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# **Tracing ‘a literary fantasia’**

Arnold Geulincx in the works of Samuel Beckett

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June 2010

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

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Tracing 'a literary fantasia': Arnold Geulincx in the works of Samuel Beckett

Summary

This thesis investigates Beckett's interests in the seventeenth-century philosopher Arnold Geulincx, tracing these interests first back to primary sources in Beckett's own notes and correspondence, and then forward through his *oeuvre*. This first full-length study of the occasionalist philosopher in Beckett's works reveals Geulincx as closely bound, in changeable and subtle ways, to Beckett's altering compositional methodologies and aesthetic foci. It argues that multifaceted attentiveness to the different ways in which Geulincx is alluded to or explicitly cited in different works is required if the extent of Geulincx' importance across Beckett's *oeuvre* is to be properly understood.

Chapter 1 presents a lineage of correspondence dating from 1936 to 1967 in which Beckett cites or alludes to Geulincx. It introduces Geulincx' occasionalism and Beckett's transcriptions from his works. Chapter 2 builds upon this empirical groundwork by arguing for a proposed chronology of *Murphy*'s composition. This focuses Geulincx' importance to *Murphy* as a frame of reference located predominantly in the novel's latter stages. Chapter 3 investigates Geulincx' explicit presence in manuscript drafts of *Watt*. It argues that this particular presence is refined out of the novel's final stages at the same time as it is thematised. Chapter 4 focuses in on a specific paragraph that cites Geulincx in *La Fin/The End* and *Suite*. The different versions of this paragraph stage a number of textual manoeuvres in revisions and translation that are revealing about Beckett's attitude towards Geulincx as a source. Chapter 5 traces the consequences of this aesthetic attitude through imagery derived from Geulincx in *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*, this latter as a novel that seeks to enact certain of Geulincx' ethical principles as narrative voice. The final chapter argues that there are highly refined and abstracted reappearances of Geulincx to be located in *How It Is* and in the television plays as a reinvigorated fascination with puppetry that also owes a debt to Beckett's reading Heinrich von Kleist.

While Geulincx has long been thought of as a fleeting presence in Beckett's *oeuvre*, this full-length study finds that the philosopher's altering and recurring presences bear closer scrutiny. Geulincx' presences are more deeply embedded in Beckett's work than previously noted by critics, and in this they frequently reflect Beckett's broader changing aesthetic concerns as Beckett developed what he called his 'series' of works.

Ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis

[Wherein you have no power, therein you should not will]

Arnold Geulincx (*Ethica*)

He had manipulated that sentence for years now, emending its terms, as joy for grief, to answer his occasions, even calling upon it to bear the strain of certain applications for which he feared it had not been intended, and still it held good through it all. He walked with it now in his mind, as though it had been there all the time he slept, holding that fragile place against dreams.

Samuel Beckett ('Yellow')

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I would like to thank the kind staff at the University of Sussex, Special Collections at the University of Reading, and for going beyond the call of duty both Justine Hyland at the Burns Library Boston College and Elizabeth Garver at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at Austin.

Lastly, my gratefulness to Tatiana Kontou is for many things. This thesis is dedicated to her generous affection.

## List of abbreviations

### Works by Beckett

<i>CDW</i>	<i>Complete Dramatic Works</i> . London: Faber and Faber, 1990.
<i>CL</i>	<i>The Letters of Samuel Beckett</i> . Edited by Martha Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
<i>Company</i>	<i>Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho, Stirrings Still</i> . London: Faber and Faber, 2009.
<i>CSP</i>	<i>The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989</i> . New York: Grove Press, 1995.
<i>Disjecta</i>	<i>Disjecta</i> . London: Calder, 1983.
<i>Dream</i>	<i>Dream of Fair to Middling Women</i> . New York: Arcade Publishing, 1993.
<i>TE</i>	<i>The Expelled, The Calmative, The End, with First Love</i> . London: Faber and Faber, 2009.
<i>HII</i>	<i>How It Is</i> . New York: Grove Press, 1964.
<i>Murphy</i>	<i>Murphy</i> . London: Faber and Faber, 2009.
<i>Proust</i>	<i>Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit</i> . London: Calder, 1999.
<i>TN</i>	[ <i>Three Novels</i> ] <i>Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable</i> . London: Calder, 1994.
<i>Watt</i>	<i>Watt</i> . London: John Calder, 1976.

### Works by Geulincx

<i>Ethics</i>	<i>Ethics: with Samuel Beckett's notes</i> . Edited by Han van Ruler and Anthony Uhlmann. Translated by Martin Wilson. Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2006.
<i>Metaphysics</i>	<i>Metaphysics</i> . Translated by Martin Wilson. Wisbech:

Christoffel Press, 1999.

*Opera* *Arnoldi Geulincx Opera Philosophica*, volumes I-III. Edited by Jan Pieter Nicolaas Land. Hagae Comitum: Apud Nijhoff, 1891-1893.

### **Library archives**

HRHRC	Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.
TCD	Trinity College Dublin Library, Department of Manuscripts.
UoR	Beckett International Foundation Archives, University of Reading Library.

### **Notes to the text**

Manuscript citation is by recto/verso.

Translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

Quotations from pp. 311-353 of *Ethics* are from Beckett's transcriptions from *Ethics*.

## A Chronology of Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx

### 1930-1932

Beckett produces the 'Philosophy Notes', a 267-folio summary history of Western philosophy itself cribbed from summarising sources. Primarily these are John Burnet's *Greek Philosophy, Part 1: Thales to Plato*<sup>1</sup>, Archibald Alexander's *A Short History of Philosophy*<sup>2</sup> and Wilhelm Windelband's *A History of Philosophy*.<sup>3</sup> According to Deidre Bair, Beckett produced these notes 'Because he had not taken a philosophy course at Trinity College, which he felt was a serious defect in his education'<sup>4</sup>. On the 189<sup>th</sup> and 190<sup>th</sup> folios, in a section titled 'Philosophy of Renaissance'<sup>5</sup>, sub-headed 'Natural Science Period'<sup>6</sup>, Beckett transcribed from Windelband three sides of notes about Geulincx and his place in the history of philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

In the 'Whoroscope' notebook of the 1930s Beckett noted the following: '21.

Murphy: I am not of the big world, I am of the little world: ubi nihil valo, ibi nihil velo (I quote from memory) & inversely.'<sup>8</sup>

### 1936

9 January	Letter from Beckett to Thomas MacGreevy. Beckett describes his unforeseen return to TCD library to research Geulincx. The National Library does not have an edition. <sup>9</sup>
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<sup>1</sup> Burnet 1914.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander 1922.

<sup>3</sup> Windelband 1901.

<sup>4</sup> Bair 1978, p. 91.

<sup>5</sup> TCD MS 10967/172r.

<sup>6</sup> TCD MS 10967/179r.

<sup>7</sup> The 'Philosophy Notes' are undated. See Engelberts, Frost & Maxwell (eds.) 2006 pp. 67-89 for arguments dating the bulk of the work to 1932 and for detailed description of the notes themselves.

<sup>8</sup> 'Whoroscope' notebook, UoR MS 3000.

<sup>9</sup> See Beckett to MacGreevy, 9 January 1936. Cited by Engelberts, Frost and Maxwell (eds.) 2006, p. 144.

- 9 January Letter from Beckett to George Reavey. In contrast to Brian Coffey's proposal of 'serious' philosophical monographs Beckett writes that 'my Geulincx could only be a literary fantasia'<sup>10</sup>.
- 16 January Letter from Beckett to MacGreevy. Beckett tells MacGreevy he 'suddenly' sees *Murphy*, the novel he was working on at the time, as a 'break down'<sup>11</sup> between Geulincx's<sup>12</sup> ethical maxim *ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis* [wherein you have no power, therein you should not will] and Malraux's 'Il est difficile à celui qui vit hors du monde de ne pas rechercher les siens'<sup>13</sup> ['it is difficult for one who lives isolated from the everyday world not to seek others like himself'<sup>14</sup>]. This latter would become the epigraph for Chapter 9 in *Murphy*.
- 29 January Letter from Beckett to MacGreevy. Beckett tells MacGreevy that Coffey had 'promised me Geulincx & Eluard informations'<sup>15</sup>, which Coffey had not supplied.
- 6 February Letter from Beckett to MacGreevy. Beckett reveals of *Murphy*'s progress that 'There only remain three chapters of mechanical writing'<sup>16</sup>. In Chapter 9 of *Murphy* Beckett will quote Geulincx' maxim, describing it as 'the beautiful Belgo-Latin of Arnold Geulincx'<sup>17</sup>. He will also make further allusions to Geulincx in the later chapters of the novel.
- 5 March Letter from Beckett to MacGreevy in which Beckett expresses his enthusiasm for the Geulincx research. He compares

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<sup>10</sup> Beckett to Reavey, 9 January 1936. *CL*, 2009, p. 295.

<sup>11</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 16 January 1936. *CL*, 2009, p. 299.

<sup>12</sup> I derive the unusual convention of referring to Geulincx' name without an 's' after the possessive apostrophe from *Ethics*, where the editors refer to Geulincx in this way throughout.

<sup>13</sup> *Murphy*, p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> Malraux 2009, p. 243. See Malraux 1968, p. 232 for the French original.

<sup>15</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 29 January 1936. *CL*, p. 305.

<sup>16</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 6 February 1936. *CL*, p. 312

<sup>17</sup> *Murphy*, p. 101.

Geulincx' philosophy variously to Berkeley, Balzac, Rimbaud, Greek mythology and the New Testament via contrasting interpretations of 'sight' and 'vision'. Beckett describes Geulincx' 'vision' as 'the only excuse for remaining alive.'<sup>18</sup>

- 25 March Letter from Beckett to MacGreevy in which Beckett says he is bored in Dublin, his reading Geulincx at TCD one of only two things getting him out of the house.<sup>19</sup>
- 25 March Letter from Beckett to Arland Ussher. Beckett recommends Geulincx to Ussher 'most heartily'<sup>20</sup>, and describes his favoured part of *Ethica* as the long section (Treatise I, Chapter II, section II, § 1-3) on humility.
- 9 April Letter from Beckett to MacGreevy. Beckett has stopped reading Geulincx. He jokes about his own inability and incapacity, specifically his being unable to read any more of Geulincx' ethical lessons about abstinence 'even in Lent'<sup>21</sup>.
- 9 June Beckett finishes a first draft of *Murphy*.<sup>22</sup>

## **1938**

Beckett writes 'Les Deux Besoins', which uses Geulincx' term 'autology'.

## **1941-45**

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<sup>18</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 5 March 1936. *CL*, pp. 318-319.

<sup>19</sup> See Beckett to MacGreevy, 25 March 1936. *CL*, 2009, pp. 323-324.

<sup>20</sup> Beckett to Ussher, 25 March 1936. *CL*, 2009, p. 329.

<sup>21</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 9 April 1936. Cited by Engelberts, Frost and Maxwell (eds.) 2006, p. 145.

<sup>22</sup> See Pilling 2006a, p. 58.

Beckett works on *Watt*, during which time specific allusions and broader themes traceable to Geulincx are written first into, before being predominantly written out of, drafts of the novel in notebooks and typescript.

## 1946

13 March                      The date in Beckett's 'Suite' notebook under which Beckett composes a passage, first in English then in French, in which the narrator recalls being given Geulincx' *Ethics* by a now dead tutor. The English passage is Beckett's final prose written first in English for many years. *Suite* was later altered and published as *La Fin/The End*.

5 July                         Beckett begins *Mercier et Camier*, which will be completed on 15 October. Towards the end of the novel a much-changed version of *Watt* appears, 'given a new lease of life'<sup>23</sup>. The newly prophetic Watt announces his author's future aesthetic horizons with a drunken outburst in which he proclaims the possibility of 'one' to be born from the ashes of previous protagonists, who in the terms of Geulincx' ethical maxim 'having nothing will wish for nothing, except to be left the nothing he hath.'<sup>24</sup>

## 1947

2 May                         Beckett begins *Molloy*, which will be completed by 1 November. In the novel Molloy says he 'loved the image'<sup>25</sup> from Geulincx' *Ethica* of a man aboard a ship attempting to travel in the opposite direction to that in which the ship is going.

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<sup>23</sup> Pilling 2006a, p. 99.

<sup>24</sup> Beckett 1974, p.114.

<sup>25</sup> *TN*, p. 51.

27 November Beckett begins *Malone meurt*, which will be completed by 30 May 1948, towards the end of which he alludes to, in a partial quotation, Geulincx' maxim. It is a fragment that becomes transformed again in the novel's later translation into *Malone Dies*.

## 1948

29 March Begins *L'Innomable*, a first draft of which will be completed by 21 January 1950, then revised later that year. In the novel Beckett returns to the imagery of Geulincx' ship a number of times. Chapter 5 discusses how this novel's narrating voice presents a thinking in ignorance which manifests an epistemology congruent with Geulincx' ethical epistemology of impotence.

## 1949

9 March Letter from Beckett to Georges Duthuit. Beckett uses the word 'autology', transcribed from Geulincx' *Metaphysica Vera*, to describe the artistic process.<sup>26</sup>

Undated Letter from Beckett to Duthuit. In this undated letter (but which is earlier than 26 May 1949<sup>27</sup>) Beckett tells Duthuit that Geulincx' maxim says everything ('Tout est dit'). The maxim's correctness is taken for granted, according to Beckett, and assessing its importance solely a matter of agreeing on the domain ('s'entendre sur ce domaine'<sup>28</sup>) implied by Geulincx' conception of worthlessness and incapacity.

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<sup>26</sup> Beckett to Duthuit, 9 March 1949. Cited by Gontarski and Uhlmann (eds.) 2006, p. 19. Beckett also used the term 'autology' in 'Les Deux Besoins' (1938).

<sup>27</sup> Pilling in private correspondence, April 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Beckett to Duthuit. Undated. Duthuit Archives, Paris.



**1954**

17 February Letter from Beckett to Erich Franzen, the German translator of *Molloy*, in which Beckett discusses how the image of the traveller on a ship as ‘a passage in the Ethics of Geulincx’<sup>29</sup> also incorporates allusions to Dante.

**1956**

7 November Letter from Beckett to Mary Hutchinson in which Beckett, who himself ‘cannot bear’ the prospect of looking back at his previous work, proposes Geulincx and Democritus as in some ‘queer’ way his work’s ‘foci’<sup>30</sup>.

28 November Letter from Beckett to Hutchinson. In a reply to questions raised by Hutchinson about Geulincx Beckett describes his search twenty years earlier for an edition of the philosopher’s works. Beckett writes that he found in Geulincx, in a phrase that complicates the description in *Murphy* of Geulincx’ ‘beautiful’ language, some ‘Frightful kitchen Latin but fascinating guignol world’<sup>31</sup>.

**1958**

17 December Beckett began composing *Comment C’est*, which was not completed until late 1960, before Beckett then translated it into *How It Is* over the following three years. The novel makes no mention of Geulincx but does name the more famous

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<sup>29</sup> Beckett to Franzen, 17 February 1954. Cited by Uhlmann 1999, p. 54.

<sup>30</sup> Beckett to Hutchinson, 7 November 1956. Mary Hutchinson Papers, Series II, Subseries B, box 2, folder 4, HRHRC.

<sup>31</sup> Beckett to Hutchinson, 28 November 1956. Mary Hutchinson Papers, Series II, Subseries B, box 2, folder 4, HRHRC.

occasionalist Nicolas Malebranche, and retains surprising residues of earlier Geulincxian imagery and phrases.

## 1962

Undated

Lawrence Harvey (publishing in 1970) dates an interview in which Beckett talked about Geulincx as taking place in this year. According to Harvey, Beckett repeated the substance of letters sent to Hutchinson eight years earlier and to Sighle Kennedy five years later to the effect that were he a critic 'he would start out with'<sup>32</sup> Geulincx and Democritus.

## 1967

14 June

Letter from Beckett to Sighle Kennedy in reply to Kennedy's promptings about Proust, Joyce, and more esoteric notions of Greenwich Mean Time as pertaining to *Murphy*. Beckett quotes Geulincx' maxim along with Democritus' as possible 'points of departure' for those in the 'unenviable position' of studying his work.<sup>33</sup>

## 1969

Beckett appears to have first encountered Heinrich von Kleist's influential essay on the marionette theatre in late 1969. Chapter 6 argues that this reinvigorates Beckett's earlier ideas of Geulincx, expressed in 1956, as a 'fascinating guignol world' of puppetry, contributing toward certain of the late plays for television including *Ghost Trio* (1975) and *Nacht und Träume* (1982), as well as *Still*.

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<sup>32</sup> Harvey 1970, p. 267.

<sup>33</sup> Beckett to Kennedy, 14 June 1967. Cited by Kennedy 1971, p. 300 (reprinted in *Disjecta*, p. 113).

**1972**

17-26 June                Beckett begins *Still* (completed the following month), described by Ackerley and Gontarski as ‘a return to the concerns of Geulincx and the Occasionalists’<sup>34</sup>.

**Undated**

Marginalia added by Beckett to his copy of Berkeley’s *A New Theory of Vision, and Other Writings*. This marginalia reads ‘Against Geulincx?’. The edition is in the library of Beckett’s Paris flat, where it has been since Beckett’s death.

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<sup>34</sup> Ackerley and Gontarski (eds.) 2006, p. 543.

## Chapter 1 – Beckett and Geulincx

### 1.1 Introduction

With a few chapters left to write of *Murphy* in January 1936 Beckett ventured within what he called ‘the abhorred gates’<sup>1</sup> of TCD library for the first time since resigning from a teaching post at the university four years earlier. Beckett returned repeatedly to the library over the following three months to transcribe extensive notes from three works by the little known post-Cartesian philosopher of ‘occasionalism’ Arnold Geulincx (1624-1669). It was not a small undertaking, and it was also not the first time Beckett had encountered Geulincx. Earlier in the 1930s Beckett had taken notes on the obscure thinker as part of the 267 pages of ‘Philosophy Notes’, where Beckett wrote briefly on occasionalism in a lineage derived from one of his compendium source books for philosophical history, Wilhelm Windelband’s *A History of Philosophy*.<sup>2</sup>

It is thanks to these two research projects and to Beckett’s later naming Geulincx in personal correspondence and in *Murphy* and *Molloy*, that this philosopher has long been recognised by scholars as a name of some importance to Beckett. Indeed, from the very first edited collection of essays on Beckett (1959<sup>3</sup>) and the first single-authored monograph (1961<sup>4</sup>), to the publication in 2006 of the first ever English translation of Geulincx’ *Ethica* as *Ethics* (in an edition that includes full

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<sup>1</sup> Beckett to Thomas MacGreevy, 9 January 1936. Cited by Engelberts, Frost and Maxwell (eds.) 2006, p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> See Windelband 1901.

<sup>3</sup> See Mintz 1959. Samuel Mintz’s article laid much of the groundwork for future study of Beckett’s relationship with Geulincx in an argument regarding Murphy’s adopted farce of astrology. Murphy is, according to Mintz, ‘committed to a method of determination outside the scope of theism’ (Mintz 1959, p. 160). Murphy is thereby, as David Hesla called him in 1971 in a description C.J. Ackerley cited in 2004, ‘an Occasionalist without at the same time being a deist’ (Ackerley 2004, p. 122). Mintz advocates a reading of Geulincx as stoically introspective, writing ‘Geulincx exhorted his readers to renounce the world and to cultivate the inner life, the only place where the self is effectual’ (Mintz 1959, p. 159). This is not an entirely accurate representation of Geulincx, as will be shown below, yet such a reading of Geulincx in relation to Beckett has proved influential.

<sup>4</sup> See Kenner 1961, pp. 83-96. Hugh Kenner wrote of Geulincx that what ‘qualifies him for repeated mention in the Beckett canon, is not simply the ceremonious resignation of his prose, but the curious doctrine it serves. It is the doctrine of a “bodytight” mental world’ (Kenner 1961, p. 83). Kenner points to the ‘strange detachment’ (Kenner 1961, p. 84) Beckett’s protagonists live with between their bodies and their minds, all of them also well aware that they are somehow simultaneously bound together. Kenner goes on to argue that themes of congruence and disconnection more broadly in Beckett’s work owe a debt to Geulincx. Kenner’s argument will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 3.

translations of Beckett's 1936 transcriptions from that work), studies devoting sections to the importance of Geulincx to Beckett are numerous.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, and somewhat surprisingly, no full-length study has attempted to explore the relationship. Is there any need for one now? Critics have dutifully followed the indication Beckett gave to Sighle Kennedy in 1967, where Beckett wrote that were he in 'the unenviable position of having to study my work my points of departure would be the "Naught is more real..." [from Democritus] and the "Ubi nihil vales..." [from Geulincx] both already in *Murphy* and neither very rational'<sup>6</sup>. Yet there are a number of limitations to this prior scholarship. Firstly, the extent to which Beckett cites or alludes to Geulincx in correspondence has never been fully recognised. Consequently the implications for Beckett's texts of his long-term thinking about Geulincx have rarely been proposed, and even less explored with any precision. Beckett names Geulincx or mentions concepts derived from the thinker (e.g. 'autology') in some sixteen separate instances of correspondence. This correspondence spans a thirty-year period and itself powerfully counters a hypothesis that Geulincx for Beckett was merely a throwaway reference, one easily exhausted of limited potential then forgotten.

A further constraint on prior (Anglophone) scholarship has been one of translation. Until 2006 no English translation from the original 'Beautiful Belgo-Latin'<sup>7</sup> as it is recalled in *Murphy* of Geulincx' masterpiece *Ethica* (from which the majority of Beckett's transcriptions derive) had ever existed. Even the Latin was out of print for 185 years before resurrection in Jan Pieter Nicolaas Land's complete collected edition of 1891-1893, the three-volume *Arnoldi Geulincx Anverpiensis Opera Philosophica* that Beckett consulted in TCD.<sup>8</sup> Land's edition is itself quite rare, Beckett having tried and failed to locate it at the National Library of Ireland prior to finding it at TCD. While occasional German and Dutch editions survive in some European libraries, these have failed to pique the curiosity of Beckett scholars writing in those languages.

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<sup>5</sup> See Mintz 1959; Kenner 1961, pp. 83-96; Hesla 1971, pp. 30-41; Pilling 1979, pp. 114-116; Dobrez 1986, pp. 12-74; Wood 1993; Ackerley 2004; Weller 2005, pp. 74-93; Uhlmann 2004, 2006a and 2006b, pp. 65-113; Casanova 2006, pp. 59-74; Feldman 2006 and 2009a.

<sup>6</sup> Beckett to Kennedy, 14 June 1967. Cited by Kennedy 1971, p. 300. Reprinted in *Disjecta*, p. 113.

<sup>7</sup> *Murphy*, p. 101.

<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the second work from which Beckett took transcriptions (*Metaphysica Vera*) was translated into English in 1999 as *Metaphysics*.

Thirdly, Beckett's transcriptions from Geulincx have also only recently been made available at TCD to scholarly consultation. Prior to this any close textual comparative work on the subject was severely hampered. Consequently it is only since 2006 that a full-length study requiring recourse to an authoritative translation could be properly founded. Geulincx, then, occupies simultaneously both a curiously new and old area of Beckett scholarship, and despite his long established and recurring presence in this scholarship the precise nature of his presence is in fact far from fixed. Indeed, scholars are not even agreed on how to pronounce Geulincx' name.<sup>9</sup>

Scholarship that addresses itself to Geulincx in the context of specific works by Beckett will be discussed in relevant chapters below. Yet it is worth highlighting here certain of the broader claims made about Geulincx' impact on Beckett. Deirdre Bair, for example, asserted that 'Geulincx's philosophy had the most lasting effect on Beckett of anything he had read to date. So impressive was it that he made it the key of his novel *Murphy*, written in 1935'<sup>10</sup>. More recently C.J. Ackerley and S.E. Gontarski claimed that Geulincx' 'ethical axiom became for SB the foundation of doubt and humility, the *bêtise* that underpins his life's work'<sup>11</sup>. Ackerley has also asserted that, somehow singularly luminous among the wide-ranging contexts of Beckett's literary and philosophical backgrounds 'Beckett's gospel is Geulincx's *Ethica*'<sup>12</sup>. Pascale Casanova similarly argues that 'Geulincx became one of Beckett's major intellectual references'<sup>13</sup>. Over-reliant on Bair's biography Casanova does not date Beckett's research on Geulincx to 1936, so is able to read Geulincx' direct influence on works earlier than *Murphy*:

Beckett would seek to illustrate Geulincx's system of mutual externality very precisely, by conveying it in literary form with the introduction of the indolent, nonchalant character from Dante's *Purgatorio*, Belacqua.

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<sup>9</sup> They are, or course, not to be entirely blamed for this. As is detailed below written occurrences of his name vary greatly even within single editions. *The Dictionary of Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Dutch Philosophers* notes spellings of 'Arnold (or Arnout) Geulincx: Geulinx, Geulings, Geulincs, Geulingius, Geulingh' (van Bunge, Krop, Leeuwenburgh, van Ruler, Schuurman, Wielema (eds.) 2003, p. 322). H.J. de Vleeschauwer also offers 'an older form of the name, Aernout' (de Vleeschauwer 1957, p. 13). Land manages to clarify the pronunciation in a paper outlining his fourteen years of research that led to the collected edition of 1891-1893, published just prior to that edition, where he helpfully points out 'the *eu* is pronounced as *oe*' (Land 1891, p. 224).

<sup>10</sup> Bair 1978, p. 92. Bair, however, offers little textual evidence for this grand claim and underestimates how long *Murphy*'s composition took.

<sup>11</sup> Ackerley and Gontarski (eds.) 2006, p. 224.

<sup>12</sup> Ackerley 2004, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Casanova 2006, p. 59.

Casanova goes on to assert the almost unlimited scope of Geulincx' impact on Beckett: 'Beckett discovered in Geulincx's system a formulation of his own intellectual, national, literary, social and psychological confinement and a tool for understanding it'<sup>14</sup>.

In stark contrast to these grand claims, arguments that Geulincx' place within Beckett's frame of reference and the *oeuvre* is minor and fleeting are just as prevalent. J.D. O'Hara insisted in 1981, for example, that 'Geulincx appears in his [Beckett's] works in a single repeated sentence'<sup>15</sup>. P.J. Murphy has argued that if there was a great influence of Beckett's reading upon *Murphy* it rather derived from 'Beckett's very close reading of Spinoza, which underlies all the other more superficial philosophical references in the novel (Geulincx, Descartes and Democritus included)'<sup>16</sup>.

*Tracing 'a literary fantasia'* follows a route through Beckett's *oeuvre* that finds a mutable, protean Geulincx whose final 'importance' lies variously between the extremities of the above claims. It argues that Geulincx' 'importance' can most clearly and persuasively be identified in discrete moments of text. Yet this is not to imply that such moments are concomitantly insignificant. 'Moments' in Beckett's works, those of fragmentary recollection, as a slippage of one realm of existence into another, as a pause in the seemingly perpetual stream of unlovable experience in the world, even as an amalgam of all three, are primary. They are frequently of such primacy that to dismiss their import is to fail to take note of an important minor key in Beckett's work that finds a realm of tangible experience opposable, albeit at times with futility, to a void of forgetting and, paradoxically, to impermanence. For example, when Krapp recalls via his self-made recordings old 'moments' these are fragmentary little pieces of time as 'hard' and distinct from the surrounding flux (and as ironically 'unforgettable') as the 'small, old, hard, solid rubber ball' that Krapp holds back a moment from a dog: 'I sat on for a few moments with the ball in my hand and the dog pawing and yelping at me. [*Pause.*] Moments. Her moments, my moments. [*Pause.*] The dog's moments'. Naïvely Krapp records of the ball 'I shall feel it, in my hand,

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<sup>14</sup> Casanova 2006, p. 61.

<sup>15</sup> O'Hara 1981, p. 249.

<sup>16</sup> Murphy 1994, p. 229.

until my dying day'<sup>17</sup>. This is not to claim that when Geulincx comes to the fore of a text he thereby consistently manifests a moment of pause or opposition to impermanence, even though this might sometimes be the case. It is merely to assert the less controversial primacy in Beckett's *oeuvre* of the fragmentary, the momentary, and the half-forgotten. As we will see, it is often in a context of these important foci that Beckett brings Geulincx to bear.

In 1936 Beckett tantalisingly referred to 'my Geulincx' as 'a literary fantasia'<sup>18</sup>. By doing so he indicated the presence of a version of Geulincx unfixed and fundamentally open to change. I argue that for Beckett Geulincx was not simply a fixed paradigm of interiority, despite the philosopher's emphasis on an inspection of the self. Nor was he a monomaniacal rationalist, whose spring could be wound while Beckett and reader laugh ironically at the follies of 'philosophy' or 'language'. Primarily, for Beckett, Geulincx' ethics as derived from his metaphysics have implications for Beckett's altering conceptions of freedom, incapacity and impossibility. These are implications that themselves alter in alignment with Beckett's own altering aesthetic focus. Primarily, I argue that multifaceted attentiveness to the different ways in which Geulincx is alluded to or explicitly cited in different works is required if the extent of Geulincx' importance across Beckett's *oeuvre* is to be properly understood.

To these ends this study proceeds with an empirical impetus, staying close to textual evidence in final published or staged form as well as in correspondence, manuscript and typescript. In these terms a 'Geulingian reading' of a Beckett text is one that seeks first to ground itself in specific and verifiable appearances of Geulincx before proceeding to questions about what these appearances might do in/to a text. Such empirical procedures, however, also attempt to not rush too fast to dismiss claims, such as those of Casanova, which might lack a precisely argued empirical basis. As Garin Dowd has pointed out in an argument against the imposition of strict empiricist boundaries on readings of Beckett's texts, Beckett's 1936 transcriptions from Geulincx are fundamentally 'of uncertain status'<sup>19</sup>. We cannot say, that is, *why* Beckett produced them. There are a number of possibilities, many of which are

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<sup>17</sup> CDW, p. 220.

<sup>18</sup> Beckett to George Reavey, 9 January 1936. CL, p. 295.

<sup>19</sup> Dowd 2008, p. 388.



persuasive. Yet despite attempts below to settle this issue as far as it can be settled, it remains stubbornly elusive. This elusiveness is important, and Dowd argues that it is impossible to trace the entirety of the literary act to a concomitant verifiable location in a world of physicality, of philosophical transcriptions, notebooks, correspondence and draft material. This issue also points towards the important assertion that if ‘influence’ is at stake in Beckett’s relationship to Geulincx, this influence is not categorical, and nor does it necessarily imply a radical break with the past.

Somehow then this important elusiveness must be reconciled with an empirical approach. In order to better conceptualise the scope of what ‘influence’ in Beckett in the context of Geulincx might imply, and how Beckett’s uses of Geulincx might operate in a manner not always easily visible, not necessarily wholly inscribed in a particular allusion or citation or neatly ascribable to a concomitant textual moment in Geulincx, the issues benefit from a concrete example.

## **1.2 ‘An unscratchable itch’<sup>20</sup>**

In Chapter 9 of *Murphy* – the chapter that bears Malraux’s epigraph<sup>21</sup> on Murphy’s narcissism, or fatalistic search for what he will never find (his own kind) – another character attempts to seek what is other than himself, namely Murphy. Ticklepenny enquires into the inner workings of the protagonist, glimpsed during Murphy’s owl-eyed repose of bondage in the chair. Murphy holds his tongue on the issue, throwing pedantic questions back at his inquisitor, unwilling to countenance ‘the absurdity of saddling such a person with the rationalist prurit’<sup>22</sup>. Beckett’s strikingly varied uses of this Latin word *prurit*, or itch – often, as stated in *Company*, one that cannot be properly scratched – illustrate in microcosm certain difficulties for any assertion of direct ‘influence’ by a single author, literary or philosophical, upon Beckett’s work and thought.

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<sup>20</sup> *Company*, p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Il est difficile à celui qui vit hors du monde de ne pas rechercher les siens’ (*Murphy*, p. 90).

<sup>22</sup> *Murphy*, p. 109.

The word *prurit* appeared in Beckett's 'Dream' notebook (c. 1930-32) in an entry taken from Pierre Garnier's 1890s book on masturbation,<sup>23</sup> prior to its incorporation in Beckett's first novel where Belacqua will drive his 'dear little sweet little Fünkelein'<sup>24</sup> to 'a paroxysm of pruritus'<sup>25</sup>. Beckett later used the word as a collective noun when he outlined plans for a future novel following *Murphy*'s failure to find a publisher. Proposing his next work should be in chapters of a suitable length for publication on sheets of toilet paper he described the project: 'All edges disinfected. 1000 wipes of good clean fun. Also in Braille for anal pruritics'<sup>26</sup>. A version of the word as a joke name for a chronic disease appears a few years later in a 1937 letter to MacGreevy, where 'the damn old pruritis is just about as bad as ever'<sup>27</sup>, Beckett referring to an intractable physical symptom of his own located somewhere 'between wind and water'<sup>28</sup>. Later still, in *Watt*, Mr Nackybal suffers from this same symptom, 'learnedly' scratching through his kilt 'a diffuse ano-scrotal prurit [...] of sixty-four years standing'<sup>29</sup>.

*Prurit*, *pruritis*, *pruritus* and *pruritics*, then, came to be used by Beckett between 1932 and 1945 in a number of divergent ways: as fragmented allusion, an obscure and (synecdochically) obscene word culled in the cause of what Beckett called the autodidactic 'demon of notesnatching'<sup>30</sup> that loomed over the 1930s; as derived autobiographically from his own lived experience of ill or irritable health, revealed in correspondence; and in *Murphy*, and differently in *Watt*, as parts of the project of undermining and satirising the rationality that saddles so many of Beckett's fictional creatures.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Beckett 1999, p. 62. Entry 443 (from *Onanisme seul et à deux sous toutes ses formes et leurs conséquences*), the word appears alongside 'prurience' and 'prurigo'.

<sup>24</sup> *Dream*, p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> *Dream*, p. 108. The word also appears on page 19, where Belacqua 'forgot his manners' and cries out for 'some ease of the old pruritus and leave me in peace to my own penny death and my own penny rapture'.

<sup>26</sup> Beckett to Mary Manning Howe, 14 November 1936. *CL*, p. 383.

<sup>27</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 16 February 1937. *CL*, p. 447.

<sup>28</sup> Beckett to Howe, 18 January 1937. *CL*, p. 422.

<sup>29</sup> *Watt*, p. 181.

<sup>30</sup> Beckett 1999, p. xiii.

<sup>31</sup> Beckett described the protagonist of *Suite et Fin* to de Beauvoir in an angry letter regarding that piece's semi-publication in a similar way, as "one of my creatures" (Knowlson 1996, p. 360). This first letter, however, was not sent. Beckett toned down his anger in the version that he did send, and which is quoted by Overbeck & Fehsenfeld. In the second version Beckett writes "Mais il m'est décidément impossible de me dérober au devoir que je me sens vis-à-vis d'une creature" (Overbeck & Fehsenfeld 2006, p. 358).

Analogies for these varying uses of and derivations from a single word can be found in Beckett's multi-faceted relationship with Geulincx. For example, Beckett encouraged Arland Ussher 'most heartily' to read Geulincx' section on humility, Beckett's evident enthusiasm for Geulincx' ethical project seemingly stemming from the possibility of taking it at face-value, as a valuable and personal lesson growing out of a detailed theorisation of attitude. Beckett signs off the communiqué hinting obliquely that this obscure Latin text might function just as appropriately as any other contemporary convention of leave-taking. Mixing Geulincx with another favourite Christian mystic Thomas à Kempis he writes '*Humiliter, Simpliciter, Fideliter* [humbly, simply, truly]'<sup>32</sup> as his valedictory gesture of friendship in a reproduction of his own previous use of the phrase in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*.<sup>33</sup> Also, the time-consuming and dedicated delving into TCD library in 1936 to do the Geulincx research, claiming he did not rationally know why, though impelled by some force of conviction that 'my instinct is right and the work worth doing'<sup>34</sup>, traces a development of earlier 'notesnatching' and the more in-depth 'Philosophy Notes' as part of a lineage of continuing but changing importance to Beckett of such autodidacticism. Following this research, as is argued in Chapter 2, Geulincx comes to function in parts of *Murphy* comically, as one of a number of prisms through which we can see Murphy's flawed self-regard more clearly than he can. Hence, in this dramatic sense, Beckett's use of Geulincx can be ironic.

However, there is an important appearance of the word *prurit* so far unmentioned that focuses these analogies. The word appears in Geulincx' *Ethica* and Beckett's notes from it. Beckett writes 'Et non spectat ad minimam impietatem ille humani ingenii pruritus ad conciliandum ea quae captum excedunt nostrum...' <sup>35</sup> The passage is copied identically from the annotations to Treatise 1, Chapter 1, § 2, Reason, annotation 8. It is translated in the 2006 publication of *Ethics* as 'This craving of human ingenuity to reconcile things that exceed its understanding involves no small

<sup>32</sup> Beckett to Ussher, 25 March 1936. *CL*, p. 329.

<sup>33</sup> Where the Alba 'will do this thing, she will, she will be the belle, gladly, gravely and carefully, humiliter, simpliciter, fideliter, and not merely because she might just as well' (*Dream*, pp. 208-209).

<sup>34</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 5 March 1936. *CL*, p. 319.

<sup>35</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/9v and TCD MS 10971/6/19. Cf. *Opera* vol. 3, 167. It is perhaps worth noting that despite Ackerley's accuracy in noting that *prurit* 'appears in Geulincx' *Ethica*, where Pythagoras's doctrine of metempsychosis is attributed to vulgar opinion' (Ackerley 2004, 165), Beckett does not transcribe it from that section, only noting a single sentence from that annotation which is prior to the appearance of '*pruritus*'.

measure of impiety...'<sup>36</sup> This appearance of the word '*pruritus*' in Beckett's notes marks, I argue, a shift of emphasis in an instance of Beckett's use of what John Pilling has called, following Beckett's beloved Dr Johnson, 'hard words'<sup>37</sup>. As seen above, Beckett had already used the hard word *prurit* prior to its appearance in his notes from Geulincx. Following his rediscovery of it in *Ethica*, however, his use of it in prose subtly alters. In *Murphy*, and also in *Watt* (in the context of Mr Nackybal's mathematical intuition via Louit's interrogation by academic committee), the word becomes closely allied with rationality and simultaneously with something ineffable, beyond or against this rationality that supervenes upon it. It no longer more baldly denotes a general sense of frustration or panic such as overcomes the Smeraldina.

This rediscovery of *prurit* in 1936 serves as a good model of certain implications in Beckett's appropriations of Geulincx more generally. That is, while Beckett had previously utilised a number of themes that are foregrounded by Geulincx, his treatment of these (such as self-inspection, freedom, incapacity and impossibility) subtly shifts after this encounter. Yet just as with *pruritus* this is not a matter of a fundamental break with the past, implying the inclusion of something that was categorically absent from earlier texts.

In a sense then we might want to argue that Casanova could well be right to trace the Geulingian aspects of Beckett's *oeuvre* back earlier than *Murphy*, to a broader context than that which would solely take account of Beckett's interests in Geulincx as starting concurrent with the research in 1936. As Beckett himself warned in *Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce*, 'The danger is in the neatness of identifications'<sup>38</sup>. However, starting from an empirical, chronological basis at least allows the possibility of an informed critical choice about the nature of such comparative manoeuvres. Tracing the change in Beckett's fictional uses of *pruritus* to his Geulincx transcriptions reveals a moment of change, a moment that should be acknowledged while also recognising its indebtedness to what came before. On a broader scale, tracing the more explicit appearances of Geulincx through Beckett's *oeuvre* reveals

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<sup>36</sup> *Ethics*, p. 317. Martin Wilson in the sentence that follows this one also translates the Latin '*prurigne*' (TCD MS 10971/6/9v and *Opera* vol. 3 167) as 'craving'.

<sup>37</sup> Pilling uses the term to categorise certain of the 'helps' that knowledge of Latin gave Beckett. For instance, as 'interesting individual instances of learned vocabulary, or what Dr. Johnson in his *Idler* paper on them (no. 70) called 'hard words'' (Pilling 1995, p. 7).

<sup>38</sup> *Disjecta*, p. 19.

Geulincx situated at a number of crucial ‘moments’ of change in the *oeuvre*. Geulincx neither wholly determines Beckett’s altering conceptions of self-inspection, freedom, incapacity and impossibility as they manifest variously through his *oeuvre*, yet nor is he entirely incidental to them. He is bound into them in such ways that a comparative, empirically grounded chronological tracing from one work to the next provides the clearest way of distinguishing his often ephemeral or faded outlines, of tracing his outlined figure more precisely against his surrounding ground.

### **1.3 The Correspondence**

As noted above, Beckett wrote to critics and colleagues on the subject of Geulincx at regular (if infrequent) intervals over a thirty-year period. In these letters Beckett either gave the name of the philosopher, quoted his axiom from *Ethica*, alluded to principles or cited terminology central to Geulincx’ metaphysics and ethics. The correspondence covered by this lengthy period, which began during the writing of *Murphy* and includes the middle period works, the turns to French and to drama, and a return to prose with *Comment c’est/How It Is*, has never previously been fully compiled and some of it remains unpublished. It forms, along with the allusions to and citations of Geulincx appearing throughout Beckett’s prose and drama, a fundamental basis for any investigation into Geulincx’ various impacts upon Beckett’s creative work and critical and philosophical thinking. Accordingly, it is discussed here in detail.

Beckett’s most widely cited reference to Geulincx is in fact his final one. In a 1967 letter to Kennedy Beckett responded to questions about his work as part of a lineage including the *oeuvres* of Joyce and Proust as based in Beckett’s early critical statements about form and content in Joyce’s then-titled *Work in Progress*:

Do the critical statements in your essay “*Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce*” – with their open admiration for the “practical... roundheaded... scientific... rational... empirical” in thought, and their repeated admiration for writing which “is not *about* something, *it is that something itself*” – do these statements in your early essay serve as a valid yardstick for measurement of your later work?<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Kennedy to Beckett, 7 May 1967. Cited by Kennedy 1971, p. 302.

Beckett attempted to steer Kennedy away from Modernist authors, with whom Beckett was of course intimately familiar, and onto more minor yet to Beckett more viable routes of enquiry:

I simply do not feel the presence in my writings as a whole of the Proust & Joyce situations you evoke. If I were in the unenviable position of having to study my work my points of departure would be the “Naught is more real...” and the “Ubi nihil vales...” both already in *Murphy* and neither very rational.<sup>40</sup>

A striking aspect of this letter is its description of the rationalist Geulincx in *Murphy* as not ‘very rational’. This is surely a self-deprecating joke that refers to Beckett’s own decision to cite Geulincx, but is it also anything more? Was Beckett perhaps also hinting that these axioms or the philosophers themselves are inherently not ‘very rational’? As will be argued in Chapter 2, when *Murphy* is looked at closely it becomes clear that these axioms (and, indeed, many other borrowings) are extensively refracted. They are bent if not entirely out of shape then enough that they might be a little more amenable to Beckett’s own immediate ends as author utilising what he called his intertextual ‘bits of pipe’<sup>41</sup>, in a structure of deliberate misappropriation comparable with Murphy’s own faux-adoption of astrology. In this sense perhaps the considered deployment within texts of fragmentary quotation such as these axioms might be described as not ‘very rational’, in that they become transformed, severed from dependence on their original meaning. At the very least the letter intimates that the philosophical borrowings Beckett makes are not intended to be straightforward.

In 1967 Beckett was writing about *Murphy* with thirty years’ worth of hindsight. Earlier letters trace his Geulincx research as it progressed. The first mention of Geulincx in Beckett’s correspondence is in a letter to MacGreevy of 9 January 1936 where Beckett writes of his new research:

I put my foot within the abhorred gates for the first time since the escape, on a commission from Ruddy. And I fear I shall have to penetrate more deeply, in search of Geulincx, who does not exist in the National [Library], but does in TCD.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Beckett to Kennedy, 14 June 1967. Cited by Kennedy 1971, p. 300. Reprinted in *Disjecta*, p. 113.

<sup>41</sup> Knowlson 1983, p. 16.

<sup>42</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 9 January 1936. Cited by Engelberts, Frost and Maxwell (eds.) 2006, p. 144.

‘Ruddy’ (Thomas Rudmose-Brown) was professor of Romance Languages at TCD, Beckett’s tutor and friend. He is incorporated into *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* as the Polar Bear, a caricature among others that Beckett came to regret given his indebtedness to Rudmose-Brown’s encouragement and interest, the teacher fostering Beckett’s wide-ranging literary education while at TCD.<sup>43</sup> Beckett’s ‘escape’ refers to his fraught decision to resign a teaching post from the college,<sup>44</sup> while the ‘And’ most likely implies that the ‘commission from Ruddy’ and Beckett’s being ‘in search of Geulincx’ are not one and the same mission. His motivation for the latter derived from somewhere else, and although it is difficult to determine exactly where Beckett perhaps gives a clue in a letter to Reavey written the same day:

He [Brian Coffey] appears to want to make the philosophical series very serious & Fach. But my Geulincx could only be a literary fantasia.<sup>45</sup>

Reportedly Coffey was planning to publish a series of philosophical monographs. Martha Fehsenfeld and Lois Overbeck repeat the rumour that Coffey had asked Beckett to produce one such monograph on Geulincx as part of this planned series, asserting that ‘Coffey encouraged SB to read Geulincx for a possible monograph in a Philosophy series’<sup>46</sup> and even more directly that ‘he [Coffey] had proposed that SB prepare a monograph on Geulincx’<sup>47</sup>. This would explain why Beckett ventured so ‘deeply, in search of Geulincx’, but it attempts to do so with no justification. Importantly, there appears to be no extant evidence to substantiate the claim. While Coffey may indeed have been planning a series of monographs there are few surviving letters between Beckett and Coffey that would settle the issue of any intended or potential contribution from Beckett.<sup>48</sup> Mark Nixon, one among a number of critics

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<sup>43</sup> See Knowlson 1996, pp. 47-51.

<sup>44</sup> A decision made official in a telegram sent from Germany in January 1932. See Knowlson 1996, p. 145.

<sup>45</sup> Beckett to Reavey, 9 January 1936. *CL*, p. 295.

<sup>46</sup> *CL*, p. 692.

<sup>47</sup> *CL*, p. 309.

<sup>48</sup> The bulk of Coffey’s own collected correspondence, held at the University of Delaware, begins in 1974, and the few surviving earlier letters have no bearing on the issue. These earlier letters, recently acquired by the University of Delaware’s ‘Coffey papers’ collection (as a supplement to the main collection and yet to be catalogued) do date from the 1930s. Yet these are mostly new-year greeting postcards and make no reference to a monograph series or to Geulincx.

sceptical of this monograph claim, adduces that such an extrapolation of Coffey's plans 'is a misinterpretation of the "literary fantasia" quotation'<sup>49</sup>.

There are precedents for Coffey's involvement in Beckett's philosophical reading. It is well known, for example, that Coffey lent Beckett Spinoza's *Ethics* in 1936, a work Beckett had some trouble with.<sup>50</sup> Yet had Coffey also directed Beckett to Geulincx it is likely this would have received mention in Coffey's memoir of his involvement with the 1930s' Beckett and the composition of *Murphy*. However, all Coffey records in *Memory's Murphy Maker* (1962, reprinted 1991) in this regard is the following, which appears in the context of a discussion of the Descartes of *Whoroscope*:

As a consequence of the original *distinction* (of body and soul), post-Cartesian thinking reached curious positions of involvement with theology. One such thinker was Geulincx, concerning whom I had a p.c. from Beckett asking questions.<sup>51</sup>

Beckett does mention this 'p.c.' to Coffey (presumably a personal *communiqué* or a postcard). In a letter of 29 January 1936 Beckett told MacGreevy that he has not heard from Coffey, who 'promised me Geulincx & Eluard informations'<sup>52</sup>. We are left, then, with Dowd's description of Beckett's notes as being 'of uncertain status'<sup>53</sup>.

Even though this issue of intention cannot be definitively resolved via this letter, the 9 January letter to Reavey describing 'my Geulincx' as 'a literary fantasia' is fundamental to a consideration of Beckett's fascination. Beckett's contrast, set up in musical terms between what might be 'Fach' and 'fantasia', is highly revealing. Colloquially meaning compartment or subject, the Fach system delineates an opera-

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<sup>49</sup> Nixon in private correspondence, 17 January 2009.

<sup>50</sup> When Beckett confessed to MacGreevy that he 'had tried it in vain in English' (Beckett to MacGreevy, 19 August 1936, cited by Knowlson 1996, p. 219) after Coffey's enthusing about Spinoza, Coffey lent Beckett some French editions of Spinoza's works and critical commentary. Beckett tantalisingly said of this further reading 'He lent me Brunschwiff's *Spinoza et ses Contemporains*, the *Ethica* in the *Classiques Garnier* with Latin *en regard*, of which I have had time only for enough to give me a glimpse of Spinoza as a solution and a salvation (impossible in English translation)' (Beckett to MacGreevy, 19 September 1936, *CL*, pp. 370-371) [the correct spelling is Brunschvicg]. Such a cliff-hanger, however, came to a rather more prosaic conclusion in a further letter from Beckett to Ussher in 1938 where Beckett writes 'I cannot see anyone throwing much light on Spinoza except Spinoza' (Beckett to Ussher, 6 April 1938, cited by Knowlson 1996, p. 746). A number of critics have, however, read Spinoza's impact on Beckett as substantial. See for example O'Hara 1981, Murphy 1994, pp. 222-239 and Dowd 2007, pp. 77-82.

<sup>51</sup> Coffey 1991, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 29 January 1936. *CL*, p. 305

<sup>53</sup> Dowd 2008, p. 388.



singer's voice-category, classifying according to range and tone. It is a system of strict though not always mutually exclusive musical boundaries. The system predominantly correlates with the English classifications of Soprano, Contralto, Tenor, Baritone, Bass and their subcategories. A particular singer graded according to a certain fach will be called upon to perform a given role written for a specific style of voice (which might not necessarily correspond to a single fach). The word Beckett chooses to contrast with fach, 'fantasia', is defined by Grove Music:

A term adopted in the Renaissance for an instrumental composition whose form and invention spring 'solely from the fantasy and skill of the author who created it' (Luis de Milán, 1535-6). From the 16th century to the 19th the fantasia tended to retain this subjective licence, and its formal and stylistic characteristics may consequently vary widely from free, improvisatory types to strictly contrapuntal and more or less standard sectional forms.<sup>54</sup>

While there is not the requisite space here to properly detail the many historical changes to the expansive and mutable fantasia form, the emphasis across its history on a personally 'subjective', potentially 'improvisatory' form is important to bear in mind. As well as the capacity of the term to refer to what might be 'more or less standard' forms, it can also, by virtue of its essential mutability, stand in stark contrast to a strictly categorised (fach) system. Beckett's 'my Geulincx', regardless of whether this was a critical monograph to be edited by Coffey, or a Geulincx of Beckett's literary imagination, is a Geulincx of which Beckett asserts his own 'subjective licence'. Such a Geulincx might 'vary widely' from anyone else's reading of the philosopher. However, this Geulincx could also bear a close resemblance to how Geulincx might see himself, in solely and strictly philosophical terms. By denoting his interest a 'fantasia' these become equally valid possibilities, as does the individuality of Beckett's own Geulincx. Beckett shifts the ground away from the possibility of properly asking of his philosophical reading whether it might be correct and accurate or not.<sup>55</sup>

This musical contrast set up in relation to Geulincx is not dissimilar to references Beckett made to Schopenhauer. In a 1932 letter to MacGreevy, for example, Beckett described his reading this other favoured philosopher of abstention

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<sup>54</sup> Field, [www.oxfordmusiconline.com](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com), last accessed 1 May 2010.

<sup>55</sup> For details of specific musical fantasias Beckett heard performed see *CL*, p. 142 ('Flight of the Bumble Bee' by Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov), and p. 173 ('Liszt's 'Après une lecture du Dante, fantasia quasi sonata').

and will-lessness in terms that strove to extricate his reading from a pre-determined framework:

I am not reading philosophy, nor caring whether he is right or wrong or a good or worthless metaphysician. An intellectual justification of unhappiness – the greatest that has ever been attempted – is worth the examination of one who is interested in Leopardi and Proust rather than in Carducci and Barrès.<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, Beckett wrote that while he had been ill in 1937 ‘the only thing I could read was Schopenhauer [...] it is a pleasure also to find a philosopher that can be read like a poet’<sup>57</sup>. Here, as with Geulincx, Beckett’s responses to philosophy extend beyond the bounds of analytic accuracy. Beckett does not hear the philosophical voice of Schopenhauer as one to be strictly classified according to how the philosopher might be ‘right or wrong or a good or worthless metaphysician’, in a ‘Fach’-styled analysis. The voice Beckett hears is one speaking poetically and intellectually about emotional and psychological experience, a voice with a range extending beyond pre-assigned, strictly philosophical, categories. Beckett’s comments recall his ‘Philosophy Notes’ in which he wrote the following of Schopenhauer:

Schopenhauer became – leaving the weaknesses of his system aside – one of the greatest philosophical writers because – in contrast to Hegel – he put the world back in its rightful place, because he attempted to think perspicuously. One reads him therefore with the admiration with which one once read Plato. Whoever demands from philosophy no more than the highest conceivable perspicuity, the liveliest metaphorical representation of abstract concepts, must call him a tremendous thinker-poet.<sup>58</sup>

This extract from the ‘Philosophy Notes’ shows again how the intellectual roots Beckett puts down in his early ‘notesnatching’ days have the capacity to break to the surface of his writing at later stages in unpredictable ways, ways that might at times sound entirely without precedent, but are not always necessarily so.

Following the ‘fantasia’ letter to Reavey, Beckett returned frequently to Geulincx’ ethical axiom in correspondence in what might be termed the *basse fondamentale* or the root-note of his semi-improvisatory incorporations of Geulincx. Beckett first mentions this axiom in a letter to MacGreevy of 16 January:

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<sup>56</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, c. 18-25 July 1930. *CL*, p. 33.

<sup>57</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 21 September 1937. *CL*, p. 550.

<sup>58</sup> TCD MS 10967/478.

No news from Coffey since I saw him here. I shall have to go into TCD after Geulincx, as he does not exist in National Library. I suddenly see that Murphy is [a] break down between his ubi nihil vales ibi nihil velis (positive) and Malraux's Il est difficile à celui qui vit hors du monde de ne pas rechercher les siens (negation).<sup>59</sup>

Similar to how it will also be cited later Beckett contrasts it with a further axiom, here a quote from Malraux's *La Condition humaine* ('it is difficult for one who lives isolated from the everyday world not to seek others like himself'<sup>60</sup>). The perspective adopted and adapted from Malraux is that of Tchen (Ch'en in English translations), a political activist who plans to blow himself up as an act of terrorism, and requires solitude in order to plan this. Nixon describes Beckett's use of Malraux here:

Unsurprisingly, Beckett removes the references to the committed man, thus obscuring a complexity that pertains to his own thinking at both this and a later time. For Beckett, the artist is as committed as the political activist, although the investment of energy is directed inward rather than outward.<sup>61</sup>

*Murphy's* indebtedness to Geulincx' philosophical ethics, in terms of intertextual references and of where Murphy himself might be situated between these two unusual bedfellows, is discussed in Chapter 2.

At the beginning of March Beckett admitted to characteristic aporia regarding his research, in his most complex letter about Geulincx:

I have been reading Geulincx in T.C.D., without knowing why exactly. Perhaps because the text is so hard to come by. But that is rationalisation and my instinct is right & the work worth doing, because of its saturation in the conviction that the sub specie aeternitatis [from the perspective of eternity] vision is the only excuse for remaining alive.<sup>62</sup>

Beckett's enthusiasm for his research is clear, and the letter speaks of its personal importance to him. Beckett goes on to situate Geulincx' central principles of *inspectio sui* and *despectio sui*, the looking inward at self and the outward looking at the world, in relation to a range of classical and modern literary and philosophical references:

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<sup>59</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 16 January 1936. *CL*, p. 299. Beckett appears to have forgotten his mentioning these difficulties of locating Geulincx at the National Library to MacGreevy a week earlier.

<sup>60</sup> Malraux 2009, p. 243. See Malraux 1968, p. 232 for the French original.

<sup>61</sup> Nixon 2005, p. 62.

<sup>62</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 5 March 1936. *CL*, pp. 318-319.

He does not put out his eyes on that account, as the Israelites did and Rimbaud began to, or like the terrified Berkeley repudiate them; one feels them very patiently turned outward, and without Schwärmerei turned inward, Janus or Telephus eyes, like those of Frenhofer in the *Chef d'Oeuvre Inconnu*, when he shall have forgotten Mabuse & ceased to barbouiller.<sup>63</sup>

In different ways George Berkeley, Arthur Rimbaud, and ‘the Israelites’ all turned away from reality or otherwise stopped their eyes from seeing. Berkeley’s importance to Beckett is attested by, for example, *Film* (1964) exploring for purposes of merely ‘structural and dramatic convenience’<sup>64</sup> Berkeley’s axiom *Esse est percipi* [to be is to be perceived]. Berkeley’s idealist contention that no objects of the perceived world exist except in the mind of a perceiver is also employed as a ‘dramatic convenience’ in other of Beckett’s work,<sup>65</sup> but it finds particular and explicit focus in *Film*. Rimbaud’s, as Beckett called it in 1931, ‘eye-suicide – pour des visions’ [for the visions], was an exploration of poetic vision by a child who in *Les Poètes de sept ans* [The Seven-Year-Old Poets] squeezes his eyes to produce hallucinogenic, hypnagogic visions:

En passant il tirait la langue, les deux poings  
À l'aine, et dans ses yeux fermés voyait des points.  
Une porte s'ouvrait sur le soir: à la lampe  
On le voyait, là-haut, qui râlait sur la rampe  
Sous un golfe de jour pendent du toit.<sup>66</sup>

He’d run by, sticking out his tongue, fists  
In crotch, eyes shut tight, seeing stars.  
A door opened onto evening; up  
There among the banisters he’d rant  
And rave in a pool of ceiling light.<sup>67</sup>

This concept of the sightless seer, as finds precedent in Beckett’s early interest in (and translations of) Rimbaud, was an important motif for Beckett in later years.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 5 March 1936. *CL*, p. 319.

<sup>64</sup> *CDW*, p. 323.

