Cynical Cosmopolitans?

Borges, Beckett, Coetzee

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

The thesis argues for a form of kynical cosmopolitanism in the late work of Jorge Luis Borges, Samuel Beckett and J.M. Coetzee. Broadly sympathetic responses to these three writers conflate their writing style and their personal habits, and identify them as stoics. Broadly unsympathetic responses conflate their choice of theme and their apparent political quietude, and identify them as cynics. Instead of finding them aligned with stoicism or contemporary cynicism, the thesis draws on work by Peter Sloterdijk and Michel Foucault to recuperate kynicism (ancient cynicism) as a heuristic to explain how the writers consciously exploit a combination of style, theme, habit and political perspective in their late works. The late works of all three writers turn on a performance of the self that takes autobiographical enactment as the starting point for exploring political subjectivity. Following Diogenes of Sinope, who labelled this performative political subjectivity 'cosmopolitanism', this thesis argues that the late works of Borges, Beckett and Coetzee must be understood as creating a self-reflexive kynical cosmopolitanism, in which the role of the writer in the world becomes an aesthetic device for engaging with cosmopolitan political subjectivity.

List of Abbreviations

Diogenes of Sinope

DL   *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, ed. R.D Hicks [1925] (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1972)

Jorge Luis Borges

Dr   *Dreamtigers*, trans. Mildred Boyer and Harold Morland (Austin, TX: UP Texas, 1964)

L   *Labyrinths*, trans. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (London: Penguin, 1970)

OC1   *Obras Completas Tomo I: 1923-1949* (Barcelona: Emecé, 1996)

OC2   *Obras Completas Tomo II: 1952-1972* (Barcelona: Emecé, 1996)

OC3   *Obras Completas Tomo III: 1975-1985* (Barcelona: Emecé, 1996)

OC4   *Obras Completas Tomo IV: 1975-1988* (Barcelona: Emecé, 1996)

TL   *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922-1986*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine and Eliot Weinberger (London: Penguin, 2001)

TR1   *Textos Recobrados: 1919-1929* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores S.A., 1997)

TR2   *Textos Recobrados: 1931-1955* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores S.A., 1997)

TR3   *Textos Recobrados: 1956-1986* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores S.A., 1997)

Samuel Beckett

Disj   *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1984)

SB1   *Samuel Beckett: The Grove Centenary Edition. Volume I: Novels*, ed. Paul Auster, intro. Colm Toibin (New York: Grove Press, 2006)

SB2   *Samuel Beckett: The Grove Centenary Edition. Volume II: Novels*, ed. Paul Auster, intro. Salman Rushdie (New York: Grove Press, 2006)

SB3 *Samuel Beckett: The Grove Centenary Edition. Volume III: Dramatic Works*, ed. Paul Auster, intro. Edward Albee (New York: Grove Press, 2006)

SB4 *Samuel Beckett: The Grove Centenary Edition. Volume IV: Poems, Short Fiction, Criticism*, ed. Paul Auster, intro. J.M. Coetzee (New York: Grove Press, 2006)

SBL1 *The Letters of Samuel Beckett Volume 1: 1929-1940*. ed. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009)

SBL2 *The Letters of Samuel Beckett Volume 2: 1941-1956*. ed. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011)

J.M. Coetzee

AI *Age of Iron* (London: Penguin, 1998)

D *Disgrace* (London: Vintage, 2000)

DBY *Diary of a Bad Year* (London: Harville Secker, 2007)

DP *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, ed. David Attwell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992)

Du *Dusklands* (London: Vintage, 1998)

EC *Elizabeth Costello* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2003)

EWSB 'Eight Ways of Looking at Samuel Beckett' *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujour'dhui*, Vol. 19 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008): 19-31.

