine. Letters published in response to *Phoebe Zeit-Geist* demand for the magazine to get back to 'adult' material, comparing the new glossy review unfavourably with older issues of *E.R* (reliant on 'shock' rather than the review's erstwhile reputation for 'daring'). However, by far the most authoritatively outraged response appears from a West German government official (labelled playfully by Grove editors as 'the top guardian of morals in Germany') addressed to the former distributor of *E.R* in the FRG. Bemoaning the 'bad taste' of *Barbarella*, the Regierungsdirektor reserves his 'horrified' response for *Phoebe Zeit-Geist* and an episode in which the heroine is whipped, while naked, by an SS officer. Admonishing the *E.R* for publishing content 'likely to endanger the understanding between the NATO nations,' (28) the continued appearance of *Phoebe Zeit-Geist* in the review (collected in book form in 1968), is a testament to *E.R*'s assault and exploitation of sexual delicatessen under the banner of 'adult' reading.

In an essay that might serve as an overture to the issue, maverick publisher Maurice Girodias ('The Erotic Society') argues for the unleashed libido as the key to a possible humanism. 'We are erotic units,'

Girodias argues, 'homo eroticus.' Written in response to a negative review of *The Olympia Reader* (brought out by Grove the previous year) by George Steiner, Girodias objects to Steiner's criticism of *Lolita*—and by association the Olympia list—as 'high pornography.' Dismissing pornography as 'an ugly and silly word,' (64) he notes the cataclysmic progress in Britain as well as in America regarding the opening up of sexual tolerance. The 'indignity,' as Girodias states, of bringing the category of pornography to bear on works as diverse as *Ulysses* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* results only in 'dealing with writers as if they were criminals.' (65) However, Girodias' enthusiasm is tempered by the fact that the sexual revolution also 'unleashed the torrents of bad taste' (66)—glimpsed in No. 39, in addition to the Olympia backlist. Nevertheless, *The Olympia Reader* was marketed heavily in the pages of *E.R.*; appearing in a full page promotion in No. 39, it is heralded as 'the finest writing that has ever been censored.' (93) Containing works by Miller, Genet, Burroughs and Beckett, many of Grove's flagship authors are represented in its pages. The background of erotic late modernism, synonymous with the Olympia connection, suggests a context through which it is also tempting to read the inclusion in this issue of Beckett's 'Imagination Dead Imagine.' Appearing shortly after Forest's *Barbarella* comic and before *Phoebe Zeit-Geist* and Girodias' excursions into the erotic, Beckett's publication fills in what Paul Stewart describes as the 'remnants of sexuality' in Beckett's work, re-focusing the 'non-normative, distorted or oblique forms.'²⁶⁴ As such, a veneer of eroticism is imparted over Beckett's heretofore 'closed space.' This inflects the minute detail into which Beckett travels in describing the 'white bodies' of the Rotunda, 'sweating' as the container rises in temperature, the 'long hair' of the female inhabitant, and the 'mist' of their breath.²⁶⁵ As such, No. 39 unearths a latent sexuality to Beckett's otherwise hermetically enclosed text.

Lastly, Paul Roche's essay on the death of T.S. Eliot ('After Eliot: Some Notes Towards a Reassessment') whose reputation, particularly amongst Don Allen's 'postmoderns,' was mired in high modernist academicism, is unpacked. At the same time, Roche reiterates many of the standard criticisms of the modernist poet, complaining of his 'bloodless cerebration'—'getting all his inspiration from books rather than from life.' (67) This statement of opposition is further insinuated by the publication of the first part of Kerouac's *Satori in Paris*. Far from Eliot's 'cerebration,' the reader follows the author's wandering tale of revelation in Paris, serving as a charge against any notion of a poetics not rooted in autobiography and the immediacy of the 'spontaneous.' In this way, No. 39 brings Kerouac back into the foreground of Grove's publishing ventures, after the recent publication of *Desolation Angels* (1965) by Coward-McGann. Along with Beckett, Kerouac stands as a looming presence over the 16 year history of the

²⁶⁴ Paul Stewart, *Sex and Aesthetics in Samuel Beckett's Work*, (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2011), p. 16

²⁶⁵ Suggestively, the short piece shares a genetic link with an earlier text, 'All Strange Away,' in which the planes of a comparable container are decorated with 'naked bodies.' (171)

initial iteration of *E.R.*²⁶⁶ As such, the *E.R.* does not allow for any uncomplicated reading of aesthetic allegiance. This is also true of No. 39; as a rejoinder to the explicit and implicit critiques of art not rooted in immediate experience, the very notion of ‘the real’ is brought into question by another long-standing member of the *E.R.* stable: Alain Robbe-Grillet (‘From Realism to Reality’). Quoting from Flaubert regarding the possibility of composing ‘something out of nothing,’ the French author strikes a staunchly anti-Kerouacean line: stating ‘I do not transcribe I construct.’ (49) As such, amongst the fundamental values of the *E.R.* as an object of study, the review’s internal debates trouble the boundary between American spontaneity and European aestheticism.

Vol. 11, No. 47 (June-July, 1967)

As a venue for marginal poetics and politics, up to its transformation in 1964, the resonance of *E.R.* as a mouthpiece for the American ‘underground’ takes on an outspokenly populist edge in the late 60s. This is apparent in the appeal to ‘adult’ readers of Grove’s *Evergreen Club*—gradually coalescing into a nationwide campaign to ‘Join the Underground.’ This populist underground is predicated on both the increased availability of cutting-edge works and the assumption that they still confer a distinct radical identity upon readers. In a 2 year subscription card, included in No. 47, one finds the magazine giving shape to this hypothetical reader: ‘do you have what it take to join The Underground?’—only the ‘adult, literate and adventurous’ need apply. Appealing to the reader’s individuality, *E.R.* nonetheless forges a group identity through the ‘underground’—a label that would be replicated in advertisements, stickers and posters throughout the existence of the Grove magazine. The extreme mood of student politics across the U.S. is, thus, merged in *E.R.* with the aestheticized gesture of radical consumption. On top of this, editorials titled ‘Notes from the Underground,’ beginning each issue, offer a first-hand glimpse into an often sensational aspect of the Greenwich Village subculture. Reinforcing the *E.R.* as the sole mouthpiece for the micro-politics of ‘underground’ life, the reader is invited into the ongoing arguments and recriminations of Grove’s inner-circle of artists and critics. This is reflected in the deluge of letters to the editor, in which character assassinations by Maurice Girodias (primarily in response to Nabokov’s ‘Lolita and Mr Girodias’ in No. 45, (Feb-March, 1967)) and Norman Mailer (an ‘open letter to Seymour Krim’) are featured. Juxtaposed against the variously giddy fan-mail, an anonymous letter alleging to be from a New York psychiatric ward captures the hysterical spirit of the magazine in these years:

‘*Evergreen* is the ultimate orgasm of audio-visual literature—a cataclysmal seminal flow of poetry, prose, photographs, screaming cartoons and yes, even interesting advertisements.’ (107)

The ‘audio-visual orgasm’ of the Grove magazine is palpable in the reappearance of *Phoebe Zeit-Geist* (‘Episode X’) in No. 47. Featured on the front cover, the issue is decorated with the memorable warning that ‘it is not enough to love art, one must be art!’ This crosses over into the world of poetry with the

²⁶⁶ This particular dyad is treated at greater length in Chapter 2.

additional inclusion of *Phoebe Zeit-Geist* writer Michael O'Donoghue's surreal poem 'Capriccio to Djuna.' Formatted alongside an ascending border of naked bodies, the visual almost entirely overwhelms the textual aspect of the poem, transforming O'Donoghue's text into a spectacular erotic object. Moreover, as the lead item of No. 47—an excerpt from Frank Reynolds' *Freewheelin Frank*, told to Michael McClure—presents a further example of *E.R.*'s popular invitation to various forms of underground communities. In this regard, the 'secretary of the San Francisco Hell's Angels' provides an entertaining and surprisingly programmatic account of the Hell's Angels, explaining 'our code, the run, red wings, our choppers, our insignia, facing outsiders...' (15) The abiding sense of a bluffer's guide to the counterculture often results in the late magazine feeling, as Beverley Gross mockingly suggests, like 'a kind of *Reader's Digest* for the avant-garde.'²⁶⁷ In this way, *E.R.*'s chief innovation becomes the blurring of the right to political dissent and the freedom to consume one's countercultural affiliations. The multiplicity of poster ads in No. 47 is a testament to this. Reproducing Aubrey Beardsley's erotic drawings, as well as Abstract Expressionist and Pop Art prints for \$1, the fetishisation of the underground as a consumer identity is readily apparent. As such, the passage of Grove's tenuous avant-garde further into the realm of popular discourse can be seen in advertising for the release of the Warhol-produced debut album of *The Velvet Underground & Nico* (1967). Approximating hip-language in its promise of 'funny instruments' and 'groovy' vocals, the opposition of popular and avant-garde are intertwined in the advert's tagline: 'what happens when the daddy of Pop Art goes Pop Music? The most underground album of all!'

At the same time, a criticism of the mainstream avant-garde constitutes one of the prominent metanarratives of No. 47. Eric Salzman's 'The Prevalence of Rock' both acknowledges the profound cultural impact of rock music while expressing concern over its 'amazing ability to absorb and subsume virtually all forms of popular musical expression.' (43) Echoing Marshall McLuhan concerning the genre's modern tribal significance, Salzman highlights rock music—'music for everybody'—as another example of the way 'avant-garde ideas generally trickle through and get turned into pop.' (82) The significance of *E.R.* as both perpetuating and militating against this process is hinted by the author, acknowledging his own part in establishing the aura around rock music: by which 'I write a dead serious article about it and *Evergreen* prints it.' (83) A similar concern for the fate of the avant-garde is expressed in an essay by the founder of New York film society *Cinema 16*, Amos Vogel. Enumerating his 'Thirteen Confusions' on the world of avant-garde cinema, the form, Vogel argues, suffers from an 'ominous new ailment': 'over attention without understanding, over acceptance without discrimination.' 'It has become fashionable,' Vogel states, 'its gurus and artists are in danger of becoming the avant-garde establishment.' (51) In a striking observation, the oversaturation of so called avant-garde cinema becomes evidence of 'groups

²⁶⁷ Beverly Gross, 'Culture and Anarchy: Whatever Happened to Lit Magazines?' in *The Antioch Review*, Vol. 29, No. 1, (Spring, 1969), p. 44

clamouring for the “underground.”” (51) However, the implication of *E.R* in this process is once again apparent with Grove’s acquisition of *Cinema 16* in 1966, adding to their list ‘an eclectic library of art films documentaries and film classics aimed primarily at schools and colleges.’²⁶⁸ In the fiction published in No. 47, one also finds echoes of this critique. B.H. Friedman’s satire (‘Did You Know Gorky? Kline? Pollock?’) undermines the status of the cosmopolitan art collector, whose desire for ‘control’ over every detail of his environment, renders art the preserve and plaything of the wealthy. On the other hand, the dialogisms of Robert Coover’s text (‘The Mex Would Arrive at Gentry’s junction at 12:10’), directly forbid any attempt at such ‘control.’ Set in a parodic vision of the Old West, the narrative is divided between Sheriff Henry Harmon and the carnivalesque antics of the titular ‘Mex’—throbbing with his ‘trademark’ ‘obscene laughter.’ (102) Appearing ‘everywhere at once,’ (101) the Mex evades the Sheriff’s pursuit up until the story’s violent conclusion. In this text, Coover anticipates a technique of postmodern montage that would be perfected in the author’s celebrated short story ‘The Baby Sitter.’ Nevertheless, Coover’s antic style speaks to the invasive influence of the popular in the literary avant-garde, inducing a formal simultaneity between different narrative paths, like the flicking channels of a TV set.

The boundary between the purity of the avant-garde and the vulgarity of commerce is significantly blurred concerning the history of Beckett’s contributions to *E.R*. This is particularly true of No. 47, featuring the second of Beckett’s post war *nouvelles*, ‘The Calmative.’ However, the author’s barren vision of a man, having died, or at the moment of death, appears distant from the hysterical enthusiasms of the issue elsewhere. This is heightened by Romanian painter Avigdor Arikha’s austere portraits of Beckett accompanying the text—a monochrome icon of the silent, retreating author, far from the nudes or glossy comic panels elsewhere in the magazine. Nevertheless, the publication of *Stories and Texts for Nothing* in June 1967—indicated in the contributors’ listings—positions Beckett’s novella as a blatant promotion in advance of the Grove book. Matthew Hogart points to precisely this tension in a well-known review for the collection, suggestively titled ‘Saint Beckett.’ It is Beckett’s ‘total lack of vulgarity’ that makes him resistant to criticism ‘since book-reviewing is a vulgar occupation; and so is all journalism, all traffic with the idols of the marketplace.’ Hogart invokes Kafka’s ‘hunger artist’ to describe Beckett’s ‘saintliness’—a wholesale removal from vulgar commerce to a ‘formless universe.’ At the same time, Hogart acknowledges a residual worldiness in Beckett’s legacy, as a dramatist as well as in the fraught lineage of the *Nouvelles* (falsely reported in the American edition) in *Merlin*—at once unstuck and physically rooted in a particular space and time. All suggest Beckett’s ‘striking grasp of the “vulgar” world,’ a point that, despite the magazine, is hinted at through its contradictory framing. Included in the 1967 volume of stories, Arikha’s drawings simultaneously remove and implant Beckett in this commercial context. In this way, visions of ‘Saint Beckett’ coexist with the commercial underground

²⁶⁸ Richard Seaver, *The Tender Hour of Twilight*, (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux: New York, 2012), p. 367

of the magazine, invoking Kenner's image of the author as 'tightrope walker'²⁶⁹—between the purity of nothingness and the contingency of the world.

Finally, Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski's long piece on the future of leftism in the West ('What is the Left Today'), offers an insight into the shifting parameters of left wing theory and praxis in the American New Left. In Kolakowski's essay, many of the heterodoxies of the post-Soviet left are perceptible: a hard distinction between 'the intellectual left' ('the left must define itself on the level of ideas' (30)) rather than a class-based politics; as well as the equal resistance against 'Soviet style Marxism' ('socialist phraseology as a façade for police states' (32)). Recalling Sartre in No. 1, Kolakowski highlights the Hungarian Communist Party as a particularly egregious example of an intellectually underdeveloped and inhumane Marxism. Curiously, the author adopts a tone that might be described as Beckettian—filtered through the negative politics of Adorno—in his characterisation of possible utopias. As Beckett resides on the 'cutting edge of negativity,' utopia must necessarily entail a turning away from the state of the given—whereby, 'to construct a utopia is always an act of negation.' (32) Kolakowski's essay is followed by commentary from *Village Voice* co-editor Jack Newfield, SDS initiator Thomas Hayden and peace activist Staughton Lynd. Each highlight Kolakowski's underestimation of the decentralisation of the New Left program and the limitations of his teachings (from a Polish context) for the American situation. Of particular interest, Newfield positions his own leftism as one of a literary character—a 'humanism' grounded in Camus, Mailer and Goodman. Like other figures on the student-led Movement, Newfield would exemplify the relationship between *E.R* and the New Left, reinforcing this connection through his status (along with Carl Oglesby and Dotson Rader) as an occasional contributing editor to the Grove magazine. Nevertheless, Kolakowski is prescient in warning of the 'fragmentary aspect' of the American left of the 60s—amounting to 'the sum total of spontaneous moral positions.' (33) While echoing *E.R*'s own attempts at bridging the spheres of high literature and revolutionary politics, Kolakowski's article, and its myriad responses, foreshadows the failures of the radical underground with which *E.R* would become increasingly captivated in its final years.

After the Underground

The final stage in the history of *E.R* occurs against a wider canvas of over-expansion and corporate mismanagement. In 1969, Rosset's investment in a new Grove headquarters, 'a seven story, forty-thousand-square-foot'²⁷⁰ building on Mercer Street, became a symbol of the publisher's hubristic abandon—a problem that was compounded by the downturn in New York real estate in the 1970s.

²⁶⁹ Quoted in Peter John Murphy, *Critique of Beckett Criticism: A Guide to Research in English, French and German*, (Camden House: London, 1994), p. 30

²⁷⁰ Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013), p. 194

Designed as a 'new kind of communications center for the sixties,'²⁷¹ the attempted consolidation of Grove as the voice of a generation belies a more fractured relationship with the underground movement that we will explore hereafter. On top of this, the accelerating transformations of Rosset's primary publishing concern also have ramifications over the character of *E.R.* With No. 51 (Feb, 1968), the magazine changed from a bimonthly to a monthly publication. As evidenced in a *New York Times* article on the transition, the rise in circulation (from 150,000 to a print run topping 200,000 by the end of the decade) became a newsworthy event. For a nominally literary magazine, this marked a staggering push in the broad dissemination of the literary avant-garde and Grove's 'Faithful Old Authors.'²⁷² At the same time, the monthly format resulted in a hyper-responsivity to the explosive political milieu closing the 1960s. A special edition on 'The Spirit of Che,' the inaugural monthly issue includes a eulogy by Fidel Castro, as well as writing by Regis Debray and chapters from Che's *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War* (published by Grove in 1968). Further exemplifying *E.R.*'s capacity to hi-jack the news cycle, the issue would result in the Grove offices at 80 University Place being targeted with a fragmentation grenade by anti-Castro exiles. Fronted with the first notable usage of Paul Davies' internationally recognisable painting of Che, the monthly *E.R.* became the perfect vehicle to propound the provocative world view of the publisher.

If No. 51 bespeaks the radical politics of Rosset, it also exemplifies the specular performance of avant-garde politics common to the magazine—a radical gesture aestheticized within the frame of a poster. The blowout from Grove's simultaneous engagement and co-optation of radical political energies reached its zenith in April 1970, with the take-over of Rosset's office by the Women's Liberation Front. The occupation, by 9 women, against the exploitative practices of Grove ('using women's bodies to rip off enormous profits for a few wealthy capitalist dirty old straight white men, like Barney Rosset!'²⁷³) highlights the emergent divisions produced by the fierce marketing of the populist underground. This conflict produces further difficulties for the magazine, as its claim to being a faithful proponent of the underground clashes with the Grove propaganda war against feminist 'censorship' (in response the occupants' threat to destroy the Grove files). As documented in contributing editor Carl Oglesby's account of the occupation in No. 80 (July, 1970), the decision to call the police finally proved catastrophic for Rosset's credentials as a radical publisher ('nobody is going to pay the slightest attention anymore to what you have to say politically' (70)). Together with the occupation, Rosset's overinvestment in European avant-garde film and New York real estate, resulted in a slow-motion collapse between 1970 and 1974. Both overburdened and unable to keep up with the radical shifts of Movement politics, Grove went from over 150 permanent workers to 14, moving headquarters, and

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² Richard Seaver, *The Tender Hour of Twilight*, (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux: New York, 2012), p. 342

²⁷³ Quoted in Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013)

retreating from its position of mainstream cultural prominence. As a result, *E.R* was discontinued in 1971, only to reappear as a quarterly trade paperback in 1972. During this period, the postmodern flavour of the magazine, apparent from No. 32, is exaggerated, with creative writing increasingly displaced by cultural commentary and sexually provocative images. The meagre amount of fiction printed in these later issues is invariably accompanied by an assortment of cartoons and illustrations, reinforcing the text itself as a visual product. In this regard, *E.R*'s dealings with Beckett provide a striking case study. While the graphic allure of the author was well established early on by the review, a wide play of visual inter-texts, responsive to Beckett's work, is staged in these late issues. This is true throughout the last years of the decade, up to the final issue. As the most prominent example of this late tendency, No. 96 finds Philippe Weisbecker assimilating the austere Europeanism of Avigdor Arikha (see No. 47) into the minimalist cartoons typical of the review. Moreover, as Glass acknowledges, the enduring influence of Grove over the growing canon of postmodern fiction is palpable. As the last bestseller under Rosset's leadership, John Kennedy O'Toole's *Confederacy of Dunces* (1980), is a testament to Grove's sometimes overlooked cultivation of postmodern voices: including Robert Coover, J.G. Ballard, and Kathy Acker (appearing alongside Beckett in No. 98). As such, the reality of Grove's postmodern connection, projects another stage of Beckett's bequest in American letters beyond the pages of *E.R*.

Vol. 13, No. 62 (Jan, 1969)

According to Beverley Gross, No. 62 exemplifies the 'pure perverse'²⁷⁴ sexuality of the later *E.R*. This is unsurprising given the exploitative front cover, advertising Michael O'Donoghue's portfolio 'Binders Keepers,' featuring a naked woman variously bound by a series of Boy Scout knots. A similar image of the violated female body in No. 62 is found in a published excerpt from George Revelli's historical erotica *Commander Amanda Nightingale* in which a female officer of the French Resistance is captured by German soldiers and subjected to torture and sexual abuse. Indeed, the adjacent image of an SS officer whipping a young topless woman is directly reminiscent of Frank Springer's illustrations for O'Donoghue's *Phoebe Zeit-Geist*. Both pieces typify the kind of content for which *E.R* and Grove would come under severe criticism by the burgeoning Women's Liberation movement. Furthermore, subscription forms for both the *Evergreen Club* and the *E.R* reveal a marked push towards lurid and often exploitatively sexual content. For the book club, the recently published volume of *The Adventures of Phoebe Zeit-Geist* (1968) is available along with the subscriber's initial purchase, including the omnipresent Sade (*Juliette*), and Dr's Phyllis and Eberhard Kronhausen's sensationalist, and pseudo-scientific *The Sexually Responsive Woman*. Moreover, No. 62 evidences Grove's infamous foray into the world of Victorian erotica, offering 'an extraordinary triple package' in return for a year's subscription to

²⁷⁴ Beverly Gross, 'Culture and Anarchy: Whatever Happened to Lit Magazines?' in *The Antioch Review*, Vol. 29, No. 1, (Spring, 1969), p. 47

the magazine. This includes *The Pearl* (3 volumes of the ‘famed but quickly suppressed underground magazine of Victorian England’), *My Secret Life* (an ‘anonymous autobiography of a wealthy Victorian who lived for sex alone’) and *A Man With a Maid* (an ‘anonymous classic of literature in the Victorian tradition’ which ‘explores with rare candor the various relationships between a gentleman and a woman who he holds in bondage’).

The political divides that would trouble Grove into the 1970s are also anticipated. One letter interestingly draws attention to the Northern-centric attitudes of the magazine, dismissing the American South as ‘synonymous with fascism and intolerance.’ (20) The ‘broad generalisations’ of the revolutionary politics promulgated by the Movement are further implicated in the issue’s ‘Notes from the Underground,’ addressing the limits of the student movement’s rhetoric around ‘liberation.’ Perhaps the most pointed diagnosis of the political situation is Jack Newfield’s ‘Letter to an Ex-Radical.’ While Newfield expresses ambivalence over aspects of the Movement (particularly the SDS and Tom Hayden, ‘a Frankenstein’s Monster of the New Left’ 31), he criticises the deep generational divide between proponents of Old and New radical tendencies: ‘you listened to Leadbelly and Woody Guthrie and I listen to The Band and The Fugs. You read Dos Passos and Steinbeck, and I read Heller and Pynchon.’ (93) In particular, Newfield highlights the lukewarm response by the old left to the political chaos at the year’s Democratic National Convention, and the subsequent trial for ‘incitement to riot’ of the Chicago 7. The article stresses conflicts over the anti-hierarchical tendency of left-wing politics in the 1960s and the push for decentralisation of the university as a microcosm of the state—a view echoed in Nat Hentoff’s commentary ‘The Universities: A Crisis of Legitimacy.’ Meanwhile, Kenneth Howard uses black humour to undermine the repressive techniques employed by President Rene Barrientos’ Bolivia and the regime’s corrupt police force. Like Newfield, Howard calls attention to the previous year’s violence in Chicago —on Mayor Richard J. Daley, he quips that ‘Mayor Daley’s jachus [police force] could teach ours a few tricks.’ (61) On top of this, Paris Flammonde’s ‘Why President Kennedy was Killed’ offers a particularly pointed barometer of the American political situation in the late 60s, racked by increasing paranoia and diffusion of purpose. In exhaustive detail Flammonde comments on New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison’s conspiratorial account of the November 1963 Kennedy assassination. Suggesting the possibility of an ‘answer to the murder mystery of the century,’ (41) Garrison’s far-ranging and influential investigation positions the assassination amid a nexus of CIA involvement, anti-Castro exiles and ultra-right paramilitaries. A culmination of what Richard Hofstadter describes as the ‘paranoid style’²⁷⁵ of American public life, Flammonde’s assessment of the cultural and political impact of the assassination reflects *E.R.’s* documentation of the paranoias and divisions affecting the American left.

²⁷⁵ See Richard Hofstadter, ‘The Paranoid Style in American Politics,’ (1964) in *Harper’s Magazine*, (27 November, 2012)

Contributing editor John Lahr approaches the world of theatre with the same attention to the tectonic shift in American culture. The mythology of the U.S.—for so long centred on categories of ‘Eden’ and ‘Wilderness’—has been superseded by accelerations in technology and the displacement of the American frontier to space travel. ‘America has lost its dream,’ Lahr writes; ‘chaos spins the country out of control.’ (55) For the author, this damages the possibility for ‘new images and words’ in the theatre—‘new gods and myths.’ (55) Responding to the work of The Living Theatre, Howard Sackler’s *The Great White Hope*, and Arthur Kopit’s *Indians*, Lahr isolates examples of theatrical works ‘turning toward the void.’ (56) While Lahr does not explicitly invoke Beckett, the bequest of the author, reintroducing no man’s land and wilderness to the visual repertoire of 1960s theatre, is strongly felt. The patrilineal connection with the American debut of *Godot* in 1956 (John Lahr’s father, Bert Lahr, famously played the role of Estragon), brings Beckett tentatively alongside the radical tradition of theatre described by Lahr. As Bianchini remarks, ‘these young adults had come of age amid the tumultuous events of the late sixties’; as such, the increased resonance of Beckett’s plays, unsurprisingly evokes ‘the essential uncertainty of life.’²⁷⁶ This is reinforced by the inclusion of the tele-play *Eh Joe*, in advance of its publication as part of *Cascando and Other Dramatic Writings*. Broadcast on WNDT (18th April, 1966)—‘our educational TV station,’ as Schneider states, and performed by George Rose (‘Joe’) and Rosemary Harris (‘Woman’s Voice’), *Eh Joe* marks a resounding creative success compared to Beckett’s previous endeavours in the world of American popular media.²⁷⁷ Celebrated for its ‘total impact’—a combination of the actors, camera work and technical proficiency—Schneider confirms the effect on Grove: ‘almost a month since *Eh Joe*, and people still talking about it. Evidently all our Grove press friends liked it especially.’ (AS to SB, 8 May, 1966)²⁷⁸ The ‘total impact’ of the play is approximated in the formatting of the piece, decorated throughout by the shifting contortions of Rose’s ‘intent’ expression. For Beverley Gross the inclusion of *Eh Joe* exemplifies one of ‘the occasional reminders of the old *Evergreen*’²⁷⁹ against a magazine succumbing to tasteless sexuality and empty provocation. The overtone of torture and sex in the ‘penny-farthing hell’ of Joe’s mind, however, mark a partial congruence with the perverse body of No.62. As such, Beckett’s status as a bastion of the residual modernist investment of *E.R.’s* first volume must contend with the immanence of Beckett to the project of the later postmodern iteration.

Vol. 14, No. 80 (July 1970)

²⁷⁶ Natka Bianchini, *Samuel Beckett’s Theatre in America*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2015), p. 93

²⁷⁷ In the April 23rd letter to Beckett, Schneider describes the production as ‘the best and most faithful of the three Beckett’s I have had the good fortune to put on TV.’ In the same letter he directly compares its merits with WNTA broadcast of *Godot* (1960) and *Act Without Words II* on NBC (1966), both directed by Schneider—in *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider*, (Harvard University Press: Massachusetts, 1998), p. 203

²⁷⁸ *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider*, (Harvard University Press: Massachusetts, 1998), p. 205

²⁷⁹ Beverly Gross, ‘Culture and Anarchy: Whatever Happened to Lit Magazines?’ in *The Antioch Review*, Vol. 29, No. 1, (Spring, 1969), p. 45

The political impetus of No. 80 appears at a crossroads with an increasingly commercialised view of avant-garde aesthetics. Advertisements by Truth and Soul clothing line ('It's the revolution in fashion') and The Avant-Garde Sit-In ('protest against uncomfortable, square-looking furniture!') both appropriate the language of the movement, appealing to revolution, individuality and sex in their advertising copy. At the same time, essays by Nat Hentoff and Frederick W. Turner III both address the subject of dehumanisation as a correlative of technological progress. While Hentoff's piece opposes the decentralising impulse of New Left politics to the bureaucracy of liberal American public life, Turner's long study traces a history of Native American genocide, through the first century of American colonialism. On top of this, poems by Allen Ginsberg ('Memory Gardens' eulogising the death of Jack Kerouac the previous year) and Michael Rumaker No. 80 ('Camden, N.J.') ultimately mark the close of an epoch, while reinforcing the role of the Beats, and Ginsberg, in particular, as the public face of the magazine. Both texts are visually decorous, with illustrations by Douglas Jamieson and Theodore Xaras respectively. Alongside Beckett, the images of Kerouac and Ginsberg were used by Grove to encourage potential subscribers to 'Join the Underground'—as Loren Glass points out, often in the same printed space.²⁸⁰ While stylistically opposed, each author embodies the visual emphasis of *E.R* throughout the 1960s, to its final issues in the early 70s.

Situated between these two texts, Beckett's 'Lessness' is featured alongside a surreal drawing by Roland Topor, depicting two featureless people, one erasing the other. As the partially erased man seems to dissolve into the landscape, so does the voice of Beckett's 'story,' remarking upon its own passage into 'ruin'— 'little body same grey as the earth sky ruins...' (35) Nevertheless, the naming of Beckett as the winner of the 1969 Nobel Prize for Literature overwhelmingly frames the author's place in No. 80 with the subheading for 'Lessness' proudly announcing 'the first American publication of a new work by the winner of the 1969 Nobel Prize for Literature.' (6) This is also noted in the contributors' listings, as well as a full page advertisement for *The Collected Works of Samuel Beckett* by Grove Press. This 16 volume set, marks a high point in the author's American legacy—citing the oeuvre as 'the most astonishing body of work in modern literature.' (12) Also stated is the Swedish Academy's testimony of 'writing which—in new forms for the novel and drama—the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation'—reinforcing Beckett's canonisation as an author of universal appeal. At the same time, *E.R*'s long-time patronage of Beckett is acknowledged—as the contributors' listings remind the reader, the appearance of 'Lessness' marks the 'seventeenth work published in *Evergreen* over the years.' (6) The rhetoric around collection and completeness not only solidifies the Grove-Beckett relationship, but highlights the *E.R* as a long-time venue for American readers interested in Beckett.

²⁸⁰ Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013), p. 25

Haunting the pages of No.80, the occupation of Rosset's office by 9 activists from the Women's Liberation Front offers an indictment on the publisher's exploitation of female bodies. The opening editorial recounts a May Day benefit held by contributing editor Dotson Rader (whose meditation on the political efficacy of the American writer is also published in No. 80 with 'What Do You Think of Your Blue Eyed Artist Now Mr Death?') hijacked by feminist activists decrying the 'left disguise' of the Grove Press. The author, Tom Seligson, uses the episode as an exemplary account of the fracturing of the Underground: an indication 'that in some terrible way it did not exist anymore.' (21) Moreover, in a published letter of resignation by *E.R* editor and activist Carl Oglesby, one finds allegiances being tested by the new political frontier of radical feminism. Criticising Grove's progressive credentials, Oglesby nonetheless reflects on 'the whole subterranean project which Grove Press was so much a part of.' (16) In this collision of emancipatory visions, one finds further and surprising evidence of Beckett's enduring influence in the literary culture. In particular, Oglesby highlights the place of Beckett in forging the identity of the publisher:

'I recall especially a 12 hour bus ride I took in 1955 from New York to Ohio. Intrigued by the odd numbness of its title, I'd picked up a paperback book *Malloy* (sic) by a man named Beckett. I was twenty. I'd thought all along that the last word on our situation had already been very well said [...] those first momentous pages of Beckett's novel struck home with the simple, heavy news that there was a whole other great aspect to our experience a whole other way of gathering the problems of redemption and responsibility and giving them to the intelligence precisely through its wounds.' (16)

This letter is illuminating precisely through its revelation of Beckett's place among young American readers. 'A Grove Press book of course,' Oglesby ties the impact of the novel to the identity of the publisher. For Oglesby, the 'heavy news' of Beckett's *Molloy* lays the groundwork for a shift in consciousness synonymous with the cultural transition of the 1960s. Furthermore, it is the 'redemption and responsibility' bound up in *Molloy* that Oglesby finds lacking in Grove Press and *E.R*— accusing Rosset of 'avarice and filthy mindedness,' squandering hard-won freedoms on 'any old fuck-a-maid-a-day freak show your bibliophile can dig up from the Nineteenth C.' (69) In response, Fred Jordan cries 'censorship,' highlighting the occupier's threat to destroy the files of Grove's bestselling and important authors. As Gontarski²⁸¹ has noted, Beckett was amongst the authors most prized by the company—and therefore, one of the authors most at risk. Jordan's appeal against what he understood to be a 'fascist demand for mindless book burning,' implicates a second vision of Beckett, opposed to Oglesby's and sympathetic with Seaver's exalted description of the author as Grove's 'North star.'²⁸² Both a stimulus to

²⁸¹ S.E. Gontarski, 'Introduction: The Life and Times of Grove Press,' in *The Grove Press Reader 1951-2001*, ed. by S.E. Gontarski, (Grove Press: New York, 2001)

²⁸² Richard Seaver, *The Tender Hour of Twilight*, (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux: New York, 2012), p. 432

political reinvention and a transcendent point of reference to Grove's avant-garde-- the division in the ranks of the publishing house, is reflected in these divergent readings of Beckett.

Vol. 19, No. 96 (Spring, 1973)

The final issue of *E.R* is published as a quarterly trade paperback after the reintroduction of the format in No. 95 (Fall, 1972). The exhumation of the old *E.R* appears a year after the magazine was discontinued in December 1971. As a result, No. 96 is born from the period of economic hardship suffered by Grove Press, with Rosset's reckless investments and mismanagement of company funds compounded by the onset of recession in the U.S. economy. From a staff of over 150 located at the Grove HQ on Mercer Street, the company was forced to downsize, firing 75 members of its workforce and moving to a smaller office at 52 East 11th Street. It is here that the issue was produced, testifying to the sudden transition of Grove from a publicly listed corporation to a small publishing venture. However, No. 96 is still recognizably indebted to the glossy magazine of the 1960s. An approximation of the 'visual excitement' of *E.R* in the mid-60s is manifested in the proliferation of dirty cartoons, including a colour portfolio of nudes by photographer Dudley Grey. Although there is minimal advertising (reflecting, amongst other economic difficulties, the damage to the reputation of *E.R* as a mouthpiece for the countercultural avant-garde) *E.R* continues its tendency towards graphic decoration of poems and short texts.

The political reputation of Grove was significantly thrown into disrepute by the feminist occupation of April 1970. In the content of No. 96, these divisions collapse into a general malaise with the promise of student radicalism in the U.S. The antic utopianism and proselytizing of *E.R* during the previous decade is displaced by pieces pronouncing the end of 60s idealism. An edition of 'Notes from the Underground' by Dotson Rader eulogises New York essayist Paul Goodman, while also remarking on the demise of the Movement for which Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd* (1960) had a catalysing effect. Peter Tauber's 'Report from Bunny Hollow' offers a more light-hearted appraisal through a humorous account of a trip to the Playboy Club Hotel in New Jersey. Playfully addressed to 'Hef,' the author describes himself as a man 'weaned' (29) on *Playboy*, and the subsequent miserable experience a disappointment to 'youth' and 'fantasy.' Moreover, just as the limits of the homosocial New Left were revealed in the feminist uprising, Cecil Brown in 'Jive Philosophy' bemoans the condition of cultural criticism wherein white critics (Brown pinpoints *E.R* regulars Norman Mailer and Nat Hentoff) are to be the chief proponents of black art. To this end, the populist radicalism of the earlier review, significantly underpinned by the 'freedom to read' avant-garde literature, proves to be no longer applicable to the political challenges, both racial and sexual, presented in the new decade.

At the same time, No. 96 also stages an attempted recuperation of its late modernist beginnings. The inclusion of Beckett's novella 'The Lost Ones' as the lead story recalls the ubiquity of the author in the

first volume of *E.R.* This closed circle reasserts Beckett as a key presence throughout the many different faces of the Grove review. On top of this, illustrations by Philippe Weisbecker, accompanying Beckett's text, interact with a parallel late-modernist history of Beckett-inspired draughtsmanship. As Gontarski observes, Weisbecker's comic sketches nonetheless echo the etchings of Avigdor Arikha, decorating the excerpts of Beckett's writing published in *The North* (1972).²⁸³ In particular, the depiction of 'the white-haired woman' on page 59, directly references Arikha's *Hair*, as it billows from the figure and covers the floor of the cylinder. Thus, the sombre abstraction of Arikha's works are retrofitted into the two-dimensional, comic-strip aesthetics of Weisbecker's illustrated panels. Unlike the dissolving forms of Arikha's figures, Weisbecker renders the narrator's desire for a 'perfect mental image of the entire system': depicting the crowd of Beckett's searchers, the queue for the ladder, the climb, as well as the various 'niches' of the cylinder. This pictorial impulse even illumines the tonality of Beckett's writing—presenting the 'dried leaves' by which the author describes the sound of the cylinder's bodies brushing together. As such, a simultaneous deference and hollowing out takes place concerning the European aura attached to Beckett. As a prime specimen of post-war avant-gardism, Beckett nonetheless serves as a towering presence in the final ludic iteration of the Grove review. This transformation is mirrored by notable developments recorded in the contributors' listings. Pointing to the November 1972 performance of *Not I* at the Lincoln Centre, starring stage and film actress Jessica Tandy, Beckett's work is located uneasily in the landscape of American stardom. Staged as part of the Samuel Beckett Festival in New York (also featuring performances by Hollywood star Hume Cronyn), Bianchini draws attention to this event as a coup in the popular and commercial success of Beckett's drama in the U.S.²⁸⁴ A sense of Beckett and the Beckettian passing into the popular lexicon is also perceptible in Parker Tyler's meditation on the history of clowning. Analysing Fellini's 1970 film *The Clowns* ('Is Man a Clown? Is Fellini? And What's a Clown?') Beckett's 'hoboes' are invoked alongside the vaudeville stylings of Harry Langdon and Harpo Marx. Implicit in this connection, is Beckett's indebtedness to an established tradition of slapstick American comedy.

Above all, the status of Beckett as an internationally famous writer is redoubled on the back cover, honouring 'The Lost Ones' as 'the first work of longer fiction by Samuel Beckett to be published since he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969.' Drawing on the prestige of the literary prize, the

²⁸³ See *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose: 1929-1989*, ed. by S.E. Gontarski, (Grove Press: New York, 1995), p. 294

²⁸⁴ Alongside this, Bianchini points to the boost afforded by Beckett's award of the Nobel Prize in 1969, as well as the radical change in cultural mood inspired by the 1960s: 'the period between 1964 and 1972 was one of great activism and unrest in American society, an unrest that was reflected in the art of the period.' p. 109 Also see *Newsweek* report on the Beckett Festival: 'He [Beckett] was all alone when [...] he told us so musically in three languages—French, English and silence—that it was finished, that the only message our overborne human consciousness could apprehend now was the jingle jangle of its dissolution. Nowadays every kid with a Bic Banana or an electric typewriter tells us that.' Quoted in Natka Bianchini, *Samuel Beckett's Theatre in America*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2015), p. 110-111

novelty of Beckett's text is underlined, while simultaneously locating it in a generic line from the Trilogy of post-war novels, through *How it is* in the early 60s. Alongside this recommendation, however, is an excerpted review of the Grove edition of 'The Lost Ones,' ('Dreams of a Way Out in a Closed World,' *New York Times*, October 29th, 1972) by postmodern sci-fi novelist Joseph McElroy, celebrating Beckett's text as 'one of the signal modern ventures in concentrated attention.' This points to a more striking reinvention concerning an emergent postmodern strain in Beckett's framing and reception. Also intimated are the undertones of postmodern science-fiction coursing through 'The Lost Ones' and amplified by No. 96. Delving deeper into McElroy's review, the author appears both reluctant to allegorise Beckett's novella, while indulging in the language of explicit metaphor; finding in Beckett's novella 'a menace no less than complete annihilation,' McElroy concludes on a chilling evocation of 'foliage dissolving, solidstate cartridges sliding, persons silently far away blown up into volumes of illuminated centimeters, my family choking on space.' At the same time, this resonance is not without precedent; in this regard, postmodern critic Brian McHale stresses the importance of Beckett's text, 'retrofitted' over time as a postmodern 'microworld.' Embodying the ontological focus of McHale's reading of the postmodern, one might also trace such readings back to Hugh Kenner three decades earlier. For Kenner, Beckett's text offers 'the reconstruction of whole worlds out of minimal fragments'—leaving the reader to examine 'as a geologist might the sole piece of some exploded planet.'²⁸⁵ In this regard, No. 96 subtly brings the Beckett world into proximity with the broader encyclopaedic worlds of McElroy and coheirs, Thomas Pynchon and William Gaddis, placed into a new ecosystem of postmodern textual systems.

As Glass remarks, the afterlife of Grove saw a partial reinvestment in other forms of literary experiment; one of these (as demonstrated in the cultivation of output by Robert Coover and John Kennedy O'Toole) is literary postmodernism. While we have hinted at the postmodern shades of Beckett's novella, this is also demonstrated via reference to the other main presence in the No. 96: J.G. Ballard. Appearing in the wake of Grove's publication of *Love and Napalm: Export USA* (1972),²⁸⁶ Jerome Tarshis' essay 'Krafft-Ebing Visits Dealey Plaza: The Recent Fiction of J.G. Ballard' explores Ballard's thesis concerning the mass media and 'violence as a spectacular pastime.' (137) Drawing heavily from the controversy around Doubleday's initial agreement to publish the novel in America (with the qualification that all references to Jackie Kennedy and Ronald Reagan be excised), Ballard's montage of violence and 'perverse sexuality'—in the face of a cultural-wide 'death of affect'—offers a further development of Grove's historical opposition to censorship. However, this countercultural gesture is filtered through Ballard's taste for post-60s dystopia. On top of this, British author Ballard serves as both magpie and outsider to the American cultural forms frequently pastiched in his works. This underlying European impulse is

²⁸⁵ Hugh Kenner, *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett*, (Syracuse University Press: New York, 1973), p. 176

²⁸⁶ Published in the UK by Jonathan Cape in 1970 under the Ballard-approved title *The Atrocity Exhibition*

exemplified in the inclusion of an episode from *The Atrocity Exhibition* ('The Assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy Considered as a Downhill Motor Race') in No. 96. Here, one finds Ballard appropriating the proto-absurdism of Alfred Jarry as a frame transposed onto the assassination of the American president. Embodying a vertiginous mix of pastiche, Americana, and the European absurd, Ballard's text offers a key point of overlap between Rosset's review and a postmodern aesthetic of the U.S. Ultimately, Ballard appears both as an author ideally suited to the promiscuous format of *E.R.*, reconfiguring Grove's decade-long expropriation of European aesthetics, while offering a grotesque of the American 60s of which the *E.R.* was an integral part.

As we have seen, the work of relocation and the piecemeal formation of the Beckett world against the diverse fabric of the review necessarily assumes different forms against the changing format and fortunes of the *E.R.* From the late-modernist nostalgia of No. 1, through the reader-centric populism of *E.R.* in the 1960s, Beckett's presence remains a constant over 16 issues of Rosset's periodical. At the same time, it has been the aim of this chapter to find in Beckett's dissemination moments of both passage and, to use Rosset's neologism, 'nontogetherness'—unsettling Grove's transcendent 'North Star' against the heterodox 'mish-mash' of the review. It is this paradoxical movement both forwards and away from the American terrain that inflects the reading of Beckett's subsequent bequest to American literature in this project. Moreover, the final duality in No. 96 of Ballard and Beckett offers a concrete testament to *E.R.*'s lasting impact over the lineaments of a postmodern literary style—a phenomenon that would, nonetheless, exceed the existence of the Grove review itself. Highlighted through the comic stylings of Weisbecker's drawings and McElroy's astute recommendations, the tentative notion of a postmodern Beckett is reinforced in the sandbox of No. 96. In conjunction with Ballard's appropriations of American spectacle and violent sexuality, Beckett's dehumanised terrain, closed to the world without, engages in a style hostile to any attempt at allegory or interpretation. It is this 'particular disquiet' that McElroy remarks as eschewing the possibility of conceptual work in Beckett's novella—a factor which 'in no way lessens the cylinder's archetypal authority.' As we have already noted, McElroy both remarks on the interpretative impasse presented by Beckett's novella, while finding in the text a grim portent of global 'annihilation.' This tension, between reading and the unreadable will be developed as a key motif of the postmodern in the following chapter.