<sup>65</sup> See Ackerley and Gontarski (eds.) 2006, p. 50 for a summary of Berkeleyan interpretations of other of Beckett’s works.

<sup>66</sup> Rimbaud 2009, p. 96.

<sup>67</sup> Rimbaud 2009, p. 97.

<sup>68</sup> *Endgame*’s Hamm, for example, is blind, his eyes having ‘gone all white’ (*CDW*, p. 94). As is A in *Rough for Theatre 1*. Both protagonists relying instead on variously wheeled contraptions and a bullied

Beckett's 'the Israelites' refers to 2 Corinthians 3:7-3:8, which describes how 'the people of Israel' could not face the fading glory of Moses:

Now if the ministry of death that was inscribed in letters of stone came with such glory that the people of Israel could not gaze on Moses' face (because the glory was fading away from it), will not the Spirit's ministry have even more glory?<sup>69</sup>

Moses covers his face with a veil to 'keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of what was fading away'<sup>70</sup>, a veil that becomes a metaphor for an adulterated truth that could 'pervert God's word'<sup>71</sup>. Geulincx' eyes, then, according to Beckett's comparisons, are able patiently and with discipline to face the vicissitudes of an outward world without turning away or closing, in full awareness at the same time of an internal world where there is little real refuge. Like the two-faced Roman God Janus, Geulincx could simultaneously and without 'Schwärmerei' [fanaticism, or raving] look in these two directions. Beckett's allusion to Telephus is similarly to a narrative of doubled self. Beckett points to the myth of Telephus's stab wound received from Achilles, a wound that would not heal unless Telephus scraped pieces of the spear that had injured him into his wound. The wound could only be cured, like Geulincx' *inspectio sui*, by turning to a complementary solution – a return to the origin of the wound, or a return to the world, analogous for Beckett with *despectio sui*.<sup>72</sup>

Beckett took the name Frenhoffer from the elderly painter of Balzac's *Le Chef d'oeuvre inconnu* [*The Unknown Masterpiece*] (1832). In the short story Frenhoffer reveals a portrait he has been working on for ten years to two younger painters (Poussin and Porbus), in exchange for the opportunity to paint Poussin's lover. Yet in a legacy of Mabuse, Frenhoffer's teacher who only ever had one student, Frenhoffer has laboured too long on the picture he mistakenly thinks is a masterpiece. The less experienced painters point out that the portrait has been obscured to such a degree by perpetual layering ('barbouiller' – to daub, or smear) that barely a foot is

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collaborator. In a visceral critique of the capacities of a sightless seer, The Unnamable will not be able to determine if his eye sockets are either crying or perhaps leaking 'liquefied brain' (TN, p. 295).

<sup>69</sup> 2 Corinthians 3.7-3.8, International Standard Version.

<sup>70</sup> 2 Corinthians 3.13, International Standard Version.

<sup>71</sup> 2 Corinthians 4.2, International Standard Version.

<sup>72</sup> Telephus is also mentioned at the beginning of *Proust*, where Beckett writes 'In Proust each spear may be a spear of Telephus', his illustration of the 'Proustian equation' examined as 'that double-headed monster of damnation and salvation – Time' (*Proust*, p. 11).

recognisable. In *Le Chef d'oeuvre inconnu* Frenhoffer never finds freedom from his teacher's legacy, never forgetting Mabuse. He realises his spectacular failure and dies after burning his canvasses. All of Frenhoffer's eloquent criticism of art as a visionary incarnation of nature, rather than a mere following of its contours, according to which 'The mission of art is not to copy nature, but to give expression to it'<sup>73</sup>, comes to nothing. In contrast to Frenhoffer, according to Beckett, Geulincx does manage to free himself from burdensome legacy, achieving a freedom in turning from the accreted layers of re-doing the same old thing.

Twenty days after this March letter Beckett briefly mentioned his Geulincx research to MacGreevy, along with his lassitude at the family house:

The days pass pearly, mild and tolerable. I seldom go to town, unless to read Geulincx in Trinity or do a pressing tot for Frank when hard beset.<sup>74</sup>

Another letter was addressed to a friend and member of the Dublin literati Arland Ussher and again spoke of Beckett's enthusiasm for Geulincx:

I am obliged to read in Trinity College Library, as Arnoldus Geulincx is not available elsewhere. I recommend him to you most heartily, especially his *Ethica*, and above all the second section of the second chapter of the first tractate, where he disquires on his fourth cardinal virtue, Humility, contemptus negativus sui ipsius [comprising its own contemptible negation].<sup>75</sup>

Despite this enthusiasm, however, it did not take Beckett long to run out of energy for the reading, as he confessed to MacGreevy on 9 April:

Could not finish the Ethic of Geulincx, à l'impossible nul n'est tenu [No one can be expected to achieve the impossible], not even in Lent.<sup>76</sup>

Beckett's joke with a French proverb relies a little on MacGreevy knowing something of Geulincx' ethics of abstinence. Being unable to fully follow Geulincx 'even in Lent' makes a joke not only of Beckett as a very 'dirty low-church P.[rotestant]'<sup>77</sup>, as he

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<sup>73</sup> Balzac 2007, p. 12.

<sup>74</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 25 March 1936. *CL*, pp. 323-324.

<sup>75</sup> Beckett to Ussher, 25 March 1936. *CL*, p. 329.

<sup>76</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 9 April 1936. Cited by Engelberts, Frost and Maxwell (eds.) 2006, p. 145.

<sup>77</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 18 October 1932. Cited by Engelberts, Frost and Maxwell (eds.) 2006, p. 134.

described himself in 1932, but also of Geulincx' ethical lessons about the impossibility of achievement as themselves impossible to achieve, even given favourable circumstances. By the time Beckett made this joke about Geulingian impossibility he had taken notes from *Questiones Quodlibeticae* and *Metaphysica Vera* and approximately two thirds of *Ethica*, stopping where posthumously edited sections of *Ethica* begin. However, Beckett did not stop writing about Geulincx to correspondents once he was again free from TCD in 1936.

Two letters to Georges Duthuit from spring 1949 refer to Geulincx.<sup>78</sup> In the first, Geulincx' ethical axiom is again cited in relation to *Murphy*:

Ussy – Samedi,

C'est vraiment très simple, [...] et pas métaphysique ni mystique pour un liard, ce que nous avons pigé, c'est même le sens commun, bon et rond comme la lettre de d'Alembert. Dans la vieille phrase de Geulincx citée dans *Murphy*, un peu à l'aveuglette il est vrai, tout est dit. *Ubi Nihil Vales, Ibi Nihil Velis*. Il s'agit seulement de s'entendre sur ce domaine où l'on ne vaut rien. On ne risque guère d'en exagérer l'étendue.<sup>79</sup>

Ussy – Saturday,

It's really very simple, [...] and not in the least metaphysical or mystical, what we've understood, it's even common sense, good and round like d'Alembert's letter. In Geulincx's old phrase, cited in *Murphy*, a little randomly, it's true, everything is said. *Ubi Nihil Velis, Ibi Nihil Velis*. It's simply a matter of agreeing on this domain where one is worth nothing. It's scarcely possible to exaggerate its extent.

These are some of Beckett's most emphatic statements on Geulincx, where an all-encompassing capacity of the axiom is stressed. According to Beckett the axiom is unarguable and it is only a matter of what the 'domaine' of its applicability might be. In a second letter to Duthuit Beckett describes Bram van Velde and an art of non-relation using the term 'autology', which he had transcribed from the title to *Metaphysica Vera*'s Chapter 1.<sup>80</sup> Beckett applies the term to creativity, to the artist who

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<sup>78</sup> Duthuit (who was Henri Matisse's son-in-law) edited the English language French publication *transition* after 1947 (taking over the name from Eugene Jolas), and corresponded in detail with Beckett. According to Knowlson, 'over the period from 1948-1952 [Duthuit] seems to have taken on Tom MacGreevy's role as Beckett's main confidant'. (Knowlson 1996, p. 371) Their collaborative discussions resulted in the *Three Dialogues* (1949).

<sup>79</sup> Beckett to Duthuit. Undated. Duthuit Archives, Paris.

<sup>80</sup> See TCD MS 10971/6/2r, and below.

‘indulges now and then in a small séance of autology with a greedy sucking sound’<sup>81</sup>. The word autology dates from the mid-seventeenth century<sup>82</sup> and is used by Geulincx in *Metaphysica Vera* to refer to what in *Ethica* is described via *inspectio sui* and *despectio sui*. This latter, the turning away from self to the world is a consequence of self-inspection’s discovery of almost total ignorance. Geulincx argues that combining one’s awareness of such ignorance and incapacity with a turning out to the world in awe at the power of God constitutes humility. Geulincx describes this specific form of humility in systematic detail and lauds it as ‘the most exalted of the Cardinal Virtues’<sup>83</sup>. The letter to Ussher shows that this humility, established through ‘autology’, was a major interest for Beckett.

In 1954 the German translator of *Molloy*, Erich Franzen, asked Beckett about the passage in *Molloy* that names Geulincx:

I who had loved the image of old Geulincx, dead young, who left me free, on the black boat of Ulysses, to crawl towards the East, along the deck.<sup>84</sup>

As Anthony Uhlmann has revealed, Beckett sent the following in reply:

This passage is suggested (a) by a passage in the Ethics of Geulincx where he compares human freedom to that of a man, on board a boat carrying him irresistibly westward, free to move eastward within the limits of the boat itself, as far as the stern; and (b) by Ulysses’ relation in Dante (Inf. 26) of his second voyage (a medieval tradition) to and beyond the Pillars of Hercules, his shipwreck and death... I imagine a member of the crew who does not share the adventurous spirit of Ulysses and is at least at liberty to crawl homewards... along the brief deck.<sup>85</sup>

Such valiant because doomed effort is, Molloy opines, ‘a great measure of freedom, for him who has not the pioneering spirit’<sup>86</sup>. This Geulingian image of the man on a ship recurs in *L’Innomable/The Unnamable* and again, reduced and barely recognisable, in later works such as *Comment c’est/How It Is*. The steady reduction

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<sup>81</sup> Beckett to Duthuit, 9 March 1949. Cited by Gontarski and Uhlmann (eds.) 2006, p. 19. Translated from ‘se livre de temps en temps à une petite séance d’autologie, avec un bruit goulé de succion’ (Gontarski and Uhlmann (eds.) 2006, p. 16).

<sup>82</sup> OED cites first use of the word in 1633 by Phineas Fletcher: ‘He that would learn Theologie must first study autologie. The way to God is by our selves’.

<sup>83</sup> *Ethics*, p. 326.

<sup>84</sup> *TN*, p. 51.

<sup>85</sup> Beckett to Franzen, 17 February 1954. Cited by Uhlmann 1999, p. 54.

<sup>86</sup> *TN*, p. 51.



and fragmentation of this image in its reappearances are traced in detail in Chapters 5 and 6, and they provide a revealing example of how Beckett's altering 'foci' are partly constituted by his attitudes towards allusion and influence.

Two years after this letter to Franzen Beckett wrote to the writer and lifelong friend of T.S. Eliot, Mary Hutchinson,<sup>87</sup> in a remarkably similar way to how he would later write the widely cited letter to Kennedy:

I feel more and more something that is almost if not quite a loathing for almost everything I have written and simply cannot bear to go back over it and into it. If there is a queer real there somewhere it is the Abderites, mentioned in *Murphy*, complicated by – ibidem – the Geulincx 'ubi nihil vales etc.' I suppose these are its foci and where a commentary might take its rise. But I really do not know myself – and don't want to know – par quel bout le prendre [by whatever end it is grabbed], and can't help anyone.<sup>88</sup>

Beckett and Hutchinson corresponded further on the subject of Geulincx, where Beckett referred to the difficulties twenty years earlier of finding *Ethica* in Ireland, and described Geulincx' world of incapacity and dependence on God as a world where man is a puppet (a 'guignol', a French forerunner of the English Punch<sup>89</sup>):

Geulincx hard to come by. I read him in TCD library, the National Library didn't boast the Ethics. Frightful kitchen Latin but fascinating guignol world.<sup>90</sup>

This letter significantly complicates the earlier admiration ambivalently voiced in *Murphy* for Geulincx' 'Beautiful Belgo-Latin'. Just as intriguing, however, is Beckett's description of Geulincx' world as 'guignol', as one of puppetry, the implications of which are discussed in Chapter 6.

This lineage of correspondence establishes that the well-known 1967 letter to Kennedy is far from an anomaly. It is instead the final letter in a regular and

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<sup>87</sup> Hutchinson, a member of the Bloomsbury group, published a book of short stories in 1927 entitled *Fugitive Pieces*. See Pilling 2006a, p. 235.

<sup>88</sup> Beckett to Hutchinson, 7 November 1956. Mary Hutchinson Papers, Series II, Subseries B, box 2, folder 4, HRHRC.

<sup>89</sup> Colloquial French use of 'guignol' is as an insult, despite the fact that Guignol himself is witty and tends to triumph over adverse circumstances. The puppet was designed as a peasant figure intended to represent provincial men from the Dauphiné region, likely by the puppet-master Laurent Mourguet (1769-1844). The name was later used by the *Théâtre du Grand Guignol*, founded in 1897, a company that specialised in depicting gothic murder, rape and suicide.

<sup>90</sup> Beckett to Hutchinson, 28 November 1956. Mary Hutchinson Papers, Series II, Subseries B, box 2, folder 4, HRHRC.

remarkably consistent series of correspondence pointing to the importance of Geulincx, a series that includes correspondence with MacGreevy, Reavey, Ussher, Duthuit, Franzen, Hutchinson, and Kennedy, and probably also includes Lawrence Harvey. In 1970 Harvey paraphrased a remark by Beckett that repeats again the substance of the Hutchinson and Kennedy letters. However, Harvey gives no citation and this leaves open the slight possibility that he might not be referring to one of the interviews conducted between himself and Beckett in 1962, but that he has perhaps made a mistake and misdated the Kennedy letter by five years:

In 1962 Beckett remarked that if he were a critic setting out to write on the works of Beckett (and he thanked heaven he was not), he would start out with two quotations, one by Geulincx: 'Ubi nihil valis [sic] ibi nihil velis,' and one by Democritus: 'Nothing is more real than nothing.' The first suggests that to Murphy (and perhaps to a lesser extent to Beckett), the body, that part of him which exists in the macrocosm, is of negligible value. Indeed, it is primarily a source of suffering. And where no value is attached, no desire is possible.<sup>91</sup>

One final empirical fragment should be noted that extends the importance of this lineage of correspondence. Left in Beckett's Paris flat at his death in 1989 was a copy of Berkeley's *A New Theory of Vision, and Other Writings* (Dent, 1926 [1910]). In the margin of p.146 of this edition, alongside propositions LXVI-LXVII of Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge* Beckett annotated in blue pencil 'Against Geulincx?' Beckett also connected the paragraphs of the two propositions by means of an undulating line in the text's margin. *Principles of Human Knowledge* is the thesis where Berkeley asserts and argues for the axiom Beckett utilises in *Film*. The propositions that struck Beckett in relation to Geulincx bear clear comparison to Geulincx' metaphysical occasionalism. Berkeley writes in proposition LXVI – '*Proper employment of the natural philosopher*', for example:

Hence it is evident, that those *things* which, *under the notion of a cause co-operating* or *concurring to the production of effects, are altogether inexplicable*, and run us into great absurdities, may be very naturally explained, and have a proper and obvious use assigned them, when they are considered only as marks or signs for our information.

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<sup>91</sup> Harvey 1970, p. 267.

Berkeley goes on to say that the proper employment of a natural philosopher is therefore to search after and understand ‘this language’<sup>92</sup> of marks and signs, rather than attributing to it external causal agency, as Geulincx would, thereby getting us into what Berkeley calls ‘great absurdities’. Berkeley writes that ‘The *fire* which I see is not the cause of the pain I suffer upon my approaching it, but the mark that forewarns me of it’<sup>93</sup>. Not so far removed from occasionalism but crucially opposed to the logical validity of matter in general, Berkeley’s argument posits an idealist informational systematisation where Geulincx sees divine causal agency. In proposition LXVII Berkeley highlights consequences of how certain (unnamed) philosophers leave out of their account of matter important qualities (‘the positive ideas of extension, figure, solidity, and motion’<sup>94</sup>) which has the consequence of necessitating an ‘*occasion of our ideas*, or [...] the presence whereof God is pleased to excite ideas is us’<sup>95</sup>. While we might not want to extrapolate too far with Beckett’s annotation, it being likely that most of Beckett’s marginalia in his library books would have been entered much earlier than 1989, it is nevertheless worth noting that far from all of Beckett’s influential early sources of fascination are accounted for in this library. If the annotation is from decades earlier, it survived much longer than many others of Beckett’s important books.<sup>96</sup>

#### **1.4 Geulincx in the ‘Philosophy Notes’**

Beckett’s first known encounter with Geulincx and occasionalism was via Windelband as part of a narrative of the history of philosophy. Following Windelband, Beckett took notes on occasionalism’s inheriting from Descartes issues of mind/body dualism. The notes first describe Descartes’s dualism:

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<sup>92</sup> Berkeley 1910, p. 146.

<sup>93</sup> Berkeley 1910, p. 145.

<sup>94</sup> Berkeley 1910, p. 146.

<sup>95</sup> Berkeley 1910, p. 147.

<sup>96</sup> Beckett had been reading other works by Berkeley in 1933. Joseph Hone, the Irish critic and biographer (1882-1959), had given Beckett a copy of Berkeley’s *Commonplace Book*, ‘which is full of profound things, and at the same time of a foul (& false) intellectual canaillerie, enough to put you off reading anything more’ (Beckett to MacGreevy, 23 April 1933. *CL*, p. 154). I would like to express my gratitude to Mark Nixon and Dirk van Hulle for their kind permission to cite this marginalia, deriving as it does from their forthcoming publication on Beckett’s Paris library (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2011).

The nature of man consists in the inner union, metaphysically incomprehensible, of two heterogeneous substances, mind and body, and this is the only instance of interaction between the conscious and spatial. Animals are mere bodies, but in humans the form of spiritus animales in pineal gland (conarium) disturbs the mental substance and gives rise to unclear and indistinct idea (emotion, passion, perturbation animi).<sup>97</sup>

Beckett goes on to summarise how a consequent ‘theory of influxus physicus led to a revision of theory of causality’. This revision of ‘psycho-physical’ interaction argued that the

true functions in causal relation are not causae efficientes, but causae occasionales. The ultimate “cause” for causal connection between stimuli and sensations, purpose and action, is God. This is occasionalism.<sup>98</sup>

Following Windelband, Beckett names Geulincx as the occasionalist who takes these ideas to their extreme:

This furthest developed in Ethics of Geulincx. Illustration of the 2 Clocks which having once been synchronised by same artificer continue to move in perfect harmony, ‘absque ulla causalitate qua alterum hoc in altero causat, sed propter meram dependentiam, qua utrumque ab eadem arte et simili industria constitutum est’.

What anthropologism!

Leibniz illustrated with same analogy his doctrine of ‘preestablished harmony’, characterised Cartesian conception by immediate and permanent interdependence of 2 clocks, and occasionalist by constantly renewed regulation of clocks by clock master.<sup>99</sup>

The Latin quotation that Windelband quoted from Geulincx is translated in the italics of the following passage from Beckett’s notes from *Ethics*.

It is the same as if two clocks agree with each other and with the daily course of the Sun: when one chimes and tells the hours, the other also chimes and likewise indicates the hour; *and all that without any causality in the sense of one having a*

<sup>97</sup> The pineal gland as ‘conarium’ foreshadows that of Murphy’s own, which had ‘shrunk to nothing’ (*Murphy*, p. 8).

<sup>98</sup> TCD MS 10967/189r.

<sup>99</sup> TCD MS 10967/189r-189v. Ackerley describes Beckett’s annotation of the notes on Geulincx, claiming ‘Beckett added in annoyance: “What anthropologism!”’ (Ackerley 2005a, p. 97) This assessment of the interpolation, while quite probably accurate, does not, however, tell the whole story. Beckett’s addition merely modifies Windelband’s own description of occasionalism’s inheritance of a Cartesian dualist ontology, illustrated via the synchronised clocks: ‘This *anthropological* rationale of *Occasionalism* fits from the beginning into a more general metaphysical course of thought’ (Windelband 1901, p. 415. Italics are Windelband’s).

*causal effect on the other, but rather on account of mere dependence, inasmuch as both of them have been constructed with the same art and similar industry.*<sup>100</sup>

This historically important passage (it is the section in *Ethics* around which debate arose in the nineteenth century disputing the provenance of Leibniz's clock simile<sup>101</sup>) was identically transcribed by Beckett both from Windelband into the 'Philosophy Notes' and then later from Geulincx in 1936. Its duplication traces an important continuity between the cribbing 'Philosophy Notes' of the early 1930s and the later more in-depth study. The duplication also reveals, of course, Beckett's familiarity with the central element of Geulincx' metaphysical system, that which Geulincx takes 'furthest' and upon which he built his ethics. This is his resolution of the problems of causality by making causation reside entirely with that 'ultimate "cause"', the agency of God.

The early notes are only a glimpse of what was to come. They gesture briefly, for example, towards relations between Geulincx' epistemological system (which sets criteria for his metaphysics) and his ethics, which as we will see is what so fundamentally distinguishes Geulingian philosophy. In the concluding section of these notes Beckett wrote

Geulincx reduces self-activity to immanent mental activity in man. The 'autology' or inspectio sui is not only epistemological starting point, it is also ethical conclusion of his system. Man has nothing to do in outer world. Ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis. Highest virtue humility – despectio sui.<sup>102</sup>

Just as Geulincx himself did, Beckett appears to have seen this axiom as holding all Geulincx' philosophy in its neatly balanced grasp. In prose works Beckett will go on to upset this tidy balance, but before this he became much more familiar with the details of Geulincx' metaphysics and ethics. Once behind the 'abhorred gates' Beckett worked assiduously on transcriptions from Geulincx. In order to gain a better appreciation of the work Beckett was engaged in for four months of 1936, with a view

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<sup>100</sup> *Ethics*, p. 332.

<sup>101</sup> This major controversy, which lasted around three years and risked miring Leibniz' prestigious reputation in accusations of plagiarism, followed the work of 'an unknown private scholar, Berthold' (de Vleeschauwer 1957, p. 45), who discovered that Leibniz' famous simile of the synchronised clocks as an illustration of his pre-established harmony has a suspiciously similar precedent in Geulincx' lesser known employment of precisely this same simile. On this see de Lattre 1970, pp. 553-566 and de Vleeschauwer 1957, pp. 45-56.

<sup>102</sup> TCD MS 10967/189v.

to then being able to determine more accurately how this impacts his literary work, the chapter turns to a detailed archaeology of these surviving notes.

### **1.5 TCD MS 10971/6**

Beckett transcribed only five sentences on a single folio from *Questiones Quodlibeticae* [*Questions Concerning Disputations*]<sup>103</sup>. The 10 folios (recto and verso) of notes from *Metaphysica Vera* [*Metaphysics*] are much more thorough, summarising sections from the entire work.<sup>104</sup> The most extensive notes are from *Ethica* [*Ethics*], some forty sides of which survive as two typescripts and a manuscript.<sup>105</sup> The first fair copy comprises 18 typed sides,<sup>106</sup> the second fair copy a further 18,<sup>107</sup> the manuscript 4.<sup>108</sup> While *Ethica* takes up a substantial part of Land's volume 3 of the three-volume *Opera*, Beckett's focus on it indicates he was not reading the collected works exhaustively from start to finish but concentrated instead on discrete works, one from each of the three volumes. Beckett's working process can be adduced with some confidence from the *Ethica* material. For instance, the first fair copy includes a number of handwritten corrections. These are incorporated as typescript into the second fair copy, which repeats the material of the first fair copy and extends it, the handwritten corrections of the first fair copy inserted where appropriate in the body of the text. The final four handwritten foolscap pages begin, with a little overlap, where the second fair copy finishes.<sup>109</sup> This manuscript ends with roughly a quarter of a page left blank, near the end of *Ethica*'s Treatise 1, at 11. *Adminiculum Humilitatis*, suggesting this was the point at which, as Beckett admitted, he 'could not finish the *Ethic*'. It appears beyond much doubt that Beckett first took handwritten notes, presumably while in the library. He then typed these up adding handwritten corrections and insertions, before retyping this first fair copy (incorporating corrections in the body text and rearranging paragraphs of the second fair copy),

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<sup>103</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/1r.

<sup>104</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/2r-6v.

<sup>105</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/7r-36r.

<sup>106</sup> 162 x 200mm.

<sup>107</sup> 203 x 329mm.

<sup>108</sup> 203 x 329mm.

<sup>109</sup> There is an overlap of two sides of material which survives as typescript at the end of the second fair copy and as handwritten notes at the beginning of the manuscript.

leaving aside a final few pages still in manuscript as for a second time he could not quite get to the end of *Ethica*.<sup>110</sup>

There is, however, an issue that is less clear about the composition of the notes, and that has potentially important implications for thinking about how Beckett's interest in Geulincx might manifest itself in his fiction of the 1930s. Typically Beckett's research into Geulincx is thought to coincide exactly with his first mentioning it in correspondence to MacGreevy in early January 1936. Yet there are anomalies in the notes that scholars have indicated might point to Beckett's using an edition of Geulincx' works other than Land's 1891-1893 edition. I provide evidence that seeks to settle this, though am forced to conclude that the familiar story is indeed the most likely if less exciting one. Despite this conclusion it is not without interest to weigh the alternatives on this issue, particularly as they have come to be cited in recent studies of Geulincx and Beckett. Most importantly, however, they bear on the extent of any impact Geulincx might be said to have on the composition of *Murphy*.

*Murphy* is the work most frequently associated with Geulincx in critical studies of Beckett's relationship to the philosopher. As early as 1960 Ruby Cohn summarised the critical orthodoxy that continues to the present day: '*Murphy* is the most Geulincxian of the works'<sup>111</sup>. However, the dating of Beckett's research becomes highly important here. Without Beckett consulting Geulincx prior to his return to Dublin at Christmas 1935 Geulincx comes to Beckett's sphere of influence relatively late into *Murphy*'s composition. That is, crucially, too late to make a significant impact on most of the novel that would not be the result of extensive rewriting. The inference must follow that given the compositional dating of *Murphy* currently available Geulincx cannot be considered as a source for major developments of the novel earlier than around Chapter 9, and is therefore unlikely to be a structural scaffold upon which earlier sections, such as Murphy's mind of Chapter 6 for example, are built, unless Beckett extensively redrafted. This impacts the critical orthodoxy greatly.

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<sup>110</sup> See *Ethics*, pp. 307-308 and Engelberts, Frost and Maxwell (eds.) 2006, pp. 141-147, for further discussions of these notes. Geulincx provides a section summary at the beginning of each section. As Uhlmann describes Beckett's paragraph alterations clearly I quote him here: 'In Geulincx, and in Beckett's first fair copy, the Argument to a given heading (which summarizes what is discussed under that heading) is given at the end of the Annotations to that Number. In the second fair copy Beckett moves all of these Arguments to the top of each section, under the relevant headings. This, no doubt, allowed for easier reference' (*Ethics*, p. 308).

<sup>111</sup> Cohn 1960, pp. 93-94. Cohn was reviewing an article in her edited special issue of *Transition* (1959) by Samuel Mintz, which she argued demonstrated this. See Mintz 1959.

Unless evidence can be found for Beckett's consulting Geulincx earlier than January 1936 a number of the broad claims for the importance of Geulincx in relation to *Murphy* begin to appear shaky. The evidence is assessed here, and its consequences for a reading of *Murphy* are discussed in Chapter 2.

One anomaly that might indicate Beckett's use of different versions of *Ethica* is variations in how Geulincx' name is spelled. Matthijs Engelberts, Everett Frost and Jane Maxwell, for example, point out Beckett's 'spelling [...] of "Arnoldus" and "Geulinx" (unusual but not unprecedented) may mean that he began his study in something other than the Land edition'. However, the editors' attribution of this spelling to 'fols 1-15'<sup>112</sup> is inaccurate. Beckett does write 'Geulinx' at the beginning of his notes, but on fol. 11v he uses the correct (standardised by Land) spelling of 'Geulincx'.<sup>113</sup> The name appears as one of very few interjections or marginalia Beckett adds to the faithfully transcribed notes. In a paragraph addressed by Geulincx to his fictional ethical novitiate Philaretus (the moniker later adopted by Geulincx' student Cornelius Bontekoe when he posthumously edited and published Geulincx' works) Beckett notes: 'Geulincx's fictitious apostrophee [sic], virtuous but hasty'<sup>114</sup>.

Land consistently spells the name 'Arnoldi Geulincx' throughout *Opera*, in large bold type on each edition's title page and throughout the editions. In 1935/6 TCD only had Land's edition of any text by Geulincx. Beckett did, however, hold a reader's ticket for the British Museum. His application for it is dated 27/7/32<sup>115</sup> and it was renewed a number of times over the following few years while Beckett was resident in London (which he was between January and late December 1935<sup>116</sup>). Might Beckett have consulted any of the other two versions of *Ethica* or other texts by Geulincx held at the British Museum?

Geulincx' name is spelled in a number of different ways throughout the publications the British Library holds on and by Geulincx. A version of *Physica Vera* (which includes *Metaphysica Vera*), published in the same edition as Bontekoe's own

<sup>112</sup> Engelberts, Frost and Maxwell (eds.) 2006, p. 145.

<sup>113</sup> Though this was before the even later standard form of the genitive, consequently Beckett added an apostrophe. This thesis follows the convention employed in *Ethics* of not using an apostrophe.

<sup>114</sup> TCD MS 10971/7/11r. Cf. *Ethics*, p. 322. This quotation is from the first fair copy, although the editors of *Ethics* assert they are using the second fair copy as the basis for transcription of Beckett's notes. The anomaly is presumably intentional because in the second fair copy the quotation is abbreviated to 'G's fictitious apostrophee, virtuous but hasty' (TCD MS 10971/6/21r).

<sup>115</sup> See CL, 2009, p. 109.

<sup>116</sup> See Pilling 2006a, pp. 50-55.



*Metaphysica* and edited by Bontekoe in 1688, has Bontekoe's name on the spine of the book but does refer, in the introductory essay a number of times, to 'Arnoldus Geulinx', the spelling that matches Beckett's initial variant. Bontekoe then uses 'Arnoldi Geulinx' on the title page for *Physica Vera*. The pattern of using a number of Latin cases in the same edition is continued in the two editions of *Ethica* other than Land's that Beckett could have consulted in the British Museum in 1935. However, these editions also exhibit variants. In a 1675 edition of *Ethica* the author is named on the title page as 'Arnoldi Geulincs'.<sup>117</sup> Yet in this edition's introductory chapter reference is made to 'Arnoldus Geulinxs', to 'Arnoldi Geulinxs', and to 'Arnoldus Geulinx', only this final a match for Beckett's. Other declensions and variants include 'Arnoldum', 'Geulingius', and 'Geulingi'. In the 1709 edition of *Ethica*, again attributed on the title page to 'Arnoldi Geulincs', Geulinx' own *Dedicatio Auctoris* is signed A. Geulinck.<sup>118</sup> The conclusion all this leads to is that if Beckett did consult one of these other versions then the more likely candidate looks to be the 1675 version, with Beckett first reading the introductory essay by Bontekoe and transcribing the spelling used there before correcting it when he came to use Land. Yet this is far from convincing evidence that Beckett used the earlier edition, and it also does nothing to settle the matter of whether Beckett first consulted Land's *Opera* in London.<sup>119</sup>

A second route of inquiry involves the typewriter Beckett used. Engelberts, Frost and Maxwell are certain that both the first and second fair copies of *Ethica* notes

are from the same typewriter as used for TCD MS 10967 (Western Philosophy), as evidenced by the offset figure '2' and left hand round bracket, and for typewritten correspondence originating variously from Dublin or Foxrock<sup>120</sup>

In contrast van Ruler, Uhlmann and Wilson advance the following:

There is also some evidence that a different typewriter was used in preparing the second fair copy: the letter capital 'D' which occurs in words such as 'Deum', is at times barely visible in the second fair copy<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Geulinx 1675.

<sup>118</sup> Geulinx 1709.

<sup>119</sup> We can be sure that Beckett did consult *Opera*, as this is the only place Geulinx' *Questiones Quodlibeticae* has been published.

<sup>120</sup> Engelberts, Frost and Maxwell (eds.) 2006, p. 142.

<sup>121</sup> *Ethics*, p. 308.

What is of primary interest here, however, is less the actual typewriter Beckett used than the location at which Beckett typed up his notes, it being plausible Beckett would use a different typewriter in London than in Dublin. Unfortunately, no identifications this neat can be claimed. There is very little evidence of differences in idiosyncrasies caused by varying typewriters between the two fair copies. van Ruler, Uhlmann and Wilson appear to simply exaggerate the discrepancies between the two typescripts. Indeed the similarity (noted by Engelberts, Frost and Maxwell) of the left open bracket in each typescript looks to fix this issue on its own. Wider at the top than the bottom, this bracket, and the less often used numerical '2' which appears with a faint shadow of itself and at a slight angle, both clearly look to come from the same typewriter. The capital letter 'D', cited van Ruler, Uhlmann and Wilson as a reason for positing a second typewriter, is very rarely distinct from its appearance in the first fair copy.

Perhaps Beckett's method of organising his material might offer some assistance. In the *Ethica* notes Beckett organises paragraphs by using capital letters that correspond to Geulincx' Arabic numerals (with lowercase 'a' added where relevant to indicate a section taken from an annotation). Beckett notes 'C' in the margin, corresponding to a section in *Ethica* Geulincx titles '3', for instance. It is a difference that may derive from Beckett's seeing, in earlier versions of *Ethica*, a convention not carried over by Land of subdividing the book into lettered sections. Located between the main text and the annotations (recto only) in these earlier editions is a capital letter. 'A' begins the sequence and the next five pages are labelled respectively 'A2', 'A3', 'A4', 'A5', and 'A6'. The six pages in the sequence after this have neither letter nor numerical indicator, whereupon a following sequence begins with the following alphabetical letter.<sup>122</sup> This continues through the first Treatise until (in the 1675 edition) 'N', when the second treatise begins with pages marked by a lowercase 'a'.<sup>123</sup> Potentially Beckett saw this system of organisation in the opening pages of *Ethica* (where there is a coincidence of paragraph numbers and this older system) and began to use the capital letters, deciding to continue with his system after

<sup>122</sup> I.e. 'B' appears, with pages indicated up to 'B6', and the next six pages appear again without either letter or numeral.

<sup>123</sup> In the 1709 edition the alphabet carries on straight through the book until completed, when a new sequence starts only seven pages from the end with 'Aa1' etc.

he will have realised the coincidence only lasts a few pages. However, this fiddly, technical and archaic pagination system is also not going to settle the issue. Beckett's organising the paragraphs where he does is less likely due to this system than it is to a shuttling back and forth among the book's well-organised sections, reading the annotations as he went and transcribing them in the order that matched his reading, in order to avoid being what Murphy calls a 'gentle skimmer'<sup>124</sup>.

The strongest evidence for claiming Beckett consulted a version of *Ethica* other than in *Opera* is the divergence of Beckett's notes from verbatim transcriptions of Land's text. Such deviations are numerous, with many often occurring on a single page. To take just fol. 7r (the first page of notes from *Ethica*), variations include the following:

Land: 'Igitur in Sapientae fano'<sup>125</sup>

Beckett: 'In Sapientae fano'<sup>126</sup>

Land: 'Imo sine Ethica'<sup>127</sup>

Beckett: '*Sine Ethica*'<sup>128</sup>

Land: 'Non enim eaedem mihi Virtutes'<sup>129</sup>

Beckett: 'Non mihi Virtutes'<sup>130</sup>

Land: 'At vero nullum'<sup>131</sup>

Beckett: '*Vero nullum*'<sup>132</sup>

What such variations indicate, however, rather than use of an edition other than Land's, is Beckett's excellent command of Latin. They indicate that Beckett knew where he could condense his transcriptions without losing the text's meaning. Both earlier editions of *Ethica* held at the British Library correspond to Land's text much more closely than they do to Beckett's variations. Specifically, that is, none of these

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<sup>124</sup> Murphy, p. 51.

<sup>125</sup> *Opera* vol. 3, p. 4.

<sup>126</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/7r.

<sup>127</sup> *Opera* vol. 3, p. 4.

<sup>128</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/7r.

<sup>129</sup> *Opera* vol. 3, p. 6.

<sup>130</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/7r.

<sup>131</sup> *Opera* vol. 3, p. 6.

<sup>132</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/7r.

missing words from Beckett's transcriptions are also missing from either earlier version. Often, as seen here, Beckett's paraphrasing amounted to little more than missing either the first word of a sentence or the occasional conjunction. Beckett studied Latin as one of the privileges of a Protestant upper-middle-class education at Portora Royal School, where it was a compulsory course taught first by, as Knowlson reports, the 'much respected Mr A. T. M. Murfet' and then by the Headmaster (Reverend Ernest G. Seale), 'a good classical scholar'<sup>133</sup>. Consequently, while it must remain a remote possibility that Beckett consulted Geulincx in London prior to his Christmas 1935 move to Dublin, it seems beyond much reasonable doubt that if he did then he consulted Land's *Opera* as he would at TCD. Claims such as by Engelberts, Frost, and Maxwell that 'It seems more likely that Beckett began reading Geulincx in London'<sup>134</sup> cannot be strongly maintained. Beckett's deviations from *Opera* are the result of his confidence with Latin rather than of verbatim transcriptions from another version. These inductions, combined with evidence about the typewriter, indicate that Beckett most probably first came into contact with Geulincx' original text in TCD, in January 1936. The remainder of Chapter 1 addresses in more detail exactly what he found there.

## **1.6 Reviving occasionalism**

Geulincx is most frequently named in the context of that minor niche he occupies within the history of philosophy where he holds, along with Nicholas Malebranche (1638-1715), the physician Louis de la Forge, (1632-1666), and Parisian lawyer Géraud de Cordemoy (1614-1684), what Han van Ruler calls 'the dubious honour of being classed among those whom history has labelled "occasionalists"'<sup>135</sup>. This small group who melded complex and sometimes seemingly contradictory influences into a multifaceted system of metaphysics now reside predominantly in

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<sup>133</sup> Knowlson 1996, p. 41. See Pilling 1995 for further details of Beckett's uses of and expertise in Latin after his time at TCD. Pilling divides Beckett's uses of Latin into three areas, and provides citations for occurrences in fiction and the notebooks of Beckett's further reading in Latin (Horace, Spinoza, Bacon, a Kempis, and those extracts of Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* that tend to have their English translation alongside the Latin).

<sup>134</sup> Engelberts, Frost, and Maxwell (eds.) 2006, p. 145.

<sup>135</sup> *Ethics*, xxiii. De Vleeschauwer and Brian Cooney are among a minority of critics who consider Geulincx' occasionalism not to be the nucleus of his thought, despite this being the epithet posterity has bestowed. See de Vleeschauwer 1957, pp. 14-23 and Cooney 1978.

historical footnotes. Yet certain of occasionalism's underlying assumptions, particularly those regarding scepticism towards the knowability of natural causality, have much in common with other thinkers, ranging from Nicolas of Autrecourt in the fourteenth century to David Hume four hundred years later. Occasionalism itself, however, along with a group of eleventh-century Muslims theologians,<sup>136</sup> distinguishes itself among this company in its extremism, in rejecting the possibility of causal relations in nature outright.

Unfortunately for occasionalism's proponents, the philosophy's very proximity to other more prominent philosophies has frequently worked against it. At one time such proximity even formed part of a highly successful and concerted effort to marginalise Geulincx. Geulincx' association with one particular name, his compatriot Spinoza, saw an effort to damage his reputation so determined that his work would go out of print for nearly two hundred years (after which time, with no little irony, it was only with money from 'what remains of the Spinoza-fund'<sup>137</sup> that Land was able to bring Geulincx back into print).<sup>138</sup>

As van Ruler and Uhlmann point out of more recent scholarship, critics and philosophers as diverse as Slavoj Žižek, Martha Nussbaum and John Cottingham have, in very different works, all argued that the ultra-rational transcendent impetus, that which certainly motivated Geulincx' project, testifies less to the real possibility of a revelatory logic than to a particular brand of psychological insidiousness. As these authors have argued, such an impetus might take root in, for example, the secretively

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<sup>136</sup> Amongst whom the philosopher Abū al-Ghazālī (1058-1111), for example, is well known as a precedent for seventeenth-century occasionalist thought (even though it is more demonstrable that Malebranche was familiar with this period of philosophical history than Geulincx). See for example Fakhry, M. *Islamic Occasionalism*, George Allan and Unwin, London: 1958. al-Ghazālī, a Sunni, was an important member of the Asherite school of early Muslim philosophy. His most famous (among his more than seventy) works include *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* and his autobiography *The Deliverance From Error*.

<sup>137</sup> Land 1891, p. 224.

<sup>138</sup> This effort to suppress Geulincx came from his previously loyal admirer, Ruardas Andala (1665-1727). As an admirer of Geulincx' work at the height of its popularity towards the end of the seventeenth-century, Andala had championed it precisely as an antidote to the perceived atheism of Spinoza. However, once Andala came to believe himself duped he accused Geulincx of 'having fallen into the "sin" of Spinozism' (Nadler 1999a, p.165). Andala was influential and in turn others came to regard Geulincx as one of the 'Spinozizing pseudo-philosophers' (Lange 1727, cited by van Ruler 2006, p. 93). This followed what de Vleeschauwer describes as 'an unbroken stream of polemical writings [in which Andala] fought against the long dead Geulincx [sic] so bitterly, that one would say it was a luring and personal foe against whom he was writing' (de Vleeschauwer 1957, p. 25). For a survey of the sustained attacks Geulincx' posthumous work became subject to, their shortcomings and their effectiveness, see de Vleeschauwer 1957.

legislative ‘Superego [...] on the side of knowledge’ in Spinoza,<sup>139</sup> according to Žižek, or the childishly permissive drives inherent in ultra high moral standards as Nussbaum argues (again targeting Spinoza).<sup>140</sup> Cottingham similarly claims that rationalism can exhibit self-delusive drives that take little account of psychology.<sup>141</sup> As the editors of *Ethics* point out, while these arguments all explicitly only target Spinoza, due to confluences in their thought ‘Where Spinoza is targeted, Geulincx is often implied’<sup>142</sup>. As a consequence of such influential criticism, ‘Reviving a philosophy from the past has therefore become a dangerous business’<sup>143</sup>.

However, an investigation into Beckett’s fascination with Geulincx must necessarily set itself against a straightforward revival. While this study is intended as a contribution to scholarship on Geulincx’ legacy in the intertwined histories of literature and philosophy as well as to scholarship on Beckett, the contribution it might make to that on Geulincx is primarily a literary one, in terms of Beckett’s specific uses and understandings of Geulincx. Fortunately therefore the complications and complicities of ‘Reviving a philosophy from the past’ can be, for the most part, sidestepped and left to those focusing on the republication of *Ethics* itself. This caveat is important here because even though the following discussions deal with Beckett’s own refracted versions of Geulincx, nevertheless a laying out of Geulincx’ thought remains necessary because without this it will be much harder to understand how Beckett’s uses of it might deviate from mere appropriation of Geulingian thought as allegory or symbol.

## **1.7 Arnold Geulincx**

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<sup>139</sup> See Žižek 2004, pp. 33-41.

<sup>140</sup> See Nussbaum 2001.

<sup>141</sup> See Cottingham 1998.

<sup>142</sup> *Ethics*, p. xxxiii. On these confluences see for example Uhlmann 2006a, p. 99, *Ethics*, p. xxviii, Garrett 1996, pp. 269-272, and Alderink 2006. For discussion of specific textual congruencies between Geulincx and Spinoza see van Ruler 2006, pp. 94-99 where evidence for the hypothesis of Geulincx’ direct influence on Spinoza is weighed against that for a broader theoretical confluence and context. van Ruler concludes that ‘it is hard to prove anything with respect to possible connections between Geulincx and Spinoza’ (van Ruler 2006, p. 98), convincingly refusing to settle on easy comparisons, asserting that ‘the only thing that can be established with any certainty is that Spinoza had formulated most of his ideas before Geulincx had published his’ (van Ruler 2006, p. 99).

<sup>143</sup> *Ethics*, p. xxxiv.

Beckett probably knew little of Geulincx' life. The biographical chronology in volume 1 of Land's *Opera* is necessarily brief. Yet the circumstances of Geulincx' life are not only intriguing in their own right, they also bear on Geulincx' philosophy and on his legacy in philosophical and intellectual history. So while a summary biography must stray from material we could claim to have had a direct impact upon Beckett, it is nevertheless a suitable place from which to begin an introduction to his thought.

Geulincx was baptized on 31 January 1624 in Antwerp's St James' church. According to van Bunge et al. Geulincx 'probably had a sister and three younger brothers'<sup>144</sup>. He benefitted from his parents' keenness to provide their children with a good education, and matriculated age sixteen at Leuven University. Geulincx continued to do well at Jansenist Louvain over the next few years, coming second place amongst 159 candidates in the exams competition of November 1643, where he obtained his licentiate. He went on to study theology and was appointed junior professor of philosophy at Leuven in December 1646. By 1652, as Land details, Geulincx 'was entrusted with the treatment of the so-called *Quaestiones quodlibeticae*' following a promotion to the grade of *primarius*. These *Quaestiones* took the form of propositions posed publicly by a single *magister* on general interest subjects. The *magister* then had to propose, 'with intelligence and in agreeable form'<sup>145</sup>, reasons both for and against the given proposition. Certain of Geulincx' *Quaestiones* are compiled in the first volume of *Opera*. Beckett's notes from Land's recording of these public and frequently playful debates are scant. He transcribed only five of the twenty-eight *Quaestiones*, leaving out the lengthy pros and cons that are also recorded by Land. They include fire-themed propositions such as the following:

25. Atrocier est noster quam Jovis ignis.

26. Mitior est naturalis quam artificiosus ignis.<sup>146</sup>

25. Atrocities belong to humanity like fires belong to Jupiter.

26. Kindness is as natural to humanity as an artificial fire.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> van Bunge, et al. (eds.) 2003, p. 322.

<sup>145</sup> Land 1891, p. 225.

<sup>146</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/1.

<sup>147</sup> Other of Geulincx' *Quaestiones*, as Land details, include 'whether riches, or the poverty usual in his state, is most profitable to a scholar; whether women should be admitted to philosophical discourses; whether it becomes well-behaved youths always to dress in the fashion; whether it is advisable to set

Unfortunately for Geulincx his popularity provoked a backlash among opponents of the new Cartesian philosophy, who closed ranks against the innovative thinker. Protective of Scholastic teaching a group led by the respected medical professor Vopiscus Fortunatus Plempius (1601-1671) fired the first of a series of shots across the bow in 1654 in the form of a letter soliciting a University-wide declaration against Cartesianism. The petition did not mention Geulincx by name, however, and it did not receive many signatures. Geulincx was still in a relatively powerful position within the Louvain academy as Dean of the Faculty of Arts from March to September of that same year, and he was designated for a canonry at the cathedral in Aix in 1657. His opponents, however, were successful in managing to keep Geulincx out of the esteemed position ‘ostensibly because he did not succeed in proving the legitimacy of his parents’ birth’<sup>148</sup>, and from here Geulincx’ misfortune snowballed. The most drastic situation may well have been caused in part by Geulincx marrying Susanna Strickers, his cousin or niece, which, as well as his growing popularity teaching controversial new philosophy, forced Geulincx from the University.<sup>149</sup>

Geulincx and Strickers moved with very little money to the National University of Holland at Calvinist Leyden.<sup>150</sup> Here Geulincx managed to secure a position among a faculty more open to Cartesianism, though the new thinking still predominantly operated in secret.<sup>151</sup> Beckett himself summarised the situation of Geulincx in this new context in a paragraph in the ‘Philosophy Notes’, which situates occasionalism’s (those of that stripe here called ‘Cartesians’) place in philosophical history:

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good liquor before friends who come to pay you a visit’ (Land 1891, p. 225). *Quaestiones quodlibeticae* has never been published in an English translation. All translations from *Quaestiones quodlibeticae* in this thesis are by Dr. Anna Castriota. These were produced for Matthew Feldman as an appendix in his unpublished Ph.D. thesis *Sourcing aporetics: an empirical study on philosophical influences in the development of Samuel Beckett’s writing*, Oxford Brooks University, 2004.

<sup>148</sup> Land 1891, p. 227.

<sup>149</sup> It is unverifiable that this was a cause of Geulincx’ being removed from office. The meeting in which the decision was made to eject Geulincx was conducted in camera. A number of commentators have pointed to the possibility of Geulincx’ familial marriage as a cause of his sudden fall from grace. See Land 1891, pp. 227-228 for a more thorough investigation of this possibility and a summary of further commentators’ views. Land describes Strickers as Geulincx’ cousin, van Bunge et al. as his niece (see Land 1891, p. 227 and van Bunge et al. (eds.) 2003, p. 324).

<sup>150</sup> Land speculates, following Jean Noël Paquot (cf. Paquot 1768, pp. 69-73), that Geulincx may have had property confiscated to pay debts. See Land 1891, p. 228.

<sup>151</sup> While certain of the faculty were well known as Cartesians, the teaching of the new science was officially banned and it received only underhand or tacit support.



Jansenists & Fathers of the Oratory, living in Augustinian-Scotist atmosphere, were friendly to new philosophy, while orthodox Peripatetics, and esp. Jesuits, opposed it violently. Thus old opposition between Augustinianism & Thomism was renewed in controversy over Cartesianism. To meet this attack the Cartesians (Louis de la Forge & Malebranche) insisted on connection with Augustine.<sup>152</sup>

In terms of Geulincx' Augustinian origins and later conversion, Land concurs:

In later years, the learned adherents of Jansenius and of Descartes were mostly the same men; and we have every reason to suppose that Geulincx' occupation with that Augustinian theology prepared the way for his going over in his mature years to the reformed confession.<sup>153</sup>

Although Geulincx would never regain the level of prestige he had once held at Louvain, he did attain a measure of popularity at Leyden thanks to substantial support received from the professor of theology Abraham Heidanus (1597-1678), and later from certain of his students (to whom Geulincx would directly address parts of *Ethica* and who would edit his posthumous works).<sup>154</sup> By 1667 he had published the first Tractate of *Ethica*.

Unfortunately this hard-won fame was not to last long. Some time between the 8 and 21 November 1669 Geulincx, along with a number of other faculty at the University, died of an unidentified plague. While lamenting the early death of Geulincx (and of his wife, who died the following January<sup>155</sup>) Land argues that Geulincx did at least manage, with his death, to avoid further misfortune. Remaining proponents of the new philosophy were steadily suppressed and their chairs made vacant by the ascendant Orange party and the 'strict clericals'<sup>156</sup> joined with it. Even the highly respected Heidanus lost his office. The university produced a bronze medallion commemorating those from the faculty who had died in the 1669 plague, yet it makes no mention of the ever-controversial and original Geulincx and consequently there is no surviving image of him. Land admits to being unable to find where he was buried.

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<sup>152</sup> TCD MS 10967/189r.

<sup>153</sup> Land 1891, p. 225.

<sup>154</sup> A letter of unknown authorship but most likely by Heidanus and his two colleagues (Johannes Coccejus (1603-1669) and Johannes Hoornbeek (1617-1666)) survives, which recommends Geulincx for the position at Leyden. See Eekhof, A. 'De Wijgeer Arnoldus Geulincx te Leuven en te Leiden', *Nederlandsch Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis*, new series, nr 15 (1919), pp. 1-24 (the letter on pp. 18-20).

<sup>155</sup> There being no mention of the children in accounts of money left to Strickers upon her husband's death (which remained unpaid) Land supposes that their children too succumbed to the disease.

<sup>156</sup> Land 1891, p. 238.

Misfortunes and their consequences pervade Geulincx' philosophy and must surely derive in part from his experiences of such in his own life. As van Ruler has described him 'Geulincx was an unhappy man and his philosophy an unhappy man's recipe for happiness'<sup>157</sup>. H.J. de Vleeschauwer calls him 'the man of the serious word and the ungrateful life'<sup>158</sup>. His exasperated rhetorical questions in *Ethics*, such as 'Why do so many and such great calamities conspire against me? Have I offended God in some way'<sup>159</sup> clearly point towards some kind of autobiographical foundation. When discussing his seventh ethical obligation concerning the onus upon the ethical novice to find a good and realistic career, Geulincx even refers specifically to an academic life as one 'in which study and a thousand tediums have to be endured, and which is subject to envy and criticism'<sup>160</sup>, with which he was intimately familiar.

Even without an accompanying commentary, however, Beckett could not fail to notice such autobiographical passages that jut, at times quite sharply, into and out of *Ethics*. It is well known that Beckett was fascinated by the logical byways of seventeenth-century philosophy and by the implications for such closed systems of moments of alterity and slippage. These are moments that have their parallels in Beckett's works. In Arsene's falling off the ladder in *Watt*, for example, which plays out a farcical paradigm where the ineffable intervenes in the otherwise properly effable. Arsene is surprised by the 'sentiment', otherwise alien to his *quid pro quo* rationalism, 'that a change, other than a change of degree, had taken place'<sup>161</sup>. Similarly, the protagonist of *Company* (1980) suddenly stands stock-still part way along a walk taken many times previously, their steps counted and the action repeated by a self that systematises the experienced environment. The sudden halt, which bears no relation to their usual numerical enfolding of the world, intrudes as one epistemology into another entirely irreconcilable with it. Geulincx' system cannot break entirely from autobiography, just as the abstract, often mathematical systematising of many of Beckett's protagonists cannot tear free of tangible connections to an experienced, remembered and lived-in world, a world that sometimes even recalls moments of Beckett's own life (walks with his father in the

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<sup>157</sup> *Ethics*, p. Xxxii.

<sup>158</sup> De Vleeschauwer 1957, p. 13.

<sup>159</sup> *Ethics*, p. 351.

<sup>160</sup> *Ethics*, p. 273.

<sup>161</sup> *Watt*, p. 42.

Wicklow mountains, for example, provide one such basis for imagery in *Company*). Of such collisions of systems and self, Molloy proclaims ‘Extraordinary how mathematics helps you to know yourself’<sup>162</sup> with a characteristic mix of spite and joy. Mathematics does not, of course, in Beckett’s closed systems, help you to know anything other than more mathematics. Something ‘other than a change of degree’ is required by these systems in order that something other than itself can be admitted. Geulincx’ occasionalism is frequently characterised by just this kind of alterity.

Summarising various interpretations of Geulincx, de Vleeschauwer writes

His friends saw in him a disciple of Descartes; his open and covert enemies called him a follower of Spinoza; the Germans and French regarded him as a rival of Malebranche and Leibniz. His modern objective critics see in him a precursor of Kant [...] and it is remarkable that up to this stage nobody has attempted to recruit Geulincx as a Christian existentialist.<sup>163</sup>

Such a range of interpretation is partly due to the multi-faceted nature of Geulincx’ thought, to his willingness to admit what might seem irreconcilable with other aspects of his system. He was certainly a bold thinker with his own ‘pioneering spirit’, as Molloy describes a man who attempts to drag himself to freedom on Geulincx’ ship while knowing it to be doomed. As we will see, it is the coming together of such opposites as the ineffable and the super-rational that produces his system of simultaneously submissive and proactive ethics. The following summary of Geulincx’ occasionalism takes its contours from *Metaphysica Vera* and *Ethica*, Geulincx’ two major works and those from which Beckett took the majority of his transcriptions.

## **1.8 Occasionalist metaphysics**

Broadly speaking, occasionalism arose among French and Dutch Cartesians of the second half of the seventeenth-century. As Jean-Christophe Bardout describes, it is

usually thought of as a response to the difficulties that its proponents see facing Cartesianism. In particular, the so-called ‘mind-body problem’: How can the real and absolute distinction between two such heterogeneous substances as mind

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<sup>162</sup> *TN*, p. 30.

<sup>163</sup> De Vleeschauwer 1957, p. 72.

and body be reconciled with the thesis of their substantial union in a human being?<sup>164</sup>

As noted above it was through consequences of the ‘mind-body problem’ inherited from Descartes that Beckett too first encountered the solutions offered by occasionalism. However, occasionalism is much wider in scope than a solution to mind-body interaction. That particular solution is merely implied by the much more ambitious remit occasionalism sought of offering an account of all causal relations in the entirety of ‘created nature’<sup>165</sup>. While none of the thinkers grouped under it actually used the ‘dubious’ title occasionalism, historically the term has come to denote a unifying, usually monotheistic thesis seeking to prove that only one single agent causes interaction between a mind a body, between minds and other minds, and between bodies and other bodies.<sup>166</sup> The movement’s name derives from Descartes’s unfinished *Treatise on Man*, published by Claude Clerselier in 1664 with notes by La Forge. In this *Treatise* the great progenitor of modern philosophy used the word ‘occasion’ during crucial discussions of mind-body interaction, and it struck certain followers that this needed further explanation. The *Treatise* contains phrases such as, for example, ‘fibres cause a movement in the brain which gives occasion for the soul [...] to have the sensation of *pain*’<sup>167</sup>. The ill-defined term ‘occasion’ became the inheritance of later Cartesians seeking to account for problems presented by a pineal gland which, we might say (following *Murphy*), has ‘shrunk to nothing’<sup>168</sup>, having been drained of explanatory power via that uninformative but load-bearing word ‘occasion’. In seeking to account for apparent divides and connections between minds and bodies, however, occasionalism was not always effective. La Forge was constrained a little by his fealty to Descartes, and despite Cordemoy’s striving to extricate himself from those same origins he and La Forge had in common a turning to the questions and solutions of occasionalism predominantly via physics and its issues of bodily causation.<sup>169</sup> Geulincx distinguished himself among his peers by

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<sup>164</sup> Bardout 2002, p. 140.

<sup>165</sup> Bardout 2002, p. 141.

<sup>166</sup> Where the terms ‘body’ or ‘bodies’ mean both inanimate objects and human and animal ‘bodies’.

<sup>167</sup> Descartes 1985, p. 103.

<sup>168</sup> *Murphy*, p. 8.

<sup>169</sup> See Bardout 2002, pp. 140-148 for further discussion of La Forge and Cordemoy’s Cartesian inheritance as it derives principally from physics.

turning more definitively towards epistemology and its consequences for ethics in a broader hope for a completion of the Cartesian project. It was routes such as these that would lead Geulincx, more explicitly than other occasionalists, to affirm the radical incapacity and impotence of the human mind, and to counsel the humility he concluded as a result.