F *Foe* (London: Penguin, 1987)

GO *Giving Offense* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1996)

IHC *In the Heart of the Country* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982)

LTMK *Life & Times of Michael K* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1983)

MP *Master of Petersburg* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1994)

SS *Stranger Shores* (London: Vintage, 2002)

WB *Waiting for the Barbarians* (London: Minerva, 1997)

Y *Youth* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2002)

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So great and genuine a man is not to be accused of

a merely cynical cosmopolitanism;

still, his cosmopolitanism is his weakness.

- G.K. Chesterton, *Heretics*

Introduction
Towards the Cynical Cosmopolitan

G.K. Chesterton, in trying to distinguish Rudyard Kipling's 'greatness' from his 'cosmopolitanism', presents us with our underlying question for this thesis: how may 'a great writer' be distinguished from 'a merely cynical cosmopolitan'?[1] For Chesterton, Kipling encapsulates his cosmopolitanism in the famous line, 'what they can know of England who know England only.' Chesterton rejoins, 'What can they know of England who know only the world?'[2] Cosmopolitanism, in its effort to know everywhere, ends up knowing nowhere. 'Cosmopolitanism' is Kipling's weakness, Chesterton claims, 'because he does not have the patience to be part of anything' and his view of the world is narrowed by this impatience.[3] But Kipling's impatience should not be treated as a 'merely cynical' attitude to particularity, because 'above all, he has had something to say, a definite view of things to utter, and that always means that a man is fearless and faces everything. For the moment we have a view of the universe, we possess it'.[4] This gives us a starting point for discussing the work of Jorge Luis Borges, Samuel Beckett and J.M. Coetzee, three late modernists who are fearless in saying what they mean to say.

To each, we can apply Chesterton's axiom on Kipling: 'No one can reasonably doubt that he means steadily and sincerely to say something, and the only serious question is, What is that which he has tried to say?'[5] It is apparent, then, that our task,

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[1] G.K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (New York: John Lane Company, 1909), 50. For the duration of this thesis, I adopt an exploratory 'we'. I will mark this periodically with modalities such as 'can', 'may' or 'might', to indicate the contingency, and fragility, of the plastic community we begin to form when you read what I write.
[2] Ibid, 48.
[3] Ibid, 50.
[4] Ibid, 43.
[5] Ibid.

though voluminous, is by no means theoretically challenging: all we must establish is that Borges, Beckett and Coetzee have tried to say something 'steadily and sincerely', identify what that 'something' is, and we have recuperated these writers from 'a merely cynical cosmopolitanism'. We might even extend this analysis to formulate Borgesian, Beckettian or Coetzeean cosmopolitanism. Proof that they have the patience to be part of something will show their cosmopolitanism to be stronger than Kipling's, since they are alive to the sense of the world's actual substance. We may establish this substantial concern with the world in Borges's commitment to Argentina and the politics of Argentinian letters, Beckett's commitment to the French Resistance and to 'going on', and Coetzee's commitment to a particular anti-totalitarian aesthetic, during and after Apartheid in South Africa. Must this come at the expense of their more generic cosmopolitanism: Borges's travels from Buenos Aires to the US, Europe and Asia, Beckett's translocation from Dublin to Paris and Coetzee's migration from Cape Town to Adelaide? Perhaps we can reconcile these elements of biography. But this biographical material seems vaguely dissatisfying, as does Chesterton's schema for analysis, not least because it neglects what is even more interesting in late modernist writers: *how* does one write whatever it is that one is trying to say steadily and sincerely?

This seemingly innocuous question raises an underlying issue of risk: how are we to mark the difference between 'greatness' and 'cynical cosmopolitanism' in three writers who, in considering how to write, consciously and expressly challenge bases of sincerity, eschew definitive views on the world, and even undermine assumptions that they have something to say? Chesterton's Edwardian distinction may give us a starting point, but it certainly will not provide a theoretical solution for situations where 'greatness' is inextricably linked to forms of cynicism and cosmopolitanism. The issue might be more productively addressed if we forego our efforts to recuperate Borges,

Beckett and Coetzee from a 'merely cynical cosmopolitanism', and begin to consider how their work plays across the boundaries of such rigorous differentiation. Perhaps there are forms of cosmopolitanism that exceed Chesterton's pejorative understanding of cynicism. We may need to challenge our understanding of both cynicism and cosmopolitanism. This challenge would lead us to reconsider the way in which Borges, Beckett and Coetzee face the universe fearlessly.