Chapter 2: 'The Frequency of the End': Beckett, Pynchon, Reading Under Duress

Having concluded the previous chapter with the encounter, staged in *E.R.*, between Beckett's 'The Lost Ones' and Ballard's 'The Assassination of Kennedy Considered as a Downhill Motor Race,' we will now return to the literary sensibility of postmodern American writing and Beckett's uneasy place as a paradoxically sympathetic and discordant predecessor. As the trajectory of the previous chapter demonstrates, the emergence of a writerly postmodern strain in *E.R.* coincides with a parallel shift towards the reader and the popular availability of avant-garde literature. For this reason, we will turn to the postmodern novels of Thomas Pynchon, announcing what critic Tony Tanner describes as 'an exemplary experience in modern reading.'²⁸⁷ Perhaps more than any author of this period, Pynchon reframes the act of reading, in the postmodern text, as a sustained encounter with the unreadable. Both critically lauded and denounced as 'unreadable,' 1973's *Gravity's Rainbow* captures the prevailing view of reading as a contested field, between the widening sphere of interpretation and what Susan Sontag describes as the avant-garde's 'flight from interpretation.' On top of this, Beckett's own endeavours in narrative unreadability will be investigated as a revelatory motif concerning Pynchon's own literary experiments. Indeed, as a notable reader of the *E.R.* (highlighting No. 1 as an 'eye opener'), Pynchon's works provide an instructive bridge through which Beckett might pass between the pages of the review and the postmodern novel. Where Pynchon marks a decisive rejection of the kind of 'prose fragment' cultivated by Beckett in the 60s, his immense multiform narratives mirror the highly eccentric tendencies enumerated in the Grove review. Against the Beat/Beckettian split identified in Chapter 1, it will be argued that Pynchon's 60s and 70s novels, thus, achieve a kind of hybrid legacy given the 'ambiguous' (using Thomas Schaub's influential critical category) ground in which Pynchon's readers operate. Situated between a Beat-influenced vitalism and a Beckettian poetics of exhaustion and entropy, Pynchon provides a worthy case study to advance 'the problem' of Beckett as a model of legacy that is simultaneously internalised and resisted. While Chapter 1 established a material ground for Beckett's contested presence, the chief method of the following chapter will highlight the productive resonance and discord existing between Beckett and Pynchon's works that can, nonetheless, be identified through the process of close reading.

The precise lineaments of this bi-directional legacy will be developed hereafter in the subsection titled 'Countercultural Ambiguity.' Before then, a brief introductory discussion of both authors' attitudes to *the readerly* will ensue. Warning in an early essay against 'the neatness of identifications,' ('Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce,' 19) Beckett's works have long staged a particularly vexed encounter with the operations of reading. To his American director, Alan Schneider, Beckett responds to 'those bastards of

²⁸⁷ Tony Tanner, *Thomas Pynchon*, (Methuen: London, 1982), p. 19

critics,' stating his refusal 'to be involved in exegesis of any kind.' (SB to AS, 29 December 1957)²⁸⁸ This view of Beckett as a reader 'unfriendly' author in the U.S. is not without precedent. Promoting the Grove paperback of *Endgame*, Rosset would famously sell Beckett's text as 'the play the critics didn't understand.'²⁸⁹ Moreover, highlighting the curious place of the 'completely unreadable' in Beckett's oeuvre, Leo Bersani in the *Partisan Review*, addresses the 'effective strategies' in the author's novels 'designed to make us find them unbearable.'²⁹⁰ At the same time, Bersani adds, one must also account for the fact that Beckett's work has been 'enthusiastically, avidly consumed'²⁹¹—a crossing between Beckett's growing presence, his *readability*, and the acceptance of his fiction as posing a generalised attack on the reader. This tension between the hostility to understanding and the continued consumption of Beckett's writing is one that significantly informs the theory of reading to be employed this chapter. In this regard, Beckett's works (as the author remarked on Joyce) both eschew easy reading, while suggesting new ways of 'looking at' and 'listening to' (Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce,' p. 27) texts. To understand this, one must look to Beckett's writing directly.

Beckett's works are replete with images of misunderstanding, and misremembering. This manifests in extremis during the opening remarks of *The Unnamable*: 'Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving.' (331) In this famously intractable text, Beckett negates the whole field of hermeneutic assurance, of 'where,' 'who,' or 'when,' leaving the reader in the unenviable position of apprehending the text in the absence of material on which to perform their reading. One is here reminded of A. Alvarez's pithy remark, rendering *The Unnamable* 'the unreadable.'²⁹² Indeed, as Beckett's second published novel, *Watt* (1953), demonstrates, the 'pursuit for meaning' in Beckett's fiction is frequently conducted through an 'indifference to meaning.' (72) This culminates with the author's famous warning of 'no symbols where none intended' (223)—further unsettling any attempt at hermeneutic stabilization. To this end, we will see that an important aspect of Beckett's confrontation with modes of unreadability is the degree to which his characters share in this experience. Pointing to Beckett's 'crucial turn into a fully hermeneutic mode of writing,'²⁹³ Jonathan Boulter reinforces this view, arguing that Beckett's novels rely upon an understanding of their own hermeneutic situation. Placing *Watt* at the locus of this 'turn,' Beckett's anticipation of the reader's hermeneutic gesture will be analyzed in more depth later in this chapter. Moreover, this reflexive structure guides the presence of a further thinker who will be important hereafter. In a uniquely developed account of Beckett's effect on

²⁸⁸ *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1957-1965*, ed. by Dan Gunn, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2014), p. 82

²⁸⁹ Quoted in Stephen John Dilks, *Samuel Beckett in the Literary Marketplace*, (Syracuse University Press: New York, 2011), p. 30

²⁹⁰ Leo Bersani, 'No Exit for Beckett,' in *The Partisan Review*, (Spring, 1966)

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² A. Alvarez, *Beckett*, (Woburn: London, 1973), p. 189

²⁹³ Jonathan Boulter, *Interpreting Narrative in the Novels of Samuel Beckett*, (University of Florida Press: Gainesville 2001), p. 17

the shape of literary hermeneutics, Wolfgang Iser provides a stirring account of the readerly impasse provided by Beckett's works. Between two major contributions to the theory of literary hermeneutics—1974's *The Act of Reading* and 1978's *The Implied Reader*—Iser provides a model of reading impelled by the textual indeterminacy of the author's 'blanks.' Opening the space for a dynamic exchange between text and reader, this formulation nonetheless terminates, for Iser, in Beckett's work. Focusing on what he describes as 'the frequency of the end'²⁹⁴ in Beckett's fiction, Iser's hermeneutic gesture clashes with a textual body already engaged in the process of failed reading. Proposing an end to a certain mode of apprehending novelistic texts, Iser, thus, illustrates Beckett's corpus as one in which the 'identification between life and interpretation is constantly broken up.'²⁹⁵

As such, Beckett's ends have elicited, for the critic of literature, an effect of reading at its terminus. If the author works towards making the 'inability to express itself an expressive act,' ('Three Dialogues,' 145) the same also appears true of the hermeneutic concerning Beckett's texts, where the unreadable is itself integrated as a moment of reading. As we have already seen in Chapter 1, a close attention to operations of reading passes into the heart of a nascent postmodernism in the U.S. in the late 50s and 60s. During this period, upheavals in the American academy, result in a decentralization of the hermeneutic away from the closed readings of the New Critics and the pseudo-scientific legitimacy of the semioticians. The resultant model of reader response—or, 'the enfranchisement of the viewer's perspective'²⁹⁶—provides a seedbed for a reader-centric postmodernism. Serving as both a symptom and repudiation of this tendency, Sontag's 'Against Interpretation' (appearing alongside Beckett's *Play* in No. 34 of the *E.R.*), singles out Beckett's oeuvre as having 'attracted interpreters like leeches.'²⁹⁷ Readily dismissing readings of Beckett as providing a 'statement about modern man's alienation from meaning or from God, or as an allegory of psychopathology,'²⁹⁸ Sontag instead situates Beckett's 'delicate dramas of the withdrawn consciousness' as unable to 'conform' to the Existentialist or Marxist depth-models of the critic's hermeneutic. As one critic has observed, in Sontag's essay, one picks up 'whispers of postmodernism.'²⁹⁹

Here, the disintegration of the hermeneutic becomes a 'significant symptom' of postmodernism as a distorted network of cultural signs, and one that echoes throughout our treatment of the postmodern in this chapter. This is redoubled by Fredric Jameson who regards Beckett's work as trifling with a

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 259

²⁹⁶ Here, I am quoting from Elizabeth Freund's engaging written overview of reader-response criticism, *The Return of the Reader*, (Methuen: London, 1987) – this 'enfranchisement' Freund argues, 'is precisely the feature which introduces the subversive possibility that each term in the "total situation" is radically unstable or indeterminate, a product of the beholder's gaze.' p. 2

²⁹⁷ Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation,' in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, (Farrar, Strauss & Giroux: New York, 1966), p. 5

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁹ Neil J. Monville, *The New York Intellectuals Reader*, (Routledge: London, 2007) p. 244

postmodern tendency towards the exclusion of meaning. Highlighting *Watt*, once again, Jameson reads into Beckett's novel the collapse of both temporality and hermeneutic valency under the postmodern.³⁰⁰ In this regard, Iser's 'frequency of the end' concerning Beckett's novels of self-reflexive ingenuity meet Jameson's generalised 'sense of ends'³⁰¹ as a flattened non-interpretative stylistic mode. Building on a strictly Jamesonian reading of Beckett, Brian McHale returns to 'The Lost Ones,' as offering potential insights in the connection between interpretation and postmodern space. In particular, McHale argues that Beckett's text resonates with Jameson's description of the Bonaventure Hotel: providing an experience of a 'packed emptiness,' 'without any of that distance that formerly enabled the perception of perspective or volume.'³⁰² Strikingly, for McHale, 'these formulations are readily transferable to the behaviour of Beckett's cylinder-dwellers.'³⁰³ Highlighting the peculiar abode of 'The Lost Ones,' McHale writes:

What are these people then if not quintessential shoppers? What is this text if not a supremely alienated ("ethnographic") description of their behaviour? And what finally is this cylinder enclosure if not a kind of minimalist shopping mall in which the lost ones circulate endlessly subject to the twofold vibration until the lights go out once and for all?³⁰⁴

In Beckett, McHale finds a surprising analogue for the facticity of postmodern space, mirroring the conclusion to Chapter 1 and further situating this novella as a transitional text regarding Beckett and the postmodern. Nevertheless, despite the inventiveness of McHale's reading, its metaphorical treatment of the hermeneutical problem raised in Beckett's narrative risks creating the same 'neat' interpretative rendering that the text, by McHale's argument, would deny. The 'readily transferable' features of Jameson's hotel risk discounting any sense of the text's insulation from such critical work (what McHale, echoing Kenner, would term elsewhere as Beckett's adherence to a 'closed field'³⁰⁵). Nevertheless, the migration of Beckett into the entropic landscape of the mall—a postmodern 'enclosure' promising only a repetitious searching before the 'lights go out once and for all'—will resonate moving forward into the thriving landscapes of Thomas Pynchon.

³⁰⁰ On *Watt*: 'a primacy of the present sentence in time ruthlessly disintegrates the narrative fabric that attempts to reform around it.' Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Verso: London, 1991), p. 28

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1

³⁰² Quoted in Brian McHale, 'Lost in the Mall: Beckett, Federman, Space,' in *Engagement and Indifference: Beckett and the Political*, (State University of New York Press: Albany, 2001), p. 121

³⁰³ Brian McHale, 'Lost in the Mall: Beckett, Federman, Space,' in *Engagement and Indifference: Beckett and the Political*, (State University of New York Press: Albany, 2001), p. 122

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*, (Routledge: London, 1992), p. 28

As we have previously stated, the repackaging of Beckett in *E.R* alongside such authors as Ballard, Burroughs, McElroy and Coover points to a postmodern tendency defined by its resistance to the reader. We will now examine the work of Thomas Pynchon, particularly his magnum opus, *Gravity's Rainbow*, named 'the paradigmatic postmodern text'³⁰⁶ by McHale. Indeed, *Gravity's Rainbow* will serve as a capstone for the unreadable as it is interrogated in this chapter. This intractability within late 60s postmodern fiction is further evidenced by postmodernist and Beckett scholar Raymond Federman. Regarding the fate of the experimental American novel, Federman asks 'is a novel labelled unreadable because it is experimental [...] or is it labelled experimental because it is left unread?'³⁰⁷ Among the unwieldy American texts 'declared unreadable,' *Gravity's Rainbow* ('an important book in contemporary fiction') is highlighted for its size (760 pages) and complexity of subject matter. The immensity of public response to the novel, included its being named (along with *A Crown of Feathers* by Isaac Bashevis Singer) the winner of the 1974 National Book Award for Fiction cements Pynchon's reputation as one of the foremost postmodern authors in America during this period. Equally significant, however, is Pynchon's misfortune before the Advisory Board for the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction; upon being nominated for the award, the novel was significantly deemed 'unreadable,'³⁰⁸ amongst other criticisms. Receiving the legacy of provocative reading, capitalised during the previous decade by Grove and *E.R*, Pynchon emerges as a lightning rod for the shifting lineaments of reading towards the unreadable in the late 60s and 70s.

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the reader follows the bewildered wanderings of Lieutenant Tyrone Slothrop at the end of the Second World War. In particular, the reader must acquaint themselves with 'the new uncertainty' (303) of the post-war European Zone, a liminal pre-Potsdam formation of 'great frontierless streaming.' (549) Proliferative in scope, Pynchon's novel perfects the maximal, poly-systemic formula of the author's previous novels, *V* (1963) and *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), demonstrating a mastery over such diverse fields as rocket science, organic chemistry, thermodynamics, quantum physics as well as more eclectic interests in American comics and German expressionist cinema. In this regard, Pynchon seems to bypass Beckett's commitment to 'ignorance, impotence,'³⁰⁹ towards the expansionist fictions of Joyce. And yet, Beckett's characterisation of Joyce's aesthetics—'the more he knew the more he could'³¹⁰—sits uneasily with the work of Pynchon. Despite their prodigious length Pynchon's fictions are seldom cumulative in their focus, and have a tendency to succumb, as Roger Bellin suggestively puts it,

³⁰⁶ Quoted in Simon Malpas, Andrew Taylor, *Thomas Pynchon*, (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2013), p. 101

³⁰⁷ Raymond Federman, 'What Are Experimental Novels, And Why Are So Many of Them Left Unread,' in *Critifiction: Postmodern Essays*, (State University of New York Press: Albany, 1993), p. 66

³⁰⁸ Quoted in John M. Krafft, 'Biographical Note,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*, ed. by Inger H. Dalsgaard, Luc Herman, Brian McHale, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2012), p. 11

³⁰⁹ Israel Shenker, 'An Interview with Beckett' in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, (Routledge: London, 1979), p. 148

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

to the 'problem of detail.'³¹¹ This is reiterated by Pynchon himself in the introduction to 1984's collection of early career shorts *Slow Learner* (1984); remarking on the inefficacy of literature to ever fully achieve worldly affect, it is nonetheless through the novel, Pynchon states, that one can assess the 'contours and coherence' of 'our ignorance'—its 'rules of operation.' (15/16) . Like Beckett, this governing 'ignorance' is parodied by Pynchon through the proliferation of parodic readers included in the text; the temptation for 'cause and effect' and 'Kute Korrespondences' (590) are here recycled back into the textual morass. Performing a willful assault on the hermeneutic, Pynchon's novel presents an arena of 'temporary alliances, knit and undone.' (347) We will continue to develop this point later in the chapter, tracing the idiosyncratic motif of paranoia in Pynchon's works against the dearth of material offered to Watt in Beckett's novel. In both cases, the authors emphasise the presence of an Iserian 'gap'—in the overdetermination of the hermeneutic in Pynchon and the poverty of reading represented in Beckett. It is into this shared conceptual space that one might productively unearth resonances of Beckett in Pynchon's otherwise wholly un-Beckettian work.

This connection, however, is not without precedent. For McHale, both Beckett and Pynchon occupy an intractable place along a continuum of experimental writing, through which questions of epistemology are traded in for the uncertainty of building fictional worlds. Indeed, in Pynchon's debut, *V* (1963), 'modernist poetics develops a hemorrhage, not yet fatal but dangerous'³¹² (McHale compares this, in passing, to Beckett's *Molloy*, directly mimicking this phrasing in his analysis of the author's 'limit-modernism'). In this regard, McHale points to *V* as a transitional text, in which 'quick change artist' Herbert Stencil, through 'impersonation and dream,' (63) culls information of questionable validity from the journals of his civil-serviceman father. Marking a shift to a postmodern poetics of ontological indeterminacy, the difficulty of reading in Pynchon is intimately connected to a failure of literary wordliness. While this category of 'world' in the novel will be explored in greater depth in chapter 3, it is worth dedicating a moment to respond to the palpable wordliness of Pynchon's novels. Indeed, throughout his works, Pynchon demonstrates a sensitivity, through minutely observed landscapes, freeways, planned 'circuitboard' towns, hothouse communities, derelict zones and wastelands, to Jameson's 'whole degraded landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Reader's Digest culture, of advertising and motels...'³¹³ As such, it is via the buried category of the ontological that one must perceive Pynchon's interrogation of reading, outlining the breakdown between subject and world. This

³¹¹ '...the problem of detail has been inflected very differently indeed in the profusion of contemporary American writing, where it might sometimes as easily be argued—in recognizably 'postmodern' terms—that the endless profusion of detail is an attempt to overcome the difficulty of arriving at any totalizing consciousness, or even a subjective response to the seeming exhaustion of politics' ability to unify a fragmented, pluralized society.' Roger Bellin, 'Pynchon's Dustbin of History: Collecting, Collectivity, and Care for the Past,' *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 2, (2012), p. 292

³¹² Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, (Methuen: New York, 1977), p. 21

³¹³ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Verso: London, 1991), p. 2

presents further difficulties for identifying a Beckettian bequest in Pynchon's works. As Pynchon scholar Martin Paul Eve states, drawing from Beckett's *Worstward Ho*, the Irishman provides a fiction framed "atween" the twain of being and void.³¹⁴ In this manner, the disturbance of the 'whole' in Beckett rubs up against Pynchon's comparatively spacious works. On the other hand, for all Pynchon's manic invention, he never quite relinquishes the possibility of knowing, and meaning enshrined in the hermeneutic.

Withholding any simple reading of Beckett's postmodern exhaustion concerning Pynchon's poetics, we will instead frame the bequest as a persistent troubling presence in the process of knowing and being. Among Pynchon's primary motifs, in this regard, is a lament for a condition of 'exitlessness' (*The Crying of Lot 49*, p. 118), whereby the architectural, and politico-economic enclosure of the American terrain, belies associations of expansiveness and possibility. Like the 'closed cylinder' of Beckett's microworld, the peripeteia of Pynchon's often frantically paced narratives, nonetheless, express a feeling of entrapment inside a Beckettian 'skullspace'.³¹⁵ As we have already seen, Beckett's works of readerly difficulty, overlap with the hermeneutic breakdown of postmodern space. Bridging the closed world of Beckett and the sterile America of Pynchon, this is illustrated by the author in the novel *The Crying of Lot 49*, where an abiding sense of enclosure also stands for the limits of the mind—dramatized most powerfully through Oedipa Maas' paranoid attempts to make sense of her world. The danger that the external world has been entirely fabricated by Oedipa herself is memorably played out through her identification with a painterly triptych from Mexican surrealist Remedios Varo: in these paintings, Varo depicts four women embroidering a tapestry from the closed-space of a tower, which then spills out to become the world. Pynchon writes, '[the tapestry] spilled out the slit windows and into a void, seeking hopelessly to fill the void: for all the other buildings and creatures [...] were contained in this tapestry, and the tapestry was the world.' (13) In this example, the desire to fill in Pynchon's 'void,' a gap, that is otherwise occupied through delusions, fantasies and ingenious paranoid episodes, betrays the difficulty of the hermeneutic situation, comparable to the projected images decorating the closed space of Beckett's 'All Strange Away.' In this 'gap,' this immanent limit, we find Beckett's influence impressing itself powerfully on Pynchon, an ineradicable horizon to the author's text that George Levine states 'seems almost desperate in the tricks it will invent to keep from its own finitude, to find some sort of life in the very decadence and de-animation of which it is a symptom.'³¹⁶

³¹⁴ Martin Paul Eve, *Pynchon and Philosophy: Wittgenstein, Foucault and Adorno*, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2014), p. 127

³¹⁵ This is Linda Ben-Zvi's designation, used to describe the circumscribed spaces of Beckett's texts, taking place 'in a head'

³¹⁶ George Levine, 'Risking the Moment: Anarchy and Possibility in Pynchon's Fiction,' in *Thomas Pynchon*, ed. by Harold Bloom, (Chelsea House: Philadelphia, 2003), p. 59

Through the shared point of unreadability, it will be argued in this chapter that the various 'deanimating' impulses of Beckett's fiction insinuate into the heart of Pynchon's outward-looking hermeneutic gestures. Spiraling from the underlying 'void' to which both authors appear drawn, Pynchon's excessive texts, nevertheless, perform, through their over-abundance, both the proliferation and obsolescence of narrative invention. As such, this chapter will mark a development in the concept of the Beckettian 'problem' as a bequest that is simultaneously internalised and quarrelled against. While Pynchon marks a decisive rejection of Beckettian minimalism and wordlessness in favour of a kinetic and polymorphous maximalism, Beckett's poetics of exhaustion—heralded in our 'Overture'—moderate this tendency towards something altogether more Beckettian. While there is little existing criticism connecting Beckett and Pynchon's works, we will work closely with the profound resonances, shared motifs and discordances offered by both authors. A prime example of this analytical method can be found in relation to *Lot 49*, in the dream of Pynchon's lachrymose DJ Mucho Maas. Haunted by his former career as a used-car salesman, Mucho relates the following:

I'd be going about a normal day's business and suddenly, with no warning, there'd be the sign. We were a member of the National Automobile Dealers' Association. N.A.D.A. Just this creaking metal sign that said nada, nada against the blue sky. I used to wake up hollering. (100)

Despite Pynchon's densely populated narratives, Mucho's observation of 'N.A.D.A.' betrays a Beckettian nothingness that can, literally, be read between the words. As such, while the excesses of Pynchon's work conflict with the progressive minimalism of Beckett, the exhaustive impulses of the latter may provide us with a fuller account of reading and the unreadable in Pynchon. As John P. Harrington states—the author of one of few articles bringing Beckett and Pynchon into a common critical space—this can be achieved through attention to their 'shared differences.'³¹⁷ We will continue to identify these moments of 'shared' resonance and discord in the following section, in which Pynchon's status as a reader of the *E.R.*, and the notion of a hybrid-legacy begins to take form.

Countercultural ambiguity: motion and entropy

What follows is a brief reflection on the tensions manifest in Pynchon's poetics between what we might conceive as the countercultural affiliations of the Beat authors and Beckett's narratives of entropy. At the same time, we will respond to Pynchon's engagement with the 1960s as perhaps the most prominent decade thematised in his otherwise expansive body of work. In *Thomas Pynchon and American Counterculture* (2014), Joanna Freer establishes the 'symbiotic relationship' between the

³¹⁷ John P. Harrington, 'Pynchon, Beckett and Entropy: Uses of Metaphor,' in *The Missouri Review*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (Summer 1982), p. 137

American 60s and 'postmodernism in general, whether seen as the form's generator or antithesis.'³¹⁸ Freer joins a small group of critics who choose to employ the label 'countercultural' to define the tacit repudiation in Pynchon's work of the 'insularity'³¹⁹ of certain reductive notions of literary postmodernism. Among its artefacts, a substantial investment in 'the Beat faith in motion'³²⁰ is upheld in Pynchon's fiction—a precursor to a broader narrative of radical countercultural possibility. Offering a thorough analysis of the Beat inheritance—particularly from Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957)—Freer writes that 'what Pynchon found inspirational in the Beat project was its raw motive energy which stood in stark contrast to the static purposelessness of the Fifties mainstream.'³²¹ Andrew Gordon echoes this view of Pynchon as 'a quintessential American novelist of the nineteen sixties,' with 1963's *V* a 'liberatory burst of energy.'³²² This is troubled, however, by the act of silent passage between Beckett and Pynchon detailed so far: a crossover that is reinforced through the mutual significance of the *E.R*—of Beckett as writer, and Pynchon as reader. Through the medium of the Grove journal, the case for a shared bequest becomes apparent, between the vivifying, expansionist Beat authors and Beckett's narratives of hermeneutic exhaustion. To recap, Beckett's bequest in the *E.R* is framed as a compound of the exceptional and obscure, immanent in the 'mish mash' of the culture, while abstracted from it; as William Burroughs unflatteringly writes of Beckett, 'he is the purest writer: there is nothing there but the writing itself.' While Beckett's increasingly static world sculptures suggest an incompatibility with Pynchon's ever-expanding literary universe, the younger author similarly can be said to occupy a position of 'nontogetherness.' A product and a critical witness of the 60s, Pynchon is attuned to what Gordon describes as the 'contradictory moods' of 'that entropic decade.'³²³ For all its vivifying energy, Pynchon remarks on the failures of 60s radicalism, highlighting in the introduction to *Slow Learner* the inability of the 'college kids and blue collar workers to get together politically,' (7) as well as the misguided stress on 'youth, especially of the eternal variety.' (9) This leads one to question the altogether more equivocal temporalities modelled in Pynchon's work, described by the author as 'a transition point, a strange post-Beat passage of cultural time, with our loyalties divided.' (9) At a distance, Pynchon highlights the mediated nature of his literary inheritance from the early Beat counterculture: 'we were onlookers: the parade had already gone on by and we were already getting everything second hand, consumers of what the media of the time were supplying us.' (9) As one of the chief mediators of the Beat movement and the later counterculture, the *E.R* provides a glimpse into the shape of this bequest, while pointing also to its immanent disappointment. In this regard, where

³¹⁸ Joanna Freer, *Thomas Pynchon and American Counterculture*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2014), p. 3

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24

³²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9

³²² Andrew Gordon, 'Smoking Dope With Pynchon: A Sixties Memoir,' in *The Portable Sixties Reader*, ed. by Ann Charters, (Viking: New York, 2003), p.229

³²³ *Ibid.*

Kerouac celebrates ‘the whole mad swirl’ (*On the Road*, 112) of the American picaresque lifestyle, Pynchon’s fiction marks a point of ‘transition,’ accommodating this influence while illustrating the tendency of the same process towards waste, inertia and—in the figure most commonly associated with the author—entropy. Here, the parallel bequest of Beckett discolours the untrammelled vitalism of Pynchon’s Beat inheritance. For this reason, this chapter will work towards a shared engagement in entropy and ‘the final absence of motion’ (‘Entropy,’ 98) as a key stage in Pynchon’s narratives of ambivalence. In particular, this will follow John Harrington’s argument concerning the shared metaphor of entropy, as a ‘common ground’ wherein ‘Pynchon’s and Beckett’s fiction offer special insights into each.’³²⁴

Using the *E.R* as a shared medium, the coincidence of Beckett and Pynchon establishes a common critical space in which we might read these two formally dissimilar authors. Addressing the cultural transformation from the ‘static’ 50s to the tumult of the 1960s, Pynchon casually draws on a formative readerly experience: ‘in 1956, in Norfolk, Virginia, I had wandered into a bookstore and discovered issue one of the *Evergreen Review* [...] it was an eye-opener.’ Accounting for this notable act of reading, Pynchon remarks on the review as an early outlet for ‘Beat sensibility,’ with those in the Academy ‘deeply alarmed over the cover of the *Evergreen Review* then current, not to mention what was inside.’ (8) In this regard, the encounter with *E.R* serves as an anticipatory moment, foreshadowing the political disruptions of the following decade. Pynchon highlights the publication of Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (‘one of the great American novels,’ *Slow Learner*, 7) as well as the censorship trials surrounding Allen Ginsberg’s ‘Howl’ and the proto-Beat subversions of Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* as ‘centrifugal lures.’ While unacknowledged by Pynchon, his celebration of an ‘expansion of possibilities’ (7) is significantly underwritten by the manifold engagements of the *E.R*, interrogated in Chapter 1. In particular, the famous issue on the ‘San Francisco Scene,’ (No. 2, 1958) consolidates the ‘Beat sensibility’ of the periodical, featuring the first of many appearances by Kerouac, as well as an excerpt from Henry Miller’s memoir of life in Big Sur. Most notably, Ginsberg’s epoch-defining poem ‘Howl’ is reprinted in support of the ongoing San Francisco trial over its alleged obscenity. As Kenneth Rexroth proclaims in the ‘San Francisco Letter,’ opening the issue, Ginsberg is a figurehead of a ‘New Generation of Revolt’—in stark opposition to ‘the world of poet-professors’ (8)—invoking ‘Our Underground Literature’ and a stance of ‘Cultural Disaffiliation.’ (5) Rather, as Ginsberg’s evokes in his famous poem, the job of the poet is to attain ‘the rhythm of thought in his naked and endless head.’ (*Howl, Kaddish and Other Poems*, 8) As such, Pynchon recalls the desire for students in the late 50s to ‘get a sense of that other world humming along out there’—a ‘preview’, as the author notes, ‘of the mass college dropouts of the 60s.’ (*Slow Learner*, 8) On the back page of *E.R* No. 2 this is celebrated as the ‘pervasive desire to get out

³²⁴ John P. Harrington, ‘Pynchon, Beckett and Entropy: Uses of Metaphor,’ in *The Missouri Review*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (Summer 1982), p. 130

into the open in order to breathe fresh creative air.’ (8) Particularly striking, is the anticipation of ‘some large poetic form that can accommodate anything and everything—including ordinarily rejected and suspect material.’³²⁵ Through his endlessly proliferating narrative structures, Pynchon internalises the openness and vitality central to the Beat project, affirming a ‘positive motion,’ as Freer argues, ‘towards new geographical, musical or literary horizons.’³²⁶

In this regard, Pynchon’s expanding, proliferating, and self-propelling narratives mark a clear inheritance of both Beat motion and assimilationist form. However, as argued in Chapter 1, the review presents an altogether more ambiguous stable of fiction in the early counterculture, with Beckett and a broader late-modernist investment, alongside the Beat presence, shaping the literary ‘underground.’ Notably, the debut issue of *E.R.*— which Pynchon cites as having read—is dominated by the presence of Beckett, featuring the early short story ‘Dante and the Lobster’ as well as the *Echo’s Bones* poetry collection.³²⁷ In particular, Beckett’s writings cast a sharply divergent tone to the affirmationist Beat authors of No. 2. In ‘Dante...’ for instance, a concatenation is staged between failed reading, immobility and a philosophical fatalism. ‘Stuck in the first canti of the moon,’ (3) Beckett’s indolent surrogate Belacqua offers an account of reading Dante’s *Paradiso*, ‘so bogged that he could move neither backward nor forward.’ Replete with ‘ruined feet’ (8) and ‘ruined voice,’ (11) Beckett’s story serves as a tacit repudiation of the literary vitalism evidenced thereafter in the Beats. Further still, the bumbling organization of Belacqua’s day—through lunch, the purchase of a lobster, and the Italian lesson—haltingly proceeds from the promise of ‘rapture and victory’(6) to the ‘quick death’ (14) of the boiled lobster. The overruling of the animate by the inanimate figured in Beckett’s text reshapes the ‘eye open[ing]’ possibilities of *E.R.*, suggested in Pynchon’s introduction, towards the entropic image evoked in ‘Enueg I’ of the ‘mind annulled/wrecked in wind.’ (15) Deviating from the energy of Kerouac and Ginsberg, Beckett’s remarkable legacy over the *E.R.* opens the possibility for an ambiguous inheritance in Pynchon’s manifestly ambivalent texts.

This is a topic that has attracted a considerable amount of attention, the most sustained of which being Thomas Schaub’s analysis of Pynchon’s ‘voice of ambiguity.’ An enormously influential study in Pynchon criticism, Schaub enumerates the ‘conditional ground’³²⁸ shared by the author’s characters and readers, whereby unifying structures of meaning are simultaneously intimated and withheld. Schaub positions V’s Herbert Stencil as a prototypical example in this regard. Attempting to find evidence of the true identity of the mysterious ‘V’ in his father’s journals, Stencil’s search is made to correspond with the poles of ‘inertness’ and ‘vitality.’ For Schaub, this is the generative matrix for Pynchon’s characters and

³²⁵ *Evergreen Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (1958)

³²⁶ Joanna Freer, *Thomas Pynchon and American Counterculture*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2014), p. 14

³²⁷ For a more complete catalogue of this issue, see Chapter 1

³²⁸ Thomas Schaub, *Pynchon, The Voice of Ambiguity*, (University of Illinois Press: Chicago, 1981), p. 103

should be understood as the coupling of the inert with the active, of environment with character, of decay with structure.³²⁹ Providing an acclaimed model of reading Pynchon's work, the ambiguity of relation accounts for a sense of his countercultural energies, without foreclosing on what the author in *V* terms the world 'run [...] afoul of the inanimate...' (270) It is this ambiguous rendering through which the Beckettian bequest appears in close proximity to the Beat inheritance in Pynchon's text. Thus, the 'heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night' illustrated in Ginsberg's poem is 'betrayed to Gravity' in Pynchon's novel, the 'Howl' becoming a 'deep cry of combustion, that jars the soul, promises escape.' (900) Such an inversion also occurs in *V* with 'human yo-yo' Benny Profane's wanderings along the Eastern seaboard echoing Sal Paradise's initial failure to reach Chicago at the beginning of *On the Road*, resulting in a motive redundancy, 'up and down, north and south, like something that can't get started.' (117) In the words of Freer, the possibilities of Beat motion are displaced by 'travel reduced to routine, an access of passivity.'³³⁰

In the landmark essay 'The Importance of Thomas Pynchon,' Richard Poirier argues for Pynchon's 'inclusiveness,' ultimately writing that his texts present 'a kind of cultural encyclopaedia.'³³¹ As such, it is with a view to this notion of the encyclopedic text that the divergent bequests of Beckett and the Beats are mutually accommodated and worked through in Pynchon's fiction. The pairing of Beckett's writing with forms of textual exhaustion and inertia is a motif that has long been congenial to critics of his work. However, the binary of energy and exhaustion contains further ambiguities for which the work of Beckett and Pynchon stand as literary exemplars. In particular, the shared motif of entropy bridges the two authors, guaranteeing against the complete efficiency in the transference of energy into motion. For Russell Smith, these poles are rendered explicit in Beckett's works along the lines of continued motion and mechanical degradation; 'two forms of teleology [...] the individual theme of the quest or journey, and the cosmic theme of entropic decay.'³³² In further distinction to the energy-burst of Kerouac and Ginsburg, the gradual obsolescence of available energy in what Norbert Wiener describes as 'the universe [...] running downhill,'³³³ is memorably visualized by Pynchon in *Gravity's Rainbow*, where life is envisioned as 'like riding across the country in a bus driven by a maniac bent on suicide.' (412) While the critical commonplace of entropy to Pynchon scholarship increasingly extends to the

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18

³³⁰ Joanna Freer, *Thomas Pynchon and American Counterculture*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2014), p. 20

³³¹ Richard Poirier, 'The Importance of Thomas Pynchon,' in *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 21, No. 2, (May, 1975), p. 152

³³² Russell Smith, 'Beckett's Endlessness: Rewriting Modernity and the Postmodern Sublime,' *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 14, After Beckett, (2004), p. 408

³³³ Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*, (Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 1950), p. 41

argument over his problematic usage of the term,³³⁴ John Harrington points to Beckett and Pynchon as unearthing both the flexibility and limitation of the status of entropy as a governing metaphor. Acknowledging ‘the dramatic contrasts involved,’ he cites the metaphorical possibilities of entropy as a striking point of confluence between their respective fictions, offering a general description of escalating chaos reflected in the proliferating scope of Pynchon’s fiction, while also ‘applicable to states of uniformity and homogeneity suggestive of Beckett’s bleakest and most minimal fictions.’³³⁵ Harrington reinscribes the formal dissimilarities between the ‘progressive compression’ of Beckett and the ‘increasing diffuseness’³³⁶ of Pynchon along lines of the ‘centripetal’ and ‘centrifugal.’ In this manner, if the Beats represent ‘centrifugal lures’ for Pynchon, then his fiction also experiences pressure from the ‘centripetal’ force of Beckett. This will be explored later in the chapter in a further point of crossover between the two authors; namely, their mutual interrogation of Maxwell’s Demon, a hypothetical experiment devised by Mathematical physicist James Clerk Maxwell, whereby the single-directedness of heat flow resulting from entropy is challenged. According to Maxwell’s experiment this is predicated on the Demon’s ability to identify and separate molecules in a closed chamber according to their speed and temperature. The ambiguous bequest of both speed and inertia in Pynchon’s works, however, undermine the possibility of a ‘sorting Demon,’ resulting in a fiction succumbing to both postmodern stasis and countercultural motion.

Reading the unreadable: the anti-critical voice in Beckett and Pynchon

‘And Watt could not accept them for what they perhaps were [...] but was obliged, because of his peculiar character, to enquire into what they meant, oh not into what they really meant [...] but into what they might be induced to mean.’ Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (1953), p.61

‘However you say – what the - what does this mean?’ Professor Irwin Corey, April 18, 1974 acceptance speech, National Book Award, *Gravity’s Rainbow*

Beckett’s works frequently exhibit at best ambivalence and quite often an open hostility to the work of ‘those bastards of critics.’ (SB to AS, 29 December, 1957)³³⁷ Where his novels don’t lambaste the professorial archetype they appear to make a virtue out of ignorance and not knowing; as Beckett writes in *The Unnamable*, ‘dear incomprehension, it’s thanks to you I’ll be myself in the end.’ (370) In an insightful essay, on ‘the loutishness of learning,’ (lifting from the author’s poetic aphorism ‘The Gnome’) Steven Connor explores the degree to which scholarly pretentiousness and vanity is mocked across

³³⁴ See Albert Rolls, ‘Pynchon’s Creative Misuse of Entropy,’ in *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature*, Vol. 5, No. 2, (June, 2017)

³³⁵ John P. Harrington, ‘Pynchon, Beckett and Entropy: Uses of Metaphor,’ in *The Missouri Review*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (Summer 1982), p. 130

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 134

³³⁷ *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1957-1965*, ed. by Dan Gunn, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2014), p. 82

Beckett's corpus, with 'the struggles to be and say' becoming 'struggles to learn and know.'³³⁸ Thus, Hamm states in *Endgame*: 'no one that ever lived thought so crooked as we.' (97) At the same time, Connor continues, Beckett demonstrates a complicated relationship with the academy, 'orientated and impregnated by an academic habitus long after he seemed to have broken with it.'³³⁹ This is particularly striking concerning the problematic relationship between Beckett's novels and the work of literary hermeneutics. On this subject, the conclusion to Beckett's second published novel *Watt*, 'no symbols where none intended' (223) is taken as a statement of the author's intractability to the symbol-searching of hermeneutics. Moreover, an investment in images of failed reading frequently populate Beckett's works, with an early example in the short story 'Dante and the Lobster.' 'Stuck in the first canti in the moon,' the protagonist Belacqua's (an irony reflecting both the character's closeness and distance from the studied text) inauspicious encounter with Dante's *Paradiso* subtly carries into the academic afterlife of the piece as represented through a 1957 letter to U.S. academic and poet Kay Boyle. Here, Beckett expresses a weary acquiescence to scholarly reading and its concomitant liberties of interpretation: 'blow up my lobster to whatever dimensions you fancy. All I know is the sudden stir of the bag that told me it was still alive—and suchlike particulars. The last words of my regrettable novel *Watt* are "no symbols where none intended". But I am willing to believe the offence is committed, maugre my...heart.' (SB to KB, 28 May, 1957)³⁴⁰ While Beckett echoes the caution against symbolisation in *Watt*, the note of resignation and even accommodation expresses the inability to either submit to or escape from literary hermeneutics. Qualifying *Watt*'s hostility to interpretative work, Jonathan Boulter notes the novel's 'meaning to be read,' prefigured in Beckett's thematisation of what it means in literary discourse *to mean*. The difficulty Beckett's works pose for hermeneutics will hereafter be explored in light of the author's engagement with the possibilities and limitations of their own status as objects of reading.

It is precisely the extent to which the 'unreadable' passes over into the 'readable,' and vice versa, that prompts the central concern of this section, providing the context for which the problem of Beckett is integrated into the challenging work of Thomas Pynchon. Refracted through Pynchon's complex novels, an exaggeration in American academic discourse towards theories of reader response becomes clear; uttered by *The Crying of Lot 49*'s Driblette, the director of play-within-a-text *The Courier's Tragedy*, 'why [...] is everybody so interested in texts?' (53) At the same time, Pynchon's works, as innumerable critics have argued, offer an obstacle to interpretation amid narratives that encompass wild temporal shifts and incorporate learning from across a diverse array of disciplines. As Pynchon is alleged to have stated

³³⁸ Steven Connor, 'Beckett and The Loutishness of Learning,' in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 22, (2010), p. 256

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁰ *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1957-1965*, ed. by Dan Gunn, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2014), p. 49

concerning the complexity of his debut novel *V*, 'why should things be easy to understand?'³⁴¹ Indeed, the double-bind between the readable and the unreadable reaches its zenith in the 1973 publication of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, and the well documented controversy of its critical response. Despite co-winning the Nation Book Award³⁴² the following year, Pynchon's novel (in spite of the enthusiasm of the judging panel) was blocked from winning the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, labelled as 'turgid,' 'overwritten' and 'unreadable.'³⁴³ This combination of mainstream acceptance and upset, along with the academic discourse that would seek to *understand* and celebrate such a text was captured in comedian Professor Irwin Corey's acceptance speech. Delivered in lieu of Pynchon, Corey's performance (under the name 'The World's Foremost Authority') draws on a stream of rambling and pseudo-intellectual double-talk, resembling, in form, Lucky's tirade on the 'acacademy' and parodic scholars 'Fartov' and 'Belcher.' Importantly, Corey's speech stages a disavowal of academic 'authority' through the ironic appropriation of scholarly jargon—all within the space of a literary acceptance speech. In this spirit, one might point to a shared recalcitrance in relation to literary hermeneutics in Beckett and Pynchon, a common ground in which their fiction might be understood. However, Corey's address to 'the great fiction story [...] now being rehearsed before our very eyes, in the Nixon administration' is telling—framing Pynchon's text in view of an attempt to symbolise a world that has become irreducible to the work of hermeneutics. On the other hand, Beckett's 'withdrawn' voices mark the impossibility of falling neatly under stable hermeneutic frames. Drawing on the work of Wolfgang Iser—a chief proponent of reader response theory— this section will explore how notions of Beckett's corpus as a hermeneutic terminus, extend into Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, as a work, in the words of Linda Westervelt, chiefly concerned with the 'systematisation'³⁴⁴ of reading. Iser's categories of 'the end' and the negation of 'objects' in Beckett will thus be levelled against Pynchon's 'paranoia' and the preponderance of 'the zero' for the author's figuration of readers in the fabric of the text.

Iser's Beckett: reading and criticism

Covering the emergence of reader response criticism in the 1960s and 70s, Susan Suleiman in her important retrospective on the period, remarks that there is no 'single widely trodden path'—rather, 'a multiplicity of crisscrossing, often divergent tracks'³⁴⁵ accounting for diverse theories of the reading process, as well as different conceptions of *who* the reader is. Across various models of reading,

³⁴¹ Jules Siegel, 'Who is Thomas Pynchon...And Why Did He Take Off With My Wife?' in *Playboy*, (March, 1977), p. 122

³⁴² Along with Isaac Bashevis Singer's *A Crown of Feathers and Other Stories*

³⁴³ Quoted in Josephine G. Hendin, *Concise Companion to Postwar American Literature and Culture*, (Blackwell: Oxford, 2004), p. 207

³⁴⁴ Linda Westervelt, "'A Place Dependent on Ourselves": The Reader as System-Builder in *Gravity's Rainbow*,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Vol. 22, No. 1, (Spring, 1980), p. 69

³⁴⁵ Susan Suleiman, *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1980), p. 6

fashioned by Stanley Fish ('interpretative communities'), Norman Holland ('identity theory'), and Jonathan Culler ('literary competence') among others, the primarily American and Western European attention to the reader as the wellspring of hermeneutic meaning signals a departure from the formalist precepts of New Criticism, as well as the scientific pretext of Semiology. One of the more complete and self-contained models of this otherwise diffuse body of criticism is provided by Wolfgang Iser who, between the publication of *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (1974) and *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978), produces two major works in the discipline. Providing an overarching 'theory of aesthetic response,' Iser derives a notion of shared responsibility between text and readerly production, underwritten by a concept of the 'implied reader'; this situates Iser's theory between the two poles of text-centred and reader-centred criticism. Moreover, one also approaches Iser for the reason that his history of the novel and reading terminates with Beckett,³⁴⁶ who 'bursts open the character of fiction.'³⁴⁷ The question is subsequently raised as to where any kind of hermeneutic legitimacy exists, following the progressive negations of Beckett's *Trilogy*. Internalising the conditions of its own hermeneutic response, Iser frames 'the conscious mind' in Beckett as it 'turns its attention away from the interpretation of things and onto its own actual processes of interpretation.'³⁴⁸

The 'implied' role of the reader, prefigured in the fabric of the text, forms the central concern for Iser's comprehensive study of the same name. Highlighting the fundamental 'indeterminacy' between the text and its encounter by the reader, the critic points to the bi-polarity of meaning production, resulting in an act of reading (*Wirkungsaesthetik*) irreducible either to the text or the reader. The two poles of reading are summarised, by Iser, in the following terms:

...the artistic pole is the author's text, and the aesthetic is the realization accomplished by the reader. In view of this polarity, it is clear that the work itself cannot be identical with the text or with its actualization but must be situated somewhere between the two. It must inevitably be virtual in character, as it cannot be reduced to the reality of the text or to the subjectivity of the reader and it is from the virtuality that it derives its dynamism.³⁴⁹

The text as a 'virtual' aesthetic object, comes into existence through the intervention of the hermeneutic act. However, the act of reading for Iser is not entirely located within the consciousness of

³⁴⁶ Concerning Wolfgang Iser, John Paul Riquelme argues, 'we have a theorist shaped by an internally divided society producing works in one language that he participates in translating into another'; thus, it follows that 'he responds to the writings of an Irish author shaped by an intensely divided society...who wrote in the language and then translated himself into another.' John Paul Riquelme, 'Introduction: Wolfgang Iser's Aesthetic Politics: Reading as Field Work,' in *New Literary History*, Vol. 31, No. 1, (Winter, 2000), p. 11

³⁴⁷ Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader*, (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1974), p. 267

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 167

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.106

the reader; instead, it is 'situated somewhere between the two,' through the reader who is excited into action by the text. As a theory of merging agencies, reducible neither to 'the reality of the text or to the subjectivity of the reader,' Iser develops the concept of an 'implied reader' through which readerly intervention is coded *in* the text. Faced with this possibility, Iser pinpoints the significant 'gaps' of a text, the spaces in which the reader's presence is necessary.