Geulincx begins *Metaphysica Vera* with the founding Cartesian axiom that Beckett duly transcribed:

Prima Scientia. Cogito ergo sum.<sup>170</sup>

Proposition 1. I think, therefore I exist.<sup>171</sup>

However, Geulincx proceeds immediately to complicate the efficacy of such a conception of what it is to ‘think’, as Beckett also noted:

Secundo S. Varios habeo cogitandi modos in infinitum.

Cogito ergo, et infinitis modis cogito; sed illae res quas cogito num sic sint ut cogito, adhuc nescio.<sup>172</sup>

Proposition 2. I have innumerable modes of thought.

Therefore I think, and think in innumerable modes. But whether the things I think really are exactly as I think of them, I still do not know.<sup>173</sup>

This ‘nescio’, a ‘to-not-know’, is central to *Metaphysica Vera*. In turn it will greatly impact Geulincx’ epistemology, before it has further important implications for his ethics. Ignorance and impotence are the cornerstones of Geulincx’ thought. Geulincx argues from this ‘Proposition 2’ that the things I think and which might not be ‘exactly as I think of them’ might very well be far from as they appear to me to be. I, however, have no way of knowing whether things are as I perceive them to be or not. Specifically, and centrally as regards his legacy as an occasionalist, Geulincx argues that no human can cause actions in a physical world, and similarly cannot cause thoughts to occur in other minds. Even though it may appear to me as though I have

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<sup>170</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/2r. Cf. *Opera* vol. 2, p. 147.

<sup>171</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 31.

<sup>172</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/2r. Cf. *Opera* vol. 2, p. 148.

<sup>173</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 32.

these capacities, according to Geulincx I emphatically do not and only God properly qualifies as a causal agent. These two conclusions (that I lack such capacities, and that God alone has them) derive from Geulincx' central metaphysical argument, the major argument that distinguishes Geulincx amongst occasionalists as a metaphysical epistemologist. According to this argument, in order to qualify as performing an action (or causing anything, including thoughts) I must have knowledge of this action. Such knowledge must consist in being able to say, fully and with reason, 'how' an action happens. If I cannot say 'how' something happens, I cannot claim that it is my own action. The metaphysical axiom that summarises this appears in Beckett's notes from both *Metaphysica Vera* and *Ethica*:

Quod nescis quomodo fiat, id non facis.<sup>174</sup>

What you do not know how to do, is not your action.<sup>175</sup>

If, as Geulincx wrote in dedicating *Ethics* 'To The Curators Of The University Of Leiden [...] In the Temple of Wisdom Ethics is the ceiling and the roof'<sup>176</sup>, then this metaphysical axiom is his supporting beam without which there can be no substantial building. Geulincx is at times so determined that his reader should accept his metaphysical axiom he contradicts himself, tripping over his own enthusiasm for it, asserting it to be so obvious that it does not require argumentation immediately prior to arguing for it:

I have not claimed that *what you do not know how to do does not happen*, but: *what you do not know how to do is not your action*. Nor is there any need for arguments here, only anyone's consciousness...I say...that if you are willing to describe yourself as the doer of anything that you do not know how to do, there is no reason why you should not believe that you have done or do anything that happens or has been done. If you do not know how motion is made in the body while being nevertheless quite sure that you made it, you could easily say with equal justification that you are the author of Homer's *Iliad*, or that you built the walls of Nineveh, or the Pyramids; you could say with equal justification that you make the sun rise and set for us all, and the succession of days and nights, and of winter and summer.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/2v (*Metaphysica Vera*), TCD MS 10971/6/14v and TCD MS 10971/6/35 (*Ethica*, where it is transcribed '*Quod nescis quomodo fiat, non facis*').

<sup>175</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 35.

<sup>176</sup> *Ethics*, p. 311.

<sup>177</sup> *Ethics*, p. 330.

The philosopher Steven Nadler has written on how, similarly to Geulincx, the more famous Malebranche also introduced an epistemological criterion to what would otherwise be a purely metaphysical theory of causation, and which is discussed in the same images as Geulincx employs – the movement of an arm. Nadler asks the fundamental question of Geulincx’ extreme axiom: ‘Why would one think that there is an epistemic condition upon causality?’<sup>178</sup> The only possible solution to the problems it raises, Nadler argues, that avoids category errors of confusing causation by volitional agents with causation by non-volitional agents (inanimate objects etc.), is to take ‘volitional agency to be *the* paradigm of causality’<sup>179</sup>, and this is precisely what Geulincx does.<sup>180</sup> Geulincx takes the metaphysical arguments on this topic to their extreme. He argues that precisely and validly analogous with the impossibility of my causing the sun to rise and fall or my having built the Pyramids, is the impossibility of my causing my own arm to rise and fall.

In defining what might qualify as knowledge of an event, such that knowledge passes his stringent epistemic tests, Geulincx argues that even an anatomist (in a paradigm of scientific knowledge) cannot properly say ‘how’ their arm is moved. There is, according to Geulincx, something missing from a purely physical account of such movement, of blood flow and what Geulincx calls the movement of ‘animal spirits’. Anatomy does not reach, cannot speak of, the ineffable ‘how’ of causation that is missing from such an account. Geulincx describes such scientific knowledge as merely *a posteriori*, according to which it is ‘no more than a consciousness and perception of *the fact that* motion is taking place’<sup>181</sup>. It is categorically not a substantive explanation of ‘how’ that motion takes place.

This ineffable ‘how’ is hugely important for Geulincx, for it is with his idea of ‘the ineffable’ that Geulincx distils and fuses his contrasting impetuses as a rationalist-Christian-mystic. Something is ‘ineffable’, for Geulincx, because it cannot be stated within rational discourse:

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<sup>178</sup> Nadler 1999b, p. 269.

<sup>179</sup> Nadler 1999b, p. 270.

<sup>180</sup> For discussion of how such a paradigm of volitional agency has precedents in medieval Aristotelians see Nadler 1999b, pp. 270-271.

<sup>181</sup> *Ethics*, p. 228 (my italics).

Something is said to be *ineffable* not because we cannot speak or think of it (for this would be *nothing*, *nothing* and *unthinkable* being the same), but because we cannot think about or encompass with our reason how it is done.

As Geulincx writes, ‘an ineffable something is always missing’<sup>182</sup>, there always remains a residue of experience not exhausted by knowledge of that experience. All possible rational description of physiological forces leaves out the irreducibly ‘ineffable’<sup>183</sup>. Only God, as Arsene in *Watt* might say of ‘what has so happily been called the unutterable or ineffable’<sup>184</sup>, can properly know such ineffable forces. For limited, non-knowing humanity, Geulincx would concur with the servant’s appraisal that ‘any attempt to utter or eff it is doomed to fail, doomed, doomed to fail’<sup>185</sup>.

Geulincx’ metaphysics is synthesised, then, via the fusing together of two seeming irreconcilable opposites – extreme rationality and the ineffable. For Geulincx all that exists for humanity is what he calls, following Descartes, the ‘occasion’<sup>186</sup> of my willing an action to happen, and there exists the ‘occasion’ (if I am making ethical decisions that accord with God’s perfect will), of that action happening. This is all I can say for certain. If that action I have willed does have occasion to occur this is only because God has caused it. We cannot, according to Geulincx, be reasonably said to have control over our bodily action or over our thoughts, and so over anything at all in the world. All humanity can do is hope and pray. It can perhaps be seen already, even in these broad terms which are elucidated in more detail below, how Geulincx’ world of ignorance and impotence bears thematic similarities with Beckett’s thoughts on humanity experiencing the world. As, for example, Beckett offered them in an interview in 1956:

I think anyone nowadays who pays the slightest attention to his own experience finds it the experience of a non-knower, a non-can-er (somebody who cannot).<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> *Ethics*, p. 334.

<sup>183</sup> *Ethics*, p. 334.

<sup>184</sup> *Watt*, p. 61.

<sup>185</sup> *Watt*, p. 61.

<sup>186</sup> Geulincx wrote, for instance, ‘I call that body mine [...] by whose occasion diverse thoughts arise in my mind that do not depend on me’ (*Metaphysics*, p. 41). Cf. TCD MS 10971/6/2v and *Opera* vol. 2, p. 154.

<sup>187</sup> Beckett cited in Graver and Federman (eds.) 1979, p. 162.



The third and final chapter of *Metaphysica Vera* is entitled ‘Concerning God’<sup>188</sup>. Here Geulincx asserts that God ‘is an ineffable Father’<sup>189</sup>, ‘Creator of the World’<sup>190</sup>, ‘a powerful Creator and Mover’<sup>191</sup> is ‘a law unto Himself’<sup>192</sup> and is ‘supremely Perfect’<sup>193</sup>. These sections were certainly of interest to Beckett. He summarised all of them in three pages of notes. The core of Geulincx’ metaphysics, however, and what locates this metaphysics in relation to the notes Beckett took from Windelband earlier and goes some way to accounting for Beckett’s developing interest in the philosophy such that he would take a further 18 pages of notes from *Ethica*, typing those up and extending them in another 18, is Geulincx’ conception of impotence and ignorance as these relate to his ethics.

### **1.9 Occasionalist ethics**

Geulincx’ emphasis on ignorance and impotence, his proposing humanity’s total powerlessness, prompts his further step into ethics. It is a step along the route where a Christian resolution to the unfinished Cartesian project, in an ethical conclusion, might be reached. According to Geulincx, humanity should be humble in the face of such limited capacity on our own part, and in the face of such limitless capacity on the part of God. The transition to ethics is summarised in the following passage, which Beckett transcribed from *Metaphysica Vera*:

Nunquam enim proprie fit quia ego volo, sed quia motor me volante vult, ut etiam me subinde volante non vult...Atque hic se pandit excursus in Ethicam, hic est ostium fluminis moralis; sequitur enim, ex his, cum nihil valeamus in humana sorte, nihil etiam ut velimus; adeoque ut hoc sit primum, summum et generalissimum, quod omnem moralitatem complectitur, Ethice fundamentum, lumine naturae notissimum: Ubi nihil vales, ibi etiam nihil velis.<sup>194</sup>

Nothing ever happens to me, properly speaking, because I will it, but rather because the true Mover wills what I will, just as He sometimes does not will what I will... And here we reach the estuary of the moral river, where the coastline broadens out into Ethics: for it follows from what I have said, that when it is not

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<sup>188</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 91.

<sup>189</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 97.

<sup>190</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 99.

<sup>191</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 102.

<sup>192</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 108.

<sup>193</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 120.

<sup>194</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/3r. Cf. *Opera* vol. 2, p. 155.

our human destiny to have power to do anything, neither should we will anything. And because it involves the whole of morality, this principle is the first, the best, and the broadest foundation of Ethics, and the one most easily known to us by the light of nature: *Wherein you have no power, therein you should not will.*<sup>195</sup>

As we have seen, Beckett cited the ethical axiom Geulincx offers as the foundation of ethics a number of times in correspondence as being a place from which commentary of his work, for those in the unfortunate position of attempting one, might also begin. Taken out of the context of the whole of *Ethica* the axiom's apparent advocating of will-lessness has led to accusations that Geulincx 'condemned man to passivity'<sup>196</sup>, where man has 'nothing to do' in the world of physical things as Beckett's 'Philosophy Notes' had it, and against which de Vleeschauwer defends him. But the importance of humility in the face of humanity's incapacity to cause action does not, for Geulincx, entail a total withdrawal from the world into the mind. Although Beckett's earlier 'Philosophy Notes' appear to point towards this interpretation, according to which 'Man has nothing to do in outer world'<sup>197</sup>, his longer transcriptions from *Ethica* testify to a much more thorough understanding of the axiom and how it coheres within Geulincx' ethics. Before continuing to a more detailed look at *Ethics*, however, there are important things to be noted about this axiom itself.

Firstly, there is the matter of translation. Uhlmann points out that the axiom

has often been translated by Beckett scholars as "Where one is worth nothing one should want nothing". The Latin, "valeo", carries the meaning both of "to be able to, to have force" and "to be worth".<sup>198</sup>

Ackerley notes of his own translation that he 'chose to retain the second person singular and something of the assonance of the original: "where you are worth nothing, there you should want nothing."<sup>199</sup> Wilson translates the axiom in *Ethics* as '*Wherein you have no power, therein you should not will*', retaining his version from 1999's *Metaphysics*. As Uhlmann points out, Beckett makes use of both senses of the

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<sup>195</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 44.

<sup>196</sup> De Vleeschauwer 1957, p. 62.

<sup>197</sup> TCD MS 10967/189v.

<sup>198</sup> *Ethics*, p. 305.

<sup>199</sup> Ackerley 2008, p. 200.

first part of the axiom, employing ‘the formula where one is “worth nothing” in *Murphy*, and alternatively where one “can do nothing” in *The Unnamable*’<sup>200</sup>.

However, for Geulincx there is only one axiom, and he was presumably well aware of its ambivalence in capturing the co-dependency between the metaphysical and the ethical where his occasionalism thrives. As Ackerley points out, the different renderings of the axiom emphasise either the metaphysical or the ethical at the expense of the other. For Geulincx, on the other hand, being ‘worth nothing’ was precisely a matter of being ‘able to do nothing’. Nevertheless, Ackerley laments Wilson’s retention of the earlier translation:

The point that Wilson’s translation misses, I feel, is the verbal relationship of the phrase not so much to the metaphysics of motion (for in that context his weighting seems most apposite) as to the virtue of *Humilitas*, for Geulincx the core of his entire ethical system<sup>201</sup>

This study uses Wilson’s translation of the axiom, keeping it consistent with other translations of *Ethica*. While Ackerley is surely correct in pointing to this version lacking ethical overtones, Beckett’s own uses of the axiom also (except in *Murphy*) tend to correspond to the metaphysical emphasis of the axiom. Yet it is also clear, as we will see in the axiom’s various deployments, that Beckett was well aware of the multiplicity of this densely woven axiom. Indeed, Geulincx’ rather playful ambivalence in his axiom might go part of the way to accounting for how a rationalist might be, at the very core of his system, as Beckett described him, not ‘very rational’. The Latin *valeo* is well chosen by Geulincx. It allows him to firmly situate his metaphysics in the realm of incapacity, as well as connoting a relationship already there between this incapacity and humility thanks to *valeo*’s intimation of worthlessness. The axiom itself renders that ‘estuary’ of the move into ethics as the transition from the first half of the axiom (the more strictly metaphysical half, whatever translation is used) to the second, ethical half.

Before Geulincx stresses the importance of his axiom, however, *Ethics* begins with a chapter on what Geulincx calls ‘Virtue ‘in General’, defined as ‘the exclusive

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<sup>200</sup> *Ethics*, p. 305.

<sup>201</sup> Ackerley 2008, p. 201.

love of right Reason'<sup>202</sup>. This intertwining of Virtue and Reason immediately sets the tone of *Ethics* as that of a rationalist's belief in God. Taking on the unfinished Cartesian project as the production of an ethical system, Geulincx sought to build upon the Christian conception of the blessed life while incorporating the structuring rationalism of current thinking. However, as van Ruler points out, a narrative that accounts for *Ethica* solely in terms of 'the invention of a Christian philosophy of morals'<sup>203</sup> would fail to note the even wider-ranging context in which *Ethics* operates. Christian conceptions of the blessed life had for more than a century and a half been admitting elements of classical thought, and *Ethics* builds on this but goes even further, such that it is also 'an extraordinary attempt to reinvest the ancient approach to ethics with an input of a genuinely Christian flavour'<sup>204</sup>. Critical of what he calls the 'pagan'<sup>205</sup> ways of thinking, Geulincx nevertheless constructs important parts of his system in frameworks comparable to those of, for instance, Aristotle, whose ethics of the mean bears comparison to Geulincx' diagrammed middle ground between '*Vice of Excess*, *Vice of Defect*'<sup>206</sup>.

In Chapter 1 of *Ethics* Geulincx discusses 'Virtue' in terms of 'Love', 'Reason', and 'Disposition'. While not as emphatically 'ineffable' as the realm of God and God's causation, those of 'Love' and 'Reason' are both initially described as beyond the power of words. Of 'Love', for example, Geulincx writes 'What love is, does not need to be stated...There is often a certain ambiguity in a name when the thing itself is perfectly clear'<sup>207</sup>. Similarly he adds of 'Reason', 'What Reason is, is sufficiently known because of the fact that it is known at some point'<sup>208</sup>. Geulincx goes on to claim how 'Reason' 'is sufficiently well known to all of us, as we have the distinction of being rational'<sup>209</sup>.

Geulincx' Augustinian foundations might be argued to partly account for his conception of 'Disposition', which shows him to be firmly an ethical intentionalist:

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<sup>202</sup> *Ethics*, p. 312.

<sup>203</sup> *Ethics*, p. xvi.

<sup>204</sup> *Ethics*, pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>205</sup> *Ethics*, p. 8.

<sup>206</sup> *Ethics*, p. 324.

<sup>207</sup> *Ethics*, p. 313.

<sup>208</sup> *Ethics*, p. 315.

<sup>209</sup> *Ethics*, p. 316.

‘*Whatever men do, they are all judged by their intention*’<sup>210</sup>. Here Geulincx also breaks from his ancient and Scholastic contexts, and ‘Disposition’ becomes for him something much more absolute than a ‘*disposition to act rightly, acquired by the frequent performance of good actions*’<sup>211</sup>.

Geulincx goes on to enumerate, following ‘Virtue in General’, ‘the *Cardinal Virtues*’<sup>212</sup>. These are ‘Diligence’ (a ‘perpetual grasping at Reason’<sup>213</sup>), ‘Obedience’ to Reason (and a concomitant avoiding of ‘what Reason forbids’<sup>214</sup>), and ‘Justice’, which ‘is the fair application of Reason’<sup>215</sup>. At the end of this section on cardinal virtues is the section Beckett recommended ‘most heartily’ to Ussher on ‘Humility’. Geulincx writes:

Humility is the most exalted of the Cardinal Virtues: when Virtue includes only Diligence, Obedience, and Justice, it is incomplete. Humility closes the circle: beyond it nothing more can be added to Virtue.<sup>216</sup>

Humility consists (typically for a Geulingian concept) of further sub-divisions. Firstly, humility requires ‘*Inspectio Sui*’<sup>217</sup> / ‘*Inspection of Oneself*’<sup>218</sup>. The section headed ‘*Inspectio Sui*’ is by far the most detailed of Beckett’s *Ethica* notes. This *inspectio sui* corresponds to the first half of the ethical axiom *Ubi nihil vales* [Wherein you have no power]. Upon delving into our selves, into what Geulincx describes as into an ‘innermost sanctum, in order to consult the sacred Oracle of Reason’<sup>219</sup> as was similarly undertaken in *Metaphysica Vera* under the rubric of ‘autology’, we discover incapacity and ignorance. As it was in *Metaphysics*, Geulincx’s argument in *Ethics* is that I cannot cause a thing to happen because I do not know how I could do so. I realise upon inspecting myself that there is no capacity for action (*ubi nihil vales*), and so I should not try to act (*ibi nihil velis*):

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<sup>210</sup> *Ethics*, p. 349.

<sup>211</sup> *Ethics*, p. 318.

<sup>212</sup> *Ethics*, p. 320.

<sup>213</sup> *Ethics*, p. 321.

<sup>214</sup> *Ethics*, p. 322.

<sup>215</sup> *Ethics*, p. 324.

<sup>216</sup> *Ethics*, p. 326.

<sup>217</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/32. Cf. *Opera* vol. 3, p. 30.

<sup>218</sup> *Ethics*, p. 327.

<sup>219</sup> *Ethics*, p. 19.

*Wherein you have no power*; we read in this the inspection of oneself...*Therein you should not will*; we read in this...disregard of oneself, or neglect of oneself across the whole human condition, and resigning ourselves into the power of His hand, in which we are, indeed, whether we like it or not [...] or what comes to the same thing, *Do nothing gratuitously, do nothing in vain*.

Following discussions of self-inspection and self-disregard Geulincx details seven ethical obligations that are consequent upon this humility. The ethical project here becomes even wider in scope in its making a clear transition from theoretical to practical ethics. Obligations, Geulincx insists, are the inevitable rules to which one who lives a blessed life should adhere. ‘I must labour not over my own happiness, blessedness, or repose, but over my obligations alone’<sup>220</sup> Geulincx solemnly asserts. Yet these obligations do not all counsel the total abstinence that might be expected from the conclusions of humility. In his sixth obligation Geulincx even describes getting drunk as a sure way to reveal one’s true ethical self, ‘*In vino veritas* [In wine there is truth]. Only a virtuous man, who never hides his true colours, comes out well here’<sup>221</sup>. The seven obligations are as follows:

1. When God summons me from the living, and orders me to return to Him, I must not persist in refusal, but hold myself ready.<sup>222</sup>
2. [...] not to depart this life unless God has summoned you.<sup>223</sup>
3. The Third Obligation concerns the need to refresh the body. It arises from the Second Obligation; for if you do not refresh the body, it will fail; which the Second Obligation forbids.<sup>224</sup>
4. 1. Choice of mode of life; 2. Devotion to this mode of life; 3. Constancy in this mode of life<sup>225</sup>
5. To bear many things, to do many things; for sometimes I cannot find a mode of life that is productive and affords me sustenance.<sup>226</sup>
6. [...] consists in the rule that one should frequently relax the mind, lest it become jaded by incessant business.<sup>227</sup>
7. I should look upon my birth as a good, never detest it, and never lament it. I must not rage with madness and impotence that I am punished by having been born. I must not revile those who engendered my body.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> *Ethics*, p. 337.

<sup>221</sup> *Ethics*, p. 349.

<sup>222</sup> *Ethics*, p. 338.

<sup>223</sup> *Ethics*, p. 339.

<sup>224</sup> *Ethics*, p. 343.

<sup>225</sup> *Ethics*, p. 346.

<sup>226</sup> *Ethics*, p. 347.

<sup>227</sup> *Ethics*, p. 349.

<sup>228</sup> *Ethics*, p. 350.

Beckett's notes begin to fade away towards the end of this section. That is, he did not type up all the handwritten notes on the seventh obligation, and following this obligation there is one small section on the 'The Adminicule of Humility'<sup>229</sup>. This is Geulincx' admonition to flee from happiness in order that it might pursue you, Geulincx arguing that a person will never attain happiness if they pursue it: 'Happiness is like a shadow: it flees from you when you pursue it; but pursues you when you flee from it'<sup>230</sup>. Geulincx' note of ethical leave-taking appears to have been Beckett's cue to take his leave from Geulincx.

Beckett's notes are all from Treatise 1 and its annotations. *Ethica* continues for a further 5 Treatises. It is important to point out, however, that the first Treatise, which occupies around two-thirds of the final version, was published by Geulincx as a stand-alone edition in 1667 as *Van de Hooft-deuchden: De eerste Tucht-verhandeling*. Many of the later sections of *Ethica* repeat material from Treatise 1. These later sections are accompanied by a small number of annotations, in contrast to the earlier, detailed accompanying notes. This is a consequence of *Ethica* being partially edited posthumously by Geulincx' students. Treatises beyond the first comprise roughly a third of the volume, and include the chapters 'On the Virtues Commonly Called Particular'<sup>231</sup>, 'On the End and the Good'<sup>232</sup>, 'the Passions'<sup>233</sup>, 'the Reward of Virtue'<sup>234</sup> and 'Prudence'<sup>235</sup>. However, in order to retain focus on the elements of Geulincx that Beckett himself focussed on these later sections are not summarised here. Instead, the following chapter turns to Beckett's work, and the novel he was writing concurrent with researching Geulincx, *Murphy*.

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<sup>229</sup> *Ethics*, p. 352.

<sup>230</sup> *Ethics*, p. 353.

<sup>231</sup> *Ethics*, p. 65.

<sup>232</sup> *Ethics*, p. 95.

<sup>233</sup> *Ethics*, p. 109.

<sup>234</sup> *Ethics*, p. 127.

<sup>235</sup> *Ethics*, p. 151.

## Chapter 2 – *Murphy*

### 2.1 Why *Murphy*?

There are two major reasons why *Murphy* should be the first of Beckett's works with which to begin an analysis of Beckett's fascination with Geulincx. Firstly, and most importantly, is the consistency of Beckett's own specific and repeated references to *Murphy* when referencing Geulincx in correspondence. This repetition makes clear that the novel must bear out some specific relation to the philosopher: 'Murphy is break down between his ubi nihil vales ibi nihil velis'; 'Dans la vieille phrase de Geulincx citée dans Murphy'; 'If there is a queer real there somewhere it is the Abderites, mentioned in *Murphy*, complicated by – ibidem – the Geulincx'; 'already in *Murphy*'. Beckett never cites Geulincx' axiom in relation to any other novel or play. It is always *Murphy* that must somehow bear the weight of the obscure reference. However, the repetition does not make clear *how* the novel bears out this relation.

Secondly, there are the arguments made by Matthew Feldman and other critics regarding 'Beckett's general practice of drawing upon his contemporaneous reading in his writings'<sup>1</sup> that further indicate the likely relevance of Geulincx to the novel Beckett was writing in 1936. This 'general practice' is the case with much of Beckett's early, Joycean method of filling notebooks with entries from his reading before integrating these into his prose or poetry, a process described in 1996 by James Knowlson:

Beckett's notebooks show [...] that he too plundered the books he was reading or studying for material that he could then incorporate into his own writing. Beckett copied out striking, memorable or witty phrases into his notebooks. Such quotations or near quotations were then woven into the dense fabric of his early prose. It is what could be called a 'grafting' technique that runs at times almost wild. He even ticked them in his private notebooks once they had been incorporated into his own work.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Feldman 2009a, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Knowlson 1996, p. 106.



Knowlson and Feldman's research builds on Beckett's own description of his early work as being 'soiled...with the old demon of notesnatching'<sup>3</sup>. Beckett would find ways to move out of the shadow of this old demon, but it was a significant shadow cast in large part by what he called the 'epic, heroic'<sup>4</sup> and encyclopaedic world-affirming inclusiveness of Joyce's 'apotheosis of the word'<sup>5</sup>. In 1936, when Beckett was completing *Murphy* and transcribing from Geulincx, his working methodology was still in part determined by this approach. For example, notes derived from English Literature in the 'Whoroscope' notebook explicitly headed 'For Interpolation' reveal that, although Beckett may have realised that "notesnatching" was actually deferring the moment when he could "put down last words of first version",<sup>6</sup> he was still working with, and at times from, notebooks of quotations. In consequence, it is the argument of this chapter that contemporaneous with Beckett's Geulincx research there are manifestations of this research grafted into *Murphy*. *Murphy* was begun in August 1935, when Beckett was still in London and before he had read Geulincx in any detail, and completed in Dublin in early June 1936. With the dates of Beckett's Geulincx research at TCD fixed as accurately as possible it is clear that they must map onto the dates of *Murphy*'s composition in such a way that a tentative identification of the point at which Geulincx comes to enter the novel's composition process could be attempted. Once this is determined then it may be possible to see how such a chronologically determined *Murphy* might account for Beckett's repeated references to Geulincx.

This important question of what precise point Geulincx comes to Beckett's sphere of possible influence in regard to *Murphy* is, however, significantly hampered by the fact that the *Sasha Murphy* manuscript, the six notebooks comprising some 800 pages in which Beckett drafted and made notes towards *Murphy*, is privately owned and unavailable to scholarly consultation. Exactly how far Beckett's Geulincx research influenced any rewriting, or even the production of whole new sections, of *Murphy* is paradigmatic of the difficulty critics face with many questions of source-incorporation in *Murphy*. Ackerley suggests that *Sasha Murphy* would probably 'not vary

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<sup>3</sup> Beckett to McGreevy, undated 1931. Cited in Beckett 1999, p. xiii.

<sup>4</sup> Beckett in interview with Knowlson, 27 October 1989. Cited by Knowlson 1996, p. 105.

<sup>5</sup> Beckett to Axel Kaun, 9 July 1937. *Disjecta*, p. 172.

<sup>6</sup> Pilling 2006b, p. 207. The 'Whoroscope' notebook was compiled by Beckett in the 1930s.

*significantly* from the typescript<sup>7</sup> held at HRHRC, though this is in contrast to the assessment of Knowlson (who has viewed the manuscript for financial-valuation and verification purposes) that it ‘differs radically from the finished text at many points’<sup>8</sup>. Given the sheer number of pages and the simple fact that he has seen it Knowlson’s assessment is surely to be preferred. With these caveats noted, however, there nevertheless remain some useful assertions that can be validly made about *Murphy*’s composition.

## **2.2 Murphy’s composition – Quantity**

Knowlson reveals that the *Sasha Murphy* manuscript was begun on 20 August 1935.<sup>9</sup> A month later Beckett wrote to MacGreevy with details of the work’s fitful progress: ‘I have been forcing myself to keep at the book, & it crawls forward. I have done about 9000 words’<sup>10</sup>. By 8 October he would report further strain along with his hope for the work’s completion:

I have been working hard at the book and it goes very slowly, but I do not think there is any doubt now that it will be finished sooner or later. The feeling that I must jettison the whole thing has passed, only the labour of writing the remainder is left. There is little excitement attached to it, each chapter loses its colour & interest as soon as the next is begun. I have done about 20000 words.<sup>11</sup>

On February 6 1936 Beckett wrote to MacGreevy of what must have been some relief as well as further difficulties: ‘There only remain three chapters of mechanical writing, which I haven’t the courage to begin’<sup>12</sup>. By this time Beckett was visiting TCD’s library and transcribing Geulincx, having told MacGreevy and Reavey in early January of this plan. Completing *Murphy* was nevertheless still to be a fraught business, and on 5 March in the same letter in which he went into such detail about Geulincx, Beckett told MacGreevy that ‘Murphy will not budge’<sup>13</sup>. Then in the letter of 25 March in which Beckett described occasional forays out of the house he reported that the novel

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<sup>7</sup> Ackerley 2004, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Knowlson 1996, p. 743.

<sup>9</sup> See Knowlson 1996, p. 203.

<sup>10</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 22 September 1935. *CL*, p. 277.

<sup>11</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 8 October 1935. *CL*, p. 283.

<sup>12</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 6 February 1936. *CL*, p. 312.

<sup>13</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 5 March 1936. *CL*, p. 320.

‘goes from bad to worse’<sup>14</sup>; so much worse that he hoped to leave Europe altogether, having applied to study cinematography under Sergei Eisenstein.

However, only two months after Beckett ‘could not finish the Ethic of Geulincx’ in early April he did manage to finish the more pressing *Murphy*, finalising a first draft by 7 June and getting it ready to send off to publishers over the following twenty days. While Beckett described his composition of this novel from start to finish as a struggle, the coincidence of dates indicates that Geulincx may be bound in some ways to *Murphy*’s final stages of composition, and may even have provided some helps towards Beckett’s finalising it.

### **2.3 *Murphy*’s composition – Quality**

Beckett’s correspondence indicates, as far as can be discerned, that for the most part *Murphy* was written chronologically, a broadly uncontroversial factor but one which will be shown to be important when tracing the origins and progress of Geulincx’ impact on the novel. For instance, Beckett ‘went round the wards for the first time’<sup>15</sup> of the Bethlem Royal Hospital in September 1935 with his friend Geoffrey Thompson, a research trip that manifests as *Murphy*’s employment at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat (MMM), an institution first mentioned in Chapter 5 when Austin Ticklepenny introduces himself and offers to arrange for *Murphy*’s ultimately ungainful employment. On 2 October 1935 Beckett attended Jung’s third Tavistock lecture, which arguably provided Beckett with material that found its way into the chapter on ‘*Murphy*’s mind’<sup>16</sup>. In a letter to MacGreevy a few days after Jung’s lecture (the same letter in which Beckett reported having written about 20,000 words of the novel) Beckett described the lecture in which Jung had shown a tripartite diagram of the mind and, in the questions put to Jung following the written lecture (transcribed in the record of the lecture series), had discussed the famous case of the girl who had ‘never been born entirely’<sup>17</sup>, a description that also finds its way into *Watt*’s addenda. Nearly six months later (in a letter of 25 March 1936) and close to the end of the

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<sup>14</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 25 March 1936. *CL*, p. 324.

<sup>15</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 22 September 1935. *CL*, p. 277.

<sup>16</sup> *Murphy*, p. 69. See Ackerley 2004, pp.116-125, particularly p. 125.

<sup>17</sup> Jung 1982, p. 107.

novel's initial period of composition Beckett describes a trip to Galway with his brother Frank, a trip that Ackerley argues becomes incorporated into the 'Clonmachnois' in Neary's vision following the protagonist's death.<sup>18</sup>

If this chronological induction is correct it implies that when Beckett wrote on February 6 1936 that 'There only remain three chapters of mechanical writing'<sup>19</sup>, the specific work being done on *Murphy* would have been, concurrent with his Geulincx research, on what became the last few chapters of the 13-chapter novel.

## **2.4 Geulincx in Chapter 9**

This hypothesis, that Geulincx is likely to most clearly appear in some form in the later stages of *Murphy*, is indeed proved accurate. Geulincx is named and the ethical axiom quoted in Chapter 9 at the moment Murphy claims to commit himself to the 'little world' of his interiority:

His vote was cast. 'I am not of the big world, I am of the little world' was an old refrain with Murphy, and a conviction, two convictions, the negative first. How should he tolerate, let alone cultivate, the occasions of fiasco, having once beheld the beatific idols of his cave? In the beautiful Belgo-Latin of Arnold Geulincx: *Ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis*.<sup>20</sup>

Beckett's reference to Geulincx' maxim in *Murphy* has a precedent in an entry Beckett added to the 'Whoroscope' notebook, which reads '21. Murphy: I am not of the big world, I am of the little world: ubi nihil valo, ibi nihil velo (I quote from memory) & inversely'<sup>21</sup>. In a 1993 article Rupert Wood made an important observation about the well-known citation of Geulincx in *Murphy*:

It is unclear whether this particular conviction, as expressed by Geulincx, forms part of Murphy's credo, or whether the line is simply a piece of narratorial intervention.

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<sup>18</sup> See Ackerley 2004, p. 209 and *Murphy*, p. 167.

<sup>19</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 6 February 1936. *CL*, p. 312.

<sup>20</sup> *Murphy*, p. 112.

<sup>21</sup> 'Whoroscope' notebook, UoR MS 3000.

This ambivalence is ‘symptomatic’, for Wood, ‘of the general uneasiness about the intrusion of the philosopher, as name or figure, that pervades Beckett’s writing’<sup>22</sup>. However, Wood’s invocation of a ‘general uneasiness’ sidesteps the fact that such moments of ‘narratorial intervention’ or assertion of a character’s ‘credo’ are discrete, and alter dramatically throughout Beckett’s *oeuvre*. There is no ‘general’ uneasiness, though there are many specific instances of uneasiness. Similarly, if this is ‘narratorial intervention’ it might be far from being ‘simply’ so. It is complicated, for instance, by Beckett’s description in 1956 of Geulincx writing in a ‘frightful kitchen Latin’. This later description indicates that whoever is speaking in *Murphy* at this point, whether Murphy or narrator, the important thing is that they might be speaking with their tongue-in-cheek. While Wood is undoubtedly correct in imputing to Beckett’s work a frequency of uneasiness at moments of ‘intrusion’ from philosophers, by speaking only of ‘general’ uneasiness Wood runs the danger of missing what distinguishes this novel’s particular ‘moments’ of Geulincx. Indeed, in *Murphy* Beckett is a great deal less uneasy about the incorporation of a ‘name or figure’ than he will be in later works, something reflected in the welcomed ‘intrusion’ that Geulincx makes.

Taking this first mention of Geulincx in Chapter 9 as crucial, I argue that there are a number of important consequences to Beckett encountering Geulincx too late into *Murphy*’s composition to drive larger aspects of the narrative throughout the novel, so late such that any influence earlier than Chapter 9 would largely be a matter of Beckett’s extensive revising and redrafting. While this late ‘intrusion’ is not the ‘key’ to the novel Bair alludes to, it is welcomed by Beckett, who seizes upon Geulincx as a source of obscure allusions and a vehicle for themes and structuring devices already present in the novel. Rather than deepening these themes or narrative arcs in line with the complexity of Beckett’s newly detailed knowledge of Geulincx, however, Beckett appears to rely on a more insubstantial reading of Geulincx entirely derivable from the earlier ‘Philosophy Notes’. This is a reading according to which Geulincx’ only, categorical and stark conclusion is that, ‘Man has nothing to do in outer world’<sup>23</sup>. Beckett’s move, to summarise it, is one of substituting for this ‘Man’ a name that also begins from his favoured middle letter, Murphy. The impression that

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<sup>22</sup> Wood 1993, p.32.

<sup>23</sup> TCD MS 10967/189v.

this conception of Geulincx predominantly determines the incorporations into *Murphy* is strengthened by noting something regarding Beckett's letter of 16 January 1936, where he described realising of his non-puppet, 'I suddenly see that Murphy is [a] break down between his ubi nihil vales ibi nihil velis (positive) and Malraux's Il est difficile à celui qui vit hors du monde de ne pas rechercher les siens (negation)'. The thing to note is that Beckett appears to have 'suddenly' seen this 'break down' before he was extensively engaged in the research, as the letter describes the research as still planned, not yet undertaken: 'I *shall have to go* into TCD after Geulincx, as he does not exist in National Library' (my italics). While Beckett certainly appears to have known that TCD held a copy of Geulincx' works, even if he had looked at *Opera* by this point he seems unlikely to have got very far with his transcriptions. Beckett was drawing broad conclusions about Murphy via Geulincx, then, without yet actually transcribing from *Opera* in extensive detail.

The compliment to Geulincx' 'beautiful Belgo-Latin' arises in the context of Murphy's mistaken, naïve and narcissistic appraisal of the patients at the MMM. The narrator intimates a similar assessment of Murphy's conceptions of the patients' sufferings:

The frequent expressions apparently of pain, rage, despair and in fact all the usual, to which some patients gave vent, suggesting a fly somewhere in the ointment of Microcosmos, Murphy either disregarded or muted to mean what he wanted.<sup>24</sup>

Murphy believes that the patients have achieved a persistence of that singular state he loves in himself when ensconced in his chair or collapsed in reveries in the grass of Hyde Park, where he 'has nothing to do in outer world'. Accordingly he hopes to one day attain the same level of exemption 'from the big world's precocious ejaculations of thought, word and deed'<sup>25</sup>, as the patients seem to him to have achieved. They have managed, so Murphy believes, to escape the daily world's contingencies and ascend to a plane of pure self, and consequently 'Murphy presupposed them, one and all, to be having a glorious time'<sup>26</sup>. Murphy is popular with the patients, and he refuses to

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<sup>24</sup> *Murphy*, pp. 112-113.

<sup>25</sup> *Murphy*, p. 115.

<sup>26</sup> *Murphy*, p. 113.

ascribe this to the farces and disasters of Suk's stars. Instead he hoards this happy outcome as a consequence of his own agency, giving him further cause to align himself with the patients, to mistakenly think 'that they felt in him what they had been and he in them what he would be'<sup>27</sup>. However, despite Murphy's hopes to attain the patients' state, to 'clinch' the matter, he is too tied to a world of physicality, too dependent on and distracted by the minor hedonistic pleasures of the big world, 'as witness his deplorable susceptibility to Celia, ginger, and so on'. He is too narcissistic to forgo the possibility that certain things he desires which might appear to him to happen due to his agency are not in fact due to this, but result only from a skewed perception. Consequently, for Murphy, even though he seeks to avoid the perhaps somewhat occasionalist 'occasions of fiasco' in his little world, it

was not enough to want nothing where he was worth nothing. Nor even to take the further step of renouncing all that lay outside the intellectual love in which alone he could love himself, because there alone he was lovable. It had not been enough and showed no signs of being enough. These dispositions and others ancillary, pressing every available means (eg, the rocking-chair) into their service, could sway the issue in the desired direction, but not clinch it.<sup>28</sup>

The approach Geulincx offers to Murphy, to 'want nothing where he is worth nothing', is insufficient. That is, Murphy still wants, still desires things of the big world even though he might be capable of very little there. Tenuously, but persistently, Murphy is tied into a world he does not love, and wherein he is not lovable, and the rocking-chair will not serve to sever these ties. The narrator is not claiming that Murphy wants nothing in the big world, yet this wanting nothing is insufficient. Rather it is the case that Murphy cannot bring himself to want nothing in the big world. When the narrator notes that 'it was not enough to want nothing where he was worth nothing', he quotes the axiom as an impossibility for Murphy, not as something he has already achieved but found wanting. This is how the ascription of beauty to Geulincx' 'Belgo-Latin' can be accounted for – it speaks of the unattainable, a futile hope of freedom.

Murphy's falling short reflects both how Beckett himself was enamoured of and resistant to Geulincx' *Ethica*, determined to go to some lengths to research him

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<sup>27</sup> *Murphy*, p. 115.

<sup>28</sup> *Murphy*, p. 112.

yet unable to reach the end of his major work, and it reflects the decisions and compromises Beckett was forced to make when nearing the novel's completion, hoping for help yet resistant to too-massive change. In turn, the incorporations of Geulincx into *Murphy*, particularly this manifestation of Geulincx as the man of the little world, function as a microcosm of the broader compromises that arguably constrain this novel. While on the one hand a great achievement, the culmination of a decade of Beckett's writing and an undoubted success, this success is not an unqualified one and *Murphy* arguably suffers at times from certain of the same things as it achieves – its semi-realist narration and its complex plot, for example. If Geulincx is a simple 'key' to open the complex lock of this wide-ranging novel, then it is one that can do so only by bringing into view the broader achievements and limitations of the novel. While Beckett appears to have striven to incorporate a number of allusions to Geulincx in the later parts of *Murphy*, before brilliantly and with little sign of awkward contrivance building him into the major climax of the novel over the chessboard, nevertheless all these incorporations, or welcomed 'intrusions', are determined to a large degree by the uncomplicated binary conceptualisation of Geulincx that Beckett did not really need to venture into TCD for at all.

The passage that cites Geulincx' axiom appears towards the end of Chapter 9, the first of the three chapters that draw most heavily upon Geulincx, the others being Chapters 10 and 11. Chapters 12 and 13 rely for their narrative propulsion and scenic dénouements on the other characters finding Murphy burnt to a cinder, before leavening their regrets in a pastoral conclusion. It is predominantly, though not exclusively, where the novel focuses on Murphy himself that Geulincx becomes most useful for Beckett, as it is the 'seedy solipsist'<sup>29</sup> himself who suffers from the particular symptoms of occasionalism.

## **2.5 Murphy's dualism and the rocking-chair**

Chapter 6 describes Murphy's mind and Murphy's own experiences of it, and summarises the stark dualist schism with which the protagonist is aligned: 'Murphy

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<sup>29</sup> *Murphy*, p. 53.



felt himself split in two, a body and a mind'. Murphy is and feels that he is part constituted by an embodied and connected mind. A mind locked 'bodytight', and he

did not understand through what channel intercourse was effected nor how the two experiences came to overlap. He neither thought a kick because he felt one nor felt a kick because he thought one. Perhaps the knowledge was related to the fact of the kick as two magnitudes to a third. Perhaps there was, outside space and time, a non-mental non-physical kick from all eternity, dimly revealed to Murphy in its correlated modes of consciousness and extension, the kick *in intellectu* and the kick *in re*. But where then was the supreme Caress?

Certainly, Murphy's lack of interaction between his thoughts and his body echoes Geulincx. For example, Beckett had transcribed from *Metaphysics*' 'Autology' section:

Proposition 8. Body, and its motions, have no natural capacity to arouse thoughts in my mind.

In whatever way bodies come together, they do not pass into my mind. I am in a thing free of parts, as was said above; and one cannot pass into something that has no parts.<sup>30</sup>

These arguments continue into *Ethics*, where they retain their similarity to Murphy's thoughts.

I do not know how, and through which nerves and other channels, motion is directed from my brain into my limbs; nor do I know how motion reaches the brain, or even whether it reaches the brain at all.<sup>31</sup>

It is tempting to posit such earlier sections of the novel as those that were rewritten after Beckett's Geulincx research. Chapter 6, after all, might be described as a discrete, stand-alone chapter, and would not have needed as much as other sections to be written in chronological order. But this cannot be confirmed and must, perhaps until *Sasha Murphy* sees the light of day, remain speculative.

Murphy himself cares little about solving the issues that have led him to see himself in occasionalist terms: 'The problem was of little interest [...] Of infinitely more interest than how this came to be so was the manner in which it might be exploited'<sup>32</sup>. Concomitant with Murphy's own avoidance of investigating this divide

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<sup>30</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 40.

<sup>31</sup> *Ethics*, p. 33.

<sup>32</sup> *Murphy*, p. 70.

head-on, so to speak, most critical investigations of the difficult and ambiguous Chapter 6, the chapter Ackerley describes as ‘that vitagraph of Murphy’s mind’<sup>33</sup>, appropriately annex themselves to a discussion of the rocking-chair. For it is only in this chair that Murphy is able to take leave of his body and access his deepest modes of mind. With a conarium that ‘has shrunk to nothing’<sup>34</sup> Murphy suffers from a divide with a rather ‘disappointed bridge’<sup>35</sup>, to adapt Stephen Dedalus’ description of Kingstown pier. In a sense this chair is Murphy’s substitute conarium, the first in Beckett’s *oeuvre* of a series of mechanised props that mediate interaction, disappointed or otherwise, between a character and their surrounding world. Uhlmann has attempted the most sustained interpretation of Murphy’s chair in relation to Geulincx, drawing attention to parallels between the chair and one of Geulincx’ central analogies in *Ethics*, that of a child’s cradle.<sup>36</sup> Geulincx argues that just as a child crying for its cradle to be rocked infers a principle of causation between its crying and the cradle being rocked, unaware as it is of the actual intervening cause (its ‘mother or nursemaid’<sup>37</sup>), so too humankind habitually thinks of itself as causing actions to happen by inferring comparable connections between willing something to happen and that thing’s happening. When in fact all there is in reality, according to Geulincx, is the disconnected and disappointed ‘occasion’ of willing, and the separate ‘occasion’ of an action.

According to Geulincx, when humanity fails to recognise the necessity of occasionalism it is in a similar position to the baby in the cradle. Humanity does not take account of the invisible hand that must belong to God. Geulincx discusses the analogy in a number of places, and it occurs three times in Beckett’s notes.<sup>38</sup> Alongside the third of these instances (in the second fair copy – TCD MS 10971/6/26) Beckett adds two annotations. In the margin of the first of three paragraphs Beckett notes ‘mater/’ [mother], and alongside the third paragraph notes ‘nostra/’ [our, or ours]. This marginalia condenses Geulincx’ extrapolation from the baby’s carer to all

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<sup>33</sup> Ackerley 2008, p. 204.

<sup>34</sup> *Murphy*, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Joyce 1993, p. 25.

<sup>36</sup> See Uhlmann 2006a, pp. 78-85.

<sup>37</sup> *Ethics*, p. 340.

<sup>38</sup> See *Ethics*, pp. 332 & 340, corresponding to TCD MS 10971/6/15v (first fair copy), TCD MS 10971/6/22 & TCD MS 10971/6/26 (second fair copy).

humanity, from a 'mother' to 'ours', Beckett foregrounding the neatness and elegance of Geulincx' argument.

In the second appearance of the analogy in Beckett's transcriptions Geulincx qualifies its force, stepping back from the dangers of too-neat identifications:

The analogy of the baby and his mother on the one hand, and of God and me on the other hand, is a lame one... (God makes motion, the mother does not make it; the baby moves his mother to move, I do not move God). But the whole force and energy of the analogy turns on this, that just as the motion or rocking of the cradle is made with the baby willing it, though this motion is not made by the baby, so equally, motion is often made with me willing it, though I never make it.<sup>39</sup>

Uhlmann traces the recurrences of rocking-chairs from Beckett's later works *Rockaby* and *Film* back to this cradle in Geulincx. His argument, that in 'occluded' ways these later chairs derive from Geulincx' rocking-chair, is bolstered by Geulincx employing the image of the child in the cradle in connection with a discussion of the impossibility of suicide. Suicide in *Ethics* functions as a synecdoche illustrating simply that because any action is impossible unless God also wills such to happen, so too is an extreme action such as suicide. Uhlmann points out that rocking-chairs in Beckett's *oeuvre* often similarly appear in the context of some relation between comfort and death (the death of Murphy, for example, the 'apparent death of "O" in *Film*, and the imminent death of "w" in *Rockaby*'<sup>40</sup>). In a separate article on images in Geulincx and Beckett, Uhlmann describes the project of identifying these occluded imagistic congruencies:

The 'discovery' of the genealogy of such images clearly brings something new to the texts, without in any sense solving them. The images will always remain in some ways occluded, as it is impossible to completely circumscribe their

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<sup>39</sup> *Ethics*, pp. 340-341.

<sup>40</sup> Uhlmann 2006a, p. 85. The question of the extent to which Murphy is responsible for his own death is not a clear one and a number of critics have advanced various solutions. Rubin Rabinovitz proposes Cooper as perpetrator (See Rabinovitz 1984, pp.113-118), Ackerley proposes (with all due qualifications) Ticklepenny, and others assume Murphy himself. There is a clear-cut case of suicide in the novel. The Old Boy's throat is cut by his own cut-throat razor for no better reason than, according to Ackerley and Gontarski, to cut his throat follows from the nature of his object (see Ackerley and Gontarski (eds.) 2006, p. 546). When it comes to Murphy, however, 'a classical case of misadventure' (*Murphy*, p. 164), the coroner's vague diagnosis, fittingly un-resolves the issue. Beckett wrote in a letter to Mania Péron of 21 April 1951 that Murphy 'pas de suicider', that his will in this regard does not in the end even matter because he had already committed 'suicider mental' (Beckett to Mania Péron, 21 April 1951, Carlton Lake Collection of Samuel Beckett Papers, Series 2, Box 17, Folder 19, HRHRC).

meaning. That is, the identification of points of resonance such as this allows new elements of the image to powerfully unfold, without in any sense exhausting their potential.<sup>41</sup>

According to Uhlmann, these imagistic, apparently atemporal ‘points of resonance’ somehow simultaneously exist within a historical genealogical lineage of occluded imagery. However, given the chronology of *Murphy*’s composition outlined above it is unclear whether such a ‘genealogy’ would begin first with the chair of *Murphy*, or, as might be preferred from the point of view of a more straightforward study of influence, with Geulincx’ cradle in *Ethics*. As we have seen, Beckett began work on the novel in August 1935. The very opening scene of *Murphy* finds the protagonist ensconced in his chair, and this chair is so central to the novel’s development that it would perhaps be surprising were this an aspect of the novel Beckett inserted when redrafting. Indeed, Ackerley has clarified this issue as informed by the ‘Whoroscope’ notebook:

The image of the central character (“X”) thus bound into his chair was present in the earliest drafts of the novel (in the Whoroscope Notebook), long before Beckett’s intensive reading of Geulincx; the question abides, therefore, as to precisely how and how far an Occasionalist reading is possible.<sup>42</sup>

Contributing further analysis of how Murphy’s chair functions as part of a mind-body binary, Shane Weller has described how, like Mr. Endon’s ‘reliance’<sup>43</sup> upon chess, the chair is a symptom of dependence on precisely that which it seeks to negate – the outer reality. The chair is irreducibly a part of the physical outer, big world, while it is also a kind of bridge to the inner world.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Ackerley refers to Geulincx’ summary phrase that asserts ‘I am a mere spectator of a machine whose workings I can neither adjust nor readjust’<sup>45</sup> to compare Murphy’s chair to Geulincx’ description of the surrounding world as a machine on which one depends: ‘In the

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<sup>41</sup> Uhlmann 2006b, p. 94.

<sup>42</sup> Ackerley 2008, p. 204. For an entirely different perspective on the context in which chairs function in relation to ‘Beckett’s Seated Figures’, see Brater 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Weller 2005, p. 88.

<sup>44</sup> See Weller 2005, pp. 88-90.

<sup>45</sup> *Ethics*, p. 333.

‘Annotata’ [§21, 212], the machinery is identified as the world; in the novel the chair is referred to as a machine [30]<sup>46</sup>.

Authors other than Beckett have turned even more explicitly to Geulincx’ occasionalist disconnection conceived in terms of a fusion of and co-dependency between man and machine. In Fred Saberhagen’s 1979 science fiction novel *Berserker Man*, for example, a small group of human resistance fighters place their hopes with a child called Michael Geulincx, who due to a hybrid parentage is part human and part machine. Similarly to how Murphy seeks what he thinks of as ‘the best of himself’<sup>47</sup> within his man-machine hybrid world, where he becomes what Beckett calls ‘the entire machine’<sup>48</sup>, so too Michael Geulincx can only fulfil his potential as Christ-like saviour when he is fused into a further machine, in his case a special kind of space suit, one sympathetic to its context as both human (it is skin-like, self-healing), and machine (it is various kinds of life-support system and weapon). This suit (‘Lancelot’) provides Michael Geulincx access to a realm of experiences otherwise beyond his reach, comparable to how Murphy can only access his deepest zone of mind in the chair:

Again Lancelot guided him into the realm that seemed to lie beyond time. And now Michael began for the first time to feel fully the stresses that Lancelot could impose upon a connected human mind.<sup>49</sup>

This ‘realm that seemed to lie beyond time’, accessible only when plugged in to the machine to become more than the sum of its parts as ‘the entire machine’, is for both Michael Geulincx and for Murphy, the ‘best’ of themselves. That Michael Geulincx is able to access such a ‘realm’ as a ‘connected human mind’ might just save all humanity. That Murphy is able will not even save Murphy, who hopes for outcomes that are far more narcissistic. This narcissism is fundamental to Murphy, and it is born out partly via the complicities and complications in Beckett’s subversion of Spinoza, a subversion that relates to Geulincx in intriguing ways.

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<sup>46</sup> Ackerley 2004, p. 29.

<sup>47</sup> *Murphy*, p. 46.

<sup>48</sup> *Murphy*, p. 21.

<sup>49</sup> Saberhagen 1988, p. 117.

## 2.6 Murphy and Spinozan self-inspection

In his chair where Murphy is free from the machinations of bodily ‘connection’ he seeks a kind of acquaintance with himself. He pursues inner explorations that might be considered analogous with Geulincx’ *inspectio sui*. Murphy’s investigations depend upon a freedom from contingency, just as Geulincx’ Cartesian investigation based on the *cogito* also does, and they purport to invite, rather than proscribe, the limits of selfhood as defined epistemologically. We might, therefore, want to assert that Murphy is a kind of philosopher. Yet Murphy loves wisdom only in so far as it is constituted by an experience of self. The only thing Murphy is interested in is ‘what he had not ceased to seek from the moment of his being strangled into a state of respiration – the best of himself’<sup>50</sup>. But Murphy is not a self-improver, a voyager. This ‘best’ Murphy cannot find venturing out in a world unless parts of this world act as his proxy, as with the patients at the MMM. Instead, he gathers himself together in the chair, and seeks to find the ‘best of himself’ deep within his own free-floating depths. In this surrendering self-inspection, Murphy’s ‘surrender to the thongs of self, a simple materialisation of self-bondage, acceptance of which is the fundamental unheroic’<sup>51</sup> as Beckett described it in a German diary entry of 18 January 1937, and as a narcissistic philosopher, might we want to assert that Murphy is wholeheartedly a Geulingian philosopher?

An important qualification should be noted before Murphy’s inner explorations are entirely co-opted as a Geulingian *inspectio sui*. Importantly, it is explicitly in terms of Spinoza that Murphy’s self-regard is framed, in the epigraph to Chapter 6 that subverts Spinoza’s description of God:

Amor intellectualis quo Murphy se ipsum amat<sup>52</sup>

[The intellectual love with which Murphy loves himself]

For Spinoza, knowing of the love God has for himself leads to the further knowledge of what mankind should do to secure its salvation:

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<sup>50</sup> *Murphy*, p. 46.

<sup>51</sup> German Diary 4, UoR.

<sup>52</sup> *Murphy*, p. 69.

Hence it follows that God, in so far as he loves himself, loves mankind, and, consequently, that the love of God towards men and the mind's intellectual love towards God are one and the same. [...] From this we clearly understand in what our salvation or blessedness or freedom consists, namely, in the constant and eternal love towards God, that is, in God's name towards men. This love or blessedness is called glory in the Holy Scriptures, and rightly so.<sup>53</sup>

Murphy, however, finds no such 'salvation' resulting from his 'love towards' himself, whose self-regarding 'love towards' might be described as more masturbatory than procreative. Murphy defers only to himself and avoids all involvement in the big world, so there is no Spinozan 'glory' for the protagonist. Murphy's ignominious *petite mort* is a logical consequence of his being ensconced in his little world.

By tying the love of God into Murphy's love of self, Beckett brings Spinoza's dictum (*Deus se ipsum amore intellectuali infinito amat*<sup>54</sup> [God loves himself with an infinite intellectual love]) down to earth via Murphy's narcissism and arrogance. As Ackerley points out of the epigraph:

Spinoza thus subverted is a convenient formulation for the rejection of the rationalist tradition, although Beckett finally relies more upon the very different *Ethica* of Geulincx, in which, however, the opposition of Ratio (reason) and Philautia (self-love) is a constant theme.<sup>55</sup>

There are also, however, some interesting interrelations between Beckett's uses of occasionalism and Spinoza along these lines. Geulincx elucidates a breakdown of 'Love' into two divisions: 'pleasant love, and effective love'. Pleasant love is itself composed of two further divisions: 'sensible or corporeal love [...] and spiritual love'. Self-love, in Wilson's translation 'concupiscent love', is a sub-division of Effective love, which manifests as

either benevolent love (which does not make for virtue, as we cannot do anything either good or bad for Reason), concupiscent love (and this makes for virtue even less, as with concupiscent love we love ourselves, not Reason), or obedient love (and this at last constitutes virtue, for no other love is consistent with Reason).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Spinoza 1992, p. 219 (*Ethica* V, proposition no. 36).

<sup>54</sup> Spinoza 1992, p. 218 (*Ethica* V, proposition no. 35).

<sup>55</sup> Ackerley 2004, p. 116.

<sup>56</sup> *Ethics*, p. 312.