Chesterton conceives of a cosmopolitan knowledge of the world as quite separate from the knowledge of any and all countries that make it up. He presents us with a paradigm for cosmopolitanism that many are eager to challenge. In fact, for thinkers like Paul Gilroy, Kwame Anthony Appiah and Homi Bhabha, cosmopolitanism is intimately linked with the local, whether 'convivial', 'rooted' or 'vernacular', which expresses already existing connections to the wider world.[6] If this trend has pushed cosmopolitan thinking away from a 'dislocated' form towards an 'integrated' one, it still sees cosmopolitanism as primarily an ethos of worldliness, where the prevalent concern is making oneself at home in the world.

However, there have always been two trends in cosmopolitan thought and practice. One, marked by this ethos of worldliness, has focused on the actions and duties of its *Weltburgers*.[7] This trend identifies a human duty to care for others. It favours loyalty to this duty over any loyalty to a *polis* or a nation-state. But there is another

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[6] For an account of 'convivial cosmopolitanism' see Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004); 'rooted cosmopolitanism' occurs in Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006); 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' is Homi Bhabha's phrase in his preface to the revised *The Location of Culture*, rev. ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004). Bhabha uses the poetic technique of enumeration to argue for his form of cosmopolitanism, a technique that is characteristic of many attempts to 'list' cosmopolitan attributes: in Chapter 2, I will discuss how Borges uses enumeration to disrupt the very site on which such attributes are held in common.

[7] *Weltburger*, literally 'world citizen', is the term developed by Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in reference to the 'cosmopolitan'. Their immediate antecedent in this tradition of translation was Christoph Wieland, whose work on cosmopolitanism intersected with his work on cynicism, particularly in his novel, *Sokrates Mainomenos, oder, die Dialogen des Diogenes von Sinope* [*Socrates out of his senses; or, the Dialogues of Diogenes of Sinope*] (1770).

trend that exposes an implicit complacency in this style of living.[8] This thesis argues that Jorge Luis Borges, Samuel Beckett and J.M. Coetzee are cosmopolitans of this second, 'negative', bent.

The first trend is what we will refer to as 'stoic cosmopolitanism'. Stoic cosmopolitanism is, according to Martha Nussbaum, the stoic development of a phrase by Diogenes of Sinope: 'Asked where he came from, Diogenes the Cynic replied "I am a citizen of the world [*kosmopolitês*]"'.[9] 'The Stoics', Nussbaum writes, 'developed the image of the *kosmopolitês* (world citizen) more fully, arguing that each of us dwells, in effect, in two communities: the local community of our birth and the community of human argument and aspiration'.[10] Christopher Gill has argued that stoicism aims for a structured self, in which the stoic forms a psychophysical whole that extends to relations with the human community.[11] Stoic cosmopolitanism seeks to expand the integrated self to an integrated world community.

Immanuel Kant adapts this stoic community of structured individuals to a form of international law, which will regulate relations between states and individuals that are not their citizens. Cosmopolitanism, for Kant, is defined by a duty of hospitality towards others.[12] In 'Perpetual Peace', Kant outlines as his third article: 'Cosmopolitan Right [*ius cosmopoliticum*] shall be limited to conditions of Universal Hospitality'.[13] Kant's limitation of the *ius cosmopoliticum* presupposes the existence of a law that will regulate relations between states and individuals on an international scale. This

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[8] Gilbert Leung also understands there to be a division between stoic and kynical cosmopolitanism, but he does not extend his analysis to consider embodied textuality. Gilbert Leung, 'Towards a Radical Cosmopolitanism', *New Critical Legal Thinking: Law, Politics and the Political*, eds. Costas Douzinas, Illan Wall, and Matthew Stone (London: Routledge, 2012).