...one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential for each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities; as he reads, he will make his own decision as to how the gap is to be filled. In this very act the dynamics of reading are revealed.³⁵⁰

Through these textual obstacles, the reader is impelled to 'fill in the gaps in his own way,' an 'inexhaustible' progression whereby the aesthetic text is built. Iser's repetition of the text's 'dynamism' reflects a general fascination for the ongoing process of reading, staged in the indeterminate space *between* reader and text. Moreover, Iser's textual 'gaps' provide a means where different readers can elicit new possibilities in the empty spaces of the artist's text. In a curious inversion, the 'gap' impels readerly activity; as Iser argues elsewhere, it is the 'very lack of ascertainability and defined intention that brings about the text/reader interaction.'³⁵¹ In this way, the 'implied reader' of Iser channels unwritten texts in addition to the narrative map of the author in the active and unfolding process of reading.

For Iser, the novels of Beckett's *Trilogy* offer a unique challenge³⁵² to the participatory sensibility outlined in *The Implied Reader*. Illuminating the individual gestalts of the reader's projections, Beckett demonstrates an extreme example of literary self-consciousness through which the possibilities and limitations of hermeneutics are revealed. In this manner, Iser recounts 'the outline of a problem that runs through Beckett's texts in something like a series of variations'—namely, the 'haphazardness of objects' in his novels, exhibiting an unwillingness to fall under stable interpretative frames. This produces an alienation of Beckett's characters from the world that Iser ties to the author's reflections on the concept of 'habit' in *Proust* (1930). In Beckett's brief study, the author provides a picture of 'habit' as the connective tissue for 'the identification of the subject with the object of his desire.' However, 'habit' can only temporarily stifle the gap in subject-object relations, as well as their ephemerality. Thus, Beckett writes, 'the subject has died—and perhaps many times—on the way.' (3) As an 'agent of security,' (22) the role of habit in removing the *haphazard* quality from our experience of

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 280

³⁵¹ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, (London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1980), p.100.

³⁵² See also Michael Guest, 'Beckett Versus the Reader, in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 11, (2001)— Guest highlights the 'effect of antagonism between Beckett and the reader' in which Iser serves as a means of approaching and understanding the text's place as an object of reading. Converse to the argument in this section, Guest argues of a 'prototype of the aesthetic object in Beckett's works.' p. 228

objects undergoes a process of breakdown in Beckett's work. For Iser, by reflecting this situation back at the reader, he offers a challenge to (drawing on Frank Kermode's term) our experience and desire for 'concord.' The subsequent reluctance of the object to be named, reaches its peak in *The Unnamable*, where the locus of subjectivity appears trapped in self-reflection, and the need to compulsively qualify its representations. In this sense, Iser's Beckett undergoes, on the 'artistic pole,' an extreme process of textual negation—the 'retraction of every gestalt of himself the moment it has been formed'³⁵³; this, in turn, prompts the reader's awareness of the contingency of any hermeneutic projection formed throughout. For Beckett, the subject becomes a series of masks, or 'vice existers,' (450) disconnected from the world, with *The Unnamable* cannibalising the avatars of the previous novels: 'all these Murphys Molloyes and Malones do not fool me. They made me waste my time, suffer for nothing speak them when in order to stop speaking I should have spoken of me and of me alone.' (380) The readerly problem, however, engages in the difficulty of keeping up with Beckett's self-conscious voices. This is figured in the internalisation by Beckett of that 'all-important question of how the reader can possibly respond to such texts.'³⁵⁴

In Iser's critical apparatus, Beckett is unique in the degree to which his texts both reveal and orbit the constitutive gap of textual hermeneutics and the subject's dealings with the world. This encounter with the unrepresentable brings Iser to a central theme in his attempt to come to terms with Beckett's intractable fiction: the end—or rather, 'when is the end not the end?' For all their reflexive tricks, Iser argues, 'Beckett's texts aim deep down at the anthropological roots of fiction' taking place 'within the history of the end not so much in the sense of another manifestation of these expectations as in an unveiling of our own need for fictions.'³⁵⁵ Staging 'a continual (though never completed) exit and each stage of the exit [...] only a starting point for more exiting,'³⁵⁶ Iser sensitively highlights both the deferral of ending in Beckett as well as an ambivalence by his characters to completely relinquish attachment to their objects. As the protagonist of *Malone Dies* states, all is rendered 'pretext'—'there is no good pretending, it is hard to leave everything.' (315) By the same gesture, Iser argues, Beckett 'activates our need for tidy arrangements,' while removing the capacity to establish and link together the objects of his text. In this way, the impossible, but inevitable notion of the end in Beckett is rendered simultaneously inconceivable without the images of the reader and irrelevant with their intervention. Throughout Beckett's *Trilogy*, we find this paradox manifesting a generative force, an impasse where the only way to proceed is 'by aporia pure and simple.' (*The Unnamable*, p. 331) The attempt to apprehend the conditions of reading and fictionality through the medium of fiction itself, result in Beckett's work taking on a condition of unendedness— 'a world at an end, in spite of appearance.'

³⁵³ Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader*, (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1974), p. 173

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 260

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 258

(*Molloy*, 39). At the same time, the reader of Beckett goes on, despite the manifest 'gap' between text and projection. Through adherence to negativity and the indeterminacy of the subject's relation to the end, Beckett brings the reader's attention to the production of their own hermeneutic fictions, through invitation and dislocation.

Beckett and the metahermeneutic mode—Watt's 'haphazard objects'

Beckett marks a point of terminus in Iser's theoretical journey, where the characters 'possess a degree of self-consciousness which the reader can scarcely, if at all, keep up with.'³⁵⁷ Concerning the notion of narrative antagonism and reader response, Iser states that 'even in texts that appear to resist the formation of illusion, thus drawing our attention to the cause of this resistance, we still need the abiding illusion that the resistance itself is the consistent pattern underlying the text.'³⁵⁸ At the same time, Beckett's recuperation of the critical voice places his novels of self-reflection in an oblique relation to theories of response. Embodying the search for meaning, Beckett's moribunds appear curiously inimical to the absorption of knowledge; in a telling moment, *Molloy* remarks that '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.' (68) This spirit of the 'incurious seeker' is exemplified in the author's second published novel *Watt*—engaged in a 'pursuit of meaning, in this indifference to meaning.' (72) Through much of Beckett's novel, the reader follows the travails of the titular character, Watt, and his efforts to 'saddle' objects and encounters in Mr. Knott's abode 'with meaning, and a formula.' (78-79) Beyond the otherwise 'abiding illusion' of Beckett as a self-consciously difficult author, the formal excesses and antic profligacy of *Watt* engage in the repetition of the hermeneutic dilemma. Throughout his residency, Watt faces an extreme manifestation of the 'haphazardness of objects,' mirroring the constitutive 'gap' in hermeneutic relations; also embodied, however, is a concrete image of the active reader who would otherwise apprehend Beckett's novel. As such, beyond the revelatory absences upon which Iserian hermeneutics is based, *Watt* presents the image of a 'parodic hermeneut,'³⁵⁹ seeking to 'exorcise' (74) objects through explanation, rather than hypostatise an underlying meaning.³⁶⁰ It is for this reason that Jonathan Boulter finds in *Watt* a 'crucial turn into a fully hermeneutic mode of writing,'³⁶¹ establishing the manner in which Beckett's work relies upon some understanding of its own hermeneutic situation. As it 'demonstrates

³⁵⁷ Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader*, (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1974), p. 284

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁹ Jonathan Boulter, *Interpreting Narrative in the Novels of Samuel Beckett*, (University of Florida Press: Gainesville 2001), p. 18

³⁶⁰ See p.61 on the 'toys' of Mr. Knott's house and grounds: 'And Watt could not accept them for what they perhaps were [...] but was obliged, because of his peculiar character, to enquire into what they meant, oh not into what they really meant [...] but into what they might be induced to mean.'

³⁶¹ Jonathan Boulter, *Interpreting Narrative in the Novels of Samuel Beckett*, (University of Florida Press: Gainesville 2001), p. 17

and ultimately parodies the problematics of interpretation even as it offers itself as interpretable object,³⁶² *Watt* exhibits a spatial ‘haphazardness’ in the image of the failure of the hermeneutic.

Reflecting on Watt’s stay in the Mr. Knott establishment, the protagonist is framed in terms that closely echo the practitioner of literary hermeneutics. Indeed, a duty to ‘explain’ bedevils Watt ‘who has not seen a symbol, nor 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.’ (60) Both Watt’s ineptitude concerning the symbol-seeking faculty, as well as his proximity to ‘face values’ significantly come to bear on the failed acts of reading dramatized in Beckett’s text, curiously extracted as a kind of concrete nothing— a process, in which the author writes, ‘a nothing had happened.’ (66) For much of the text, Beckett’s hapless protagonist spends his time ‘in the midst of things which, if they consented to be named, did so as it were with reluctance.’ (67) Furthermore, concerning both the persistence and termination of the hermeneutic in Beckett’s novel, Boulter writes of a ‘metahermeneutic’ possibility for the reading of Watt’s ‘reading of his world.’³⁶³ This metahermeneutic reading of a failed reading is dramatized throughout the novel in Watt’s troubled search for ‘semantic succour.’ (68) However, the first ‘thing’ Watt encounters, in the well-known episode of ‘the pot,’ exemplifies Beckett’s ‘metahermeneutic mode’:

Looking at a pot, for example, or thinking of a pot, at one of Mr. Knott's pots, of one of Mr. Knott's pots, it was in vain that Watt said, Pot, pot. Well, perhaps not quite in vain, but very nearly. For it was not a pot, the more he looked, the more he reflected, the more he felt sure of that, that it was not a pot at all. It resembled a pot, it was almost a pot, but it was not a pot of which one could say, Pot, pot, and be comforted. It was in vain that it answered, with unexceptional adequacy, all the purposes, and performed all the offices, of a pot, it was not a pot. And it was just this hairbreadth departure from the nature of a true pot that so excruciated Watt. For if the approximation had been less close, then Watt would have been less anguished. For then he would not have said, This is a pot, and yet not a pot, no, but then he would have said, This is something of which I do not know the name. (67)

What ensues is a parodic drama of hermeneutic mystification, demonstrating the distance of the ‘pot’ ‘from the nature of a true pot.’ In Watt’s frustrated attempt to name the pot, the reader is presented with the possibility of the object and the ‘hairbreadth departure’ which prevents it being named as such. In other words, the ‘aesthetic object’ of the ‘pot,’ is rendered ‘haphazard’ through Beckett’s comedic presentation of the ‘gap,’ inviting as it upsets understanding by Watt under Iser’s theory. As such, the pot is rendered ‘a pot, and yet not a pot’—an ‘unexceptional adequacy,’ demonstrating what

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 20

Iser labels the futility and necessity of readerly gestalts in responding to narrative media. Furthermore, to render a gap explicit in the manner Beckett does in *Watt*, results in the negation of meaning taking on a strange presence, threatening to fill in the spaces otherwise filled by the reader. In Beckett's terminology, we are left with a 'total object, complete with missing parts.' (*Three Dialogues*, 138) Moreover, concerning Boulter's category of the 'metahermeneutic,' the reader of Beckett's novel is compelled 'to balance his or her hermeneutic desire against the exigencies of Watt's own interpretive praxis.'³⁶⁴ As a case study of the intractability of objects in *Watt*, Beckett's illustration of the possibility and impossibility of the textual pot under hermeneutic scrutiny marks a significant bind in subject-object relations figured in the novel.³⁶⁵ As Beckett remarks elsewhere in the text, the self-conscious integration of this critical discourse highlights the process whereby 'nothing happens with all the clarity and solidity of something.' (63)

Unpacking the 'metahermeneutic,' Boulter identifies the reader's 'specular relation to Watt,'³⁶⁶ through which we are both drawn in and distanced by his failed readings of the world. Moreover, the 'virtuality' of the 'aesthetic object,' for Iser, becomes a useful analogue for Watt's encounter with the image as a troublesome hermeneutic category. In particular, the tortured ekphrasis of Watt's reception of the painting that he finds in fellow lodger Erskine's room, parodies both the 'virtual' object as well as the role of the spectator. Raymond Federman describes this curious scene as an imbedded reference to Beckett's 'explanation of his own work,' going on to describe how 'Watt's puzzlement in front of that painting corresponds to the confusion a reader may feel confronting Beckett's work.'³⁶⁷ Depicting a 'broken circle' and a 'dot,' Watt—who 'knew nothing about painting'—wonders 'what the artist had intended to represent.' However, at this point Boulter's 'metahermeneutic' threatens to break down as the canvas tempts the reader with what might be described as the *image* of hermeneutics in Beckett's novel: '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...' (110) Troubled by the disturbance of 'perspective' and 'the illusion of movement in space,' Watt questions whether they were 'harried by some force of merely mechanical mutual attraction, or the playthings of chance.' (111) One is left wondering whether Beckett might be asking this of Watt, distracting from the possibility that we may be asking this of ourselves as we read Beckett's

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 19

³⁶⁵ Alan Astro identifies the reader's implication in this scene through the 'gradual dissolution of the link between the sound of a word and its meaning [...] he has temporarily robbed the word of its meaning for us as well by repeating it and rhyming it with Watt and Knott.' Alan Astro, *Understanding Samuel Beckett*, (University of South Carolina Press: Columbia, 1990), p. 6

³⁶⁶ Drawing on Lacan's 'mirror stage,' Boulter raises the dialectic of identification and misrecognition by the reader of the textual Watt to further understand the ways in which text becomes 'mirror and parody of the modes and means of its own decipherment.' Jonathan Boulter, *Interpreting Narrative in the Novels of Samuel Beckett*, (University of Florida Press: Gainesville 2001), p. 20

³⁶⁷ Raymond Federman, 'The Imagery Museum of Samuel Beckett,' Lecture delivered in February 2000, at the Kunsthalle in Vienna on the occasion of a Beckett and Bruce Nauman exhibition, accessed 20 May, 2016, <<http://www.samuel-beckett.net/imagery.html>>

novel. We are left watching Watt, watching a painting, depicting the dispossessed components of the hermeneutic problem. A parody of cathartic response is, thus, elicited from Watt:

at the thought that it was perhaps this, a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, in boundless space, in endless time, then 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. (110)

The relief from strong emotion in this passage does not register with the reader as an instant of true catharsis but a moment of combinatorial excess. The compulsive realignment of the circle in 'the middle foreground' and the dot in the 'eastern background,'³⁶⁸ through which perspective is interrupted for Watt, mark the formation of new meanings, and the concomitant 'illusion of movement,' generating the exhaustive enumeration of possible scenarios for interpretation. The purgation of Watt's 'tears' vindicate Boulter's argument concerning Beckett's 'attempt to relate the phenomenological tradition of self-awareness to the experience of reading texts that in some ways deny the very grounds of self.'³⁶⁹ The fungible nature of the 'virtual' object through its various conjugations, relate to the efficacy of hermeneutics in 'boundless space' and in 'endless time.' Ultimately, as Boulter argues 'our interpretations tend not toward events themselves but towards interpretations of interpretations of nebulous events.' In this way, through *Watt* we glimpse a situation through which 'the event [...] is continually receding temporally.'³⁷⁰

Reading 'beyond the zero': between meaning and non-meaning in Gravity's Rainbow

The question of reading in Thomas Pynchon's intractable oeuvre has become something of a prerequisite for engaging with aspects of the author's manifest political and historical concern. As demonstrated by Hanjo Berresam's Coda to the 2012 *Cambridge* 'handbook' on Pynchon's work, behind his voracious approach to knowledge and openness to the world of historical fact, we are persistently confronted by the question of 'how to read Pynchon.'³⁷¹ This is further reinforced by the proliferation of reader's guides and reference books, promising the illumination of Pynchon's densely layered novels.³⁷²

³⁶⁸ Compare also Iser's description of the retentions and protensions of the reading experience 'bring[ing] about a spotlighting of textual perspectives, and these in turn become reciprocally influenced backgrounds which endow each new foreground with a specific shape and form.' Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, (London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1980), p. 116

³⁶⁹ Jonathan Boulter, *Interpreting Narrative in the Novels of Samuel Beckett*, (University of Florida Press: Gainesville 2001), p. 19

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27

³⁷¹ Hanjo Berresam, 'Coda: How to Read Pynchon,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2011), p. 168-178

³⁷² In the case of Steve Weisenberger's *A 'Gravity's Rainbow' Companion: Sources and Contexts for Pynchon's Novel*, (University of Georgia Press: Athens, 2006) some have become landmark works of Pynchon criticism in their own right.

Arguably the zenith of Pynchon's synonymy as an author whose fiction transgresses the formalities of reading transpires with the rejection of *Gravity's Rainbow* by the 1974 Pulitzer board who cite its status as an 'obscene,' 'overwritten' and—importantly—'unreadable' text. The threat of toppling into non-meaning, together with the expansion of the horizon of reading is tied together in Pynchon's famously unruly text. Concerning the ambience of hermeneutic uncertainty around the author's landmark novel, Jeffrey Nealon unpacks its implications for the reinvention of the role of the critic:

How does one read [...]a text that is perhaps the postmodern text par excellence[...] whose difficulty and resistance to interpretation are legendary, even within the criticism that would want to interpret it? How does a critic or discipline respond to a text that resists the paradigms of criticism, that always seems to elude being mastered, that puts aside the possibility of a determinate decision concerning its meaning?[...] one way to deal with such an impasse is "simply" to re-thematize the work of criticism, to allegorize reading or critical work as the revelation of its own impossibility [...]In fact, for the majority of Pynchon scholars, the way into reading *Gravity's Rainbow* is precisely through this difficulty, through the text's status somewhere between meaning and non-meaning.³⁷³

'Somewhere between meaning and non-meaning,' the hermeneutic act is re-thematized towards a 'revelation' of its 'impossibility.' This is equated with Pynchon's postmodernism, grounded in the failure of any critical approach to assimilate the deliberately unmasterable text. Through Nealon, the spectre of the unreadable becomes an invitation to reinvent the function of criticism—perversely a 'way into reading.' However, as argued by Brian McHale in his authoritative analysis of Pynchon's novel, one must also account for the way in which the author 'ontologises' the problem of reading, disclosing and withholding the possibility of connection with the concrete world of its readers. In this regard, *Gravity's Rainbow* is an arresting text for its response (and its formulation of that of the reader) to a world succumbing to 'the new Uncertainty.' (303) This is exemplified by the figure of the supersonic V-2 rocket, utilized by the German forces at the end of WWII: 'first the blast, then the sound of its falling...'(57) Thus, Pynchon's novel is cast into an ambivalent light with regard to the hermeneutic rupture in Beckett's work—where the figure of the end, according to Iser, results in a fiction in which 'identification between life and interpretation is constantly broken up.'³⁷⁴ Unlike Beckett's *Watt* that engages in fraught examples of intra-textual hermeneutics, Pynchon's novel thrives with attempts to reconstruct an image of the world, eagerly 'gathering correspondences.' (36) Where the 'incurious' *Watt* struggles to apply words to 'exorcise' his haphazard objects, Pynchon's novel is garrulous in its compulsion to name, to label, to extend the limits of its intra-textual worlds. Mindful of the

³⁷³ J.T Nealon, *Double Reading: Postmodernism After Deconstruction*, (Cornell University Press: New York, 1993), p.108

³⁷⁴ Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader*, (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1974), p. 266

'concretization' and 'deconcretisation' of readerly images, however, the negation of Beckett's hermeneutic frames nevertheless serve as a useful counter-text to Pynchon whose text both wilfully resists and is gravitationally drawn to ending. As one character states: 'sometimes I dream of discovering the edge of the World. Finding that there *is* an end.' (856) In this manner, McHale refers to Beckett as exemplary of the 'limit cases' of early postmodern literature, whose 'relation between the game like artifices of fiction and the problematic imitation of reality' Pynchon exceeds. This leaves the younger author's work at a stage subsequent to the 'end for end's sake' of Beckett's *Iserean* negations.³⁷⁵ The equation of the hermeneutic act with the intra-textual search for the 00000 V-2 rocket, situates the critical space in Pynchon as divided between the ontological possibility of meaning and 'the informationless state of signal zero.' (404) As such, while the terminus of Beckett's readerly bequest is coded into the heart of Pynchon's novel, it is ultimately deferred as part of the unfulfilled quest for 'the World.'

Throughout Pynchon's career a wariness of the logic of reading is felt, establishing distance in the otherwise teeming worlds his fiction attempts to encompass. In the later novel *Mason & Dixon* (1997) this is rendered explicit in the opening image of the 'sinister and wonderful Card Table,' whose 'Wave-like Grain' causes, as the author writes, 'an illusion of Depth into which for years children have gaz'd as into the illustrated Pages of Books.' (5) This bind between the 'sinister and wonderful' is manifest elsewhere in *The Crying of Lot 49*, where the 'group of concepts' (14) of Southern Californian topography, for Oedipa Maas, withhold a 'sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate,' a 'revelation' trembling 'just past the threshold of her understanding.' (15) The deferral of Pynchon's texts to clear resolution in this regard, impacts upon the tension between the occlusion of hermeneutics and the possibility of a 'rethematized' mode of apprehension. Rather than disavowing this need to bring the seemingly random into 'pulsing stelliferous Meaning,' (56) Pynchon's fiction, as argued by many critics, carries at its centre an 'epistemological theme'³⁷⁶ of what it means to create meaning. The most storied category to Pynchon's writing, in this regard, has been the figure of paranoia.³⁷⁷ The propensity to connect profuse fragments of detail under a unifying narrative is here both elevated and parodied under the image of the paranoid. As the most protracted exploration of the paranoid tendencies of Pynchon's writing, *Gravity's Rainbow* reflects on the place of paranoia amid its own process of world

³⁷⁵ This is borne out in Iser's criticism: 'at the other end of the historical spectrum, Iser thinks that postmodern writers such as Donald Barthelme and Thomas Pynchon move beyond the limitations of "modern" authors such as Joyce and Beckett making these earlier projects, in their turn, like "a humanistic experiment."' Ben De Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser: A Companion*, (De Gruyter: Berlin, 2012), p. 66

³⁷⁶ Linda Westervelt, "'A Place Dependent on Ourselves": The Reader as System-Builder in *Gravity's Rainbow*,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Vol. 22, No. 1, (Spring, 1980), p. 69

³⁷⁷ The standard for such readings is provided by Tony Tanner who argues that paranoia subsumes 'a philosophy, a theory of history, a law of thermodynamics,' under the 'subtler human phenomenon—the need to see patterns which may easily turn into the tendency to suspect plots.'—Tony Tanner, 'Patterns and Paranoia, or Caries and Cabals,' in *Salmagundi*, (No. 15: Winter, 1971), p. 78

building. In addition to the comical ‘proverbs for paranoids’ littered through the text, the necessity for what is described as an ‘operational paranoia’ (29) on the part of the reader is held to abet the ‘risk’³⁷⁸ immanent in the novel’s onrush of information. Crucially, this is filtered through the competing poles of order and chaos: ‘paranoia’ and ‘anti-paranoia.’ ‘If there is something comforting—religious, if you want—about paranoia,’ the author reminds us, ‘there is still also anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long’ (515). As a spectrum of reading in Pynchon’s texts, an irresolvable tension is maintained between these poles, locked between design and disintegration. In this way, paranoia exemplifies, for the hermeneutic act, the possibility and ‘sinister’ edge of textual synthesis. To approach this mode in Pynchon, one must hereby not discount the assembly and disassembly of these interpretive categories within the text—a process in which paranoia plays a significant role.

As Brian McHale has argued convincingly, *Gravity’s Rainbow* is a text that abounds in images of reading; whether it be Eddie Pensiero’s talent to ‘read’ shivers, *Säure Bummer’s* to ‘read reefers’ or Thanatz’s to ‘read whipscars,’ (759) reading saturates the narrative, to the extent, McHale argues, where Pynchon ‘holds the mirror up not so much to nature as to reading.’³⁷⁹ This extends to the turbulent environment as the author describes: ‘big globular raindrops, thick as honey [...] splat into giant asterisks on the pavement, inviting him to look down at the bottom of the text of the day, where footnotes will explain it all.’ (243) At the same time, the metaphorical resonance of the paranoid as reader in Pynchon³⁸⁰ provides a burlesque of the hermeneutic act; in the case of Tyrone Slothrop, ‘with the greatest interest in discovering the truth’ connecting his libido, the blast sites of V-2 rockets and the shadowy history of American commerce and German industry, Pynchon’s paranoid is ‘thrown back on dreams, psychic flashes, omens, cryptographies, drug-epistemologies, all dancing on a ground of terror, contradiction, absurdity.’ (582) Placing oneself in a critical position in the midst of what Boulter would describe as metahermeneutic images, Pynchon, like Beckett, negates the hermeneutic gestalts of his characters; this process, as McHale notes, can occur hundreds of pages following the initial seed in which Pynchon plants an expectation for the reader only for it to be withheld as fantasy or illusion. As such, Pynchon produces set pieces ‘whose ontological status is unstable flickering indeterminable.’³⁸¹ Here, Pynchon’s writing departs from the inability to name enshrined in Beckett, where the constitutive gap is engendered through a dearth of means. Where the problem of the ‘pot’ in Beckett’s *Watt* marks an

³⁷⁸ George Levine, ‘Risking the Moment: Anarchy and Possibility in Pynchon’s Fiction,’ in *Thomas Pynchon*, ed. by Harold Bloom, (Chelsea House: New York, 2003), p. 57

³⁷⁹ Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*, (Routledge: London, 1992), p. 87

³⁸⁰ On this point McHale quotes from Jules Siegel: ‘the author relies on the reader to find correspondences between names, colors, or the physical attributes of character and other invisible qualities of those characters, places and actions, while to do so in real life would clearly be an indication of paranoid behaviour,’ in *Constructing Postmodernism*, (Routledge: London, 1992), p. 81

³⁸¹ Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*, (Routledge: London, 1992), p. 70

archetypal metahermeneutic encounter for the author—visualising its ‘hairbreadth departure’ from the nature of a ‘true pot’—Pynchon’s hermeneutic encounters, while exhibiting a similar misalignment between signifier and thing, reflect a remarkable capacity to be named. Counter to Beckett’s injunction against ‘symbols,’ Pynchon’s characters reside in an overdetermined hermeneutic field, where redolence of meaning coats everything; detailing the lost figures of post-war Europe—itsself about to be reread along the sphere of U.S., Soviet, British and French influence— Pynchon describes ‘the scholar-magicians of the Zone, with somewhere in it a Text to be picked to pieces, annotated, explicated, and masturbated till it’s all squeezed limp of its last drop.’ (616) As an ‘endlessly interpretable symbol,’ (520) the figure of the V-2 missile in *Gravity’s Rainbow* provides such a text, producing through its own excess of possible symbols a constitutive gap. In this manner, Pynchon appears to take on board the plight of Beckett’s Molloy, of saying either ‘too much or too little.’ (34)

The search for the 00000, the V-2 fired at the close of the war unbeknownst to all parties, provides a concrete example of Pynchon’s corruption of the hermeneutic in the immanence of ‘zero.’ Whether towards infinity or the infinitesimal, one appears to be engaged in a question of fictional limits and termination, a flight towards an increasingly elusive ‘Final Zero.’ Slothrop’s ‘function’ to ‘learn the rocket, inch by inch’ (257)— as the ‘explicator’ and ‘masturbator’ of the ‘Text’—impels the reader’s hermeneutic gesture, both reflexively aware and in tandem with Slothrop’s story. Furthermore, the Schwarzgerät, or the ‘black device,’ attached to the 00000 promises to unveil the mystery behind Slothrop’s prescience concerning the V-2 attacks, conditioned at an early age using the Impiplex G plastic from which the S-gerät was constructed. Like many of the other intra-textual ‘connections,’ the accuracy of Slothrop’s conspiracy threatens to collapse into another paranoid fantasy, a ‘flickering’ ontological construction. Nevertheless, the ‘zero’ in Pynchon, does not entirely exclude insight into itself. Instead, Pynchon impels his readers into making a choice in their hermeneutic encounter with the novel; as the narrator labels statistician Roger Mexico, defined against the strict determinism of Pavlovian Edward Pointsman, his praxis occurs in ‘the domain *between* zero and one.’ (the author’s italics) (65) By contrast, in his ‘sterile armamentarium’ (752) of rigid cause and effect, Pointsman is capable only of possessing the ‘zero and the one.’ (65) This hermeneutic choice is condensed through the struggle between Oberst Enzian, commander of a group of displaced ‘Zone Hereros’ the Schwartzkommando, and ‘the Empty Ones,’ an insurgent band of Enzian’s tribe. Shipped to Germany in the aftermath of the 1914-17 Herero genocide, Enzian’s story, like many of Pynchon’s characters is held in orbit around the 00000 rocket, in this case, the alleged ‘real Text.’ However, as ‘revolutionaries of the zero,’ (377) ‘The Empty Ones’ reveal a conflict, for Enzian, ‘between two kinds of death: tribal death and Christian death.’ (379) Here, the author stages a dichotomy between self-extinction and transcendence via the rocket towards the ‘Eternal Center’ (379)—occasioning further tensions between negation and affirmation, apophatic and cataphatic impulses in Pynchon’s text. ‘Coding, recoding, redecoding the Holy Text,’ (520-521) the hermeneutic reading of Pynchon’s metahermeneutic images, depart from the

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distortion of Erskine's canvas in *Watt*, the circle and centre, 'receding temporally.' Nor however, does the author disavow the Beckettian zero; in Enzian's admission of 'a strange rapprochement with the Empty Ones,' [...] the Eternal Center can easily be seen as the Final Zero. Names and methods vary but the movement towards stillness is the same.' (379) As such, the younger author's dichotomised 'zero' and 'one' provides space to formulate a hermeneutic 'between,' neither affirmative in its readings, nor drawn to submit before the 'final zero' immanent in the object.

While Slothrop's storyline 'scatters' long before the end of the novel, the reader is left with the spectre of the 00000, and the characters associated with its construction and launch. At the conclusion of *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon once again foregrounds ways of seeing and reading, placing the reader amid a movie theatre seconds before—what we are lead to believe—is the explosion of the 00000. Concerning Pynchon's gargantuan novel, this scene, as has been suggested by critics, is revelatory of its unique virtuality:

The screen is a dim page spread before us, white and silent. The film has broken, or a projector bulb has burned out. It was difficult even for us, old fans who've always been at the movies (haven't we?) to tell which before the darkness swept in... And in the darkening and awful expanse of screen something has kept on, a film we have learned not to see...' (902)

Equating text with film, and vice versa, the conclusion of the novel highlights both its intra-textual audience, and inhospitality towards the 'imaging' function of Iser's active reader. Pynchon's motion towards the audience—'(haven't we?)'—sets the reader to reflexively measure their own hermeneutic position, in and above, the narrative superstructure. And yet, Pynchon's text is also hostile towards a certain kind of spectatorial reading—concerned with the framing of set-pieces into a *persistence of vision*. As such, as the author's burnt out movie camera suggests, it is only upon the text's failure in this regard that we as readers are afforded a glimpse into the 'virtual' inside the text. While the end of the film may concretise the desperation of Enlightenment rationality, the incapacity to conceptualise one's response to 'a world under erasure,' the concatenation of the screen into a 'dim page'—'white' and 'silent'—brings the closure of Pynchon's novel under the shadow of a failing hermeneutics. Arresting the text in this way, the concomitant 'gaps' of the virtual imago are, like Beckett, made explicit. However, unlike the 'nothing' that paradoxically 'happened' through Watt's attempt to place himself in the abode of Mr Knott, Pynchon's manages to suspend his world between the negation of the 00000 rocket and the 'something' that 'kept on'—'a film we have learned not to see.' Where *Watt* dramatizes a world become nothing, out of nothing, through the horror and terror of the dim page Pynchon renders a hysterical and uncontainable aesthetics. It is in this sense that we are invited to read Pynchon's characters' reading of unreadable.

'...a fellow wanderer': motive and exhaustive tendencies in Beckett and Pynchon

As we have seen, the resolution to 'go on' in the perceived absence of possibilities or direction is one that resonates between the Beckettian and Pynchonian oeuvres. The following section seeks to elaborate on this notion, analysing the authors' respective metaphors of mobility, and how they are articulated against the existent hermeneutic images prevalent in their texts. In particular, the figure of the 'wanderer' will be highlighted as a point of shared attention, around which the instructive differences between Beckett and Pynchon will be further brought into focus. At this point, it is worth considering the ambivalence intimated in the category of wandering, infused by what Pynchon upholds as the 'between' (64) of any distinct binary. Moreover, one might also remember the kind of 'wandering' Derrida attributes to the differential gesture—an openness 'without finality, what might be called blind tactics, or empirical wandering.'³⁸² Neither entirely active nor passive, neither with nor without direction, these 'blind tactics' both imply a wastage of movement, in addition to the refusal, as Beckett writes, 'of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road.' ('Three Dialogues,' 139) Ultimately, the rest of this section will unpack the degree to which Beckett and Pynchon disclose the *wandering* process of reading as such: the discursive slippage, whereby one *traverses* texts, *arrives* at obstacles, and *orientates* oneself with regard to the spatial and temporal coordinates of narrative—a process at work concerning their respective parodic readers detailed in the previous section.

Counter to Brian McHale's diagnosis of Beckett's 'closed field'³⁸³ whereby possibilities are progressively exhausted, the wider corpus of the author's output presents a sustained investment in images of mobility. Early Beckett, in particular, tends towards a perepetia both of form and content, with the texts' Joycean profusions reflecting the disorderly comings and goings of Belacqua. In 'Ding Dong,' from the *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934) collection, Belacqua's solipsism is depicted as inverse to his need to 'move constantly from place to place'—'being by nature however sinfully indolent.' (31) Indeed, the oscillation between 'coming' and 'going,' 'stirring' and 'stillness,' reinforces this category of mobility as a site of conflicting binaries, a process both exhausting movement, and of exhaustive movement, in which motion is skewed, as Molloy states, towards a condition 'both coming and going and rooted to the spot.' (56) As Mark Byron has eloquently argued, Beckett's fictions deal in a wide array of mobile images, wherein 'the problem of movement comes to permeate the narrative fabric itself, where the process of narrative composition inscribes and delimits the conditions of characters' agency and motility.'³⁸⁴ Beckett's second novel, *Watt*, presents a significant intervention in this case; detailing a 'journey of

³⁸² Jacques Derrida, 'Différance' in *Margins of Philosophy*, (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1982), p. 7

³⁸³ Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*, (Routledge: London, 1992), p. 29

³⁸⁴ Mark Byron, 'To End, Yet Again: Samuel Beckett's Interrupted Journeys,' in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (October, 2013), p. 406

interruption both thematically and materially,' the intermittent travels of Watt provide an insight into what it means, in the words of neo-John Thomist Mr Spiro, to be 'a fellow wanderer.' (21) Building on the synthesis of texts in the reader's mind, Beckett's inversion of Wolfgang Iser's theory of the 'wandering viewpoint' adds to the metahermeneutic edifice already established concerning the author's crumbling objects and endless ending. By internalising the process of Watt's 'funambulistic stagger,' painstakingly rendered as a moment of stasis, Beckett once again opens a space whereby the hermeneutic gesture is erected and dismantled in the fabric of the text.

On the efficacy of the wanderer as hermeneutic praxis, Iser's 'wandering viewpoint' enables 'the text to pass through the reader's mind as an ever expanding network of connections.'³⁸⁵ It is in this manner, that the figure of the wanderer also becomes a significant node in the complex tissue of Pynchon's narrative practice. Indeed, a diverse range of influences mark the motive background to Pynchon's work; in the introduction to *Slow Learner*, the author describes the inspiration of Helen Waddell's *The Wandering Scholars* (1927), over his own work, detailing the exodus of Medieval lyric writers from the monasteries to the roads of Europe. Calling to 'that other world humming along out there,' Pynchon takes from the study 'a preview of the mass college dropouts of the 60s.' (*Slow Learner*, 8) And yet, Pynchon casts suspicion on the romanticisation of motion—highlighted particularly in the 'centrifugal lures' of the Beat authors. Rather, in *The Crying of Lot 49*, the Kerouacian road is reimagined as 'a hypodermic needle, inserted somewhere ahead into the vein of a freeway,' offering only the 'illusion of speed, freedom, wind in your hair, unreeling landscape.' (16) It is with attention to the ambiguity of the wandering protagonist that Pynchon might be said to integrate an element of a Beckettian paralysis-in-movement. Here, we may think of the vagrants of Pynchon's debut novel *V*: 'wandering bums or the boys with no place to go' (145); like protagonist Benny Profane, whose repetitive motions lead him to 'doubt his own animateness,' (217) *V* embodies the vision in Pynchon's early novels, of a world running 'afoul of the inanimate.' (290) In this spirit, a reflection of what Beckett's Moran describes as 'the inertia of things' (134) can be sought in Pynchon's depiction of wandering in two key examples; that of 'tourism' in *V*, and the ruin of post-war Berlin in *Gravity's Rainbow*. In the latter case, while Pynchon's novel grounds itself in the ruin out of which Beckett's disintegratory texts also are drawn, we are witness to an overbearing openness, revealing winding pathways that reflect renewed possibilities of hermeneutic engagement in Pynchon's erstwhile un-readerly text. Mirroring this ambivalence, Pynchon's Argentine anarchist Squalidozzi, cautions against the 'terror' of the post-war Zone; but 'in the openness of the German zone,' he adds, 'our hope is limitless.' (470)

³⁸⁵ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, (John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1978), p. 116

Watt and the 'wandering viewpoint'

The metaphor of the journey is an essential element of Iser's theory of reading. By tracing the evolution of the reader through a history of diverse texts, the critic articulates a 'wandering viewpoint' as 'a means of describing the way in which the reader is present in the text.'³⁸⁶ The interplay between 'artistic' and 'aesthetic' poles is engendered through the reader's shifting perspective, building 'gestalten' from the various 'textual repertoires and strategies' encountered in the work. This, Iser argues, is particular to the manner in which one *reads through* a given text. To elucidate this critical metaphor, he provides the following example:

A traveller in a stagecoach [...] has to make the often difficult journey through the novel, gazing out from his moving viewpoint. Naturally, he combines all that he sees within his memory and establishes a pattern of consistency, the nature and reliability of which will depend partly on the degree of attention he has paid during each phase of the journey. At no time, however, can he have a total view of that journey.³⁸⁷

Both the 'consistency' imposed by the reader and the blind spots of the same process are manifested in this passage. The implication of the reader's 'active' presence, rendering the 'aesthetic object,' is offset, in Iser's formulation, by its ephemeral aspect—on the move, wary of the 'often difficult journey through the novel' and its particular obstacles to the 'total view' of the text. The elusive aspect of the 'total view' impels the 'moving viewpoint,' subject to reconstitution as one proceeds through the text. It is this sense of a *readerly motion*—prompted once again via the 'gap' in the reading process—that can be adequately said to represent the 'wandering viewpoint' in Iser's theory. As such, the incompleteness of any readerly gestalt necessitates further hermeneutic synthesis, subsequently establishing the spatial dimension of reading: both the figural landscape of the reader's cognition of textual sign posts, and the ground upon which any reading can possibly take place. Nevertheless, in the words of John Paul Riquelme, a difficulty arises as to the 'lack of firm ground'³⁸⁸ for the reader. Caught by and transcended by the textual object, the spatio-temporal coordinates of the text operate in relation to the impossibility of any total image of the text by the 'active' reader. The vicissitudes of this hermeneutic balancing act become increasingly apparent in what will be described as the spatio-temporal polarities of Beckett's metahermeneutic.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 118

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 16

³⁸⁸ John Paul Riquelme, 'Introduction: Wolfgang Iser's Aesthetic Politics: Reading as Field Work,' in *New Literary History*, Vol. 31, No. 1, (Winter, 2000), p. 8

The 'walk-talkers'³⁸⁹ of Beckett's fiction, using Ruby Cohn's critical category, significantly inform the nature of the obstacles encountered during the reading experience. In this regard, *Watt* holds a unique place in Beckett's oeuvre as a text saturated by the energies of transit. Fleeing from Paris, 'heavy notebooks'³⁹⁰ in tow, the novel remains a fiction of displacement with much of the text composed in the subsequent three years of literal *field work* in the farms of Roussillon. Curiously inseparable from these contingencies, the resulting novel is described by the author as 'a stylistic exercise [...] in order to stay sane,' as well as a bid 'to keep in touch.'³⁹¹ In the years after its equally circuitous route into publication,³⁹² the mobility of Beckett's protagonist and the novel's participation in the tradition of the literary quest narrative become familiar tropes of early criticism. In particular, Raymond Federman highlights the 'Heroic' tradition of *Watt* as 'journeyman'—'a kind of knight-errant, Don Quixote of the irrational.'³⁹³ As such, Federman addresses *Watt*'s traversal of the world of Hacketts, Nixons and McCanns, the Knott house and finally the mental asylum, as a protracted attempt to 'apprehend the fictional illusion.'³⁹⁴ Unremarked, however, is the degree to which *Watt*'s status as a traveller intertwines with the performance of the hermeneutic in Beckett's intractable novel. The manner in which *Watt* arrives into the novel provides an interesting case study in this regard. From the moment that he is introduced, 'interested spectators' (12) Mr Hackett and Mr and Mrs Nixon undercut and ironize *Watt*'s incipient journey to Knott's estate. It is thus that Mr Hackett betrays a useful frame of inquiry regarding *Watt*'s character, and the nature of his 'journey'; questioning Mr Nixon's alleged connection to Beckett's protagonist, Mr Hackett bemoans that 'here is a man you seem to have known all your life [...] who owes you five shillings for the past seven years, and all you can tell me is that he has a huge big red nose and no fixed address [...] And that he is an experienced traveller.' (16) Not only does this exchange introduce the notion of *Watt* 'as journeyman' into the text, but it stages a performance of the exegetic process whereby this interpretation may arise. Echoing the 'syntheses' wrought by the Iserean reader, *Watt*—without 'fixed address'—nevertheless remains at odds with hermeneutic enquiry. In Hackett's and the Nixons' interpretative bickering, one finds Beckett's protagonist ultimately identifiable neither as 'a man or a woman [...] a parcel, a carpet [...] or a roll of tarpaulin.' (11) While *Watt*'s condition as an 'experienced traveler' is amongst the only stable gestalts in this intra-textual

³⁸⁹ Quoted in Susan D. Brienza, 'Perilous Journeys on Beckett's Stages: Travelling Through Words,' in *Myth and Ritual in the Plays of Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Katherine H. Burkman, (Farleigh Dickerson University Press: Madison, 1987), p. 30

³⁹⁰ James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, (Bloomsbury: London, 1996), p. 300

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.333

³⁹² After a number of rejections, *Watt* would eventually be released as the first novel to be published under the Merlin imprint of Maurice Girodias' Olympia Press (see Chapter One for an analysis of the significance of Merlin and Olympia in Beckett's career) almost a decade after its completion in 1944.

³⁹³ Raymond Federman, *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction*, (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1966), p. 97

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

hermeneutic, it is also used as a means of obfuscating the same process of exegesis and ‘consistency building.’

On the subject of Watt’s ‘ways,’ to and from Knott’s establishment, Garin Dowd points to the reader’s gesture over Beckett’s protagonist, called to ‘negotiate, even if to transcend, or to render traversable, borders and hinterlands operative within the exegesis convened in his name.’³⁹⁵ Developing the interstitial pathways, Dowd highlights the path through Beckett’s text as one constituted through the text’s readiness to admit obstacles—a path ‘to and from the Knott household, albeit littered with obstacles that give rise to a series of encounters.’³⁹⁶ In this striking reading, the unsettling of spatio-temporal location underwrites the act of reading Beckett’s notoriously profuse text. In this light, Watt’s encounter with Mr Spiro—comically referred to as a ‘neo-John Thomist’—marks the inauguration of the latter’s journey to Mr Knott’s establishment, by tram and then by foot. Over the course of this exchange, Spiro addresses Watt as a ‘fellow wanderer’ (21) rendering explicit this connection between aggrieved travel and the Beckettian milieu. More striking, however, is Beckett’s deconstruction of the Iserian stagecoach, sharing with Iser the salient image of the itinerant scholar. In this regard, the notion of wandering in Beckett’s novel becomes a useful analogy for both the questing of *Watt* as well as its metahermeneutic parody throughout the text. In this sense, the supplementary aspect of the metahermeneutic process—reading Watt’s reading—is playfully suggested as an exogenous influence on Watt’s own hermeneutic agency. In the same episode, Watt is unable to respond to Spiro’s ramblings, hearing ‘nothing of this, because of other voices, singing, crying, stating, murmuring, things unintelligible, in his ear. With these, if he was not familiar, he was not unfamiliar either.’ (22) These interpretive palimpsests, along with the text’s own internal vacillations, highlight the difficulty of responding to Beckett’s recuperation of this ‘wandering’ gesture. In this way, the reader once again contends with the artistic text as it exceeds the syntheses of the reader per se, mirroring its functional tropes back in the space of its narrative.