As Beckett transcribed:

Amor concupiscentiae...non est aliud quam amor sui, seu Philautia...et fomes Peccati, aut potius ipsissimum Paccatum.<sup>57</sup>

Concupiscent Love...it is nothing other than Self-Love or Philautia...it is the tinder of Sin, or rather Sin its very own self.<sup>58</sup>

In Chapter 10 of *Murphy* Wylie, former pupil of the Newtonian Pythagorean Neary, asserts his own Geulingian prerogative in similar terms:

'My attitude,' said Wylie, 'being the auscultation, execution and adequation of the voices, or rather voice, of Reason and Philautia, does not change.'<sup>59</sup>

Beckett annotated his Geulincx notes on self-love with a summary phrase added in English (here in bold):

**Humility foreign to the ancients...** But self-love seduced them all; and here I excuse no-one, not even great Plato...<sup>60</sup>

Humility is also foreign to Murphy, and self-love, following the subversion of Spinoza's phrase, also seduces Murphy. It does so in such a way as to owe debts both to Spinoza and to Geulincx that become even more interwoven and complex when we consider Beckett's earlier 'Philosophy Notes'. These reveal that Beckett had previously aligned aspects of occasionalism with Spinoza's axiom. The notes cite Malebranche's concept of universal reason as a parallel to the Spinozan original of *Murphy*'s Chapter 6 epigraph: '(amor intellectualis quo deus se ipsum amat = raison universelle of Malebranche)'<sup>61</sup>.

The incidence of the word *Philautia* in *Murphy* might at first appear to imply its provenance as deriving from Beckett's Geulincx transcriptions, yet Beckett had noted *Philautia* earlier. It appears in the 'Dream' notebook (entry no. 779), where it is snatched from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* as part of the entry 'inexorable &

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<sup>57</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/8v.

<sup>58</sup> *Ethics*, p. 315.

<sup>59</sup> *Murphy*, p. 134.

<sup>60</sup> *Ethics*, p. 311. In the first fair copy Beckett wrote this phrase as 'Humility no virtue for the ancients' (TCD MS 10971/6/7r).

<sup>61</sup> TCD MS 10967/188.



supercilious & arrogant & eminent ~~philolau~~ philautia'<sup>62</sup>. The occurrence of the word itself and the broader conceptual apparatus of self-love in *Murphy*, then, provide examples of how Beckett's incorporations of Geulincx are sometimes more complex than at first sight they might appear to be.

## 2.7 Geulincx in Chapter 11

The word '*adminicles*', which appears in Chapter 11, can with more confidence be said to derive from the Geulincx notes. Murphy feels himself the subject of a further binary division, this time of separateness from all his daytime involvement with the hospital patients, and 'the gulf' becomes tangible:

There were the patients themselves, circulating through the wards and in the gardens. He could mix with them, touch them, speak to them, watch them, imagine himself one of them. But in the night of Skinner's there were none of these adminicles, no loathing to love from, no kick from the world that was not his, no illusion of caress from the world that might be.<sup>63</sup>

Here, as with Chapter 6, Beckett again melds psychology with philosophy. In an atmosphere of night ordained by the radical behaviourist psychologist B. F. Skinner, whose theories prioritised individual private experience (which more traditional theories of behaviourism necessarily lacked), Murphy's own singular and private experience lacks the support of daytime distractions, the consolations of interaction with the patients.<sup>64</sup> Following Geulincx' section in *Ethics* on the seven ethical obligations that proceed from an acceptance of humility and the *ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis* axiom, is the penultimate section of Treatise 1 concerning what Geulincx calls the '*Adminicle of Humility*'<sup>65</sup>. Beckett's notes to this section are all contained in the handwritten manuscript that continues from the end of the second fair copy. This

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<sup>62</sup> Beckett 1999, p. 111.

<sup>63</sup> *Murphy*, p. 149.

<sup>64</sup> Skinner was involved in many psychological theories and projects, inventing 'operant conditioning', and receiving many awards (including the National Medal of Service, awarded by Lyndon Johnson). Skinner had a preference for pigeons as his experimental creature of choice, and during the Second World War concocted 'Project Pigeon', a plan for a pigeon-guided missile where the bird, trained to recognise a picture of the target, would peck at a directional screen in the nose cone of a missile.

<sup>65</sup> *Ethics*, p. 352.

word *adminicle*, derived from *adminiculum* and meaning prop or support, summarises Geulincx' thoughts on humility as it pertains to happiness:

Happiness is like a shadow: it flees from you when you pursue it; but pursues you when you flee from it. But you should be aware that it may not always pursue you when you flee; for if you learn cunning in the ways of happiness and flee from it in order that it may pursue you, it will not pursue you.<sup>66</sup>

Geulincx insists on humanity finding a way to become solely compelled to follow its ethical obligations, not to more wildly or frantically pursue satisfactions of temporary happiness. This is not only because following the dictates of Reason, according to Geulincx, is the right thing to do (as we have seen, Geulincx argues that 'Virtue is the exclusive Love of right Reason'<sup>67</sup>), it is also because pursuing happiness is futile anyway, because 'it flees from you' when you do so. It is Geulincx' final lesson in Treatise 1 deriving from the instruction not to attempt what you cannot attain (*ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis*), and it is asserted with a florid boldness that Beckett transcribed:

Let us forsake these inauspicious standards behind which with such great pomp, such great consent and concourse, so many impediments and burdens of studies and counsels, the human race marches. Day and night they seek Happiness; it is the Palladium for whose capture they compete...Nor are they ashamed of such disgraceful service, or rather servitude...Their watchword is public, and in the mouths of all: *Let us be happy and prosper!*<sup>68</sup>

But what function does the word 'adminicles' have as a quotation in the context of *Murphy*? I want to suggest that it manifests a kind of middle ground as regards Beckett's 'notesnatching' of fragmentary words and phrases from Geulincx. A number of other allusions to occasionalism in the novel do not require any strong integration between the allusion and its context in the novel. In Chapter 9, for example, Murphy questioned 'the etymology of gas', wondering whether gas might 'turn a neurotic into a psychotic'. He concludes:

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<sup>66</sup> *Ethics*, p. 353.

<sup>67</sup> *Ethics*, p. 312.

<sup>68</sup> *Ethics*, p. 353.

No. Only God could do that. Let there be heaven in the midst of the waters, let it divide the waters from the waters. The Chaos and Waters Facilities Act.<sup>69</sup>

These wonderings are narrated as Murphy drifts off into himself in his chair. The intimation of an occasionalist God who is the only agent capable of causation is one of the first hints that Geulincx might be entering the peripheries of the novel. This peripheral presence becomes more subtly cohered with Murphy's character in later allusions, and this is what happens with 'adminicules'. The later 'adminicules' aligns Geulincx' description of happiness as only possible in a turning away from happiness (in the hope that it might follow) with Murphy's involvement with the shadowy patients at the hospital whom he pursues but who rarely pursue him. However, the word still juts out from the contextual text a little awkwardly, exhibiting its author's expertise in Latin and manifesting a precision of intellectual omniscience at odds with the novel's more determinedly ambiguous drives (such as bring about the more elusive Chapter 6), resulting in something comparable to the sections of the novel that Uhlmann critiques as occasional lapses into overly didactic uses of philosophy.<sup>70</sup> Consequently, it reveals, as do the infrequent but striking lapses into a didactic tone, that Beckett's philosophical reading was still partly a hindrance to his firmly establishing his own voice. That is, Beckett's Geulincx transcriptions provide a wellspring of complex concepts and 'hard words'. But in instances such as this Beckett shows signs of struggling with the incorporation of these ideas.

In the novel's final few chapters there are further instances of fleeting allusions to occasionalism. Neary's willingness 'to count on the Almighty to pull off the rest' after 'the ice has been broken'<sup>71</sup> in his hoped for relationship with Miss Counihan in Chapter 10, for example, subtly renders human wishes in terms of the deistic agency of occasionalism. As does the description of the sleeping patients:

Those that slept did so in the frozen attitudes of Herculaneum, as though sleep had pounced upon them like an act of God. And those that did not did not by the obvious grace of the same authority.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Murphy*, p. 110.

<sup>70</sup> See Uhlmann 2006a pp. 75-77.

<sup>71</sup> *Murphy*, p. 138.

<sup>72</sup> *Murphy*, p. 149.

Yet even these are still fragmentary incorporations, and while they arguably import a level of irony they do not drive any major aspects of narrative, and little of the characterisation in the novel relies upon such interjections. Hence a description of the use of ‘adminicules’ as residing on middle ground, as marking a transition point in Beckett’s allusions to Geulincx where an apparently fleeting reference nevertheless deepens an understanding of the situation it is brought to bear on.

There is an exception to these compromises of the middle ground, however, a place where Geulincx does not jut out at all obviously and which drives an important whole section of the novel’s dramatic structure and characterisation. The section is even more important than this, however, as it opens up for Beckett a wholly new area of literary expression. This is in the chess game of Chapter 11, and the following discussion reads this game in relation to Geulincx’ occasionalist philosophy of futile causation, and argues for the importance of the section as illustrative of Beckett’s aesthetics more broadly as they developed from *Murphy* to *Watt*.

## **2.8 The failure of ‘vicarious autology’ in the chess game**

Geulincx argues for an epistemology, contra his philosophical progenitor Descartes, founded in ignorance, or ‘*nehiscence*’. We should follow a programme of self-inspection, but whereas Descartes found the *cogito*, a solid ground upon which all future knowledge could be confidently built, Geulincx finds ignorance of our place in a world and how we might interact with that world. In basing his philosophy on principles of incapacity rather than sure knowledge of self, Geulincx’ *cogito*, as Uhlmann points out, becomes a *nescio* (‘to not know’<sup>73</sup>). Geulincx’ eyes, as Beckett wrote in March 1936, turn ‘patiently inward’ (his principle of *inspectio sui*), but finding that we do not know anything about the things that we do, that we cannot therefore be said to actually *do* anything at all in the world, those eyes, which he does not ‘on that account [...] repudiate [...] like the terrified Berkeley’ or try to ‘put out [...] as Heraclitus did and Rimbaud began to’<sup>74</sup>, turn patiently outwards (the consequent *despectio sui*), in wonder and in humility. I argue that it is in this act of

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<sup>73</sup> Uhlmann 2006a, p. 98.

<sup>74</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 5 March 1936. *CL*, p. 319.

turning, in the choice of direction in which he looks, that Murphy fails and falls short of Geulincx' axiom. Murphy looks inside himself and finds there the joyous 'pleasure, such pleasure that pleasure was not the word'<sup>75</sup> and so finds no reason to look out again. Yet it will be while he is strapped into this closed space, in thrall only to himself, that he will clumsily set light to the big world around him and be gone forever. Thinking he was free from the big world's elemental contingencies, Murphy's rootedness in, literally his being tied to, the physical world, will be the cause of his death.

Murphy is flattered that he appears to Ticklepenny to have 'a great look of [the patient] Clarke'. For three weeks Clarke has been in a catatonic stupor in which he 'would repeat for hours the phrase: "Mr. Endon is *very* superior."<sup>76</sup> Murphy is flattered by his resemblance to Clarke because Murphy thinks the same about Mr. Endon. The patients in the MMM are to Murphy, like his own mind, a 'Matrix of surds [...] missile[s] without provenance or target, caught up in a tumult of non-Newtonian motion'<sup>77</sup>. They are of interest to Murphy only in so far as they mirror his own sense of self. And for Murphy Mr. Endon is the apotheosis of this, the point at which to End-on. Mr. Endon for Murphy is the pinnacle of achievement of a self-inspection, a staring at one's 'within' (as is often pointed out in regard to Mr. Endon's name, the Greek preposition *endon* means 'within'). Knowlson points out of Mr. Endon that this figure 'owes as much to Beckett's readings about the unconscious, as it did to the patient whom Beckett saw in the hospital where Geoffrey Thompson was working'<sup>78</sup>. The real life precedent is revealed in the note that was the basis for Knowlson's published assertion, in which Knowlson quotes Beckett saying Bethlem was indeed 'where I saw Mr. Endon'<sup>79</sup>. The fictionalised Mr. Endon apparently suffers (though this may be such suffering that suffering is not the word, for he is numb and inviolable, not raging or in any apparent pain) from 'a psychosis so limpid and imperturbable that Murphy felt drawn to it as Narcissus to his fountain'<sup>80</sup>. However,

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<sup>75</sup> *Murphy*, p. 4.

<sup>76</sup> *Murphy*, p. 121.

<sup>77</sup> *Murphy*, p. 72.

<sup>78</sup> Knowlson 1996, p. 218.

<sup>79</sup> This note belongs to the James and Elizabeth Knowlson collection, UoR. It is not yet catalogued.

<sup>80</sup> *Murphy*, p. 116.

as Murphy peers with an impatient eye through the Judas window into the little world of Mr. Endon's cell the discrepancy between the two becomes clear:

[...] the sad truth was, that while Mr. Endon for Murphy was no less than bliss, Murphy for Mr. Endon was no more than chess. Murphy's eye? Say rather, the chessy eye. Mr. Endon had vibrated to the chessy eye upon him and made his preparations accordingly.<sup>81</sup>

In a farce as ridiculous as the monkeys playing chess Beckett wanted as a frontispiece for the novel,<sup>82</sup> the frustratedly stuck-in-the-big-world Murphy and the unwittingly stuck-in-the-little-world Mr. Endon will play out through Beckett's favourite game of closed-space abstraction the Geulingian lack of causality, the 'ethical yoyo'<sup>83</sup>, between themselves. For it is indeed Murphy's failure to heed the axiom from *Ethics* during this game that is his undoing. That is, Murphy does not realise he has no power to cause any response in Mr. Endon, despite Mr. Endon being 'voted by one and all the most biddable little gaga in the entire institution'<sup>84</sup>, and he persists with wilful determination, unable to cast his eyes with humility on the irreconcilable differences between himself and Mr. Endon.

Even before the game starts a discrepancy between the two players is made clear. Mr. Endon must always play as Black, for 'If presented with White he would fade, without the least trace of annoyance, away into a light stupor'<sup>85</sup>. The fundamental difference between Murphy and Mr. Endon is established here as their capacity for value judgements. Whereas Murphy casts his vote for the little world because of the value he places upon it, in sharp contrast to the loathed 'occasions of fiasco' he encounters when involving himself in the big world, Mr. Endon makes no such assessments about the world around him. If Murphy does not get his way he

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<sup>81</sup> *Murphy*, p. 150.

<sup>82</sup> Publishers were not forthcoming. Beckett stated he would spend his life 'regretting the monkeys' (Beckett quoted in Ackerley and Gontarski (eds.) 2006, p. 380) after reminding Reavey a number of times to try to get this picture into the novel. He asked 'what about apes' (Beckett to Reavey, 13 January 1938, HRHRC) then lamented further: 'I suppose my apes have faded out as a possibility. I am disappointed' (Beckett to Reavey, 17 January 1938, HRHRC)).

<sup>83</sup> *Murphy*, p. 69. Described in Ackerley 2004 (p. 120) as a reference to Geulincx' *Ethics*, specifically to the post-Cartesian problem addressed therein of the interaction between mind and body, rather than to mediation between good or bad moral qualities.

<sup>84</sup> *Murphy*, p. 149.

<sup>85</sup> *Murphy*, p. 152.

rebels, twists the occasions to match his disposition. Mr. Endon does no such things, merely ‘fading away’ as subject to powers beyond his control.

Murphy’s first move in the game, pawn to king’s fourth, is intriguingly a move that was also described in Beckett’s first published piece of fiction written seven years prior to *Murphy* in 1929. The first paragraph of the short story ‘Assumption’ contains the following:

He spoke little, and then almost huskily, with the low-voiced timidity of a man who shrinks from argument, who can reply confidently to Pawn to King’s fourth, but whose faculties are frozen into bewildered suspension by Pawn to Rook’s third [...] He indeed was not such a man, but his voice was of such a man<sup>86</sup>

In this earlier story Beckett is willing to inscribe a specific move of chess with the force of a whole personality. This use of chess prior to *Murphy* gives a hint that we might be on a right track in thinking of Murphy’s own self as somehow inscribed in the moves of his game.

Mr. Endon’s first move is knight to king’s rook third. Murphy tries mirroring Mr. Endon. Indeed his second, third, fourth, sixth and seventh moves all mirror those of Mr. Endon. In the one instance of the game where Mr. Endon repeats a move Murphy has made (Mr. Endon’s eighth), he brings his pieces back to exactly the same positions they held when the game began. It might have been presumed from reading the annotation that describes this move as ‘An ingenious and beautiful début, sometimes called the Pipe-opener’ that this was a highly specialised real opening. In fact it is a comical manifestation of Mr. Endon’s mania for symmetry and his solipsism. He has merely rearranged his pieces in a monochrome visual pattern. After Murphy’s eighth move (mirroring Mr. Endon’s) the board is left just as it was after Murphy’s very first move of the game, as if Murphy had only played his pawn to king’s fourth opener. While the very first move of the game, not this eighth or the ninth, was described as ‘the primary cause of all White’s subsequent difficulties’<sup>87</sup>, this is only because it is the first move, Murphy’s necessary assertion of self that he can not take back. The primary cause of Murphy’s difficulties is just this, himself – his sanity,

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<sup>86</sup> *CSP*, p. 3.

<sup>87</sup> *Murphy*, p. 152.

his normality in playing pawn to king's fourth, and its rootedness in the world he longs to escape.

In a series of moves calculated to solicit recognition of them, to force Mr. Endon to recognise Murphy as an independent agent, Murphy takes another approach to its extreme and tries desperately to give up his pieces. He moves a knight into a losing position three times and tries valiantly with what the narrator calls 'the ingenuity of despair' at move twenty-seven to sacrifice his queen, trying again at forty-one, yet still Mr. Endon's non-reaction is unshakeable. Neither approach causes Mr. Endon to produce anything like a competitive move. Just as Mr. Endon saw not Murphy at his Judas window but the 'chessy eye', similarly he follows the abstract rules of chess in a further abstraction. He does not follow them competitively, but instead adheres to them only in so far as they allow him, without actually breaking any of them, to monomaniacally rearrange a monochrome visual pattern according to a strict plan of symmetry, a closed system. Indeed, Mr. Endon's manipulation of the pieces to rearrange symmetry is the single most determining factor of his moves in the game. On a further five occasions he manages to manoeuvre his pieces into a different symmetrical pattern, at move 21, 23, 27, 39 (this with his rooks upside down, though this does not upset the symmetry) and 41.

Mr. Endon's turns taken, the claim being that we cannot really call them his responses, during Murphy's abject begging for quittance are described as his 'irresistible game'<sup>88</sup> when rather than taking Murphy's queen he returns a knight to a corner square, revealing his pieces in the comic symmetry of move 27. Murphy's pieces of course end in utter disarray. Murphy is by turns confused, imitative, desperate, seemingly random, then suicidal, finally giving up the ghost when forced into a winning position by Mr. Endon's most likely (but illegal) 44<sup>th</sup> move that would establish his pieces in a seventh occurrence of symmetry.<sup>89</sup> Murphy can see that Mr. Endon is not going to notice him and is about to form another symmetrical pattern, and he cannot bear the consequent realisation that Mr. Endon does not see him as a

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<sup>88</sup> *Murphy*, p. 153.

<sup>89</sup> It may be interesting to note that Murphy's travails with conduits between the two worlds of the big and the little (the chair and Mr. Endon) are bookended by instances of the number six nearly but not quite becoming the number seven: Murphy's seven scarves in the novel's opening scene actually lack a seventh.



partner, an equal. So Murphy suddenly ‘surrenders’<sup>90</sup>: ‘Further solicitation would be frivolous and vexatious, and Murphy, with fool’s mate in his soul, retires’<sup>91</sup>.

Geulincx wrote in *Ethics*:

We have no power to affect either our own or any other body; this is perfectly obvious from our consciousness alone, and no sane man would deny it.<sup>92</sup>

This Cartesian founding principle ‘obvious from consciousness alone’ is Geulincx’ clear and distinct realisation of impotence. Murphy does not realise he has no power to affect Mr. Endon. Instead his hubris prolongs the fruitless manoeuvres in a game he can only lose, and in his consequent frustration we might well hear an echo of Geulincx’ realisation that ‘I am a mere spectator of a machine whose workings I can neither adjust nor readjust. I neither construct nor demolish anything here’<sup>93</sup>. If only Murphy would try the alternative approach of Geulingian restraint he might just beat this catatonic at his own game. If Murphy would cast his eyes with humility upon his impotence and realise that where he cannot act, where he is worth nothing, he should not try to act, then he might at least stand a chance of failing this game in a better way. But Murphy is not a humble man. Geulincx asked rhetorically ‘How will [a humble man] listen to what Reason says if he listens only to what he himself says’<sup>94</sup>. Besotted with his own company, in the words of Malraux Murphy seeks out only those others who are like himself, listening only to himself or his vice-existers, and forcing the oblivion. Presaging Geulincx’ terminology as used by Beckett writing in 1946 to Duthuit, Murphy had been transfixed by a ‘vicarious autology he had been enjoying [...] in little Mr. Endon and all the other proxies’<sup>95</sup>. However, Murphy’s self-regard will get the better of him and when his inferno engulfs him it will be while he is still in thrall to himself and his own ‘autology’.

Following the collapse of the game Murphy stares into the unresponsive cornea of Mr. Endon and sees ‘horribly reduced, obscured and distorted, his own

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<sup>90</sup> *Murphy*, p. 152.

<sup>91</sup> *Murphy*, p. 153.

<sup>92</sup> *Ethics*, p. 243.

<sup>93</sup> *Ethics*, p. 333.

<sup>94</sup> *Ethics*, p. 220.

<sup>95</sup> *Murphy*, p. 118. Beckett uses this term again only three paragraphs later in an instance of repetition unlike his other uses of ‘hard words’ derived from Geulincx in *Murphy*.

image'<sup>96</sup>. This instant of non-perception has been described as a 'Geulincxian critique of the Proustian moment, which redeems nothing'<sup>97</sup>. Murphy is horrifyingly still himself, unwilling to let go of his sanity's rootedness in the big world. The cost of letting go is too great for the variously impecunious hero. O'Hara has described Murphy in this scene as reproducing 'the pose of Narcissus, bent over the stream to see himself'<sup>98</sup>. This is the point at which Murphy in his narcissistic way blooms. To pursue this analogy briefly (while leaving O'Hara's Freud to one side in favour of Ovid, whose *Metamorphosis* Beckett was fond of), if Mr. Endon is Murphy's Echo, with his psychosis perhaps a little of Juno's curse, this is only after Murphy has in vain and in vanity tried to sound the echo of Mr. Endon's moves in the game. However, Murphy will be 'melted, consumed by the fire inside him'<sup>99</sup> as is the fate of Narcissus, rather than turning to stone. The game has unmasked him as the selfish Narcissus, not the selfless Echo. By the following day he will be dead and dust, even more literally 'a speck in Mr. Endon's unseen'<sup>100</sup>. Murphy, unable to resign himself to the Geulingian knowledge that 'whatever I do stays within me; and that nothing I do passes into my body, or any other body, or anything else'<sup>101</sup>, persists with the misguided belief that there might be something to achieve in this game. There is not, and for Murphy as for anyone else Geulincx would offer the simple restraint: 'It is vain to attempt what I cannot undertake'<sup>102</sup>. Murphy cannot properly seek out the company of others like himself, as he sees Mr. Endon (*à la* Malraux), yet nor can he sufficiently adhere to only his own (as with Geulincx). He will indeed 'break down', as Beckett described it, between these two in his dying whilst tied to the chair, to his 'disappointed bridge' that is neither here nor there, neither wholly of the big world nor of the little, just like Murphy.

Chess is a frequently recurring motif in Beckett's oeuvre. He is quoted describing a German production of *Endspiel*, for example, the title of which derives from the final phase of a chess game: 'Hamm is the King in this chess game lost from

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<sup>96</sup> *Murphy*, p. 156.

<sup>97</sup> Ackerley 2004, p. 202.

<sup>98</sup> O'Hara 1997, p. 60.

<sup>99</sup> Ovid 2004, p. 16.

<sup>100</sup> *Murphy*, p. 156.

<sup>101</sup> *Ethics*, p. 331.

<sup>102</sup> *Ethics*, p. 339.

the start. He knows from the start that he is only making senseless moves... He's only trying to postpone the inevitable end... He is a poor player'<sup>103</sup>. Hamm's autocratic attempts to position himself in relation to the dimensions of the room, hugging the walls before making sure he is dead centre, are movements that form part of a lineage in Beckett's *oeuvre* that finds its first strong foothold with Mr. Endon's solipsistic symmetry, though also goes back further to 'Assumption'. According to Ackerley and Gontarski, when Beckett calls on chess this is frequently in order to 'illustrate [a] paradox of freedom and restriction'<sup>104</sup>. Such a motif serves particularly well the demands of a narrative driven by occasionalist incapacity, that is with the appearance of freedom and the reality of restriction. The chess game of *Murphy* also elaborates the theme already in the novel of closed systems,<sup>105</sup> in this instance given a Geulingian impetus. In both this and in its exceptionality in the novel as a game, an enumeration of specific, ludic moves, the chess game anticipates the many logistical and numerical systematic machinations to which Beckett will subject his next protagonist, Watt, and to which Watt will attempt to subject the world.

*Murphy*'s chess game section was, therefore, hugely important to Beckett. Through all the difficulties trying to get the novel published Beckett remained steadfast in refusing to alter this section. Beckett had even considered 'putting the game of chess there in a section by itself'<sup>106</sup>, and on 20 December 1936 flatly pointed out his frustration and incredulity at a publisher's wishes to cut some of the book:

I can't imagine what they want me to take out. I refuse to touch the section entitled *Amor Intellectualis quo M. se ipsum amat*. And I refuse also to touch the game of chess. The Horoscope chapter is also essential. But I am anxious for the book to be published and therefore cannot afford to reply with a blank refusal to cut anything.<sup>107</sup>

Nearly thirty years later when *Murphy* was reprinted by John Calder's Jupiter imprint Beckett was again working on this chess game, altering Mr. Endon's penultimate

<sup>103</sup> Ackerley and Gontarski (eds.) 2006, p. 96.

<sup>104</sup> Ackerley and Gontarski (eds.) 2006, p. 95.

<sup>105</sup> Those adumbrated by Ruby Cohn as 'the park, Miss Dwyer's figure, Murphy's mind, and the horse leech's daughter are all closed systems' (Cohn 1962, p. 61). A closed system is a tightly bordered zone where any 'quantum of wantum' (*Murphy*, p. 38) is self-contained. An amount of desire becomes, in a closed system, a self-perpetuating ratio of desire to suffering. Closed systems by definition do not leak, and serve well as playthings of the monomaniacal and the insane.

<sup>106</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 7 July 1936. *CL*, p. 350.

<sup>107</sup> Beckett to Reavey, 13 November 1936. *CL*, p. 380.

move, number 42. Ackerley describes how ‘in many editions of *Murphy* Mr. Endon’s move 42 is incorrect, being printed as K-Q2, an illegal final move into check’, and continues:

The Routledge original, the Grove Press printing and the French translation are correct; the error crept in when the novel was reset for the 1963 Jupiter edition, and was replicated in the Picador version where it went unnoticed even by those (Taylor and Loughery, 1989; myself, 1998) writing specifically on the game.<sup>108</sup>

Ackerley could not have been aware when publishing this in 2004, as Beckett’s correspondence with Barbara Bray was not publicly available until 2006, that in this correspondence Beckett refers to the following alteration to the move:

Checked *Murphy*’s game of chess and made a small change. Mr. Endon’s 42<sup>nd</sup> move: K – Q2 instead of K – K2. Pretty feeble joke the whole thing. Could do it a little better now – but not much.<sup>109</sup>

The new move would place Mr. Endon’s King at the mercy of Murphy’s Queen on an adjacent square, which is an illegal move. The publishing ‘error’, however, in fact appears to be in reprinting the earlier K – K2, not in fixing the move to reflect legality. There is an argument to be made that this modification by Beckett was itself the error, as it is the only move in the game that breaks the rules of chess. Beckett may have had this pointed out to him. In a letter to Bray of early the following year Beckett reports he looked again at ‘*Murphy* proofs’ and writes ‘I thought there was an error in the Endon affence, but there does not seem to be, or I could not find it’<sup>110</sup>. With either move, however, the central point remains that Murphy refuses to end the game by making winning moves, but K – Q2 makes the ‘feeble joke’ of Mr. Endon’s lack of recognition that much more explicit, while also retaining the possibility that his next move would complete the symmetry.

## **2.9 Occasional(ist) Reviews**

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<sup>108</sup> Ackerley 2004, p. 195.

<sup>109</sup> Beckett to Bray, 7 February 1962, TCD MS 10948/1/170.

<sup>110</sup> Beckett to Bray, postmark unclear but early-mid-January 1963. TCD MS 10948/1/219.

In 1938 Coffey wrote a review of *Murphy* that J.C.C. Mays argues presumably pleased Beckett enough to have been a major reason for his gifting Coffey the novel's manuscript (the now privately owned *Sasha Murphy* discussed above, which Coffey sold sometime in the 1960s). In the allusion-heavy 'review' Coffey also asserts the chess game to be the novel's climax, and writes of the scene following the game's collapse:

Communication – the crash together in space of two granite blocks – ends at the finger-nails. He does not undesire but through pain of loss. The experiment failed again.<sup>111</sup>

For Coffey, as for Beckett, the chess game is the novel's climactic 'crash together in space', revealing Murphy as he has studiously avoided seeing himself. How this climax comes about for Coffey, who frames the issue in terms of 'Communication', is through the very Geulingian concept of 'undesire'. The realisation of the failure of Murphy's 'experiment' is a consequence of his inability to 'undesire', to undo his desires, to 'want nothing'.

In a much more negative 1938 review, in which he wrote that "Murphy" is difficult, serious, and wrong', thanks in part to Beckett selling 'his bluffs over the double counter', Dylan Thomas did at least recognise the intelligence of the work, calling Beckett 'a great legpuller and an enemy of obviousness'. This was not enough to redeem the novel in its entirety however, and Thomas concludes that the novel 'fails':

It fails in its purpose because the minds and the bodies of these characters are almost utterly without relation to each other.<sup>112</sup>

Thomas's central criticism of the novel, then, is one rather peculiarly framed in terms that point to the novel's occasionalist concerns. The disconnections between mind and body, residing in the novel as we have seen as a 'problem [...] of little interest' neither to be solved or even necessarily neatly rendered but rather 'exploited', is for

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<sup>111</sup> Coffey 1938. Cited by Mays 2010, p. 89.

<sup>112</sup> Thomas 1938, p. 454. Beckett in his turn appears to have not been overly enamoured with Thomas. In a 1958 letter to Bray he wrote: 'I listened to Dylan Thomas reading his fat poems and being witty on poetry, poets and him-self and didn't like any of it, the pulpit voice and hyper-articulation and sibilation, but I'm lousy public' (Beckett to Bray, 29 November 1958, TCD MS 10948/1/13).

Thomas only one that invokes ‘walking, gesticulating brains’<sup>113</sup>. Thomas’ imagery, however, is well suited to a depiction of Geulincx occasionalism. A ‘walking, gesticulating’ brain figures what for Geulincx is the essential ineffable mystery of all human life. That is, given that I have a brain and that I appear to do things (like walk and gesticulate, examples Geulincx even uses<sup>114</sup>), what is there constituting me but these two separate events upon which, with no rational justification, I impose a causal relation? If I reflect on the other hand ‘with reason’ then I will see that this causal relation is entirely impossible. According to Geulincx we are indeed just such ‘walking, gesticulating brains’. As Coffey did, Thomas also gets to the heart of *Murphy* as a novel founded on occasionalist disconnection. For Coffey this is a disconnection between minds, between Mr. Endon’s and Murphy’s, and it instances the brilliance of the novel’s climactic non-climax. For Thomas it is between minds and bodies and shows the flaws in what he thinks of as the work itself not properly transited from Beckett’s own mind to the page.

If, as argued, Beckett’s substantial encounter with Geulincx comes too late into the composition of *Murphy* for the philosopher to make a significant impact upon earlier stages of the novel (that would not be the result of extensive revisions), but when he does come to have an impact, as revealed in the chess game, this is an important one, might we therefore be inclined, or even forced, to think of the importance of Geulincx for Beckett in terms of a broader place in the *oeuvre*, focusing on the ‘already’ of Beckett’s ‘already in *Murphy*’ offered to Kennedy in 1967? If Geulincx was ‘already’ in *Murphy* then he would also be, this ‘already’ hints, in later works. The Geulincx notes taken in 1936 remained with Beckett all his life, in contrast to many other papers donated to archives at Reading or elsewhere, hinting perhaps that, as Uhlmann has suggested, ‘they were made [...] for works he might write after *Murphy*’<sup>115</sup>. While Uhlmann’s stark assertion of what the notes were ‘made for’ is at odds with an ambiguity in the notes being ‘of uncertain status’ in this regard, nevertheless the proposed chronology of how Beckett’s transcriptions map onto *Murphy*’s composition, if even close to accurate, may have implications far beyond

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<sup>113</sup> Thomas 1938, p. 454.

<sup>114</sup> Geulincx wonders, for example, how ‘when I want to walk, my feet are flung forward’ (*Ethics*, p. 33). The focus on gesticulating as the movement of a hand or arm is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

<sup>115</sup> *Ethics*, p. 303.

*Murphy*. *Murphy* shows signs of occasionalism right from the start of the novel's composition in August 1935, something that alone implies that Beckett's enthusiasm for Geulincx at the time of the 1936 research was less to do with the discovery of an entirely new and revolutionary paradigm of knowledge. It speaks rather of accretion, sympathy, and cohesion, and perhaps a little serendipity. As a consequence, it might not be accurate to describe *Murphy* as 'the most Geulincxian of the works'<sup>116</sup>, nor to describe Geulincx as really 'the key of his novel *Murphy*'. That Geulincx does arguably come to play an important role in the final stages of *Murphy*, as climax rather than 'key', perhaps holds out the more tantalising promise that works beyond *Murphy* might also be subtly constructed, in synchronicity more than in sympathy, with aspects of Geulingian philosophy more complex than those Beckett derived from the stark dualism of *Murphy*. The next chapter explores this potential, and how it interacts with a new context of Beckett's shift away from an earlier 'notesnatching' methodology, to become fundamental to the major, transitional novel, *Watt*.

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<sup>116</sup> Cohn 1960, pp. 93-94.

### Chapter 3 – *Watt*

#### 3.1 *Watt* in Beckett Scholarship: ‘the series’

In the same chapter in which he argued for the importance of Spinoza to *Murphy* the critic P.J. Murphy wrote of Beckett’s enigmatic English-language novel *Watt*, written over a protracted period between 1941 and 1945, ‘*Watt* is perhaps the decisive work for reappraising Beckett’s relationship to the philosophical tradition’. Murphy focuses the claim, however, to substantiate the narrower argument that ‘*Watt* is a Kantian novel’<sup>1</sup>. *Watt* has also been read as detective fiction, as a specifically cryptic text, a farce of cruelty and absurdity, and as its influential initial critical studies had it, a parody of Cartesian rationality.<sup>2</sup> There have been many other readings.<sup>3</sup> Ackerley and Gontarski suggested as recently as 2006 that ‘the novel could sustain infinite exegesis’<sup>4</sup>.

A persuasive critical commonality has come to obtain in recent years as regards *Watt*, a commonality that reflects a more nuanced version of a view such as Murphy’s. According to this recent reconceiving of *Watt*, the novel is a vitally important juncture in Beckett’s *oeuvre* in the context of his relationships with philosophy, psychology, and how these interact with a changing working methodology as regards source-incorporation. In 2009 Feldman wrote, while criticising Murphy’s going too far with Kant, ‘*Watt* may be seen as *the* pivotal novel in Beckett’s *oeuvre*’<sup>5</sup>, whereby, according to Feldman, *Watt* was Beckett’s breakthrough in ‘beginning to write phenomenologically’<sup>6</sup>. Similarly, Weller argues for the transitional status of *Watt* and its original ways of enacting and performing as a defining characteristic. According to Weller *Watt* is the point at which Beckett achieves ‘an actualization’, rather than (as was the case in earlier works, particularly *Murphy*) ‘the thematization’, of what Weller calls ‘the Schizoid voice’<sup>7</sup>. *Watt*, then, the last long fiction Beckett would begin and

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<sup>1</sup> Murphy 1994, p. 229.

<sup>2</sup> See respectively Smith 2006, Benjamin 1997, Doherty 1971 pp. 34-48, and Hoefer 1959.

<sup>3</sup> For a useful summary of these up to 1984 see Büttner 1984, pp. 7-26.

<sup>4</sup> Ackerley and Gontarski 2006 (eds.), p. 629.

<sup>5</sup> Feldman 2009b, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Feldman 2009b, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Weller 2009, p. 43.



finish in English until *From an Abandoned Work* in 1956, has come to the fore of philosophical and psychological studies of Beckett's *oeuvre*.

Beckett himself had a characteristically more diffident assessment when it came to describing the novel he is often said to have referred to as his 'ugly duckling'<sup>8</sup>. Harvey quotes Beckett saying *Watt* was "a game"...a means of "staying sane", and a way "to keep [his] hand in."<sup>9</sup> In 1947 while Reavey (acting as agent) was having great difficulty placing the novel with a publisher Beckett described how circumstances had imposed compromises on the novel he would come to call 'our old misery'<sup>10</sup>, yet at the same time he intimated how the novel's importance might be gauged:

It is an unsatisfactory book, written in dribs and drabs, first on the run, then of an evening after the clod-hopping, during the occupation. But it has its place in the series, as will perhaps appear in time.<sup>11</sup>

*Watt*'s status as part of a series has indeed been appearing in time, 'its place' now being properly recognised by Feldman, Weller and others. This is a series Beckett also spoke of to Reavey in 1948:

I am now retyping, for rejection by the publishers, Malone Meurt, the last I hope of the series Murphy, Watt, Mercier & Camier, Molloy, not to mention the 4 Nouvelles & Eleuthéria.<sup>12</sup>

Also important to note in this context is the fact that *Watt* is not only part of a series of published works. It manifests seriality in a number of ways. Once Watt is inside the house, continuing the series that is the lineage of perpetually replenished servants, his movement between levels of the house is also passed as part of an indefinite series. On a more micro scale, Watt's thought processes at these various stages themselves

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<sup>8</sup> There is, however, no reliable citation for this quote, despite its frequent critical deployment. In a letter to Reavey after the war Beckett wrote of publication troubles 'I knew H.H. was hatching a dead egg. Or rather that Watt was under a dead hen' (Beckett to Reavey, 18 November 1947. HRHRC). The 'H.H.' presumably refers to the publisher Hamish Hamilton, who had 'sat on *Watt* for several months' (Pilling 2006a, p. 102) before rejecting it.

<sup>9</sup> Harvey 1970, p. 222. This and certain other quotes Harvey attributes to Beckett (such as pertain to the 'syntax of weakness') are frequently misquoted. Typically this appears as quoting Beckett stating *Watt* was 'only a game', whereas in fact Harvey attributes the two words 'a game' to Beckett, adding the 'only' himself. The difference is perhaps both minor and major. The originator of the error may be Bair, who bases her reading of *Watt* as autobiographical psychological self-therapy partly on this misquotation. See for examples of this Bair 1978, p. 346 and Ackerley 2005a, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Beckett to Reavey, 12 May 1953. HRHRC.

<sup>11</sup> Beckett to Reavey, 14 May 1947. HRHRC.

<sup>12</sup> Beckett to Reavey, 8 July 1948. HRHRC.

involve the management of numerous serial processes. It is the novel's serial enumerative reasoning, occasionally entropic and that which Deleuze subtitled the '*Langue I*' of Beckett, that constitutes so much of its critique of rationalism.<sup>13</sup> The protracted and experimental process of *Watt*'s composition also manifests seriality, further complementing the novel's other intrinsic and extrinsic serial aspects. A playful visible residue of the composition process is retained as the novel's addenda, the partly jettisoned material functioning as a synecdoche pointing toward the novel's own prior existence as a process of decision-making about parameters of language. The full extent of this complex serial existence, as characters, places and scenes slowly emerge through a number of transitions and amendments, is preserved in the so-called 'white whale'<sup>14</sup> of Beckett scholarship; the stages at which the novel exists in the six notebooks and single typescript held at HRHRC and commonly referred to as the 'Ur-*Watt*'<sup>15</sup>.

This multiplicity of serial existences is of direct relevance when approaching the potential importance of Geulincx to Beckett's composing *Watt*. Primarily this is because it is reasonable to expect that given the timing of Beckett's Geulincx research (when much of *Murphy* was already written) Geulincx' presence in *Watt* would be more pervasive than in the previous novel. In support of this hypothesis and Uhlmann's arguments regarding it discussed above, is the fact that Beckett noted at the top of folio 31, the first of the manuscript folios, the annotation 'COMMEABUNT'<sup>16</sup> [let us visit this often<sup>17</sup>]. This suggests at least that even though Beckett declined to type up these final pages, they were not therefore of negligible importance, perhaps even that they were intended to be returned to repeatedly whilst writing further works. What appears to be more accurately the case, however, is that Geulincx features more overtly in the novel's protracted process of composition in the Ur-*Watt*'s six notebooks and single typescript, while much of this presence was refined out of the work during the latter stages of this process. Tracing this fleeting

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<sup>13</sup> Mary Bryden concisely describes Deleuze's system: 'Langue I, is what Deleuze calls 'cette langue atomique' [this atomic language] (Deleuze, 1992: 66). It is a language of enumeration, in which combinatory relations replace syntactical ones. This language is associated with the novels, culminating in *Watt*, where words proliferate in circles or permutation' (Bryden 2002, p. 85). Translation by Bryden.

<sup>14</sup> Lake 1984, p. 76.

<sup>15</sup> See for example Cohn 2001, p. 109.

<sup>16</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/31r.

<sup>17</sup> Translation by Engelberts, Frost, & Maxwell (eds.) 2006, p. 146.

presence as it shifts from the explicit to the implicit, from its manifestations in the composition process to its more refined forms in the final novel, is of some interest as regards both Beckett's uses of Geulincx and the broader concern of Watt's place in a 'series'. It reveals important points at which central preoccupations of Beckett's, his conceptions of psychological interiority and the inevitability of insatiable needs, for example, find new routes of creative possibility by mapping onto literary explorations of communicative possibility. In the parts he plays in this shifting emphasis of Beckett's works, Geulincx becomes central to a conception of Beckett's 'series' as one that moves with an increasing agility from description to performance, from 'thematization' to 'actualization' in a number of ways. *Watt* is an important step, albeit at times a faltering one not dissimilar to Watt's own way of walking, on the way towards the abstracted voices of Beckett's middle period works.

An important aside is worth noting here with regard to Beckett's working methodology finding its own stable ground in breaking from an earlier Joycean 'notesnatching' procedure and concomitant aesthetic. Beckett was forced to leave behind many of his belongings in Paris when he had a short time to pack fleeing likely Nazi arrest in 1942, and we might well infer that he left behind many notes. Consequently, both personal and very public factors contributed to the ways Beckett's work would progress via *Watt*. Affixing the monumental post-war shift to the epiphany in his mother's room does not take full account of extrinsic circumstantial evidence surrounding Beckett's shifting into more abstract, minimal terrain, factors like 'the clod-hopping' Beckett pointed out to Reavey. With *Watt* Beckett began to work with fragmentary shards of knowledge, taking the limitations imposed upon him by the impossibility of his previously verifiably accurate 'notesnatching' approach, and turning this to his advantage as he focussed on actualising the themes of ignorance and impotence.

As we have seen, Beckett's rediscovery of the word *prurit* is a good model of his appropriation of Geulincx more broadly: while he had previously been occupied with a number of themes that are foregrounded by Geulincx his treatment of them subtly shifts after this encounter. Also important to note is that if there are any Geulingian analogies in place we would do well to expect Beckett to want to keep

them, as with Dante in the choice of ‘layers’ in *Murphy*, ‘out of sight’<sup>18</sup>. We have also seen how interiority was such an important aspect to *Murphy*, and how in a number of ways Geulincx’ ethical axiom and dualism delimits this interiority. Taking *Watt* to be a novel in a ‘series’ that will develop aspects of *Murphy*, the following discussion begins with the broad concept of an inward investigation, what Geulincx called *autology*. This allows us to trace, in certain instances, Beckett’s refining Geulincx out of existence, his making sure Geulincx too would be ‘out of sight’. Firstly, tracing the various uses Beckett makes of the concept of *autology* and its derivations and deviations, along with his uses of the word itself, promises to reveal a similar dynamic – albeit on a much larger canvas – to that suggested by the variations of *pruritus*.

### 3.2 Autology

Interiority as literary operator was of course familiar to Beckett before he read Geulincx’ idiosyncratic formulations. *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, for example, completed four years prior to Beckett’s short but intense period of Geulincx research, finds Belacqua ‘nesting in a strange place’<sup>19</sup>, where for two months he ‘lay lapped in a beatitude of indolence’, in homage to his namesake’s purgatorial stasis. During this restful phase of the protagonist’s otherwise hectic schedule his internal state is described in a passage that foreshadows Murphy’s mind:

If that is what is meant by going back into one’s heart, could anything be better, in this world or the next? The mind, dim and hushed like a sick-room, like a chapelle ardente, thronged with shades; the mind at last its own asylum, disinterested, indifferent, its miserable erethisms and discriminations and futile sallies suppressed; the mind suddenly reprieved, ceasing to be an annex of the restless body, the glare of understanding switched off.<sup>20</sup>

The point hardly needs making that Beckett did not discover the categories or imagery of the mind as a closed-space or a mortuary chamber in Geulincx. On the surface, at least, it would seem possible to take a rather un-grand tour from Belacqua’s resting place to Murphy’s mind, through the room in which Malone himself lays

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<sup>18</sup> I.e. ‘Choose “layers” carefully, on some such principle as V.’s distribution of sins and punishments. But keep whole Dantesque analogy out of sight’ (Entry no. 8 in the ‘Whoroscope’ notebook. Cited in Feldman 2006, 64).

<sup>19</sup> *Dream*, p. 43.

<sup>20</sup> *Dream*, p. 44.

‘lapped’ in bed and on to the closed-space short later works without noticing the need for much recourse to Geulincx at all.

There are also more extrinsic precedents for Beckett’s focus on internal investigations. It is well known that Beckett underwent psychoanalysis in London in 1934-5. This ‘truncated’<sup>21</sup> analysis is no less significant for being an autobiographical self-exploration. Along with the reading in psychology and notes undertaken alongside it, Beckett’s analysis further attests to the complications and complicities amongst his various familiarities with delving into a self, either on his own or accompanied by another (Wilfred Bion acting as Beckett’s Virgilian guide in the Tavistock clinic). Nonetheless, a change in Beckett’s depictions and descriptions of interiority does seem to emerge after his encounter with Geulincx.

As with Geulincx’ Cartesian inheritance, Beckett first summarised Geulincx’ *inspectio sui* as filtered through Windelband in the ‘Philosophy Notes’:

Geulincx reduces self-activity to immanent mental activity in man. The ‘autology’ or *inspectio sui* is not only epistemological starting point, it is also ethical conclusion of his system.<sup>22</sup>

In these notes the term is given as interchangeable with that favoured in *Ethica: inspectio sui*, and Geulincx himself points to these as interchangeable when he writes in *Ethics* that ‘I discussed this kind of inspection that I called *Autology*’<sup>23</sup> in the earlier work *Metaphysics*. *Autology* is the first stage (the ‘epistemological starting point’) in establishing the *humilitas* that Beckett found so captivating. The second stage is the turning from self that proceeds from the discovery that self is comprised of ignorance and impotence (the ‘ethical conclusion’). Beckett records the word ‘autology’ itself, in the one instance in which it appears in his 1936 Geulincx notes, in Greek, following the convention in Land’s 1891-3 collected edition. Beckett noted the title of chapter one of *Metaphysica Vera* in Land’s *Opera* exactly as it appears there:

Pars Prima: De Me Ipso, sive      ΑΥΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Connor 2008, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> TCD MS 10967/189v. Cf. Windelband 1901, p. 417 n. 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ethics*, p. 241.

<sup>24</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/2r. Cf. *Opera* vol. 2, p. 147. The Greek subtitles for each of Geulincx’ three chapters are all handwritten by Beckett, as is to be expected.

Martin Wilson translates this in *Metaphysics*:

PART ONE      Concerning Myself, or AUTOLOGY<sup>25</sup>

This autology is a fundamental distinguishing factor of Geulincx' thought. For it is due to an epistemological inspection of the self that Geulincx' occasionalism culminates in the assertion of *nescience*: humanity depicted as ignorant and utterly impotent in the face of God, and despite the infrequency with which Beckett records the word itself, this single word's legacy throughout *Metaphysics* and *Ethics* is immense. Beckett recorded from *Metaphysics* some of Geulincx' most fundamental assertions about the agency of self as derived from *autology*, such as 'I am a thing one and simple'<sup>26</sup>, 'I have thoughts that do not depend on me'<sup>27</sup>, and 'My human condition is completely independent of me'<sup>28</sup>. Geulincx goes into some detail regarding these headings in *Metaphysics*, but is in *Ethics* that such ideas come to a fuller fruition.

### 3.3      Autology in Watt

If Watt were to look inside himself to inspect what he knows of himself, 'in a careful enquiry into the nature, condition, and origin of oneself'<sup>29</sup>, as Geulincx describes self-inspection, he would, one might expect, not discover very much. Any force of personality Watt has is as bland as the milk Mr. Hackett believes is all he lives on.<sup>30</sup> Early in the novel Watt finds that he cannot hear Mr. Spiro's responses to the question of what should be done with a rat that 'eats of a consecrated wafer'<sup>31</sup>. He cannot hear 'because of other voices, singing, crying, stating, murmuring, things unintelligible, in his ear'. Sometimes, of these voices, 'Watt understood all, and sometimes he understood much, and sometimes he understood little, and sometimes he understood nothing, as now'<sup>32</sup>. Such is Watt's flawed, limited, inspection of himself. Bearing out a conception of 'the series', and of the composition of *Watt*

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<sup>25</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 33. Cf. TCD MS 10971/6/2r.

<sup>27</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 34. Cf. TCD MS 10971/6/2r.

<sup>28</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 43. Cf. TCD MS 10971/6/2v.

<sup>29</sup> *Ethics*, p. 329.

<sup>30</sup> See *Watt*, p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> *Watt*, p. 26.

<sup>32</sup> *Watt*, p. 27.

specifically, as characterised by a shift from reliance on a more overt conceptual apparatus to one where explicit philosophical and psychological vocabulary is refined away from the work, the first-person plural narrator of the *Watt* typescript bears a stronger similarity in this regard to Murphy.<sup>33</sup> Both Murphy and this narrator have a firmer sense of their own interiority and its importance. When asked, for example, where exactly it is the narrator is planning to ‘get along’ to following his proposed departure from Arsene, the narrator replies:

“To some other place” we said, “some other scene, some other field of activity.”

“Nothing more definite than that?” said Arsene. “Think well before you reply.”

We thought well and then we replied. “Perhaps deep down in our unconscious mind – “

Arsene rubbed his hands. “Ah” he said. “the unconscious mind! What a subject for a short story!”

“Perhaps deep down in those paleozoic profounds, midst mammoth Old Red Sandstone phalli and carboniferous pudenda, lurked the timid wish to leave you.”

“More!” cried Arsene. “Again! Again! Further! Deeper! The Upper Silurian! The Lower Silurian! The truth! The truth!”<sup>34</sup>

Ackerley has discussed how in drafts of *Watt* such exploration of a stratified mental world was ‘defined as ‘autospeliology [sic]’<sup>35</sup>. Ackerley relates this geological zoning to the broader elemental imagery of mud, rocks, and geographical zones in the Beckett Country. The neologism also recalls Geulincx’ sub-title ‘autology’, but it is removed from the novel before its final version. ‘Arsie’, as the narrator nicknames Arsene, wills the narrator on to delve into these rocky domains: ‘Dig! Delve! Deeper! Deeper! The Cambrian! The uterine! The pre-uterine!’<sup>36</sup> The later *Watt*’s mind as

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<sup>33</sup> This typescript, as Ackerley details, does not ‘constitute or correspond with any one period of creation’ (Ackerley 2005a, p. 22.) It does not neatly interpolate material from the early notebooks, to which the later notebooks only add material. However, despite some overlap of material the typescript can be seen to roughly correspond to a stage of composition following production of the first four notebooks and prior to completion of the final two (see Ackerley 2005a, pp. 239-243).

<sup>34</sup> *Watt* Typescript, HRHRC, p. 149.

<sup>35</sup> *Watt* Typescript, HRHRC, p. 149.

<sup>36</sup> Ackerley 2005b, p. 152.

<sup>37</sup> *Watt* Typescript, HRHRC, p. 149. The narrator has a limit, however, replying that the pre-uterine, a step too far, ‘reminds us of the rocks at Greystones’. Greystones was a fishing village in County Wicklow that served as a seaside holiday resort for Beckett’s family in his youth where, according to Knowlson, ‘The Beckett and Roe children used to play on the stony beach with its large grey and pink pebbles’ (Knowlson 1996, p. 28). This autobiographical injection is further evidence of *Watt*’s composition process as partly one of refinement from the explicit to the implicit.

published has become, in contrast to this zone of stony penises, planty arses and womb-ages, a jumble of voices. Watt has lost whatever capacity this earlier narrator had for an awareness of, or at least vocabulary for, his ‘unconscious mind’. The later Watt instead turns his attention more fully towards the world, to his role as servant within it, and to what might be characterised as a form of *despectio sui*, where a servant must disregard their own desires in order to function more properly in that role.

Beckett’s imagining psychological space as delineated according to geological periods is earlier pointed to in the ‘Whoroscope’ notebook, where Beckett notes ‘the *geology* of conscience – Cambrian experience, Cainozoic judgements, etc...’<sup>37</sup>. This is derived from Jean-Paul Sartre’s *L’Imagination*. As Pilling details ‘Sartre (141, 144ff) speaks of a “géometrie” in Husserl; Beckett is using “conscience” in the French sense, to mean sensibility’<sup>38</sup>. What the fascinating amalgam of references indicates is how Beckett transforms a derivation from one source (Sartre) in its first appearance in the ‘Whoroscope’ notebook, and then reconfigures it further via a Geulingian inflection in the composition of *Watt*. Beckett also used the term in a letter to MacGreevy in August 1936 where he wrote of his reading *Faust* that he could understand how “keep on keeping on” could function as a ‘social prophylactic, but not at all as a light in the autological darkness’<sup>39</sup>.

Unlike the later Mr. Knott, Quin also had some interest in autology.<sup>40</sup> His internal depths are primarily determined by a ‘prevailing sensation [...] of nothingness’<sup>41</sup>, and Beckett wrote a long passage on ‘The Nothingness’<sup>42</sup> as it pertains to Quin’s interiority, with ‘The Sky’<sup>43</sup> above and ‘The Waste’<sup>44</sup> below, between which Quin abides as ‘a dark nothing between the dark thing above and the dark thing beneath’<sup>45</sup>:

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<sup>37</sup> ‘Whoroscope’ notebook. Cited in Pilling 2005, p. 46.

<sup>38</sup> Pilling 2005, p. 46.

<sup>39</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 19 August 1936. *CL*, p. 368.

<sup>40</sup> James Quin is an early incarnation of the novel-to-be’s central character. Gradually through the *Ur-Watt* he becomes Mr. Knott.

<sup>41</sup> *Watt* Typescript, HRHRC, p. 53.

<sup>42</sup> *Watt* Typescript, HRHRC, p. 55. This section in the notebook was originally called ‘The Isolation’, but the title was crossed out with ‘The Nothingness’ replacing it.

<sup>43</sup> *Watt* Typescript, HRHRC, p. 61.

<sup>44</sup> *Watt* Typescript, HRHRC, p. 63.

<sup>45</sup> *Watt* Typescript, HRHRC, p. 61.



The feeling of nothingness, born in Quin with the first beat of his heart, if not before, died in him with the last, and not before.<sup>46</sup>

Yet, similarly to Watt, Quin's ability to inspect these depths of 'nothingness' is limited by a number of factors, one of which recalls a neologism that was noted in the 'Dream' notebook (entry no. 1123), 'Autopornography'<sup>47</sup>:

Not that Quin, regarding this and other traits of his nature, was quite devoid of curiosity. But each time he set himself to give it satisfaction, he was filled with that selfsame chagrin as is the man, the woman, or the child, who seeks to obtain, without the aid of a reflector, a clear view of his or her own anus.<sup>48</sup>

Quin not only suffers from a sense of nothingness, he cannot even glimpse this nothingness. Such doubled incapacity, here in a man literally and comically doubled over, recalls the incapacity Geulincx argues characterises the self's causal agency. Not only can we do nothing, but we also cannot even comprehend this lack of agency because causal agency is the ineffable domain of God alone. We simply watch the world, and do nothing in it. Geulincx, however, manages at times to contrive from this impotence of spectatorship some degree of consolation, unlike many of Beckett's characters. Beckett transcribed the following from Geulincx' summary of how 'I am but a spectator of the World':

God alone can produce that spectacle. [...] And He does so in such an ineffable and incomprehensible manner that among all the stupendous miracles with which God favours me on this scene, I myself, the spectator, am His greatest and most enduring miracle.<sup>49</sup>

For Quin, despite insurmountable obstacles, lack of proper tools or any religiosity he might harbour, compulsion to his own version of self-inspection is less a matter of the 'stupendous' and is merely, and unfortunately, inevitable:

And the time comes, alas, in the life of each one of us, however godfearing that life may have been, and wholesome, and upright, when a clear view of that part, if without synecdoche it may be called a part, would more than Baiae's [sic] Strand, the Vale of Avoca, or the lakes of Killarney, gratify the eye. In this respect, as in others adjacent, the dog, and indeed quadrupeds in general, with

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<sup>46</sup> *Watt* Typescript, HRHRC, p. 55.

<sup>47</sup> Beckett 1999, p. 161.

<sup>48</sup> *Watt* Typescript, HRHRC, p. 55.

<sup>49</sup> *Ethics*, p. 336.

the regrettable exception of the heavier pachyderms, will be found superior to the man, to the woman, and to the child.<sup>50</sup>

Interiority was Murphy's *raison d'être*. As noted, the only thing Murphy finds worthwhile is his interiority as 'the best of himself', a 'best' he finds via compromises and caveats (the chair of the big world, and his being powerless to prevent even the tiniest of big world events such as the ringing of a telephone from happening), but which nevertheless exists for Murphy as the only worthwhile zone of experience. Belacqua too had few reservations about his own 'wombtomb', Belacqua whose interiority 'was real thought and real living, living thought'<sup>51</sup>. However, there was to be no comparable 'best' of anyone's interiority after Beckett read Geulincx, and little of any characters' interiorities at all in the final version of *Watt*. As we have seen, for Quin inspection of self is the inspection of a void. Whereas Murphy's access to his nothingness was an index of his freedom, 'the nothingness' in the *Ur-Watt* evinces a shift into interiority as a different kind of emptiness, an unmasterable ignorance and impotence that comes after Beckett transcribed his lengthy notes on Geulincx' own comparable convictions about such an exploration. Geulincx summarises these discoveries of incapacity and ignorance in the following sentence: 'I cannot get beyond *I do not know*, there is nothing I can add to this *I do not know*'<sup>52</sup>.

In the third notebook of the *Ur-Watt* Beckett uses the term 'autology' to describe Watt's thinking about the abstract and for him inexplicable Mondrian-style circle and dot painting he discovers in Erskine's room (and which in the novel brings him to a state of impotent tears):

As to whether the formation was the fixity of self-indifference or – Watt sought for a word, found one, found two, three, four, approved them, related them, approved the relation, disapproved them, disapproved the relation, let them stand and was discontent – the regulated turmoil of autology's autoscapy, the loss in each case was the same, because it was the loss of all.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *Watt* Typescript, HRHRC, p. 55. Presumably the spelling is intended to be Baile's, perhaps an allusion to W.B. Yeats' 1904 play *On Baile's Strand*. Or perhaps just to Baile's Strand, the seashore around Dundalk, County Louth. It may even be a joke at the expense of the Irish coast, opting in preference for the sunnier Baiae on the bay of Naples.

<sup>51</sup> *Dream*, p. 45.

<sup>52</sup> *Ethics*, p. 334.

<sup>53</sup> Beckett, *Watt* notebook three, HRHRC. Cited in Pilling 1997, p. 180. The *OED* defines an autoscope as 'An instrument invented by [Ernst] Coccius for the self-examination of the eye'. It is then, perhaps, the kind of instrument that Quin's more auto-erotic explorations lack.

As Pilling has described this scene in the notebook of Watt examining the picture:

This anticipates the moment when Watt can find no words to assuage his 'need of semantic succour' (79). But *Watt* as a whole is a product of the tensions dramatized here. The novel exhibits Beckett working with whatever can be 'found', in the certain knowledge that 'loss' will ensue. With every intention of creating 'regulated turmoil', Beckett is nevertheless obliged to content himself, or discontent himself, with the 'fixity' which any 'formation' – visual or verbal – confers upon its constituent ingredients.<sup>54</sup>

Though left out of the final novel, what this use of Geulincx' term reveals is that it is possible to locate at a kind of theoretical centre of the project that became *Watt* a conception of its own communicative possibilities conceived in Geulingian terms. This is where a linguistic manifestation of 'autology's autoscapy', a language of self-critique, is a critique incapable of penetrating that 'veil'<sup>55</sup> of language Beckett described in 1937 because construed in that self-same language. Here Beckett makes an important shift, a shift away from a language of description to a description of language. Although there are numerous other places in the novel, notebooks and typescript of *Watt* that bear on the status of language to communicate meaning or change the status of something in the world, the transition from metaphysics to epistemology implied in this linguistic *autology* instances Beckett's 'series' developing linguistic terms in which the possibilities of a self-analysis of language can at least be framed, if not satisfactorily resolved. That Beckett thought about aspects of this transition in terms derived from Geulincx has previously gone unnoticed by critics.

Beckett had noted a similar word to 'autology' in the 'Whoroscope' notebook: 'autolysis'<sup>56</sup>. Autolysis is a physical process whereby cells of the body are destroyed by their own enzymes, and is more commonly referred to as self-digestion. It is a process perhaps not dissimilar to Watt's own self-induced communicative entropy that manifests in the asylum. Watt's entrapment in his fatalist philosophical method drives him eventually to this even more lowly refuge, where his inability to look into his own working methods with those self-same working methods is shown to be as flawed an enterprise as Quin's attempts without the aid of an autoscope to look up his own arse to see himself. Watt's predicament here is the impossibility of 'autology's autoscapy',

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<sup>54</sup> Pilling 1997, p. 180.

<sup>55</sup> *Disjecta*, p. 171.

<sup>56</sup> Cited in Pilling 1992, p. 20.

of critiquing the confines of his language from within. It is a more linguistic version of Geulincx' insinuations upon the impossibility of discovering a self that is capable of agency from within that same self. Its being traceable back to this use of 'autology' in the *Ur-Watt's* third notebook provides evidence that for Beckett Geulincx' metaphysical and ethical ideas were becoming increasingly flexible, amenable to more determinedly literary ends.

### **3.4 Coming, being, going 1**

In the first monograph study on Beckett, Hugh Kenner argued that instances of the 'partially congruent'<sup>57</sup> in Beckett's *oeuvre* bear a mark of Geulincx' influence in their playing out the central theme of occasionalist metaphysics – a lack of identifiable causation. Examples of Geulingian partial congruence in *Watt*, according to Kenner, include Watt's way of walking and the frog song where 'each frog attends only to its own private schedule of croaks'<sup>58</sup>. In situations such as these a coincidence, a harmony of sorts, appears, but only appears, to occur – Watt advances forwards, and the frogs produce what is heard as song. Such congruity, however, occurs by accident rather than design. Watt does progress forward, but this is not something easily predictable from his Monty-Python-esque shambling. Although the frogs do not intend to produce a coherent 'song', Watt hears the sounds the frogs produce as music. These are instances of the 'pre-established arbitrary',<sup>59</sup> rather than the harmonious Leibnizian alternative. According to Kenner such almost-connect between events and the perception of these events, as in these coincidences, 'qualifies him [Geulincx] for repeated mention in the Beckett canon', because such incongruity derives from Geulincx' 'doctrine of the "bodytight" mental world, around which, or perhaps attached to which, the body performs its gyrations according to laws the mind need not attempt to fathom'<sup>60</sup>. Kenner could not have known, but Beckett even transcribed specific examples that bear out these arguments. Recalling Watt's 'headline

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<sup>57</sup> Kenner 1961, p. 83.

<sup>58</sup> Kenner 1961, p. 86.

<sup>59</sup> *Watt*, p. 132.

<sup>60</sup> Kenner 1961, p. 83.

tardigrade’<sup>61</sup> Geulincx wrote, for example, ‘These feet are not moved because I wish to go on my way, but because another wishes what I wish’<sup>62</sup> in the same arguments in which he established the cradle analogy.

However, broken or partial connections appear throughout Beckett’s *oeuvre* in many divergent guises. Kenner marshals these as all Geulingian, and while this grouping does find a way to track the possible influence of Geulincx on Beckett that stands the important test of cogency when brought to bear on different works, and thereby hints at possible repercussions across the *oeuvre* of the importance of Geulincx, it also makes too neat and complete a comparison of Geulincx. The viability of Kenner’s reading across various works is at the cost of making Geulincx an equivalent force in manifestations of causal incongruity or partial congruence across all these works, and it thereby offers little in the way of a strategy for distinguishing between widely divergent forms of disconnect.

Nonetheless, in Kenner’s enumeration of the implications for Beckett’s works of Geulincx’ “bodytight” mental world’ lies the kernel of something that has both far-reaching and yet more clearly identifiable boundaries and specificities than that of his dualist conception. In his discussion of how ‘Geulincx and his school are driven to a treatment of motion as grotesquely analytic as the work sheets of a Disney animator’<sup>63</sup>, Kenner quotes Geulincx on the importance of what he calls *abitus*, *transitus*, and *aditus*, citing the following from *Physica Vera* and *Annotata ad Metaphysicam*:

‘Sicut in omni corpore sunt tres dimensiones,’ writes Geulincx, ‘as in all bodies there are three dimensions, so in all motion three tendencies, *abitus*, *transitus*, *aditus*; for in all movement there is a parting from somewhere, a passage somewhere, a going to somewhere. But there is no departure without transit and arrival, no transit without departure and arrival, etc.’<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Watt, p. 28.

<sup>62</sup> *Ethics*, p. 332.

<sup>63</sup> Kenner 1961, p. 87. While Kenner’s reference to what was, Kenner claimed in 1961, ‘the type of all up-to-date technology’ (Kenner 1961, p. 87) might now seem quaint, his point remains a strong one underlined by his insight, still pertinent, that Beckett was ‘profoundly right in finding the seventeenth-century Occasionalists aesthetically relevant to an age that has no difficulty in diagnosing their speculative shortcomings’ (Kenner 1961, p. 85).

<sup>64</sup> Kenner 1961, pp. 87-88.

I want to argue that as a specific type of non-causal narrative Geulincx' metaphysics of coming, being, and going appear and reappear in Beckett's *oeuvre* as both shadowy thematic and narrative structure. Geulincx emphasises the importance of coming, being and going in *Ethica* where it appears in the section on humility Beckett lauded. Geulincx argues, in a passage that in its English translation retains Beckett-like brevity, that in relation to God

Totus fum (totus huc veniendo, totus hic agendo, totus hinc abeundo).<sup>65</sup>

I have my whole being (in coming hither, acting here, departing hence).<sup>66</sup>

Such a tripartite existence is, in relation to the house of Mr. Knott, Watt's. If there is a narrative trajectory in the novel to be spoken of, it is surely this movement. That is, we could say that Watt's whole being is determined by his status as coming hither, acting here, or departing hence, his being part of 'the series of servants'<sup>67</sup> as it was explicitly called in the typescript. Watt comes to the house with the intention of becoming a servant, he acts at the house as a servant, and then he departs having been a servant. Yet this coming hither, acting here, and departing hence is non-causal. Inside the house, when servants move from one floor to another, even though 'every going, every being, every coming consisting with a being and a coming, a coming and a going, a going and a being' gives Watt the impression of cause and effect, this is inaccurate:

Tom's two years on the first-floor are not *because of* Dick's two years on the ground-floor, or of Harry's coming then, and Dick's two years on the ground-floor are not *because of* Tom's two years on the first-floor, or of Harry's coming then, and Harry's coming then is not *because of* Tom's two years on the first-floor, or of Dick's two years on the ground-floor,<sup>68</sup>

Rather, all these changes are somehow simply 'because Tom is Tom, and Dick Dick, and Harry Harry, [...] of that the wretched Watt was persuaded'<sup>69</sup>.

In earlier drafts of *Watt* death was the crucial factor, if not quite the cause, in the serial transition of servants. In the typescript Arsene and the narrator finish an

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<sup>65</sup> *Opera*, vol. 3, p. 37.

<sup>66</sup> *Ethics*, p. 337.

<sup>67</sup> *Watt* Typescript, HRHRC, p. 353.

<sup>68</sup> *Watt*, p. 132.

<sup>69</sup> *Watt*, p. 133. Bearing in mind the serial transitory nature of Beckett's servants it is perhaps worthy of note that much later, in 1962, in a typescript of *Play* sent to Bray Beckett used the name Arsene before he later altered it to Erskine (TCD MS 10948/1/195a).

early, dialogic, version of Arsene's 'short statement'<sup>70</sup> and rather than leaving of his own accord Arsene dies in the narrator's arms, thereby inaugurating a new stage of servants in the house. The narrator, later to become Watt, then seems another of Beckett's seedy solipsists:

The man must have been literally exhausted with what he had been through. But we not at all. Not yet. The time would come, and perhaps sooner than we thought, when we too would be tired, we had not the slightest doubt in our mind about that, but for the moment we were not in the least tired, so the tiredness of our partner could not be expected to interest us particularly.<sup>71</sup>

Ruby Cohn has detailed how Watt the character emerges in the notebooks via the conceptual apparatus of coming, being, and going:

It is in A3, penned in several places while Beckett eluded the Nazis, that the character Watt moves to the forefront. On the very first page Beckett lists: "1. The Coming; 2. Downstairs; 3. Upstairs. [These are grouped as "The Being."] 4. The Going."<sup>72</sup>

Some of this tripartite structuring of character is retained and echoed, in a refined form, in the final novel:

Mr. Knott was harbour, Mr. Knott was haven, calmly entered, freely ridden, gladly left.<sup>73</sup>

In concert with Mr. Knott being the haven that is 'calmly entered, freely ridden, gladly left', Watt's own relations to Mr. Knott map onto these as 'The Coming', 'The Being' and 'The Going'.

For Geulincx all his life, all his 'coming hither, acting here, departing hence' is determined entirely by God, 'For He who joined us to our body can alone remove us from it'<sup>74</sup>. For Geulincx God provides the causal connections between 'coming hither, acting here, departing hence', and these three thereby become fully congruent. For Watt there is no such congruency between events. As Murphy did, Watt also lives without any explicit consolations of the all-powerful. Nevertheless, Watt's coming,

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<sup>70</sup> *Watt*, p. 37.

<sup>71</sup> *Watt* Typescript, HRHRC, p. 173.

<sup>72</sup> Cohn 2001, p. 110. 'A3' is the third notebook of six, according to Cohn's own system.

<sup>73</sup> *Watt*, p. 133. Such tripartite delineation also structures narratives of later works, such as *How It Is*, with its three parts 'before', 'with', and 'after Pim'. See Chapter 6.

<sup>74</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 113. Cf. TCD MS 10971/6/6r.

being, and going is shadowed if not by comparisons between himself and Christ or admiration of himself as an ‘enduring miracle’, then by a vague ‘purpose’ which shadows this empty space between events. Arsene asks Watt the following rhetorical questions, among others, on the matter of the servants coming and going:

But [...] is there a coming that is not a coming to, a going that is not a going from, a shadow that is not the shadow of purpose, or not? For what is this shadow of the going in which we come, this shadow of the coming in which we go, this shadow of the coming and the going in which we wait, if not the shadow of purpose, of the purpose that budding withers, that withering buds, whose blooming is a budding withering. I speak well, do I not, for a man in my situation. And what is this coming that was not our coming and this being that is not our being and this going that will not be our going but the coming and being and going in purposelessness?<sup>75</sup>

Arsene implies with his longing for the alternatives that he had been seeking a kind of purposelessness via his employment as servant, action free from ‘the shadow of purpose’, and although he admits he might appear to be departing the house in purposelessness, this (as with other causal incongruities) is appearance only, and Watt should not get too carried away with the appearance.

There may be no cause and effect, but this does not mean there is no ‘shadow of purpose’. Figuring the terms of coming, being and going as floral metaphors Arsene inverts any hopeful pastoral connotations by diagnosing waste and ruin in every hope that seeks its own fulfilment, where every budding necessitates a concomitant withering. It is a self-annihilating structure that echoes, in a complex weave of Beckett’s philosophical analects, his description of Bruno’s identified contraries in *Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce* of ‘generation’ and ‘corruption’, where ‘The maximum of corruption and the minimum of generation are identical: in principle, corruption is generation’<sup>76</sup>. It also instantiates a further development of the closed system, the ‘horse leech’s daughter [whose] quantum of wantum cannot vary’<sup>77</sup> of *Murphy*. Every action in such a closed system is shadowed by its contrary: Mr. Endon by Murphy, Arsene by Watt, budding by withering, purpose by purposelessness.

Taking Arsene at his word, I want to ask the following questions about ‘this shadow’, and to argue that they can be answered via recourse to Geulincx. Might it be

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<sup>75</sup> Watt, pp. 56-57.

<sup>76</sup> *Disjecta*, p. 21.

<sup>77</sup> *Murphy*, p. 38.



possible, without psychologising the literary figment too reductively, to elucidate what underlies, what the ‘purpose’ is of Watt’s coming, being and going in relation to the house of Mr. Knott, if anything? Can a reader infer what this ‘shadow of purpose’ is that is cast over Watt’s tripartite literary life, knowing it is never explicitly stated, and knowing the novel to be comprised of many frequently discrete and self-sufficient scenes that work to confound a generalised critical appraisal of this novel of fragments? One possible solution, I want to claim, resides with a conception of ‘need’ which, in order for it to be explicated properly benefits from reference to Geulincx.

### 3.5 Watt and Need

While visiting Germany in January 1937 Beckett read Friedrich Stieve’s *Abriss der deutschen Geschichte von 1792-1935*, and found that it ‘was not the reference book on German history he was seeking’<sup>78</sup> as Nixon details. Beckett vented his frustrations regarding Stieve’s impulse to reduce historical chaos to rational order in his diary:

I am not interested in a “unification” of the historical chaos any more than I am in the “clarification” of the individual chaos, + still less in the anthropomorphisation of the inhuman necessities that provoke the chaos [...] I say the background + the causes are an inhuman + incomprehensible machinery + venture to wonder what kind of appetite it is that can be appeased by the modern animism that consists in rationalising them. Rationalism is the last form of animism. Whereas the pure incoherence of times + men + places is at least amusing.<sup>79</sup>

The diary entry gives a clue not only to Beckett’s politics, at least to his ‘distrust of the political and historical assertions encountered in Nazi Germany’. It also, as Nixon argues, renews Beckett’s

attack on anthropomorphism as a falsification of essential incoherence, and reasserts an emphasis on the “incomprehensible machinery”, which had determined outer reality in *Murphy* and resurfaces as the “pre-established arbitrary” in *Watt*.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Nixon 2005, p. 186.

<sup>79</sup> German Diary 4, 15 January 1937, UoR. Cited in Nixon 2005, pp. 186-187.

<sup>80</sup> Nixon 2005, p. 187.

Undoubtedly, one thing Watt seeks is to order the ‘essential incoherence’ of the world and his knowledge of it in such ways as they correspond, one to the other. In the frequently cited case the pot, for example, ‘was not a pot of which one could say Pot, pot, and be comforted’<sup>81</sup>. Of this pot Ackerley reports that Beckett was ‘particular about this capitalization’<sup>82</sup> as it reflects a Platonic discrepancy between idea and instance, between Platonic form (‘Pot’) and specifically instantiated matter (‘pot’). Watt is anguished in correlation with how far the instance (the lowercase) differs from the idea (the uppercase). But this is not because the instances differ greatly. On the contrary it is because they very nearly coincide, and ‘if the approximation had been less close, then Watt would have been less anguished’<sup>83</sup>. Although Watt requires his words and his world to correspond, when they are just such an apparently negligible distance apart all analysis and categorisation would be easier for Watt if they would just separate fully and have done with it. It is the temptations of partial-congruence that taunt him. However, ascribing this frustrated critical impulse to Watt as his fundamental motivating factor might be said to itself run the risk of conflating matter and form. Watt is a consistently, determinedly, unremittingly rationalist protagonist. I want to leave aside a reading of *Watt* in terms of its parodying Cartesian rationality, however, and argue that Watt’s rationalism is born of something much more elemental, that it has roots in the ‘incomprehensible machinery’ of something far more chaotic than its systematising manifestations. Hovering as a backdrop to this frustrated supra-rationalist’s precision is insatiability, instability, and unremitting need born of a different ‘kind of appetite’.

Beckett had ideas of need in mind in relation to Geulingian terminology shortly before the composition of *Watt*. In ‘Les Deux Besoins’ (‘The Two Needs’), a still untranslated critical essay written in 1938, Beckett picks up the theme of need in the following way, where he places the Geulingian term ‘autology’ at the boundaries of a project involving artistic conceptions of need:

Besoin d’avoir besoin (DEF) et besoin dont on a besoin (ABC), conscience du besoin d’avoir besoin (ab) et conscience du besoin dont on a besoin – dont on *avait* besoin (de), issue du chaos de vouloir voir (Aab) et entrée dans le néant d’avoir vu (Dde), déclenchement et fin de l’autologie créatrice (abcdef). Voilà par

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<sup>81</sup> *Watt*, p. 78.

<sup>82</sup> Ackerley 2005a, p. 99.

<sup>83</sup> *Watt*, p. 78.

exemple une façon comme une autre d'indiquer les limites entre lesquelles l'artiste se met à la question, se met en question, se résout en questions, en questions rhétoriques sans fonction oratoire.<sup>84</sup>

The need to need (DEF) and the need that one needs (ABC), the awareness of the need to need (ab), and the awareness of the need that one needs – that one needed (de), the result of the chaos of wishing to see (Aab) and the way into the nothingness of having seen (Dde), the beginning and end of creative autology (abcdef). That, for example, is one way of indicating the limits within which the artist begins to question, puts himself in question, turns into questions, into rhetorical questions without an oratorical function.

'Les Deux Besoins' elaborates a framework Beckett described immediately prior to it that same year in a review of Denis Devlin's poems:

As between these two, the need that in its haste to be abolished cannot pause to be stated and the need that is the absolute predicament of particular human identity, one does not of course presume to suggest a relation of worth. Yet the distinction is perhaps not idle, for it is from the failure to make it that proceeds the common rejection as 'obscure' of most that is significant in modern music, painting and literature.<sup>85</sup>

An assertion of a 'predicament of' need rather than the rush to overcome it is the goal of worthwhile art. An assertion of the impossibility of achievement, rather than merely the overcoming of a gulf recognised, saluted, in passing.

Ackerley has argued that Mr. Knott's progenitor, Quin, is named according to "'*Qui ne*," negative intentionality'<sup>86</sup>. This gives a hint of Beckett imbuing Mr. Knott early in the composition process with a sense of desire, of purpose, and a concomitant void. In German one word for need is *Not*, where *die Not* is potentially both 'the need', and also 'the emergency'. If we think of Mr. Knott's name as compound, as character-names in Beckett are frequently thought of,<sup>87</sup> then we can see that beginning with his incarnation as Quin, Mr. Knott is in some sense a figure, or a figuring, of need, yet perhaps also of something more panicked and less controllable, the

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<sup>84</sup> *Disjecta*, p. 56.

<sup>85</sup> *Disjecta*, pp. 91-92

<sup>86</sup> Ackerley 2005b, p. 156.

<sup>87</sup> For example, Lawrence Graver reads that most famous of Beckett's names as self-reflexively compound:

Closest in sound is godet, the name of a popular cognac, but also the French word for 'a wooden bowl' or 'mug', which in different usages refers to the bowl of a pipe (smoked by Pozzo who carelessly refers to Godot as Godet) and a small glass of wine (which washes down Pozzo's chicken). [...] Inevitably, as Colin Duckworth has concluded, the receptacle called a godet might in the broad sense hold any meaning put into it. (Graver 1989, pp. 44-45)

‘emergency’. According to the novel’s ostensible narrator, Sam, the only two surmises Watt makes of Mr. Knott of any validity whatsoever concern the issue of Mr. Knott not needing:

For except, one, not to need, and, two, a witness to his not needing, Knott needed nothing, as far as Watt could see.

If he ate, and he ate well; if he drank, and he drank heartily; if he slept, and he slept sound; if he did other things, and he did other things regularly, it was not from need of food, or drink, or sleep, or other things, no, but from the need never to need, never never to need, food, and drink, and sleep, and other things.

This was Watt’s first surmise of any interest on the subject of Mr. Knott. And Mr. Knott, needing nothing if not, one, not to need, and, two, a witness to his not needing, of himself knew nothing. And so needed to be witnessed. Not that he might know, no, but that he might not cease. This, on the subject of Mr. Knott, was Watt’s second, and closing, conjecture not entirely gratuitous.<sup>88</sup>

There is a Berkeleyan impetus of connotation here in Watt’s second ‘conjecture’ concerning Mr. Knott’s need for witness. Aligned here also, however, in Watt’s ‘first surmise’ is a conception of need that can be formulated in relation to Geulincx’ axiom. That is, necessary for adherence to the ethical axiom *ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis* is the requirement, the need, not to need. Without finding it possible to need nothing, a person will never achieve Geulincx’ advocated ethical consciousness wherein one’s will is determined by occasionalist impotence. Freedom from futile desiring is just such a freedom from need. If one is to follow Geulincx’ ethics then one needs to not need. Via Watt’s non-relations with Mr. Knott, however, Beckett insists upon the impossibility of a freedom from need. Watt rarely gets close to Mr. Knott, and never attains anything like his determining status. He sees him fleetingly and serves him variously, orbiting the fixed point of Mr. Knott and going away again, and this non-encounter plays out the insatiable nature of need: Watt, as servant, takes the place of Mr. Knott’s needs – it is thanks to Watt that Mr. Knott needs nothing. Yet Watt is left always having to need, always willfully acting in order to bring about some outcome in the world. Watt’s entrapment in a paradoxical state of need, whereby he must get rid of all of his own needs at the same time as he must always act on the needs of someone else, underlies his rationalist method with a ‘purpose’ that is at once ineffable and elemental.

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<sup>88</sup> Watt, p. 202.

Important to a reading of *Watt* as concerned with conceptions of need, specifically with an inevitability of insatiable need, is an anomalous aside late in the novel, a rather quiet, if not quietist, aside placed incongruously among the noisier enumerations of Mr. Knott's footwear:

To think, when one is no longer young, when one is not yet old, that one is no longer young, that one is not yet old, that is perhaps something. To pause, towards the close of one's three-hour day, and consider: the darkening ease, the brightening trouble; the pleasure pleasure because it was, the pain pain because it shall be; the glad acts grown proud, the proud acts growing stubborn; the panting the trembling towards a being gone, a being to come; and the true true no longer, and the false true not yet. And to decide not to smile after all, sitting in the shade, hearing the cicadas, wishing it were night, wishing it were morning, saying, No, it is not the heart, no, it is not the liver, no, it is not the prostate, no it is not the ovaries, no, it is muscular, it is nervous. Then the gnashing ends, or it goes on, and one is in the pit, in the hollow, the longing for longing gone, the horror of horror, and one is in the hollow, at the foot of all the hills at last, the ways down, the ways up, and free, free at last, for an instant free at last, nothing at last.<sup>89</sup>

Here the 'instant' spoken of is in some sense of a 'pause' in a present, between a 'being gone' and a 'being to come', in a 'three-hour day' as a microcosm of the tripartite life of coming, being and going. Such a moment of 'nothing at last' equated with being 'free at last' coheres with Geulincx' conception of nothing expressed in the axiom where the only freedom possible is a freedom that is a recognition of a kind of nothingness (*ubi nihil vales* – wherein you have no power). It is a negative kind of freedom, a freedom-from rather than a freedom-to, the only possible, true to life consequence of which, according to Geulincx, is abstention from futile desiring (*ibi nihil velis* – therein you should not will). Ann Beer has argued that this aside is the 'one passage where the underlying narrator seems to speak in his own voice'<sup>90</sup>. Such a claim finds support in a letter from Beckett to Bray of 1958 in which Beckett described an 'acute crisis about my work' in similar terms:

have decided that I not merely can't but won't go on as I have been going more or less ever since the Textes pour Rien and must either get back to nothing again and the bottom of all the hills again like before Molloy or else call it a day.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> *Watt*, p. 201.

<sup>90</sup> Beer 1985, p. 57. Beer makes the argument that apart from a couple of treatments by Bair and Harvey (who draws out Dantean interpretations from the passage), this aside's 'deeper implications have been ignored'.

<sup>91</sup> Beckett to Bray, 29 November 1958. TCD MS 10948/1/13.

While it might be more in keeping with the numerous instances of *myse en abyme* in *Watt* to describe the passage as an exhibition of what such an interventional authorial passage would look like if such a thing could exist, if it could find a sure enough foothold, it is an important passage for the novel. This is in part because it implicitly describes Watt's goal motivating his exhaustive enumerations: in emulation of his master Mr. Knott, Watt seeks a refuge from need, he longs for 'longing gone', and accordingly he seeks a place where he is worth nothing, at the house. Implicit in the paragraph Beer considers to be the novel's 'core of the onion'<sup>92</sup>, is Watt's need to not need (or need to need (k)nott).

The aside's emphasis on freedom from need as a kind of nothingness, on 'the longing for longing gone' has a precedent in Arsene's earlier statement to Watt. Arsene guffaws, in Democritean fashion, at the disappointing and fleeting nature of his transcendent fall from the ladder. The moment echoes the story of Mr. Hackett's hunch, received in similar fashion as a boy, his place of origin described as 'there I fell off the ladder'<sup>93</sup>. Beckett himself insisted the ladder reference is to an obscure Welsh joke, and the appearance in *Murphy* of the line 'Do not come down the ladder, they have taken it away'<sup>94</sup>, a syntax reappearing in *Watt* as 'Do not come down the ladder, Ifor, I haf taken it away' would seem to bear out this assertion by Beckett that there is a specific syntactic source for the joke, a source which, given the syntax in which Geulincx' ladder is situated, means that this ladder cannot wholly derive from Geulincx. Nevertheless, it is redolent of *Ethics* in a number of ways.

Arsene goes on to describe, in terms of constrained needs, his reasoning that followed from the fall:

And yet it is useless not to seek, not to want, for when you cease to seek you start to find, and when you cease to want, then life begins to ram her fish and chips down your gullet until you puke, and then the puke down your gullet until you puke the puke, and then the puked puke until you begin to like it. The glutton castaway, the drunkard in the desert, the lecher in prison, they are the happy ones. To hunger, thirst, lust, every day afresh and every day in vain, after the old

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<sup>92</sup> Beer 1985, p. 57. Cited as Beer though the quote refers to Beckett's 'nux-vomica [added to] an apéritif of metaphors – the heart of the cauliflower or the ideal core of the onion' from *Proust*, offered as a 'tribute to the labours of poetical excavation' (*Proust*, p. 29).

<sup>93</sup> *Watt*, p. 14.

<sup>94</sup> *Murphy*, p. 118. The punch line to the joke is 'Too late, I'm halfway down already' (Ackerley and Gontarski (eds.) 2006, p. 307).

prog, the old booze, the old whores, that's the nearest we'll ever get to felicity,  
the new porch and the very latest garden. I pass on the tip for what it is worth.<sup>95</sup>

Sentiments expressed by Arsene can and have been productively read in terms of both Schopenhauer's will-lessness and Leopardi's extinguishing of desire.<sup>96</sup> However, Arsene's statement also revolves around certain Geulincxian aspects. In accord with Geulincx' 'Adminicule of Humility', Arsene describes how 'when you cease to seek you start to find'. This parallels Geulincx' cautioning that 'No-one ever attained Happiness by doing something to attain it'<sup>97</sup>, and that in order to properly pursue 'Happiness' one must cease to seek it. This 'Adminicule', 'prop' or 'support', and its relation to seeking and serving perhaps provide us with a further clue as to the significance of the ladder in *Watt*, the support or prop from which Arsene temporarily, unwittingly and clumsily descends. Arsene claims in the above extract that it may be possible for a seeker, such as Watt, to find what they might seek, but unfortunately such discovery yields a sickening result. When Arsene fell off the ladder, achieving a flawed momentary transcendence, the 'incident'<sup>98</sup> gave up little more than a fleeting awareness that he had, indeed, just fallen off the ladder. It gave Mr. Hackett less than this, yielding only back problems.<sup>99</sup> Better, Arsene tells Watt, is to be in a place where one desires, but where one cannot act on, let alone fulfill, these desires. Such a place, in Geulincx' terminology, is where one has no power, where one cannot achieve what one nevertheless needs. Arsene's conclusion as a prior servant, going as Watt is coming, is that the best of all is to desire intensely, even slavishly, in a place where precisely that thing you desire is that which you cannot have. The upshot of Arsene's tip is that desire, need, is inevitable if one is not to have rammed 'down

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<sup>95</sup> *Watt*, p. 43.

<sup>96</sup> See for example Ackerley 2005a, p. 66, which mentions both Schopenhauer and Leopardi. Leopardi's '*e fango è il mondo*' ['the world is mud'] was an epigraph for *Proust*, though it does not appear in the English Calder edition. Ackerley quotes Schopenhauer on *ennui*: 'the absence of satisfaction is suffering, the empty longing for a new wish, languor'. More concisely in *On The Suffering of the World* Schopenhauer states 'Want and boredom are indeed the twin poles of human life' (Schopenhauer 1970, p. 45), boundaries which Malone perhaps alludes to with his 'Dish and pot, dish and pot, these are the poles' (*TN*, p. 185).

<sup>97</sup> *Ethics*, p. 353.

<sup>98</sup> *Watt*, p. 41.

<sup>99</sup> It is implied in the novel that the fall off the ladder in the farmyard was the cause of Mr. Hackett's hunch. According to Ackerley, Mr. Hackett's 'pose is that of Punch' (Ackerley 2005a, p. 30). If this is the case then perhaps such an introductory character might be seen as ushering a reader gently in to a very 'guignol world'.

your gullet' all the puke of 'habit', that 'great deadener'<sup>100</sup>. Such needs in the physical world cannot be willfully ignored, as Murphy tried to do by plugging himself into his chair and his internal depths while yet still subject to his 'deplorable susceptibility to Celia, ginger, and so on'. As we have seen, Murphy's ties to the physical world that enable his mind's coming alive will, as accessories, also kill him. Nor can such needs be reasoned or worked away, as Watt in his domestic servitude attempts, his serving the needs of Mr. Knott. This merely results in a different kind of closed system, one of self-perpetuating almost-entropy. So, if we cannot prevent desires and the desperate hope of action and fulfilment unless resigned to the banality and 'puke' of satisfaction become habit, then, Arsene says, we should embed ourselves in desires precisely where we cannot fulfill them. Thereby, in an ironic *fait accompli*, imprisoning them as our own torturers.

Such a conclusion breaks in half Geulincx' well-balanced axiom. It dispenses entirely with the possibility of wanting nothing, leaving only the validity and inevitability of a place where one has no power, where one is worth nothing, where one cannot get what one will inevitably need. We might well conclude that such a place is the domain Beckett wrote of to Duthuit, where the all-encompassing importance of Geulincx' phrase is imagined as a place, 'a domain where one is worth nothing' that there is little chance of 'exaggerating the scope of'.

Feldman has also traced Arsene's ladder in Watt back to Geulincx, though to a specific instance of a ladder in *Ethics* Geulincx uses as a metaphor for the pragmatic workaday ways in which we must, at God's behest, keep ourselves alive:

The virtuous man is always ascending and descending this ladder: he seeks ease that he may be fit for work; he wants to be fit for work that he may work; he wants to work that he may have something else to eat; he wants to eat that he may live; he wants to live because God has ordered it, not because it pleases him, and not because life (as it has become popular to say) is so sweet.<sup>101</sup>

Feldman argues that 'Arsene's entire statement is powered by an appropriation of Geulingian ineffability', and that compared to the importance of Mauthner's *Kritik* or Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, Arsene's analogy 'would seem to make more sense in the

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<sup>100</sup> CDW, p. 84. Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot* asserts in his final soliloquy that 'habit is a great deadener', which echoes Beckett's earlier railing against habit in *Proust*, where he proclaimed that 'Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit' (*Proust*, p. 19).

<sup>101</sup> *Ethics*, p. 327.



context of Geulingian detachment, or withdrawal into consciousness'<sup>102</sup>. The fall off the ladder, for Feldman, is a fall away from an everyday world of working and serving.

### **3.6 The Ineffable**

Yet this ladder carries even more resonances of Geulincx than these of the everyday world and of the prop or support from which one must, in humility and aware of the futility of seeking satisfaction, turn away (or jump/fall off). Arsene wistfully tells Watt of his experience of the fall. Of his momentary 'existence off the ladder'<sup>103</sup>:

I felt, that Tuesday afternoon, millions of little things moving all together out of their old place, into a new one near by, and furtively, as though it were forbidden. And I have little doubt that I was the only person living to discover them. To conclude from this that the incident was internal would, I think, be rash, for my – how shall I say – my personal system was so distended at the period of which I speak that the distinction between what was inside it and what was outside it was not at all easy to draw.<sup>104</sup>

This fleeting, unspeakable moment of 'reversed metamorphosis' was Arsene's maximal point of his time at the house, his climax, and as per Bruno's identified contraries it was simultaneously his minima. This moment of change that is 'other than a change of degree'<sup>105</sup> instantiates a moment of simultaneous pathos and bathos, of budding and withering. Inevitably shadowing with 'purpose', Arsene questions and questions again what this event was, only to conclude with banality that it was, indeed, 'not an illusion'<sup>106</sup>. In its being real but unspeakable Arsene's experience of the fall is ineffable, what Arsene describes as 'what has so happily been called the unutterable or ineffable, so that any attempt to utter or eff it is doomed to fail, doomed, doomed to fail.'<sup>107</sup> This 'ineffable' was described in more detail earlier in *Watt's* composition process:

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<sup>102</sup> Feldman 2009a, p 50.

<sup>103</sup> *Watt*, p. 42.

<sup>104</sup> *Watt*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>105</sup> *Watt*, p. 42.

<sup>106</sup> *Watt*, p. 43.

<sup>107</sup> *Watt*, p. 61.

what we know partakes in no small measure of the nature of what has so happily been called the unutterable or ineffable, so that any attempt to utter or eff it is doomed to fail, the discourse being frequently interrupted by long loud bursts of crying and of laughing, and finally brought to a standstill, without any useful information having been imparted.<sup>108</sup>

The section Beckett cut from the final novel reveals that attempting to think the ineffable coheres with Beckett's concerns with an impossibility of communication, whereby it is the bodily, physical outbursts of a rootedness in the world ('crying', 'laughing') that shut off the possibility of imparting information from one mind to another.

The 'ineffable' is central to Geulincx' thought. Indeed, this is the primary epistemological criterion he applies to the category of knowledge that distinguishes his work among his fellow occasionalists. As we have seen, for Geulincx it is the impossibility of being able to know how something happens that forces us to admit we therefore cannot be said to do that thing. When this is the case, as with any action in the physical world or thought in the mind, these things are said to be 'ineffable'. When something is ineffable for Geulincx, however, this is not only because 'we cannot speak or think of it (for this would be *nothing*, *nothing* and *unthinkable* being the same), but because we cannot think about or encompass with our reason how it is done'<sup>109</sup>. According to Geulincx, this ineffability is the proper domain of God alone: 'He is a Father, and the manner in which He is the Father of us all is stupendous and ineffable'<sup>110</sup>. The 'ineffable something'<sup>111</sup> that remains unaccounted for in a rational description of experience in the world can only be properly known by God. It is primarily via 'the ineffable' that Geulincx reveals his mystical leanings, and it is along comparable lines that *Watt* is revealed as more than a novel of Cartesian rationalist entropy. It too is shadowed by the 'ineffable', by the unknowable residual realm of experience that is not exhausted by Watt's otherwise exhaustive method. Arsene warns the next in line that the ineffable will elude, even confound, the rationalist's capacities for assimilation, and his underlying insatiability is doomed, either way, to dissatisfaction or worse, to satisfaction.

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<sup>108</sup> *Watt* Typescript, HRHRC, pp. 242-243.

<sup>109</sup> *Ethics*, p. 334.

<sup>110</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 97. Cf. TCD MS 10971/7/5r.

<sup>111</sup> *Ethics*, p. 334.

### 3.7 *Mercier and Camier in Watt's 'series'*

Towards the end of *Mercier et Camier* a bombastic incarnation of Watt appears. This Watt looks back at his own previously strange questing past and, as Pilling has read it, announces Beckett's own future aesthetic horizons, 'predict[ing] what Beckett will attempt in narrative terms when, as soon, *Mercier et Camier* will be done with'<sup>112</sup>:

Il naîtra, il est né de nous, dit Watt, celui qui n'ayant rien ne voudra rien, sinon qu'on lui laisse le rien qu'il a.<sup>113</sup>

One shall be born, said Watt, one is born of us, who having nothing will wish for nothing, except to be left the nothing he hath.<sup>114</sup>

This second version of Watt announces here the coming of the masterworks of voice, of the first-person narrators and their narratives that will arise from the ashes of *Mercier*, *Camier*, *Murphy* and *Watt*. The raucous Watt is, then, invested with responsibility for 'the ordaining of a being to come by a being past, of a being past by a being to come'<sup>115</sup>. He ordains both the coming of the wish-less voice and also the status of his own previous namesake, altered post-facto in relation to these identities-to-come, giving this earlier version of himself an important role in this series of incarnations, and turning Beckett's protagonists into a series not unlike that of the servants in *Watt*. In the English version Watt performs his ceremonial invocation with Biblical solemnity in the style of a drunken John the Baptist, 'hath' translating grandly the more colloquial French; Watt is very serious about this being to come. Yet he makes it while causing a fuss in a pub, raging while drunk. Perhaps, then, his solemn tone is a little sullied by its context, Beckett's tongue a little in his cheek. It must be asked, despite the grandiosity of the announcement being undermined, why might it fall to Watt, a Watt notably different from his prior namesake, to announce this future coming? Secondly it must also be asked why such an announcement is framed in the terms of *ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis* borrowed from Geulincx?

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<sup>112</sup> Pilling 1997, p. 209.

<sup>113</sup> Beckett 1970, p. 198.

<sup>114</sup> Beckett 1974, p. 114.

<sup>115</sup> *Watt*, p. 134.

Beckett wrote *Mercier et Camier* between July and October 1946<sup>116</sup> after completing *Suite* (an early version of *La Fin*) and immediately prior to beginning *Premier amour*. During this time the manuscript of *Watt* was rejected by a number of publishers, continuing the pattern begun over a year earlier by Routledge, despite their previous ‘whole-hearted enthusiasm for’<sup>117</sup> *Murphy*. Beckett wrote to Reavey of the issue:

My book *Watt* has been turned down by Routledge. Mr. Ragg and Mr. Read agreed that it was wild and unintelligible and felt very sorry for the author of *Murphy*.<sup>118</sup>

Perhaps this chronological overlap might go some way to explaining the strange appearance of a raging, frustrated *Watt* in the later French pseudocouple novel, with both works current in Beckett’s mind and one the source of some practical frustration, not only for Beckett. But such speculation does not tell the whole story. A more substantial answer to the question of why *Watt* appears in this later work to proclaim Geulingian prophecies lies in Beckett’s conception of the earlier *Watt* as having ‘its place in the series’. This is a series which this second-coming *Watt* reaches into explicitly, and the fact that he does so in the borrowed terms from Geulincx hints that Beckett’s thoughts on ‘the series’, which were clearly determining much of his focus during the intensively creative period that, according to Bair, Beckett called the ‘siege in the room’<sup>119</sup> of the immediate post-war writings, were in part determined by Geulincx. With this possibility in mind the following chapter turns to the novella *The End/La Fin* and its pre- and post-publication versions and variants, with specific focus on a paragraph that names Geulincx, to investigate how Geulincx comes to play a new part in the evolution of Beckett’s ‘series’, one that Beckett felt could be viably framed in terms of Geulincx’ axiom.

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<sup>116</sup> See Pilling 2006a, pp. 98-99.

<sup>117</sup> T.M. Ragg to Beckett, 6 June 1945. Cited in Knowlson 1996, p. 342.

<sup>118</sup> Beckett to Reavey, 20 June 1945. HRHRC.

<sup>119</sup> Bair 1978, p. 346.

## **Chapter 4 – Suite / La Fin / The End**

### **4.1 What Follows<sup>1</sup>**

*Suite et Fin*, the two-part French novella that would become *La Fin* after its first part was published as *Suite* and be translated as *The End*, was begun (though at that stage lacking a title) in February 1946.<sup>2</sup> *Suite* was published in Sartre's *Les Temps modernes* in July of that year, though this truncated publication would lead to acrimony between Beckett and the magazine's editors.<sup>3</sup> Begun in English, partway through composition *Suite* became Beckett's first extended foray into writing prose in his adopted French, thereby inaugurating the famously productive stages of his middle period during the so-called 'frenzy of writing',<sup>4</sup> the author under 'siege in the room'. *Suite* was translated by Richard Seaver with Beckett and published as *The End* in *Merlin* 2.3 (1954). Beckett was furious with this version, however, and the translation was extensively revised for publication in *Evergreen Review* 4.15 (November-December 1960). This latter now standardised English language version of the novella has been republished a number of times in England and America.<sup>5</sup> *La Fin* was first fully published in Éditions de Minuit's *Nouvelles et Textes pour rien* (1955).

The following discussion focuses on a single passage in *The End*, a passage that describes the narrator-protagonist being gifted by a now dead tutor a copy of Geulincx' *Ethics*. Beginning with a reading of the standard version of this passage I then go back to its origins to trace the versions of the passage in a lineage that begins

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Ricks opts for translating the fragmented title *Suite* as *What Follows*. With its complete title it is perhaps closer to *Continuation and Conclusion*, a double, oxymoronic moniker similar to the audibly multi-faceted *Comment c'est*. See TE, p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Cohn dates this as 7 February (Cohn 2001, p. 129), Pilling as 17 February (Pilling 2006a, p. 96).

<sup>3</sup> Beckett wrote to Simone de Beauvoir at *Les Temps modernes* expressing his disappointment and frustration at *Suite*'s being severed in half, thereby killing off too soon 'one of my creatures'. De Beauvoir had refused to publish the second part of *Suite et Fin* in what Beckett called 'Sartre's canard' (Beckett to Reavey, 27 May 1946, HRHRC), citing her (misconceived) anger that Beckett had sought slyly to publish in two issues, pushing his luck as a relatively unknown author. According to Knowlson the 'many references to itches in the privates and the arse and far too much pissing and farting to be compatible with the tone or, as Beckett put it later, 'la bonne tenue' of the review' (Knowlson 1996, p. 359) may have also played a part.

<sup>4</sup> Beckett in an undated interview with Harvey. Cited by Knowlson 1996, p. 358.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Calder's *No's Knife: Collected Shorter Prose 1945-1966* (1967, reprinted in 1984 as *Collected Shorter Prose 1945-1980*), Grove's *Stories and Texts for Nothing* (Beckett 1967), and Calder's *Four Novellas* (Beckett 1977), among other places. Its more recent publication has been by Grove (as CSP in 1995), Penguin (Beckett 2000) and in 2009 by Faber & Faber, which reprints Calder's *Collected Shorter Prose* of 1984 (TE).

with Beckett's 'Suite' notebook, and proceeds through diverging published versions up to its final translations.

What I will call the 'Geulincx passage' instances a kind of crucible in which a number of important aspects of Beckett's work of this period are inscribed and reworked. Beckett makes his hugely important turn from writing prose in English to French at the precise point of this passage. Yet this turn towards untrammelled possibilities is coupled with a backwards glancing at Beckett's own prior education. The resulting struggles manifest as subtle textual choices, altering through different versions of the novella, that speak to Beckett's uses of source materials and his previously expansive approach to self-education as it might impact his work, in a more decisive and purposeful rejection of anything resembling 'notesnatching' than earlier in the 'series'. The passage also reveals important manoeuvres in Beckett's translation and self-translation.

#### **4.2 The End: vision and the tutor**

The reading I want to put forward of the Geulincx passage depends primarily on the importance in it, and to it, of *sight*. As a specific moment of the importance of sight in Beckett's *oeuvre* the passage has implications for thinking about sight in the wider *oeuvre*, while it is itself partly produced by these other instances of sight. Seeing, looking, gazing and staring, in various forms, become powerful elements from this point in Beckett's *oeuvre*. *The Unnamable's* narrator, for example, will gaze straight-ahead, eagle-eyed and unwavering, complementing the narrative propulsion of a novel deriving from its will to 'go on'<sup>6</sup>, coupled with a paradoxical inability to do the same. It is thanks to these staring eyes that the fictionalised narrator sees his earlier avatars whirl round him, and through them he expels what might be either tears or 'liquefied brain'<sup>7</sup>. *Film* will open with a full-screen shot of an eye opening, blinking and staring, before the work explores for purposes of merely 'structural and dramatic convenience' the Berkeleian maxim *Esse est percipi* [to be is to be perceived]. Comparably, *Rockaby* ends with the unseen speaker aligning W's being,

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<sup>6</sup> TN, p. 418.

<sup>7</sup> TN, p. 295.

her *esse*, with a capacity to perceive via the eyes, where the implication is that W's life is fucked at the same moment that her eyes are stopped:

rock her off  
 stop her eyes  
 fuck life  
 stop her eyes  
 rock her off  
 rock her off<sup>8</sup>

Beckett had also utilised imagery associated with sight prior to *Suite*. In the very early drafts of *Watt*, for example, a long passage in the first notebook entitled 'The Eyes'<sup>9</sup> details those of Erskine. The passage is separated and titled similarly to how categories of Scholasticism had determined from the first page of the notebook the novel's proposed structure and contents ('who, what, where, by what means, why, in what way, when'<sup>10</sup>). In this sense 'The Eyes' are as important as the 'Where' which would become 'The Nothingness', later the house, and the 'Who' which would become Quin, later Mr Knott. Beckett's even earlier descriptions of psychological or imaginative life as proximate to sight include a letter to MacGreevy of 1936 in which Beckett aligns the creative impulses of his mind with where it physically sits – 'behind the eyes':

I have neither written anything nor wanted to, except for a short hour, when the frail sense of beginning life behind the eyes, that is the best of all experiences, came again for the first time since *Cascando*, and produced 2 lines and a half.<sup>11</sup>

This fascination with sight and seeing as related to knowledge, experience and creativity is one that also has roots in Beckett's early interest in what he called Rimbaud's 'eye-suicide – pour des visions'<sup>12</sup>. As cited above Beckett referred to Rimbaud's sightless seer as falling short of Geulincx' twin-sighted abilities, his 'Janus or Telephus eyes'. It has already been noted how Beckett detailed the powerful impressions Geulincx made upon him via intertextual comparisons based in sight,

<sup>8</sup> CDW, p. 442.

<sup>9</sup> *Watt* Notebook 1, p. 91. HRHRC.

<sup>10</sup> *Watt* Notebook 1, p. 3. HRHRC.

<sup>11</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 16 February 1936. CL, p. 447.

<sup>12</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 11 March 1931. CL, p. 73.

where of Geulincx' eyes Beckett sensed they were 'very patiently turned outward, and without Schwärmerei turned inward'. By 1946, however, evidence indicates Beckett no longer felt that seeing, either through the eyes or as part of an internal 'life behind the eyes', was any longer 'the best of all experiences', and the Geulincx passage in *The End* speaks to precisely this change.

Quoted below is the version of the passage published by Beckett's long-term American publisher Grove Press. It comes immediately after a sudden change in the narrative. The narrator had earlier been wrestling with a cow in a forest, before getting back on a road and attempting to get run over by passing carts. Then, 'The day came when, looking round me, I was in the suburbs, and from there to the old haunts it was not far, beyond the stupid hope of rest or less pain'<sup>13</sup>.

So I covered the lower part of my face with a black rag and went and begged at a sunny corner. For it seemed to me my eyes were not completely spent, thanks perhaps to the dark glasses my tutor had given me. He had given me the *Ethics* of Geulincx. They were a man's glasses, I was a child. They found him dead, crumpled up in the water closet, his clothes in awful disorder, struck down by an infarctus. Ah what peace. The *Ethics* had his name (Ward) on the fly-leaf, the glasses had belonged to him. The bridge, at the time I am speaking of, was of brass wire, of the kind used to hang pictures and big mirrors, and two long black ribbons served as wings. I wound them round my ears and then down under my chin where I tied them together. The lenses had suffered, from rubbing in my pocket against each other and against the other objects there. I thought Mr Weir had confiscated all my belongings. But I had no further need of these glasses and used them merely to soften the glare of the sun. I should never have mentioned them.<sup>14</sup>

The primary claim I make in regard to this passage is that there is a complex association, one that is pushed to the point of identification, between 'the *Ethics*' and 'the glasses'. So when the narrator writes that he has 'no further need of these glasses', he is thereby also writing that he has no further need of 'the *Ethics*'. These two objects in a certain sense become fused as one and the same object through the act of reading the passage. Specifically, it is Beckett's highly attuned syntax that makes these two

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<sup>13</sup> This sentence leading into the passage on Geulincx itself has a particular occasionalist resonance. Decrying the possibility of a 'beyond' these two innocent hopes as 'stupid' not only describes an awfulness, a situation where all is so unrelentingly terrible there is no point hoping for respite. It also insists on the futility of any will to change circumstance itself. Both 'rest' and 'less pain' are paradigmatic, whereby hoping for anything is equally 'stupid'. In French the point is made more clearly with the words 'stupide espoir' [stupid hope] functioning as a near visual and aural pun on *désespoir* [despair].

<sup>14</sup> CSP, pp. 91-92.



ontologically distinct objects appear inseparable. More specifically, it is a lack of the adverb ‘also’ from the sentence naming Geulincx that by its very absence brings about this strange melding, where this lack of distinguishing boundary allows the two objects to collapse into each other. The sentence in question (third in the passage) is enclosed by two sentences both of which make no mention of ‘the *Ethics*’, but refer explicitly only to ‘the glasses’. These are the three sentences (the second, third and fourth) quoted separately:

For it seemed to me my eyes were not completely spent, thanks perhaps to the dark glasses my tutor had given me. He had given me the *Ethics* of Geulincx. They were a man’s glasses, I was a child.

The lack of conjoiner is glaring, yet its implications are subtle. If the tutor had *also* given the young student Geulincx’ *Ethics* then the two objects (treating *Ethics* at this point specifically as a physical object, a book) would be categorically distinguishable from each other. Without this *also*, the echo of ‘glasses’ that sounds in ‘*Ethics*’, where the two-syllable ‘glasses’ forms part of an alliterative pattern almost but not quite rhymed by ‘*Ethics*’, as similarly happens with the ‘tutor’ and ‘Geulincx’, forces the objects beyond the point of mere contiguity. Instead, the echoes of the objects and authors in each other collude in an implicit though imperfect identification.

The identification between the glasses and *ethics* is not only paradigmatic, however, it is also, to borrow Roman Jakobson’s term, syntagmatic. It is partly through the rhythm of these sentences that Beckett achieves this shading, a greying or *vaguening*, of one realm of existence into another. Excising *also* results in exact repetition of the three words ‘had given me’. These two instances of ‘had given me’, separated only by a period and the single word ‘he’, similarly contribute to the sense that these things are fused. A residual presence of the object of ‘had given me’ from the first sentence (‘the glasses’) becomes present again, is subtly recalled, when we read ‘had given me’ in the second sentence, the ostensible object of which is solely ‘the *Ethics*’. Before a reader’s eye even reaches ‘the *Ethics*’ the repetition of ‘had given me’ carries an expectation, what we might even call a prejudice, that the object is already ‘the glasses’.

There are a number of other stylistic manoeuvres that intensify the impression of objects fused. For example, the issue is partly one of punctuation when the narrator notes the apparent ownership of both items:

The *Ethics* had his name (Ward) on the fly-leaf, the glasses had belonged to him.

In this sentence not only is there a missing ‘also’ or ‘and’ which if in place would make the ontological distinction between the two objects clear and distinct. But further, if these two objects are to be considered as separate a reader might expect that the comma halfway through the sentence would instead be a period. Beckett’s subtle choice of a comma rather than a period manages to fuse two otherwise entirely distinct realms of existence, two distinct objects. Paul Auster called Beckett ‘the master of the comma’<sup>15</sup>. Its use here instantiates again Beckett’s ability to manipulate rhythm as a carrier of implied meaning. In this sentence about the ‘fly-leaf’ what follows after the midway comma reads as if it were a qualification of what came before the comma. That is, it reads as a qualification of ‘The *Ethics*’. It follows from the fact of the name on the fly-leaf that the glasses had *therefore* belonged to the tutor, and so that they are the same object. Yet, perhaps comically, this ownership only literally *follows from* the previous proposition. It comes after, but it is not therefore necessarily caused by, what comes before. A reader would perhaps do well to bear in mind Arsene’s cautioning Watt about the impressions of cause and effect when all there is in reality is incongruent simultaneity. As in Geulincx’ occasionalist causation there is no truly ‘effable’ interconnecting agency. All apparent cause and effect imputed to experience is an illusion. Here with a simple single comma Beckett actualises the theme Kenner called the ‘partially congruent’, allowing mere simultaneity of ownership to more fully imply the identification of one object with the other via an illusory impression of cause and effect.

### **4.3    *The End: pockets of philosophy***

If this reading of the first part of the Geulincx passage is persuasive then the curious enquiry might be made to set out the ends to which Beckett orchestrates this

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<sup>15</sup> Auster 2003, p. 346.

irresolvable melding of the glasses and *Ethics*. A first step in addressing this requires recollection of Beckett's often cited authorial programmatic statement made in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. Importantly as regards this statement, taken as it often is and as I do so here, out of the book's broader context, it was Belacqua who 'mused' and 'submused' about the possibilities of fiction. That is, the elusive 'programme' is itself fictionalised. Nevertheless, the 'smartness' and 'slickness' outlined by that fictional protagonist in the first novel echo with implication through the rest of the *oeuvre*:

The blown roses of a phrase shall catapult the reader into the tulips of the phrase that follows. The experience of my reader shall be between the phrases, in the silence, communicated by the intervals, not the terms, of the statement, between the flowers that cannot coexist, the antithetical (nothing so simple as antithetical) season of words, his experience shall be the menace, the miracle, the memory, of an unspeakable trajectory.<sup>16</sup>

In the fusion of objects in the Geulincx passage Beckett manifests just this 'catapult', first described in 1932. While Beckett's middle period prose is markedly less *flowery* than these earlier aesthetic epiphanies of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, at moments it nevertheless achieves certain of the intentions dormant in the earlier work as regards being flung between these 'roses' and 'tulips', existing in 'the intervals'. The experience in the Geulincx passage is just that of needing to be 'between the phrases', where the simplicity of the antithetical is entirely insufficient, and it is in the act of reading this Geulincx passage that such a space 'between' is opened.

A second way to frame the ambiguities in the Geulincx passage, to ask why they are there, resides with Beckett's changing attitude to the incorporation of potential source material. In earlier works, with *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* the earliest long prose work and concomitantly the most extensively and explicitly woven from recycled fabrics, from what that novel calls 'the tag and the ready-made'<sup>17</sup>, moments of intertextual 'intrusion' were often welcomed, were not dismissed as radically as they appear to be here in *The End*, where the narrator with regret bemoans 'I should never have mentioned them'. The Geulincx passage is a specific instance of what Wood called Beckett's 'uneasiness' about the 'intrusion' of

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<sup>16</sup> *Dream*, p. 138.