Ultimately, the poles of kineticism and difficulty impinge on the reader’s journey through Beckett’s narrative landscape. This is epitomized in Watt’s manner of walking—his ‘funambulistic stagger’ (24)—whereby the author merges the poles of ambulation and form. Amongst the first of many digressive passages throughout the text, the possible permutations of Watt’s ‘stagger’ are painstakingly listed to comedic effect:

Watt’s way of advancing due east, for example, was to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and at the same time to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and at the same time to fling out his

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 76

left leg as far as possible towards the north, and then again to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then again to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north, and so on, over and over again, many many times, until he reaches his destination, and could sit down. So, standing first on one leg, and then on the other, he moved forward, a headlong tardigrade, in a straight line. The knees, on these occasions, did not bend. They could have, but they did not. (24)

By minutely detailing Watt's spasmodic movements, the novel connects to later comic efforts, including the permutations of the famous 'sucking stones' scene in *Molloy*, as well as *Endgame's* arthritic Clov. In this example, however, Beckett strikes at the heart of the possibility of movement and direction. Through the comprehensive account of Watt's 'stagger,' the linearity of the 'straight line,' to which Watt aims, is scattered, finding wandering in directedness, wastage in efficiency.³⁹⁷ While expediting the journey to Mr Knott's abode, Beckett nonetheless erects an immense textual obstacle for the reader, typical of the exhaustive style of the novel. As such, in the process of creating what Dowd describes as a 'total view'—a 'taxonomy of the novel's many "ways"'³⁹⁸—the motive quality of Beckett's protagonist nonetheless ebbs into a mode of narrative wastage, to be awkwardly repeated 'over and over again, many many times.' Generative of the possible ways and solutions to the character's wandering, the movement and paralysis³⁹⁹ captured in Watt's 'stagger' dramatically transforms them into further obstacles and problems to the hermeneutic act.

The wanderer as 'Tourist'—reading amid the 'waste piles'

Reading Pynchon, one finds a prolonged investment in images of sloth and motion. From Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon's 233 mile journey west into the American wilderness in *Mason & Dixon* (1997) to Oedipa Maas' ride across the freeways of 1960s California, these texts, according to Richard Pearce, fall under an American tradition of the 'novel of movement [...] the novel of motion.'⁴⁰⁰ At the same time, Pynchon's work is attuned to the tendency of the same process towards wastage, and exhaustion, incorporating a critical analysis of the loss of energy into what Beckett describes in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1992) as 'an unsurveyed marsh of sloth.' (121) In a journalistic piece for *The New York Times*, Pynchon reflects on the diverse representations of sloth in American fiction and history. Tracing

³⁹⁷ See *Molloy* for the inversion of this process—'I did my best to go in a circle, hoping in this way to go in straight line.' (94)

³⁹⁸ Garin Dowd, "'Watt's" Ways: Addenda, Borders and Courses,' in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 19, (2008), p. 76

³⁹⁹ Also see for a development of this topic—Paul Ardoin, 'Deleuze's Monstrous Beckett: Movement and Paralysis,' in *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 38, No. 2, (Winter, 2015)

⁴⁰⁰ Richard Pearce, 'Thomas Pynchon & the Novel of Motion: Where're They at, Where're They Going?' in *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 21, No. 1, (Spring, 1980), p. 177—Pearce develops a model of response to 'America's unchecked energy' grounded in Whitman's 'Nature without check with original energy.'

its connotations as a mortal sin, through Thomas Aquinas and finally its secularization in the 18th and 19th centuries with the development of American capitalism, Pynchon paints an ambivalent picture of writers as ‘the mavens of sloth.’⁴⁰¹ In particular, the author explores the relation between inactivity and a corresponding mode of viewership culminating in what Pynchon ironically describes as TV culture’s ‘gifts of paralysis.’⁴⁰² As such, like Beckett, Pynchon’s fictions depend on a complex opposition of inertia and motion in their exploration into different modes of reading. The remainder of this section will unpack the degree to which both author’s interventions rely on the mutual critical space of the wandering subject. However, where Beckett scatters the energies of his parodic hermeneut, Pynchon, Pearce argues, enacts an extreme contingency of narrative whereby ‘the security of traditional forms, categories, directions, links’ is denied, and the author ‘forces us to sympathise, judge and choose.’⁴⁰³ Through intra-textual images of wandering, Pynchon points to a means whereby a ‘path of least resistance’ (443) might be salvaged from the openness and saturation of his textual worlds.

Whether it be the ‘Field Book’ of *Mason & Dixon* or the various editions of ‘The Courier’s Tragedy’ in *The Crying of Lot 49*, the meta-textual function of the books that litter Pynchon’s novels is tied closely with the exigencies of traversing narrative landscapes. In the preamble to *Slow Learner*, Pynchon draws particular attention to ‘guidebook eponym Karl Baedeker,’ (17) illuminating the role of the Baedeker over the global geographies of his fictions. Disclosing the ‘old Baedeker trick’ as one involving the repurposing ‘of a time and place I had never been to,’ (17) Pynchon’s adoption, as well as the demystification of this technique, remain particular curiosities of this short piece of autobiography. At the same time, Pynchon’s novels acknowledge the limits of the handbook as a guarantee of safe passage through his narratives, forbidding their accommodation within the fantasy of a frictionless reading experience. In the case of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Pynchon’s allusions to the Baedeker blitz, in which guidebooks of London were used by the German Luftwaffe to locate strategically efficacious bombing targets, intensify this warning. In a striking point of crossover, Pynchon’s interrogation of the Baedeker is prefaced in Beckett’s early study *Proust* (1931). For Beckett, the Baedeker becomes a hermeneutic caution wherein ‘we are in the position of the tourist [...] whose aesthetic experience consists in a series of identifications and for whom Baedeker is the end rather than the means.’ (11) Beckett’s warning against our habitual identifications is extended to the desire to mask or exorcise the ‘cruelties and enchantments of reality.’ As such, Pynchon’s simultaneous adoption and criticism of the *Baedekerised* landscape, encounters some friction against Beckett’s stern counsel. This question of whether Pynchon’s ‘Baedeker trick’ is here an end, or the means to some further critical possibility merits further exploration.

⁴⁰¹ Thomas Pynchon, ‘The Deadly Sins/Sloth; Nearer, My Couch, to Thee,’ in *New York Time*, (6 June, 1993)

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*—Also see 1990’s *Vineland*, and the prevalence of the ‘thanatoid’ for a development of this motif.

⁴⁰³ Richard Pearce, ‘Thomas Pynchon & the Novel of Motion: Where’re They at, Where’re They Going?’ in *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 21, No. 1, (Spring, 1980), p. 193

As noted in the previous section, the prevalence of intra-textual readers in Pynchon's work must be acknowledged firstly before attempting any hermeneutic of his novels. This notably extends to instances of embattled 'Baedekerism' illustrated in the fabric of the text, whereby Pynchon blocks any attempt to perversely make of his engagement with the Baedeker itself a Baedeker guide to his works. Looking back to his nation-hopping debut in *V* (1963), Pynchon foregrounds the image of the reader as 'Tourist,' locked into circumscribed identifications. In this manner Pynchon offers the following description of Cairo during the height of the Fashoda incident (1898):

A world if not created then at least described to its fullest by Karl Baedeker of Leipzig. This is a curious country, populated only by a breed called "tourists." Its landscape is one of inanimate monuments and buildings; near-inanimate barmen, taxi-drivers, bellhops, guides [...] More than this it is two-dimensional, as is the Street, as are the pages and maps of those little red handbooks. As long as the Cook's, Travellers' Clubs and banks are open, the Distribution of Time section followed scrupulously, the plumbing at the hotel in order [...] the tourist may wander anywhere in this coordinate system without fear. War never becomes more serious than a scuffle with a pickpocket [...] Tourism thus is supranational, like the Catholic Church, and perhaps the most absolute communion we know on earth: for be its members American, German, Italian, whatever, the Tour Eiffel, Pyramids, and Campanile all evoke identical responses from them; their Bible is clearly written and does not admit of private interpretation; they share the same landscapes, suffer the same inconveniences; live by the same pellucid time-scale. (218)

Providing an image of Cairo as *read* in what the author ironically remarks as 'little red handbooks,' Pynchon, like Beckett, traces the overdevelopment of the hermeneutic impulse as a moment of 'Tourism.' Concerning his depiction of tourism as an analogue for reading, Pearce identifies in Pynchon's landscape 'not a choice to escape or to pursue but to abdicate choice. It is an acknowledged or unacknowledged obedience or following of some authoritative set of directions.'⁴⁰⁴ At this point, we reencounter the figure of the wanderer as a mode of hermeneutic activity coded within Pynchon's text. In the author's Baedeker landscape 'the tourist may wander anywhere in this coordinate system without fear,' finding an image of hermeneutic passivity in stark contrast to the dynamism of Iserean wandering. What Beckett would describe as a language 'abstracted to death' ('Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce,' 28) is here elevated into 'the supranational,' a 'Bible' that 'does not admit of private interpretation.' Pynchon's total image of place, 'described to its fullest,' thus, lays bare the lineaments of the 'inanimate' landscape, finding an echo of Beckett's 'straight line' in the inertia and de-animation of the fully described landscape.

⁴⁰⁴ Richard Pearce, 'Thomas Pynchon & the Novel of Motion: Where're They at, Where're They Going?' in *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 21, No. 1, (Spring, 1980), p.182

Through the presence of the Baedeker, both in the form and content of Pynchon's diffuse spaces, the author uncovers the danger of the homogenous in the image of heterogeneity—the way in which detail can pass over into a loss of geographical specificity. The uneasiness of these poles is felt in the revelatory function of his work towards different ways in which to *read* landscape. In the post-war, pre-Potsdam Zone of *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon hints at this possibility amid a space in which, as George Levine writes, 'the surreal takes on the immediacy of experience.'⁴⁰⁵ Prior to its division according to the mandates of the post-war Superpowers, Pynchon's Zone becomes a space of competing readings, featuring diverse claims over the fabric of reality. Nevertheless, in the absence of any clear spatial division, there is 'never a clear sense of nationality anywhere, nor even of belligerent sides, only the War, a single damaged landscape.' (306) As such, against the 'Tourist's' capacity to 'wander anywhere [...] without fear,' a polar shift occurs in Pynchon's conception of read space. Against the paralysis tied up in Beckett's diffusion of Watt's journey, the 'cripp'd Zone' of Pynchon's novel motions towards a renewed possibility. It is thus that Pynchon describes the 'emptiness of Berlin' following the Allied bombs:

[...] an inverse mapping of the white and geometric capital before the destruction—the fallow and long-strewn fields of rubble, the same weight of too much featureless concrete... except that here everything's been turned inside out. The straight-ruled boulevards built to be marched along are now winding pathways through the waste-piles, their shapes organic now, responding, like the goat trails, to laws of least discomfort. The civilians are outside now, the uniforms inside. Smooth facets of buildings have given way to cobbly insides of concrete blasted apart, all the endless-pebbled rococo just behind the shuttering. Inside is outside. Ceilingless rooms open to the sky... (443)

Sketching a blasted canvas without clear paths, this example of Pynchon's post-war Zone typifies the form of reading encountered in *Gravity's Rainbow*. As Tony Tanner memorably suggests, one is never sure 'whether we are in a bombed-out building or a bombed out mind.'⁴⁰⁶ Compared to the 'supranational' scope of the Tourist in *V*, the collapsing of 'inside' and 'outside' presents a markedly different picture through which the internal is externalised as a function of landscape. As such, the 'ceilingless rooms' sacrifice hermeneutic control to one of vulnerability, providing an 'inverse mapping' of the landscape.⁴⁰⁷ Thus, the mapping function is never eschewed entirely by Pynchon, despite

⁴⁰⁵ George Levine, 'Risking the Moment: Anarchy and Possibility in Pynchon's Fiction,' in *Thomas Pynchon*, ed. by Harold Bloom, (Chelsea House: New York, 2003), p. 57

⁴⁰⁶ Tony Tanner, *Thomas Pynchon*, (Methuen: London, 1982), p. 51

⁴⁰⁷ Enumerating the logic of 'the map' in Pynchon's work, Martin Kevorkian, Krzysztof Piekarski, Elisabeth McKetta address the author's polemic against 'an art of abstraction, a fictive construction that can nevertheless impose its order on real bodies.' They argue: 'maps can serve the brutal games of power and desire that take place on all scales, from the global to the interpersonal, at every vantage point from which a "They" enjoys the privilege of subjugating another.'—'Mapping, The Unmappable and Pynchon's Anti-Tragic Vision,' in *Pynchon's Against the*

withholding the possibility of 'straight-ruled boulevards' upon which to base one's hermeneutic. This significantly departs from the 'straight line' of *Watt*, where Beckett dramatises a means of direction, progressively exhausted; instead, Pynchon finds direction and hermeneutic efficacy at the point at which they conceivably break down—'goat trails' and 'winding pathways' the only means through the 'blasted' terrain. As such the internalised 'wandering viewpoint' of the reader is never jettisoned, but recuperated in Pynchon's deeply circuitous paths and broken landscapes. Where Beckett's *Watt* finds stasis in the mode of narrative wandering, Pynchon locates 'winding pathways through the waste piles.' In this way, the problem of hermeneutics is transformed into the possibilities of following 'laws of least discomfort.'

Entropy, Maxwell and the running-down of the metahermeneutic

So far, Beckett and Pynchon's respective fictions have been read according to their problematisation of the hermeneutic: following the thematisation of the object, ending and wandering. Binding these categories, this final section will consider the authors' engagement with the figure of entropy, reinscribing the opposite poles at which Beckett and Pynchon share the same critical space. Describing The Second Law of Thermodynamics, entropy is defined by *the Clausius statement* that 'heat does not pass from a body at low temperature to one at high temperature without an accompanying change elsewhere.'⁴⁰⁸ Thus, the law of entropy undergirds the single-directedness of heat flow, marking an immutable horizon to the amount of energy in a closed system available for work. This section will consider the metaphorical baggage of entropy, as it names a process of inescapable waste and what Norbert Wiener describes as 'the universe running downhill.'⁴⁰⁹ As the key poet of the entropic mode in postmodern U.S. literature,⁴¹⁰ no other author has done so much to push forward the literariness of the concept than Pynchon. As a presence in the author's work it insinuates into his representation of reading and mobility—while significantly channelling the presence of Beckett through what John P. Harrington describes as their respective 'sense of ends.'⁴¹¹ Bearing connotations of the chaotic, randomness and disordered states, entropy is shown to be a driving force behind the surface difficulty of any hermeneutic in Pynchon's text; in this manner, 'the Rocket' of *Gravity's Rainbow* is unique as a gestalt 'held against the entropies of lovable but scatterbrained Mother Nature.' (324) Moreover, Pynchon's fiction speaks to the possibility of entropy as a governing metaphor to describe the disjointed

Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide, ed. by Jeffrey Severs, Christopher Leise, (University of Delaware Press: Newark, 2006), p. 47

⁴⁰⁸ Quoted in Peter Atkins, *The Laws of Thermodynamics: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2010), p. 42

⁴⁰⁹ Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*, (Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 1950), p. 41

⁴¹⁰ Judith Chambers describes entropy as the 'most dominant metaphor' of the author's works—Judith Chambers, *Thomas Pynchon*, (Twayne Publishers: 1992), p. 40

⁴¹¹ John P. Harrington, 'Pynchon, Beckett and Entropy: Uses of Metaphor,' in *The Missouri Review*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (Summer 1982), p. 137

fabric of 60s and 70s America. This is most strongly felt in the early short ‘Entropy,’ in which the titular theory is rendered ‘an adequate metaphor’ to describe American consumerism, its ‘tendency from the least to the most probable, from differentiation to sameness.’ (88) In this case, the fragmentary ‘entropies’ of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, and the ‘adequate metaphor’ of early Pynchon point towards a hermeneutic ground in the disjunctive and exhaustive processes named by the concept itself. At the same time, Harrington argues, despite ‘the sort of randomness apparent in Pynchon’s many lists, series, and congeries [...] the term is applicable to states of uniformity and homogeneity suggestive of Beckett’s bleakest and most minimal fictions.’⁴¹² Where Pynchon’s fiction expands out into unexplored territories, the common reading of Beckett is one heading ‘worstwards’ and towards the ‘turning-inward’ named in the Greek root *entropia*. While this binary has proven to be not so clearly defined, the enclosure of Beckett’s entropic spaces—particularly in the author’s 60s short fictions—will be treated as useful counter-texts to Pynchon’s profligacy. This schism is redoubled by Harrington as ‘fundamental to each writer’s work and the governing principle on which they will come to deploy the metaphor in fiction,’ a split between ‘centrifugal’ openness and ‘centripetal’⁴¹³ enclosure. Nevertheless, in naming the inevitable transformation of hot to cold, of differentiated order to a chaotic sameness, the shared figure of entropy marks a route of passage for reconsidering the shadow Beckett casts over the later work of Pynchon. It follows the process whereby a hyperkinetic Pynchon, might conceivably become an exhausted Beckett. As such, this section will begin with a brief reflection on the importance of entropy over the span of Beckett’s career, with a focus on his engagement with Maxwell’s sorting demon, and the ‘closed spaces’ of the 60s. This will be followed by a consideration of Pynchon’s integration of the failure of the sorting-impulse as it is integrated and challenged in his short texts and novels.

Beckett’s ‘cosmic discord’: entropy, Maxwell and the aesthetics of failure

There is a close affinity between the running down of Beckett’s closed spaces and the concept of entropy. While offering a general description of disordered states and escalating chaos, at its core entropy guarantees against the complete efficiency in the transference of heat energy into work in closed systems. Following David Houston Jones and Laura Salisbury,⁴¹⁴ one may reiterate Beckett’s investigation into the nature of heat in the so-called cylinder narratives of the 1960s, restaging the Beckettian binaries of light and dark in terms of the oscillation between states of hot and cold. However, rather than arguing for any putative ‘thermodynamic turn,’ the loss of usable energy, waste and inefficiency, are upheld early on by Beckett as a distinct aesthetic investment. This is demonstrated

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, p. 130

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 134

⁴¹⁴ In particular David Houston Jones, ‘“So Fluctuant a Death”: Entropy and Survival in *The Lost Ones* and *Long Observation of the Ray*,’ in *Beckett and Ethics*, ed. by Russell Smith, (Bloomsbury: London, 2011), and Laura Salisbury, ‘Art of Noise: Beckett’s Language in a Culture of Information,’ in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd’hui*, Vol. 22, (2010)

primarily through Beckett's interrogation of 'Maxwell's Demon,' revealed through the author's engagement with Poincaré's *La Valeur De La Science* (1905) in the 1930s. Mathematical physicist James Clerk Maxwell's thought experiment, challenges the single-directedness of heat flow resulting from the Second Law of Thermodynamics, providing the analogy of a 'sorting Demon,' identifying and separating molecules in a closed chamber according to their speed and temperature; this, Maxwell posits, occurs without the surplus expenditure and redundancy of available energy due to the process of entropy. Using this analogy, Beckett negotiates the connection between disorderliness and the imposition of order in his own artistic practice. The migration of Maxwell's analogy to the critical essay, 'Les Deux Besoins,' or 'The Two Needs' finds Beckett attempting to give expression to the contradictions of art, rendered unassailable 'unless you are Maxwell's Demon.' (*Disjecta*, 55) And yet, the slow exhaustion of the Beckett world, its tendencies towards entropic loss, stage a criticism of the sorting impulse in the face of material Beckett would thereafter describe as the 'unusable' residua of writerly invention. In this regard, the 'fidelity to failure,' ('Three Dialogues,' 145) at the centre of Beckett's project, takes on a new physical urgency, at a crossroads between literary exhaustion and cosmic failure.

As with any reading engaging with the intersections of Beckett and science, one is indebted to Angela Montgomery and her early survey of 'a zone of cultural reference within Beckett's works' owing to the 'trace of physicists and mathematicians.'⁴¹⁵ Rather than affecting a schism between art and science, Montgomery offers a symbiotic reading of Beckett where 'the use of logic has led to the discovery of the "absurdity" of nature.'⁴¹⁶ While Montgomery justifies her argument of 'natural absurdity' through evidence of quantum indeterminacy in *Watt*, further insight can be drawn from Beckett's readerly encounter with the science of heat. Transcribing from Poincaré's *La Valeur de la Science* in the 'Whoroscope Notebook' in 1936, Beckett describes the dissipation of heat energy in the Carnot cycle. This investigation by French engineer Nicolas Leonard Sadi Carnot, into the conversion of heat in steam engines places limitations on the efficiency in the transference of heat into motion. As such, it figures as a precursor of what would later in the 19th century be referred to as entropy. Significantly, Beckett copies Poincaré's definition of the Carnot Principle: why 'temperatures tend to a level, without the possibility of going backwards.'⁴¹⁷ The irreversibility of this process is further illustrated through a series of analogies: a drop of wine falling into a glass of water, a grain of barley in a heap of wheat. In this way, Beckett finds a ready catalogue of images 'for interpolation'⁴¹⁸ as famously indicated in the 'Whoroscope Notebook.'

⁴¹⁵ Angela Montgomery, 'Beckett and Science: *Watt* and the Quantum Universe,' in *Comparative Criticism*, Vol. 13, (1991), p. 171

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 173

⁴¹⁷ Henri Poincaré, *La Valeur de la Science*, (Cosimo: New York, 1905), p. 96-97

⁴¹⁸ Quoted in John Pilling, "'For Interpolation": Beckett and English Literature,' in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 16, (2006)

In spite of the sequestering of Beckett's characters from the empirical world, these 'interpolated images' habitually place them as all the more a part of it. At the same time, the material world in Beckett is in piecemeal; as noted in 'Recent Irish Poetry,' the 'breakdown of the object' and 'rupture of the lines of communication' consequently render the world at a conceptual distance. Here, the chapter heading from Poincare, 'The Present Crisis of Mathematical Physics,' indicates an employment of the scientific register in excess of its practical function. Poincare's diagnosis of what he describes as the 'crumbling' of physical principles in the face of experimental difficulties of relativity and the emerging quantum field, for Beckett comes to partake in a broad discourse of 20th century crisis. As a scientific concept, entropy holds a unique position in this nexus. In this manner, Rudolf Arnheim in his celebrated study *Entropy and Art* (1971) describes the evocation of heat death and entropic decline as 'congenial to a pessimistic mood.'⁴¹⁹ Moreover, in the 1961 interview with Tom Driver, Beckett famously gestures towards 'a new form and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos.'⁴²⁰ While largely unacknowledged, this remark harkens back to the early period of Beckett's writerly career in 1929's 'Assumption.' Here, Beckett prefigures the intimacy between chaos and aesthetics, giving voice to a barely repressed longing to be 'fused with the cosmic discord.' The cacophony troubling the artist's 'silence' is foreshadowed in the opening of the text, in which Beckett's character 'could have shouted and could not.' (3) In this early example, the emergence of the *Beckettian* double-bind, parallel with the apprehension of the discordant totality, provides a template for a profound interrogation of the limits of aesthetic categories in the face of irreversible chaos. In this regard, Beckett's portrayal of failure and human incapacity take on a 'cosmic' scale.

The maximal and minimal polarities of this motif, however, exist in tension. Derived from the Greek root *entropia*, the same process of entropy also names a literal 'turning-inward.' Beckett suggests an awareness of this ulterior meaning in his early attempts at aesthetic self-definition. Following the commitment to 'cosmic discord' and the voracious reading of the 30's, the 1938 essay 'Les Deux Besoins' brings the language of thermodynamics into proximity with the self-definition of Beckett's aesthetic practice. In this first attempt, in the French language, at conceptual expression, Beckett establishes a constellation of reference between Poincare, chaos, and the 'spasms of judgement' (56) constitutive of the creative act. Furthermore, the struggle between the 'great' and 'small' needs, referenced in the 'two needs' of the essay's title, elicit a stripping of extraneous material, an ostensible abandonment of the macrocosm; as such, for Deidre Bair, the overriding image of the essay is one of humanity 'doomed to failure... the artist's *turning inward*.'⁴²¹ And yet, the proliferation of learning and

⁴¹⁹ Rudolf Arnheim, *Entropy and Art: An Essay on Disorder and Order*, (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1971), p. 8

⁴²⁰ 'Tom Driver in *Columbia University Forum*, Summer 1961,' in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Lawrence Graver, Raymond Federman (New York: Routledge, 1979), p. 219

⁴²¹ Deidre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, (Simon & Schuster: New York, 1978), p. 295

reference exhibited throughout the essay—from Pythagoras, to Galileo—form an image of Beckett and the world placed between metaphor and the thing in itself. Parsing the contradictory impulses of art, the dilemma remains ultimately intractable ‘unless you are Maxwell’s demon.’⁽⁵⁶⁾ Here, the sorting-demon becomes a panacea for the ‘rotting election’ (56) underpinning the creative process. As such—and parallel to the tensions exhibited by the ‘two needs’—Beckett occasions a further antinomy, between the fantasy of order betokened through Maxwell’s analogy and the degeneration of art.

An overview of Maxwell’s thought experiment is provided in *Theory of Heat* (1871), along with its extent and consequences:

Now let us suppose that such a vessel is divided into two portions, A and B by a division in which there is a small hole, and that a being, who can see the individual molecules, opens and closes this hole, so as to allow only the swifter molecules to pass from A to B and only the slower one to pass from B to A. He will thus, without expenditure of work, raise the temperature of B and lower that of A, in contradiction to the second law of thermodynamics.⁴²²

Under the caption the ‘limitation of the second law of thermodynamics,’ Maxwell considers the possibility of lossless energy transfer, creating inequalities of temperature in a closed system, without the dissipation of available energy. The possibility of moving the molecules in the ‘vessel’ without the loss of energy through work runs counter to the necessary increase in the unavailability of energy formulated in the second law of thermodynamics. The outcome of Maxwell’s thought experiment would be a perpetual and inexhaustible sorting process, wherein the imaginary Demon is able to shift mobile bodies to different locations without any heat loss. However, Maxwell’s Demon is remembered for its remarkable image of an operator at the centre of a closed vessel. Capable of allowing swifter molecules to pass to one section of the vessel and slow molecules to the other without the surplus expenditure of energy, the imaginary demon Poincare writes, ‘could well constrain the world to return backward.’⁴²³ The arrow of time, marked by ‘Carnot’s Principle’ is thus circumvented, the stable heat differential between the two chambers opening the possibility for perpetual motion and the ready availability of energy.

However, as Laura Salisbury observes, Beckett seems more in tune with the immanent degradations of the second law of thermodynamics than with the ‘effortless order’⁴²⁴ of Maxwell’s imaginary demon. In this regard, Maxwell’s description of one ‘whose faculties are so sharpened he [...] would be able to do what is at present impossible to us’ is telling. A more forceful conclusion may be that, for Beckett, the

⁴²² James Clerk Maxwell, *Theory of Heat*, (Longmans: Harlow, 1871), p. 328

⁴²³ Henri Poincare, *La Valeur de la Science*, (Cosimo: New York, 1905), p. 96-97

⁴²⁴ Laura Salisbury, ‘Art of Noise: Beckett’s Language in a Culture of Information,’ in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd’hui*, Vol. 22, (2010), p. 361

creative act is imbued with the very inefficiencies vitiated by Maxwell, 'that whole zone of being that has always been set aside by artists as something unusable.'⁴²⁵ The physical necessity of increasing waste and unavailability warranted by entropy hereby inflect the obligation towards the 'unusable' in Beckett's aesthetics. In this regard, the mechanics of heat and its progression towards unusability and death in entropy, inform the residua of the 1960s. This dynamic has been well documented by David Houston Jones and John Harrington regarding the architecture of 'Imagination Dead Imagine' (1965), 'The Lost Ones' (1970), and unpublished shorts like 'Long Observation of the Ray' (1976). However, as the first of the cylinder pieces, 'All Strange Away' is conspicuously absent from these studies. Written across 1963-64, 'All Strange Away' frames the closed space as fundamentally 'a place to die in.' (169) As such, the 'worstward' course of many of Beckett's containers is explicitly framed in light of a state of entropic exhaustion and creeping heat death. Such is the nature of the search two decades prior in 'Les Deux Besoins' for a principle upon which to base an aesthetic. For Beckett, the final category is to be an acknowledgement of the 'irreversible. The dead and wounded bear witness to it.' (57) Furthermore, the demon in Maxwell's thought experiment is also incorporated into the fabric of the text. Sketching a series of containers for a male and female body, Beckett both works through and undercuts the spontaneous order synonymous with the sorting demon. While the narrator defers to 'fancy' as the 'only hope,' the presence of the demon ironically subverts this fantasy of order in the following passage:

Sleep stirring now some time add now with nightmares unimaginable making waking sweet and lying waking till longing for sleep again with dread of demons, perhaps some glimpse of demons later. Dread then in rotunda now with longing and sweet relief but so faint and weak no more than weak tremors of a hothouse leaf. (179)

The correspondence between the revenant demon and the hothouse anticipates the exploration of heat loss in the later cylinder pieces, further embodying Beckett's aesthetic of irreversibility. However, while framing the presence of 'demons' as 'nightmare,' the deferral 'perhaps some glimpse of demons later' suggests an investment in the analogy, against the fact of its failure. At the same time, the fascination for the exercise of 'fancy,' and the capacity to 'imagine other' to the limits imposed by the rotunda, undermines the structural limits of Maxwell's closed sphere. This could be a signifier, in excess of the otherwise closed system—the reference to 'Dante' in 'The Lost Ones,' or the Pantheon in 'All Strange Away.' The provisionality of the system in the latter text, vacillating from cube to rotunda, wasting away, pairs the aesthetic ordering principle with its collateral in physical ruin: the 'walls and ceiling flaking plaster or suchlike, floor like bleached dirt.' (173) As 'hothouses' then, Beckett's vessels register the paradox of an aesthetic of unusability and waste in terms of their physicality: mediated through the scientific register, and the vocabulary of thermodynamics. In the words of Adolf Loos, from whom

⁴²⁵ 'An Interview with Beckett (1956): Israel Shenker in *New York Times*' in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, ed. By Lawrence Graver, Raymond Federman (New York: Routledge, 1979), p. 149

Beckett was consciously indebted, aesthetic 'ornament' is to be closely linked with its ultimate degradation, as it leads to 'the waste of human labour, money and materials. That is damage time cannot repair.'⁴²⁶

Significantly, these problems also mirror those levelled at Maxwell's thought experiment. Among the critiques of Maxwell's hypothetical Demon, Leon Brillouin's argument is frequently cited—stating that the supposedly closed, equilibrium-state of the 'vessel' in which the Demon operates necessarily must be affected by a net increase in the rate of entropy. 'Before an intelligent being can use its intelligence,' Brillouin argues, 'it must perceive its objects, and that requires physical means of perception. Visual perception in particular requires the illumination of the object. Seeing is essentially a non-equilibrium phenomenon.'⁴²⁷ Given the closed nature of the container, without any source of light, there would be no way for Maxwell's Demon to sort the fast-moving molecules from the slow. In this instance, the energy the Demon would use to gain information about the molecules would be greater than that produced by the process of sorting.⁴²⁸ Taking into account these criticisms of Maxwell's thought experiment, its presence in Beckett stands not only for the irrevocability of the sorting impulse but an image of the observer within a context of failure and persistence.

In this regard, Jones interrogates the narrative function of the sorting Demon as contributing to the 'creeping sense of epistemological crisis in "The Lost Ones."⁴²⁹ In a sober and detached tone, the narrator of 'The Lost Ones' provides a species count of the 'microscopic' beings trapped in the cylinder. Throughout the text, the careful schematising and precise measurements of the narrator betray an appeal to objectivity, in an effort to provide 'a perfect mental image of the entire system.' (204) However, 'despite the apparently authoritative narrative,' Jones states, 'the narrator's own position within the cylinder world is deeply problematic [...] like the closed chamber in Maxwell's experiment, the imperative of observation stands in direct contradiction of the closedness of the world to which it applies.'⁴³⁰ The liminal position of the narrator, at once seemingly outside and implicated *in* the fictional edifice, introduces a marked inconsistency into the author's manipulation of the figure of the Demon. In this way, the connection between the Demon-function and that of narratorial disturbance echoes Brillouin's declamatory statement concerning the non-equilibrium nature of observation. In this way, the structural problems that Beckett introduces into his own fictional models amplify the surplus presence of some third party, an 'observer,' the problematic of observation underwriting its

⁴²⁶ Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays*, (Ariadne Press: Riverside, 1998), p.169

⁴²⁷ Quoted in Bruce Bassoff, *Secret Sharers: Studies in Contemporary Fictions*, (Ams Pr Inc: New York, 1984), p. 58

⁴²⁸ Brillouin continues: 'The cylinder in which the demon operates is, optically speaking, a closed black body...The observer must use a lamp that emits light of a wavelength not well represented in the black-body radiation, and the eventual absorption of this light by the observer or elsewhere increases the entropy of the system.'—*Ibid.*

⁴²⁹ David Houston Jones, "'So Fluctuant a Death": Entropy and Survival in *The Lost Ones* and *Long Observation of the Ray*,' in *Beckett and Ethics*, ed. by Russell Smith, (Bloomsbury: London, 2011), p. 119

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.122

'imperative.' Overall, Beckett's fictions implicate the act of observation and interpretation in the steady process of entropic disorder. As indicated in a conversation with painter Avigor Arikha, between the poles of energy and entropy, the 'dream' of 'giving a form to speechlessness' can be voiced. 'Because of energy' states Arikha, this desire is ultimately unsatisfied, to which Beckett responds 'and entropy. And between these two we know which one wins.'⁴³¹

Entropy, communication and the inefficacy of metaphor in Pynchon

Despite Pynchon's disavowal of any special insight into the concept, the author's references to entropy have become a critical touchstone of Pynchon studies. Encompassing a matrix of reading, engagement and wastage, Richard Poirier writes of the proliferation of possible symbols and possible meanings as emblematic of the author's 'literature of waste.'⁴³² This is reinforced in a particularly vitriolic reading by Gore Vidal for the *New York Review of Books*. Invoking Pynchon's eclectic prose style, Vidal states that 'this is entropy with a vengeance. The writer's text is ablaze with the heat/energy that his readers have lost to him'—the result is 'neither a readerly nor a writerly text but an uneasy combination of both.'⁴³³ In spite of its intent, this review betrays a broader structure, explored across this chapter, concerning Pynchon's internalised strategies of hermeneutic activity and inertia. At the same time, the foregrounding of entropy in Pynchon's work may be said to serve less as a mission statement—a literature of waste, entropy, or any other thematic—than an exploration of the possibility of any governing hermeneutic to apprehend the world. Beginning with the short text 'Entropy,' Pynchon, in the introduction to *Slow Learner*, describes the story, self-effacingly, as 'a procedural error'—a caution against starting from the point of 'a theme, symbol or other abstract unifying agent.' (12) As such, in an insightful study of the same text, Julian Jimenez Heffernan writes of the critic 'captured in a hermeneutic predicament'—between the desire to read the concept of entropy 'into "Entropy"' and seeing in the early text the 'seed of Pynchon's mature achievements.'⁴³⁴ For the purpose of this section, the former of these 'misreadings' will be foregrounded, while following Heffernan in echoing David Seed's call that 'we should not jump to the conclusion that Pynchon is endorsing the metaphor.'⁴³⁵ By framing his approach to 'Entropy' as privileging irony and distance, Heffernan opens Pynchon's early text onto the possibility of dissenting viewpoints, strategies of hermeneutic engagement resonating

⁴³¹ Quoted in Anne Atik, 'Beckett as Reader,' in *The American Poetry Review*, Vol. 28, No. 5 (September/October, 1999), p. 37

⁴³² For Poirier, 'each is a clue not to meaning so much as to chaos of meaning, an evidence of the impossibility of stabilization.' Richard Poirier, 'The Importance of Thomas Pynchon,' in *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 21, No. 2, (May, 1975), p. 154

⁴³³ Gore Vidal, 'American Plastic: The Matter of Fiction,' in *The New York Review of Books*, (15 July, 1976), accessed 7 April, 2015, <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1976/07/15/american-plastic-the-matter-of-fiction/>>

⁴³⁴ Julian Jimenez Heffernan, 'Ironic Distance in Thomas Pynchon's "Entropy,"' in *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 52, No. 2, (Summer, 2011), p. 298

⁴³⁵ Quoted Julian Jimenez Heffernan, 'Ironic Distance in Thomas Pynchon's "Entropy,"' in *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 52, No. 2, (Summer, 2011), p. 301

with the author's poetics of ambiguity. It is into this gap that Beckett may be productively read as an enervating presence in Pynchon's work. This will take from what Harrington describes as the 'dramatic contrasts involved'⁴³⁶ concerning their mutual interrogation of entropy—between the failure of the ordering-impulse in Beckett's fiction and the attempt, by Pynchon, to avert 'total chaos.' ('Entropy,' 97)

Before we continue into a reflection on Pynchon's work, it is worth spending a brief moment to consider the place of entropy as an applied metaphor, a transposition from the realm of thermodynamics to information flow and metaphor. Drawing on Brian Baker's summary, the spectre of entropy as an expression of cultural decline has attained a particular prevalence in the second half of the 20th Century, in the wake of the catastrophe of the Second World War. In this regard, Baker writes, 'the universe [has been] thought of as a closed system: there is nobody actively combating the flow of heat from hot to cold and the increase in disorder this brings. This means that the universe will eventually run down, the temperature eventually becoming the same at every point, a state of maximum disorder and undifferentiated "heat death."⁴³⁷ This notion of the world as a 'closed system,' succumbing to a steady, albeit inevitable, process of exhaustion shadows the migration of entropy into the literary text. It is, however, worth remembering that literary evocations of entropy, at this point of cultural time, are not restricted to the hard science of pre-war science fiction; instead, they blur into what John Barth describes as the "apocalyptic ambience"⁴³⁸ of the 60s, along with the hybrid forms of the postmodern.⁴³⁹ As such, one finds the process of entropy represented in the global catastrophe caused by Ice-9 in Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* (1963), the degenerative fictions of William Burroughs and Barth's 'exhaustion' of literary forms—evoked in *Giles Goat Boy* (1966) as 'an entropy to time, a tax on change.' (707) Further still, in Don DeLillo's celebrated novel, *White Noise* (1984), the texture of life in the city is described according to the poles of heat and energy: 'Heat. This is what cities mean to me. You get off the train and walk out of the station and you are hit with the full blast. The heat of air, traffic and people... The eventual heat death of the universe that scientists love to talk about is already well underway...' (10) In these examples, the use of entropy as a metaphor for American life is questioned, along with the pessimistic view of a cosmic march towards the enclosure of possibility. This American slant is redoubled by Harrington who writes of the prevalence of literary representations of entropy in the late 50s and 60s as a 'distinctive characteristic of American fiction [...] an identifiable means of addressing a specifically national sort of disillusionment and sense of purpose turned paranoia and

⁴³⁶ John P. Harrington, 'Pynchon, Beckett and Entropy: Uses of Metaphor,' in *The Missouri Review*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (Summer 1982), p. 129

⁴³⁷ Brian Baker, *Literature and Science: Social Impact and Interaction*, (ABC-CLIO: Santa Barbara, 2005), p. 246

⁴³⁸ John Barth, 'The Literature of Exhaustion,' in *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction*, (Johns Hopkins University Press: London, 1988), p. 72—for a more thorough analysis of the exhaustive tendency of postmodernism see: Introduction

⁴³⁹ See Peter Freese, *From Apocalypse to Entropy and Beyond: The Second Law of Thermodynamics in Post-war American Fiction*, (Verlag Die Blaue Eule: Essen, 1997)

frontier turned wasteland.⁴⁴⁰ It is out of this context, that Pynchon's literature of waste becomes possible.

Over the span of Pynchon's career, his texts have demonstrated a profuse engagement with the social applicability of entropy as metaphor. Lifted from the sphere of marine insurance, the titular 'inherent vice' of Pynchon's 2009 novel, provides a measure of 'what you can't avoid.' (351) This is similarly echoed in *Against the Day* (2006) in which entropy makes a brief appearance: 'no one acquainted with the Second Law of Thermodynamics [...] would have expected a perfect transfer of funds—some of those Turkish pounds would always be lost in the process.' (238) Together, these poles of corruptibility and loss saturate Pynchon's fictions, an implicit factor in situations of historical irrevocability, along with the corruption of political ideals and enthusiasm. The earliest example of this, however, is found in Pynchon's short story, 'Entropy,' a text that, Heffernan suggests, 'pre-emptively dramatizes such epistemological uncertainty'⁴⁴¹ that comes with the metaphorical application of entropy to culture. Throughout the text, the author playfully juggles two separate narrative strands—one involving a 'lease-breaking party' held by Meatball Mulligan steadily devolving into chaos, and the other a carefully controlled 'hothouse jungle.' The latter is kept by Callisto, at a stable temperature of 37 degrees, aiding in the preservation of a small bird. 'Hermetically sealed,' Callisto's 'hothouse' serves as 'a tiny enclave of regularity in the city's chaos...' (83) Between the spaces occupied by Mulligan and Callisto, 'Entropy' renders explicit the 'double vision' that Thomas Schaub (borrowing from a term in *V*) cites as a motivating force in Pynchon's work. To this end, locked away from Mulligan's party, Callisto finds himself 'aghast' (84) at The Second Law of Thermodynamics, with its promise of enduring waste and possibilities for metaphor:

He found in entropy or the measure of disorganization in a closed system an adequate metaphor to apply to certain phenomena in his own world. He saw, for example, the younger generation responding to Madison Avenue with the same spleen his own had once reserved for Wall Street: and in the American 'consumerism' discovered a similar tendency from the least to the most probable, from differentiation to sameness, from ordered individuality to a kind of chaos. He found himself, in short, restating Gibbs' prediction in social terms, and envisioned a heat-death for his culture in which ideas, like heat-energy, would no longer be conserved. (88)

⁴⁴⁰ John P. Harrington, 'Pynchon, Beckett and Entropy: Uses of Metaphor,' in *The Missouri Review*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (Summer 1982), p. 129

⁴⁴¹ Julian Jimenez Heffernan, 'Ironic Distance in Thomas Pynchon's "Entropy,"' in *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 52, No. 2, (Summer, 2011), p. 299

In this extract, the reader finds Callisto in the middle of dictating his memoirs, an exercise in the 'third person' reminiscent of Henry Adams.⁴⁴² In particular, his prophecy reinforces the transformation of entropy from the sphere of thermodynamics to that of information theory. Name checking 19th C American scientist Willard Gibbs, a key figure—along with Norbert Wiener—in what Callisto notes as the bid to restate 'chaos' in 'social terms,' entropy serves as a node crystallizing many of Pynchon's influences. Elsewhere, the efficacy of entropy as a mode of communicative analysis is interrogated for comical effect; away from Callisto's 'hothouse,' one of Mulligan's friends, Saul, recalls a fierce argument with his partner—an argument, ironically, over communication theory. What ensues is a discussion of 'a kind of leakage': 'Tell a girl: "I love you." No trouble with the two-thirds of that, it's a closed circuit. Just you and she. But that nasty four-letter word in the middle, *that's* the one you have to look out for. Ambiguity. Redundance. Irrelevance...' (90) Thus, in a particularly insightful essay, David Seed remarks how the text 'stands in its own right as a dramatization of how the concept of entropy can be applied to human behaviour.'⁴⁴³ It is this notion of entropy as an 'adequate metaphor' that filters through into Callisto's musings. The entropic 'tendency from the least to the most probable,' from 'differentiation to sameness,' is reframed in light of 'American consumerism,' a statement that is less interesting for its efficacy as a mode of social critique than the competing voices that trouble the character's engagement with the entropic world to begin with. At the same time, Pynchon's cross-section of cultural references is integrated into the American landscape of Madison Avenue and the growing engine of American consumption. In this way, Pynchon's story offers both an interrogation and representation of entropic literature.