<sup>17</sup> *Dream*, p. 48.

philosophical voices and figures. Geulincx' name is invoked at the same moment as it is turned from. It is only half-remembered and is somehow only of singular, pragmatic use to the narrator – it shades the 'glare of the sun'. Perhaps Geulincx is invited here to stand for the intellectual fascination of all previous narrators, as a paradigm empty of specificity but full of force. While this might be a neat, it is also an inaccurate resolution. There is specificity working against this supposition – the specific name 'Geulincx' and that of *Ethics*. Geulincx' barely recognisable, almost forgotten name as it stands in the margins of the history of philosophy is perfectly pitched to evoke the fragmentary and partially lost knowledge Beckett's first-person narrator's insist upon as the only possible knowledge. Yet this evocation also becomes, by dint of naming Geulincx, a highly specific fragment of knowledge the narrator invokes at the moment of his simultaneous turning away from it. This is in fact a highly Geulingian manoeuvre, bearing comparison with Geulincx' invoking the capacities of self only to assert more forcefully a turn away from them in order to properly conceptualise humility. The second incarnation of Watt spoke of a narrator to come, 'one is born of us, who having nothing will wish for nothing, except to be left the nothing he hath'. In putting away Geulincx by invoking Geulincx the narrator of *The End* makes just such a manoeuvre. They wish for nothing except to be left the nothing they have, yet this nothing wished for is necessarily only thinkable in terms derived from things they have.

Beckett here produces a particular kind of 'actualization' of that double manoeuvre determining so many of his fictional characters of a contradictory impulse to leave, coupled (or pseudo-coupled) with a commitment to stay. The passage enacts a crucial moment of struggle and 'uneasiness', inflected in part with Beckett's turning to philosophical sources such as Geulincx in times of major transitions of his fiction – in those Scholastic categories of knowledge with which he programmatically began *Watt*, for example. Originally in the first notebook the paradigm referred to Socrates as its 'who', a paradigm which as Ackerley points out broadly 'generates the later Watt (NB1, 7ff) and the Beckett protagonist of the next forty years'<sup>18</sup>. Similarly, Murphy's interiority was summarised in subverted Spinozan terms, and we have seen how Geulincx positively enabled Beckett to go further in the later stages of the

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<sup>18</sup> Ackerley 2005a, p. 233.

troubled gestation of *Murphy*. The Geulincx passage in *The End* shows too that there is no moving away in Beckett's *oeuvre* that is not also a being tied back, no freedom that is not also constrained by or in some way responsible to its own history.

The passage's insistence upon the fragmentary and the residual is made more forceful through its second half, which turns on the contents of the narrator-protagonist's pockets. The glasses/*Ethics* that have been rubbing together while in the narrator's pockets are a highly effective, though (as Uhlmann uses the word) 'occluded' image of the refining and amalgamating of possible sources for Beckett's works of this period post-*Watt*. In the possession of this new first-person narrator/protagonist, fragments of previously tightly delineated systems of knowledge are pushed and scraped together, having 'suffered, from rubbing', such that each element of a system becomes so distorted by complementary others that none can be seen through clearly, individually. The image draws out further resonance of Feldman's description of Beckett's allusions. In reference to *Molloy's* pockets of sucking stones, and based on entries about Protagoras and Zeno in Beckett's 'Philosophy Notes' resulting in partial-quotations in *Endgame* and *Mercier and Camier*, Feldman writes 'Allusions become like revolving stones to be shifted and manipulated, all the while hidden in pockets of age-old trousers'<sup>19</sup>.

These glasses not only instantiate an image of fragments of knowledge 'rubbing' together, but the flimsy coherence of systems of knowledge that allows such mutual engraving is figured into this imagery too as the glasses being strung together by makeshift ribbons and wire. This 'brass wire', used normally for hanging 'pictures and big mirrors', impersonates a system of connections, represents in makeshift fragments that only roughly approximate an original. Both of the more usual uses for the wire imply a gaze, a *despectio* gaze outward at the world in 'pictures' of it, or inward at the self, in 'big mirrors'. Yet this crumpled mess of patched-together copies implies that neither direction can now be distinguished clearly. These degraded and distorted lenses, handed-down and fit only for single and limited pragmatic purpose, sit at the border of self and outer world, neither wholly preventing the outside world from getting in, nor enabling an inward gaze. As elements of what would once have been discrete instances of Beckett's 'notesnatching' are in *The End* indelibly engraved

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<sup>19</sup> Feldman 2006, p. 36.

by each other, Geulincx here by unnamed others, so too each is committed to an earth, buried, *en-graved*, in the stratified geological/psychological zone the investigation of which is that ‘autospeliology’ of the *Watt* drafts. Molloy says of burying Lousse’s dog that ‘I contributed my presence. As if it had been my own burial. And it was’<sup>20</sup>. In a sense too the burial of Geulincx enacted in *The End* is also the narrator of *The End*’s burial.

However, this is not to argue that these glasses should be read as only a metaphor for the *Ethics* of Geulincx. It is all too neat and convenient at this stage of the ‘series’ to alight comfortably on such one-sided conveniences of correspondence. But this does not mean that alighting uncomfortably is therefore to be avoided entirely. Beckett’s art of nonrelation, described in 1937 to Kaun, calls forth a ‘literature of the unword’<sup>21</sup> that seeks to dissolve what Beckett called the ‘terrible materiality of the word surface’<sup>22</sup>. From the mid-1940s onward immateriality in Beckett’s *oeuvre* is effectively focussed in opposition to an art of ‘allegory, that glorious double-entry, with every credit in the said account a debit in the meant, and inversely’<sup>23</sup>, as he described it in a review of Jack B. Yeats of 1936. What is crucial in reading works from this period is less a locating what might at first sight be a persuasive correspondence, but rather a foregrounding of the blurred ontological boundaries between the realms of existence Beckett’s imagery occupies. Easy correspondences are the dangerous neatness that can function as a trap for the ‘gentle skimmer’ mocked in *Murphy*. As Uhlmann and other critics have argued, it is not the case that Beckett simply rejects philosophy outright, but rather that ‘Beckett’s works continue to interact in important ways with works of philosophy’<sup>24</sup>. While tracing these ‘important ways’ becomes increasingly complex and at times self-undermining, it is nevertheless a fruitful, indeed necessary exercise when tracing the continuity of Geulincx’ influence across the *oeuvre*.

Perhaps, however, there is a more pragmatic, simpler and rather more bathetic resolution to the ambiguities in the Geulincx passage, according to which the ambivalences in intentional omissions and punctuation details argued for above might

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<sup>20</sup> *TN*, p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> Beckett to Kaun, 9 July 1937. *Disjecta*, p. 173.

<sup>22</sup> Beckett to Kaun, 9 July 1937. *Disjecta*, p. 172.

<sup>23</sup> *Disjecta*, p. 90.

<sup>24</sup> Uhlmann 2006a, p. 65.

be merely typographical errors. Errors have appeared in this passage through various published versions, the most obviously striking of which is a misspelling of the name ‘Geulincz’ that appears in a number of published versions of the novella: the 1958 *La Fin* in *Nouvelles et Textes pour rien* published by Minuit<sup>25</sup>, and in numerous English texts including Grove’s *Evergreen Review* of 1960<sup>26</sup> and the Calder *No’s Knife* of 1967<sup>27</sup> and *Collected Shorter Prose* of 1984<sup>28</sup>. Editing *The End* for publication by Faber and Faber in 2009 Christopher Ricks used Calder’s 1984 text as the basis for an edition entitled *The Expelled, The Calmative, The End & First Love*, and this also reprints the misspelling.<sup>29</sup> The page proofs of Calder’s 1984 *Collected Shorter Prose* are held at HRHRC, and they reveal that although Beckett deleted a repetition of ‘He had given me’ (thereby reducing to two the appearances of ‘had given me’), he made no further corrections or alterations to the passage, leaving the spelling as ‘Geulincz’.<sup>30</sup> Typographical errors are an important issue regarding the novella’s anomalous incarnation in *Merlin* (see below). Yet we will not be able to properly address this hypothesis without recourse to earlier manuscript versions of the text. So with the above reading of the passage as instantiating an important irresolvable ambivalence and a simultaneous rejection via an embrace of Geulincx on the one hand, along with the more banal possibility of textual errors with ‘Geulincz’ as precedent on the other, I turn now to the origins of the passage in its earliest incarnation in the ‘Suite’ notebook, before looking at further versions including the French *La Fin* and its translation in the English language *Merlin* and beyond. This sub-series of versions of this one work both complements and complicates the reading given above. It reveals that Beckett’s reshaping and translating the passage plays out certain of the struggles that reach their ambivalent finality in the later standard version, yet this is via some intriguing instances of textual error and amendment.

#### 4.4 *Suite*

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<sup>25</sup> See Beckett 1958, p. 105.

<sup>26</sup> See Beckett 1960, p. 33.

<sup>27</sup> See Beckett 1967, p. 58.

<sup>28</sup> See Beckett 1984, p. 62.

<sup>29</sup> Ricks’s justification for resorting to this base-text is the fact that Calder’s was ‘the last edition in Beckett’s lifetime’ (*TE*, p. xviii).

<sup>30</sup> See *Collected Shorter Prose 1945-1980*, corrected galley proofs, pp. 62-63. Carlton Lake collection of Samuel Beckett papers, Series I, BV4, HRHRC.

The Geulincx passage would have been the opening paragraph of the second part of *Suite et Fin* had de Beauvoir consented to publish as Beckett thought was agreed. That is, if Beckett left the paragraphs in the order we might expect them to be in, based on how later versions are published. The final sentence of *Suite* as published in *Les Temps modernes* ends ‘*au delà du stupide espoir de repos ou de moindre peine*’<sup>31</sup>, translated later as ‘beyond the stupid hope of rest or less pain’. Following this as the intended opening of the second part of the story would have been the Geulincx passage. In the English *Merlin* publication of the novella (1954) where it is titled *The End*, a line break, the only one in the work, separates these paragraphs. This gives us a clue as to the centrality this passage plays in the novella’s various incarnations, a centrality even more pronounced in the ‘Suite’ notebook.

As Cohn has detailed following Knowlson’s discovery of the ‘Suite’ notebook, a volume Cohn describes as ‘a manuscript treasure’, it is precisely at the point of the Geulincx passage in this notebook where Beckett turns to writing in French:

Until recently, it was thought that Beckett [...] shifted after the war to creation in French. However, the ‘Suite’ notebook modifies that view of Beckett as a French writer [...] On March 13 – often a significant number for Beckett – he stopped ten lines down on the twenty-eighth page of his manuscript and drew a horizontal line across the page. In his rushed handwriting, he recapitulated in French a passage he had written about the narrator-protagonist’s tutor, who had given him dark glasses and *The Ethics* of Geulincx, and who was found dead on the floor of his water closet (cf. *CSP*, 91). The death of the tutor was the occasion of Beckett’s birth as a major French writer.<sup>32</sup>

There follows a transcription from the ‘Suite’ notebook of the Geulincx passage that adheres line-by-line to the text as it appears in the notebook. While this gives the impression of the novella as written with a short-line, poem-like structure, this is rather a result of Beckett’s elongated, right-leaning ‘rushed handwriting’, and the size of the notebook.

Being now for the moment  
virtually decent – far changed –  
as far as my face was concerned,

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<sup>31</sup> Beckett 1946, p. 119.

<sup>32</sup> Cohn 2001, p. 129.



capable of no expression ~~but the~~  
 other than that of ?<sup>33</sup> gravity  
 nor of any sound but the sound  
 but the most formal sound, I ?<sup>34</sup>  
 to cover its lower part with a black  
 cloth and to entreat alms on a  
 sunny corner, a south-western  
 corner. For ~~it was my belief~~ I suspected that  
 my eyes were not as yet totally  
 extinguished, thanks no doubt  
 to the smoked glasses that my  
 tutor had given me, together with  
 the Ethics of Geulincx, when I was  
 13 or 14 ^years old^. ~~He had the foresight~~  
~~to~~ They were a very fine pair of glasses,  
 full size, with gold branches. He  
 was a far seeing man. He was found  
~~dead~~ one morning ^on the floor^ in his W.C., his  
 dress in shocking disorder, ~~xxxx A cerebral hemorage~~  
 xxxx xxxx dead of  
 an infarct.

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With this line across page 28 of the manuscript Beckett separated his *oeuvre* with English on one side, and the rest of the novella, now a *nouvelle*, written to the end in French. Beckett went back to the beginning of the Geulincx passage and, as Cohn describes, recapitulated it in French. What is immediately most striking about this first version of the passage in relation to the arguments above is that Beckett uses a conjoiner in ‘my tutor had given me, together with the Ethics of Geulincx’, where this ‘together with’ categorically separates the book from what are here ‘smoked glasses’. Beckett does go on in this version to invest the glasses with a strange ambiguity, where the tutor is ‘a far seeing man’, a man perhaps whose capacity for what Beckett

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<sup>33</sup> This may be ‘insufficient’.

<sup>34</sup> This may be ‘set my mind’ or ‘imagined’.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Suite’ notebook, pp. 27-28, Boston College. Strangely, as with the French version of the passage which follows in the notebook, Beckett appears to spell Geulincx’ name correctly. His handwriting is at times very difficult to decipher, however, and this particular letter cannot be asserted with full confidence.

referred to as Geulincx' 'sub specie aeternitatis [from the perspective of eternity] vision' is his 'only excuse for remaining alive'. Without the perspective, he dies of a heart attack. However, this being 'far seeing' is more than a visionary ability, it is also an inability, his being long-sighted as oppose to short-sighted and so his being in need of the corrective lenses that are handed down to his *protégé*. Yet the ambiguities in this double meaning are nevertheless constrained by the narrator being given *Ethics* 'together with' the glasses. We can see in this passage then, when compared to the later version, Beckett negotiating ways to instantiate an irresolvable ambivalence regarding the theme of being simultaneously free and being constrained, yet this is not as fully formed as it would become. Certainly it would be hard to make a case for this theme being actualised in the text as it stands in the notebook. While there is a tantalising fragment of how the tutor might have '~~had the foresight to~~' do something relating to the gift of the *Ethics* and the age of the recipient, Beckett's curtailing this and rapidly turning to a description of the glasses as 'very fine' cuts off what may have resulted in a more obviously dual use of 'sight'.

Something was lacking in this version, and it was presumably in an adventurous or brave attitude, perhaps also one of frustration, that Beckett suddenly struck a blow right across the page and began again in French. While he had written a number of poems and critical pieces in French by 1946, something in the stylisation of English at precisely this point gave Beckett the impetus to shift languages and not return to English as a language of prose composition for twelve years, other than in translation. Perhaps Beckett just came to the same conclusions Belacqua had 'mused' over regarding his own wanting to 'write without style': 'Perhaps only the French can do it. Perhaps only the French language can give you the thing you want'. In 1932 Belacqua's musings were immediately rejected as the product of an earnestness not yet managing to fathom the subtleties of actual, rather than theoretical, creative work: 'Don't be too hard on him, he was studying to be a professor'<sup>36</sup>. The possibility of French prose was then shelved for fourteen years.

Beckett's experiment writing prose in French appears to not have instantaneously yielded the 'thing' Beckett wanted in 1946 either, though fourteen years older Beckett perhaps had the patience and confidence to stay with it when he

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<sup>36</sup> *Dream*, p. 48.

‘mused’ it might work this time. The French passage that follows in the notebook is much closer to its eventual published counterpart than the English, but there are important deviations from and similarities to the English notebook version. For the most part Beckett retains the sharp divisions between the objects in French:

Il m’avait  
donné, à la même occasion, l’Ethique  
de Geulincx.<sup>37</sup>

He had given me  
on the same occasion, the Ethics  
of Geulincx.

This became simply ‘Il m’avait donné l’Ethique de Geulincz’<sup>38</sup> in the published text. Similarly, while this French passage saw the arrival of the signed fly-leaf, the book was still kept separate from the glasses:

L’Ethique  
portait son nom sur la page de garde  
et ~~xxxx xxxx xxxx~~ les lunettes  
lui avaient peut-être appartenu  
aussi.<sup>39</sup>

The Ethics  
bore his name on the fly-leaf  
and ~~xxxx xxxx xxxx~~ the glasses  
had perhaps belonged to him  
too.

This was eventually published as ‘L’*Ethique* portait son nom (Ward) sur la page de garde, les lunettes lui avaient appartenu’<sup>40</sup>, which introduces the crucial comma and avoids the fixity and distinctness in the ‘Suite’ notebook. Beckett also retains from the

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<sup>37</sup> ‘Suite’ notebook, p. 28. Boston College.

<sup>38</sup> Beckett 1958, p. 105.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Suite’ notebook, p. 28. Boston College.

<sup>40</sup> Beckett 1958, p. 106.

English the visionary status of this tutor, who was ‘un homme du voyant’<sup>41</sup> [a man of vision].

If, then, Beckett did not immediately find ‘the thing you want’ in *La Fin* in the turn to French in this passage (assuming, that is, that this ‘thing’ has been correctly identified in the arguments about fused objects), when did he? He seems to have found it for both the English and French versions, and so remade the early French attempt into a fully viable and publishable work, through a further act of translation a number of years later as a much more experienced French writer. This was while working with Seaver to produce a version for *Merlin* a full eight years later.

#### 4.5 *Merlin*

Although Beckett completed the work as a French text before translating it back into the language in which *Suite* had been started as *The End*, arguably giving the impression that if this bilingual text might have a primary version it would be the French, thanks to de Beauvoir’s strictness it was the English *The End* that first saw the piece’s full-length publication. This was in 1954 in the English-language Paris-based journal *Merlin*, edited by Alexander Trocchi and Richard Seaver, dubbed by Beckett the ‘Merlin juveniles’<sup>42</sup>. The *Merlin* version too bears on the arguments about the later version’s fusion of the glasses and the *Ethics* as a product of syntax. The corresponding tutor passage is quoted in full:

So I covered the lower part of my face with a black rag and went and begged at a sunny corner. For it seemed to me my eyes were not yet completely spent, thanks perhaps to the dark glasses my tutor had given me when I was small. He had also given me, on the same occasion, the *Ethics* of Geulinx [sic], I don’t know why. They were a man’s glasses already, with a gold frame, for he was farsighted. They found him dead one fine morning, crumpled up in the water closet, his clothes in awful disorder, struck down by an infarctus. The *Ethics* had his name (Ward) on the front page, and the glasses had perhaps belonged to him too. The bridge, at the time I am speaking of here, was of brass wire, of the kind used to hang pictures and big mirrors, and two long black ribbons served as wings. I wound them round my ears and then down under my chin where I tied them together. The lens had lost their opacity, doubtless from rubbing so long in my pocket against each other, and against the other objects there. But I had no further need of these glasses and used them merely to soften the glare of the sun. If I speak of

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<sup>41</sup> ‘Suite’ notebook, p. 28. Boston College.

<sup>42</sup> Beckett to Reavey, 8 May 1953, HRHRC. Cited by Knowlson 1996, p. 393.

them, it is for the sole reason of explaining why my sight lagged behind my other senses.<sup>43</sup>

It is clear from a comparison between this version of the passage and Grove's that the missing conjoiners hypothesised above, and which manifest as 'together with', 'à la même occasion' and 'aussi' in the 'Suite' notebook, make a similarly explicit appearance in this published version. The tutor 'had also' given the student, 'on the same occasion, the *Ethics* of Geulinx [...] and the glasses had perhaps belonged to him too'. There is no confusing the two objects whatsoever. Not even the man's being 'farsighted' appears to imply anything about his *Ethics*. How might this be accounted for, and what, if anything, does this version illuminate in relation to Beckett's intended uses of Geulincx?

Importantly, Beckett did not approve this version. Despite being credited as 'translated from the French by Richard Seaver in collaboration with the author'<sup>44</sup> in *Merlin* Seaver apparently did most of the translating, and vitally Beckett never saw proofs before publication. Seaver told his side of the débâcle in a preface to a 1976 Grove reader, where he admitted that *Merlin's The End* was 'my translation. Well, sort of my translation'<sup>45</sup>. According to Seaver, Beckett had himself suggested that Seaver attempt the translation, and the two met to discuss Seaver's first draft in Paris at Le Dôme at Montparnasse:

Beckett began to read. After a few minutes of perusing first my translation, then the original, his wire-framed glasses pushed up into the thick shock of hair above – the better to see, no doubt – he shook his head. My heart sank. Clearly, the translation was inadequate. "You can't translate that," he said, fingering the original with utter disdain. "It makes no sense."<sup>46</sup>

Beckett went on to point out to Seaver places where 'you're literally right', but where Seaver should make such moments what Beckett called 'a bit tighter'<sup>47</sup>. For instance, according to Seaver, the novella's opening lines changed through these collaborative sessions from the following:

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<sup>43</sup> Beckett 1954, pp. 153-154.

<sup>44</sup> Beckett 1954, p. 159

<sup>45</sup> Seaver 1976, p. xiv.

<sup>46</sup> Seaver 1976, p. xxiii.

<sup>47</sup> Seaver 1976, p. xxiv.

They dressed me and gave me money. I knew what the money was to be used for, it was for my travelling expenses. When it was gone, they said, I would have to get some more, if I wanted to go on travelling'<sup>48</sup>

to the less explicit

They clothed me and gave me money. I knew what the money was for, it was to get me started. When it was gone I would have to get more, if I wanted to go on.<sup>49</sup>

Yet the collaborative picture Seaver paints comes under some strain when taking into account how furious Beckett was with the editors at *Merlin* when he saw the published version, not having been given an opportunity to correct proofs following Seaver's completed translation. He vented his frustrations to *Merlin*'s co-editor Trocchi:

I have received, not from you, a copy of the latest issue of *Merlin*. My text is full of errors. Why did you not send me proofs? If, in this instance, circumstances had prevented me from correcting them, and they would not have, at least you could have done what it was incumbent on you to do. Are you too forgetting, in the fun of editing, the needs of writers? I am still waiting for you to begin payment of the royalties you owe me. I begin to weary of your treatment of me.<sup>50</sup>

It is unfortunate that there is no detailed description of what Beckett considered the specific errors to be, even if Trocchi's reply appears to indicate the existence of such detail: 'That you were able to get so many recriminations on one small page does credit to your literary ability but says little for what I believed was our friendship'<sup>51</sup>. Consequently, it cannot be said with certainty that the differences between the two English versions of the passage were indeed certain of those 'ridiculous mistakes' Beckett found in the *Merlin* version. Given Beckett's quoted focus on making it 'a bit tighter' and his apparent balking at Seaver's literalism, however, such an inference is perhaps justified. The passage is at once, in its refinement over the period 1954-1960

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<sup>48</sup> Seaver 1976, p. xxiii.

<sup>49</sup> Cited in Seaver 1976, p. xxiv.

<sup>50</sup> Beckett to Trocchi, 27 August 1954. McMaster University Samuel Beckett collection, box 1, folder 22 ('Collection Merlin'). Beckett wrote to Pamela Mitchell on the same day, thanking her for sending a copy of *Merlin*, telling Mitchell he'd written 'a stinker' to Trocchi and that he was 'fed up with them' (Beckett to Mitchell, 27 August 1954, UoR MS MIT/037).

<sup>51</sup> Trocchi to Beckett, 30 August 1954. McMaster University Samuel Beckett collection, box 1, folder 22 ('Collection Merlin').

in a further translation by Beckett for its next English appearance in *Evergreen Review*, made more focussed with brevity while also more open-ended with implication. That *Evergreen Review* version is almost identical to the above-cited Grove version and so is not cited in full here. The only variant distinguishing it from Grove's beyond the misspelling 'Geulincz' noted above is the indication of the tutor's name '(Ward) on the front page'<sup>52</sup> instead of on the 'fly-leaf'. This is an interesting amendment in itself, in that it converts a general vocabulary to a more technical literary one, and so produces a phrase that intimates more forcefully the forgotten learning of the young student by exhibiting a fragmentary synecdoche of this learning. The amendment militates against a conception of 'the series' as entirely one of a reduction from specifics to the more general and abstract, with this alteration of 'front page' to 'fly-leaf' inserting some specialist specificity.

In between these two English texts Beckett published *La Fin* in 1955, and again in 1958, both through Éditions de Minuit. Comparable to the later Grove version, and in contrast to the botched *Merlin* translation, this French text carries the ambivalence regarding the ontological status of these two objects. Beckett had apparently found the thing he wanted yet it is arguably the case that this came about at least partly through the considerations of translating a French version back into English.

Something just as interesting results, however, from a comparison of the *Merlin* and 'Suite' notebook's French passages. Seaver's rendering of 'on the same occasion' would appear wildly speculative, were it not for the apparent 'aussi, à la même occasion' in the French part of the 'Suite' notebook. Whatever French text Seaver was working from it seems plausible that it was not the final French version as published by Minuit and was a further version somewhere between the French as it was in the 'Suite' notebook and as it appeared in Minuit's 1955 edition. It is unknown where this missing stage might be. The fifth Watt notebook at HRHRC bears the title 'Samuel Beckett Watt V / Suite ~~et fin~~ / 18.2.45 / 5 Paris Et debut [sic] de L'Absent / Malone meurt / Novembre-Janvier 47/48'<sup>53</sup>. However, as Beer and J.M. Coetzee<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Beckett 1960, p. 33.

<sup>53</sup> Cited in Ackerley 2005a, p. 245.

<sup>54</sup> Ackerley quotes Coetzee's PhD thesis accounting for the 90 leaves in the notebook: 'First 50 leaves given to Watt, the next 39 to Malone meurt, leaf 90 to notes on Watt' (Ackerley 2005a, p. 245).

point out, there is no sign of *Suite* in the notebook and ‘presumably Beckett wrote this [title on the cover] when he did not expect to need more than five notebooks, and returned to correct ‘Suite et fin’ to ‘Suite’ when he found a sixth was required’<sup>55</sup>. Ackerley points out that ‘the opening pages are ripped out’<sup>56</sup> of this notebook.

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<sup>55</sup> Beer 1985, p. 60.

<sup>56</sup> Ackerley 2005a, p. 245.



## Chapter 5 – Three Novels<sup>1</sup>

### 5.1 ‘Vaguen’

This chapter offers a critical reading of the importance of Geulincx for the Three Novels of Beckett’s middle period, focusing predominantly on *The Unnamable*. Firstly the chapter takes a visual approach, enumerating the appearances of imagistic allusions to Geulincx, the first of which explicitly names Geulincx. Secondly it focuses a similar approach linguistically by explicating the partial quotations of Geulincx’ axiom as it manifests throughout the novels. This dual analysis frames Beckett’s developing uses of borrowed imagery and quotation in his effort to ‘vaguen’<sup>2</sup>. As recorded first by Gontarski, Beckett’s marginalia in a *Happy Days* manuscript stated that on further revision he should ‘vaguen’ description of the stage’s set, an impetus Cohn describes as ‘a despecifying process that would become habitual in the composition of his drama’<sup>3</sup>. It would also be put to effective use in prose, and the lineage of imagery derived from Geulincx that can be traced through the Three Novels exists as a paradigm of Beckett’s ‘fantasia’ in microcosm. Whereas the project to trace the importance and viability of Geulincx, a Geulincx brought out of and in to the *oeuvre*, begins with explicit citation in *Murphy* and moves towards the barely-there fleeting presence in the fragmented and minimalist texts and plays beyond the Three Novels, so too within these Three Novels the progress of a movement to ‘vaguen’, a transit from the explicit to the implicit, can be traced. It is a movement that is also one from intertextuality to intratextuality, whereby later appearances of Geulincx are allusions not only to Geulincx’ own texts, but reference the already refracted references to Geulincx within Beckett’s own texts.

Following these discussions I argue that the ‘one [who] will be born’ in Geulingian terms heralded by the Watt of *Mercier and Camier* could be the self-flagellating self-asserting first-person narrating voice of *The Unnamable*. To this end I

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<sup>1</sup> I follow the convention of referring to the ‘Three Novels’ rather than the ‘Trilogy’. This seeks to follow Beckett’s own preference expressed a number of times, including to Bray in 1959: ‘No news from Calder, but I was told the 3 in 1 was imminent. Please God he doesn’t call it a trilogy’. (Beckett to Bray, 26 March 1959, TCD MS 10948/1/24)

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Gontarski 1977, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Cohn 2001, p. 263

build on Uhlmann's epistemological suggestion that *The Unnamable* manifests less a Cartesian than a Geulincxian form of *cogito*, and argue that Beckett manages with *The Unnamable* to achieve something entirely new in the 'series' that can be traced to Geulincx. Recalling Weller's terminology, this is an 'actualization' of principles fundamental to Geulincx' ethics that becomes narrative, that aligns the seeking and turning away from self inherent to Geulincx' *humilitas* with *The Unnamable*'s paradoxical non-self-assertion. Geulincx' axiom therefore comes to be seen as central to the climax of Beckett's middle period works.

## **5.2 Molloy sets sail**

The only explicit naming of Geulincx in the Three Novels occurs in the following passage from the first section of the first novel, where Molloy has recently left Lousse. Molloy questions his capacity for choice and action, and in this context asserts his love for Geulincx:

Now as to telling you why I stayed a good while with Lousse, no, I cannot. That is to say I could I suppose, if I took the trouble. But why should I? In order to establish that I could not do otherwise? For that is the conclusion I would come to, fatally. I who had loved the image of old Geulincx, dead young, who left me free, on the black boat of Ulysses, to crawl towards the East, along the deck. That is a great measure of freedom, for him who has not the pioneering spirit. And from the poop, poring upon the wave, a sadly rejoicing slave, I follow with my eyes the proud and futile wake. Which, as it bears me from no fatherland away, bears me onward to no shipwreck.

Molloy refuses to face the fact of his own impotence, which would be fatal. As Moran will also do, Molloy gilds his impotence, adorning it with wistful admiration of the philosopher of freedom in slavery, Geulincx. The valiant because doomed effort of a 'sadly rejoicing slave' destined to wish for a shipwreck that will not come is, Molloy opines, 'a great measure of freedom, for him who has not the pioneering spirit'<sup>4</sup>.

As might be expected, this passage has been cited by a number of critics as evidence of an impact on Beckett's *oeuvre* of his interest in Geulincx. As Feldman puts it, for example, the passage 'perfectly corresponds to a sentence in Beckett's

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<sup>4</sup> TN, p. 51.

transcriptions of the *Ethics*<sup>5</sup>, a passage in which Geulincx attempts to find a space within all-encompassing impotence for a Christian-like free will:

Just as a ship carrying a passenger with all speed towards the west in no way prevents the passenger from walking towards the east, so the will of God, carrying all things, impelling all things with inexorable force, in no way prevents us from resisting his will (as much as is in our power) with complete freedom.<sup>6</sup>

In 1999 Uhlmann brought to public view a letter written by Beckett to *Molloy*'s German translator (Dr Erich Franzen) in 1954, in which Beckett was unusually expansive in his explications of the allusions of the passage in the novel that mentions Geulincx, tying it to the passage from *Ethics*:

This passage is suggested (a) by a passage in the *Ethics* of Geulincx where he compares human freedom to that of a man, on board a boat carrying him irresistibly westward, free to move eastward within the limits of the boat itself, as far as the stern; and (b) by Ulysses' relation in Dante (*Inf.* 26) of his second voyage (a medieval tradition) to and beyond the Pillars of Hercules, his shipwreck and death... I imagine a member of the crew who does not share the adventurous spirit of Ulysses and is at least at liberty to crawl homewards... along the brief deck.<sup>7</sup>

Beckett neglects to mention Homer to Franzen in this connection, though perhaps merely because it is too obvious. Entry no. 714 in the 'Dream' notebook reads 'black cruiser of Ulysses', which Pilling annotates:

Bérard, 175; *Odyssey*, X, 501-502. CF. 'Draff' ('black as Ulysses's cruiser'; *More Pricks Than Kicks*, 198), the 'black ferry' of the poem 'Text', and 'the black boat of Ulysses', (*Molloy*, 'trilogy' 51).<sup>8</sup>

Dante does not mention the colour of the boat in canto XXVI of *Inferno*, but following Pilling's work on the 'Dream' notebook we can see how the boat being 'black' reveals the *Molloy* passage to be even more expansively allusive than Beckett indicates. One particularly striking parallel between the episode told by Dante and the

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<sup>5</sup> Feldman 2009a, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> *Ethics*, p. 317. Feldman's quotation of the passage, however, does not quite perfectly correspond. It misquotes Wilson's translation by missing out 'west in no way prevents the passenger from walking towards the' without inserting ellipses. See Feldman 2009a, pp. 45-46.

<sup>7</sup> Beckett to Franzen, 17 February 1954. Cited by Uhlmann 1999, p. 54. Cf. Uhlmann 2006a, p. 78.

<sup>8</sup> Beckett 1999, p.103.

context of the ship's passenger in *Ethics* lies in how both rely on a dualist distinction between an inner and outer world. In *Inferno* Ulysses exhorts his crew onward on the perilous journey 'beyond the Pillars of Hercules' through flattery of their inner lives as well as of their heroism in the physical world. Citing their heritage Ulysses says

Consider what you came from: you are Greeks!  
 You were not born to live like mindless brutes  
 but to follow paths of excellence and knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

This path of an inner world of 'excellence and knowledge' supervenes upon the exploratory and dangerous journey in the physical world, as in *Ethics* the proper way to live in the social world is dependent upon an inspection of the private inner world.

The passage from *Ethics* in question appears in annotation 9 to Treatise 1, Chapter 1, § 2, Reason.<sup>10</sup> The section in the main body of the Treatise that Geulincx annotates, however, is worthy of further investigation, as it speaks to the possibility of Beckett's fascination with Geulingian thought as an ethics of failure. Fundamental to Geulincx' conception of the authority of God is that it is metaphysically impossible to resist. For Geulincx it is pointless to think of resisting, because we have no real causal agency. This thoroughgoing submission endangers the viability of Geulincx' thoughts on free will, even on freedom to intend, despite the fact that Geulincx stakes his entire ethics on intentionality. Geulincx' theorising the omnipotence of God's capacity for causation and humanity's incapacity to resist this in any way might quite easily be read as invoking a ruthless, unmovable and authoritarian God, a God whose pre-established synchronicity is brutal, even fascistic. Geulincx details his ethical fatalism:

To wish to obey the absolute, true and strict will of God in some matter, is to wish what has already been done; whether you like it or not, you will obey, just as all things will necessarily obey. (But here is not the place to speak of why this does not make God the author of Sin, and of how it is consistent with our freedom of will).<sup>11</sup>

The correct place to 'speak of why [...] freedom of will' is unaffected by this strict inevitability that looks suspiciously like determinism, according to Geulincx, is in his

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<sup>9</sup> Dante 2003, p. 309 (Inf. XXVI 118-120).

<sup>10</sup> See *Ethics* p. 182 for the passage as it appears in the main body of the annotations.

<sup>11</sup> *Ethics*, p. 16.

annotations. Annotation 9, describing the passenger on the ship, is appended to this paragraph in order to reconcile a sense of God as ultra-authoritarian with human free will. Surely, we must conclude, Geulincx' ship analogy fails this self-imposed test.<sup>12</sup> The image of a ship-hand crawling in the opposite direction to a ship's motion fails Geulincx because it does not capture the internalised notion of freedom of intention Geulincx argues is the only measure of ethical worth. It is a similar failure, though one here left unexplained, to the weaknesses Geulincx admits to in the cradle analogy. What Geulincx' analogy does achieve, however, given its failure on these terms, is an image of futility that we might suppose to have appealed greatly to Beckett. It is this unintended sense of the image as of thorough futility and failure, rather than as one illustrating real affirmative freedom (as intended by Geulincx), that strikes Beckett so forcefully that he will incorporate it into his work twenty years after he studied it, as a paradigm of the possibility of freedom 'for him who has not the pioneering spirit'.

This ship on which Molloy imagines himself is the only appearance of Geulincx' ship analogy in *Molloy*. Uhlmann writes 'The ship image recurs on three occasions in *The Unnamable*'<sup>13</sup>, and with his citations keyed to the original Grove publication of 1958 cites these as 'pp. 68, 72, 148'<sup>14</sup>. This is arguably inaccurate, however, as the image recurs four times in *The Unnamable*, each time more reduced and abstracted from its source, more and more *vaguened*. In missing this fourth, fleeting appearance, Uhlmann misses too what is so vital to this lineage – its instantiating a micro-'series' of imagistic *vaguening*, Beckett's reducing to what he called 'fundamental sounds'<sup>15</sup> the reified, memorialised residues of what once were sources. The image also, again far from clearly, appears in *Malone Dies*. The following analysis traces these reappearances and argues that they are paradigmatic of Beckett's evolving art as one moving from more direct relation, from more readily identifiable influence and allusions (despite their obscurity), to an art of non-relation characterising Beckett's prose of the late 1940s and the 1950s.

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<sup>12</sup> Beckett transcribed Geulincx' annotation almost in its entirety, leaving out only a final long sentence where Geulincx justifies 'familiarising ourselves with these and other analogies' by virtue of their permitting us to 'perceive the thing itself as well as if we had always been familiar with it' (*Ethics*, p. 182).

<sup>13</sup> Uhlmann 2006a, p. 78.

<sup>14</sup> Uhlmann 2006a, p. 165.

<sup>15</sup> Beckett to Alan Schneider, 29 December 1957. Cited in Harmon, ed. 1998, p.24.

### 5.3 Geulingian imagery in *The Unnamable*

*The Unnamable* is so continuously ingrained with the ‘aporia’<sup>16</sup> foregrounded in its very first paragraph that any attempt to write generalised critical commentary on this self-lacerating novel, so exhaustively characterised by what *Texts for Nothing* 13 calls ‘The screaming silence of no’s knife in yes’s wound’<sup>17</sup>, is bound to be undone. We can never assert anything of the novel without taking account of such an assertion’s necessary concomitant negation. So, at least, runs one strain of orthodoxy as regards the critic’s relationship to this work. It is the perception of such undermining oppositional structure that is in part responsible for what Bruno Clément, while stopping short of calling it a ventriloquising of the critical response, describes as a ‘duality of narrative authorities [in] the Beckettian text’:

The not-very-attentive reader (indeed, as experience proves, even the more battle-hardened reader) only belatedly becomes aware (if indeed he or she becomes aware at all) that there is in the work, in the text that he or she reads, a voice resembling, to the point of their being mistaken for one another, the critical voice.<sup>18</sup>

Clément describes a broad category of ‘the’ critical voice already embedded in, indelibly bound into, ‘the’ work. Yet these words of caution, of Clément’s and of mine above, must themselves be cautioned, as they also already assert generalised critical statements. It is important to note how the authorial option of ‘aporia’, for example, mooted by the narrating voice at the beginning of *The Unnamable*, is itself asserted without anything like a full commitment to its implications. It is framed in a question: ‘how proceed? By aporia pure and simple? Or by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later?’<sup>19</sup> Not even this assertion of a framing structure for the novel-in-embryo is without its own particular element of ironic self-reflexive doubt and specificity. Following this precedent, doubts and hesitations that arise in the novel are of course not all ‘pure and simple’. This most uneasy of novels hesitates and doubts in specific instances, in individual moments, and some of these hesitations and doubts are more assertive than others. Still others are discarded,

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<sup>16</sup> *TN*, p. 294.

<sup>17</sup> *CSP*, p. 154.

<sup>18</sup> Clément 2006, p. 119.

<sup>19</sup> *TN*, p. 294.

undermined, directly opposed, left partially unresolved, entirely ignored, in multifarious ways. In summary, I argue that one should be wary of asserting anything too broad and general about the novel, as it will indeed likely be undermined by a specific textual moment that works against the validity of any given assertion. But this does not mean that one should refrain from critical commentary on the novel out of fear that the critical voice is always already embedded in the text as a monolithic voice, where the voice of critical commentary is merely the sound of the critic being second-guessed. It is possible to speak of this novel without being engulfed by its voracious appetite for all-comers, but the safest way to do so, I argue, is by attending to the specificities of individual textual moments, always aware that consequent generalising is the riskier strategy.

These general comments about general comments are important for two reasons. Firstly, they seek to underwrite an approach to Geulincx' relevance in this work as one comprised in the first analysis of specific textual moments, though ones that function within broader thematic frameworks. Secondly, they frame the first strongly made assertion of self-identity in *The Unnamable*. This is an assertion that is not, at least not immediately, 'invalidated as uttered'. Just as some claims about the novel can be made more forcefully, some assertions in the novel are made more forcefully, more categorically, than others. There is only one instance in this novel of selfhood where the first person pronoun constitutes an entire sentence. It is, as so many of the other instances of 'I' are in the novel, asserted in the context of a questioning, but what follows is an instance of a rare and strongly asserted self-identity, and it occurs as a continuation of the lineage of imagery deriving from Dante and Geulincx:

I. Who might that be? The galley-man, bound for the pillars of Hercules, who drops his sweep under cover of night and crawls between the thwarts, towards the rising sun, unseen by the guard, praying for storm. Except that I've stopped praying for anything. No, no, I'm still a suppliant. I'll get over it, between now and the last voyage, on this leaden sea.<sup>20</sup>

When I claim that this identity is forcefully asserted, I mean that it is striking that the 'I' of this passage is left asserted as the 'galley-man' of Geulincx' and Dante's ship.

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<sup>20</sup> *TN*, p. 339.

The narrator does not retract or otherwise object to their identification with the slave making their first moves for freedom, dropping their 'sweep' and crawling towards the east. What is qualified in this passage, in 'Except that I've stopped praying for anything. No, no, I'm still a suppliant' of the fourth and fifth sentences, is not the narrator's identity as the 'galley-man', but only the actions of this identity. The question of whether or not the 'galley-man' still prays is first asserted then denied, before finally being left as implied. Beckett's intriguing pun here is 'thwarts'. While these 'thwarts' are literally the slats as seats for rowers across a boat (the seats athwart/across), the word also connotes being thwarted, hindered or stopped. Crawling 'between the thwarts' is then a movement of freedom through extrication that, in virtue of its nautical resonances, recalls Stephen Dedalus's Icarian attempts to 'fly by those nets' of 'nationality, language, religion'<sup>21</sup> in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Beckett's Geulingian protagonist crawling across the floor heading in the opposite direction to which the ship is travelling and so only free to get as far as the bounds of the ship, in contrast to Stephen's heroic flight into open-ended air, serves as an intriguing image of the contrasting visions of freedom and constraint the two writers pursue. While Stephen would be the determiner of his own destiny, the 'galley-man' is 'still a suppliant'.

Both Molloy and *The Unnamable*'s narrator think of their ship being wrecked by a storm. Molloy remembers with affection, with his 'love' for Geulincx, how he imagined himself carried 'onward to no shipwreck'. *The Unnamable*'s narrator goes further, impotently 'praying for storm'. This wish for 'shipwreck' not quite there in *Molloy* but forcefully made in *The Unnamable* builds on the Dantean impetus in these images, alluding to Ulysses's ship that met a storm five days after passing through the Pillars of Hercules:

Our celebrations soon turned to grief:  
and from the new land there rose a whirling wind  
that beat against the forepart of the ship

and whirled us round three times in churning waters;  
the fourth blast raised the stern up high, and sent

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<sup>21</sup> Joyce 2000, p. 171.



the bow down deep, as pleased Another's will.

And then the sea was closed again, above us.<sup>22</sup>

Even in this allusion to storm and wreck so closely allied to Dante, however, Geulincx is also melded. Ulysses describes the fatalistic storm as having 'pleased Another's will', and in this ascription of the storm deriving from God, as only possible as deriving from God, the two authors are aligned by Beckett. For Geulincx too discusses shipwrecks in this context. In a chapter entitled 'The Shipwreck of Belief' van Ruler discusses another ship analogy to illustrate how the 'different ways in which the analogy operates in [Herman] Witsius and Andala on the one hand and Geulincx on the other, are indicative of their conflicting theological views'<sup>23</sup>. In this earlier analogy Geulincx describes how a ship could be 'made ready, fitted-out' in all good preparation, yet this would not prevent circumstances from conspiring against it, where it might be 'plunged into a storm, or captured by pirates'. Just as in the life of an aspiring academic such as himself:

A speech or lecture is perfectly pitched to secure fame and praise, composed with the utmost care, and elaborated by exhaustive study, but no honour ensues, no applause, only mockery and derision.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, Geulincx writes of a merchant on a ship 'plunged into a storm' to again illustrate occasionalist freedom. Describing a freedom he calls freedom to '*do as thou pleasest; or...do as thou art minded*'<sup>25</sup>, Geulincx adds in his annotations 'For example, the merchant who when a storm blows up flings his merchandise into the sea does *not* enjoy this kind of freedom', rather this merchant 'does not do what pleases him, but on the contrary acts against how he is minded, and would by no means do it if he were not forced to do it'<sup>26</sup>. Beckett was aware of these further analogies in *Ethica*, so it

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<sup>22</sup> Dante 2003, p. 309 (Inf. XXVI 136-142).

<sup>23</sup> van Ruler 2003, p. 127.

<sup>24</sup> *Ethics*, p. 143. Geulincx employs this earlier analogy in the context of his theorising sin and divine punishment as further evidence for the impotence of the will, according to which misfortune is inevitable and cannot be willed away.

<sup>25</sup> *Ethics*, p. 323.

<sup>26</sup> *Ethics*, p. 205. That imagery of ships is so fundamental to Geulincx' work is of little surprise. van Ruler points out for example that Geulincx was 'born within a mile of the ships that visited Antwerp's harbour, and [...] knew about sea-trade' (van Ruler 2003, p. 126).

perhaps seems unlikely he would entirely disregard them when thinking of ships and storms in the context of Geulincx.<sup>27</sup>

A few pages after its first mention in *The Unnamable* Beckett returns to this ship image in the context of self-identification, reducing it from what it was previously to something *vaguened*, less explicitly tied to either Dante or Geulincx:

I am he who will never be caught, never delivered, who crawls between the thwart, towards the day that promises to be glorious, festooned with lifebelts, praying for rack and ruin.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly to the image's first appearance in *The Unnamable*, here it also frames a self-identity asserted with a commitment that is often absent, in complex and multivalent ways, from so many other assertions of self in the novel. Beckett appears to have obtained from Geulincx an analogy for a sense of identity that, even under the auspices of *The Unnamable*'s violent narrator, stabbing 'no's knife in yes's wound', is not yet destroyed. However, despite the fact that such a sense of identity is yet to be entirely discarded or disregarded, images of the galley-man are progressively and steadily fragmented through the novel. The pastoral but ominous 'rising sun' of earlier appears in this second image as 'the day that promises to be glorious'. It marks a *vaguening* shift from objects to atmospherics, from description of a specific object to an intimation of mood. Similarly, the 'storm' of the first image becomes the consequences of that storm in the second, the less specific 'rack and ruin'. We have seen the transition from relation to non-relation traceable through a genetic criticism of the Geulincx passage in *Suite/The End/La Fin*. A similar transition is enacted within *The Unnamable*, but here the alterations and refinements all take place as themselves the sinews of the final published text, viewable before our eyes as bounded within the limits of the novel itself. These transitions, traceable through elements derived originally from Geulincx, reveal the philosopher to be central to Beckett's evolving art, yet central in precisely his being a fleeting and fragmentary presence.

In the third appearance of this ship possibilities of real physical escape become limited to mere visual glances of prospective freedom, seen as the new sunnier day:

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<sup>27</sup> Geulincx also employs a ship analogy to define propositional content: 'as there is no shipwreck without a ship, neither is there a negation without an affirmation' (*Opera* vol. 1, p. 177, cited and translated by van Bunge et al. (eds.) 2003, p. 325).

<sup>28</sup> *TN*, p. 341.

What a joy it is, to turn and look astern, between two visits to the depths, scan in vain the horizon for a sail, it's a real pleasure, upon my word it is, to be unable to drown, under such conditions.<sup>29</sup>

This is the version of the image missing from Uhlmann's account.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps this is the case because Uhlmann considers it not to qualify as a part of the lineage. Certainly it differs in certain ways from the other images. It is, for example, the only instance of the ship imagery not to mention 'thwarts'. However, it does give the direction of looking as the same as earlier ('astern', which is the rear of the ship, as Molloy described looking out from the 'poop' deck, which is the top rear of the ship). These directions bear comparison with Beckett's description to Franzen of a man 'on board a boat carrying him irresistibly westward' who nevertheless resists, and travels 'eastward within the limits of the boat itself, as far as the stern'. This third image also marks an important change in the lineage from one of movement to stasis. The turning to 'look astern', while the ship travels forward, is the stilled and contemplative version of the physical crawling 'towards the east' or 'the rising sun' when the ship was travelling west. Continuing the trend of this ship imagery instantiating in microcosm broader shifts within Beckett's 'series', if not the entire *oeuvre*, at this midpoint the balance alters from one of searching and seeking, of trying to be free within the limited bounds of the ship, to one of standing still, looking and contemplating. In the broader 'series' such a shift happens in the middle novel of the middle-period, *Malone Dies*, whose waiting and watching for death in his bed follows logically, if not entirely consequentially, from Molloy and Moran's entropic wanderings. Here, within *The Unnamable*, it happens halfway through this lineage of imagery.

The final of the four images appears shortly after the third (as did the second from the first), only a few pages from the end of the novel. There has been a further change on board this mysterious ship, and the galley-man with his hope of impossible freedom has, if not mutinied, taken some kind of charge:

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<sup>29</sup> *TN*, p. 395.

<sup>30</sup> It appears on p. 146 of the 1958 Grove edition Uhlmann uses.

Now it's I the orator, the beleaguers have departed, I am master on board, after the rats, I no longer crawl between the thwarts, under the moon, in the shadow of the lash<sup>31</sup>

Whatever nameless authority was keeping the deck hand subjugated and dreaming of a freedom in drowning has 'departed'. The narrator is now second in command 'after the rats', those elemental and frequently violent creatures that reappear throughout Beckett's *oeuvre*, often as they do so confounding enumerative rationalism. This new type of freedom in stasis, in no longer crawling towards a freedom to be found elsewhere, no longer even standing still and observing the possibility of freedom, asserts the central paradox of Beckett's middle period. As Alice and Kenneth Hamilton assert of Beckett's twinning of Geulincx and Democritus, the conclusions reached by Beckett in navigating between these two reside in a resignation to irresolvable paradox:

Beckett's people appear to be given two choices: either *stasis* or circular motion. Both amount to the same – getting nowhere. The wise among them accept the possibility with Democritan laughter, while the less wise (as in *Waiting for Godot*) say, "Let's go," and do not move. Molloy is in many ways the best example of the one who has learned the lesson drawn by his creator from Democritus and Geulincx. He ends his narrative with the words "I longed to go back into the forest. Oh not a real longing. Molloy could stay, where he happened to be" (p. 124).<sup>32</sup>

The comparable culmination inheres in *The Unnamable* in that most climactic of Beckett's lines – 'I can't go on, I'll go on'<sup>33</sup>. Still subject to the movement of the boat, the stillness of stasis within movement is the fleetingly best that can be hoped for, and that is what the narrator asserts they achieve.

Continuing the precedents set above by *pruritus* and internalised psychological inspection, this ship from Geulincx, explicitly pointed to by Beckett as deriving from *Ethics*, has a near relative in a much earlier image. In *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* Beckett wrote of a ship on which Belacqua 'is alone on the deck of steerage-class' travelling by the south coast of England at night. The narrator asks of his fictional puppet 'what would be the correct thing for him to think for us', and

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<sup>31</sup> TN, p. 396.

<sup>32</sup> Hamilton and Hamilton 1976, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> TN, p. 418.

constructs a scene of Belacqua's stilled pause that mirrors the narrator's own questions and lack of direction:

To begin with, of course, he moves forward, like the Cartesian earthball, with the moving ship, and then on his own account to the windy prow. He can go no further with security. He leans out to starboard, if that means landward when land is to the right of the ship's motions, and scans the wastes of waters, the distant beacons. Was it Beachy Head or the Isle of Wight, was it Land's End or tragic lightboats standing afar out about the shallows of the sea, or lightbuoys moored over the shoals? They were red and green and they lanced his heart, they brought down his lips and head over the froth of water. If I were in, he thought richly, and it up to me to swim to one of those lights that I can see from here – how would I know that land was there, I would see no light from the level of the sea, I would certainly drown in a panic.<sup>34</sup>

As Pilling has pointed out of this scene, Beckett derives the 'Cartesian earthball' from Descartes.<sup>35</sup> In *Principles of Philosophy* Descartes seeks to define 'What external place is' via an analogy of a person on a moving ship. He argues that 'the names "space" and "place" do not signify a thing different from the body which is said to be in the place', and so we must think of 'external place' in relative terms:

Thus, when a ship is heading out to sea, a person seated in the stern always remains in one place as far as the parts of the ship are concerned, for he maintains the same situation in relation to them. But this same person is constantly changing his place as far as the shores are concerned, since he is constantly moving away from some and toward others. Furthermore, if we think that the earth moves (and is rotating on its axis), and travels from the West toward the East exactly as far as the ship progresses from the East toward the West; we shall once again say that the person seated in the stern does not change his place: because of course we shall determine his place by certain supposedly motionless points in the heavens.<sup>36</sup>

Descartes's 'earthball' moves 'on its axis' just as Belacqua moves in relation to the land and also in relation to the ship. Belacqua, that is, is very rarely stilled in relation to his boisterous environment and is more often buffeted by the constantly changing world around him than he is able to resist it. This concern with freedom as stasis in relation to movement on board a ship, traceable through *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* to Descartes, then later through *The Unnamable* via Geulincx, evinces Beckett's altering 'foci' on particularly Cartesian strains of freedom. Beckett himself

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<sup>34</sup> *Dream*, pp. 134-135.

<sup>35</sup> See Pilling 2004, p. 235.

<sup>36</sup> Descartes 1984, p. 45.

made journeys by ship around the coast of England a number of times<sup>37</sup>, and as will be shown later such voyages also appear refracted through the Geulingian ship in *Comment c'est/How It Is*. Before that, however, one other arguable appearance of the post-Cartesian ship in the Three Novels must be addressed.

#### 5.4 The ship in *Malone Dies*

The appearance of the troubled ship in *Malone Dies* is itself a little troubled. Malone, sick of the ‘Mortal tedium’<sup>38</sup> of his embedded fictional narratives, describes instead certain of his previous faltering foci. These include incidents and characters that recall moments from Beckett’s previous novels, such as Murphy’s encounter with Mr. Endon (‘With the insane too I failed, by a hair’s-breadth’). Malone continues:

Bawling babies are what dumbfound me now. The house is full of them finally. Suave mari magno, especially for the old salt. What tedium. And I thought I had it all thought out.<sup>39</sup>

‘Suave mari magno’ derives from Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* [*On the Nature of Things*], in which the first century B.C. Roman poet expounds an atomist philosophy that includes a number of axioms. This allusion is also arguably one among the lineage of ship imagery. The subject of the opening two lines of the second book of *De Rerum Natura*, subtitled ‘The Dance of Atoms’, is markedly similar to Beckett’s storm-battered ship from Geulincx as it appears in *Molloy* and *The Unnamable*:

Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis  
e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem<sup>40</sup>

How sweet it is to watch from dry land when the storm-winds roil  
a mighty ocean’s waters, and see another’s bitter toil<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Nixon points out, for example, that ‘Beckett sailed to Hamburg from the port of Cobh on board the S.S. Washington on 29 September 1936’ (Nixon 2005, p. 5).

<sup>38</sup> *TN*, p. 218.

<sup>39</sup> *TN*, p. 219.

<sup>40</sup> Lucretius 1821 (Book II.1), p.96.

<sup>41</sup> Lucretius 2007, p. 36.

Again Beckett is drawn to a dichotomy between watching or wishing for a storm to wreck a ship and the actual events immediately surrounding that person watching or wishing, either safely on ‘dry land’ or crawling ‘along the deck’. Although this passage originates from Lucretius, Beckett transcribed it indirectly, from volume 2 of Schopenhauer’s *The World As Will and Representation* into the ‘Whoroscope’ notebook (as pointed out by Nixon in 2005<sup>42</sup>). The passage, then, reveals a similar fusion of sources to that of the ship image in *Molloy*, which fuses allusions to Dante and Homer. What makes this image in *Malone Dies*, relayed by the storytelling Malone, cohere with those others of stricken ships in the Three Novels is the perspective adopted. Malone watches from the shore, immune from disasters befalling another, just as the ‘galley-man’ will watch for disaster knowing he too is safe from it. The partial quotation is thereby also a voice of the novel’s self-referentiality, if not quite of the critical voice Clément describes embedded in *The Unnamable*: Malone himself, safe and dry but dying in bed, narrates a story of a troubled sea-trip in the third person, a story that brings his own novel to a disintegrating finality. Eventually exhausted at the end of his narrative Malone (via the vice-exister Lemuel) rapidly hatches to death the majority of his protagonists before corralling the last of them into his boat. Lemuel sets them sailing and the novel ends upon a final image of his hatchet raised in the boat, the oars lolling in the sea, the scene frozen but fading in Malone’s collapsing telling of it. Malone himself, however, dying and eventually dead, is safe from all this ‘roil’ and ‘toil’ in his bed just as if watching the scenes unfold from the ‘dry land’ of the shore. He is the ‘old salt’ in both its senses – as the adventuring seafarer imagined on board, and as the storyteller returned safe from the voyage.

## **5.5 The axiom**

Around two-thirds into *Molloy*’s narrative in the first of the Three Novels the protagonist leaves his temporary residence-shelter with Lousse and wanders the town. He ensconces himself on the stairs of a ‘mean lodging-house’ before again wandering off ‘in search of a familiar monument’ by which he might identify the town as his. *Molloy* describes the physical scene around him, comprising ‘a narrow alley [...]

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<sup>42</sup> See Nixon 2005, p. 116.

windows [...] Lavatory lights I suppose [...] a blind alley [...] two recesses', and nested somewhat incongruously amongst his semi-realist scenic depiction is Molloy's statement on axioms:

There are things from time to time, in spite of everything, that impose themselves on the understanding with the force of axioms, for unknown reasons.<sup>43</sup>

Molloy's impressions of the physical world around him, those inevitable elemental fragments of being in the world (as *The Unnamable*'s narrator says, 'I have few illusions, things are to be expected'<sup>44</sup>), are aligned with acts of intellection. The 'windows', 'lights' and the 'alley' 'impose themselves' on Molloy's understanding. Yet it is 'axioms' that are the paragon of visceral fact, of forcefulness, the more unquestionable and absolute. Molloy does not ask questions of the things he sees here in the town, but records them piece by realist piece as they 'impose themselves' upon him with an authority akin to that of 'axioms'. With this reference to the capacity of axioms to 'impose themselves on the understanding' in mind, the following discussion traces the versions of Geulincx' famous axiom (*ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis*) as it reappears in various instances in *Malone meurt*/*Malone Dies* and *L'Innomable*/*The Unnamable*. This sets the groundwork for the arguments that follow about just how forcefully the epistemological boundaries set by the axiom determine the acts of intellection given narrative form in *The Unnamable*.

The one appearance of a version of Geulincx' axiom in *Malone Dies* is notable for how it diverges from the French *Malone meurt*. The passage containing it occurs in Malone's story of Macmann:

And he clung closer and closer to the wall, but not too close, for it was guarded, seeking a way out into the desolation of having nobody and nothing, the wilds of the hunted, the scant bread and the scant shelter and the black joy of the solitary way, in helplessness and will-lessness, through all the beauty, the knowing and the loving.<sup>45</sup>

Et il allait de plus en plus du côté de la muraille, sans toutefois trop s'en approcher car elle était gardée, cherchant une issue vers la désolation de n'avoir personne ni rien, vers la terre au pain rare, aux abris rares, des terrifiés, vers la

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<sup>43</sup> TN, p. 60.

<sup>44</sup> TN, p. 294

<sup>45</sup> TN, p. 279.



noire joie de passer seul et vide, ne rien pouvant, ne rien voulant, à travers le savoir, la beauté, les amours.<sup>46</sup>

In the English version any allusion to Geulincx is barely noticeable. However, a more literal translation of the French ‘ne rien pouvant, ne rien voulant’ would be ‘able to do nothing, wanting nothing’ or ‘without being able, without wanting’. Such a translation would surely also echo, as the passage in *Malone meurt* does, Geulincx’ axiom. With an emphasis on capacity rather than on value, on being able rather than on being worth, Beckett reproduces the metaphysically slanted Latin axiom in a sparse French. In contrast, the English ‘in helplessness and will-lessness’ lacks any Geulingian syntactic inflection at all. If one were to posit a potential source for this English phrase with its explicit ‘will-lessness’ a much more likely candidate than Geulincx would probably be Schopenhauer. These two advocates of philosophical will-lessness, Geulincx and Schopenhauer, might then be shown here as separate sources for Beckett, for the passages in *Malone meurt* and *Malone Dies* respectively. When these passages from both are placed side by side, however, they reveal themselves as instances of just the sort of mutually engraved fragments that rattled round the pockets of *The End*’s narrator. Beckett’s translation of this fragment from *Malone meurt*, done sometime between mid-1954 and October 1955<sup>47</sup>, is not a simple case of jettisoning one referent (Geulincx) for a better (Schopenhauer), just as on a broader scale Beckett’s acts of translation are, similarly, not a matter of jettisoning one language for a better. Rather, the translation refines the more overt reference to Geulincx in the French to become one more fundamentally reduced to its sounds, a sound (‘will-lessness’) that we might at first read as wholly Schopenhauerian, but which we can now see, having noted the Geulingian axiomatic inflection in *Malone meurt*, would be rushing to a mistake as it is also indebted to Geulincx.

## 5.6 The axiom in *L’Innommable*/*The Unnamable*

In contrast to the axiom as translated from *Malone meurt* into the version in *Malone Dies*, those from *L’Innommable* to *The Unnamable* retain the Geulingian

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<sup>46</sup> Beckett 1951, p. 197.

<sup>47</sup> See Pilling 2006a, pp. 126-127.

inflections of their originals. The axiom appears clearly twice in *The Unnamable*, yet there are also a number of other instances where it is partially quoted or alluded to. The first more direct quotation is roughly halfway through the novel. The narrating voice dismisses the work of previous narrators in a phrase reflecting the fascination Beckett had with Geulincx' ontology of puppetry, his 'guignol world', by saying these previous works were 'too clumsily done, you could see the ventriloquist'. In contrast, the narrator hopes, the real work is 'about to begin'. Such work will happen in a place, a closed space that is a physicalised development of earlier mathematical closed systems, and the real work happening in this closed 'place' that will begin at last is work that owes its own possibility to Geulincx' axiom:

Quick, a place. With no way in, no way out, a safe place. Not like Eden. And Worm inside. Feeling nothing, knowing nothing, capable of nothing, wanting nothing.<sup>48</sup>

This closed 'place' the narrator desires where there would be no more 'puppets' is the place where Worm exists, Worm who in Geulingian terminology would be 'capable of nothing, wanting nothing'. But intriguingly it is the sealed 'safe place' itself that determines this impotence and nothingness. Such places, the narrator says a little later, are 'blessed':

the place to be, where you suffer, rejoice, at being bereft of speech, bereft of thought, and feel nothing, hear nothing, know nothing, say nothing, are nothing, that would be a blessed place to be, where you are.<sup>49</sup>

This and the previous quotation reveal the axiom's extension into relation with other domains of nothingness, sensory, ontological and variously epistemological. More than this, however, the 'place to be, where you are' as a place in which one is subject to Geulingian impotence situates the narrator squarely within that domain 'It's scarcely possible to exaggerate' the extent of that Beckett described to Duthuit. It also asserts their awareness of, if not quite their exact identification with, he who 'shall be born, said Watt, one is born of us, who having nothing will wish for nothing, except to be left the nothing he hath'. While Geulincx' axiom is embedded within a series of

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<sup>48</sup> *TN*, p. 351.

<sup>49</sup> *TN*, pp. 377-378.

repetitions in the first quotation here, disguised and perhaps therefore appearing as somewhat throwaway, it in fact conveys much more ‘force’ as an axiom in its intratextual resonances. It repeats the substance of a freedom inhering in stasis in relation to movement, that of Belacqua on the ship and the ‘galley-man’ of the Three Novels, where the achievement of a ‘place to be’ is achieved, as the second Watt also noted, in being ‘where you are’.

The second, slightly less overt, appearance of the axiom repeats some of these ‘nothing[s]’, while locating them within a broader context of occasionalist metaphysics:

I can’t say anything, I’ve tried, I’m trying, he knows nothing, knows of nothing, neither what it is to speak, nor what it is to hear, to know nothing, to be capable of nothing, and to have to try<sup>50</sup>

The futility of action (being ‘capable of nothing’), its being tied with such immediacy to an epistemological incapacity (‘he knows nothing’), combined with the obligation to act anyway (‘to have to try’), is a remarkably resonant point in Beckett’s ‘fantasia’. Firstly, in relation to Geulincx, it reproduces the transition staged in *Ethics* between a theoretical and a practical ethics. As de Vleeschauwer has argued, defending Geulincx against critics arguing that Geulingian occasionalism implies quietism,<sup>51</sup> Geulincx’ *Ethics* read fully wallows neither in this, nor in solipsism. There are indeed discrete moments where Geulincx appears to be carried by tendencies towards both, tempting as they must have been to someone so initially concerned to shut out the external world. Yet there is also an important transition in *Ethics* that shifts the discussion entirely from a theoretical ethics of self-immersion and a resignation to incapacity, into a very practical everyday or ordinary ethics that advocates, indeed depends upon and is directed entirely towards, a thorough engagement with a world of pragmatic decisions. The impetus for this comes about precisely because of a need Geulincx recognises ‘to have to try’. That is to act, despite apparent futility. Geulincx readily admits that *Ethics* cannot provide a person with answers to the multitude of ethical decisions made throughout a life, and nor does it develop an elegant Kantian categorical solution, despite the neatly balanced central axiom. But what *Ethics* does

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<sup>50</sup> *TN*, pp. 405-406.

<sup>51</sup> See de Vleeschauwer 1957, p. 62.

seek to do is provide some structured mediation between the abstracted realms of *humilitas*, *inspectio-sui*, and the everyday and divergent ethical decisions encountered all the time. That is, Geulincx advises on what might well be classed as hypothetical imperatives, though Geulincx gives them the name *obligatione* [obligations], of which he enumerates seven. For example, the fourth obligation stresses the need to find oneself a job or career and to commit to it with determination. Yet this determination should only last, as the fifth obligation makes clear, until this choice becomes too much to bear. That is, Geulincx directs, should a chosen ‘mode of life’<sup>52</sup> become too awful one should then, pragmatically, take up something else, ‘*redirecting the course of my pilgrimage elsewhere, if need be*’<sup>53</sup>. These pragmatic yet open-ended, systematically interwoven obligations that Geulincx argues all flow from the axiom, are Geulincx’ thought yielding to the possibility of the unforeseen and unknown. What is certain is that one cannot, in fact, really do anything. However, Geulincx concedes, as does *The Unnamable*’s narrator, you ‘have to try’.

This combination of impotence with obligation also resonates in the context of Beckett’s own criticism, his own attempts to make the sometimes awkward and always difficult step from the abstract to the more concrete as regards his thinking about an art of failure in criticism. The situation described in *The Unnamable*, of being capable of nothing yet having nevertheless to try, bears broader comparison with Beckett’s aesthetic foci as depicted in the *Three Dialogues*. In a rare clarion call Beckett wrote

to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail [...] failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living.<sup>54</sup>

According to the dramatised Beckett (B) who nominally attempts to convince a version of Duthuit (G) in some of Beckett’s most frequently cited critical statements on art, it is feeble for an artist to attempt what B calls mere disturbances of things ‘on the plane of the feasible’. Asked what other plane is possible B admits ‘Logically none’, but this should not stop one turning in disgust from such feasibility, such graspable possibility and achievability ‘weary of its puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able’. B prefers

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<sup>52</sup> *Ethics*, p. 346.

<sup>53</sup> *Ethics*, p. 348.

<sup>54</sup> *Proust*, p. 125.

The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.<sup>55</sup>

This paradoxically confident expression of the futility and failure of expression ironically and effectively ends the first of the dialogues. What is primarily intriguing about it in relation to Geulincx' *Ethics* and Beckett's utilisations of the Geulingian axiom is how it bears comparison with the quotation from *The Unnamable* which, as argued above, carries a trace of Geulincx' text. It would certainly be claiming too much to assert a direct influence on Beckett regarding his theorising artistic failure and obligation from Geulincx. Nevertheless, it is striking that at the culmination of Beckett's 'series', the climax of the final novel of the three, lies this assertion by *The Unnamable*'s narrator of knowing nothing and being capable of nothing that borrows Geulincx' axiom to frame conclusions that are drawn from Beckett's 'fidelity to failure'<sup>56</sup>.

The final appearance of the axiom is only a few pages from the novel's end. Asking once again who exactly all this torrent of words has been 'about', the narrator continues:

I don't know who it's all about, that's all I know, no, I must know something else, they must have taught me something, it's about him who knows nothing, wants nothing, can do nothing, if it's possible you can do nothing when you want nothing, who cannot hear, cannot speak, who is I, who cannot be I, of whom I can't speak, of whom I must speak,<sup>57</sup>

Here, near the paradoxical ending of *The Unnamable*, Geulincx can still be found deeply embedded in Beckett's prose. Yet at this relatively late stage in 'the series' the philosopher is not discarded, as a matter now resolved or question answered, as he predominantly was in *Murphy*. Instead it appears that the years of familiarity with Geulincx and his axiom have deepened Beckett's feeling for the intractable nature of the ethical axiom, in proximity to which *The Unnamable*'s narrator chooses repeatedly to define their 'I'. Geulincx appears here in a question, left unanswered, as to the viability of the ethical axiom: 'if it's possible you can do nothing when you want

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<sup>55</sup> Proust, p. 103.

<sup>56</sup> Proust, p. 125.

<sup>57</sup> TN, p. 408.

nothing'. Working against the idea that Beckett's *oeuvre*, or indeed the 'series' within it, is one that seeks wholeheartedly to reject the uneasy intrusions of philosophy or philosophers, and always to be resisting an infringement, the fragmentary inclusion of Geulincx' axiom here as a question shows a development in Beckett's thinking about allusion and philosophy still willing to set itself the philosophical problems it had once rendered as solved. To borrow Gontarski's phrase, Beckett is intent on undoing what had been earlier established.<sup>58</sup>

### 5.7 *Nescio*

In a 2008 review of Geulincx' *Ethics* Ackerley expressed how he was impressed by a point made by Uhlmann in the introduction to *Ethics*. It had been made previously by Uhlmann in 2006, but Ackerley argues that situated 'in the more immediate surrounding of Geulincx' actual writings, it resonates more meaningfully'<sup>59</sup>. Ackerley emphasises Uhlmann's point as not only fundamental to the philosophical implications of *The Unnamable*, but to Beckett and philosophy more broadly:

I should like to consider briefly the implications of what I believe to be one of the more stunning and important statements about Beckett and philosophy that I have yet encountered; indeed, something that might well shake the foundations of a lot of current scholarship.

Ackerley contextualises this ambitious claim by briefly summarising the 'long established and indeed incontrovertible' critical orthodoxy potentially shaken, an orthodoxy which holds that

just as *Murphy* deals with the Cartesian dualism of body and mind, and *Watt* constitutes an assault upon the Cartesian *méthode*, Beckett's *Trilogy* and especially *The Unnamable* comprise some sort of critique of the *cogito*.<sup>60</sup>

As Feldman also did in Beckett's centenary year (2006), Uhlmann strove to shift the long-standing critical focus of this genealogy away from Descartes. While Feldman's empirical basis for his attack was in part the lack of manuscript material

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<sup>58</sup> See Gontarski 1985.

<sup>59</sup> Ackerley 2008, p. 207.

<sup>60</sup> Ackerley 2008, p. 206.

substantiating, or proportionally corresponding to, a critical emphasis on Descartes, Uhlmann's proposed shift of emphasis derives instead primarily from his reading of Geulincx:

I argue that the 'cogito' which is described in *The Unnamable* (and which inheres in later works) is a Geulingian cogito, rather than a Cartesian one: that it emerges through an inspection of the self which leads to the understanding that one knows nothing (as in Geulincx) rather than to a point of foundation upon which one might build up an accurate knowledge of the world (as in Descartes). To my mind Geulincx and Beckett have in common the core affirmation that we are ultimately ignorant: while Beckett has stated that the key word to his works is 'perhaps', Bernard Rousset has claimed that 'nescio' (I do not know) is the key word to Geulincx'.<sup>61</sup>

This 'insight'<sup>62</sup>, as Ackerley describes it

at a stroke [...] defines the incontrovertible truth that *The Unnamable*, arguably the key-stone to Beckett's entire Temple of Wisdom (or should that now be the Folly of Nescience?), is a Geulingian work, and that the philosophical position assumed within it can be understood only in these terms (for the moment I am content with 'only').<sup>63</sup>

Uhlmann's arguments are more detailed in the '*cogito nescio*' chapter of his 2006 *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image*. Uhlmann argues for Beckett's use of an 'image of thought'<sup>64</sup> derived from Geulincx' insistence on ignorance and impotence, that in turn determines the epistemological boundaries in *The Unnamable*. Images of thought, according to Uhlmann (whose definition is derived from Deleuze's conception of them), are primary, underlying systematised relations between coordinates of knowledge that delimit epistemological borders. They determine what can be known before any secondary categories that might appear to play this determining role are invoked. These secondary categories are then in some sense dependent on that first category of the image, even masquerading as the first category. Such patterned relations constitute, according to Deleuze, 'a prephilosophical understanding'<sup>65</sup> upon which a philosophical understanding is based, without that philosophical understanding necessarily acknowledging or even being aware of this

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<sup>61</sup> *Ethics*, p. 306.

<sup>62</sup> Ackerley 2008, p. 207.

<sup>63</sup> Ackerley 2008, p. 207. Ackerley's reference to Geulincx' 'Temple of Wisdom' is a reference to the preface to *Ethics*: 'To the Curators of the University of Leiden' (See *Ethics*, pp. 3-5).

<sup>64</sup> Uhlmann 2006a, p. 61.

<sup>65</sup> Deleuze 1995, p. 148. Quoted by Uhlmann 2006a, p. 86.

basis. Uhlmann's claim is that Beckett 'borrows an image of thought (a way of imagining what it means to think) from Arnold Geulincx'<sup>66</sup>, one derived from Geulincx' repeated insistences on the nature of human ignorance. Uhlmann argues 'following Geulincx, he [Beckett] identifies the cogito (the "I think") with a nescio (an "I do not know")'<sup>67</sup>, an epistemological alignment resonant with the many instances in Beckett's works of 'one confronted by ignorance, suffering that ignorance'<sup>68</sup>. However, although Uhlmann makes the provocative assertion that impresses Ackerley, it is not investigated in detail, and its viability has in fact not been exhaustively tested. Consequently there follow below moves towards a more thorough enquiry into the viability of Uhlmann's initially persuasive, though summary, 'insight'.

As noted in Chapter 1, Beckett transcribed the word *nescio* from *Metaphysica Vera* in 1936:

Secundo S. Varios habeo cogitandi modos in infinitum.

Cogito ergo, et infinitis modis cogito; sed illae re? quas cogito num sic sin tut cogito, adhuc nescio.<sup>69</sup>

Proposition 2. I have innumerable modes of thought.

Therefore I think, and think in innumerable modes. But whether the things I think really are exactly as I think of them, I still do not know.<sup>70</sup>

Beckett also transcribed it within a passage from *Ethica*:

Haereo, nescio, nec habeo quod dicam aliud, nisi nescio. Nescio modum, quo sum in hac condicione.; tantum abest ut sciam, quomodo ad illam condicionem devenerim.<sup>71</sup>

But I cannot get beyond *I do not know*, there is nothing I can add to this *I do not know*. I do not know how I came to this condition... What is lacking is the knowledge of how I came to this condition.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Uhlmann 2006a, p. 87.

<sup>67</sup> Uhlmann 2006a, p. 90.

<sup>68</sup> Uhlmann 2006a, p. 92.

<sup>69</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/2r.

<sup>70</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 32.

<sup>71</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/23.

<sup>72</sup> *Ethics*, p. 334.



Beckett later deployed the word in *The Unnamable* where it appears in a passage that might itself be read as a critique of Cartesian clear and distinct foundations of perception. The narrator describes Worm:

Feeling nothing, knowing nothing, he exists nevertheless, but not for himself, for others, others conceive him and say, Worm is, since we conceive him, as if there could be no being but being conceived, if only by the beer. Others. One alone, then others. One alone turned towards the all-impotent, all-nescient, that haunts him, then others.<sup>73</sup>

The passage produces a critique that aligns a Cartesian conception of self with thinking itself, where these ‘others’ constitute an ontology conjured, magically, from within an epistemology. Worm is brought into existence through an act of intellection, where his being ‘conceived’ is a pun on this birth precisely as a product of his being thought. In the fact that there is no real possibility of conjuring anything real from thinking alone, other than the fictional avatars turned towards their ‘all-impotent, all-nescient’ creator, there being no real possibility of asserting the self at the same moment as being that self, the ‘*ergo*’ of Cartesian cogitation is collapsed, ‘shrunk to nothing’. While the *cogito* was also a foundational axiom for Geulincx, his immediate problematising of it becomes his critique of causation more broadly, and Beckett comparably produces a critique that appears to conclude, in its instantiation in *The Unnamable*, in a parodic version of the *cogito* that amounts to no more than ‘I think therefore I think’. We have seen how Geulincx puts the *cogito* under the microscope with his assertion that ‘I have innumerable modes of thought. Therefore I think, and think in innumerable modes’. While it is difficult to assert, alongside Ackerley, a generalised viability of ‘*the philosophical position assumed within*’<sup>74</sup> *The Unnamable*, much as it was difficult to go along with Wood’s ‘general uneasiness’, at certain moments there are fragmentary critiques that course through the text and which bring to light possibilities for a Geulingian critique of Cartesianism in discrete, individualised ways.

## 5.8 ‘fundamental sounds’ – pre-established harmony

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<sup>73</sup> TN, p. 349.

<sup>74</sup> My italics.

A brief background on Beckett's Windelband-derived notes is helpful to contextualise a discussion of the references in *Molloy* and *The Unnamable* to pre-established harmony. According to these notes Geulincx' *Ethics* is the place an occasionalist conception of God as the ultimate arbiter between will and action is 'furthest developed'. Beckett noted what Windelband called the '*anthropological rationale*' of Geulincx: 'Illustration of the 2 Clocks which having once been synchronised by same artificer continue to move in perfect harmony'. This is before noting how 'Leibniz illustrated with same analogy his doctrine of "preestablished harmony"'. Beckett then went on to note the following distinction, a distinction recorded as made by Leibniz, between a typically Cartesian and an occasionalist conception of pre-established harmony:

[Leibniz] characterised Cartesian conception by immediate and permanent interdependence of 2 clocks, and Occasionalist by constantly renewed regulation of clocks by clock master.<sup>75</sup>

The distinction Beckett recorded is revealing. If we go back to Windelband's philosophical history we can see that the division is not quite so sharply delineated. For example, Windelband argues in a footnote that an ambivalence regarding pre-established harmony resides within Geulincx' own texts:

in the latter author [Geulincx] doubt is not entirely excluded as to whether God's causality in this connection is regarded as a special intervention in each individual case, or as general and permanent arrangement. In some passages, indeed, the former is the case, but the spirit of the doctrine, taken as a whole, doubtless involves the latter.<sup>76</sup>

Windelband points out, however, that in the analogy of the two clocks Geulincx is at his clearest.

Uhlmann suggests that a refracted instance of a clock to illustrate pre-established harmony appears in *Molloy*, where 'it appears as a gong, which Molloy hears at the end of his narrative and which calls Moran to his dinner'<sup>77</sup>. This gong,

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<sup>75</sup> TCD MS 10967/89r.

<sup>76</sup> Windelband 1901, p. 415. Windelband argues that this lack of clarity is particularly prevalent in the analogy of the baby in the cradle, and that variant editions of *Ethics* present this differently: 'the first edition of the *Ethics* (1665), in fact, introduced more the *deus ex machina*, while the annotations added in the second edition (1675) presented throughout the profounder view' (Windelband 1901, p. 415).

<sup>77</sup> Uhlmann 2006a, p. 78.

however, might also be seen as a forerunner of the bell that ‘rings piercingly’ in *Happy Days* waking Winnie to ‘another heavenly day’<sup>78</sup> that denotes little of simultaneities but conveys instead something of the interrogating authority inhering also in other instances in Beckett’s *oeuvre* of intrusion and subjugation. In the beams of spotlight projected in *Play* and *Not I*, for example, or the switch that goes on and off in *What Where* marking the passage of off-stage interrogations. There are, however, explicit appearances of pre-established harmony in the Three Novels Uhlmann does not address. Molloy, trying to find the right tense in which to speak of his life (‘now I speak of it as something over, now as of a joke which still goes on, and is there any tense for that’), alludes to what might well be read as alluding to occasionalism’s ‘regulation of clocks by clock master’:

Watch wound and buried by the watchmaker, before he died, whose ruined works will one day speak of God, to the worms.<sup>79</sup>

Paul Davies has described Molloy’s statement as ‘echoing Leibniz’<sup>80</sup>, which is surely accurate. Yet the ascription is perhaps also not exhaustive. The statement is also ‘echoing’ Geulincx. Beckett’s ‘Philosophy Notes’ indicate that Geulincx’ version of pre-established harmony was imagined as a clock ‘having once been synchronised by same artificer’, just as Molloy’s has been ‘wound and buried by the watchmaker’.

Beckett did delve further into Geulincx’ clock analogy than only in the ‘Philosophy Notes’, and the resulting research appears in the notes to *Ethica*:

It is the same as if two clocks agree precisely with each other and with the daily course of the Sun: when one chimes and tells the hours, the other also chimes and likewise indicates the hour; and all that without any causality in the sense of having a causal effect on the other, but rather on account of mere dependence, inasmuch as both of them have been construed with the same art and similar industry.<sup>81</sup>

Geulincx uses the analogy to illustrate the incongruous non-relation of will to action. Just as ‘the motion of the tongue accompanies our will to speak’<sup>82</sup>, for example, so too

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<sup>78</sup> *CDW*, p. 138.

<sup>79</sup> *TN*, p. 36.

<sup>80</sup> Davies 1997, p. 61.

<sup>81</sup> *Ethics*, p. 332.

<sup>82</sup> *Ethics*, pp. 332-333.

two clocks tell the same time, though with neither clock *causing* the time as told by the other.<sup>83</sup>

Later in the novel Molloy again refers to pre-established harmony when describing his new direction of wandering:

I am no longer with Lousse, but out in the heart again of the pre-established harmony, which makes so sweet a music, which is so sweet a music, for one who has an ear for music.<sup>84</sup>

As Davies also informatively points out here, Beckett is ‘echoing [...] Plotinus and Pythagoras, whose doctrines of music in the forces of the universe entered Europe through the Florentine court of Marsilio Ficino’<sup>85</sup>. There is, however, very little that is harmonic about this world outside the strange sanctuary of Lousse’s house. Molloy is ‘out in the heart again’ of a much more chaotic universe than Pythagoras’s, and any ‘sweet [...] music’ Molloy hears in concert with this ‘pre-established harmony’ is surely a music somewhat of chaos. Beckett’s version of pre-established harmony, then, taking a lead from Geulincx as well as from these other sources cited by Davies, is established as an elemental world of ruinous entropy. Surely Molloy does not actually hear this music of the spheres. Molloy has no ‘ear for music’. What he does have is an ear for having once heard about this music. Molloy’s world, that is, might be a pre-established world, a world in which he can do nothing to alter the course of events, where he ‘could not do otherwise’, but it is not therefore one of ‘harmony’.<sup>86</sup>

Beckett transcribed from *Ethica* on the subject of naming: ‘Things do not depend on names, and if there are not names for newly-discovered things, let some be

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<sup>83</sup> While arguments here do not require a detailed investigation into the nineteenth-century controversy surrounding the discovery of the analogy in Geulincx’ work and the impact this had on the perceived originality of Leibniz’ analogy, it is nevertheless important to note actual passages of text in which Beckett read of this analogy. On the controversy surrounding Leibniz’ clock as potentially copied from Geulincx see de Lattre 1970, pp. 553-566, and de Vleeschauwer 1957, pp. 45-56.

<sup>84</sup> *TN*, p. 62.

<sup>85</sup> Davies 1997, p. 61.

<sup>86</sup> This inability to interact with clockwork events in the world underlies more of *Molloy*. In the woods searching for his nemesis Moran admits to his self-delusion when he wonders why he had accepted ‘this commission’. He proposes ‘Honour’, admitting ‘It did not take me long to guild my impotence’ (*TN*, p. 106). Moran’s inability is to alter the course of events that are at the behest of an unknown (except by name) authoritarian entity, even despite his own determined sense of propriety and property when it comes to his son, maid and house.

devised'<sup>87</sup>. In the same annotation Geulincx quotes Horace on the subject, which Beckett also transcribed:

It has been right, and always will  
To give a name to what has none<sup>88</sup>

*The Unnamable*'s narrator cannot even confidently name his own thoughts as thoughts, unsure if thought 'is the name for this vertiginous panic as of hornets smoked out of their nest'<sup>89</sup>. The narrator then sums up his self-inspection as an operation of naming:

it's the fault of the pronouns, there is no name for me, no pronoun for me, all the trouble comes from that, that, it's a kind of pronoun too, it isn't that either, I'm not that either,<sup>90</sup>

Such parallels, however, should also be resisted. *The Unnamable* and the two novels prior to it certainly exhibit a number of sympathies with Geulincx, as partial quotation, fragmented allusion, even giving the philosopher's name. Tracing the continuity of Beckett's preoccupation with freedom as a man on a ship, be that man Belacqua, Ulysses, Geulincx, or someone watched by Lucretius or Schopenhauer, however, does not reduce the whole of these broad and deep novels to ones predominantly driven by a singular Geulingian focus. The 'name for' *The Unnamable*'s narrator is not 'Geulingian', even if the devising critic might be tempted, Watt-like, to resolve partial-congruency.

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<sup>87</sup> *Ethics*, p. 324.

<sup>88</sup> *Ethics*, p. 325.

<sup>89</sup> *TN*, p. 353.

<sup>90</sup> *TN*, p. 408.

## Chapter 6 – Late Works

### 6.1 ‘Who, what, where, by what means, why, in what way, when?’<sup>1</sup>

What is it to approach the possibility of the presence of Geulincx in the late works of Beckett, in anything beyond the *Textes pour rien/Texts for nothing* of 1951/1952? To be clear from the start, there are no longer any obvious allusions to Geulincx to be found. Similarly there is little in the way of a Geulingian lineage of imagery comparable to that running through *The Unnamable*, and certainly nothing like *Murphy*’s overt invocation of the beauty of Geulincx’ axiom can be expected. If a valid discourse is to be had about the presence of Geulincx in the late works it must simultaneously somehow address itself to his apparent absence.

Are there then any reasons to suppose Geulincx’ relevance to a reading of late works at all? One simple reason is that as late as June 1967 Beckett told the critic Sighle Kennedy that Geulincx would be one of his ‘points of departure’ should he be in the unfortunate position the critic found herself in, of studying his work. Such a departure point, however, might be thought to be relevant solely to the early works, works composed when Beckett was himself departing on his ‘series’. Kennedy was after all writing a monograph focussed on *Murphy* and it was specifically this novel about which Beckett was asked for information. When Beckett writes ‘my work’ in this 1967 letter, perhaps he only means *Murphy*.

Even though this might be an unlikely appraisal of Beckett’s intended meaning, better reasons than this single fragment of correspondence are needed for exploring Geulincx and the late works. If possible such reasons would engage with important reservations about the validity of any project tracing influence upon Beckett *per se*. General reservations along these lines frequently find most purchase in the context of Beckett’s later works where reduction and abstraction make more typical comparative study increasingly difficult. O’Hara, for example, put forward his reservations to such a project in 1981 and in so doing spoke for more general objections potentially raised in regard to anything like influence and the late works:

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<sup>1</sup> Watt Notebook 1, HRHRC, p. 3.

[...] any discussion of the influence of [...] Mr. X on Beckett is likely to be either simpleminded, if it implies that that X's influence has reached Beckett and shaped his work purely and without adulteration, or exasperatingly modified, temporized, complicated, and footnoted to death if it admits that Mr. X must be understood in the light of J, S, and R, with  $\sqrt{2}$  always to be considered.<sup>2</sup>

A number of critical approaches in Beckett studies since 1996, some fifteen years after O'Hara's statement, have indeed become extensively 'temporized', if by this O'Hara means subjected to the accurate dating of Beckett's reading, the contents of his correspondence, his note-taking and manuscript composition. It is what might be termed empirical temporizing that, for example, cautions us against reading an extensive influence of Geulincx in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* or *More Pricks Than Kicks* quite simply because Beckett did not read Geulincx in the original until after these works were completed. Such an approach might indeed become 'complicated' and 'modified', as there exists the potential to find in these earlier works themes that in some specific way correlate with those Beckett later found in Geulincx, as was discussed above in relation to 'pruritus' and Casanova. Such arguments about parallels, fascination and serendipity might convince or they might not. But is the fact that something could become 'temporized' a convincing objection in itself? O'Hara's argument is surely one of taste, and it does not demolish the validity of studying influences upon Beckett *per se*. Interestingly, O'Hara makes this broad statement in the context of one of his own studies of influence, in a paper on Beckett and Schopenhauer. Here O'Hara offers no clear alternative for how a study of influence on Beckett should proceed, and himself progresses to a 'modified' Schopenhauerian reading of a number of Beckett's texts. For example, according to O'Hara certain Schopenhaurian qualities of Beckett's texts are 'modified' via Berkeley:

The topic of not being to escape one's self recurs often in Beckett's postwar writings, usually with some reference to Bishop Berkeley. But it derives much of its importance and many of its characteristics from Schopenhauer.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, when discussing the extensively Schopenhauer-influenced *Proust* essay O'Hara writes 'Proust offered Beckett a way of representing in art what

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<sup>2</sup> O'Hara 1981, p. 253.

<sup>3</sup> O'Hara 1981, p. 258.

Schopenhauer had emphasized, the primacy of individual consciousness'<sup>4</sup>. All of which is assessed in so far as it leads us towards or away from what O'Hara terms 'Beckett's world'<sup>5</sup>, whereby it is enough to validate the comparisons that 'Beckettians will recognize ideas and topics echoed in Beckett's work'<sup>6</sup>. However, O'Hara's general reservations should still be met with answers, even if his own comparative procedures, at least in this paper, appear to offer few solutions.

The scholastic categories of inquiry that inaugurated the composition process of *Watt* ('who, what, where, by what means, why, in what way, when') might indeed strike one as the valid terms in which to ask intertextual questions of Beckett's late work: 'Who' is the Geulincx of this period for Beckett? 'What' is he doing to/for/in Beckett's texts? 'Where' exactly is he in these texts? 'By what means' does his presence interact with the text or can we be certain that this is indeed Geulincx? 'Why' invoke or utilise him at all? 'In what way' does recognising this presence alter our reading? 'When' should we be able to verifiably say this presence is Geulingian? These questions have served an analysis of Geulincx' various appearances in Beckett's *oeuvre* well until this point. They have revealed, for example, 'when' in relation to *Murphy* Geulincx becomes important, 'why' Geulincx becomes inadequate for the composition of *Watt*, 'where' Geulincx is central to versions of *Suite / The End / La Fin*, and 'by what means', in *The Unnamable*, Geulincx provides Beckett with elements of a narrative voice and a lineage of imagery. Such questions will also serve to reveal the necessity of an empirically 'temporized' and 'qualified' presence of Geulincx in certain aspects of the later works. But importantly these categories of question also fall short of recognising, or at least of providing a vocabulary in which to speak of, the even more radical ambivalences and ambiguities at work in the later works. Without finding a way of addressing this shortfall any discussion of Geulincx in the later works might be no less constricted than O'Hara's reading of Schopenhauer.

One thing that such quantitative questions fail to accord validity to is the more qualitative open-ended possibility of 'perhaps'. As Beckett told Tom Driver in 1961 while discussing in broad terms dramatic structure as mirroring the presence of 'both

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<sup>4</sup> O'Hara 1981, p. 264.

<sup>5</sup> O'Hara 1981, p. 257.

<sup>6</sup> O'Hara 1981, p. 254.



light and dark', knowledge and ignorance, as simultaneously present in human lives, 'the key word in my plays is "perhaps"' <sup>7</sup>. Yet an invocation of this 'perhaps' here is not in order to excuse the unarguable, and variously focusing on Geulincx as 'perhaps' present in the late works is not only to focus on a minor or unlikely facet of the works. It is also a way in which that central 'key word' to the late works, the 'perhaps' itself, might be approached.

It has been argued above that traceable from Beckett's work concurrent with his Geulincx research in 1936, up until 1958's English *The Unnamable*, there persists a 'fantasia' that with the benefit of hindsight can be seen as chiefly characterised by progression towards its own negation. Allusion and citation in *Murphy* become fragmented in *Watt*, jumbled with other single-use objects in *The End*, and further abstracted and refined through *The Unnamable* until they are finally fully severed from any directly identifiable connection to its origin. In order to be seen at this severed point Geulincx must be traced indirectly, through that process of refinement and fragmentation in what might be summarised as a transition from the intertextual to a necessity of the intratextual. There is in this trajectory less Geulincx' sliding away from Beckett's sight than an active, purposeful putting out of sight. Geulincx does not simply disappear. He is disappeared, intentionally forgotten, en-graved as he was in *The End*. Yet this is not the end of his story.

If we recall the 'autospeliology' of the *Watt* notebooks and the strikingly Dantean metaphor of voices of a psyche buried in layers of rock, the archaeological investigation of which is this 'autospeliology', the metaphor can be used to see more clearly how Beckett's purposeful killing off and burying of Geulincx is not necessarily an act of finality, and why therefore its posthumous consequences should be investigated. The solidity of this rock, in the context of *Watt* a metaphorically layered coherence of self, might also function as a metaphor to describe Beckett's forms of source incorporation in the earlier stages of the *oeuvre*. This is to say that Beckett's 'notesnatching' and its resulting fictional incorporations once manifest as an investigable and parsable layering, where the identification of a source was a matter of pointing up the particularities of a discrete strata, a moment of voice, of quotation, or

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<sup>7</sup> Cited in Graver and Federman (eds.) 1979, p. 244.

allusion. One voice, quotation etc. could be separated from another in a relatively clear and critical 'autospeliology'.

Yet in progressing towards its own negation Beckett's self-devouring 'series' complicates this process. It negates one source with another, just as in the narrator's pocket in *The End* each object indelibly etches itself onto another, each marking and burying, en-graving, another like itself. Beckett's own layers of rock, his various strata of sources and influences, become themselves buried inside yet other layers of rock. The memory of Geulincx, for example, en-graves those of Dante, Homer and Joyce via the lineage of galley-slave imagery. One allusion etches itself into the other to make something entirely new, yet made of old things. As the narrator of 1958's *From an Abandoned Work* puts it, 'so in some way even olden things each time are first things, no two breaths the same, all a going over and over and all once and never more'<sup>8</sup>. All four of these important figures for Beckett are folded into one another in this imagery. Beckett's intention appears to be not an almighty overcoming of the authority of these previous writers in a Bloomian act of sabotage, making those previous weak in order that he might be strong. Rather it is his determined reduction of aspects of these authors to certain of their 'fundamental sounds', and it is in a distillation and mutual engraving that these previous voices become buried.

Daniela Caselli points out in a study of Beckett's uses of Dante, a study that argues these uses should not be considered as singular, but rather as producing multiple Dantes, that by 1960 Beckett had hoped to entirely dispel even his long-standing company of Belacqua. Beckett wrote to Kay Boyle:

Belacqua for me is no more than a kind of fetish. In the work I have finished he appears 'bascule sur le côté las d'attendre oublié des cœurs où vit la grace endormi' (cor che in grazia vive) ['fallen over on his side tired of waiting forgotten of the hearts where grace abides asleep' (heart that lives in grace)], and I hope that's the end of him.<sup>9</sup>

The graceful sleeping stillness that Beckett quotes from part one of *Comment c'est* was, as Caselli points out, 'not the end of Belacqua, however: he is also referred to in

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<sup>8</sup> CSP, p. 162.

<sup>9</sup> Beckett to Boyle, 29 August 1960. Cited in Caselli 2005, p. 151.

part two of *How It Is/Comment c'est*, and 'the old lutist' is still able to wrench a 'wan smile' from Dante in *The Lost Ones/Le dépeupleur* and *Company/Compagnie*'<sup>10</sup>.

While the recurrences of Dante that Caselli cites following Beckett's hoped for 'end of' Belacqua are still empirically verifiable, still stand out as a relatively discrete strata, this example of Dante shows that even though buried, when we are in the later stages of Beckett's *oeuvre*, its most ghostly stages, such buried voices have the capacity to return. Indeed, Beckett's frequent killing off of a character often serves to revivify later on, the self-cannibalising serial protagonists drawing their ever less energy from the incorporation of previous characters. Such literary self-cannibalising was arguably begun with a pragmatic response to circumstance in Beckett's turning the rejected first novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* to various new good uses in stories for *More Pricks Than Kicks*. This self-cannibalism was later imagined figuratively when *The Unnamable*'s narrator observes his previous avatars wheel around him, where 'Malone passes'<sup>11</sup> though it might be 'Molloy, wearing Malone's hat'<sup>12</sup> along with what resembles 'the pseudocouple Mercier-Camier'<sup>13</sup>. More so than with Belacqua, however, Beckett does successfully see to the end of Geulincx. Yet it might still be expected, given the example of Dante, that such an end would nevertheless not be the final end of Geulincx. How then, we should ask, might a ghostly presence or voice of Geulincx, once buried, reassert itself?

In seeking to address these issues the chapter focuses first on a work entirely lacking in strata of rock. *How It Is* takes place in the messy and fluid 'warmth of primeval mud'<sup>14</sup>. In this difficult breakthrough work for Beckett, a work that manifests fluidity in a number of original and important ways, the 'perhaps' presence of Geulincx is indeed buried, yet only in a somewhat shallow grave, and it returns ghost-like to haunt certain scenes, assertions, and stylistic manoeuvres.

## **6.2 Geulincx and quotation in *Comment c'est/How It Is***

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<sup>10</sup> Caselli 2005, p. 151.

<sup>11</sup> *TN*, p. 296.

<sup>12</sup> *TN*, p. 295.

<sup>13</sup> *TN*, p. 299.

<sup>14</sup> *HII*, p. 11.

In the muddy and fluid world of *How It Is* the frequent dominant impetus when scraps of old voices that might sound like quotation rear themselves is to quickly suppress them. For example, when *Hamlet* is allowed a momentary breaking to the surface the narrator/narrated<sup>15</sup> becomes benign and reassuring, recalled to their duty to 'on and end part one' without recourse to what Edouard Morot-Sir has called Beckett's sometime 'easy magic'<sup>16</sup> of allusion:

a little less of to be present past future and conditional of to be and not to be  
come come enough of that on and end part one before Pim<sup>17</sup>

Yet the narrative does not always recognise its sources in literary or philosophical history, or even the fact that it might have specific sources. Predominantly it recognises such scraps of quotation when they are as obvious as the one from Shakespeare. That is, only when these are most in danger of being uncovered, when the narrator might be ousted as having, to use Eliot's influential terminology, borrowed rather than stolen the allusion. For the reader familiar with Geulincx in Beckett's *oeuvre*, however, the occasional indirect reference still bubbles through the mud unremarked upon by the self-lacerating narrative. For example, the multiple nothings of *The Unnamable* return to bring a similar invocation of wide-ranging impotence:

in the dark the mud hearing nothing saying nothing capable of nothing nothing<sup>18</sup>

As it was in *The Unnamable*, the assertion of impotence is phrased similarly to Geulincx' axiom. The narrator/narrated's being 'capable of nothing' here continues the fragmentation of the axiom that was begun with Murphy's dissatisfaction at the axiom's unrealistic though nevertheless enticing beauty, and that occurs across 'the series'.

A second residue of earlier intertextual and intratextual reference that might surprise in its persisting, or recurring again, at this late stage involves the Geulingian

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<sup>15</sup> I follow the convention in relation to this novel outlined by Beckett to Hugh Kenner of referring to a 'narrator/narrated', rather than to a narrator. See Kenner 1973, p. 94, where Kenner applies the terms to *Molloy*.

<sup>16</sup> Morot-Sir 1976, p. 63.

<sup>17</sup> *HII*, p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> *HII*, p. 61.

galley slave from *Molloy* and *The Unnamable*. This final and ghost-like reappearance brings a newly nuanced understanding of this lineage of imagery, one that speaks to Beckett's struggles as a writer of dual cultural origin. Typifying the self-contradictory shifting temporal emphases in *Comment c'est/How It Is*, in part one the narrator/narrated asserts there is no more ship:

old dream I'm not deceived or I am it all depends on what is not said on the day  
it all depends on the day farewell rats the ship is sunk a little less is all one begs<sup>19</sup>

The narrator/narrated is here back in the 'old dream' of the question whether one is being deceived or not. They recall the to and fro of Malone's 'old aporetics'<sup>20</sup> and 'The screaming silence of no's knife in yes's wound', while the narrator/narrated bids 'farewell' to the rats that have featured so frequently in 'the series' and that in *The Unnamable* took charge on this very ship. However, just as the last of Belacqua had not quite been seen despite hopes to the contrary, the ship too is not yet entirely sunk and it recurs in *How It Is* towards the end of part two. Shortly after the narrator/narrated describes his novel as 'little private book these secret things little book all my own the heart's outpourings', this heart pours out a further recollection of 'life above in the light'<sup>21</sup>. There are a number of autobiographical recollections filtered through the unpunctuated prose of *Comment c'est/How It Is*, and 'perhaps' this scene too describes one such scene, of Beckett returning to Ireland:<sup>22</sup>

what men all colours black to white tried them all then gave up no worse too  
vague pardon pity home to native land to die in my twenties iron constitution  
above in the light my life my living made my living tried everything building  
mostly it was booming all branches plaster mostly met Pam I think<sup>23</sup>

The whole love story between the narrator/narrated and Pam, here set on 'native land', is then hilariously told from start to finish in a single verset ending in

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<sup>19</sup> *HII*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>20</sup> *TN*, p. 181.

<sup>21</sup> *HII*, p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> See for example Knowlson 1996, pp. 462-463 for discussion of these refracted recollections which include a visit to a friend in hospital, praying as a young boy with his mother, and even the shutting himself away from callers while writing the novel.

<sup>23</sup> *HII*, p. 85. When Beckett returned to Ireland in December 1935 from London he may well have felt as though he were going to die as he immediately spent a week in bed with pleurisy before embarking on the Geulincx research the following January. He was, however, 30 years old.

‘forgiveness’ before ‘silence falls again’<sup>24</sup>. From this silence rises a scene of what is ‘perhaps’ then Beckett leaving ‘native land’ from the port at Dun Laoghaire or Cobh heading for a measure of relief in Europe:

sea beneath the moon harbour-mouth after the sun the moon always light day  
and night little heap in the stern it’s me all those I see are me all ages the current  
carries me out the awaited ebb I’m looking for an isle home at last drop never  
move again a little turn at evening to the sea-shore seawards then back drop sleep  
wake in the silence eyes that dare open stay open live old dream on crabs kelp

astern receding land of brothers dimming lights mountain if I turn water  
roughening he falls I fall on my knees crawl forward clink of chains perhaps it’s  
not me perhaps it’s another perhaps it’s another voyage confusion with another  
what isle what moon you say the thing you see the thoughts sometimes that go  
with it it disappears the voice goes on a few words it can stop it can go on  
depending on what it’s not known it’s not said<sup>25</sup>

While this water ‘roughening’ at the stern of the ship is the ship’s own wake and not so much the storm of *The Unnamable*, the ‘clink of chains’ of the ‘little heap in the stern’ situates this recollection as a further (and final) stage in the lineage of ship imagery.<sup>26</sup> The narrator/narrated hears this clink of the chains they are bound in as they imagine themselves once again as the galley slave, here wondering though if they might be confusing themselves with someone else. If this ‘land of brothers’ is the ‘native land’ of Beckett’s Ireland then such a reappearance of the enslaved galley-man travelling the Irish Sea reveals an intriguing and distinctive aspect to the lineage. The ship is travelling in one direction (east towards Europe) but the enslaved narrator/narrated moves in the other (back home to Ireland), similarly to the earlier images in *The Unnamable* where the slave shifts between two poles. In those earlier images, importantly, this movement towards the boundary of the boat indexed ‘a great measure of freedom’. Transposing the galley slave’s freedom of movement in stasis to the Irish Sea instantiates one of very few images to be found in Beckett’s *oeuvre* of his culturally divided, mutually committed, literary lands. As Cohn describes

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<sup>24</sup> *HII*, p. 85.

<sup>25</sup> *HII*, p. 86.

<sup>26</sup> It is perhaps also viable to read this wake as having something of Finnegans in it, though of course this requires reading the word ‘wake’, my own imposition on Beckett’s description, as itself a kind of Joycean accumulative word. Nevertheless, Joyce has been alluded to in the earlier incarnation of the ship in *Molloy*, and might perhaps be seen as an aspect of that novel’s ‘proud and futile wake’.

Beckett he is a 'French-writing Irishman'<sup>27</sup>, belonging and committed to both places, and writing from a cultural vantage point of navigation between the two. Yet as the narrator/narrated of *How It Is* will describe such voyages, there is little relief to be had in having travelled 'west to east':

we can drag ourselves thus by the mere grace of our united net sufferings from west to east towards an inexistent peace we are invited kindly to consider<sup>28</sup>

We should be cautious retrofitting the geographical specificity of this final incarnation of the galley slave onto the earlier appearances. Nevertheless the fleeting and ephemeral presence of Geulincx here brings with it a residue of the earlier imagining of the galley slave as a repository of freedom in constraint. The past-presence of Geulincx brings a particular context to the ghostly imagery of the narrator/narrated leaving 'native land', or 'perhaps' Beckett leaving Ireland, instancing a fractured memory carrying within it and enabling a further fractured memory.

Caselli points to William Colerick's reading of this scene 'as a reference to the episode of Ulysses's voyage as represented in the *Comedy*'. Caselli argues that although it is possible to accept, along with Colerick, that the imagistic specificities such as the ship, the mountain, dimming light and the roughening water 'refer to Ulysses's tale in the *Comedy*, we can nevertheless read the passage differently'. The passage, Caselli argues, can also be read according to

an intertextual perspective, in which the 'above mentioned' is not only textual but also intertextual. This example shows how a number of scenes are not precise allusions but rather a 'familiar' murmur, as what has already been said.<sup>29</sup>

Such an 'intertextual perspective' should also take into its consideration the galley slave from Geulincx, who constitutes one of the multifarious strands of the 'familiar' identity here that has 'already been said', already murmured.

### **6.3 Not-Geulincx in *Comment c'est/How It Is***

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<sup>27</sup> Cohn 2001, p. 256.

<sup>28</sup> *HII*, p. 143.

<sup>29</sup> Caselli 2005, p. 160.

In moving further away from anything resembling what Harold Bloom might call mere ‘allusion-counting’<sup>30</sup> in relation to *Comment c’est/How It Is*, particular moments of the text come to the fore in their being in different ways almost but not quite traceable to Geulincx. At such moments the absence of Geulincx itself becomes a presence, at least for the reader familiar with the Geulingian traces running through the *oeuvre*.

Geulincx is not named at any point in *Comment c’est/How It Is*, which is in contrast to his fellow, and more famous, occasionalist Malebranche. Malebranche is named in this work amongst what must rank as some of Beckett’s most beautiful writing in his entire *oeuvre*. The lengthy scene rendered as another semi-autobiographical memory deriving from the Dublin Leopardstown racecourse rises mistily out of the mud before dissipating back into it, disintegrating and fading, the recollection of shared moments between a protagonist and partner sharing sandwiches and affection enlivened briefly before it disappears again. Though as the narrator/narrated points out, this recollection is faulty, it might be ‘very pretty only not like that’<sup>31</sup>. Knowlson & Pilling describe the scene as simply ‘too picaresque and euphoric to be confused with real life’<sup>32</sup>. The verset appearing midway through this section that names Malebranche is as follows:

suddenly yip left right off we go chins up arms swinging the dog follows head  
sunk tail on balls no reference to us it had the same notion at the same instant  
Malebranche less the rosy hue the humanities I had if it stops to piss it will piss  
without stopping I shout no sound plant her there and run cut your throat<sup>33</sup>

Malebranche has a dual presence here. He is regarded by the narrator/narrated on the one hand as merely ‘the humanities I had’, previous learning now useless along with others also listed at other points in the text, ‘notions of mathematics astronomy and even physics’<sup>34</sup>, ‘and with that flashes of geography’<sup>35</sup>, for example. All of these ‘humanities’ and sciences are described by the narrator/narrated as being now

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<sup>30</sup> Bloom 1997, p. 31.

<sup>31</sup> *HII*, p. 32

<sup>32</sup> Knowlson and Pilling 1979, p. 67.

<sup>33</sup> *HII*, p. 30.

<sup>34</sup> *HII*, p. 41.

<sup>35</sup> *HII*, p. 42.



nothing but the ‘scraps’<sup>36</sup> introduced on the novel’s first page. Yet Malebranche is also specifically named. Out of an amorphous ‘humanities’ comes this momentary flash of precision, his name even spelled correctly unlike the mention of Geulincx in *The End /La Fin*. This dual presence of Malebranche, specific yet vagued, reflects certain of Beckett’s own experiences of the occasionalist.

Ackerley and Gontarski cite the apocryphal claim that ‘Malebranche allegedly died of the excitement induced by metaphysical discussion with Berkeley’<sup>37</sup>. Malebranche’s lack of ‘rosy hue’, his death, was quite probably something with which Beckett was indeed familiar. Beckett’s tutor while he had been studying various humanities at TCD, A.A. Luce, was an expert on Berkeley and Malebranche. Luce’s influential *Berkeley and Malebranche: A Study in the Origins of Berkeley’s Thought* (published in 1934, only two years after Beckett resigned from teaching at TCD<sup>38</sup>) sets itself out clearly: ‘My aim is to show that the way to the heart of Berkeleianism lies through Malebranche’<sup>39</sup>. It goes on to trace this specific influence upon Berkeley via Berkeley’s notebooks and correspondence (particularly those leading up to Berkeley’s *Theory of Vision*, the work Beckett had annotated with ‘Against Geulincx?’ and which is still in his Paris library). In *Berkeley and Malebranche* Luce describes a meeting between the two philosophers held in Malebranche’s Paris monastery, ‘when Malebranche raised his voice and lost his temper, and according to the *bon mot*, Berkeley became unwittingly “the occasional cause of his death”’<sup>40</sup>. This death of an occasionalist, the tale of a loss of ‘rosy hue’ relayed via a tutor, has resonances with a similar death from great excitement, that of the narrator’s Geulincx tutor in *The End /La Fin*.

Further evidence for Malebranche’s importance as a component of any humanities once ‘had’ by Beckett resides alongside Geulincx’ first fleeting appearances in Beckett’s early ‘Philosophy Notes’. In these notes Beckett summarised some of Descartes’s ideas discussed above in relation to ‘space’ and ‘place’. Beckett noted that there was no such thing as ‘empty space’, this being because ‘Bodies are

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<sup>36</sup> *HII*, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Ackerley and Gontarski (eds.) 2006, p. 341.

<sup>38</sup> Luce also served as a referee for Beckett’s 1937 application to Cape Town for a lectureship in Italian (see Knowlson 1996, p. 754 n. 5).

<sup>39</sup> Luce 1934, p. 43.

<sup>40</sup> Luce 1934, p. 89.

parts of space, limitations of the universal extension'. Beckett noted the lineage accounting for the more famous occasionalist in terms of his views on what Tad Schmaltz calls Malebranche's 'Vision in God [...] the doctrine that we see all things (that is, bodies) in (that is, through ideas in) God'<sup>41</sup>. Beckett writes of Malebranche's epistemological ideas in the notes, comparing them to Descartes's ideas on space: 'Similar view of mental world by Malebranche'<sup>42</sup>. The notes go on to cite Malebranche as a parallel to the Spinozan original of *Murphy*'s Chapter 6 epigraph: '(amor intellectualis quo deus se ipsum amat = raison universelle of Malebranche)'<sup>43</sup>, and they name Malebranche on further occasions both where he becomes interchangeable with Geulincx and where he is aligned more closely with La Forge. When Beckett described occasionalist conceptions of God he conflated Geulincx' and Malebranche's views as distinct from Spinoza's:

According to Geulincx & Malebranche God creates world & us of will,  
according to Spinoza the world is necessary consequence of nature of God.  
Causal relation understood in two quite different ways.<sup>44</sup>

Malebranche also enters the notes at other moments as a seeming afterthought, an annotation, such as during a summary of Descartes's ideas on error:

Error is an act of free-will parallel to act of sin; it is the guilt of self-deception.  
(This thought elaborated by Malebranche).<sup>45</sup>

The claim deserves to be made that such notes of Beckett's from the early 1930s are part of what constitute any ghostly 'humanities I had', the learned repository that now only exists as 'scraps' in *Comment c'est/How It Is*. There is a biographical precedent already established for such a claim. That is to say, similarly to how scenes from Beckett's own life in a predominantly Irish landscape find their refracted and redacted ways into the text of *Comment c'est/How It Is*, so too do instances of his early

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<sup>41</sup> Schmaltz 2000, p. 59. It was about such views that Malebranche had his extensive argument with Antoine Arnauld (1612-94). Schmaltz describes this exchange: 'The exchange between Malebranche and Arnauld on the issue of the nature of ideas, which was one of the major intellectual events of the early modern period, appears at times to be a battle for the soul of Descartes' (Schmaltz 2000, p. 61).

<sup>42</sup> TCD MS 10967/187v.

<sup>43</sup> TCD MS 10967/188r.

<sup>44</sup> TCD MS 10967/190v.

<sup>45</sup> TCD MS 10967/184r.

autodidactic ‘notesnatching’ such as manifested by the ‘Philosophy Notes’ and in his likely familiarity with certain of Luce’s work. By 1960, however, such ‘humanities I had’ are as fragmented into ‘scraps’ as are the autobiographical images, and similarly are seen only darkly.

There were two good reasons for Beckett to explicitly name Malebranche rather than Geulincx as one of the ‘scraps’ of ‘the humanities I had’ in *Comment c’est/How It Is*, other than simply Malebranche’s eligibility as an occasionalist. Not the least important of these is that Geulincx could not function in *Comment c’est/How It Is* in the way Malebranche does. Geulincx has been too prevalent through Beckett’s earlier works to warrant his appearance in *Comment c’est/How It Is*. This late text requires ‘the humanities I had’ to be further removed from any humanities voiced or named in Beckett’s previous works. Had Beckett here named Geulincx minus a rosy hue he would thereby have given Geulincx’ name in three works (*Murphy*, *Molloy*, and *Comment c’est/How It Is*). At the very least such repetition would have been Beckett overplaying his hand, over-relying on Geulincx as a name that would span the entire ‘series’ and beyond. Beckett needed an occasionalist for *Comment c’est/How It Is* but Geulincx was unavailable. Specifically, Geulincx cannot any more function as a simple token of occasionalism, which is one of Malebranche’s functions in this text. In this sense, then, Malebranche functions in part as Geulincx’ occasionalist understudy, taking his place. But Malebranche also functions specifically, ‘less the rosy hue’, and in this he becomes not only fixed into ‘the series’ in his echoing the tutor in *The End /La Fin* but he also exhibits a fragment, a multifarious scrap of Beckett’s own ‘humanities’ deriving from both his early ‘notesnatching’ and his TCD tutor that is not pointed up at any other place in the *oeuvre*. In these ways, the non-presence of Geulincx, the presence that is instead Malebranche’s, is as important for consideration of Geulincx’ relevance as is the overt presence of Malebranche.

#### **6.4 Not-quotation in *Comment c’est/How It Is***

The narrator/narrated admits of such ‘scraps’ of ‘the humanities I had’ that despite their fragmentary nature in the present ‘they have marked me that’s the main

thing'<sup>46</sup>. Perhaps not with the violence with which characters are attacked with tin openers, their names etched into each other's backs and arses with fingernails, but such 'notions' have indeed 'marked' the narrator/narrated and his novel in deep yet subtle ways. There are a number of points in *Comment c'est/How It Is* where a critic might attempt to reveal this being 'marked', to elucidate what might 'perhaps' be a residual presence of Geulincx. Certain of these are addressed here, specifically the mud, the narrator/narrated binary and the tripartite structure of the novel, before in the following section focus turns to what a 'guignol world' might be in *Comment c'est/How It Is, Still, Act without Words 1* and in two late works for television.