The possibility and circumscription of entropy as a metaphor pass into the 'Rousseau-like fantasy' of Callisto's hothouse; as such, despite being depicted as an aesthete of Romantic lineage, the form of this inheritance suggests an altogether more ominous sense of enclosure. It is at this point that Beckett appears to haunt Pynchon's utopian fantasy, with the deceleration of Callisto and his partner Aubade, hidden behind a 'hermetic seal.' This is reaffirmed by Seed and Heffernan, both of whom find traces of Beckett's presence in 'Entropy.' For Seed, Callisto's compulsive weather-checking becomes reminiscent of *Endgame's* Clov,⁴⁴⁴ peering out onto a world at 'zero.' On the other hand, Heffernan finds in Pynchon's humour and willingness to dispense with the tropes of novelistic realism an opening onto

⁴⁴² For a thorough analysis of Pynchon's debts to Adams in 'Entropy' see David Seed, 'Order in Thomas Pynchon's "Entropy",' *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, Vol. 11, No. 2, (Spring, 1981)

⁴⁴³ David Seed, 'Order in Thomas Pynchon's "Entropy",' *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, Vol. 11, No. 2, (Spring, 1981), p. 135

⁴⁴⁴ Seed suggestively points to the diversity of viewpoints in 'Entropy' compared to the 'gloom' of Beckett's play: 'Both works have pre-apocalyptic elements, but Pynchon confines them mainly to Callisto.' David Seed, 'Order in Thomas Pynchon's "Entropy",' *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, Vol. 11, No. 2, (Spring, 1981), p. 139

Beckett's work; pointing to Beckett's *Murphy* as a 'likely precedent'⁴⁴⁵ for 'Entropy,' Heffernan quotes from the author's comedic description of Murphy's mind 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.' (69) Figured as an act of 'thermodynamic compensation,' whereby the inner universe opens to the 'dynamic rule'⁴⁴⁶ of the universe without, the self-sufficiency of Murphy's mind, like Callisto's 'hothouse' is nonetheless proven to be inadequate. As such, this model of enclosure—with Murphy's mind a 'closed system' in Beckett's text—significantly insinuates into the literary practice of Pynchon's work; this occurs both through the formal inheritance of 'closed systems' and the reverberation, in entropy, of a merging of poles. Thus, in 'Entropy,' the 'hermetic seal' is violently broken, demonstrated through Aubade's smashing of the window separating 'hothouse' from the world beyond the apartment block and, symbolically, Mulligan's party. While Pynchon, like Beckett, dramatizes the failure of the ordering principle, the perforation of this boundary, for the younger author, occurs as a moment of communion: opening onto 'a hovering curious dominant' whereby 'their separate lives should resolve into a tonic of darkness and the final absence of all motion.' (98) Also 'resolved,' in this example, is the looming dominant of stasis, between the two authors, raised in the previous section. Furthermore, where the example of Murphy's mind ebbs to a point of 'willessness,' Pynchon dramatizes the possibility of communication, open to the 'vagaries of the weather, of national politics, of any civil disorder.' (84)

Crucially, metaphors of mobility and communication coincide in the concept of entropy. For Anne Mangel, this preoccupation becomes a broad concern for Pynchon's characters: 'in their world,' with an 'emphasis on 'such things as thermodynamics and signal-to-noise ratios.'⁴⁴⁷ This is particularly true, Mangel highlights, in *The Crying of Lot 49*; Pynchon's second novel provides, in turn, a further point of crossover between the author and Beckett concerning their shared engagement with the figure of Maxwell's Demon. In a key narrative set-piece, Oedipa's symbol-searching takes her to an L.A University campus where she meets John Nefastis, the inventor of a machine containing an 'honest-to-God Maxwell's Demon.' (60) Like Beckett, the poles of text and entropy are combined in the figure of the sorting-Demon—'a figure of speech [...] a metaphor' connecting 'the world of thermodynamics to the world of information flow.' (73) Just as Callisto marks the transition from a cultural condition of 'differentiation' to 'sameness,' the same process is thematised with the transposition of entropy into the space of metaphor. This is exaggerated in the following excerpt where Nefastis endeavours to explain entropy and Maxwell's Demon to Oedipa:

⁴⁴⁵ Julian Jimenez Heffernan, 'Ironic Distance in Thomas Pynchon's "Entropy,"' in *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 52, No. 2, (Summer, 2011), p. 319

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁷ Anne Mangel, 'Maxwell's Demon, Entropy, Information: The Crying of Lot 49,' in *Triquarterly* 20 (1971), p. 197

He began then, bewilderingly, to talk about something called entropy [...] but it was too technical for her. She did gather that there were two distinct kinds of this entropy. One having to do with heat-engines, the other to do with communication. The equation, for one, back in the 30s, had looked very like the equation for the other. It was a coincidence. The two fields were entirely unconnected, except at one point: Maxwell's Demon. As the Demon sat and sorted his molecules into hot and cold, the system was said to lose entropy. But somehow the loss was offset by the information the Demon gained about what molecules were where. (72)

A careful balance is drawn between the revelation of intersecting disciplines embodied by the Demon, and the parodic tenor of the scene (Nefastis will thereafter proposition Oedipa against the background of rolling news). Maxwell's Demon is thereby explained 'bewilderingly,' and as a hermeneutic frame 'too technical' for ready application. While Pynchon is more forthcoming than Beckett in the naming of Maxwell and the sorting-Demon as inter-texts, both authors readily undermine the 'effortless order' of Maxwell's thought experiment. However, where Beckett internalises the Demon's closed container into the substance of his fiction, Pynchon ironises the presence of the Demon, elucidating but also outstripping intra-textual reading in each case. As the scene progresses, Oedipa's "understanding" is opened onto her possible role as a 'sensitive,' one capable of communing with the Demon and impelling the sorting process without any surplus energy expenditure. Nefastis explains:

Communication is the key...The Demon passes his data on to the sensitive, and the sensitive must reply in kind. There are untold billions of molecules in that box. The Demon collects data on each and every one. At some deep psychic level he must get through. The sensitive must receive that staggering set of energies, and feed back something like the same quantity of information. To keep it all cycling. On the secular level all we can see is one piston, hopefully moving. One little movement, against all that massive complex of information, destroyed over and over with each power stroke. (72-73)

The 'untold billions' (72) of Nefastis' sealed box are apprehended by Oedipa in the process of becoming a 'sensitive.' Resembling the manifold 'particles' in Beckett's 'The Lost Ones,' the purview of the sorting-Demon, in both cases, is engaged in a process of collecting data on their populace, delineating what bodies 'were where.' As Oedipa meditates upon the image of the Demon—literalised on the outside of the box in the profile of James Clerk Maxwell—the reader must perform the same process on Pynchon's protagonist. The likelihood of the exchange of information between Oedipa and the captured Demon, in this instance, stands as a prime example of the metahermeneutic process: the acquisition of information about one already engaged in the process of 'sorting.' Nevertheless, the fantasy of complete knowledge, or Beckett's 'perfect mental image of the entire system' is rendered 'doubtful.' The validity of Nefastis' 'sensitives' is immediately questioned by Oedipa who challenges 'the true sensitive' as one that only shares 'in the man's hallucinations.' (74) In this manner, Nefastis' faith in the Demon as 'Objectively

true' (73) serves as one more hermetic fantasy, like Callisto's 'hothouse jungle.' At the same time, the potential for 'feedback' in Pynchon's novel extends Oedipa's relation to the Demon beyond the inevitable course, in Beckett's fiction, towards finality and increasing stillness. As such, the process endures throughout the author's vast novels of detail, embodying an 'endless capacity for convolution' (*The Crying of Lot 49*, 21) while never entirely abandoning the search for adaptive hermeneutic strategies.

Throughout this chapter we have provided an account of postmodern reading, reframed through various encounters with the unreadable. Intersecting with the authors' hermeneutic images of movement and stasis, Beckett and Pynchon provide a broad insight into this tendency, frequently situating their fictions at antithetical points within this shared critical space. Where Beckett's works privilege the exhaustion of interpretative faculties, Pynchon explores a vast array of hermeneutic strategies to counter the 'mess' of which Beckett speaks. By the same token, through the abiding threat of exhaustion and stasis in Pynchon's fictional worlds, the author nonetheless allows space for a Beckettian resonance to be felt. In this regard, the shared hermeneutic metaphors of wandering and entropy have served as key nodes within the protracted quarrel between Beckettian and Pynchonian style. Indeed, it is this sense of the younger author working partly against tendencies embodied across Beckett's oeuvre that is captured in the motif of 'the problem' of Beckett in this chapter. In both cases, the Beckettian aesthetic of 'the unusable' passes into the metaphorical fabric of Pynchon's writing and is challenged through the author's thematization of the recapture of energy. Looking back on Chapter 2, Pynchon serves as an ideal candidate for an author informed by the 'ambiguous' stable of the *E.R* (articulated in Chapter 1)—a sentiment, as we have seen, that is echoed by Pynchon himself. Part of a broader 'expansion of possibilities' remarked upon by the author, the Grove review nevertheless offers a possible channel through which Beckett's entropics might insinuate into the generalised post-Beat tonalities of Pynchon's work. In the following chapter, we will partially dissent from this reading of Beckett as a poet of entropy and failure, exploring the author's second postmodern bequest.

Chapter 3: 'A Sensation of Dilation': Beckett, DeLillo, 'Extend[ing]' into the World

Following the previous chapter's disquisition into the Beckettian resonances of Pynchon's 60s and 70s texts, an image emerges of Beckett as a writer of entropic pessimism. While the aforementioned tendency bedevils the fictional worlds of Pynchon, this view of Beckett's diminishing returns also inflects much of the vast body of scholarship constituting Beckett studies. A generally accepted telos frames Beckett's 60-year career as a journey towards progressive minimalism and, in the author's words, 'lessness.' Indeed, the pursuit of 'simplicity' extends to Beckett's revision of earlier works for performance; a prime example of this 'vaguening' (using S.E. Gontarski's oft-quoted term) is the performance-text of *Waiting for Godot* in which Beckett, by the 1980s, sought to remove all traces of worldliness, including the 'country road': 'Only tree and stone! As simple as possible!'⁴⁴⁸ By contrast, this chapter will seek to unearth a latent sense of expansiveness in Beckett's writing. This occasionally underwritten element of Beckett's poetics drives, as Steven Connor argues, the author's bequest to 'other arts and artists of the dilatory.'⁴⁴⁹ Celebrated alongside Pynchon as one of the forefathers of a maximal postmodern tradition, this 'dilatory' aesthetic will be explored in relation to the writing of Don DeLillo and his unique response, in particular, to Beckett worldliness. For DeLillo, Beckett is positioned as one of few selected authors who 'wrote a kind of world narrative'⁴⁵⁰—a literature equipped to bridging the gulf between world and text. To this end, the image of Beckett as the preeminent world-denying minimalist is subtly decentred by DeLillo; in its place, emerges an author, as Peter Boxall avers, tied between an attenuated perspective and a 'global imagination.'⁴⁵¹ At the same time, DeLillo regards this sense of a 'world' fiction as having largely expired along with Beckett. As such, DeLillo's often densely populated novels of American contemporaneity speak to the urgency of retaining a Beckettian worldliness in the corporatized milieu of DeLillo's novel. In this way, the Beckettian 'problem' is recalibrated by DeLillo, defining Beckett's legacy explicitly against the postmodern as a proto-global formation of American capitalism. Unlike Pynchon, DeLillo offers an explicit engagement with Beckettian style from his first interview in 1982, to the progressive minimalism of the author's 'late' novels. As such, this chapter will move away from the internal 'ambiguities' discussed previously, to what Boxall notes as a 'generative'⁴⁵² dialogue between two ostensibly dissimilar writers.

⁴⁴⁸ Quoted in Walter Asmus, 'In Memoriam,' *Journal of Beckett Studies* (Vol. 19, No. 1: April, 2010) p. 103

⁴⁴⁹ Steven Connor, 'Slow Going,' in *Beckett, Modernism and the Material Imagination*, (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2014), p. 129

⁴⁵⁰ Adam Begley, 'Don DeLillo: The Art of Fiction, No. 135,' *Paris Review* (No. 128: Fall, 1993), accessed 5 April 2015, < <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1887/don-delillo-the-art-of-fiction-no-135-don-delillo> >

⁴⁵¹ Peter Boxall, *Since Beckett: Contemporary Writing in the Wake of Modernism* (Continuum: New York, 2009) p.140

⁴⁵² Peter Boxall, 'Stirring From the Field of the Possible,' in *Beckett's Literary Legacies*, ed. Matthew Feldman, Mark Nixon, (Cambridge Scholars: Newcastle, 2007), p. 208

Considerations of 'the world' in the text also point to a development in the postmodern as it will inform the course of this chapter. From the 1970s, into the following two decades, the postmodernism which appears to enervate DeLillo's narratives, moves on from the literary aesthetic of hermeneutic uncertainty suggested in Chapter 2 to the broader question of American literary globalism. This view of postmodernism as a cultural mode rather than a literary style is implied in the appearance of the term 'postmodern' in 1985's epochal *White Noise*; the 'postmodern sunset' (227) admired by protagonist Jack Gladney—resulting from the effect of the 'airborne toxic event' occurring at the centre of the novel—relocates the category as an environmental habitus under which DeLillo's character's live. The ramifications of this understanding of the postmodern have been unpacked by various critics,⁴⁵³ positing both the expansion of America as a global superpower and the erosion of countervailing forces (following the 1989 collapse of the Soviet Union) as leading engines of a generalised American monoculture. Most notably, Fredric Jameson decries 'this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture' and its predication on 'the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world.'⁴⁵⁴ This presents certain tensions for conceiving of a strictly American bequest to Beckett's writing—through which the field of American influence is insinuated both everywhere and nowhere. In particular, the academic surge in 'global' perspectives and performances following the 2006 Centenary is testament to the worldly proliferation of Beckett's works in recent history. In a number of literal cases, 'Samuel Beckett,' the name, has grown to inhabit the world, marking the landscape as he does the world stage; Beckett Theatres in both Dublin and New York, along with more controversial projects, not least the commission and subsequent floating out of the *Samuel Beckett-class OPV*⁴⁵⁵ contribute to Beckett's standing as an artist of global stature and the possibility of a recognisable 'Beckett brand.' As such, throughout the world, Beckett has proven to be uniquely amenable to different cultural contexts, exceeding singular instances of nation and repatriation: neither entirely Irish Beckett, French Beckett, Polish Beckett, Japanese Beckett...⁴⁵⁶

For this reason, we will approach Beckett's works in this chapter precisely through their dialogue with the concept of 'world,' and the complex relationship they cultivate between world and text. While Beckett's fiction has developed a reputation, over time, for its apparent worldlessness there is, as Beckett remarks to George Duthuit, 'more than a difference of degree between being short of the world, short of self, and being without these esteemed commodities.' ('Three Dialogues,' p. 143) In an

⁴⁵³ In particular, see Emily Apter's account of the 'paranoid subjectivity' at work in post-war American fiction under the category of 'Oneworldliness.' 'Like globalization, oneworldedness traduces territorial sovereignty and often masks its identity as another name for "America."' – Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, (Verso: London, 2014), p. 71

⁴⁵⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Verso: London, 1991), p. 5

⁴⁵⁵ One of a triad of offshore patrol vessels ordered by the Irish Naval Service including the *James Joyce* and the forthcoming *W.B. Yeats*.

⁴⁵⁶ See Nixon and Feldman in *The International Reception to Samuel Beckett*, (Bloomsbury Academic: London, 2009)

elegant essay on the globalization of *Godot*, Enoch Brater notes how Beckett's 'landmark play,' echoing Didi's melancholy self-address, happens to talk 'to all mankind.' Brater continues to explain that 'Beckett's characters move very deftly from their local situation to the global. Trapped in a manufactured tableau that always seems to yearn for a world that is both itself and yet larger than itself.'⁴⁵⁷ Prefigured in the play,⁴⁵⁸ Beckett's work, contrary to the initial image of the author as world denying, engages the question of literary worlds, what it means to be both 'short of' and swallowed by the world outside the text. On this topic, Steven Connor also approaches Beckett's 'peculiarly worldly work' as raising a number of questions concerning the world and the place of the subject in it: 'what is a world? Can one live in such a thing? Or out of it? What worlds have there been, and what might there be? Can a world be made? Can one help making worlds?'⁴⁵⁹ To these queries, Connor claims that Beckett marks a horizon to the practice of world imaging, while understanding the insufficiency of ever having 'done' with the construction of fictional worlds. Beckett displays 'a singular resolve to decline any grandiose worlding of the world, while also denying us and itself the consolation of ever being able to live out of this world.'⁴⁶⁰ Representing the simultaneous retreat and exertion of influence in Beckett's fiction, Connor provides a subtle caution against the potential for the ideation or the imposition of theory onto the world; the result, in the Beckettian parlance, positions both author and fiction in a new 'term of relation' as an artist, who must make 'failure his world.' ('Three Dialogues,' p. 145)

As such, the gesture in which Beckett's fiction insinuates itself into the world is at the same time a questioning of the possibility of conceiving 'world,' or as Hamm laments in *Endgame*, ever being 'there.' (128) Between the 'little worlds' and 'big worlds' traversed in *Murphy*, Connor nevertheless remains attuned to the globalization of the 'Beckett world,' rooted in its 'consolidation':

Curiously enough, the consolidation of 'the Beckett world,' with its familiar landmarks, languages, and local customs, has assisted rather than impeded the absorption of Beckett into the 'big world'; that Beckett not only plays but presumably also plays in capitals across the world, to audiences who have as strong a pre-understanding of what is to be expected from 'the world of Beckett' as readers of Dickens do of 'the world of Dickens' or Terry Pratchett fans do of *Discworld*.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁷ Enoch Brater, 'The Globalization of Beckett's *Godot*', *Comparative Drama* (Vol. 37, No. 2: Summer 2003), p. 146

⁴⁵⁸ Brater focuses on the 'strict economy' of Beckett's theatrical minimalism, as well as the author's meta-theatrical flourishes on the abstraction of time and space; 'they are, nonetheless, somewhere; that somewhere turns out to be *a stage, the stage, any stage, every stage.*' Enoch Brater, 'The Globalization of Beckett's *Godot*', p. 150

⁴⁵⁹ Steven Connor, 'Beckett and the World,' a lecture given at the Global Beckett conference, Odense, 26 October 2006, accessed 3 June 2016, <<http://www.stevenconnor.com/beckettworld/>> republished in *Beckett and Ethics*, ed. Russell Smith, (Continuum: New York, 2008), p. 134-147

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Connor reminds us that the 'Beckett world,' as well as his international reputation, is still intermeshed within a globalised culture of multinational capital and increasingly uniform aesthetic images. The 'preunderstanding'—of cleared stages and 'nothing to be done'—is no longer contingent on ever having seen or read anything by Beckett but rather a symptom of the author's 'absorption into the "big world."' In this sense, Beckett's work risks succumbing to the same condition of cultural glaciation that Adorno declared *Endgame* as having implicitly diagnosed: the 'trace and shadow of the world, from which it withdraws in order not to serve that semblance and conformity the world demands.'⁴⁶² However, Connor is sensitive in his qualification that 'if Beckett is going global, then it is as a kind of "global niche," a paradox that gets us to the heart of what we might mean by globalism today.'⁴⁶³ Furthermore, the question of Beckett and the world is equally tied up with the possibility of the author's resistance to absorption, the ingress and ejection of his fiction in a world which, as stated in *Malone Dies*, 'parts at last its labia and lets me go.' (25) By staging an interrogation of 'the worlding of the world, the production of the world,' Beckett is able to provide a blueprint for what globalization scholar Mike Featherstone describes as its 'field [of] differences, power struggles and cultural prestige.'⁴⁶⁴

It is this sense of the world as global matrix— where to be in place, is also to be out of place—that is subtly implied in Beckett's works. As Beckett's *Malone* states, 'a sensation of dilation is hard to resist,' (266) through which the crumbling of fictional forms opens onto the totality of the world. Nevertheless, as we have already stated, the extent of Beckett's worldliness presents certain challenges to the possibility of delineating between the author's various national bequests. In correspondence with Connor's thesis, Peter Boxall explores the valency of the imagination in Beckett's fiction that channels the post-war 'tensions between the national and the international.'⁴⁶⁵ In parallel to the increased transparency of Beckett's voices and the placelessness of his later works, 'the antagonism between the national and universal or global starts to give way, to produce less friction.'⁴⁶⁶ By implication, Boxall argues, this leads one towards the moment when 'political and economic power migrates from colonial Europe to global America...to the point of unravelling [the national], of giving way to the global.'⁴⁶⁷ It is in light of this socio-economic shift that we find Beckett's second postmodern bequest.

Following the transition from a European nationalism to a global culture of U.S. postmodernism, the work of Don DeLillo deals, in explicit terms, with the 'dilatatory' effect on individuals existing on a globalised world stage. For this reason, David Cowart argues how critics of DeLillo must engage 'the

⁴⁶² Theodor Adorno, 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*,' in *The Adorno Reader*, (Blackwell: Oxford, 2000), p. 329

⁴⁶³ Steven Connor, 'Beckett and the World,' a lecture given at the Global Beckett conference, Odense, 26 October 2006, accessed 3 June 2016, <<http://www.stevenconnor.com/beckettworld/>>

⁴⁶⁴ Mike Featherstone, *Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity*, (Sage: London, 1995), p. 13-14

⁴⁶⁵ Peter Boxall, *Since Beckett: Contemporary Writing in the Wake of Modernism* (Continuum: New York, 2009) p.140

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 147

whole landscape of postmodernism,' turning a critical eye to structures of economy, socius, space epistemology and belief in postmodern America.⁴⁶⁸ At the same time, in spite of their restless curiosity, DeLillo's novels frequently channel a sense of cultural endedness, articulating the impossibility of critique amid a postmodern American hegemon (as Bucky Wunderlick in the 1973 novel *Great Jones Street* has it, tracing the 'edge of every void.' (1)) Furthermore, in 2002's *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction*, Boxall notes the 'extended enactment of the exhaustion of possibility in post-war culture,'⁴⁶⁹ through which DeLillo's oeuvre channels the 'unavigable aporia'⁴⁷⁰ concluding Beckett's *The Unnamable*. More than any other critic, Boxall has provided a number of essential insights into the nature of this relationship. In particular, Boxall points to a 'weakening of the negative' resulting from a globalised American culture, through which the residual possibility of what he describes as a 'critical fiction' (through a matrix of Adorno, Blanchot and Bloch) is retained in the figure of Beckett. Mirroring Loren Glass' sustained critique of the 'incorporation of the avant-garde' in Chapter 1, DeLillo's novel adopts as a governing subject the fate of the 'incorporated' writer. Moreover, in DeLillo's commentary on the global and personal effects of Beckett's literature, a similar sense of the author's fiction as a kind of critical epitaph emerges:

Beckett is a master of language. He is all language. Out of the words come the people instead of the other way around. He is the last writer whose work extends into the world so that (as with Kafka before him) we can see or hear something and identify it as an expression of Beckett beyond the book or stage.⁴⁷¹

Where Beckett marks a kind of cultural terminus as the 'last writer,' his fiction also 'extends into the world,' successfully blurring the gulf between text and world. It is worth noting the echo between Connor's 'preunderstanding' and the model of the Beckettian painted by DeLillo—both different and the same. Where Connor hints at an absorption of Beckett as one more global commodity, DeLillo points to the capacity of literature to impress itself on the world, 'beyond the book or stage.' As Christian Moraru writes, for DeLillo, Beckett is 'among the last to have built a universe—Beckett's "world"—in which his readers could be said to "live." In the post-Beckett era [...] it is the other way around: writers are

⁴⁶⁸ David Cowart, *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language*, (University of Georgia Press: Athens, 2002), p. 1 – suggestively, Cowart defines DeLillo's engagement in the postmodern against the 'ontological pretensions' (p.3) of McHale's autonomous postmodern worlds.

⁴⁶⁹ Peter Boxall, *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction*, (Routledge: New York, 2002), p. 4

⁴⁷⁰ 'Beckett's work, it has been suggested, stands as a kind of epitaph to the possibility of any critique of a culture which has become globalised and self-perpetuating; it marks the exhaustion of the possibility of fiction. The final snippet of the final sentence of his novel *The Unnamable* – "I can't go on, I'll go on" – brings fiction up against a blank and unavigable aporia.' Peter Boxall, *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction*, p. 3

⁴⁷¹ Gary Adelman, 'Beckett's Readers: A Commentary and Symposium,' *Michigan Quarterly Review*, (Vol. 53, No. 1: Winter, 2004), accessed 3 December 2015, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?cc=mqr;c=mqr;c=mqrarchive;idno=act2080.0043.108;rgn=main;view=text;xc=1;g=mqrqg>>

somehow sucked into the world surrounding theirs.⁴⁷² This represents a fundamental variation⁴⁷³ on the dynamic posited between Beckett and Pynchon in the previous chapter. Where Beckett insinuates into Pynchon through the entropic breakdown of the energised interpretive faculties represented in the fabric of the *E.R.*, in DeLillo he promises some route ‘beyond the book or stage.’ This heterodox reading of Beckett as an author in whom one finds traces of worldliness will be significantly interrogated over the course of this chapter. As we will see, Beckett’s intractable fictions, for DeLillo, protect an essential residuum of *the writerly*. Marking a further departure from Chapter 2, DeLillo’s remark to Adelman echoes a phrase from Beckett’s *The Unnamable*, broaching ‘a question of words.’ (382) Moving forward, we will consider DeLillo’s conception of the writer and his view of language as an ‘ontological force,’ both ‘subject’ and ‘instrument,’⁴⁷⁴

At the heart of this question, Beckett’s novels dramatize the potential for the text to outlive its origin, going on at the point of their apparent exhaustion. In the words of Beckett’s unnameable voice, ‘the search for a means to put an end to things [...] is what enables the discourse to continue.’ (*The Unnamable*, 341) This is exemplified in DeLillo’s model of Beckett as the ‘last writer,’ making a further striking appearance in the 1991 novel, *Mao II*. In DeLillo’s novel, the conditions of a Beckettian enclave of composure and writerly vision amid the teeming contemporary moment are interrogated. The very impossibility of Beckett against the densely populated and situated world of DeLillo’s novel—‘belonging to crowds’ (16)—curiously underwrites the urgency of Beckett’s vision in the literary fabric of the younger author. As Boxall states, it is ‘in the forms in which Beckett continues to appear in a world which seems to leave no room for his mode of thinking and seeing,’⁴⁷⁵ that provides fertile ground for Beckett’s bequest to DeLillo. In one important exchange, dormant cult author Bill Gray names Beckett as ‘the last writer to shape the way we think and see. After him, the major work involves mid-air explosions and crumbled buildings. This is the new tragic narrative.’ (157) The binary between the ‘last writer’ and ‘the new tragic narrative’ posited here demands closer attention. Just as Beckett is the ‘last writer to shape the way we think and see,’ the ‘narrative’ ambience against which DeLillo’s characters find themselves (and it seems, following a number of public statements, the author himself) suggest a narrative system defined in light of the qualitative difference exemplified in Beckett. In this way, Beckett is integrated into the central debate of DeLillo’s novel: the renunciation of countercultural power from the author to the terrorist. For Gray, ‘everything else is absorbed. The artist is absorbed, the madman in

⁴⁷² Quoted in Christian Moraru, ‘Consuming Narratives: Don DeLillo and the “Lethal” Reading,’ *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Spring, 1997), p. 198

⁴⁷³ In a letter to literary critic Frank Lentricchia DeLillo praises *Gravity’s Rainbow* for its ‘unapologetic global range.’ DeLillo’s comment on global possibility in Pynchon here may offer a reclamation of the problem of Beckett’s heretofore world-denying texts over readings of Pynchon. Quoted in (and all credit to) James Gourley, *Terrorism and Temporality in the Works of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo* (Bloomsbury: London, 2013), p. 5

⁴⁷⁴ David Cowart, *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language*, (University of Georgia Press: Athens, 2002), p. 2

⁴⁷⁵ Peter Boxall, ‘Stirring From the Field of the Possible,’ in *Beckett’s Literary Legacies*, ed. Matthew Feldman, Mark Nixon, (Cambridge Scholars: Newcastle, 2007), p. 210

the street is absorbed and processed and incorporated.’ (157) Concerned with the decline of a critical aesthetic against the looming threat of some ‘dedicated reader,’ Beckett provides a locus to a renewed critical fiction. This notably echoes the trajectory followed in Chapter 1, from the countercultural freedoms of reading, spearheaded by *E.R* to the collapse of possibility in the 1970s. This shift in power-relations between the writerly and the readerly is of grave importance to DeLillo for whom the paranoia of audience is never far from the narrative surface. In an interview with *The Paris Review*, he claims that after Beckett one loses a ‘kind of world narrative [...] the inner world of the novelist [...] folded into the three-dimensional world we were all living in.’ Now, DeLillo laments, the ‘world has become a book.’⁴⁷⁶ In this sense, Beckett is framed in oddly paradoxical terms: at the end of a certain aesthetic; but also as that which ‘extends,’ which continues to ‘go on.’ It is this tension which underwrites Beckett’s legacy for DeLillo as exceptional to ‘the larger cultural drama of white hot consumption and instant waste.’⁴⁷⁷

By marking a point of termination in DeLillo’s writing, the introjection of Beckett as an inter-text opens a conspicuous, shaped absence in the author’s fiction; it is in these absences, in which one is invited to ‘think and see’ Beckett, that we will situate this chapter. As we will see, this is particularly striking concerning the early fiction of DeLillo, through which the possibility of ‘living outside the glut of the image world’ is interrogated. In this manner, the critical tension of both *End Zone* (1972) and *Great Jones Street* (1973)—categorised as DeLillo’s ‘narratives of retreat’⁴⁷⁸ by Joseph Dewey— emerges from the respective ‘exile’ of their protagonists. Where Gary Harkness, the football star of *End Zone*, ventures out to lose himself in the West-Texas desert, *Great Jones Street* follows Bucky Wunderlick, DeLillo’s rock star hermit, in the attempt to insulate himself from the ‘excess’ of his former role and finally become ‘the least of what I was.’ (87) Both examples will be developed later in this chapter. In each case, the logic of exile, and the incursion of forces from without impact the dimensions of the texts’ spatial-poetics—the ‘form of void’ suggested in *End Zone*, reinforced by Harkness’ elegy to the desert and the ‘mythology’ of ‘wasted places.’ (40) Lingering on ‘wasted spaces,’ one finds the simultaneous retreat and retention of Beckett’s influence in DeLillo. Aping the Beckett of the ‘Three Dialogues,’ one character harangues Bucky Wunderlick, ‘there’s nothing to paint and nothing to write and nothing to film and nothing to sing about and nothing to make love to. But your sound comes out of the radio all the time.’ (80)

⁴⁷⁶ Adam Begley, ‘Don DeLillo: The Art of Fiction, No. 135,’ *Paris Review* (No. 128: Fall, 1993), accessed 5 April 2015, < <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1887/don-delillo-the-art-of-fiction-no-135-don-delillo> >

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁸ DeLillo’s ‘Narratives of Retreat,’ appears as an organising category in Joseph Dewey, *Beyond Grief and Nothing: A Reading of Don DeLillo*, (University of South Carolina Press: Columbia, 2006), p. 17-49

Ultimately, the ‘peculiar extension of Beckett’s oeuvre beyond its apparent limits, historical, spatial, political,’⁴⁷⁹ according to Boxall, features as a curious aspect of Beckett’s terminal poetics and a condition whereby influence is registered in the fiction of DeLillo. Boxall’s scholarship into this relationship looms large in this chapter—as it does over much of the project. More lightly represented by Boxall, however, are certain, otherwise well-documented, inconsistencies in DeLillo’s writing. The most obvious of these is the jettisoning of the maximalist and ‘world-building’ ambitions underpinning works like *Underworld* (1996) and *Libra* (1988) towards the increasingly brief narratives following the new millennium. *The Body Artist* (2001) and *Point Omega* (2010) are among the sparest in length and tone of the author’s career. To this extent, they seem curiously at odds with DeLillo’s, hitherto, finely tuned sense of ‘the contemporary,’ which, following the global ambitions of Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, extend themselves via a ‘maximum reach outward.’ (161) Moreover, much has been written about the shifting critical fortunes of these shorter texts, including the particularly sour initial reception of 2003’s *Cosmopolis*. Of this text, Daniel Green interprets the negativity as a symptom of the waning aesthetics of postmodernism, and the text ‘clinging to an approach no longer fashionable.’⁴⁸⁰ The shifting towards what some critics have taken to describing as late-DeLillo, in the attenuation of literary postmodernism, reflects on what I will later consider as a recidivist modernism in the author’s later novels. And yet, this belies the fact that DeLillo’s works have always been allied, at best, obliquely to the postmodern label with an eye to a previous modernist lineage. As David Bell, of DeLillo’s debut novel *Americana* imagines, ‘James Joyce and Antonioni and Samuel Beckett sitting in my living room, six legs crossed at the ankles’ (220), the world of DeLillo’s fiction, from the beginning, overlaps with that of a wellspring of transformative, modernist experiment. This form of modernist bequest will be unpacked in relation to the ‘landscapes of estrangement’ voiced in relation to DeLillo’s dead film director, Rey Robles, in *The Body Artist*; significantly, this echoes a phrase used by DeLillo disavowing Beckett’s spatial bequest of an entirely ‘theoretical’ environment situated ‘nowhere.’ Against the questionable failure of these late-DeLillo texts, Beckett reappears, marking a pointed shift: from ‘the jazzy, vernacular, darkly humorous language employed to such galvanic effect’ to ‘spare, etiolated, almost Beckettian prose.’⁴⁸¹ Moreover, a review of *Point Omega* for *New York* magazine, notes DeLillo’s ‘glacial aesthetic’— ‘after Beckett and Robbe-Grillet, the indisputable master of grinding a plot to the brink of stasis and then recording its every last movement.’⁴⁸² This is further reiterated in Michiko Kakutani’s review for *The Body Artist*; naming, suggestively, the ‘problem’ of the text:

⁴⁷⁹ Peter Boxall, ‘Stirring From the Field of the Possible,’ in *Beckett’s Literary Legacies*, ed. Matthew Feldman, Mark Nixon, (Cambridge Scholars: Newcastle, 2007), p. 208

⁴⁸⁰ Daniel Green, ‘Postmodern American Fiction,’ *The Antioch Review*, (Vol. 61, No. 4: Autumn, 2003) p. 730

⁴⁸¹ Michiko Kakutani, ‘Make War. Make Talk. Make it all Unreal’ *The New York Times* (1 February, 2010), accessed May 3 2015, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/02/books/02book.html?pagewanted=all&mcubz=0>>

⁴⁸² Sam Anderson, ‘White Noise’, *New York*, (1 February, 2010), accessed May 3 2015, <<http://nymag.com/arts/books/reviews/63210/index1.html>>

The problem is that his writing seems strangely attenuated in these pages, stripped of its usual pop and fizz, its tactile sense of detail... Maybe after the monumental achievement of "Underworld"... the author simply wanted to work in a minimalist vein, to change the wide-angle lens on his camera to an up-close and personal zoom, and in doing so experiment with a more pared-down, Beckettian kind of prose.⁴⁸³

The problematics of 'thinking' and 'seeing' Beckett, here, take on a new dimension. Where *Mao II*, laments the loss of the kind of writerly independence synonymous with Beckett, the adoption of an 'attenuated' prose style in DeLillo's late fiction both repositions and reinscribes this relationship. Remarking on *The Body Artist*, Boxall situates the text as emblematic of the later novels of DeLillo, appearing 'utterly unable to orient themselves to the virtual space and time of global capital.'⁴⁸⁴ While this may be true, the cultural reference points of minimalist DeLillo reopen to readerly scrutiny the 'extension' of Beckett as a looming presence in the author's corpus. Emerging from the glossy postmodern fictions of the early novels, the Beckettian 'lessness' of late-DeLillo invites critics to return to the emptied and 'theoretical' spaces of *Endzone* and *Great Jones Street* with a new eye. Amid the noise and bustle of DeLillo, the ascetic impulse of 'men in small rooms'⁴⁸⁵ can thus be felt to underwrite a broader sense of time and space in his novels; one also thinks of the Afterword of the epic *Underworld*, of the 'blank space' of the 'wall' – 'what a writer stares at during the dead times.' (829) While late-DeLillo more superficially resembles the spare prose of Beckett, one might also argue, paradoxically, that the inability of DeLillo to respond to the changing economic and cultural forms of history heralds a signal of his failure to fully integrate Beckett's bequest of an exhausted, but persistent, critical literature. While DeLillo's fiction is pared down, it fails in its own mission to extend into the world, following Beckett. As a result, the ambiguities associated with DeLillo's reading of Beckett feed back into inconsistencies immanent to his own writerly praxis.

'Buried in the world': the world and death

Don DeLillo's Beckett is one of 'the world' and it is with this category that one must begin. At once shrinking from and 'extend[ing] into the world,' DeLillo's formulation of Beckett's reach beyond the apparent limits set by his fiction also serves to foreground tensions at play in the works themselves. Of the author's later output, *Worstward Ho* (1983) exemplifies the search for the 'merest minimum' (82) of language, orientating itself towards categories of 'body' and 'place' while highlighting their

⁴⁸³ Michiko Kakutani, 'A Marriage Replayed Inside a Widow's Mind', *The New York Times*, (January 19, 2001), accessed 15 March 2016, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/01/19/books/books-of-the-times-a-marriage-replayed-inside-a-widow-s-mind.html?mcubz=0>>

⁴⁸⁴ Peter Boxall, 'Stirring From the Field of the Possible,' in *Beckett's Literary Legacies*, ed. Matthew Feldman, Mark Nixon, (Cambridge Scholars: Newcastle, 2007), p. 223

⁴⁸⁵ Anthony DeCurtis, 'Q&A: Don DeLillo', *Rolling Stone*, (17 November, 1988), accessed 15 June 2015, <<http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/matters-of-fact-and-fiction-19881117>>

provisionality. The movement and location of the narrative voice, in the absence of concrete reference, is vividly enacted in the third paragraph of the novella: ‘Say a body. Where none. No mind. Where none. That at least. A place. Where none. For the body. To be in. Move in. Out of. Back into. No. No out. No back. Only in. Stay in. On in. Still.’ (81) Beckett’s *paralepsis* renders it possible for the voice to both ‘move in’ and ‘out of’ strict relation to its referents; in this way, a provisional space is mapped ‘for the body’—marked not as a reduction, but an enlargement, ‘at bounds of boundless void.’ (103) Significantly, these denuded relations witness the overlap between polarities of text and world with notions of impermanence and death. It is in this spirit that the exhumed images of father and son, of mother, are described in *Worstward Ho* as alighting on a ‘here of bones.’ (82) It is Beckett’s preoccupation with death as an impossible limit, frequently obscured as a blurred passage between life and death, that Steven Barfield and Philip Tew argue accounts for the ‘uniquely, uncannily productive’⁴⁸⁶ place it holds in his corpus. Together with important studies by Christopher Ricks (1995) and Simon Critchley (1997), Beckett’s work has been treated as a wellspring of images invoking literary death. At the same time, what Ricks describes as the Beckettian impulse to ‘want oblivion’⁴⁸⁷ introduces a hesitant relationship with the category of ‘world,’ opening onto parallel discussions concerning the subject, particularities of place, as well as the ‘universal.’ In this regard, the frequency with which evocations of death in Beckett’s work pass into considerations of a tentative emplacement gives one pause. Earlier in Beckett’s career, the more circumscribed ‘closed spaces,’ beginning in ‘All Strange Away,’ provide variations on the fictional container as ‘a place to die in’ (169); likewise, where Malone ruminates upon the ‘dead world,’ (228) Molloy pictures ‘a world at an end’— ‘its end brought it forth, ending it began.’ (42) As such, in Beckett’s work one is ultimately drawn into the world through death. For this reason, the significance of death as a measure of one’s relation to the world, and other subjects, will hereafter be explored throughout Beckett’s work. Alongside this, DeLillo’s understanding of Beckett as a writer who notably ‘extends into the world’ will be further unpacked, accounting for the younger author’s re-evaluation of the limits of the ‘fallen world.’ (*Mao II*, 13)

To begin, it is worth taking a brief detour into what Beckett means by ‘world’ as it appears throughout his oeuvre. Embodying both contractive and *dilatory* tendencies, Steven Connor casts Beckett’s ‘worlding’ as enacting a form of ‘constitutive maladjustment—a maladjustment out of which a kind of world may itself be made.’⁴⁸⁸ In this way, Beckett’s interrogation of the concept, coded in the work, is illustrated in order to both cast doubt, while demonstrating the failure to ever escape such a relation. As one journalist from *Time* writes in response to Beckett’s 1969 Nobel Prize success, ‘Beckett roams inside

⁴⁸⁶ Steven Barfield, Philip Tew, ‘Critical Foreword,’ in *Beckett and Death*, (Bloomsbury: London, 2009), p. 1

⁴⁸⁷ Christopher Ricks, *Beckett’s Dying Words*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1995), p. 3

⁴⁸⁸ Steven Connor, ‘Beckett and the World,’ a lecture given at the Global Beckett conference, Odense, 26 October 2006, accessed 3 June 2016, <<http://www.stevenconnor.com/beckettworld/>>

a character's skull as if it were a continent.⁴⁸⁹ Adding credence to Connor's category, Molloy's misjudgement of 'the distance separating me from the other world,' results in an instability of dimension, through which the nearness of the world, or the far-ness of the self is confused; Molloy continues, 'often I stretched out my hand for what was far beyond my reach and often I knocked against obstacles scarcely visible on the horizon.' (53) A similar problematic is anticipated in *Murphy*, in which the extent of 'Murphy's mind' — 'hermetically closed to the universe without' is, nonetheless, troubled by the 'partial congruence of the world of his mind with the world of his body.' (70) The disharmony between the 'virtual' (69) contents of Murphy's mind and the residual organicism of the body, reflects the opposition between the abstract and concrete staged by Connor, following a reading of Heidegger's 'world...resting upon the earth' (as that which 'strives to surmount it'⁴⁹⁰). Defining 'the world' as a productive openness to the self-concealed 'earth,' Connor, through Heidegger, elaborates upon the generative opposition between these categories: 'as self-opening [the world] cannot endure anything closed; the earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world into itself and keep it there.'⁴⁹¹ Throughout Beckett's fiction, however, there is a self-conscious earthliness, a desire to reach down into the subsoil of narrative. As such, this shrinkage into the earth withholds the 'virtual' concept of world through a closeness to that upon which it 'grounds itself.' We may glimpse this impulse in the bed-ridden narrator of *Malone Dies*:

The search for myself is ended. I am buried in the world, I knew I would find my place there one day, the old world cloisters me victorious [...] the wise thing now would be to let go, at this instant of happiness. And what do I do? I go back again to the light, to the fields. (225)

In this excerpt, Beckett illustrates a retrenchment of the world as that which is both 'buried,' and buries all trace of itself. Underlined by the gravitational pull on the narrator, drawn in to the earth, one recalls Beckett's dictum on the artist, imagined in *Proust*; hereby, the artist is 'active but negatively, shrinking from the nullity of extracircumferential phenomena, drawn in to the core of the eddy.' (*Proust*, 65) And yet, Malone cannot but turn 'back again to the light, to the fields,' further highlighting the author's tendency to concatenate the lifeless and the verdant, the cloistered and the illuminated. In this instance, location in the world is positioned alongside the image of narrative death, a desire to 'let go' leading to the impulse to 'go back again.' Moreover, the process of dying, across the span of the novel, forbids Beckett's narrator from ever thinking himself separate from some residual notion of the world,

⁴⁸⁹ 'Nobel Prize: Kyrie Eleison Without God,' in *The Critical Response to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Cathleen Culotta Andonian, (Greenwood Press: Westport, 1988), p. 230

⁴⁹⁰ Quoted in Steven Connor, 'Beckett and the World,' a lecture given at the Global Beckett conference, Odense, 26 October 2006, accessed 3 June 2016, <<http://www.stevenconnor.com/beckettworld/>>

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*

revealed at the moment of what Maurice Blanchot describes as Beckett's narrators' 'endless dying.'⁴⁹² As another 'buried' character, Winnie states in *Happy Days*: 'there always remains something [...] of everything.' (161) The scale of the world is glimpsed in Beckett at the point of death—as that which must, at once, vanish but also cause to vanish, that buries and is 'buried.'

The closeness to death of many of Beckett's moribunds, absenting themselves from the world, also serves to literally place them in the ground. In this manner, the image of the world is conjured as humanity is rid from it. For Michael Goldman this extends to the works for theatre as they dramatize a 'struggle between vitality and deadness.'⁴⁹³ Thus, for Winnie the world becomes that 'old extinguisher'; for Clov in *Endgame* the world, 'in a word,' is 'corpsed' (106); furthermore, the 'billions of others' (58) dead in *Waiting for Godot* provide a measure of the 'universe,' together with Vladimir's sense that 'in an instant all will vanish.' (75) Thus, a negative image of the world is revealed through the text, created out of the foreknowledge in which 'everything's dead.' In this case, the possibility of the absence of the world transfigures the characters' relation thereof. This leads to gentle alteration of the privileged image of retreat concerning Beckett's fiction, wherein the Beckett Country becomes the Beckett World. In his far reaching study *Since Beckett*, Peter Boxall discusses the porous relation to national boundary exhibited in Beckett's spatial poetics that underwrite the manner in which his work—using DeLillo's phrase—'extends into the world.' Particularly in Beckett's later works, Boxall notes how the author's 'narrators/characters have pressed against such boundaries, seeking to penetrate the skin that divides mind from world, language from nothingness, nation from nation.'⁴⁹⁴ It is the erosion of these 'boundaries,' that speak for what Boxall finds as 'a new global perspective,' symptomatic of a 'loss of local placedness, fragility of the boundaries that hold the body in remembered landscapes.'⁴⁹⁵ In this light, one finds this erosion intermixed with evocations of death, through the 'defused vitality'⁴⁹⁶ concerning Beckett's specificities of place and memory. In *Godot*, for example, memory is ironically mixed with fantasies of self-erasure ('Estragon: Do you remember the day I threw myself into the Rhone?') subsequently played against their final internment ('Vladimir: That's all dead and buried'). This practice can be extended to the 'buried' extra-textual world of Beckett's compositions, eliminated through the author's well established process of vagueness.⁴⁹⁷ Thus, Beckett's boundaries—'that assert

⁴⁹² Maurice Blanchot, 'Where Now? Who Now?' in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*, ed. by Harold Bloom, (Chelsea House: New York, 1988), p. 28

⁴⁹³ Michael Goldman, 'Vitality and Deadness in Beckett's Plays,' in *Beckett at 80: Beckett in Context*, ed. by Enoch Brater (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1986), p. 210

⁴⁹⁴ Peter Boxall, *Since Beckett: Contemporary Writing in the Wake of Modernism* (Continuum: New York, 2009), p. 145

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 161

⁴⁹⁶ Michael Goldman, 'Vitality and Deadness in Beckett's Plays,' in *Beckett at 80: Beckett in Context*, ed. by Enoch Brater (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1986), p. 211

⁴⁹⁷ On this point, Mark Nixon draws on the leitmotif of the cast-off, or abandoned, destabilising the distinction between the buried ms and exhumed text. In this way, Beckett's texts 'inscribe the tension between demise and

themselves only to crumble⁴⁹⁸—are underwritten by the work of death in the text. In this way, the further the process of decay, the greater the world, and Boxall's 'global' fall into relief.

World haunted, Beckett's elusive texts, on the brink of vanishing, provide multiple opportunities for re-evaluating Don DeLillo's finely-tuned sense of the contemporary. The protean relation to the world, established in Beckett, result in a series of fictional tactics which both disrupt and 'extend' into the certifiably 'worldly' work of DeLillo. For the younger author, as for Frederic Jameson, the problematics of the contemporary intersect with the rise of the 'more fully human world'⁴⁹⁹—an impasse of the cultural, parallel with the 'immense dilation of its sphere (the sphere of commodities) an immense and historically original acculturation of the Real, a quantum leap in what Benjamin still called the "aestheticisation" of reality.'⁵⁰⁰ Where, for Jameson, this marks the boundary between a completed modernism and a reified postmodernism, these polarities are integrated by DeLillo, embodying both a symptom and self-conscious examination of the globalised postmodern world. This tension reaches its zenith in *Mao II*, interrogating the possibility for independence from a world in thrall to 'the rush of endless streaming images.' (158) In this regard, the capacity for Beckett's texts to 'bore one hole after another' (*Disjecta*, p. 172) in DeLillo's image-bound world will be evaluated, at once contracting from the sphere of global literary forms, while disturbing the process of 'worlding' in DeLillo's texts predicated on unity and 'one'-ness. This act of world-building, as a moment of 'world-shattering' (16) is highlighted during the overture to *Mao II*, set in Yankee Stadium in the middle of a mass Moonie wedding. From 'a series of linked couples' to 'one continuous wave,' the passage into homogeneity represented by the wedding is witnessed by the stadium crowd—and by DeLillo's readers who are significantly placed between Karen, to be married on the playing field, and her family, as onlookers to the 'spectacle.' (3) DeLillo reflects on the becoming-virtual of the event as it steadily relinquishes precedence to its representation in photographs: 'they're here but also there, already in the albums and slide projectors, filling picture frames with their microcosmic bodies, the minikin selves they are trying to become.' (10) Overall, the increasing homogeneity and 'aestheticisation' of the event is captured in what DeLillo writes as the 'forming of aura.' (15) However, where the author marks the transporting power of the collective Moonie chant as it 'becomes the boundaries of the world,' (15) a nameless excess is also perceptible—racing towards 'one language, one word, for the time when names are lost.' This act of 'world-shattering rapture' occurs notably through an embrace of 'end time.' (16) It is thus, as the chant becomes more vigorous, that 'something new enters the world.' It is this surplus without

survival in the compositional process itself,' – Mark Nixon, "'Writing myself into the ground": Textual Existence and Death in Beckett,' in *Beckett and Death*, (Bloomsbury: London, 2009), p. 23

⁴⁹⁸ Peter Boxall, *Since Beckett: Contemporary Writing in the Wake of Modernism* (Continuum: New York, 2009), p. 162

⁴⁹⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Verso: London, 1991), p. ix

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. x

name, that heralds what Beckett in *Malone Dies* describes as the 'slow fall and rise of other worlds,' (270) and by which we may further probe the relation between Beckett and DeLillo.