The elemental mud of *Comment c'est/How It Is* has frequently been discussed by critics alongside that of Dante's muddier sections of Hell. In 1978 Michael Robinson claimed the novel's narrator 'exists in a landscape which is composed of a number of details from different circles of the Inferno'<sup>47</sup>. The mud, specifically, recalls the fifth circle of the banks of the river Styx to which the wrathful are condemned:

And I, intent on looking as we passed,  
saw muddy people moving in that marsh,  
all naked, with their faces scarred by rage.<sup>48</sup>

This mud 'gurgles in their throats'<sup>49</sup> as those who claw their way through the mud inflict attacks on each other with violence comparable to *Comment c'est/How It Is*:

They fought each other, not with hands alone,  
but struck with head and chest and feet as well,  
with teeth they tore each other limb from limb.<sup>50</sup>

More recently Daniel Albright has argued of such a comparison that in sections of *Comment c'est/How It Is* the text 'looks like Dante but is in fact quite up to date, – a parody of Dante based on modern technology'. According to Albright, Beckett parodies the obligation to express via the medium of radio, whereby 'Each mud-

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<sup>46</sup> *HII*, p. 41.

<sup>47</sup> Robinson 1978, p.79

<sup>48</sup> Dante 2003, p. 132 (Inf. VII, 109-111).

<sup>49</sup> Dante 2003, p. 133 (Inf. VII, 125).

<sup>50</sup> Dante 2003, p. 133 (Inf. VII, 112-114).

crawler with his can opener treats the man in front of him as if he were a radio, making him speak or sing out through a series of learned responses'<sup>51</sup>. In the study with perhaps the most subtlety and authority, one that takes its theoretical contours from the multivalent concept of 'authority' itself, Caselli correlates the mud of the text with speech, the muddy surface of the text enacting its process of constructing itself as heard and recorded speech:

*Inferno* VII is reconstructed in *How It Is/Comment c'est*'s painfully detailed exploration of the materiality of speech and its investigation of how repetition and reproduction confer the status of reality upon invisibility.<sup>52</sup>

For Caselli, *Inferno* is less a source for this text than something which 'participates in the intractable economy of the text by being an "unthinkable beginning", an already said/written which constitutes itself as the transcription of an already said'<sup>53</sup>.

In contrast to the many studies citing Dante's relations to this novel, Geulincx' name has never been invoked in relation to the mud of *Comment c'est/How It Is*. Yet while he offers nothing like the images of violent resourcefulness of Dante's unrelenting damned, Geulincx does describe a geographically based zone of existence that bears comparison with *Comment c'est/How It Is*. Geulincx describes himself staring out at the world from his occasionalist, disconnected vantage point. He asks himself what good his eyes are if he will only ever see ill, if he can never know for sure that the world is as he naïvely believes it to be. Nevertheless, he enumerates an ontology comprising 'regions' of the earth as he (admittedly, quite probably faultily) sees it. Beckett transcribed Geulincx' regions in summary, which in their strange mixture of specificity and generality also convey similarities with the semi-geographical areas such as 'The Sky' and 'The Nothingness' Beckett outlined as those in which *Watt* would take place:

We see then that the world as it affects our senses can be conveniently divided into regions, and the inhabitants of those regions. The first region is that of the vast *sky*...and the inhabitants of this region are the stars...The second region is the air [...] its inhabitants are clouds, and the phenomena they produce...The third region is the sea, whose inhabitants are fish... The fourth region is the land, of which there are two sub-regions: the upper, whose inhabitants are plants and

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<sup>51</sup> Albright 2003, p. 120.

<sup>52</sup> Caselli 2005, p. 156.

<sup>53</sup> Caselli 2005, p. 157.

animals...and the lower sub-region, whose inhabitants are metals, stones, and every kind of mineral.<sup>54</sup>

It is the fourth of these regions, specifically the 'lower sub-region', that adds a Geulingian aspect to the mud of *How It Is*. This is not only because it offers an evocative image of a Dantean environment with which Beckett was also familiar, or because it emphasises the elemental ontology of 'stones' and 'metals' that constitute so many of Beckett's own environments as they affect the senses of his protagonists. It is also because of how Geulincx writes of his own body as subject to this fourth region:

*My body* is a part of the world, an inhabitant of the fourth region, and claims a place among the species who walk over it<sup>55</sup>

As much is to be expected, of course, of Geulincx' place in the world. That is unless he would want to claim to be something other than a human who would 'walk over' the surface of the Earth. However, the walking 'over it' here reads in two ways, once we have in mind *Comment c'est/How It Is*. Not only is the 'it' the earth which is walked over, putting Geulincx safely in the upper fourth region, 'it' is also the body of Geulincx' narrator, a body that is itself walked over in an image of barbarism and cruelty more at home in a murky lower region. Just as Geulincx claims a place among the species that walk over the earth, he claims a place among the species that also walk over his body. It is something he does in many other places where he describes his being subject to, in a different (metaphorical) zone, that 'boundless ocean of miseries, on which I presently toss'<sup>56</sup>. As we have seen, the sometime painful facts of Geulincx' own life creep to the surface of *Ethics*, where he alludes to the cruelties and hindrances inflicted upon him, his family and his hopes. Placing himself in this zone reads as though he is in a series of those who might 'walk over' one another, a series similar to that in *Comment c'est/How It Is*.

In this 'fourth region', as Geulincx describes the world in which humanity lives, any 'I' is subject to the authority of God, of another existing elsewhere, living their 'life the other above in the light'<sup>57</sup> as *How It Is* renders its vision of such

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<sup>54</sup> *Ethics*, p. 329. Ellipses are quoted as they appear in *Ethics*.

<sup>55</sup> *Ethics*, pp. 329-330.

<sup>56</sup> *Ethics*, p. 350.

<sup>57</sup> *HII*, p. 8.

dependency. The narrator of *Comment c'est/How It Is* is simultaneously produced as the novel's narrated by virtue of the narrator's hearing and recording, 'when the panting stops', this other, this other who is a narrator telling of his own life: 'my life last state last version ill-said ill-heard ill-recaptured ill-murmured in the mud'<sup>58</sup>. The fractured narrative that is 'ill-heard ill-recaptured', then, is also an I-heard, an I-recaptured. The narrator's self is both murmuring itself in the present and recuperating 'I' from the past, from elsewhere. Such an interweaving of identity and its relations to an ultimately inaccessible other also has its Geulingian precedent. The occasionalist divide that becomes tangible to humanity, though still limited by a lack of access to the ineffable, becomes for Geulincx tangible in the fourth region of elemental walking over. Exhibiting both the impressionableness of Descartes's piece of wax<sup>59</sup> and a proto-existentialist sense of being-in-the-world within a theological framework, Geulincx describes being subject to the authority of one who must resemble us and on whom we depend, even though we are not given real access either to our world or to theirs:

Hence also, there must be someone else who can by His own power impress on me the likeness of the world; just as He impresses my action on small parts of the world; and in each case in an ineffable manner, which perpetually eludes me as I try to grasp it.<sup>60</sup>

Just as the world is only 'ill-seen' and 'ill-recaptured' by the narrator of *Comment c'est/How It Is*, for Geulincx there is only an unverifiable 'likeness' impressed upon him by another, an authority to which he must defer. He must defer to this other, just as Beckett's narrator requires a narrated, because there is no such thing as direct knowledge or unmediated experience, no event in the present or memory of the past that does not elude one as one tries to 'grasp it'. Such is illustrated in *How It Is*, for example, by the cooing of the couple at the Dublin racecourse where the narrator admits it sounds 'very pretty only not like that'. Geulincx writes that

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<sup>58</sup> *HII*, p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> The piece of wax Descartes uses in the second meditation to illustrate how his idea of a thing, the piece of wax, cannot be known through the senses but through ideas in his mind of the thing. The wax, held to the fire, is for Descartes a paragon of physical impressionability.

<sup>60</sup> *Ethics*, p. 328.

things placed outside us cannot impress their likeness on me; nor can I myself capture that likeness of my own accord; for such things impinge or affect at most my own body, and this is as much to say that it does nothing of itself towards perceiving them.<sup>61</sup>

This is as much to say that a body is not sufficient, just as a narrator is not sufficient. The narrated is required to enliven, to enable narrative, just as Geulincx requires the agency of God to enliven the body, to connect it with the experiencing consciousness of the mind.

### **6.5 Coming, being, going 2**

As well as such fragmentary shards of Geulincx and not-Geulincx in *Comment c'est/How It Is* there are also broader approaches Geulincx takes to ethics that have a resonance with the structure of *Comment c'est/How It Is*. As we have seen, Beckett transcribed Geulincx' notion that 'I have my whole being (in coming hither, acting here, departing hence)'<sup>62</sup>, the tripartite structure setting clear boundaries that map onto the tripartite structure of *Comment c'est/How It Is*. Cohn describes this number three, as, along with the mud, Beckett's 'debt to Dante'. According to Cohn 'The number three is emphasized – sacred to the Florentine, but arbitrarily chosen by the French-writing Irishman'<sup>63</sup>. But 'perhaps' this choice is not as arbitrary as it might appear. Just as the mud can be seen to also owe something to Geulincx along with its debts to Dante, revealing similarly intertwined debts to those owed by the image of the galley slave, so too this 'triune plot'<sup>64</sup> traces similar contours to the triune life that Geulincx describes in *Ethics* and *Metaphysics*. It thereby continues the trend among these earlier images of combining 'scraps' derived from both Dante and Geulincx.

As Beckett transcribed in the penultimate paragraph of his typed notes, Geulincx' seven ethical obligations are bounded by this tripartite structure, mirroring how Geulincx conceives of the structure of life itself:

I introduce a division of the Obligations into those concerned with death (such as the first two Obligations), those concerned with life (such as the third, fourth,

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<sup>61</sup> *Ethics*, p. 328.

<sup>62</sup> *Ethics*, p. 337.

<sup>63</sup> Cohn 2001, p. 256.

<sup>64</sup> Cohn 2001, p. 257.



fifth and sixth), and those concerned with birth (such as the Seventh Obligation). For every Obligation of man is concerned with either coming hither, being here, or departing hence; in short, with *hither*, *here*, or *hence*.<sup>65</sup>

There is, then, an intriguing structural parallel between Geulincx' emphasis on how life is and the three parts of *Comment c'est/How It Is*, the three parts which are announced in the novel's very first words with 'how it was I quote before Pim with Pim after Pim how it is three parts I say it as I hear it'<sup>66</sup>. However, when it comes to later stages of the novel Beckett frequently confounds such strictly demarcated divisions. The three sections of the novel are indeed predominantly bound by the narrator/narrated's coming '*hither*' to Pim, his being '*here*' with Pim, and his having gone '*hence*' from Pim. Yet the frequent struggle to avoid a continual restatement of these categorical differences manifests as the narrator/narrated asserting these temporal zones out of order, or simultaneously, as one against or as one opposed to the other. As a consequence it must be acknowledged that while Geulincx might be seen to operate in such boundaries and borders of the text, he is also, in the text's pushing against these boundaries and borders, resisted.

## 6.6 The 'guignol world'

Even in the ontologically minimal and cruel world of *Comment c'est/How It Is* there is occasional and occasionalist wonder at the body and its apparent miraculous abilities, even though such abilities might be only misplaced impressions of agency. Such wonder appears, for example, at the climax of the novel, where the act that concretises part two's being '*here*' with Pim is the laying on of a hand. The event is mediated via a remarkably occasionalist perspective:

Smartly as from a block of ice or white-hot my hand recoils hangs a moment it's vague in mid air then slowly sinks again and settles firm and even with a touch of ownership already on the miraculous flesh<sup>67</sup>

In this taut verset there is little sign of a will motivating this hand. There is not even any 'I' merely congruent with the occurrences observed. The hand feels as though

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<sup>65</sup> *Ethics*, p. 350.

<sup>66</sup> *HII*, p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> *HII*, p. 51.

either freezing cold or blazing hot, but the narrator cannot say which. The sensation stops at the hand, and does not reach the experiencing consciousness of the narrator. There is figurative description, but not wilful action. All is ‘as from’ or ‘with a touch of’. All is observed and recorded, but nothing is caused and nothing of the hand’s movement is described in terms of an interaction between it and the rest of the narrator/narrated. While it might be ‘my’ hand that ‘recoils’ and ‘hangs’, ‘sinks’ and ‘settles’, ‘my’ is not strong enough on its own to claim the connection, and while there is ownership, it is a cruel ownership of the other, of Pim and not of the self. Molloy at times had suffered similar fissures and mediated perceptions of his hands. When crouched behind the rock like Belacqua at the beginning of his narrative, Molloy gazed ‘towards my hand also, which my knee felt tremble and of which my eyes saw the wrist only’<sup>68</sup>. Such apparent fissure between mind and body, the narrator/narrated watching with some ‘vague’ wonder the movement of his own body, reveal Beckett’s continuing interest in a nuanced understanding of Cartesianism, where the best account of the specifics of such a progressively nuanced understanding is his engaging with occasionalism. As Cornelis Verhoeven describes Geulincx’ accounts of movement as expressed in his axioms, ‘we become the astonished spectators even of our own activities at the very moment we perform them’<sup>69</sup>.

It is the fact that Beckett focuses specifically on the movement of a hand, as Geulincx does in *Ethics*, that leads to the suggestion such moments reflect Beckett’s Geulingian occasionalist interests. Yet ‘perhaps’ it is as much Malebranche as Geulincx who informs such passages. For the disconnected hand or arm (that lays onto and into Pim) was also Malebranche’s metaphor of choice for illustrating occasionalist incapacity and disconnection. In *The Search After Truth* Malebranche writes, for example, ‘I move my arm because of the *union* God has established between my mind and my body’<sup>70</sup>. Malebranche goes on to discuss his arm’s movement in detail (and to define terms such as ‘*union*’ and ‘*faculty*’). In his study of Malebranche and Berkeley, Luce cites an extract from one of Berkeley’s notebooks that, as Luce reads it, pokes fun at Malebranche’s argument about limbs: ‘We move

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<sup>68</sup> *TN*, p. 11.

<sup>69</sup> Verhoeven 1973, p. 78. Translated and cited by van Bunge et al. (eds.) 2003, p. 329.

<sup>70</sup> Malebranche 1997, pp. 669-670.

our legs ourselves. 'Tis we that will their movement. Herein I differ from Malbranch<sup>71</sup>.

Beckett's emphasis in his transcriptions on the movement of a hand, arm or body follows that of Geulincx' examples. His transcriptions from *Metaphysica Vera*, for example, contain the following on the movement of a hand:

Manus nostra non movetur ad imperium voluntatis, sed ad concensum.<sup>72</sup>

But my hand is moved not at the command of my will, but by consent to it.<sup>73</sup>

The wonder expressed at occasionalist movement of the hand in *How It Is* is given a deistic aspect when, for example, movement appears to be 'impossible', reliant on a 'miracle' for its achievement of 'the impossible':

huge cymbals giant arms outspread two hundred degrees and clang clang miracle  
miracle the impossible do the impossible suffer the impossible<sup>74</sup>

For Geulincx, as we have seen, movement in a physical world is entirely dependent upon God's willing such action, who 'in an ineffable manner conjoins certain motions'<sup>75</sup> with my own will. A human body, according to Geulincx, has no more capacity for being influenced by my own will than any other element of the external world. I am conjoined to all only when God wills it, or 'because of the *union* God has established' as Malebranche describes it.

Movements of a hand or arm without apparent agency such as appears in *Comment c'est/How It Is* can be seen as even more closely allied with Beckett's ideas on Geulincx and distinguishable from those on Malebranche when we recall Beckett's description of Geulincx' 'fascinating guignol world'. This is a world where, as Beckett appears to have understood it, all is puppetry, where humanity and everything in the world are puppets at the mercy of God the all-powerful puppet-master. The body that lays its hand upon Pim in the climax of the novel goes on to treat Pim as if he were a

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<sup>71</sup> Berkeley quoted in Luce 1934, p.90. It is a 'summary statement', as Luce describes it, which resembles Beckett's own perceptive annotation in his edition of Berkeley's *Theory of Vision*.

<sup>72</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/3v.

<sup>73</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 42.

<sup>74</sup> *HII*, p. 64.

<sup>75</sup> *Ethics*, p. 231.

puppet. Just like a puppet Pim is an empty vessel until he is mistreated into action, until another will ‘walk over’ him:

Pim never be but for me anything but a dumb limp lump flat for ever in the mud  
but I'll quicken him you wait and see and how I can efface myself behind my  
creature when the fit takes me<sup>76</sup>

Pim as ‘a dumb limp lump flat’ waiting to be quickened by the violent hand of the narrator/narrated serves as a sharp reminder of the authority in Geulincx’ authoritarian world. The violent ‘fit’ that forces Pim into action, and behind which the narrator/narrated can ‘efface’ themselves, recalls us to the dominion of God in Geulincx’ world where, as Beckett described it, all is puppetry, where there is no sight of God who is ineffably effaced behind His own actions. Where He is, as Stephen Dedalus describes the artist, ‘refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails’<sup>77</sup>. Or in the case of *Comment c’est/How It Is*, sharpening them for further attack.

## 6.7 *Still*

In order to focus more tightly on this idea of puppetry and a ‘guignol world’ I turn now to the short prose piece *Still*, a piece which, similarly to *Comment c’est/How It Is*, turns on such puppet-like movement, but which foregrounds the explication of such movement as the *raison d’être* of the entire piece. Written between 17 June 1972 and the end of July that same year,<sup>78</sup> *Still* has a multivalent relationship to an idea of the ‘series’ in Beckett’s *oeuvre*. Standing apart as an individual piece (the only one of the *Foirades/Fizzles* written first in English), it became a part of that series of short texts, and was also incorporated into the tripartite collection that includes *Sounds* (1972-3) and *Still 3* (1973). Both these latter pieces received their first publication alongside an essay by Pilling in *Essays in Criticism* (1978) in which Pilling describes *Still* as an achievement of Beckett’s syntax of weakness, the phrase Beckett used in

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<sup>76</sup> *HII*, p. 52.

<sup>77</sup> Joyce 2000, p. 191.

<sup>78</sup> See Bryden, Garforth, Mills (eds.) 1998, p. 172.

1962 in an interview with Harvey and again in correspondence with Bray.<sup>79</sup> This is a syntax that operates in *Still*, according to Pilling, ‘by insinuation rather than assertion, by its infinite suggestibility rather than by its vehement rigour’<sup>80</sup>. Arguing that *Still* is a high-water mark within the context of certain of Beckett’s aesthetic concerns, Pilling asserts that these concerns date as far back as Beckett’s earliest works of fiction:

Nothing better illustrates how far Beckett has travelled in forty years of writing than the way he has ‘enlivened the last phase of his solipsism’ not, as his ‘sometime friend’ Belacqua did (in *More Pricks than Kicks*, 1934), ‘with the belief that the best thing he had to do was to move constantly from place to place’, but rather with the belief that the best thing he can do is to keep still.<sup>81</sup>

Internally too *Still* conveys a series, a tripartite before, during, and after. Its first and final sections are comprised predominantly of strong declarative sentences that become, as Pilling calls it, ‘ruffled’<sup>82</sup>, unsettled, by the physical movement of the narrated protagonist’s hand and head in the middle section. Yet *Still* not only reflects a Geulingian structure in the hand and head coming ‘*hither*’ towards each other, being ‘*here*’ if only a moment with each other before departing ‘*hence*’ from each other. Ackerley and Gontarski suggest that the movement of the protagonist’s arm up to meet his head whilst sat on a chair in the middle section’s action, action around which the work centres and which disturbs the surface of declarative stasis, ‘constitutes a return to the concerns of Geulincx and the Occasionalists’<sup>83</sup> for Beckett at this late stage. Certainly, *Still* focuses on physical movement as a separate occurrence to the body’s willing it, as it also appeared at moments in *Comment c’est/How It Is*. The ‘miracle’ of movement as it was in *Comment c’est/How It Is* is something observed in *Still*, however, with a reverential resignation that distinguishes it from *Comment c’est/How It Is*, and aligns it even more closely with a Geulingian aesthetic. The dense, fragmentary syntax of the breathless *Comment c’est/How It Is* lacked the necessary breathing space for anything like the visceral realist focus of *Still*. Yet certain movements of the body are nevertheless remarkably similar to those in the

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<sup>79</sup> Beckett used the term with Bray specifically to describe his work in the second notebook in which he was composing the beginning of *Pim*, as *Comment c’est* was then called.

<sup>80</sup> Pilling 1978, p. 149.

<sup>81</sup> Pilling 1978, p. 143.

<sup>82</sup> Pilling 1978, p. 148.

<sup>83</sup> Ackerley and Gontarski (eds.) 2006, p. 543.

earlier novel. A body again seemingly moves of its own, or someone else's, accord; 'this movement impossible to follow let alone describe':

The right hand slowly opening leaves the armrest taking with it the whole forearm complete with elbow and slowly rises opening further as it goes and turning a little deasil till midway to the head it hesitates and hangs half open trembling in mid air. Hangs there as if half inclined to return that is sink back slowly closing as it goes and turning the other way till as and where it began clenched tightly on rest.<sup>84</sup>

The narrated's right hand here takes 'with it' its own forearm. *It* has the power of hesitation, and 'it' can seemingly choose to hang there, almost possessing its own inclination to return to the armrest. It is a graceful and steady movement that 'ruffles' not only the declarative stasis, but also opposes itself to the body's un-still-able 'trembling all over'<sup>85</sup> of the first and third part, thereby constituting an opposition of stasis to movement, as well as one of movement to stasis. The arm's movement is described not unlike that of a budding plant, its 'leaves' not only the arm's leaving behind the armrest, but as its 'opening slowly' and 'opening further' also do, revealing a slight pastoral impetus in the movement, a movement that also echoes Arsene's contrarian analysis that any budding will inevitably also wither. The scene also carries a fractional echo of a Celtic past in 'deasil', a Scottish (perhaps surprisingly not Irish) Celtic word meaning, according to the OED, 'Righthandwise, towards the right; motion with continuous turning to the right'. Yet 'deasil' also carries connotations of magic, of rituals involving people animated clockwise round a sacred stone, for instance, or a significant building. The movement of this hand, then, read as Ackerley and Gontarski's 'return to the concerns of Geulincx and the Occasionalists', is indeed partly a detailed illustration of the favoured example discussed by Geulincx and Malebranche. It does not substitute for God, 'the Bastard, he [who] doesn't exist'<sup>86</sup>, a farcical astrological backdrop such as in *Murphy*. But the Celtic interjection (of a word that also appears repeatedly in 1964's *All Strange Away*) nevertheless brings a

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<sup>84</sup> *CSP*, p. 241.

<sup>85</sup> *CSP*, p. 240.

<sup>86</sup> '[T]he bastard, he doesn't exist' paraphrases a quotation from Hamm in *Endgame*, but Beckett reportedly replied to a question from Edna O'Brien (who was writing an article for the *Sunday Times Magazine* in 1986) with the same sentence: "God – do you have any thoughts you would like to air, about God?" "No...no...none....Wait, [vigorously] I do – the bastard, he doesn't exist" (O'Brien 1986, p. 53).

hint of ritual and witchery to this simple movement both familiar yet in *Still* become estranged.

There is, however, something else that intrigues in the occasionalist movement of *Still* that bears a mark of Beckett's 'fantasia'. As discussed above, a musical fantasia can be improvised or semi-improvised, it can continue in a particular vein or it can freely incorporate elements from around it. A fantasia is unpredictable and foregrounds itself as a malleable and changeable thing. It can encounter something apparently wholly other to itself yet does not need therefore to turn away to continue being itself. It can incorporate what is other as a new version, a changed version, of itself. William Drabkin describes how Beethoven's fantasias would 'both maintain and break with tradition', arguing that certain of these fantasias could incorporate elements previously entirely alien to them:

It was in the Fantasia for piano, chorus and orchestra op. 80 (1808), however, that Beethoven broke most strikingly with tradition by introducing a chorus into a form that had been instrumentally conceived for some 300 years.<sup>87</sup>

The comparison worth making here is between this history of instrument-only composition, and Beckett's own works until the early 1970s. That is, the 'fantasia' involving Geulincx, having laid implicit and even dormant at various times up until now, will be reinvigorated by coming into contact with ideas that might seem entirely alien and other, but which in fact turn out to be quite close to Beckett's earlier ideas on Geulincx, and cohere with them to form something new, yet nevertheless something that is a continuation of a lineage.

When O'Hara argues that the critic cannot write of influence upon Beckett because such writing must, if it is not to be simpleminded, be too complex, 'modified' and 'temporized', he shuts off one of the ways in which complexity itself in Beckett's art might be grasped, an art that is so frequently and deeply characterised by complexity, even in its moments of stark minimalism. Beckett's own creative impetuses are themselves 'modified' and 'temporized', indeed his works even make use of these two both as themes and as stylistic performances. Ignoring what is either 'modified' or 'temporized' in Beckett's works is to ignore fundamental aspects of

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<sup>87</sup> Drabkin quoted in Field. Last accessed 1 May 2010.

these works. What is intriguing in the movement of *Still*'s narrated, what fits the nameless seated man into a 'series' of protagonists that includes the narrator/narrated of *Comment c'est/How It Is* before him, is that similarly to how Pim was 'dumb limp lump flat' waiting to be animated into something resembling life, the arm of this narrated too is that of a puppet's.

If we accept this assertion, that the arm of *Still* is in a sense the arm of a puppet, can we say that this description is wholly accounted for by describing it as 'a return to the concerns of Geulincx and the occasionalists', even when we invoke Beckett's description of Geulincx' 'guignol world'? What really constitutes this 'return'? Why 'return' to anything like Geulincx or the occasionalists at all? The answer to these questions, I want to argue, lies with Beckett's 'fantasia' having encountered, only shortly before Beckett wrote *Still*, something that would further modify and temporize it, that was at first sight other than itself. While this other might not be as seemingly alien as Beethoven's chorus was to the previously exclusively instrumental form, it nevertheless altered any further manifestations of a Geulingian 'fantasia' in the remainder of Beckett *oeuvre*. It is in part Heinrich von Kleist who prompts Beckett's 'return to the concerns' of occasionalism. The puppetry of Geulincx does indeed 'return' in Beckett's late works, but this is only once Beckett encountered Kleist's writings on puppetry. The following discussion of this encounter and its manifestations in Beckett's works beyond *Still* argues how encountering Kleist appears to have reinvigorated Beckett's interest in a 'guignol world', making such an idea 'fascinating' and viable once again.

## **6.8 Kleist**

Beckett's interest in Kleist's essay on puppetry and grace has long been known about, having first been brought to light by Knowlson in 1979, who then discussed it further in the biography of 1996.<sup>88</sup> When Knowlson first reported Beckett's interest in 1979 he qualified the interest, yet this via stating its potential significance:

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<sup>88</sup> See Knowlson & Pilling 1979, pp. 275- 285, and Knowlson 1996, pp. 569, 584, & 632-633.



If, on the little evidence available, there is no justification for speaking of actual influence, there is much common ground to be explored between Kleist's essay and Beckett's own ways of thinking about art, the theatre and life.<sup>89</sup>

The theme of puppetry runs from Beckett's earliest works. In 'Love and Lethe' the courting couple were likened to puppets:

Like fantoccini controlled by a single wire they flung themselves down on the western slope of heath. From now on till the end there is something very secco and Punch and Judy about their proceedings,<sup>90</sup>

Shortly after writing *Murphy* Beckett's hope and simultaneous fear was that his protagonist was too little and thereby also too much a 'puppet'. *Murphy*'s narrator had insisted that their star protagonist was distinguished from all other characters in the novel in regard to his self-determinism:

All the other puppets in this book whinge sooner or later, except Murphy, who is not a puppet.<sup>91</sup>

Yet Murphy's self-determinism, manifesting in his refusing to search out a job, for example, and refusing to explain himself to curious onlookers such as Ticklepenny, comes with its own problems that can undermine the very distinction the narrator confers. Shortly after finishing the novel in July 1936 Beckett described Murphy's apartness to MacGreevy, where he admitted its flaw:

There seemed to me always the risk of taking him too seriously and separating him too sharply from the others. As it is I do not think the mistake (Aliohsa mistake) has been altogether avoided.<sup>92</sup>

The reference to one of the brothers in Dostoevsky's *The Karamazov Brothers* forms part of the admission that Murphy's freedom, the thing that Murphy himself takes most seriously, separates him from the other puppets of the novel a little too baldly, and he thereby becomes a puppet of his creator who illustrates the importance of such a distinction. Also, *The Unnamable*'s narrator describes himself as being 'in my

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<sup>89</sup> Knowlson and Pilling 1979, p. 277.

<sup>90</sup> Beckett 1993, p. 100 ('Fantoccini' – 'puppet' or 'doll'; 'Secco' – 'dry').

<sup>91</sup> *Murphy*, p. 78.

<sup>92</sup> Beckett to MacGreevy, 7 July 1936. *CL*, p. 350.

Punch and Judy box'<sup>93</sup>. Yet while this list is not necessarily to describe a latent trajectory that reaches its logical terminus in the puppetry of the late works, the theme finds its most focussed and determining manifestations in certain late works, and there are a number of reasons for this distinction.

Beckett's interest in puppetry was revived and subsequently became further concretised following what appears to be a discovery datable to late 1969, and is owed somewhat to Bray. In a letter from Beckett to Bray dated '2.9.69' Beckett mentions 'grace in the Kleistian sense'<sup>94</sup>, and in a further letter a month later he writes 'Got the Kleist Marionetten theater [?] and other essays'<sup>95</sup>. On October 13 Beckett again mentions 'Kleist's marvelous essay on Marionetten theater with unforgettable anecdote of duel with bear. Other essays in book pall compared'<sup>96</sup>. It is well documented in their correspondence that Bray continually sent Beckett works to read, and this is what appears to have happened with Kleist. Further circumstantial evidence points the same way. Knowlson reports that in late 1969 Beckett went looking for Kleist's memorial at Wannsee (which he could not find, returning later with an unnamed friend), and it is not long after the series of correspondence with Bray in 1969 that Beckett mentions Kleist on a number of occasions. In 1971 during rehearsals for *Happy Days* at the Schiller-Theater Beckett was apparently trying to imbue Winnie with a sense of 'grace in the Kleistian sense', as Knowlson describes:

He was anxious to ensure that all of Winnie's movements should be as crisp, precise and economical as possible. He argued that precision and economy would produce the maximum of grace, quoting Kleist's essay on the Marionetten theatre to reinforce his argument.<sup>97</sup>

Five years later, in 1976, this after the particular take on puppet-movement had been focused in *Still*, Beckett again referred Knowlson and Ronald Pickup to Kleist's essay. According to Knowlson, Beckett used the essay to 'illustrate what he said about the relations between economy and the grace and harmony that he wanted to see in the movements of the protagonist of *Ghost Trio*'<sup>98</sup>.

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<sup>93</sup> *TN*, p. 342.

<sup>94</sup> Beckett to Bray, 2 September 1969. TCD MS 10948/1/432.

<sup>95</sup> Beckett to Bray, 3 October 1969. TCD MS 10948/1/440.

<sup>96</sup> Beckett to Bray, 13 October 1969. TCD MS 10948/1/443.

<sup>97</sup> Knowlson 1996, p. 584.

<sup>98</sup> Knowlson 1996, p. 632.

Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater* (1810) describes the marionettes of puppet-theatre as embodying a state of grace unattainable in a human world of self-consciousness. In a fictional dialogue between two men in a public park narrated in the past tense by one of the interlocutors, Kleist uses a number of examples to argue that self-consciousness erases 'grace' via knowledge of that very grace. In one such example a 'young acquaintance of mine had lost his innocence before my very eyes'<sup>99</sup>, when an attractive youth of about fifteen, who had started to show 'faintly the first traces of vanity, a product of the favour shown him by women', was informed how he resembled a well-known statue in one particular movement he made while putting his foot on a stool. The youth had apparently just been noting to himself this same resemblance, and the coincidence flattered his burgeoning vanity. Yet as he tried to replicate the movement in a mirror, to witness it a second time, his movements that had once manifest as selfless grace became grossly comic as his consciousness of the movement prevented him from actually attaining it, even as it taunted him with its proximity. Over the following year the boy's attractiveness entirely dissipated. A similar story involves the 'fencing bear', where Kleist tells of a bear (a paradigm implicitly lacking human self-consciousness) that could fence better than any human because it would never be fooled by feints of a sword, responding only to genuine thrusts which it could successfully parry. Marionettes, according to Kleist, embody the state of grace that was in the boy before his fall, and in the fighting bear that would respond only to the real. Kleist's logical conclusion is that puppetry or non-human consciousness affirms the state of grace that humanity's self-consciousness denies. It is a conclusion that is comparable and compatible for Beckett with Geulincx' so-called 'guignol world', a world in which all is puppetry because all is dependent on God.

According to Geulincx humanity lacks knowledge of how it does things, of how it is connected to the world around it, yet it is connected to the world around it via its 'Pater ineffabilis'<sup>100</sup> ['ineffable Father'<sup>101</sup>]. There is, however, an important distinction between Kleist's and Geulincx' conceptions of being tied to a world. Humanity for Geulincx is still capable of an awareness of the fact of its being tied, of

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<sup>99</sup> Kleist 1978, p. 1211.

<sup>100</sup> TCD MS 10971/6/5r.

<sup>101</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 97.

its incapacity, even though it cannot alter its fate, whereas no puppet is capable of attaining this awareness of its own state. Indeed it is precisely such lack of awareness that defines it, for Kleist, as the embodiment of grace. A Geulingian ‘guignol world’, then, is potentially a much crueller affair than that of the ‘Kleistian’ puppet-world, a world in which puppets enact grace as a lack of self-consciousness. There is in Geulincx’ ‘guignol world’ a comparable impotence and dependence to that of Kleist’s conception of puppetry. There is also, however, self-consciousness – the capacity for an awareness of one’s being tied if not a capacity for breaking ties. It is awareness of these ties that motivates Geulincx’ occasionalist ethics, that prompts the axiom. According to Geulincx, God (as Beckett noted from *Metaphysics*) is ‘The Author of this union’<sup>102</sup> between humanity and the world, and ‘neither we, nor our bodies, nor anything else, can move something without the cooperation of Him who is the author of motion’<sup>103</sup>. Any motion we experience is only thanks to God’s use of it ‘as an instrument to engender various thoughts in our mind’<sup>104</sup>. These ‘thoughts in our mind’ are what distinguishes Geulincx’ puppetry from Kleist’s. The basic difference between the two conceptions is one of a kind of suffering. Both Kleist’s and Geulincx’ puppets are dependent on an external authority for anything to happen. But with an awareness of being tied, Geulincx’ puppets are subjected to perceiving their enslavement, which no Kleistian puppet has to suffer. The ‘grace’ of Kleist’s puppets is one of blissful ignorance.

Perhaps something like this distinction accounts for Beckett’s description of Geulincx’ world as specifically ‘guignol’, a world as not just puppet-like. Beckett may have had in mind the Parisian *Théâtre du Grand-Guignol*, a theatre famous in the early part of the twentieth century for its displays of cruelty and violence, its name for a time even becoming shorthand for such performances.<sup>105</sup> Combining the two puppet-

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<sup>102</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 94. Cf. TCD MS 10971/6/5r.

<sup>103</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 100. Cf. TCD MS 10971/6/5r.

<sup>104</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 105. Cf. TCD MS 10971/6/5v.

<sup>105</sup> The *Théâtre du Grand-Guignol* was founded in 1897, and had its heydays (under various directors) in the first three decades of the twentieth century prior to its being taken over in 1930 by Jack Jouvin. After the war the theatre declined until its eventual closure in 1962. ‘Nous n’aurions pas pu concurrencer Buchenwald’ [We could not compete with Buchenwald] (quoted in Pierron 1995, p. XXXIV) was the assessment of Charles Nonon, the theatre’s final director, on why the post-war audience had less appetite for fictional visceral horror. There were, however, also accusations of wartime collaboration levelled at the theatre. For a history of the theatre, see Hand & Wilson 2002.

worlds of Kleist and Geulincx would provide Beckett with a single world of both grace and cruelty at one and the same time.

Kleist and the marionette theatre therefore illustrate a shift in Beckett's working parameters comparable to that ascribed earlier to 'pruritus'. As with 'pruritus' we know Beckett had at times a more, and at times a less, explicit concern with puppets and puppetry. Most specifically Beckett is concerned with how puppets and puppetry might function as framing imagery for a novelist's fictional character, or 'vice-exister'<sup>106</sup> as *The Unnamable* also calls it, and a character's relations to their author. At times, as in *The Unnamable*'s reference to Punch and Judy, such concern might bear little apparent relation to anything involving Geulincx. At others, however, the relation between Beckett's tropes of puppetry and his interest in Geulincx might be argued to be stronger. To clarify such relations, before turning to how Kleist and Geulincx interact in the later works *Ghost Trio* and *Nacht und Träume*, I look at *Act Without Words 1* in order to argue that any later utilisation of the tropes of puppetry is best thought of as a modification of earlier such deployments, earlier deployments that can be seen to bear comparison with Geulincx.

## **6.9 Staging the 'happy ones' – *Act Without Words 1***

Because Beckett's first encounter with Kleist appears to have occurred in late 1969 it can be confidently asserted that Kleist's ideas of puppet-grace had no bearing on Beckett's composing *Act Without Words 1*, written in 1956. In contrast, what does impact on this earlier piece as regarding puppetry and mime, is Geulincx, but Geulincx filtered through the theme of insatiable need that is manifested in *Watt* in an implicit fracturing of the ethical axiom. In summary, in *Act Without Words 1* Beckett puts in play one of Arsene's 'happy ones', one of those who would always need in precisely the place where they could not satisfy that need, and the visual vocabulary through which Beckett stages this is that of puppetry, where the man onstage is treated by an offstage taunting authority as if he were a puppet of that authority's cruel whims.

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<sup>106</sup> TN, p. 317.

Seen in the context of Arsene's statement in *Watt*, according to which 'The glutton castaway, the drunkard in the desert, the lecher in prison, they are the happy ones', *Act Without Words 1* might then be seen as more than a self-contained work of 'obvious allegory'<sup>107</sup> as Ackerley and Gontarski describe it, or 'too obvious and pat'<sup>108</sup> as Ihab Hassan wrote. Cohn has similarly described the piece as instantiating 'slapstick comedy at the cosmological level, and the meaning is almost too explicit',<sup>109</sup> with Gontarski summarising how critics are frequently embarrassed by the mime's apparent 'directness'<sup>110</sup>. Situating the play in a lineage of imagery that takes a cue from Arsene's statement, however, makes it possible to see that the idea of need that is central to *Act Without Words 1* is threaded with an aesthetic of impotence and desperation traceable to Beckett's fracturing of Geulincx' ethical axiom in *Watt*. Given such an inflection, this unnamed man in the desert can be seen as less a straightforward image of generalised humanity, what we might take Beckett's own description of him as 'human meat – or bones'<sup>111</sup> to mean. Not even an all-too-neat allegory of Existentialism (as Gontarski argues as a way of redeeming the play's torture-farce elements and its theme of freedom and enslavement), the mime can be seen, in light of Geulincx' importance for *Watt*, as a fragmentary shard of the complications and complicities inherent in Beckett's analects of philosophical imagery. As we have seen, Beckett uses the phrase 'guignol world' to describe Geulincx' world on 28 November 1956, which was very close to when he was working on the play he described to Alan Schneider on October 15 1956 as 'the desert mime'<sup>112</sup>. Beckett, then, had guignol worlds very much at the forefront of his mind in late 1956.

In the short mime a man in a desert is continually taunted with temptations to his needs by the shade and non-shade of a contrary palm tree, and by 'a tiny carafe, to

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<sup>107</sup> Ackerley and Gontarski (eds.) 2006, p. 3.

<sup>108</sup> Hassan 1967, p. 192.

<sup>109</sup> Cohn 1962, p. 247.

<sup>110</sup> Gontarski 1993, p. 29. Gontarski summarises previous critical embarrassment prior to his existentialist reading of the rebellion implicit in the protagonist's 'cutting of the umbilical rope' (Gontarski 1993, p. 32), a reading according to which the play reveals that 'Man, in a frenzy of (in)activity, is born – free' (Gontarski 1993, p. 32). Gontarski is thereby one of the few dissenting critics in his offering an affirmative appraisal of the play.

<sup>111</sup> Gontarski 1993, p. 31.

<sup>112</sup> Beckett to Schneider 15 October 1956. Cited in Harmon (ed.) 1998, p. 12.

which is attached a huge label inscribed WATER'<sup>113</sup>, hung out for him by an unseen offstage figure. The man is taunted in a world in which he appears as a puppet of his invisible and unaccountable torturer. It is not, however, simply a master/slave dynamic between the separated non-pseudo-couple (the man onstage vs. the authority invisible offstage) that situates the play within a 'guignol world'. More specifically, the man's suffering is manifested in the visual language of that of a puppet. This mime employs less a choreography redolent of music-hall slapstick, as much of the later comedy in Beckett's theatre arguably references, and relies instead on a figure 'dumb' and 'limp', as Pim is in *Comment c'est/How It Is*, a figure of a puppet quickened by the invisible unnamed ('ineffable') figure offstage.

The man enters the stage 'flung backwards', is whistled back offstage and is flung back on again twice before he 'hesitates, thinks better of it, halts, turns aside, reflects'<sup>114</sup>. The whistle continues to direct his action, calling his attention to objects or locations on stage. It makes him aware of the palm, carafe, the scissors and cubes. But it is perhaps the ropes of the play that most forcefully illustrate him as puppet. The text does not specify how any of the objects should be lowered, only stating a rope when one is dropped for the man to climb up (the 'umbilical rope'<sup>115</sup>, as Gontarski describes it), which he then cuts with the scissors. Yet the practicalities of performance dictate that objects would be lowered either by rope or some other kind of thread, amenable to being hoisted slower or more quickly as the text specifies. Such ties are akin to those of a puppet, and as the man reaches up to the carafe of water, bundles cubes on each other and falls off them trying to reach skywards, his movements appear as those of a marionette. Though, importantly, a marionette separated from his puppeteer. As the water is lowered so the man raises his hands, and as the cubes are deposited so he goes to them. He is brought '*hither*' to act '*here*' just as for Geulincx God brings humanity into the world to act here, connected invisibly and conducted entirely at the mercy of this unknowable, unspeakable, 'ineffable' authority.

Yet there is self-consciousness to this puppet, an awareness of his impotence. The puppet-like man is continually preoccupied with his own hands. He looks at

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<sup>113</sup> CDW, p. 204.

<sup>114</sup> CDW, p. 203.

<sup>115</sup> Gontarski 1993, p. 32.

them at the beginning of the play, cuts his fingernails part way through the play, and in his final gesture prior to the curtain ‘He looks at his hands’<sup>116</sup> again. This is a man decidedly in a world where his own instruments of capacity are no use. They cannot prevent his being tortured, however much he might rebel, and as the play progresses his frustration turns to disillusion. As the man stares at his own impotent hands while the curtain falls the effect is one of witnessing his implicitly asking similar questions to those asked by Geulincx of his ‘guignol world’:

Why do so many and such great calamities conspire against me? Have I offended God in some way? [...] Thrust into a body as if into a prison, am I paying the penalties that I have deserved, and among others this grave one, that I am oblivious of the offence that I am expiating?<sup>117</sup>

This 1956 mime and Geulincx’ sideways relevance to it mean that Beckett’s later focus on puppetry and the grace of movement in the physicality of characters on stage and screen cannot solely be ascribed to his encountering Kleist. What is more fruitful is the attempt to reveal how Kleist impacts on these elements of Beckett’s work that were previously, as is the case with *Act Without Words 1*, marginal or perhaps distant relations of his interest in Geulincx. In the late television plays Beckett explores other guignol worlds beyond that of *Still* in works that increasingly invoke formality as a way to dispel self-consciousness, seeking to enact Beckett’s own form of Kleistian ‘grace’ as infiltrated by a Geulingian puppet-like impotence, as one of suffering and self-consciousness.

#### **6.10 ‘Chamber Telly’<sup>118</sup> as ‘guignol world’**

Although Beckett had referred to Kleist while rehearsing *Happy Days* in 1971 in relation to Winnie’s ‘economy’ of movement, it is his reference five years later when rehearsing *Ghost Trio* that more pointedly reveals the late period interests in puppetry, a reference recorded by Knowlson:

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<sup>116</sup> CDW, p. 206.

<sup>117</sup> *Ethics*, p. 351.

<sup>118</sup> Beckett to Bray, 24 January 1976, TCD MS 10948/1/599. Whilst Beckett had said ‘Possible title for TV piece: TRYST’ (Beckett to Bray, 16 January 1976, TCD MS 10948/1/597), and he had given the piece this title in its manuscript (UoR MS 1519/1) before changing it to *Ghost Trio*, ‘Chamber Telly’ was the ‘Idea for a perhaps better title’ he later gave to Bray (Beckett to Bray, 24 January 1976, TCD MS 10948/1/599).



Beckett applied Kleist's two examples to the figure in *Ghost Trio* as he moves to the window or the door, or looks up from the pallet to the mirror. From the two different kinds of movement in the play, one sustained, economical and flowing, the other abrupt and jerky, as F 'thinks he hears her', it is as if Beckett's figure is poised midway between two worlds. For his 'man in a room' is still, in spite of everything, a creature bound to the world of matter, not quite the still-life figure that at moments he appears to be.<sup>119</sup>

In another article on *Ghost Trio* Knowlson makes further parallels between the two types of movement of the protagonist F and Kleist's puppets, pointing out that the lack of footfalls heard when F walks reflects Kleist's ideas that puppets do not need to feel or rebel against the force of gravity. Kleist's argument is that 'puppets need the floor only to touch and enliven the swing of their limbs by momentarily retarding their action'<sup>120</sup>. Similarly, when the bodiless female voice V says of F that he will 'now think he hears her'<sup>121</sup>, Knowlson points out of the sudden movements in a particular production that in 'Beckett's German production, this raising of the hand is even more abrupt and puppet-like than in the BBC version'<sup>122</sup>.

An early manuscript version of *Ghost Trio* stipulates that F 'moves bowed through space with no visible propulsion'<sup>123</sup>, a direction Ackerley describes as giving 'an incorporeal or immaterial quality to his actions'<sup>124</sup>. Such movement of F is perhaps one reason he might himself be considered one of the *Trio* of ghosts (along with V and the briefly appearing boy). Yet the trio, as Cohn notes, might also refer to Beckett's own 'three instruments – Beethoven's Largo, a woman's voice, and a camera eye. "Trio" may also embrace the play's [...] three movements, or its three positions'. As argued above, Beckett's tripartite structuring of *Comment c'est/How It Is* maps onto the structure of a human life as described by Geulincx. This movement of 'no visible propulsion' is also, as well as being ephemeral, a form of puppet-like movement. It is the gliding 'grace' of a marionette unfixed to the floor. Consequently, we can say that the two types of movement in *Ghost Trio*, the jerky sudden surprise and the premeditated slow and steady repetition, are both puppet-like movements.

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<sup>119</sup> Knowlson 1996, p. 633.

<sup>120</sup> Quoted by Knowlson 1986, p. 197.

<sup>121</sup> *CDW*, p. 410.

<sup>122</sup> Knowlson 1986, p. 196.

<sup>123</sup> UoR MS 1519/1. Cited by Ackerley 2009, p. 144.

<sup>124</sup> Ackerley 2009, p. 144.

The protagonist of *Ghost Trio* is confined within the bounds of puppetry even while they might appear to rebel against them, as was also the case for the protagonist of *Act Without Words 1*. As Cohn describes, there may be a ‘cue to rebellion’<sup>125</sup> in V’s ‘Ah!’ when F declines her instruction, but as is implied by Knowlson in whichever of the two types of action F pursues, ghostly steadiness ‘with no visible propulsion’ or jerky, seemingly spontaneous, rebellion, each is subject to its own kind of limitations. The ‘guignol world’ of *Ghost Trio*, then, is one in which rebellion too is a form of puppetry. It was in order to illustrate just such a thesis of thoroughgoing constraint and limitation that Geulincx contrived the analogy of the traveller on the ship. According to this image as Geulincx presents it, the will of the ineffable other might be resisted, but this resistance is futile because it opposes itself to what cannot be influenced.

#### **6.11 *Nacht und Träume***

Whereas Beckett had considered using Schubert’s music in what became *Ghost Trio*,<sup>126</sup> he went further with his final television piece, borrowing the name from the Schubert Lied as title. The title, however, is far from the only aspect of *Nacht und Träume* that makes real an idea Beckett had in mind much earlier than the play’s actual process of composition. As Cohn details, a number of the late television pieces found newly viable forms for earlier ideas. Just as ‘*Quad* successfully negotiated the geometries of the abandoned “J.M. Mime” of 1962, so *Nacht und Träume* successfully enfolds the dream of the abandoned *Mime du rêveur A* of 1954’<sup>127</sup>. The 1982 work eschews the comedy of the earlier protagonist (A) injecting himself with a ‘seringue de sa fesse’<sup>128</sup> [syringe in his buttocks], and A’s clumsily burning himself with a match used for both sight and the needle’s sterilisation. The Pavlovian narrative of education as serial punishment inhering in A’s dealings with the match would be utilised two years later in *Act Without Words 1*. *Nacht und Träume* does, however, return to the broader device of staging, here filming, a mime within a mime as a dream (the

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<sup>125</sup> Cohn 2001, p. 338.

<sup>126</sup> See TCD MS 10948/1/498 (Beckett to Bray, 22 January 1976) where Beckett writes he had been thinking of using a ‘Schubert quartet I hope’ for what became *Ghost Trio*, but he did not know which.

<sup>127</sup> Cohn 2001, p. 374.

<sup>128</sup> UoR MS 1227/7/16/1 fol.2. Cited in Gontarski 1985, p. 196.

hypodiegetic dream of 1954's *Mime du rêveur* A remaining unwritten). It is the fleeting dream existence of *Nacht und Träume* that is this work's 'guignol world', forming as it does another minor turn in Beckett's Geulingian 'literary fantasia'.

*Nacht und Träume* brings in from off-screen an aspect of the multifarious off-stage/off-screen identities that in *Act Without Words* 1 was the taunting faceless force offering temptations, in *Act Without Words* 2 prompts the figures from their slumbering in sacks with a 'goad'<sup>129</sup>, and in *Ghost Trio* was the dislocated V. In *Nacht und Träume* such a mysterious and 'ineffable' figure manifests synecdochically as the hands offering comfort. The hands come into the frame when the protagonist (A) dreams 'His dreamt self (B)'. They place a Benedictine assurance on the brow of the dreamer and wipe his mouth after offering a cup. As A dreams of himself receiving these comforts he thereby gives himself up to a guignol world where his rest, his momentary stasis, his stillness, relies on this external authority, this authority of a disembodied pair of hands. In one of the most striking puppet-like images in this piece, in Süddeutscher Rundfunk's production when L (the left hand) places itself on B's head and B wakes within the dream, L then moves gently back and as it takes itself away from B's head the synchronicity between the removing hand and A's rising head has all the looks of a hand pulling back the puppet-head of B with invisible strings. In the text this movement is rendered only as 'B raises his head, L withdraws and disappears'<sup>130</sup>. Yet on screen, as Knowlson observed of *Geister Trio*, the puppet-like motion of those in the play is much more pronounced. This invisible force with which L pulls back the head of A works as a subtle streak of menace against the images of benediction.

Themes of power and impotence are thereby inscribed in the play's dream within a dream structure. A remains himself even in this dream where he becomes B. That is, he dreams himself to be the same person who is in need of such relief, and as such is not free from the needs from which he suffers. In a revealing letter to Reinhart Müller-Freienfels (who commissioned the play) Beckett responded to a question about whether the dreamer and his dreamt self could be played by two different actors:

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<sup>129</sup> CDW, p. 210.

<sup>130</sup> CDW, p. 465.

The dreamer's face is virtually invisible. Head resemblance alone is enough. So by all means 2 separate performers for the dreamer and his dreamt self. The more so as he may be supposed to dream himself somewhat other than he is.<sup>131</sup>

The dreamer's dreamt self could appear different, but not entirely distinct. He must be a version of himself in his moment of relief. Even though he is stilled, paused in one of Beckett's many 'moments' for comfort, he is 'still' himself needing this relief, relief that is conveyed through the hands. As the off-screen authority was in *Ghost Trio*, in *Nacht und Träume* this is a thoroughgoing authority. It does not offer any substantial relief from the state of affairs in which it is needed other than further dependence upon its own temporary cures.

Grayley Herren argues, as does Ulrika Maude, for the centrality of this play's technological aspects in any critical assessment of it. Herren names these technological aspects the play's 'formal tensions', a move similar to Albright's, who describes Beckett's exploration of the limits of a particular mode of technology as his 'extraordinary doting on technique'<sup>132</sup>. Herren writes that '*Nacht und Träume*'s formal tensions undermine its superficial harmonies, offering the manipulative powers of art as the only enduring consolation'<sup>133</sup>. Herren points out that the dream in *Nacht und Träume* happens when called to happen by A. B is thereby, according to Herren, an artistic creation of A. Herren's conclusion is also similar to Albright's. It is the artistic act of making rather than anything resulting from this that redeems the doomed attempt to make. Yet perhaps the neatness of such a consolatory conclusion might make us wary of its effectiveness.

A 'guignol world' as a place of self-created temporary restfulness, of momentary stillness, such as is dreamt by A in *Nacht und Träume*, brings us back to *Murphy*. For Murphy also sought, or rather surrendered himself to in his bondage enabling self-inspection in his chair, a temporary relief in a trance-like version of himself. For both Murphy and A, for the former explicitly so and for the latter implicitly, Geulincx' ethical occasionalism is 'not enough' as a means of finding a freedom that is not also dependence and subservience. This is the truer 'manipulative' element to A's dreaming of B. B has a powerful hold over A such that A is a puppet of

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<sup>131</sup> Beckett to Müller-Freienfels, 5 August 1982. Cited in Maude 2009, p. 129.

<sup>132</sup> Albright 2003, p. 3.

<sup>133</sup> Herren 2000, p. 186.

B. He is the manifestation not of A's freedom, but rather of his enslavement. However, B in his turn is the puppet of the disembodied hands. *Nacht und Träume*, then, far from offering a play of consolation and religious relief, implicates a series of dependence and subservience in a guignol world not unlike that of the series in *Comment c'est/How It Is*.

### Conclusion

It is perhaps fitting that the end of Beckett's 'fantasia' is reached with discussion of an explicitly musical work, *Nacht und Träume*. That Beckett told Harvey 'painting and music have so much better a chance'<sup>1</sup> than his own usual medium, in one of a number of places where Beckett pointed to the importance of music for literature, should keep readers alert to the viability of a musical vocabulary brought to bear on Beckett. The 'fantasia' that has been argued for here is one we must necessarily see with hindsight. It derives from a musical term presumably never intended by Beckett as a direct description of his prose, whether or not he ever meant the term to apply to a planned monograph for Coffey. Yet it is more than an easy convenience that this musical term should be co-opted into a discussion of Beckett's *oeuvre*. The term, so immediately alien to Beckett's *oeuvre* of starkness and minimalism, nonetheless allows a critical tracking and tracing of change, incorporation, and progressive vision through the works that brings Geulincx, as a single strain of influence and confluence among many, clearly into view.

There was never any reason to expect, in a body of work so changed as Beckett's between 1936 and 1982, that Geulincx would be a fixed and stable point of reference for Beckett. The foregoing stays close to identifiable moments at which Geulincx breaks to the surface of Beckett's often strict and unyielding prose, revealing Geulincx' latent, though sometimes explicit, presence in works well beyond what is traditionally 'the most Geulincxian of the works', *Murphy*. Yet throughout these various reasserted recurrences Geulincx in Beckett retains something of a residue of freedom memorialised, freedom both remembered and buried. Geulincx provides a way of reading across Beckett's shifting 'series' that maps the contours of a determinedly changeable aesthetic while never reducing such contours to a definitive, neat, single shape. The trajectory that traces a progression from the explicit to the implicit, from the thematic to the performative or even the realist to the abstract through Beckett's *oeuvre* is a familiar, yet nevertheless fascinating one. While the 'moments' at which Geulincx is asserted through fragmentary allusion or citation

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey 1970, p. 249.

predominantly adhere to such a coherent trajectory, it is hoped that the foregoing analysis also points to those moments at which the residual, remembered en-graved presence of Geulincx complicates or confounds the neatness with which one might, with hindsight, fix Beckett as simply working through and then beyond the struggles he determinedly set himself as a young man. In a body of work so concerned with memory, obligation and futile or entropic emancipation, the remembered, memorialised presence of one who promised so much strange and complex freedom such as Geulincx is deferred to at the same time it is critiqued even in Beckett's very late years. Geulincx' presence remains through Beckett's great realisation that 'all I am is feeling'<sup>2</sup>, to become one of few philosophical figures of feeling in the middle to later period works, a figure of both affection and *obligatione*.

There is also little wonder in the fact that Beckett was so drawn to Geulincx' slave on the ship. For not only is the slave an image of metaphysics and of ethics, he also figures as an image of the creative act as one of momentary relief, futile yet determined. As Geulincx wrote and Beckett transcribed, 'Every analogy is lame,'<sup>3</sup> though Beckett nevertheless used one to describe the artistic will to go on that parallels the constrained freedom of the onboard slave:

'What do you do,' Beckett once asked, 'when "I can't" meets "I must"?' and he compared himself to a man 'on his knees, head against the wall – more like a cliff – with someone saying "go on" – Well, the wall will have to move a little, that's all.'<sup>4</sup>

For Geulincx 'I can't' also meets 'I must'. While the ethical axiom counsels abstention, his pragmatic realisation was that one must act in the world even if one cannot. When the then little-known writer encountered the little-known philosopher in 1936 the kinship and admiration Beckett felt is palpable in his correspondence. His moving away from thoroughgoing enthusiasm and indebtedness over the following decades was itself only a matter of going so far within limited bounds, within self-imposed constraints. The difficulties and necessities of this manoeuvring produce Beckett's 'literary fantasia' as itself a philosophically ethical one of incapacity and obligation.

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<sup>2</sup> Graver and Federman (eds.) 1979, p. 240.

<sup>3</sup> *Ethics*, p. 323.

<sup>4</sup> Graver and Federman (eds.) 1979, p. 29.

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