In this manner, the reified world, moving towards 'one language, one word,' becomes a problem for DeLillo, spurring a discussion into the ownership of worlds; as DeLillo's surrogate writer-in-exile, Bill Gray states, 'the world squashes me the minute I think it's mine.' (159) However, if DeLillo's fiction traces a historical cause towards increasing 'one-ness' and consolidation, then it is the violent drive towards the 'nameless'—the impossible 'something'—that, as Boxall argues, DeLillo inherits from Beckett. In this regard, a respective motion 'worstwards' and 'deathwards' marks a striking point of intersection in their distinct poetics. As Jack Gladney, the Chair of Hitler Studies in *White Noise* (1984) contends: 'All plots tend to move deathward. This is the nature of plots. Political plots, terrorist plots, lovers' plots, narrative plots, plots that are part of children's games. We edge nearer death every time we plot.' (30) The satiation of meaning through DeLillo's repetitious prose provides the reader with a glimpse into the 'white noise' of the title. Like the Moonie wedding of *Mao II*, the author's intertwining of the drive to uniformity and termination presents a shattering of distinction in which we are all, as Clov in *Endgame* states, 'corpsed.' However, if all plots end in 'death,' a similar tension is nonetheless intimated in the oft unquoted afterthought to this remark: 'Is this true? Why did I say it? What does it mean?' (30) It is this generative and self-propelling orbit around the possibility of ending, 'this death' that Boxall states, 'allows for the continuing possibility of critique'⁵⁰¹ in the glaciated sheen of DeLillo's work. Indeed, this triad of death, world and plot pervades the multi-layered and cross-temporal narrative strands of *Underworld* (1997). Significantly, the prologue 'The Triumph of Death' both expands on and offers a response to that of DeLillo's previous novel, *Mao II*; dramatizing the 1951 Giant-Dodgers pennant, the author, in free-indirect discourse, recreates the aerial view of the mass wedding, with the event split between the players on field, and those 'players' in the stadium; amongst them: a young African-American truant, a WMCA commentator and a private box populated by Frank Sinatra, Jackie Gleason, Toots Shor and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover. However, where *Mao II* invokes 'the end' as a means of separating from what Karen describes as the 'fallen world,' *Underworld* posits a form teeming death embodied in the shredded paper spreading from the fans to the players. It is this residuum of material, 'the residue of love affairs and college friendships,' that the author describes as 'the fans' intimate wish to be connected to the event.' (45) A reproduction of *The Triumph of Death* by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, detected by Hoover in an issue of *Life* magazine, is a further example of the porousness of this boundary; 'a painting crowded with medieval figures who are dying or dead—a landscape of visionary havoc and ruin,' (41) Bruegel's image becomes both leitmotif to the 'contagion of paper' (39)—of which the painting is also a part—connecting players, spectators and Hoover, underpinning the 'unseeable life forms' (18) with which DeLillo crowds this opening scene. Like the

⁵⁰¹ Peter Boxall, *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction*, (Routledge: New York, 2002), p. 11

intertext of Remedios Varo's tryptich *Bordando el Manto Terrorstre* in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, DeLillo's tableau underwrites the tone of the novel, while also acting as a thematic barometer of Beckett's influence. Unlike Pynchon's vision of a world-enclosure, 'seeking hopelessly to fill the void,' (13), DeLillo rather echoes Adorno, in the author's notes on *The Unnamable*, observing in Beckett a tendency towards 'a plenitude of nothing.'⁵⁰² In this manner, the world into which Beckett 'extends' does not insulate from the 'fallen world,' but is rather one in which 'death falls on the living.' (*Underworld*, p. 50) It is to this end, in the most literal sense, that Beckett's measure of the world, insinuates itself into the simultaneous world-making/unmaking of DeLillo's writing.

'Painkillers'—Beckett, DeLillo and the nuclear metaphor

'There's no way to express thirty million dead. No words [...] They don't explain, they don't clarify, they don't express. They're painkillers.' Don DeLillo, *End Zone*, p. 79

Clov: There's no more pain-killer.

[pause]

Hamm: [Appalled] Good...! [Pause] No more pain-killer!

Clov: No more pain-killer. You'll never get any more pain-killer.' Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 127

Amongst the primary 'symbols' warned against in Beckett's oeuvre, the '*fable*'⁵⁰³ of nuclear apocalypse, and catastrophe, is one that is compulsively returned-to in Beckett criticism. Even in the anecdotal, critical references are manifold; M.M Brewer describes a 'nuclear telos'⁵⁰⁴ at work in Beckett's *Trilogy*; Vivian Mercier finds *Endgame* to be 'one of a spate of works of art directly promoted by the existence of first the atomic and then the hydrogen bomb'⁵⁰⁵; on the other hand, Gabriele Schwab, while convinced of the play's invitation to 'open' models of reception, conducts her reading in light of the 'suggestive' symbols of 'finality, decay, and apocalypse.'⁵⁰⁶ Equally present, however, is the fact that no mention is made in his work of nuclear weapons, no sense of nuclear history, Pacific weapons tests, the Baruch plan, or any explicitly post-nuclear catastrophe; rather, in Beckett's words, we hear these things in the

⁵⁰² Quoted in, Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Philosophizing with Beckett: Adorno and Badiou,' in *A Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by S.E. Gontarski, (Blackwell: Chichester, 2010), p. 103

⁵⁰³ Jacques Derrida, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),' in *Diacritics* Vol. 14, No. 2, (Summer, 1984), p. 23

⁵⁰⁴ Maria Minich Brewer, 'Samuel Beckett: Postmodern Narrative and Nuclear Telos' in *boundary 2*, Vol. 15, No. 1/2 (Autumn, 1986 – Winter, 1987)

⁵⁰⁵ Vivian Mercier, *Beckett/Beckett*, (Souvenir Press: London, 1977), p. 174

⁵⁰⁶ 'nothing seems more evident,' Schwab argues, than to see this scene as anticipating the advancing decay of our culture or an imminent global catastrophe.' Gabriel Schwab, 'On the Dialectic of Closing and Opening in *Endgame*,' in *Waiting for Godot and Endgame: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. by Steven Connor, (Macmillan: London, 1992), p.88

‘silence’ pouring into his writing ‘like water into a sinking ship.’⁵⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the absence of any clear nuclear referent in Beckett both troubles and opens onto the possibility of *thinking the unthinkable* in relation to his work. It is this expression, naming the problem of literature to properly conceptualise the event of nuclear war, that Derrida considers the chief focus of nuclear age criticism. We are forced to apprehend ‘an irreversible destruction, leaving no traces of the juridico-literary archive—that is total destruction of the basis of literature and criticism.’⁵⁰⁸ In this way, it is the work’s finitude and the essential risk of the nuclear disaster over the archive that delimits, for Derrida, literature’s ‘serious’ response to the nuclear question. Instead of dissimulating a referent for an experience that is entirely ‘fabular,’ and ‘phantasmatic,’ it is instead modernist fiction, Derrida argues, that is best equipped to formulate this response. As such, Beckett’s statement as to the ‘many ways in which the thing I am trying in vain to say may be tried in vain to be said,’ (‘Three Dialogues,’ 144) echoes the linguistic benightedness adequate to the unnamability of nuclear fiction. Writing of artistry amid ‘ashes’ (*Endgame*, 113), Beckett provides both a case study, and dramatisation of the difficulty of nuclear reference—both shrinking away, and inviting such readings. Without running afoul of the ‘analogymongers’ (16) for which Beckett reserved such disdain, it is worth also reflecting on the degree to which the problem of nuclear narrative overlaps with the parallel tension of Beckett’s ‘worldliness.’⁵⁰⁹ ‘Outside of here it’s death!’ Hamm warns, of the expanse beyond their ‘old shelter,’ reinstating the notion of a world circumscribed by the threat of destruction. In this way, an account of the precarious relationship of Beckett’s work to the metaphor of *total* nuclear destruction may shine a light on the equally tense relationship between Beckett and the world.

The critical connection between Beckett’s *Endgame* and the nuclear metaphor is remarkably insistent, despite having little grounding in the text of the play. Possible allusions are insinuated through the suggestiveness of Beckett’s writing: in Hamm’s ‘old refuge’ (126) from the silence and stillness without; in Clov’s macabre fantasy of the ‘world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place under the last dust.’ (120) As Nancy Ansfield writes, a background of nuclear war, ‘stalk[s]’ the stage in Beckett’s play, haunting it but never fully declaring itself; for Vivian Mercier this ambiguity is to the author’s credit: that ‘what makes it [Endgame] unique is that it never mentions these agents of devastation.’ Rather, Beckett’s language connotes a violence that is amplified through its being withheld; we hear this in the author’s choice for Hamm to ‘exterminate’ a rat loose in their kitchen;

⁵⁰⁷ Quoted in Lawrence Graver, *Beckett: Waiting For Godot, A Student Guide*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1989), p. 24

⁵⁰⁸ Jacques Derrida, ‘No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),’ in *Diacritics* Vol. 14, No. 2, (Summer, 1984), p. 26

⁵⁰⁹ The problem of nuclear narration, in certain places overlaps the unique place of *Endgame* concerning the nuclear metaphor; Charles A. Carpenter reads Beckett’s play in light of the ‘shelter craze’ and the ‘specific dilemma’ associated with private fallout shelters in the 1950s.-- Charles A Carpenter *Dramatists and the Bomb: American and British playwrights Confront the Nuclear Age, 1945-1964*, (Greenwood: Westport, 1999), p.136

likewise, this violence is perceptible in the ‘stink’ of ‘corpses’ that pervades *Endgame’s* ‘universe.’ Curiously, the nuclear narrative is felt in these instances of erasure—a gesture that is described by Marjorie Perloff, concerning the tensions in Beckett’s historical perspective between ‘a curious literalism’ and the ‘Mallarmean principle that to name is to destroy.’⁵¹⁰ As such, a condition of the nuclear question as it pertains to Beckett, has taken the form of an equally vehement insistence that no such correspondence is made explicit, either in the play or Beckett’s intention. At the same time, the concatenation of Beckett’s language, which nonetheless withholds explicit reference, has led to renderings of a more explicit nuclear context in the field of adaptation and performance.⁵¹¹ An example on which this section will briefly reflect is the work of US-Korean composer Earl Kim, co-founder of the Musicians Against Nuclear Arms (MANA). Infused with a nuclear critique, *Now and Then* (1981), a symphony by Kim in 5 parts, uses Beckett’s poetry (‘Roundelay’, ‘thither’) amongst other excerpts by Chekhov and Yeats, in response to Kim’s experience as a combat intelligence officer in the U.S. air-force.⁵¹² Rather than his language, Kim’s chosen texts reflect the ‘range of poetic images’⁵¹³ that underwrites the transposition of words to music—a process at which Beckett excels through ‘repetitions, beautifully crystallized images’ along with the will to ‘keep going [...] in spite of our ephemeral perplexing existence.’⁵¹⁴ The focus on the repetitive force of Beckett is mirrored in the structure of the symphony, circling back on the text from Beckett’s poem ‘thither’ in the second and fourth movements. At the height of the 80’s US nuclear scare, this symphony, along with Beckett’s poetry was performed as part of the premier Gala Benefit concert (21 Feb, 1982) organised by MANA to lobby for ‘a mutual freeze on the testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapons.’⁵¹⁵ An overview of MANA’s mission statement in the program reveals the objective to ‘[unite] the people in their desire to avert the ultimate disaster.’⁵¹⁶ Together with Beckett’s diminutive poems—tracing the ‘unbidden gestures’ and ‘sole sound[s]’ at ‘end of day’—the notion of the ‘ultimate disaster’ is immanent in the shard-like and extreme brevity of the texts. Their sculptural quality, for example, is reflected in the predominance of the white of the page, the text opened onto blank space. Here, Beckett

⁵¹⁰ Marjorie Perloff, ‘“In Love With Hiding”: Samuel Beckett’s War’, *The Iowa Review*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Spring, 2005), p. 99

⁵¹¹ See Charles A Carpenter *Dramatists and the Bomb: American and British playwrights Confront the Nuclear Age, 1945-1964*, p. 138 – in particular, the ‘overt post-nuclear-holocaust setting of Douglas Stein’s 1984 American Repertory Theatre production [*Endgame*].’ Carpentier adds, ‘this is almost surely the way many spectators and readers of the late 1950s when “nuclear terror” was at a peak, would have construed these verbal allusions and scenic signs.’ P. 210

⁵¹² Notably, Kim isolates the memory of flying over the Japanese city of Nagasaki 24 hours after the drop of the ‘Fat Man’ fission bomb, 9 August 1945.

⁵¹³ Earl Kim, ‘Now and Then,’ in ‘Gala Benefit Concert for the Nuclear Weapons Freeze : Musicians Against Nuclear Arms ; Symphony Hall, 21 February 1982, 7:30pm,’ in University of Reading, Special Collections, Beckett Collection-49-GA

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*

is thus exposed to a broader question of something *beyond*—a ‘far cry for one so little’—the fading into relief of a world glimpsed through the erasure of text.

If Beckett, despite himself, expresses something of the existential anxiety and solipsism wrought, first by the post-war atomic threat, and then of nuclear tension between the U.S.-Soviet superpowers, the nuclear story for American writers has become a form of degraded grand narrative at a moment irreducible to linear cultural, historical and political teleology. As David Grausam writes, it is the ‘attempt to understand life lived under the threat of total nuclear war,’ that prompts the proliferation of narrative experiment in American postmodern fiction per se, with those authors providing ‘new understandings of space and time produced by the nuclear age.’⁵¹⁷ In this way, American writers variously contend with the new strategies of warfare precipitated by the Second World War, (Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*), deconstruct the possibility of ‘moral war’ (Joseph Heller, *Catch 22*) as well as the terminal consequences of the U.S. Manhattan Project (Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat’s Cradle*) and the rush to nuclear supremacy on contemporary American culture (Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*). In a notable retrospective on DeLillo’s *Underworld* in the *New York Review of Books*, Michiko Kakutani celebrates the novel’s success as a ‘portrait of life under the shadow of the atomic bomb.’⁵¹⁸ The possibility of historical verisimilitude⁵¹⁹ in DeLillo immediately sets his fiction apart from the significant silences echoing through Beckett. And yet, as critics have noted,⁵²⁰ for all DeLillo’s deftness at rendering the novel through the wide lens of American post-war history, *Underworld* also takes as its subject the limits of such a narrative. As Anne O’Hare McCormick’s famous reportage, two days after the nuclear attack on Hiroshima (6 August, 1945) suggests, the explosion of the ‘Little Boy’ fission bomb elicits ‘an explosion in men’s minds as shattering as the obliteration of Hiroshima.’ Thus, in DeLillo’s novel, the author follows the first Soviet missile test in 1951 to an underground nuclear test centre in Kazakhstan in the 1990’s. The analepsis of *Underworld*, from decade to decade, provides a view of life inflected by the evolution of American technology, with the palpable remoteness of the bomb at the centre of the text. Throughout, DeLillo interrogates the difficulty of writing about the Atomic bomb, a thing ‘they had brought’ into the world that ‘out-imagined the mind.’ (76) Predicated on the obsolescence of ‘world,’ this reinforces, in the words of Grausam, the spectre of ‘an ending so final that it would preclude any

⁵¹⁷ Daniel Grausam, *On Endings: American Postmodern Fiction and the Cold War*, (University of Virginia Press: Charlottesville, 2011), p. 4

⁵¹⁸ Michiko Kakutani, ‘A Prescient Novel Retains its Power,’ in *The New York Times*, (14 July, 2011), first accessed 3 May 2016, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/15/books/don-delillos-underworld-still-holds-power.html?mcubz=0>>

⁵¹⁹ On this point, Peter Boxall suggests that both DeLillo’s and Pynchon’s oeuvres ‘can be read as a history of military technology,’ *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction*, p. 6

⁵²⁰ See Phillip E. Wegner, ‘October 3, 1951 to September 11, 2001: Periodizing the Cold War in Don DeLillo’s *Underworld*,’ *American Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 1, (2004), p. 51-64 and Johanna Isaacson, ‘Postmodern Wastelands: *Underworld* and the Productive Failures of Periodization,’ *Criticism*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Winter 2012), p. 29-58

position from which it could retrospectively be represented.⁵²¹ In this way, DeLillo's 'success' remains locked with a failure of the imagination to name this 'unwitnessable fact of nuclear ending,' a ghost that 'haunts' the novel and those of the nuclear postmodern canon.

Beneath the 'signature textual difficulties'⁵²² of a postmodern DeLillo, Boxall highlights a fraught engagement with death underwriting the continued 'possibility of fiction' for the author. Under the aegis of a 'deathly global uniformity,' bolstered through the interconnected matrices of U.S. military technology, the author inherits from Beckett a fiction that 'performs the persistence of the negative' in the grip of a deathly stasis. The Beckettian compulsion not to name is here allied with a narrative death 'at work in the now,' allowing 'for the possibility of duration, of spatial and temporal diversity, of a continual becoming over time.' As such, Beckett's presence is insinuated into the aesthetic frisson of DeLillo's writing as it confronts an unnameable historical situation. This unthinkable end is tied with a poetic excess in *Underworld*, pivoting on the 'the thing with no name, the bomb that would redefine the limits of human perception and dread.' (442) Here, the system—or the 'closed-loop' (as Tom LeClair puts it in his eminent study on DeLillo's novels⁵²³)—provokes an excessive surplus that would 'redefine' its own limits. Nevertheless, as nuclear scientist Matt Shay states in the novel, 'all technology refers to the bomb,' (467) suggesting the existence of a 'horrific system of connections in which you can't tell the difference between one thing and another, between a soup can and a car bomb.' (446) As such, DeLillo stages the tension between the technological progress lead by the bomb as a system of closure and self-referring uniformity, and the thermonuclear capacity to undo the 'horrific system.' A totality under the bomb, one nonetheless perceives the potential for what Adorno terms the internal 'divergent, dissonant, negative...'⁵²⁴ This irony is further voiced by DeLillo in another of *Underworld's* memorable episodes, during a routine by a fictionalised Lenny Bruce on the Cuban Missile Crisis. During these sections, the author—through the comedian— muses on the 'replacement of human isolation by massive and unvaried ruin.' (507) Like Beckett's *Molloy*, DeLillo's Bruce conceives of a collective 'ruin'— 'a place with neither plan nor bounds.' (40) Finding the 'dilatatory' potential of Beckett's narrative death in the worldly threat of the bomb, the audience looks to the comedian to 'make the transition to the *total global thing* that's going on out there with SAC bombers rumbling over the tarmac and Polaris subs putting to sea.' (my italics) (504) And yet, the manner in which Bruce riffs on President Kennedy's 'grim speech' as 'dialogue from every submarine movie ever made,' contribute to the 'remarkably unreal' effect of this passage (undoubtedly guiding DeLillo's decision to utilise the figure of the comedian in the first place). As 'the thing with no name'—or rather, *the thing only a name*— the use of the comedic

⁵²¹ Daniel Grausam, *On Endings: American Postmodern Fiction and the Cold War*, (University of Virginia Press: Charlottesville, 2011), p. 6

⁵²² *Ibid.*, p. 5

⁵²³ Tom LeClair, *In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel*, (University of Illinois Press: Chicago, 1988)

⁵²⁴ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, (Routledge: London, 1973), p. 5

register reflexively highlights the shortfalls of linguistic critique, performing its inadequacy through the repeated gag and mantra *'we're all gonna die!'* In this way, DeLillo's critique insinuates Beckett's internal resistance to the nuclear metaphor, shrinking from the discursivity of our governing symbols.

The central problem of imaginative and linguistic efficacy is anticipated in earlier output by DeLillo. In 1972's *End Zone*, football star-in-exile Gary Harkness embarks on a protracted conversation with Modern Warfare teacher Major Staley on the subject of nuclear war: 'what it *might* be like.' (my italics) (81) This dialogue attempts to index the polysemy of nuclear discourse, whereby the possibility of nuclear war 'has to be talked about and expounded on. It has to be described for people, clinically and graphically.' (80) At the heart of the novel, the author's marriage of the 'jargon' of warfare and the 'elegant gibberish' of football foregrounds the absurdity of nuclear discourse against the absence of its referent. The tautological judgement that 'warfare is warfare' raises the limitation of this metaphor—a 'death by analogy' as the author interjects. In this manner, the entire symbolic edifice, 'between football and war,' is repeatedly tested leading to a remark by Harkness, delineating the 'descriptive' and 'expressive' modes of the nuclear text: 'There's no way to express thirty million dead. No words [...] They don't explain, they don't clarify, they don't express. They're painkillers.' (79) The impossibility of expressing Beckett's 'millions of others' dead, calls attention to the virtuality of the nuclear threat—that which can only be apprehended through script and intertextuality. This playfully heralds the reflection on 1980's American nuclear escalation by Jacques Derrida, 'No Apocalypse Not Now' (1984) in which the shared fabric of existence at the nuclear brink is one of deferred 'anticipation,' of 'fable' and 'phantasm.' In the essay, Derrida elaborates upon the degree to which the threat to the humanities elicits an *understanding* of a broader threat: a 'total and remainderless destruction of the archive.' As such, Derrida argues, the logic of nuclear deterrence and aggression 'structures not only the army, diplomacy, politics, but the whole of the human socius today, everything that is named by the old words culture, civilization, *bildung*, *schoe*, *paideia*.'⁵²⁵ One arrives at a reframed image of 'the total global thing,' in which the danger of 'complete destruction' opens onto an inverse image of 'world,' the nuclear factor surfacing through the limitations immanent in the linguistic work of narrative 'worlds.' However, the potentially *totalizing* effect of the world narrative apparatus, finds Derrida returning to literature in a unique position of critical purchase, as 'the most radically threatened...by the nuclear catastrophe.' This condition of threat, Derrida states:

allows our thought to grasp the essence of literature, its radical precariousness and the radical form of its historicity; but at the same time literature gives us to think the totality of that which,

⁵²⁵ Jacques Derrida, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),' in *Diacritics* Vol. 14, No. 2, (Summer, 1984), p. 23

like literature and henceforth in it, is exposed to the same threat, constituted by the same structure of historical fictionality, producing and then harbouring its own referent.⁵²⁶

The concealed referent of literature and the 'historical fictionality' of the nuclear 'fable,' through its 'radical precariousness' gives us to understand the 'same threat' affecting both. In either case, recognition of the unstable relation to any concrete referent behind the self-referring system of discourse provides a sophisticated means by which to apprehend the 'totality,' in light of a 'remainderless and a-symbolic destruction of literature [...] its only ultimate and a-symbolic referent.'⁵²⁷ The critical possibility harboured in the instability of these discourses is hinted at in *Underworld*: recalling Harkness' textual *painkillers*, and the self-conscious redundancy of DeLillo's ironic critique through the cipher of Lenny Bruce. Rather than mollifying the speaker, Bruce has the capacity to 'shatter a urinal at fifty feet'; reflecting later in the novel on the refrain 'we're all gonna die!' the narrator states of Bruce that 'it purified his fear and made it public at the same time—it was weak and sick and cowardly and powerless and pathetic and also noble somehow, a long, loud and feelingly high-pitched cry of grief and pain that had an element of sweet defiance.' (547) While arriving at the 'weakness' of utterance, a reflexive language of 'public [...] defiance' also becomes possible. The system under which 'we're all gonna die' hereby becomes part of the overarching project of *Underworld* in which a shared death becomes a Beckettian 'far cry' of connection. As such, where the nuclear 'painkiller' for DeLillo marks the tension between a nullifying jargon and nuclear reality, Beckett's 'painkiller,' is forthright in the dispensing of the metaphorical apparatus. In this way, *Endgame* is unlike *Godot*, who is deferred in a state of non-arrival; rather, Clov's violent rebuttal that there's no more painkiller' cancels this deferral, foregrounding the symbol as one more game to be played.

For Derrida, the discursive 'impasse' of nuclear criticism occasions the significant reframing of literature's apprehension of the world through the question of literary modernism. As Derrida writes: 'Mallarme, or Kafka, or Joyce,' deal with the nuclear age 'more "seriously"' 'than in present-day novels that would offer direct and realistic descriptions of a "real" nuclear catastrophe.'⁵²⁸ Given the tension, in Beckett criticism, between the positive assertion of a nuclear metaphor and the foreclosure of explicit reference, one may easily add Beckett to Derrida's selected authors. The 'real' of a nuclear catastrophe is for Derrida not an issue of verisimilitude or objectivity but rather an extra-textual, and impossible referent, the event of which would erase the possibility of literary utterance. At the same time, the proliferation of nuclear metaphor concerning Beckett's work also performs the desire for 'direct and

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 28

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*

realistic' description of catastrophe. If Beckett offers the 'final fizzles'⁵²⁹ of a critical modernism, according to Boxall, he also echoes both impulses in Derrida's vision of a nuclear critique. At such an impasse, Ross Chambers, identifies a practice of 'brinksmanship' in Beckett's drama, practiced 'like the political variety [...] in considerable uncertainty':

But where political brinksmanship has been keeping us for so long on the threshold of hell-on-earth, Beckett's characters are in the not much more enviable position of being on the endless, uncrossable brink of entry into a kind of paradise (the paradise of eternal self-possession) so that for them existence is a kind of purgatory on earth a purgatory of exclusion and waiting.⁵³⁰

For Chambers, the experience of the 'brink' state subverts the model of 'political brinksmanship,' instead glimpsing 'self-possession' through 'the endless, uncrossable brink.' The political exigencies of this 'kind of paradise' recalls the Beckett of *Ill Seen Ill Said*, and the 'happiness' snatched in the edging from 'farewell to farewell.' (78) As such, if Beckett casts the figure of a quintessential nuclear modernist avant la lettre, DeLillo expounds on the topic at such length that his novel appears to echo Derrida's critique of literary works that only 'multiply their strategic manoeuvres in order to assimilate that unassimilable wholly other.'⁵³¹ And yet, through the multiplication of DeLillo's fiction—it's dialogue with the idea of the 'whole global thing'—the author reflects on the kernel of unnamability grounded in the life 'under the shadow of the bomb.' This rupture in the simulated real of nuclear worldiness underwrites the way in which Beckett 'extends into the world' and into the fabric of DeLillo's reality. At the narrative brink, Beckett's works of ending and beginning again, conversely reveal the generative failures of DeLillo's aesthetic profligacy.

'The death of the last writer'—The problem and possibility of literature

Asking the question 'who speaks in Samuel Beckett's books,' French critic-novelist Maurice Blanchot writes of the 'the horrifying discovery' forced upon his characters 'that when they are not speaking they continue to speak; when they stop they go on; are never silent, for in them silence ceaselessly speaks.'⁵³² The articulation of the irrevocable gulf between author and narrative voice opened by the work in Beckett's post-war *Trilogy*—through which 'silence ceaselessly speaks'—frames the texts' attitudes towards finality and a form equal to the task of apprehending the end. Blanchot describes the

⁵²⁹Full quotation: 'If the progress of the twentieth century has seen a gradual weakening of the negative, an attenuation of the ways in which possibility can be preserved in the art work as that which has yet to be realised, then Beckett's writing sees the final fizzles of the possibility of critical fiction.' – Peter Boxall, *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction*, (Routledge: New York, 2002), p. 3

⁵³⁰ Ross Chambers 'Beckett's Brinksmanship,' in *Samuel Beckett: a Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Martin Esslin, (Englewood Cliffs: New Jersey, 1965), p. 157

⁵³¹ Jacques Derrida, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),' in *Diacritics* Vol. 14, No. 2, (Summer, 1984), p. 28

⁵³² Maurice Blanchot, 'Where Now? Who Now?' in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*, ed. by Harold Bloom, (Chelsea House: New York, 1988), p. 23

tendency for Beckett's narratives to assume a kind of ghostly persistence where, as Beckett writes, 'the end of life is always vivifying.' (240) Driving this relation between ending and generation, across Blanchot and Beckett's respective works is the terminal case of the writer's hand. This is exemplified in Blanchot's reflections on 'the death of the last writer,' collected along with the author's essay on Beckett in 1959's *Le Livre a Venir* (translated in 2002 as *The Book to Come*). Echoing the incessant silence that Blanchot sees as being peculiar to Beckett's writing, he remarks on the existence of a 'silent density' opened through the obsolescence of the writer's role in society. For Blanchot, this is 'all the more present when we turn away from it.' This evocation of 'the last writer' holds a certain weight over the problem of responding to Beckett's works, as they retain a sense of ongoing life through their drive to self-extinction. Moreover, as Peter Boxall states, to deal seriously with the question of Beckett's legacy one must 'contend with the perception, deeply ingrained in our culture, that Beckett is in some sense the last writer.'⁵³³ Owing to Anthony Cronin's appellation of Beckett as 'The Last Modernist,' it is in Beckett's writing 'that the impossibility of a poetic expression in the wake of modernism reaches a kind of paradoxical terminal expression'⁵³⁴; in this way, Beckett heralds a sense of fiction, after modernism, terminating in its capacity to apprehend the increased complexity of the postmodern world. For Don DeLillo, Beckett similarly marks an authorial end-point, posing a significant problem for writers working after him. Thus, self-exiled author, Bill Gray, in *Mao II* places Beckett as 'the last writer to shape the way we think and see. After him, the major work involves midair explosions and crumbled buildings. This is the new tragic narrative.' (157) The failure of fiction's capacity to 'shape the way we think and see,' marked in the passing of Beckett is, as Boxall notes, part of the constellation of events that underwrite DeLillo's novel, occurring throughout the course of the year 1989. Going 'quietly unremarked in the heart of the novel,'⁵³⁵ the death of Beckett late in December passes behind the screen of history as it is illustrated in the novel—the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the disaster at Hillsborough, the Rushdie fatwah. In this instance, 'the death of the last writer,' exerts an influence, silently, apart from and in close proximity to the 'news of disaster.' (42) Defined against the 'new tragic narrative' of 'midair explosions and crumbled buildings,' Beckett as 'the last writer' antagonises the cool surfaces of DeLillo's novel—'more present when we turn away.' Held in abeyance, this reflects both the invisible presence of Gray's 'withheld' novel, as 'the only eloquence left' in *Mao II*. Furthermore, while the writer acknowledges the terminal position of Beckett amid the novel's world of glut and consumption, the spectre of Beckett nonetheless haunts DeLillo's novel—erupting in Gray's invocation of 'the last writer.' During this section, we will argue that the exhaustion of Beckett's influence

⁵³³ Peter Boxall, 'Stirring From the Field of the Possible,' in *Beckett's Literary Legacies*, ed. Matthew Feldman, Mark Nixon, (Cambridge Scholars: Newcastle, 2007), p. 207

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 210

nonetheless opens a space, in DeLillo's novel, for sustained reflection on the work of dying writers and the 'dead book[s]' they leave behind.

The second novel of Beckett's post-war Trilogy, *Malone Dies*, occasions a new attitude in the space of the Beckettian corpus towards the place of the writer. This occurs through the figure of Malone who, during the course of the text, authors a number of stories which gradually overtake the protagonist's own narrative, immobile, alone in a room. As such, the stories that Malone tells undergo two stages: a means whereby Malone may 'pay less heed' (203) to himself—'nothing is less like me than this patient, reasonable child' (219) says Malone as he narrates the tale of a young farm boy, Sapo; Beckett also demonstrates the inadequacy of Malone's attempts to dissimulate these characters into stable meta-narratives; 'I wonder if I am not talking yet again about myself,' (214) the narrator states, prefacing the transformation of Sapo into Macmann, a figure, at the care of a nurse, alone in a room, altogether more comparable to Malone. Throughout the novel, authorial exigency is paired with the 'dying' of the narrator, through which Malone offers the pretext, 'I shall not watch myself die, that would spoil everything.' (204) Rather, the change of Sapo into Macmann—simultaneously a substitution for Malone—finds Beckett's narrator in a curious relation to his own death, both continuing through the suspension of Lemuel's hatchet over the fictional avatar, while terminating through the collapse of distinction between author and authored, rendering the distinction between 'hatchet' and 'pencil' immaterial. Crucially, the image of the writer as one who disappears and yet is unable to separate from his stories places Beckett's novel in an interstitial relation to the nominally whole protagonists of *Murphy* and *Watt*; instead, this dynamic is displaced into the relationship between author and text, a disjunction, as Simon Critchley argues 'that opens up between the time of narrative, the chain of increasingly untellable and untenable stories and the nonnarratable time of the narrative voice.'⁵³⁶ As such, *Malone Dies* anticipates what the author in *The Unnamable* labels the 'vice existers' of narrative through which character becomes an act of literary ventriloquism, a performance across myriad identities; at the same time, the threat of self-reference reveals the role of narrator/author as another identity, neither in control nor apart from its 'creatures.'

Tracing the development of Beckett's *Trilogy*, Blanchot finds a connection in *Malone Dies* between the elision of space and place in the text and the introduction to writing. Following the peripetia of *Molloy*, in Malone 'the wanderer is a dying man and the space he explores has none of the resources still available to Molloy; city streets, forests and seascapes. Here there is nothing but a room, a bed and a stick'; there is however, Blanchot adds, 'the pencil which extends his range more significantly since it

⁵³⁶ Simon Critchley, 'Who Speaks in the Work of Samuel Beckett?' in *Yale French Studies* No. 93 (1998), p. 115

turns his space into the infinite space of words and stories.⁵³⁷ The degree to which the scriptable and spatial polarities of the text inform each other is clear in the value given to the ‘exercise book’ in Beckett’s novel. A mediating presence between the ‘vice existers’ of Sapo and later Macmann, the book also delimits the time and the space of the text: ‘my little finger glides before my pencil,’ states Malone, ‘across the page and gives warning, falling over the edge, that the end of the line is near.’ As such, Malone’s passage into Macmann, and vice versa, is conveyed through the same channel of the exercise book, with Malone admitting, ‘I write about myself with the same pencil.’ (235) With the room becoming a book, it also takes on the ‘infinite’ quality identified by Blanchot, extending out into ‘words and stories’—stories that ‘are no longer self-supporting,’ but rather move towards ‘pure, unashamed fictions.’ Moreover, ‘saying nothing that is not false,’ (204) the simultaneous circumscription and expansion of the novel through the figure of the exercise book underwrites a broader question around the coterminous relationship between the author and the termination of the writer in the book. On the subject of this process as it is dramatized in *Malone Dies* (and finally the unanchored voice of *The Unnamable*) Blanchot argues that ‘we may be in the presence not of a book but rather something much more than a book: the pure approach of the impulse from which all books come, of that original point where the work is lost, which always ruins the work...’⁵³⁸

For Blanchot, Beckett’s concept of writing and the book is at once generative and degenerative, with the ruins of fiction also issuing fiction. In this way, the endless relationship of writing to the inexorable *outside* of the work, brings the figure of the author into a creative proximity with the figment of their own dying. The disjunction between author and book, suspended in a relation of unreadability, aligns with Blanchot’s notion of the ‘noli me legere’ of the work: the constitutive gap from which the work issues but is simultaneously rendered void. This exists among the many horizons, for Blanchot, through which the work simply ‘is.’ Responding to Blanchot’s criticism of Beckett, Critchley argues of the Heideggerian orientation ‘toward-death’ dramatised in *Malone Dies*—through which ‘the voice gives itself the possibility of death *as possibility*,’⁵³⁹ remarking ‘I could die today, if I wished, merely by making a little effort.’ (203) Dying ‘quietly, without rushing things,’ Malone is carried through the ‘ungraspable temporal stretch’⁵⁴⁰ where he must both finish writing and finish dying. Missing in Critchley’s analysis, however, is Blanchot’s evocation of ‘the last writer’ as a literary critical trope, echoing the ‘ceaseless’ silence imputed to Beckett. In ‘the death of the last writer,’ published in *Le Livre à Venir* (1959), the silence of the author’s hand is subsumed into the process of creation, becoming the precondition for the

⁵³⁷ Maurice Blanchot, ‘Where Now? Who Now?’ in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*, ed. by Harold Bloom, (Chelsea House: New York, 1988), p. 29

⁵³⁸ Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2003), p. 213

⁵³⁹ Simon Critchley, ‘Who Speaks in the Work of Samuel Beckett?’ in *Yale French Studies* No. 93 (1998), p. 117

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

continued possibility of a critical fiction. In this regard, the death of the critic's hypothetical 'last writer,' for Blanchot, achieves a 'recoil of silence':

the rending of the silent density and, through this rending, the approach of a new sound. Nothing serious, nothing loud; scarcely a murmur, which will add nothing to the great tumult of cities from which we think we suffer. Its only characteristic: it is incessant. Once heard, it cannot stop being heard, and since one never truly hears it, since it escapes all understanding, it also escapes all distraction, it is all the more present when we turn away from it: the echo, in advance, of what has not been said and will never be said.⁵⁴¹

The death of the writer and the 'incessant' quality of the work are, for Blanchot, coextensive. Furthermore, pointing to the persistent murmur of 'silence,' Blanchot implicitly invokes the intractable 'murmurs' of Beckett's own phantasmal voices—murmurs, the critic writes, irreconcilable with the formal demands of 'good books.'⁵⁴² Of this silence, Beckett's narrator in *Malone Dies* muses: 'I shall merely say that there is nothing, how shall I merely say, nothing negative about it.' (251) As such, Beckett's dying writer mirrors the impulse towards a 'rending' silence, troubling the consistency of the writer's hand as both constitutive of his stories, as well as the persona of the author himself. In this way, Malone 'dies' by producing texts which collapse into self-reference, dramatizing the death of which they are also a product. Following Blanchot's framework—and the passage of the Beckettian scribe into death—the novel beckons to the provisional 'new sound' of *The Unnamable*.

'I'm sitting on a book that's dead'

The critical efficacy forecast by the 'last writer,' places Blanchot as surprising early proponent of political interpretation concerning Beckett's work (Adorno (1982), Eagleton (2006), Weller (2009), Morin (2017)). On this point, Blanchot's category is defined in opposition to 'the dictator': he 'of imperious repetition, the one who, each time the danger of an unknown language appears, tries to struggle against it by the rigor of a commandment without rejoinder and without content [...] to mere boundless murmuring, he opposes the cleanness of the word of command.'⁵⁴³ By contrast, the writer's proximity to the silence, or 'death' at work in the act of writing, is contrasted with the dictator's 'shouted order.' The critical nexus of last writers and censorious dictators, according to Blanchot, is one of modern innovatory literature's implicit attributes:

The temptation, which literature is experiencing today, always to come closer to the lonely murmur is linked to many causes, unique to our time, to history, to the very development of art,

⁵⁴¹ Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2003), p. 218

⁵⁴² Maurice Blanchot, 'Where Now? Who Now?' in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*, ed. by Harold Bloom, (Chelsea House: New York, 1988), p. 23

⁵⁴³ Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2003), p. 220

and its effect is to make us almost hear, in all the great modern works, what we would be exposed to hearing if suddenly there were no more art or literature.⁵⁴⁴

The anxiety of ‘no more art or literature’ is one which Don DeLillo adapts to the millennial frisson of *Mao II*. As Boxall argues, in DeLillo’s novel ‘the withering of the transformative potential of critical art’⁵⁴⁵ is dramatized, through the renunciation of literature’s critical capacity—leaving, in its place, the disruptive violence of terrorism. The possibility of literature to elide the ‘machinery of gloss and distortion’ (45) is hereby replaced by terrorism’s ability to ‘dominate the rush of endless streaming images,’ (157/158) feeding the global brain of 24-hour news. Here, Blanchot warns of the ‘fog of ambiguity’ between ‘dictators’ and ‘the place of writers, artists, men of thought.’ This significantly anticipates the parallel drawn between literary fiction and ‘the cult of the book’ in *Mao II*; with its ‘call to unity’ (162) embodied in the figure of Mao, one that finds DeLillo drawing on the potential for the displacement of the author as ‘the arch individualist, living outside the glut of the image world.’⁵⁴⁶ In this regard, the character of Bill Gray both exemplifies and satirises the writer’s necessary exclusion from the world of commerce as a prerequisite for a ‘dangerous’ literature. As ‘a sentence maker’—‘like a donut maker only slower’ (162)—DeLillo’s interrogation of *both* the hermetic and ‘assimilated’ writer account for the novel’s thick layer of irony, forbidding any simple translation of Gray into DeLillo. Unearthing intimations of a critical aesthetic from out of art’s obsolescence, Blanchot underlines the importance of the threat of ‘no art’ manifest in the literary work itself. It is, thus, through its ultimate failure in the face of hostile societal discourses, that ‘these works are unique, and also why they seem dangerous to us...’⁵⁴⁷ Moreover, through the figure of Beckett as the Blanchotian ‘last writer’ in *Mao II*, DeLillo interrogates the possibility of literary work engendered by this creative impasse—where ‘the only way to progress is to stop’ (*Molloy*, 86). As such, the rending silence of which Blanchot writes—and which issues ‘ceaselessly’ from Beckett’s self-displacing books—conversely helps to ‘place himself more clearly in the world,’ separating DeLillo’s writer ‘from the forces around him, streets and people and pressures and feelings.’⁵⁴⁸ Through the intercalation of influence in the fabric of DeLillo’s text, this allows for the situation in which ‘words stick’ as ‘lives fly apart.’ (170)

The spectre of a terminal avant-garde haunts the narrative of *Mao II*, as it interrogates the critical potential of the countercultural author to impress their vision on the image world. The protagonist of DeLillo’s 1991 novel, Bill Gray, exemplifies this desire for the author to exist independently, in thrall to

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 221

⁵⁴⁵ Peter Boxall, ‘Stirring From the Field of the Possible,’ in *Beckett’s Literary Legacies*, ed. Matthew Feldman, Mark Nixon, (Cambridge Scholars: Newcastle, 2007), p. 209

⁵⁴⁶ Adam Begley, ‘The Art of Fiction CXXXV: Don DeLillo’ in *Conversations with Don DeLillo*, (University Press of Mississippi: Jackson, 2005), p. 101

⁵⁴⁷ Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2003), p. 221

⁵⁴⁸ Adam Begley, ‘Don DeLillo: The Art of Fiction, No. 135,’ *Paris Review* (No. 128: Fall, 1993), accessed 5 April 2015, < <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1887/don-delillo-the-art-of-fiction-no-135-don-delillo>

'isolation [...] unsparing, stony and true.' (197) Gray is not the first attempt by DeLillo at equating the poles of artistry, isolation and the threat of commerce, co-optation and fame. The rock star hero of *Great Jones Street* (1973) Bucky Wunderlick, through harried dealings with his manager, ABC reporters and a mysterious commune, is prompted to withdraw from his fame: to become 'the least of what I was.' (87) However, in *Mao II*, Gray's commitment to 'the moral force of a sentence' (67) reflects a thwarted affirmative desire, distinguishing him from Wunderlick's maxim of 'least is best.' (119) Gray's writerly project is characterised by his editor Charlie Everson as one resistant to commercial or political incursion; 'the writer belongs at the far margin [...] the state should want to kill all writers.' Opposed to 'every government, every group that holds power,' (97) *Mao II* examines the intersections between the isolated author as an embodiment of the will to extend 'the pitch of consciousness and human possibility,' (200) and the outside forces that would stifle this desire. This informs perhaps the novel's most memorable thematic conceit regarding the 'curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists':

[...] in the West we become famous effigies as our books lose the power to shape and influence
[...] Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of a culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated. (41)

For DeLillo, the death of the author occurs in tandem with their irrelevancy. With the capacity to 'alter the inner life of the culture' passing over to 'bomb-makers and 'gunmen,' the death of the last writer appears as the writer is 'incorporated'—a process in which, as Gray states shortly afterwards, everything tends to 'some final reality in print or on film.' (43) The renunciation of literature's countercultural power is evidenced elsewhere in the ironic texture of DeLillo's language: from the 'little red books' of the novel's Maoist agitators, to the 'drama of mechanical routine' at the Moonie wedding—'a mass of people turned into a sculptured object.' (7) The same forces threatening the writer's first principle of individuation are themselves aestheticized; this indication of a neo-avant-garde occurring inside the machinery of repression is important for Boxall, who forges a genetic connection with the waning of the literary avant-garde and Murray's rapt enthusiasm, in *White Noise*, for the supermarket and its cultivation of 'bold new forms.' (22) Expressive of 'the last-avant-garde,' this elicits one of the fundamental tensions of DeLillo's corpus, concerning the ambiguity between counterculture and cultural dominant, revealing 'the counter cultural power of the avant-garde in the very engines of consumer culture.'⁵⁴⁹

The possibility of critique, after 'we were all incorporated,' is one that is explored in relation to the legacy cast by Beckett. In a striking exchange between Gray and the mediator for the Maoist group

⁵⁴⁹ Peter Boxall, 'Stirring From the Field of the Possible,' in *Beckett's Literary Legacies*, ed. Matthew Feldman, Mark Nixon, (Cambridge Scholars: Newcastle, 2007), p. 209

responsible for kidnapping the poet, Beckett is named ‘the last writer to shape the way we think and see.’ After Beckett, the ‘inner life’ of the culture is taken over by news, terrorism and catastrophe—by ‘mid-air crashes and crumbled buildings.’ The question of the author’s resistance to forms of consumption and capitalist enterprise has been touched on by a number of critics.⁵⁵⁰ Concerning DeLillo’s novel, Christian Moraru cites the evocation of Beckett as the quintessence of ‘the creator opposing cultural co-optation’⁵⁵¹; further still, Joe Moran developing DeLillo’s own curious relation to the ‘author-recluse myth,’ puts forward Beckett’s displeasure with the 1969 Nobel Prize as a compelling case study.⁵⁵² Regarding the cultivation of Beckett as ‘myth,’ Moran illustrates the immanent critique of seclusion in DeLillo’s fiction, assimilated by the same narrative it purports to criticise. The most developed exploration of the Beckett and DeLillo connection, however, is offered by Boxall as an opportunity for a ‘new understanding of the relationship between Beckett’s writing, American mass consumption and the dwindling possibility of critical fiction.’⁵⁵³ As Boxall argues, DeLillo’s novel ‘is somewhat sceptical about the capacity of such a beleaguered critical aesthetic to make a dent in the mass produced surface’; as such, the ‘failure of critical fiction,’ pervading *Mao II*, provides the opportunity to ‘fail better,’ whereby a negative imprint of Beckett is left on the postmodern world of image consumption. As a consummate poet of failure, Beckett withholds the possibility bound up with being the ‘last writer’—embodying a capacity, only, to ‘expiate vilely [...] dumb, uncomprehending, possessed of no utterance but *theirs*.’ (my italics) (*The Unnamable*, 422) Thus, the Beckettian text aspires to ‘go silent for good, in spite of its being prohibited.’ (45) In this way, DeLillo’s novel opens onto a dialogue with Beckett, whereby the possibility of literature’s critical extension arises from out of the context of its failure. One may, thus, situate Beckett’s prose in relation to DeLillo as opening a Blanchovian ‘recoil of silence,’ while remaining attentive to the many ‘forms’ in which to seek relief from ‘formlessness.’ (336)

In particular, the protracted enterprise of Gray’s unfinished novel marks a striking point of coincidence through which Beckett’s textual praxis insinuates into the younger author’s. Pressured by Everson to finish and publish his ‘long suffering book,’ (140) Gray’s third novel stands as a node of ambivalence

⁵⁵⁰ See Liz Barry, ‘Beckett, Bourdieu and the Resistance to Consumption,’ in *Modernist Cultures*, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 31-41

⁵⁵¹ Christian Moraru, ‘Consuming Narratives: Don DeLillo and the “Lethal” Reading,’ *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Spring, 1997), p. 195

⁵⁵² Joe Moran, ‘Don DeLillo and the Myth of the Author: Recluse,’ *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (April, 2000), p. 137-152. Moran cites the following passage from James Knowlson’s *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, (Bloomsbury: London, 1996) as one of his ‘real-life examples’ (p. 142), detailing the response to Beckett’s 1969 Nobel Prize success: ‘Three days after the award, then, Beckett made an appearance [...] smoking a cigar, with his hair cut very short [...] he sat down, looking ill at ease, said nothing, and puffed away at his cigar. The cameras whirred, and, before the cigar even had time to burn down a single centimetre, he was whisked away and back to his room.’ (p. 570-571)

⁵⁵³ Peter Boxall, ‘Stirring From the Field of the Possible,’ in *Beckett’s Literary Legacies*, ed. Matthew Feldman, Mark Nixon, (Cambridge Scholars: Newcastle, 2007), p. 210

concerning the author and his eventual commodification. Holding the work in abeyance, Boxall maps the non-arrival of Gray's novel onto Beckett's position as 'last writer,' in which 'the failure of this critical capacity after Beckett is borne out by the failure of his own [Gray's] work to appear.'⁵⁵⁴ It is this failure to arrive that Boxall reads alongside similar deferrals in Beckett: Godot, or the dismissal in *Endgame* of any possible 'painkiller.' At the same time, it is worth briefly exploring the paranoia of reading as a 'master motif'⁵⁵⁵ of *Mao II*, where the 'withheld work of art is the only eloquence left.' (67) Amid a world of 'handsome covers, prosperous and assured,' (19) a suspicion of reading and different types of reader is foregrounded in DeLillo's novel. From Maoist tracts, to religious scripture, to pulp fiction, *Mao II*, as Moraru argues, engenders a particularly sour vision of US reading as spectatorship, laying bare a 'collective apparatus of narrative misreading.'⁵⁵⁶ This is reinforced through Gray's personal assistant, Scott, who remarks: 'for Bill, the only thing worse than writing is publishing. When the book comes out. When people buy it and read it. He feels totally and horribly exposed. They are taking the book home and turning pages. They are reading the actual words.' (53) Equating reading with exposure and vulnerability, the threat to the last writer occurs notably at the hands of 'some dedicated reader.' (196) In this manner, Gray's withheld novel, exhibits a curious departure from the language of rapacious reading, and 'the cult of the book,' framed, instead, through the lens of 'failure': 'Keep the book. Hide the book. Make the writer the book. I totally fail' (72); 'It's a master collapse. A failure so deep it places suspicion on the great early work.' (73) Synchronous with Beckett, Gray's novel, the third book of two 'slim novels,' mirrors *The Unnamable* in its dismantling of the very edifice of a closed trilogy—through which Beckett's unnamable character resolves to 'never be silent. Never.' (332) As Blanchot's ruinous 'origin' of all books, Beckett's *Unnamable*, like Gray's withheld novel, unravels the textual foundation of the two previous books, 'casting doubt.' Expanding in size, the invisible novel exerts pressure on the primary milieu of *Mao II*, underwriting the character's respective relations to Gray as the novel collects 'aura and force, deepening old Bill's legend undyingly.' (224)

The obligation for the book to 'manifest' as a closed entity— an object of writerly presence— is one that follows *Mao II*, and its protracted discussion of the relation between author and audience. This is dramatized through the tension between the author's image and the text. As part of photographer Brita's 'species count' of reclusive authors, the image of the writer is semantically linked to the question of their dying; in this spirit, Gray declares that 'a portrait doesn't mean anything until the subject is dead.' (42) As such, the death of the author serves to starve the book amid what David Cowart describes as the 'two-dimensionality' of the image. A renunciation of the linguistic dimension, 'the book

⁵⁵⁴ Peter Boxall, 'Stirring From the Field of the Possible,' in *Beckett's Literary Legacies*, ed. Matthew Feldman, Mark Nixon, (Cambridge Scholars: Newcastle, 2007), p. 215

⁵⁵⁵ Christian Moraru, 'Consuming Narratives: Don DeLillo and the "Lethal" Reading,' *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Spring, 1997), p. 191

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 190

disappears into the image of the writer.’ (71) To this end, Gray’s withheld novel exists in an oblique position to the terms of discussion: indicative, neither of the writer as ‘champion of the self’ nor the fantasy imago of the novelist within the readily incorporated book. One is reminded of DeLillo’s parodic author Fenig in *Great Jones Street* who pronounces on the book market ‘that loves or kills.’ Rather, DeLillo’s book comes to resemble Malone’s exercise book that ‘annihilates all it purports to record.’ (295) This sentiment is glimpsed through one key exchange in which Gray adds further thematic weight to the absent novel, recalcitrant in its reluctance to accede to the world:

I no longer see myself in the language [...] I’ve forgotten what it means to write. Forgotten my own first rule. [...] I’ve lacked courage and perseverance. Exhausted. Sick of struggling. I’ve let good enough be good enough. This is someone else’s book. It feels all forced and wrong. I’ve tricked myself into going on, into believing. Can you understand how that can happen? I’m sitting on a book that’s dead. (48)

The expression of writerly ‘exhaustion’—having ‘forgotten what it means to write’—places DeLillo’s text in unspoken correspondence with John Barth’s signal of the postmodern literary impulse as an exhaustion of ‘means and material.’⁵⁵⁷ This is reframed in view of the novel’s conversation regarding ‘dead’ writers and the asymptotic dead books they produce. An occlusion of identity, the ‘dead’ book becomes ‘someone else’s book,’ thereby challenging the postmodern politics of the image read by critics as a constitutive aspect of DeLillo’s fictive strategies. In this way, Gray’s ‘dead’ book seems a paradoxical entity, in excess of the ‘exhausted’ writer, disclosing the possibility of a site of critical efficacy. Having become disconnected from ‘first rules’ and ‘what it means to write,’ one finds echoes of Blanchot’s ‘impersonified’ book, performing a kind of ‘death.’ Gray’s book, in Blanchot’s words, ‘uses things by transforming them into their absence [...] opening this absence to the rhythmic becoming that is the pure movement of relationships.’⁵⁵⁸ This is reinforced through the tendency of the hidden novel to colonise the world *outside* of the book, rather than the other way around: ‘the ooze of speckled matter, the blood sneeze, the daily pale secretion, the bits of human tissue sticking to the page.’ (28) As such, the writer’s ‘dead’ book urges towards a means of ‘going on,’ not as a commodity but as a rhythm, an immanence, a buried potential in the text.

Having taken on a kind of ‘death,’ Gray’s text is thereby exposed to something fundamental in the *poesis* of literary writing. Representative of ‘the impulse from which all books come,’ Beckett’s prose provides a striking model for Gray in a mode of literary generation predicated on ‘that original point where the work is lost.’ Overriding the difficulty in DeLillo between the sequestered writer as victim and

⁵⁵⁷ John Barth, ‘The Literature of Exhaustion’ in *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction*, (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 67

⁵⁵⁸ Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2003), p. 226

as a bastion of critical efficacy, Beckett's fiction demonstrates what Liz Barry describes as 'a tension between incorporation and rejection'—echoing Beckett's 'attitude to the consumption and transmission of culture itself.'⁵⁵⁹ This point is embodied in the tendency for the work to 'ooze' or 'secrete' (*Worstward Ho*), a primordial material from which the book arises. In *Mao II* the withheld novel, heretofore a spectral presence takes on a kind of Derridean monstrosity: 'a neutered near-human dragging through the house, humpbacked, hydrocephalic, with puckered lips and soft skin, dribbling brain fluid from its mouth'; elsewhere, Gray avers, 'I keep seeing my book wandering through the halls. There the thing is, creeping feebly, if you can imagine a naked humped creature with filed-down genitals, only worse...' Here, the lost 'eloquence' of the withheld gesture takes on an expression 'formless, mute, infant and terrifying...'⁵⁶⁰ Moreover, the 'creature' of Gray's book retrofits what in Beckett remains, according to Joseph Anderton a step towards 'autonomous life'⁵⁶¹ in the author's work, the text as 'creature' underlying 'the significance of the on-going creative act for the existential status of the creations themselves [...] a type of vitality that subsists despite the static, self-reflexive conditions of Beckett's work.'⁵⁶² As such, DeLillo's intra-textual 'dead book,' Gray's own undead 'creature,' 'wanders' its crevices and alleys, spatializing latent anxieties of a critically ineffective writing. In this way, DeLillo gestures towards the possibility of literature's on-going and autonomous life.

'Nowhere'—Beckett and DeLillian spatiality

In detailing the different degrees to which Beckett's bequest 'extend[s]' into the later career of Don DeLillo both writer's relation to categories of the world and the terminal writer have been explored. What follows is a more concentrated analysis of the 'void place' and 'spacious nothing' (*Murphy*, 60) from which Beckett's attitude towards emplacement and situatedness arises, in his frequently considered 'placeless' fiction. As the narrator of Beckett's late novel *Company* (1981) indicates, his works often take place 'nowhere in particular'—a designation that at once engenders and belies what David Addyman describes as the 'irreducible facticity'⁵⁶³ of Beckett's spatial production. This is particularly striking when one considers the equivocation exhibited by DeLillo, towards fiction located 'precisely nowhere.' For the later author, this betrays a complex attitude towards a form of spatial modernism in DeLillo's writerly practice: a placelessness defined as 'Beckett and Kafka insinuating themselves onto the page.'⁵⁶⁴ DeLillo's initial disavowal of what he describes as 'landscapes of

⁵⁵⁹ Liz Barry, 'Beckett, Bourdieu and the Resistance to Consumption,' in *Modernist Cultures*, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 33

⁵⁶⁰ Jacques Derrida, 'Structure Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,' in *Writing and Difference*, (Routledge: Abingdon, 1978), p. 370

⁵⁶¹ Joseph Anderton, *Beckett's Creatures: Art of Failure After the Holocaust*, (Bloomsbury: London, 2013), p. 6

⁵⁶² *Ibid.* p. 7

⁵⁶³ David Addyman, 'Rest of the Stage in Darkness: Beckett, his Directors and Place,' *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 22, (2010), p. 301

⁵⁶⁴ Thomas LeClair, 'An Interview with Don DeLillo,' in *Conversations with Don DeLillo*, (University of Mississippi Press: Jackson, 2005), p.15

estrangement' is significantly complicated by the introjection of this 'nowhere' in what some critics have taken to describing as 'late DeLillo.'⁵⁶⁵ This is reiterated through the mirroring of the statement in 2001's *The Body Artist*, where DeLillo never quite exorcises as his subject 'people in landscapes of estrangement.' (29) Given the complexity, and aesthetic shifts in Beckett's 'nowhere,' together with those of DeLillo, the poetics of space becomes a contested category between these authors, from 'nowhere in particular' to 'alien places, where extreme situations become inevitable and characters are forced toward life-defining moments.' (29) In this way, through the simultaneous loss of place, and the inability to escape categories of place in Beckett's work,⁵⁶⁶ an interrelationship can be drawn between DeLillo's later denuded texts, and the immanence of 'nowhere' in the packed postmodern world of his earlier fiction.

Beckett's 'nowhere' is an established critical trope. 'No other writing,' Hugh Kenner avers, 'so steeped us in total aversion from whatever the present immediacy may be: absorption, possession, by a time and place cloudily re-membered, elsewhere, nowhere.'⁵⁶⁷ The dislocation of Beckett's works stands as a cipher for the sometimes over-emphasised interiority of Beckett's fiction, where inner space takes precedent over 'the present immediacy.' The perception of landscape 'in a head' (*Malone Dies*, 251), finds a more explicit critical purchase in Linda Ben-Zvi's designation of the 'skullscape.'⁵⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Beckett offers his own diagnosis for the sense of isolation so common to his fiction; this is predicated on what the author describes in an essay on 'Recent Irish Poetry' as a 'space that intervenes between [the artist] and the world of objects'—finding expression in the work of art 'as no-man's-land, Hellespont or vacuum.' (*Disjecta*, 70) Following Beckett's formulation of the disjunction between subject and world, a greater attention to the manner in which space escapes definition, rather than the wholesale abstraction of space, will be more congenial for the purpose of this reflection. Indeed, rather than a strict interiority, Beckett often dramatizes a sense of experience 'on the rim.' (*Disjecta*, 71) A popular example of this is voiced in *The Unnamable*, comparing itself to 'the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either.' (134) The conflict imbedded in the liminality of Beckett's spatial practice—neither entirely in nor out of place— risks being lost in Kenner's description. By highlighting the exemplary nature of Beckett's cancellation of spatial categories, Kenner risks an over-determination of the Beckettian 'nowhere' by excluding the more complex 'breakdown of the object,' (*Disjecta*, 70) framing the problem of place as a pure signified.

⁵⁶⁵ See Matthew Shipe, 'The Politics of Don DeLillo's Late Style,' in *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (May, 2016)

⁵⁶⁶ David Addyman, 'Rest of the Stage in Darkness: Beckett, his Directors and Place,' *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 22, (2010), p. 302

⁵⁶⁷ Hugh Kenner, *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study*, (University of California Press: Los Angeles, 1968), p. 21

⁵⁶⁸ Quoted in Marjorie Perloff, *Differentials: Poetry, Poetics, Pedagogy*, (University of Alabama Press: Tuscaloosa, 2004), p. 282

Furthermore, questions of emplacement in Beckett's work must account for the significant reworking of spatial markers across the diverse output of the author's career. Such spatially and temporally specific works such as *Murphy*, amid the mews of 1930's London, belie any notion of Beckett's bequest as simply one of void. On the other hand the progressive 'erosion' (57) of identifiable spatial markers, into the increasingly circumscribed and 'still' spaces of late-Beckett, appear dramatized in *Ill Seen Ill Said*; at the 'inexistent centre of a formless place,' (46) the old woman's cabin persists under an encroaching abstraction where 'everywhere every instant whiteness is gaining.' (57) Even in those landscapes that Beckett renders partially identifiable, recurring instances of retreat into invisibility and stasis obscure the spatio-temporal grounding of Beckett's characters. Via the quest for his mother, Molloy offers an extended reflection on the extent of his 'region,' highlighting the difficulty separating boundaries of space, the way they 'merge into one another.' (71) While Molloy ventures through nominally distinct and identifiable landscapes, the manner in which space, for Beckett's protagonist, is transfigured into 'my region' threatens to unravel: 'For if my region had ended no further than my feet could carry me, surely I would have felt it changing slowly. For regions do not suddenly end, as far as I know, but gradually merge into one another.' In this way, an impasse is created between the apparent proximity to 'my region' and his distance from it—both constituted and disrupted by the traversal of Molloy. The self-deconstructing qualities of 'my region,' are hereby turned to the issue of subjectival failure: 'I fail to see, never having left my region, what right I have to speak of its characteristics. No, I never escaped, and even the limits of my region were unknown to me.' (71) Unable to 'escape,' Molloy's discourse, nonetheless, causes spaces 'to vanish.' Through the problem of Molloy's region, Beckett thematises the broader complexity of place in his work, allowing the reader to catch a glimpse of 'nowhere,' as regions are formed.

In *The Unnamable*, the voice acutely comments on the intractability of Beckett's places, declaring 'here is my only elsewhere.' (462) The metamorphosis of 'here' into 'elsewhere'—as demonstrated in the previous example of Molloy's 'region'—continues to trouble Kenner's reading of the loss of 'here' in Beckett into 'elsewhere, nowhere.' As the author reminds us in the final text of the *Texts for Nothing* series: 'unfortunately it is not a question of elsewhere, but of here.' (153) Among many critics to have explored this topic, David Addyman offers a sustained exploration of the poetics of space in Beckett's work and its interrogation of both the presence and absence of existing in space. Referring to the 'irreducible facticity' of existence in the ambivalent spaces one encounters in Beckett, Addyman draws on both the problems re-locating Beckett's work (in the manner of JoAnne Akalaitis' controversial production of *Endgame*), as well as the enthusiasm for many to reduce Beckett's spatial-poetics to placelessness. Ultimately, Addyman claims, 'there can be no full and present emplacement, yet at the

same time there is no escape from place.⁵⁶⁹ Highlighting Beckett's post-war work, Addyman observes how this 'axiom is twisted into an imperative which is also a curse'—a situation where 'the self has to remain in place experiencing the loss of place.'⁵⁷⁰ This collapse of the conceptual schema of the subject in space is a constitutive part of Beckett's aesthetics, developed further in his prolonged exchange with George Duthuit. Here, Beckett offers both a figurative and literal grounding to his artistic practice:

I shall never know clearly enough how far space and time are unutterable, and me caught up somewhere in there [...] one may just as well dare to be plain and say that not knowing is not only not knowing what one is, but also where one is, and what change to wait for, and how to get out of wherever one is... (Beckett to Duthuit, 11 August, 1948)⁵⁷¹

This remark is notable for its synthesis of the classic Beckettian obligation to 'not knowing' with an intractable form of emplacement. In this instance, Beckett refuses to discard the possibility of location retained in the traces of the artist writing from 'wherever one is.' In this way, the work refuses the wholesale disarticulation of space, but rather forges an expression of 'not knowing where one is,' with the artist 'caught up somewhere in there.' Significantly, Beckett's alignment of the abstract poetics of space with the creative impulse prefaces his statement in the 'Homage to Jack B. Yeats' that 'the artist who stakes his being is from nowhere.' (*Disjecta*, p.148) Thus, Beckett's formulation of 'nowhere'—with 'me caught up'—predicates the artistic act on a simultaneous spatial problematic, where 'nothing to express' also crucially entails 'nothing from which to express.' (*Disjecta*, p. 139)

In the difficult spatial poetics of Beckett's writing, the creative voice, issuing 'from nowhere,' signifies an immersion that occludes the clear representation of spatial categories. In this regard, as he states elsewhere, to write is to be 'in the shit up to your neck.' Moreover, just as different areas are said to 'merge' under the perambulations of Molloy, the binding of the subject with its milieu, represented throughout the Beckettian corpus, problematises any clear definition between container and contained. In 1969's *Lessness* the decomposition of the speaker's body mirrors the 'ruin' in which the text is located; likewise, the disintegrating visages of the lovers in 1963's *Play* coalesce with funeral urns in which they are confined. Overall, Beckett dramatizes a curious form of captivity in space, a fact that circumscribes the possibilities for movement and as well as the 'not knowing' constitutive of the work as such. The dialogue Beckett stages between the imaginative faculties and the notion of emplacement

⁵⁶⁹ David Addyman, 'Rest of the Stage in Darkness: Beckett, his Directors and Place,' *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 22, (2010), p. 301

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 302

⁵⁷¹ *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1941-1956*, ed. by Dan Gunn, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2011), p. 98

aligns with what Steven Connor describes as the ‘matter riddled’⁵⁷² imagination at work in Beckett. Having established one of the most memorable tableaux of Beckett’s theatre, 1961’s *Happy Days* provides an obvious analogue for this kind of spatial-practice. The image of Winnie, first buried up to her waist and then up to her neck in sand visually dramatises ‘the way man adapts himself [...] to changing conditions.’ (153) Like much of Beckett’s work, the play reflects on the condition of ‘human weakness’— a remark that Winnie suggestively qualifies, after inspecting the sand mound, in which she is trapped; in this way ‘human weakness’ becomes coextensive with ‘natural weakness.’ (146) This also transpires in S.E. Gontarski’s disquisition into the material evolution of the manuscript drafts of *Happy Days*. The retrogression towards ‘an increasingly hostile environment’— where a ‘grassy expanse rising gently’ transforms into Winnie’s ‘expanse of scorched grass’⁵⁷³— is emblematic, Gontarski writes, of the ‘cachexia and entropy’⁵⁷⁴ that run through Beckett’s works for theatre. As such, the retrogression of spatial coordinates, while retaining traces of the artist’s hand, open onto the immanent degradations of place.

For Connor, Beckett significantly challenges the imaginative work’s ‘traditional duty of taking us beyond the merely given or present at hand.’ If Beckett’s oeuvre exhibits a tendency to turn from the ‘present immediacy,’ as per Kenner’s thesis, one must also account for the ways in which it remains ‘on the alert against its own tendency to levitate or refine itself out of existence.’⁵⁷⁵ The inversion Beckett offers to Thomas Macgreevy on Wordsworth’s famous dictum is telling in this regard: through which the ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’ becomes the ‘spontaneous combustion of spirit’ (Samuel Beckett to Thomas Macgreevy, 18 October, 1932). This sense of materiality under stress is explored further in *Act Without Words I*, another of Beckett’s desert spaces, where the pratfalls of the mime renders Winnie’s ‘adaptive’ organism along blackly comic lines. In a frequently cited letter to Barney Rosset, Beckett enunciates how ‘the play requires that this last extremity of human meat [the protagonist]—or bones—*be there*, thinking and stumbling and sweating, under our noses.’ (my italics) (SB to BR, 27 August, 1957)⁵⁷⁶ Being there, as Beckett describes it, occurs as the mime attempts to recover some utility from the desert environment. The audience watches as the mime contends with the unlocatable whistle, the impossibility of the tree, the lowering of water from the rafters—the latter of which is identifiable only via the empty signifier ‘water.’ The reduction of ‘water’ to its purely symbolic value, returns one to the communicative breach of early Beckett. In each case, the objects of

⁵⁷² Steven Connor, ‘Beckett’s Atmospheres,’ accessed 1 December 2015, <<http://stevenconnor.com/atmospheres-2.html>>, later published as part of *Beckett After Beckett*, ed. S.E. Gontarski and Anthony Uhlmann (University of Florida Press: Gainesville, 2006), p. 52-65.

⁵⁷³ S.E. Gontarski, *Beckett’s Happy Days: a Manuscript Study*, (Ohio State University Press: Cleveland, 1977), p. 26

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁵ Steven Connor, ‘Beckett’s Finitude,’ in *Beckett, Modernism and the Material Imagination*, (University of Cambridge Press: Cambridge, 2014), p. 8

⁵⁷⁶ *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1957-1965*, ed. by Dan Gunn, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2014), p. 64

the world are rendered a series of ineffective props, with Winnie's 'natural weakness' moving closer to Hamm's statement in *Endgame* of 'no more nature.' (97) Nevertheless, the repetition of moments in which the mime is said to 'reflect,' offer the audience, and the mime pause; strikingly, they become charged instances where the distinction between Beckett's materialism and metaphysics are made to seem porous. Throughout the single act, the mime turns to look at his hands—a gesture both of the material constitution of the subject as well as its capacity to reflect and insulate from the landscape outside. At the last instance, the false promise of water, held 'a few feet from his body,' prompts the mime to develop a self-reflective independence from the world as he is constituted by it. Therefore, Beckett's ostensible spatial abstractions may be more aptly put as embodying the disjunction between subject and world in Beckett's aesthetics; this tension between character and the 'object in breakdown,' uneasily mirrors the artist's relation to the work.

'landscapes of estrangement'

By contrast, a strict attitude towards emplacement underwrites much of DeLillo's 20th century fiction. This is foregrounded in the author's most celebrated works: namely *Libra* (1988), in which DeLillo's account of the 'haunted'⁵⁷⁷ spaces of Lee Harvey Oswald's youth and later life pervade the text as an exemplar of novelistic research. Tending towards omniscience, the text aligns itself with the proliferative tomes of James Joyce, transforming the 26 volumes of the Warren Commission report into the assassination of President John F. Kennedy into 'the Joycean Book of America [...] the novel in which nothing is left out.' (182) The Joycean metaphor is also deployed by DeLillo in an interview in which he refers to 'a masterwork of trivia ranging from Jack Ruby's mother's dental records to photographs of knotted string.'⁵⁷⁸ Exhibiting an attachment to a complex and multi-layered representation of place, DeLillo's text—in which ostensibly 'nothing is left out'—mirrors the dictum from *Ulysses* that 'the supreme question about a work of art is out of how deep a life does it spring.' (49-50) This 'deep life' however is troubled by the question of Beckett's bequest for DeLillo, particularly concerning the older author's attitude towards a fiction situated 'nowhere.' In an early interview with Thomas LeClair, DeLillo enumerates his attitude towards textual space with regard to the course of 'modern fiction':

So much modern fiction is located precisely nowhere. This is Beckett and Kafka insinuating themselves onto the page. Their work is so woven into the material of modern life that it's not surprising so many writers choose to live there, or choose to have their characters live there. Fiction without a sense of real place is automatically a fiction of estrangement, and of course this is the point. As theory it has its attractions, but I can't write that way myself. I'm too

⁵⁷⁷ Anthony DeCurtis, 'Q&A: Don DeLillo,' in *Rolling Stone*, (17 November, 1988), accessed 15 June 2015, <<http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/matters-of-fact-and-fiction-19881117>>

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

interested in what real places look like and what names they have. Place is color and texture. It's tied up with memory and roots and pigments and rough surfaces and language, too.⁵⁷⁹

In a pairing to which DeLillo frequently returns, Beckett and Kafka serve as ambassadors of fiction located 'precisely nowhere.' Against spatial abstraction, DeLillo expresses his fidelity to the 'memory and roots and pigments' of 'real place'—a 'masterwork of trivia' rather than a passage into the void. Despite DeLillo's insistence that 'I can't write that way myself,' his impression of Beckett's 'nowhere' as 'woven into the material of modern life,' is reiterated six years later in an interview where DeLillo speaks to the 'strong sense that the world of Beckett and Kafka has redescended on contemporary America, because characters seem to live in a theoretical environment rather than a real one.'⁵⁸⁰ This broadens the spectrum for what Philip Nel describes as DeLillo's 'move towards modernism'⁵⁸¹—a modernism 'canonized by academics in the 1950s [...] a modernism of form.'⁵⁸² Highlighted by Nel as a 'homage to modernist poetics,' 2001's *The Body Artist* provides fertile ground for an interrogation of DeLillo's aesthetics against the changing shape of his fiction. Crucial to note, however, is the text's reframing of the author's spatial poetics towards an accommodation of this 'nowhere'—a point absent from Nel's study. As DeLillo's late auteur Rey Robles demonstrates, 'people in landscapes of estrangement' (29) continue to 'redescend' on the author's imagination. Given the complexity of Beckett's 'nowhere,' this broaches the possibility of a more ambivalent reading of space in the DeLillian corpus: between the 'deserts and wasted places' (40) of *End Zone* and the barren waste of *Point Omega* (2010). It is by this 'theoretical' disjuncture that Beckett continues to 'insinuate' into the fiction of DeLillo.

There is a constant tension in DeLillo's novels between verisimilitude and style in their attitude towards place. The immersive quality of the author's more maximal texts cast doubt on 'the real' as an aestheticized product— what Fredric Jameson describes as 'a world transformed into sheer images of itself.'⁵⁸³ In this light, DeLillo's drive to faithfully capture 'what I see and hear'⁵⁸⁴ is deceptively complex, marrying Joycean abundance with an image of circumscription, a world rendered more readily 'a book.' Into this terrain, the author recalls the impetus behind his first novel *Americana*, from which the richly articulated vision of place gives way to a significant 'pause'; he continues, 'something open[ed] up

⁵⁷⁹ Thomas LeClair, 'An Interview with Don DeLillo,' in *Conversations with Don DeLillo*, (University of Mississippi Press: Jackson, 2005), p.15

⁵⁸⁰ Anthony DeCurtis, 'Q&A:Don DeLillo,' in *Rolling Stone*, (17 November, 1988), accessed 15 June 2015, <<http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/matters-of-fact-and-fiction-19881117>>

⁵⁸¹ Philip Nel, 'Don DeLillo's Return to Form: The Modernist Poetics of *The Body Artist*,' in *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Winter 2002), p. 737

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 736

⁵⁸³ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Verso: London, 1991), p. 18

⁵⁸⁴ Robert McCrum, 'Don DeLillo: "I'm Not Trying to Manipulate Reality – This is What I See and Hear,' in *The Observer*, (8 August, 2010), accessed on 3 December 2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/aug/08/don-delillo-mccrum-interview>>

before me [...] it was all implicit in the moment—a moment in which nothing happened.⁵⁸⁵ This interval in referential space becomes increasingly insistent when one factors in the contemporary shift in DeLillo's poetics towards barren landscapes and a denuded prose style in the post-*Underworld* novels. Despite DeLillo's commitment to 'what real places look like and what names they have,' a sustained *vaguening* of place occurs in tandem with the author's later works. The condensation of subject matter—embodied in Pentagon advisor Richard Elster's desire in *Point Omega* (2013) for a 'haiku war [...] a war in three lines' (29)—is reflected in a concomitant spatial aesthetic, with DeLillo's late novels locating themselves with greater frequency 'somewhere south of nowhere.' (*Point Omega*, p. 20) Crucially, DeLillo's clipped text reminds us how 'the landscape inspire[s] themes. Spaciousness and claustrophobia.' (20) *Locked in a big space*, they offer inroads to considering Beckett's bequest over the complexities of DeLillo's poetics, gravitationally drawn towards 'nowhere in particular.'

This late-aesthetic in DeLillo's writing resonates with the younger author's ambivalent relationship to a predominantly modernist spatial aesthetic framed as 'Beckett and Kafka insinuating themselves onto the page.' Where Kafka's *The Castle* (1926) presents the titular castle as a constantly receding beacon of centreless bureaucratic power, circumscribing and rendering farcical the efforts of the Land Surveyor, Beckett interrogates the logic of emplacement itself. As previously determined, Beckett's texts provide a tentative form of material grounding rooted in the loss of place. The decision to highlight Beckett specifically over Kafka acknowledges the more complete atrophy of narrative forms in the former (a distinction that Beckett himself acknowledges⁵⁸⁶), thereby rendering the sense of the opposite more compelling in relation to DeLillo. These 'landscapes of estrangement' hold a particular importance in the coastal-set narrative of 2001's *The Body Artist*—a text which Philip Nel reads as the culmination of DeLillo's modernist engagement. Detailing the life of the titular body artist, Lauren Hartke, following her husband's suicide, DeLillo in subdued prose examines the effect of trauma on the lineaments of space and time brought into 'lurid ruin.' (116) In a particularly striking review, Tim Adams highlights the slight text as part of a larger quarrel in the author's style between Joycean and Beckettian influences; he states that 'If *Underworld* required the reader to think of Joyce, *The Body Artist* brings to mind, in the wariness of its prose, Beckett.'⁵⁸⁷ As such, the novel quietly turns away from the onrush of detail common to DeLillo's packed texts of postmodern exuberance, instead dramatizing 'a shedding of every knowable surface and process.' (22) In this regard, the parable of Kotka marks a point at which Beckett

⁵⁸⁵ Adam Begley, 'Don DeLillo: The Art of Fiction, No. 135,' *Paris Review* (No. 128: Fall, 1993), accessed 5 April 2015, < <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1887/don-delillo-the-art-of-fiction-no-135-don-delillo>>

⁵⁸⁶ To Israel Shenker, Beckett elaborates: '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. Another difference. You notice how Kafka's form is classic, it goes on like a steamroller—almost serene. It seems to be threatened the whole time—but the consternation is in the form. In my work there is consternation behind the form, not in the form.' Quoted in Gary Adelman, *Naming Beckett's Unnamable*, (Rosemont: Lewisberg, 2004) p. 147

⁵⁸⁷ Tim Adams, 'The Library in the Body,' in *The Observer*, (11 February, 2001) accessed on 2 February 2016, < <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/feb/11/fiction.dondelillo>>

'insinuates' into the spatial fabric of DeLillo's fiction, establishing a further point of dialogue between the two authors. In this key scene, Hartke views a live video feed of a two lane road in Kotka, Finland: witnessing cars 'entering and leaving Kotka,' opening onto 'a place stripped of everything but a road that approaches and recedes.' (38) The landscape is glimpsed at a remove, behind the screen: a 'sense of organisation, a place contained in an unyielding frame as it is and as you watch.' (38) As Hartke watches the coming and going of vehicles on the screen, the distance between Kotka 'as it is' and 'as you watch' (foregrounding also the relation between reader and DeLillo's spare text) is revealed. An act of 'floating poetry' the digitally mediated Kotka,—like Beckett before him—provides an insight, in miniature, of the transformation of 'here' into 'elsewhere.' Moreover, in a key line, the writer notes, 'it emptied her mind and made her feel the deep silence of other places'; signifying the porousness of Hartke's world, Kotka 'offers a channel whereby Beckettian traces are distributed into DeLillo's writing.

Despite its detachment from postmodern plenty, Boxall argues that DeLillo's Kotka 'cuts a path from modernist to postmodernist organisations of time and space.'⁵⁸⁸ It is this road, Boxall writes, that 'connects DeLillo to Beckett, America to Europe, this century to the last.'⁵⁸⁹ However, we will consider the possibility of modernist shadows in DeLillo's disruptive 'nowhere.' This is substantiated through reference to DeLillo's film director, Rey Robles, marking in a moment of synchronicity across two decades of DeLillo's career a persistent engagement in 'Lonely Spaces' and 'landscapes of estangement.' In a moment of synchronicity across two decades of DeLillo's career, the author writes of film director Robles' 'Lonely Spaces,' described in his obituary (set aside as a precis to the remainder of the novel) as 'landscapes of estrangement.' Set aside as a precis to the remainder of the novel, the manner in which this is revealed serves to further amplify this category of spatial dislocation in DeLillo's text. Recorded in a newspaper in which abstruse details of Robles' life and career are dryly documented, it simultaneously appears at a remove from Robles' suicide occurring outside of the purview of the reader, in the blank space between the first and second chapters. A more compelling medium for Robles presence—and with it a Beckettian spatial modernism— occurs through the character of Mr. Tuttle. Appearing in Hartke and Robles' house, after the latter's suicide, Mr. Tuttle further reinforces the vulnerability of space to perforation in DeLillo's novel. In particular Mr Tuttle's uncanny ability to dissimulate the voice of Robles cause Hartke to consider that 'maybe this man experiences another kind of reality where he is here and there, before and after, and he moves from one to the other shatteringly, in a state of collapse.' (64) Through Mr. Tuttle, DeLillo dramatises the vulnerability of 'here' to 'there,' place to the threat of 'nowhere.' This is reinforced by the disruptive quality of Tuttle's voice; like *The Unnamable*, a voice between 'vice-existers,' deracinated in space:

⁵⁸⁸ Peter Boxall, 'Stirring From the Field of the Possible,' in *Beckett's Literary Legacies*, ed. Matthew Feldman, Mark Nixon, (Cambridge Scholars: Newcastle, 2007), p. 224

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

‘Coming and going I am leaving. I will go and come. Leaving has come to me. We all, shall all, will all be left. Because I am here and where. And I will go or not or never. And I have seen what I will see. If I am where I will be. Because nothing comes between me.’ (74)

Occurring simultaneously ‘here and where,’ the possibility of Tuttle as a medium for Robles is both occasioned and short-circuited by the a-syntactical disturbance of the character’s speech. Rendering a glimpse of ‘elsewhere’ from the habitus of ‘here,’ Tuttle also significantly ventriloquizes Beckett, whose presence ‘coming and going’ from DeLillo’s narrative stands in for the author’s interrogation of the possibilities of nowhere. Where Tuttle gnomically avers ‘nothing comes between me’—it is this ‘nothing’ that challenges and is finally assumed into the body of *The Body Artist*. Moreover, with Hartke’s grief embodied in the character of Tuttle, the reader learns through the final glimpse of an interview, how the titular body artist partially recuperates his influence through her work. As she states near the end of the novel: ‘I am Lauren. But less and less.’ (117)

The focus for the remainder of this chapter will be on the ways in which Beckett ‘insinuates’ into the spatial fabric of the younger author, with this category revelatory as a measure of formal change between late and early DeLillo. Through the initial disavowal of modernist abstraction, this will serve as a fulcrum whereby to gauge Beckett’s embattled presence in the postmodern fabric of the earlier texts. While the complete negation of place in Beckett has passed into something of a critical bromide, his capacity to shrink from ‘the present immediacy’ nonetheless disturbs what DeLillo terms ‘the surface context, a landscape unaccountably familiar.’ (*Players*, 194) As David Cowart reminds us, these are texts that engage ‘the whole landscape of postmodernism,’⁵⁹⁰ and thus we would do well to ‘test’ them ‘against elements of the postmodern aesthetic.’⁵⁹¹ In particular, Cowart marks out an ‘affinity’ with the critical philosophy of Baudrillard in particular. While he enumerates the different stages of simulacra against DeLillo’s critique of ‘image culture,’ an equally relevant passage occurs in Baudrillard’s *America*, finding the French theorist taking on the open frontier of the American desert:

All that is cold and dead in desertification or social enucleation rediscovers its contemplative form here in the heat of the desert. Here in the transversality of the desert and the irony of geology, the transpolitical finds its generic, mental space. The inhumanity of our ulterior, asocial, superficial world immediately finds its aesthetic form here, its ecstatic form. For the desert is simply that: an ecstatic critique of culture, an ecstatic form of disappearance.⁵⁹²

By finding an ‘aesthetic’ analogue, Baudrillard proposes the recovery of a ‘contemplative form’ in the homogenised culture of postmodernity, its affectless surfaces reconfigured in the timelessness and

⁵⁹⁰ David Cowart, *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language*, (University of Georgia Press: Athens, 2002), p. 1

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11

⁵⁹² Jean Baudrillard, *America* (Verso: London, 1988), p. 5-6

unmarked depth of the desert. In this manner, the desert becomes a space in which it also becomes possible to think of the alienation of the subject's emplacement, a mind 'emptied' in the words of *The Body Artist*, from any strict connection to location and place. Where the desert points to a cognitive origin from which a 'critique of culture' becomes thinkable, it provides the situation to reconsider the bequest of Beckett's deserted landscapes (prefaced in *Happy Days* and *Act Without Words I*) over DeLillo's early output. As we have discussed, the possibility of the 'contemplative' in these pieces invariably serves to reposition Beckett's protagonists amid a material ground, caught between the promise of autonomy and exposure of landscape. As such, this bequest catches DeLillo in an aesthetic conundrum—between the possibility of 'critique' and the ecstasy of 'disappearance.' This remains true concerning the resonance of 'nowhere' as a site of tension for the author, heralding its more complete accommodation in the late novels.

In DeLillo's second novel *End Zone* (1972), protagonist Gary Harkness reflects this ambivalent attitude towards retreat providing an exemplary account of the 'mythology of all deserts and wasted places.' (85) Set at the Logos Football Academy—'built [...] out of nothing' (6)—the emptied landscape bears heavily on the story of Harkness and the students at the training academy. In particular, Harkness' 'investigative projects' (65) in the desert beyond the walls of the College provide, for Boxall, areas of absence where 'a pocket of calm, a pool of something like quietist resistance'⁵⁹³ is retained in DeLillo's text. At the same time they are described by Harkness as 'parodies of grief or hunger or exile' (65), flaunting their redundancy in the protagonist's efforts to achieve 'simplicity.' In this spirit, quietism is rendered a 'new asceticism' as per Harkness' description of his heavily overweight roommate Bloomberg: 'all the visionary possibilities of the fast. To feed on the plants and animals of the earth. To expand and wallow.' (47) As a consequence, DeLillo's early text at once invites and forbids any simple reading of Beckett's presence. Nevertheless, the lineaments of the desert space, posited by Beckett, impinge on the text, insinuating into the form of thought; as Harkness acknowledges, 'Exile or outcast: distinctions tend to vanish when the temperature exceeds one hundred.' (6) Locked between disappearance and dissent, this transformative simplicity is felt during a significant passage in DeLillo's novel, through which the transition into clipped noun phrases describes the atomisation of elements in the landscape: 'The sun. The desert. The sky. The silence. The flat stones. The insects. The wind and the clouds. The moon. The stars. The stars. The west and east. The song, the color, the smell of the earth.' (82) For Harkness, this insight conforms to the possibility of a new mode of apprehension—a 'generic mental space':

Perhaps there is no silence. Or maybe it's just that time is too compact to allow for silence to be felt. But in some form of void, freed from consciousness *the mind remakes itself*. What we must

⁵⁹³ Peter Boxall, 'Stirring From the Field of the Possible,' in *Beckett's Literary Legacies*, ed. Matthew Feldman, Mark Nixon, (Cambridge Scholars: Newcastle, 2007), p. 216

know must be learned from blanked out pages. To begin to reword the overflowing world. To subtract and disjoin. To re-recite the alphabet. To make elemental lists. (84) (my italics)

In this excerpt, the deserted spatial formation opens onto a 'void place' in which 'the mind remakes itself.' In Harkness' fidelity to 'blanked out pages,' we find a rarefication of vision, echoing Beckett's *Molloy*,⁵⁹⁴ leading to a tentative possibility of critique. DeLillo transforms a *theoretical* 'estrangement' into an injunction to 'reword the overflowing world.' For Boxall, 'this moment [...] can be read as a manifesto of a sort'; he continues, 'if DeLillo is a writer who is conscious of the increasing rarity of silence, then he is also a writer who has sought, even in his most noisy works to allow a silence to be felt.'⁵⁹⁵ This invitation to a 'form of void,' represented in the open desert, hereby redoubles what Winnie in *Happy Days* describes as 'the silence of this place.' (145) At the heart of *End Zone*, it is this silence that remains tenuous and at risk—as DeLillo writes, 'time is too compact to allow silence to be felt.'⁵⁹⁶ Through a close analysis of DeLillo's 'landscapes of estrangement' (and the concomitant spatial bequest of Beckett) one may find traces, early in DeLillo's career, of the author's tendencies to 'subtract,' 'disjoin' but also 're-recite' its claim to narrative place.

Over the course of this chapter we have explored the impact of a residual worldliness in Beckett's fiction, predicated on the suspension of writing and place as motivating categories. The tension, enshrined in Beckett, between a fiction that simultaneously contracts and dilates significantly impacts DeLillo as an author whose works engage with questions concerning the postmodern 'incorporation' of critical fiction against the cultural glaciation of U.S. global power. At the same time, we have been able to advance 'the problem' of Beckett in this chapter, drawing on DeLillo's characterisation of the author as a disappearing influence, whose works nevertheless critically 'extend' into the world beyond the text. This marks a crucial departure from the logic of Chapter 2, in which the problematics of Beckett emerge from the looming threat of entropy and exhaustion troubling Pynchon's narrative universe. Moreover, if the image of the reader serves as a key component in the development of postmodernism in the first two chapters, it is, thus, the recapture of a key residuum of the writerly that underlines Beckett's bequest for DeLillo. In Beckett's termination as 'the last writer,' remarked upon in *Mao II*, the author's legacy nonetheless persists as a buried possibility in the heart of DeLillo's novel. However, as the concluding section of this chapter betrays, this dynamic is far from uniform when viewed in light of aesthetic transformations throughout DeLillo's career. Paraphrasing *End Zone's* Gary Harkness, novels which are 'too compact' to allow Beckett's presence to be felt, subside into a 'late' tendency in which

⁵⁹⁴ Here, Boxall compares Harkness' claim to that of Molloy—c.f. 'You would do better, at least no worse, to obliterate texts than to blacken margins, to fill in the holes of words till all is blank and flat...' (10)

⁵⁹⁵ Peter Boxall, 'Stirring From the Field of the Possible,' in *Beckett's Literary Legacies*, ed. Matthew Feldman, Mark Nixon, (Cambridge Scholars: Newcastle, 2007), p. 223

⁵⁹⁶ Reading the temporalities of DeLillo, James Gourley finds in the author's tendency to decompress of time, a marked investment from Beckett's *Proust* (1930)—see James Gourley, *Terrorism and Temporality in the Works of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo* (Bloomsbury: London, 2013)

'nowhere,' as a peripheral spatial category, re-emerges as a key component of DeLillo's 21st Century aesthetics. As a consequence, the precision of Beckett's legacy begins to blur as DeLillo adopts a minimalist writing style, both ostensibly informed by Beckett and distant from the world building ambitions withheld in his works. Moving into the new millennium, the consistency of 'the problem' as a viable model of Beckettian legacy will now be interrogated, against the wider canvas of this project.

Conclusion: Beckett 'Redescending'—The Bequest After Postmodernism

To conclude, we will now reflect upon the possible futures for reading Beckett's persistence in U.S. fiction beyond the heyday of postmodernism as a hegemonic literary form. Drawing on DeLillo's curious phrase, the ways in which Beckett's works have come to 'redescend' on the imagination of contemporary America offers an extended scope to the legacies heretofore explored. Furthermore, the efficacy of 'the problem' as a viable category for conceiving Beckett's bequest will be tested against new strains of American writing that at once resist and operate in postmodernism's wake. This is predicated on a presupposition that has undergirded this project, whereby responses to the unique 'silence' of Beckett's prose and drama are nonetheless inflected by categories of time and history. So far, we have traversed the anticipatory moments of countercultural expression, signalled in 1957, through the development of a postmodern literary aesthetic, arriving at the solidification of American empire in the 80s and 90s. This has manifested in the distinct personalities of each of Beckett's bequests previously enumerated; in Beckett's 'nontogtherness' with the 'mish-mash' of the *E.R* in Chapter 1; in the figures of hermeneutic uncertainty through which Beckettian echoes can be heard in Pynchon in Chapter 2; and finally, the 'dilatary' global perspectives of Beckett that DeLillo regards as being vulnerable in a globalized, postmodern America in Chapter 3. At the same time, by adopting the unified category of 'the problem' concerning these legacies, we have conversely been able to articulate a common difficulty arising from the U.S. being 'somehow not the right country' for Beckett. By the same token, in Beckett's fictions one finds a legacy that continues to persist 'somehow on.' Moving forward, it is necessary to reflect back on this 'problem,' as it further exposes the paradoxical motilities of the Beckettian text and a legacy torn between persistence and extinction.

As we have seen, 'the problem' of Beckett in postmodern American literature speaks to a broader tension rooted in the Beckettian text, allowing for the continuation of the author's influence beyond the conditions of its extinction. This central 'aporia'—as Beckett's *The Unnamable* describes its existence between two competing impulses—lays the groundwork for the tone of the author's inheritance in the three bequests outlined in this project. For this reason, each chapter has exhibited a shared focus on the deracination or displacement of Beckettian influence, with exhaustion and internal-resistance evolving as key motifs throughout. As mentioned previously, Peter Boxall has perhaps offered the closest approximation of 'the problem' in his acknowledgement of the simultaneity of Beckett's legacies of 'persistence' and 'exhaustion.' While this is evident in Boxall's centrality to Chapter 3, similarly oblique relationships grounded on both resistance and complicity are cultivated in the preceding two chapters. Fostering a material basis for Beckett's deracination into the post-war U.S., the *E.R* offers tangible proof of the author's position as both a guiding influence and a troublesome kernel in the vigorous avant-garde fostered by Rosset. Through the populism and promiscuity of the *E.R*, the Grove review also offers an enlightening channel into the U.S. imaginary from which American postmodernism would emerge.

These postmodern shades are recaptured by Thomas Pynchon in Chapter 2 in which one of the principle dualities of the *E.R.*—between Beckett’s exhausted poetics and the kinetics of the Beat authors—provide the ground for Pynchon’s novels of postmodern ambiguity. At the centre of this chapter is the notion of postmodernism as a phenomenon in part emerging from the widening sphere of reading and interpretation (a motif also undergirded by the ‘freedom’ trumpeted by the *E.R.*). As such, sufficient space is afforded to explore Beckett and Pynchon’s respective works of hermeneutic resistance; filtered through the twin poles of exhaustion and mobility, we arrive at the ‘shared differences’ of Beckett and Pynchon over the theory of entropy as a viable hermeneutic frame. It is a kernel of writerly possibility, however, that is at stake in the ‘incorporated’ postmodernism of DeLillo. Here, Beckett’s emergence as ‘the last writer’ reinforces his importance as an author of a peculiar ‘world narrative’; at the same time, DeLillo’s critical fictions are acutely conscious of the image-ridden postmodern economy that appears to leave no room for Beckett’s bequest. It is this contradictory path that unites each chapter, while allowing the space for a unique encounter with Beckettian style and the author as a public figure. Echoing the simultaneity of exhaustion and persistence grounded in Beckett’s post-war writing, ‘the problem’ hereby befits the legacy of an author so commonly conceived as between opposing binaries: of presence and absence, postmodernism and modernism, America and Europe.

In the first decades of the new millennium, fresh possibilities and limitations concerning ‘the problem’ of the author’s U.S. legacy continue to emerge. To this end, Amanda Dennis, in a recent article on the ‘radical indecision’ of *The Unnamable*, positions the ‘blockage’ of aporia in Beckett’s writing as a ‘transformation of the conditions of progress and passage.’⁵⁹⁷ As such, the alien environments and occluded pathways through which Beckett’s legacy for postmodern American authors might be defined as a ‘problem,’ also offer an instructive view into future discoveries beyond the zenith of postmodern experiment. At the same time, we do not have the sufficient space to offer a complete account of the multiplicity of diverging pathways arising from the fate of postmodernism as an exhausted enterprise. A cursory view of those concepts haemorrhaging from the perceived death of postmodernism might include the post-postmodern, (Nealon, 2012) (Timmer, 2010), the posthuman (Hayles, 1999) (Braidotti, 2013), the meta-modern (Abramson, 2015), and the digimodern (Kirby, 2009). Regarding subsequent forms of literary expression, we might include re-constructivist narratives (Huber, 2014), the post-secular engagement with belief (Hungerford, 2010), and a reinvestment in the realist novel; concerning the latter, one also finds glimpses in the so-called ‘new sincerity,’ the compound forms of hysterical realism and the confessional slant of Alt-Lit’s wave of electronic literature. In each case—and to varying degrees—a rebuke to postmodern irony and metafiction is manifested. This new terrain has inevitably impacted the overall timbre of Beckett’s American bequest in recent years. In conjunction with this,

⁵⁹⁷ Amanda Dennis, ‘Radical Indecision: Aporia as Metamorphosis in *The Unnamable*,’ in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2, (Sep, 2015), p. 181

attempts to critically re-evaluate the postmodern, finding in its claims of free play and heterogeneity unspoken hierarchies of race, class and gender, also offer potentially productive areas of further inquiry. In this regard, the fragmented textual experiments of Susan Howe and Kathy Acker—set against the predominantly white male postmodern canon—uneasily accommodate the deracinated voices of Beckett’s prose. Particularly noteworthy are the terse stories of Lydia Davis, presenting a sustained investment in Beckettian *style*.⁵⁹⁸ From the 2007 collection *Varieties of Disturbance*, Davis’ ‘*Southward Bound reads Worstward Ho*’ stages a wry encounter with Beckett’s late fiction, marking not only its intractability but its repeated capacity to inspire and influence. Recounting the protagonist’s journey by airport-shuttle, and the ensuing period of idleness, Davis details the experience of the narrator reading Beckett’s notoriously difficult novella. The story is split across a primary text and a detailed series of footnotes, vacillating between scenic description and the reader’s response to Beckett’s novella. Taking place between the first and last lines of *Worstward Ho*, the reader becomes privy to the narrator’s reflections, confusions, pleasures, and displeasures with Beckett’s text: (‘The van is quiet, so she reads *Worstward Ho*. The first words are: “On. Say on. Be said on. Somehow on. Till nohow on. Said nohow on.” She is not very pleased with these words’ (572)). Frequently, Beckett’s telegraphic style inflects the protagonist’s account of the local scenery (the van’s location relative to the position of the sun, the flow of passengers entering and leaving the shuttle); to this end, the narrator, Beckett and the reader are left to endure, as Davis writes, ‘the nowhere all together.’ In a markedly explicit fashion, ‘*Southward Bound...*’ incorporates ‘the problem’ of reading Beckett, while allowing his landscapes and tonality to effect those of Davis’ text.

Davis’ gentle musings on reading Beckett, however, appear against the tide of a broader transformation in Beckett’s U.S. passage. As the title of the 2015 volume of essays edited by P.J. Murphy and Nick Pawliuk betrays, Beckett’s emergent status as a ‘postmodern icon’⁵⁹⁹ appears to leave little space for a legacy defined equally by exhaustion and non-recognition. Associating the literary innovations of Beckett with the tech-vanguard of Silicon Valley, the author’s absorption into the minimalist surface of a 1999 Apple ad campaign, recuperates the necessary friction of ‘the problem’ under the injunction to ‘think different.’⁶⁰⁰ Indeed, the visual impact of Beckett—and the concomitant associations of the author in retreat—have conversely served as a significant strategy of further integrating the author into the marketplace.⁶⁰¹ This ‘iconic’ status can be felt elsewhere, both testifying to Beckett’s achievements and redirecting his influence into new avenues of American cultural life. Significantly, the degree to

⁵⁹⁸ During an interview, Davis recalls coming to Beckett as a formative experience: ‘I actively studied his way of putting sentences together. I copied out favorite sentences of his.’—Lydia Davis, ‘I am Simply Not Interested at this Point in Creating Narrative Scenes between Characters,’ in *The Believer*, (January, 2008)

⁵⁹⁹ P.J. Murphy, Nick Pawliuk, *Beckett in Popular Culture: Essays on a Postmodern Icon*, (McFarland & Co: Jefferson, NC, 2016)

⁶⁰⁰ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 21

⁶⁰¹ See Stephen John Dilks, *Samuel Beckett in the Literary Marketplace*, (Syracuse University Press: New York, 2011)

which Beckett's works have provided a yardstick for those wishing to faithfully represent American catastrophe cannot go unmentioned. The international fall-out from the 2001 and 2003 Afghanistan and Iraq wars finds a new wave of literature engaging with the images of destitution enshrined in Beckett's theatre. Noah Cicero's 150 page tirade, *The Human War* (2003) stages a close dialogue with the Beckett of *Waiting for Godot*, tracing a genetic link between the formal arrangement of Beckett's play and the clipped sentences of Cicero's novel.⁶⁰² As such, if Beckett reflects something of the minimalist aesthetic of Apple, then he has also influenced a new poetic vocabulary of austerity and depression. Writing for the *New York Times*, Charles Isherwood considers the effect of the 2008 financial collapse on American theatre; finding a suitable archetype in *Godot*, Isherwood writes that 'calls are being made to strip away the glossy distraction, the unnecessary indulgence. Ostentation is out; austerity in. Send in the tramps!'⁶⁰³ Isherwood's call for 'austerity,' echoes a long history of Beckett's play amid moments of crisis.⁶⁰⁴ Recalling Susan Sontag's storied production of *Godot* in war torn Sarajevo, the 2007 production of Beckett's play by artist-activist Paul Chan across a number of outdoor locations in New Orleans marks an exceptional addition to the history of Beckett's play in the U.S. Staged in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Beckett 'iconic' play is repurposed as an expression of American devastation—less 'an existentialist cri de coeur than [...] a terse topographic description.'⁶⁰⁵

This tension between the (international) iconic status of Beckett and the lineaments of 'the problem'—as it has developed over the course of this project—must surely underwrite future understanding of Beckett's American legacies. On this point, some insight might be gleaned from the rebirth and continued existence of the *E.R* as a purveyor of Beckett's influence in the U.S. after 1973. The publication of the special issue No. 98 in 1984, featuring three plays by Beckett ('Ohio Impromptu,' 'Catastrophe,' 'What Where') together with contributions by Margurite Duras and Michael McClure, point to Rosset's reinvestment in the publisher's 'Good Old Authors.' Particularly striking is the parallel appearance of Kathy Acker, placing the issue consciously in response to the 60s Grove heyday. Characterised by Loren Glass as the 'last significant acquisition for Grove,' Acker nonetheless represents 'the ambiguous legacy of Grove's signal achievement: the mainstreaming of the avant-garde.'⁶⁰⁶ Moreover, following the 1993 merger between Grove Press and The Atlantic Monthly Press, the rebirth of *E.R* as a digital magazine marks a further advance in the publisher's legacy—alongside which one

⁶⁰² Noah Cicero, 'explaining the style of the human war,' 2012, video, viewed 4 May, 2015, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M07jFcr1WY>>

⁶⁰³ Charles Isherwood, 'A Long Wait for Another Shot at Broadway,' in *New York Times*, (22 April, 2009), accessed 5 August, 2017, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/26/theater/26ishe.html?pagewanted=all>>

⁶⁰⁴ See Lance Alfred Duerfahrd, *The Work of Poverty: Samuel Beckett's Vagabonds and the Theater of Crisis*, (Ohio State University Press: Columbus, 2013)

⁶⁰⁵ Holland Cotter, 'A Broken City. A Tree. Evening,' in *New York Times*, (2 December, 2007), accessed 10 July 2017, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/02/arts/design/02cott.html>>

⁶⁰⁶ Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, Evergreen Review and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013), p. 214

finds a further deepening in the review's association with Beckett.⁶⁰⁷ The digital *E.R* would be revived once more in 2017 under the editorship of novelist and critic Dale Peck. In Peck's editorial (suggestively titled 'Apophysis') for the first issue of the review's latest iteration (Spring, 2017), the current situation of American writing is reiterated as trapped in an interstitial passage between 'recidivist postmodernism and reactionary realism.'⁶⁰⁸ At the same time, Beckett's position as a revelatory figure is once more established. Included in excerpted form, the publication of Michael Coffey's 'Samuel Beckett is Closed' offers a personal response to the question 'why Beckett.' Coffey includes a number of heterodox set pieces, in particular, recalling 'famously war-and-assassination-wearied' Walter Cronkite reporting on the premiere of *Breath*. In this manner, Beckett's impact on Coffey notably arrives through the filter of the famous American news anchor. Elsewhere, Coffey muses on various arcana pertaining to Beckett, including the peculiar claim of an illegitimate American daughter fathered by the Irish author. Strikingly, the excerpt concludes with a reflection on the obstacle to those writers looking to process Beckett's influence: the seductive pull of the author, conflicting with his 'convoluted, self-mocking sentences.'⁶⁰⁹ As such, the tension between Beckett the 'icon' and 'the problem' is curiously rendered in Coffey's piece, asserting the vaunted position of Beckett (both in and outside the *E.R*), while acknowledging the author's difficult gifts.

Before we continue into two speculative bequests, relevant to this liminal period of American letters, one must also note the continued output of both Pynchon and DeLillo—well beyond the standard temporal markers of American postmodernism. Beginning with 1990's *Vineland* (published after 17 years, broken only by the 1984 publication of *Slow Learner*) the motif of cultural inheritance running through much of Pynchon's early works is overtaken by what Simon Malpas and Andrew Taylor state as 'the question of nostalgia and the viability of its preservative force.'⁶¹⁰ In this case, the student radicalism of the 1960s is thematised, in Pynchon's novel, as a period of lost countercultural possibility, set in 1984, amid the re-election of Ronald Reagan and the reification of 'the Tube' as an omnipresent factor of American life. Indeed, the author's zany excursion into 60s nostalgia, is echoed in 2009's *Inherent Vice*. Following hippie P.I. Doc Sportello's marijuana-addled investigations into the disappearance of real estate guru Michael Z. 'Mickey' Wolfmann, the author presents a fiction simultaneously yearning for the ideals of the student led counterculture, without turning from its corruptibility at the hands of cult ideology, commercialism and CIA espionage. The nostalgic impulse behind these texts leaves little room for the Beckettian bequest as previously explored; rather,

⁶⁰⁷ Marking the 2006 Centenary, *E.R* would use John Minihan's photograph of Beckett in his Boulevard Saint Jacques flat for the front cover of No. 111

⁶⁰⁸ Dale Peck, 'Apophysis, or "Widget" is a Name for Something Whose Name You Don't Know,' in *Evergreen Review*, (Spring, 2017), accessed 5 May, 2017, <<http://evergreenreview.com/apophysis-dale-peck/>>

⁶⁰⁹ Michael Coffey, 'Samuel Beckett is Closed,' in *Evergreen Review*, (Spring, 2017), accessed 6 June, 2017, <<http://evergreenreview.com/read/samuel-beckett-is-closed/>>

⁶¹⁰ Simon Malpas, Andrew Taylor, *Thomas Pynchon*, (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2013), p. 141

Pynchon's novels have witnessed a heightening (if not a wholesale adoption) of the Beat driven ideals of Kerouac and Ginsberg. Similarly, in 2013's *Bleeding Edge* images of Beckettian withdrawal are recuperated back into the countercultural modus of Pynchon's poetics, with the internet site DeepArcher, nevertheless offering protagonist Maxine Tarnow the space to become 'constructively lost.' (76) To this end, the broad progression of Pynchon's opus marks a falling away of the Beckettian 'problem' into the more *readable* narrative of countercultural failure.

As we have already seen in Chapter 3, DeLillo's 'late' minimalist tendency marks a divergent path to that of Pynchon, without resulting in an imitation of Beckettian 'lessness.' Rather, these texts offer a productive development concerning DeLillo's fascination for the minutiae of place in literary fiction. While *The Body Artist* and *Point Omega* appear more accommodating to the particular 'nowhere' of Beckett and Kafka, novels of relative density such as 2007's *Falling Man* do not shy away from writing of a straightforwardly representative bent. Responding to the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Centre, *Falling Man* develops certain themes initially raised in DeLillo's immediate response to the tragedy in the essay 'In the Ruins of the Future.' (2001) Here, DeLillo points to a limit in the vision of unimpeded American futurity, of 'the dramatic climb of the Dow and the speed of the internet summon[ing] us all to live permanently in the future, in the utopian glow of cyber-capital.'⁶¹¹ The author subsequently remarks on the 'howling space' opened as a result, locating a trauma at the heart of the U.S. urban landscape. This is further elaborated in *Falling Man*, detailing the story of lawyer Keith Neudecker caught in the aftermath of the terrorist attack. Observing something 'critically missing from the things around him,' DeLillo's text is charged with Beckett's 'world collapsing endlessly,' (*Molloy*, 41) placing a Beckettian ruin in the packed New York city-scape—opening to 'smoke and ash' and 'otherworldly things.' (3) As a necessary corrective to the triumphalism of American futurity, we might perceive traces of 'the problem' of Beckett as a revelatory event in DeLillo's writing, unsettling the reified world of American hegemony, rendered 'unfinished, whatever that means,' with 'things unseen, whatever that means.' (5) This concern for the consolidated future will be treated shortly in light of DeLillo's latest novel-length publication, 2016's *Zero K*. In particular, we will consider the prevalence of the 'posthuman' as a shared frontier in which Beckett and DeLillo offer a constructive dialogue. This will be followed by a new character in the presence of David Foster Wallace. While we do not have the sufficient room to fully justify the immense breadth and singularity of Wallace's oeuvre, he offers a body of work consciously conceived in the wake of Pynchon and DeLillo's postmodern poetics. It is in moments of Wallace's post-postmodern writing that 'the problem' as a mode of Beckettian legacy achieves a further coherence; in light of Wallace's own ambivalence to the overbearing surfaces of

⁶¹¹ Don DeLillo, 'In the Ruin of the Future,' in *Harper's Magazine*, (December, 2001), accessed 14 May 2016, <<https://harpers.org/archive/2001/12/in-the-ruins-of-the-future/>>

American postmodernism, Beckett is single out as an author whose work locates the possibility of depth, existing between postmodern signification and pre-symbolic reference.

'What I understand comes from nowhere': Zero K, Beckett and posthuman futurity

In recent years, Beckett's corpus has attracted increasing attention for its symbiotic relation to what is variously labelled a posthuman-turn⁶¹² in the humanities. Emergent both within and in excess of the poststructuralist orthodoxies of postmodern critical discourse, Beckett's rigorous interrogation of our 'loss of species' (Watt, p. 71) ties the author to a multifaceted discussion regarding the limits of the traditional humanist subject. Widely considered to be the first to fully articulate the notion of a posthuman Beckett, Jonathan Boulter traces the progressive disembodiment of the author's characters, in the novel and on stage, following the concrete presences of Didi and Gogo in *Waiting for Godot*, up to the extreme vagueness of *Worstword Ho*. In this way, Boulter argues, Beckett demonstrates a desire to 'push the human past our common conceptual boundaries,' moving 'into the space of death, of what is perhaps a kind of afterlife.'⁶¹³ Established in a wide body of Beckett criticism, the simultaneous death and 'afterlife' of the subject is a topic explored thoroughly across the three post-war novels *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, attaining a particular potency in the final text of the 'Trilogy,' *The Unnamable*. Oft-quoted examples of Beckett's protagonists being 'given birth unto death,' (*Malone Dies*, 323) reach their apex in the figure of the Unnamable, through which the author painstakingly attempts to give voice to a subject 'made of silence.' (474) As such, the decentring effect of the voice's opening pleas—'Where now? Who now? When now?'—mark what Simon Critchley describes as the Beckettian narrator's 'continuous negotiation'⁶¹⁴ between 'I's' passage into 'not I.' This sensitivity to the 'provisional' subject is prefaced in the unaired 1946 radio text 'Capital of the Ruins,' detailing the author's experience of the razed landscapes of St. Lo after Allied bombing and German occupation during the Second World War. Concluding the text, Beckett invokes an image of 'the time honoured conception of humanity in ruins'; articulating a shattering of foundation, Beckett conversely surveys the ground for 'the terms in which our condition is to be thought again.' (278) Offering tentative ways of thinking and being in the world, Beckett's images of remaindered humanity, nonetheless, trouble any linear telos through which an obsolete humanism might be succeeded by a posthuman future. This is intimated by Ruben Borg in an illuminating essay on Beckett and representations of the posthuman future. At the heart of these debates, Borg argues, lies 'an overwhelming temporal contradiction': a simultaneous currency and

⁶¹² For a thorough account of this development see Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, (Wiley: Hoboken, 2013)

⁶¹³ Jonathan Boulter, *Beckett: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (Bloomsbury: London, 2008), p. 13

⁶¹⁴ Full Quote: 'thus, when the voice in *The Unnamable* writes, at the beginning of its exhausting 112-page final paragraph, "I, of whom I know nothing," one might well want to pursue the question of the "I" in Beckett and the continuous negotiation that it maintains with the "not I"...' Simon Critchley, *Very Little, Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature*, (Routledge: London, 1997), p. 169

futurity, leaving the posthuman 'already with us, even as it is yet to come.'⁶¹⁵ The degree to which the posthuman is always already at work in the human passes into a broader diffusion of meaning concerning the figure of the posthuman subject. Sensitive to the partial reinvestment of postmodern energies into the question of posthumanism, Beckett's work is shown to extend, lattice-like, across a diversity of references: to the exaggeration of the decentred postmodern subject, as well as the limitation of 'subject' as a signifier germane to the problem of bio-informatics and the advancement of artificially intelligent machines.⁶¹⁶ Thus, Borg argues, Beckett, perhaps more than any other author, 'has labored to articulate this condition of self-externality,' offering a case study for the 'historically obsolete and yet unsurpassable' figure of the human subject. It is in this spirit that one might briefly consider a posthuman inheritance alongside Beckett's intractable postmodern lineage.

Such challenges are voiced in Don DeLillo's most recent publication, *Zero K* (2016), in which the author explores the political and ethical problems raised by a speculative posthuman future, promising escape from as well as a reinscription of the inequities of the present. The novel follows the story of Jeffrey Lockhart and his father Ross Lockhart, a venture capitalist and financier for a cryonics facility known as The Convergence. At the centre of the plot is the decision to indefinitely preserve the body of Ross' wife, opening the text onto a broader question concerning the potential life for the human after death. This is further demonstrated in the novel's confrontational opening sentence, uttered by Ross Lockhart: 'everybody wants to own the end of the world.' (3) Acidly described as 'the billionaire's myth of immortality,' (117) the novel enacts a search for a corrective to the transhumanism and techno-optimism heralded by those associated with The Convergence. Preparing for life after the death of the body, various 'advances' are documented in the text: 'parts of the body replaced or rebuilt' (47); as well as the invention of 'an advanced language unique to the Convergence [...] a language that will enable us to express things we can't express now.' (33) The possibility of a critical posthumanist discourse interrogated in DeLillo's novel reflects earlier arguments voiced by Katherine Hayes in her seminal study *How We Became Posthuman* (1999); for Hayes, the danger of the posthuman future resides not as an essential corollary to the concept itself but rather its potential to expand the will to power of the liberal humanist subject. Concerning Hans Moravec's study into the increased capacity for computer hardware to model the human brain, Hayes argues against the 'grafting of the posthuman onto a liberal humanist view of the self.'⁶¹⁷ In this way, the choice to digitally transcend one's own body is rendered an act of

⁶¹⁵ Ruben Borg, 'Putting the Impossible to Work: Beckettian Afterlife and the Posthuman Futurity of Humanity,' in *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 35, No. 4, (Summer 2012), p. 164

⁶¹⁶ Concerning Beckett, these challenges are notably confronted by Gabriel Schwab, David Porush, and David Houston Jones

⁶¹⁷ N. Katherine Hayes, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1999), p. 286—c.f: 'When Moravec imagines "you" choosing to download yourself into a computer, thereby obtaining through technological mastery the ultimate privilege of immortality,

‘technological mastery’ by the self-determined subject—‘not abandoning the autonomous liberal subject but [...] expanding its prerogatives into the realm of the posthuman.’⁶¹⁸ As Lockhart senior implores his son, the objective is to get ‘beyond your experience [...] beyond your limitations.’ (35) By engaging in the capacity for techno-science to simply mirror the autonomous subject, as well as the imbalances of wealth and power that undergird this model of the human, DeLillo’s novel provides ample ground for a conflicting view of the posthuman future.

As DeLillo’s ‘last writer,’ at once radically entering the world while embodying a sensitivity to the novelist’s inability to do anything other than ‘stammer out [their] lesson,’ (*Molloy*, 32) Beckett’s corpus provides rich counter-texts to DeLillo’s novel, situated as it is in anticipation of things *to come*.

‘Drench[ed] in last things,’ (144) *Zero K* approaches the ‘predicament’ of futurity as a phenomenon ‘already here,’ echoing Peter Boxall, ‘in which the post-apocalyptic future that is darkly massing behind the flimsy boundary of the second millennium comes flooding in, to arrive “ahead of schedule”’ (*Point Omega*, 84).⁶¹⁹ As such, a decade-and-a-half into the 21st century, the eroding boundary between the present and the future is accompanied by the falling of self-erected walls in DeLillo’s narrative practice. The yielding of spatial-aesthetics in *Zero K*, to what Jeffrey Lockhart describes as ‘nowhereness’ (74) marks the reinvestment in theoretical landscapes, dismissed in the 1980’s as a negative bequest from Beckett and Kafka. Both authors find a contemporary resonance in the Kazakh research facility of The Convergence, emblematic of a future at once ‘already here’ but constructed (like the underground missiles of *Underworld*) out of sight. Thus, Jeffrey marks his entrance into the preservation chamber as ‘an abstract thing, a theoretical occurrence,’ (138) reinforcing the significance of ‘nowhere’ as a governing aspect of DeLillo’s late-style. More than any of DeLillo’s later publications, *Zero K* stands as a reflection on this trend towards enclosure and vagueness, offering a manifesto of sorts on the author’s late aesthetics: ‘Since coming here i’ve found myself concentrating on small things, then smaller. My mind is unwinding, unspooling (...) It’s a sense of closing down coming to an end.’ (17) Marrying a poetics of isolation with a focus on the ‘unwinding, unspooling’ of the facility itself, DeLillo forges a correspondence between ‘nowhere’ and the posthuman for which The Convergence serves as a waiting room. As argued in Chapter 3, the foregrounding of ‘nowhere’ in DeLillo’s late fiction opens the door for a reconsideration of Beckett’s influence on DeLillo’s work; this includes the earlier texts in which ‘nowhere’ and ‘silence’ are bound together as zones of conflict. In *Zero K*, however, this spatial configuration bears heavily on the terms by which the novel approaches the question of the posthuman. As Elizabeth Effinger argues, Beckett’s performance of the posthuman subject in *The Unnamable* relies on a relation of *topos* and the self-alienated subject, exceeding tech-based posthumanism, finding

he is not abandoning the autonomous liberal subject but is expanding its prerogatives into the realm of the posthuman.’ p. 287

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁹ Peter Boxall, *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction*, (Routledge: New York, 2002), p. 4

sympathetic voices elsewhere in the limit-experiences outlined by Blanchot and Derrida.⁶²⁰ It is in this manner, that one might trace the outline of a Beckettian bequest in *Zero K*, leaving a faint after-image of humanity at the point where 'human' become untenable. This new language is hereby prefaced in *The Unnamable*: as Beckett's voice declares 'at the same time it is over and it goes on, is there any tense for that?' (366)

Where disembodiment augurs the passage into the posthuman, Beckett's writing demonstrates a complex interweaving of corporeality, situation and ontology. As Borg's poet of 'externality,' the issueless voice of *The Unnamable* decentres the transcendental subject; at the same time, the author traces the lineaments of spatial belonging, imagining a container like a burial urn, a 'place where one finishes vanishing.' (333) In the process of cryonic preservation detailed in *Zero K*, DeLillo imagines a similar moment of self-reflection, trapped within an enclosed space:

The brain-edit. In time you will re-encounter yourself. Memory, identity, self, on another level. This is the main thrust of our nanotechnology. Are you legally dead? You will have a phantom life within the braincase. Floating thought. A passive sort of mental grasp. Ping ping ping. Like a newborn machine. (238)

Describing the digitally rendered mind after the 'brain-edit,' DeLillo echoes the 'closed spaces' of Beckett's 60s texts. In particular, the 'ping' of his posthuman subject is curiously mirrored in Beckett's 1966 short text 'Ping,' in which a 'white body' is imagined fixed in a 'white' container; here, the 'ping' of the title triggers the binary state of the figure, oscillating between here and elsewhere, between sound and silence. Beckett's machinic narrator,⁶²¹ hereby, prefigures the body, in DeLillo's novel, colonised by nanotechnology. Duplicating the closed algorithm of the machine, this digital 're-encounter' with the self provides a speculative image of a Moravecian human-computer hybrid. At the same time, this situation, gnomically described in 'Ping' as that in which 'almost never all known,' (193) significantly impacts on DeLillo's speculative rendering of the posthuman subject. This is particularly urgent in the sequence titled 'Artis Martineau,' describing the encounter of Martineau with a simulated version of herself after her body has undergone cryonic preservation. Above all, the self-negating poetics of *The Unnamable* resonate throughout this section:

I only hear what is me. I am made of words.

Does it keep going on like this.

⁶²⁰ Elizabeth Effinger, 'Beckett's Posthuman: The Ontology of "The Unnamable,"' in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 23, (2011)

⁶²¹ For an engaging analysis of this aspect of Beckett's poetics see David Porush, 'Beckett's Deconstruction of the Machine "The Lost Ones,"' in *L'Esprit Createur*, (26:4, 1986)

Where am I. What is a place. I know the feeling of somewhere but I don't know where it is.

What I understand comes from nowhere. I don't know what I understand until I say it.' (158-159)

In this terse and enigmatic section of *Zero K*, the author has internalised the logic of Beckett's novel, rendering a subject 'made of words'—ventriloquizing Beckett's unnamable narrator situated 'in words, made of words, others' words...' (386) The 'phantom life' of the disembodied posthuman subject is here anticipated as a moment of self-reference, incapable of finding 'place,' a space for 'I' in the closed-loop of machinic consciousness. In this manner, Borg finds in Beckett's receptivity to the 'impossible' a disturbing presence for the techno-scientific mastery of the human's transcendence into the posthuman.' Issuing from 'nowhere,' the attempt, by DeLillo, to articulate the voice of Artis Martineau, passing into its 'barest sheddings' (162) finds the ruination of Beckett's subject in what Jeffrey describes as 'the controlled future' (146)—a future 'all known.' As such, the attempt by DeLillo to express the 'residue' (160) of identity, reinjects a Beckettian exteriority into the fabric of the novel, an experience of the subject rendered as 'all these words, all these strangers.' (387)

Between 'sign and thing': David Foster Wallace and 'bore'-ing postmodernism

The work of David Foster Wallace is often lauded for its attempt at groping towards a counter-narrative to a postmodernism that has largely run its course. Laced with many of the formal tricks and self-conscious pyrotechnics of 60s and 70s American postmodern fiction, the storied publication⁶²² in 1996 of *Infinite Jest*, with its taste for novelistic excess rivalling that of Pynchon, Gaddis and Gass, nonetheless marks a turn towards a literary earnestness, dwelling equally within the internal minutiae of its vast landscape of characters. Published three years earlier in the *Review of Contemporary Fiction*,⁶²³ Wallace's essay 'E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction,' provides, perhaps, the most direct statement of the author's intent concerning an alternative to postmodern experimental and naive realism. In the essay, Wallace argues that postmodern tropes—'the involution, the absurdity, the sardonic fatigue, the iconoclasm and rebellion'—have been co-opted by Television culture, steered towards 'the end of spectation and consumption.' (64) These cultural affects are subsumed under the wider targets of a hegemonic 'irony and ridicule,' once strategies of dissent in literary writing, now 'agents of a great despair and stasis in U.S. culture.' (49) In this now oft-cited essay, as Paul Giles aptly puts it, Wallace constructs a kind of literary manifesto to rival that of John Barth's 'The Literature of

⁶²² The publication of *Infinite Jest* (1996) would itself produce para-texts in David Lipsky's interviews with Wallace, following the book-tour to promote the novel, *Although of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself*, (Broadway Books: New York, 2010) as well as its filmic adaptation *The End of the Tour* (2015)

⁶²³ Later republished in David Foster Wallace, *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*, (Little Brown: London, 1997), p. 21-83

Exhaustion’—‘enjoying the same kind of status’⁶²⁴ as Barth’s clarion call for literary ironists a generation earlier. Concluding the essay, Wallace envisions a ‘weird bunch of *anti-rebels*’ (author’s italicisation) concerned with what he labels ‘single-entendre principles’ of ‘plain old untrendy human troubles and emotions.’ (81) Giles situates this shift as ‘a more affective version of posthumanism, where the kind of flattened postmodern vistas familiar from the works of, say, Don DeLillo are crossed with a more traditional investment in human emotion and sentiment’; in this way, Wallace elicits a fiction both sentimental and attuned to the ‘psychological fragmentation endemic to posthumanist cultural landscapes as a *fait accompli*.’⁶²⁵ Embedded within the self-conscious and cosmetically postmodern form of his works, Wallace motions towards new forms of psychic investment, demonstrating an openness and receptivity, without shying away from forms of enclosure and the problematics of expression—or, as Wallace writes, the ‘timeless sigh in the opening of the hermetically sealed jar.’ (‘Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way’ 260)

Published posthumously on 15th April, 2011, three years after the tragic suicide of its author, Wallace’s unfinished third novel *The Pale King*, compiled from manuscript drafts, floppy disks, and pages of handwritten notes left by the author, necessarily occupies an uneasy space in the Wallace canon. On the one hand, the text marks a distillation of themes concerning anxiety, depression and late capitalist culture tackled in *Infinite Jest*; at the same time the novel, in its published form, marks a further move away from his literary forefathers, removing much of the zaniness and exuberance of Pynchon or Barthelme in favour of what Michiko Kakutani in an early review notes as an ‘ode to stasis and perseverance.’⁶²⁶ Detailing the lives of an assortment of characters working in a tax-assessment centre in Peoria, Illinois, Wallace explores the rationale for their vocation in ‘the Service,’ related in a series of fragmentary episodes, fictional interviews, flashbacks, dialogue-only exchanges. The immediate critical response, as Ralph Clare avers, centred with ‘almost perverse glee’⁶²⁷ on the novel’s representation of boredom as a master motif—intimated in the novel’s description of ‘dullness, information and irrelevant complexity.’ (85) As the fictional character David Wallace reaffirms, early in the novel, the text is ‘about negotiating boredom as one would a terrain, its levels and forests and endless wastes.’ More telling, however, is the elision of Wallace’s explicitly postmodern inheritance, erasing the deathly ‘Entertainment’ of *Infinite Jest*, towards earlier models of influence. This has been picked up by a number of critics—in particular, by novelist Tom McCarthy who writes of the novel as ‘haunted by

⁶²⁴ Paul Giles, ‘Sentimental Posthumanism: David Foster Wallace,’ in *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 53, No. 3, (Fall, 2007), p. 328

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 330

⁶²⁶ Michiko Kakutani, ‘Maximized Revenues, Minimized Existence,’ in *New York Times*, (31 March, 2011), accessed 9 August, 2017, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/01/books/the-pale-king-by-david-foster-wallace-book-review.html?mcubz=0>>

⁶²⁷ Ralph Clare, ‘The Politics of Boredom and the Boredom of Politics in David Foster Wallace’s *The Pale King*,’ in *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 44, No. 4, (Winter 2012), p. 428

modernism's (very plural) legacy.⁶²⁸ Echoes of Kafka, Eliot, Grillet, make room, along with earlier models (McCarthy, in particular highlights the 'older ghost'⁶²⁹ of Melville's 'Bartelby') for the persistence of Beckett in the novel's evocation of literary boredom. For the remainder of this section, we will consider how Wallace's engagement with the latter, represents a final accommodation of the problem of Beckett, towards the American author's own fraught dealings with the intellectual edifice of postmodernism.

Little sustained criticism has been written on the bequest of Beckett in the literary stylings of Wallace. And yet, for authors whose respective output diverges so sharply according to tendencies of expansion as well as local texture of place and periodicity, a reading of Wallace as exhibiting curiously Beckettian tendencies proves a potentially illuminating route for future study. This is echoed in a suggestive remark by Clare Hayes-Brady, whose piercing monograph *The Unspeakable Failures of David Foster Wallace: Language, Identity and Resistance* (2016), points to generative possibilities between the two authors. Analysing the motif of failure in Wallace, she states that 'we might look to the deep failures of Samuel Beckett, whose sense of the impossibility of successful emergence from subjective hell elucidates the use here of the term.'⁶³⁰ In particular, she points to Wallace's implicit repudiation of Joycean aesthetics in the short story 'The Soul is Not a Smithy,' while highlighting an earlier engagement with Beckett as a possible alternative. In 'The Empty Plenum,' a review by Wallace of David Markson's experimental novel *Wittgenstein's Mistress* (1988), the author upholds Beckett's *Molloy* as a manifestation of 'the textual urge, the emotional urgency of text, as both sign and thing.'⁶³¹ In this light, the episode between the titular protagonist of Beckett's novel and two strangers, referred to simply as A and C, may take us one step further. Beginning with the reflection that Molloy's monologue takes place 'in the head,' (4) the narrative turns to the matter of A and C, briefly encountering one another on a bare country road. 'Going slowly towards each other, unconscious of what they were doing,' (5) the two figures halt in the middle of the road, 'face to face.' The momentary impasse of the two strangers elicits a starkly empathetic reaction from Molloy; in spite of being locked in 'a head,'⁶³² the novel attempts to reconcile 'all that inner space one never sees, the brain and heart and other caverns where thought and feeling dance their sabbath.' (6) This passes suggestively into the later fiction of Wallace, for whom the object

⁶²⁸ Tom McCarthy, 'David Foster Wallace: The Last Audit,' in *New York Times*, (14 April, 2011), accessed 10 August, 2017, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/17/books/review/book-review-the-pale-king-by-david-foster-wallace.html?mcubz=0>>

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁰ Clare Hayes-Brady, *The Unspeakable Failures of David Foster Wallace: Language, Identity and Resistance*, (Bloomsbury: London, 2016), page?

⁶³¹ Quoted in Clare Hayes-Brady, *The Unspeakable Failures of David Foster Wallace: Language, Identity and Resistance*, (Bloomsbury: London, 2016), p. 8

⁶³² In particular, see the opening to *Infinite Jest* for a suggestive parallel in this regard

of literary fiction, as the author pointedly noted, is to make ‘heads throb heartlike.’⁶³³ Furthermore, if it is ‘solipsism’ that conversely ‘binds us together’ (‘Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way,’ 261) in Wallace, its thematisation in Beckett serves as a potential analogue for the problems of fictional form in which ‘there was never anyone but you, talking to you about you.’ (452) In this regard, the acknowledgment in Beckett’s prose of the text as a self-referential tissue, contributes to the text’s reflexive netting while aiming to pierce the narrative fabric. Wallace’s ‘Octet’ voices a similar notion of impasse amid what the author describes as the attempt to ‘salvage the aesthetic disaster’ (124); thus, around its meta-textual games, the statement of an ‘urgency’ manifests as an unnamable ‘something [...] though what that something is remains maddeningly hard to pin down.’ (123) As such, these textual lacunae form an important part of the mutual aesthetics of failure in Wallace and Beckett; as *The Unnamable* submits, ‘if only there were a thing somewhere, to talk about even though you couldn’t see it, or know what it was, simply *feel* it there.’ (452) (my italics)

This brings us back to Wallace’s tragically curtailed final novel, *The Pale King*—through which, as Clare argues, the author sets about exploring the roots of boredom as ‘a specific historical formation of late capitalist American life.’⁶³⁴ The nightmare vision of Wallace’s novel, of ‘rows of foreshortened faces [...] blank as the faces on coins’ (253), finds in boredom an endurance of ‘an anxiety whose lack of a proper object is what made it horrible, free-floating.’ (253-254) In this way, the text imagines the migration of the hunched figures of Kafka and Beckett as remainders of a world, depicted in *Infinite Jest*, as *entertained to death*. This is further reinforced in a memorable episode, during which the author relates a scene in double-entry columns of a room of examiners quietly turning the pages of tax returns: “‘Irrelevant” Chris Fogle turns a page. Howard Cardwell turns a page. Ken Wax turns a page. Matt Redgate turns a page...” (310) In Wallace’s wilfully dense prose, one finds an approximation of the unending permutations of Beckett’s *Watt*, an unreadable tissue buried in the heart of the novel. At the same time, alongside Wallace’s cultural critique, the author, as Clare argues, invests in an ‘aesthetics of boredom,’ through which boredom as a motif is redeemed as a means of transcending the dire circumstances of the author’s characters. Evidenced in a key scene involving tax examiner Lane Dean Jr. the word boredom takes on a strange resonance: ‘unbidden came the thought that boring also meant something that drilled in and made a hole.’ (378) This is reiterated later in the episode, in which the character receives an etymology on the word ‘boredom’ by the ghost of a rote-examiner who wanders the booths of the Peoria examination centre, left unquestioned by the other examiners. Again the connection is made between boredom and ‘industry’s rise [...] the automated turbine and drill bit and

⁶³³ Quoted in D.T. Max, *Every Love Story is a Ghost Story: A Life of David Foster Wallace*, (Penguin: London, 2012)—also see Hamm’s remark in *Endgame*, ‘there’s something dripping in my head. A heart. A heart in my head.’ (116)

⁶³⁴ Ralph Clare, ‘The Politics of Boredom and the Boredom of Politics in David Foster Wallace’s *The Pale King*,’ in *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 44, No. 4, (Winter 2012), p. 429

bore.’ (383) At once a hollowing out, the digging metaphor also marks a breaking through, a perforation—withholding the capacity, as Lane Dean discovers, to ‘bore down.’ (379)

In this manner, Beckett stands as an instructive precursor to Wallace, posing a means by which to express the inexpressible. In the well-known German Letter, penned by the author after his six-month trip to Germany, Beckett articulates a poetics grounded in a peculiar act of *boring*. Concerning language, Beckett writes, the role of the author is to ‘to bore one hole after another in it until what lurks behind it—be it something or nothing—begins to seep through.’ (‘German letter of 1937,’ 172) The uncertainty of ‘something’ behind the tissue of words echoes Wallace’s attitude towards the ‘textual urge’ exemplified in Beckett, through which the symbolic order of language reveals some trace of *thingness*. Marrying a concern for this act of boring and the residual real, beyond language, the author early in the novel, provides a sketch of ‘a totally real, true-to-life play’ (106):

The setting is very bare and minimalistic—there’s nothing to look at except this wiggler, who doesn’t move except every so often turning a page or making a note on his pad [...] at first there was a clock behind him, but I cut the clock. He sits there longer and longer until the audience gets more bored and restless, and finally they start leaving, and then the whole audience, whispering to each other how boring and terrible the play is. Then, once the audience have all left, the real action of the play can start. This was the idea [...] Except I could never decide on the action. (106)

Strikingly, in the examiner’s vision of a ‘realistic play,’ the ‘real’ is a category that is persistently deferred. Like Beckett’s *Godot*, the ‘real action’ is left to come while the ‘audience gets more bored and restless.’ In this example, as suggested by Tom McCarthy, we see the ‘entirety of Beckett’s drama’⁶³⁵ writ large as a bequest in Wallace’s novel (see also the more oblique, but striking resonance of *The Unnamable*, during the voice’s ‘compulsory show’: ‘you buy your seat and you wait [...] that’s the show, waiting for the show, to the sound of a murmur’ (437)) Marrying the objectless anguish of waiting, with the close dynamics of spectacle and audience, Beckett’s novel serves as a suggestive partner-text to Wallace’s perennially unfinished, and unfinishable novel. Moreover, by providing an instructive precedent, for Wallace, concerning a narrative mode that aptly ‘bores’ through the fabric of postmodern surface, the legacy of Beckett’s intractable ‘problem’ achieves a tentative afterlife.

⁶³⁵ Tom McCarthy, ‘David Foster Wallace: The Last Audit,’ in *New York Times*, (14 April, 2011), accessed 10 August, 2017, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/17/books/review/book-review-the-pale-king-by-david-foster-wallace.html?mcubz=0>>

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