[9] Martha Nussbaum, 'Kant and Cosmopolitanism', *Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant's Cosmopolitan Ideal*, eds. James Bohman and Matthias Lutz-Bachmann (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 29.

[10] Ibid, 29.

[11] Christopher Gill, *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006).

[12] Immanuel Kant, 'Perpetual Peace', *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. H.S. Reiss [1971] (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991).

[13] Ibid, 105.

distinguishes it from national law, which involves relations between states and their citizens, and international law, which involves relations between states and other states.

Post-Kantian developments of Kantian cosmopolitanism have challenged Kant's limitation of the law but not the existence of the duty, nor its presupposition of a 'coming community' of human argument and aspiration.[14] Jacques Derrida, for instance, critiques the metaphysics of a law that *limits* itself to conditions of universal hospitality. He prescribes those conditions in a way that always necessarily falls short of ideal hospitality, but does not question the necessity of such laws (perverted though they might be) in the founding of a community.[15] Rather, he explicitly avows their necessity. Stoic cosmopolitanism, even as a critique, concerns itself with supra-national communities and hospitality. However, there are also those cosmopolitans who remain skeptical about any identification with a community and who feel as uncomfortable with the implicit ideality of unconditional hospitality as the necessary compromises of actual hospitality.

'The cosmopolitan' existed before cosmopolitanism,[16] and it was the cynic, Diogenes of Sinope who coined the term.[17] Before 'cosmopolitanism' was a coherent

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[14] Katherine Hallemeier begins her study of Coetzee and cosmopolitanism by noting that there are almost 150 extant forms of cosmopolitanism in recent scholarship. Therefore I develop my discussion around the writers' own utterances on the topic in Chapter 2. But, it is worth noting the significant work of David Held (2010), Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006) and Ulrich Beck (2006) in developing cosmopolitanism as, respectively, a liberal response to global capitalism, a rooted identification with both the local and the global and a sociological description to actually existing circumstances. In each, very different, case, there is an implicit understanding of cosmopolitanism as heralding multiple sites of belonging, or 'stoic' cosmopolitanism. Katherine Hallemeier, *J.M. Coetzee and the Limits of Cosmopolitanism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4.

[15] Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, pref. Simon Critchley and Richard Kearney (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001).

[16] Robert Fine has argued that even emerging models of cosmopolitanism risk turning genuine insight into 'something fixed, abstract and absolute [...] Sometimes they seem to construct an image of the world *as it ought to be* that has little connection with the world as it is'. Fine's assessment of the trend follows the institution of cosmopolitanism as a political or social order, where this thesis focuses on cosmopolitan writers navigating existing national and international situations. Robert Fine, 'Taking the 'Ism' Out of Cosmopolitanism', *European Journal of Social Theory* Vol. 6, No. 4 (2003), 465; 466.

[17] Scholarship is divided on whether Diogenes had a positive theory of cosmopolitanism: R. Bracht Branham argues that the utterance should be read as a form of playful rhetoric, while John Moles maintains that Diogenes's ethics are consistent with a more systemic cosmopolitanism. Since Diogenes exhibits a habitual ethic, but there are no extant works, between Bracht Branham and Moles there falls an unreconstructed, anti-systemic cosmopolitanism that follows an ethic of virtuous practice. R. Bracht

doctrine, theory or practice, 'the cosmopolitan' was a neologism adopted by an exile to critique his own position within the Greek *polis*. The second position predates the first. The second position we refer to as 'cynical cosmopolitanism'. However, to refer to it as 'cosmopolitanism' ascribes to the position a doctrinal unity or substance that it does not have. Since the trend describes a method (rather than a doctrine) that uses the material position of the body, and the political position of speaker, to critique existing political structures, it cannot found a new community or extend hospitality to those who do not 'belong' to it. For this reason too, it is only via a contested relationship with states and stoic cosmopolitanism that the cynical cosmopolitan may be identified. Hence our anachronistic description of the first trend, the cynical cosmopolitan, follows after the second trend, stoic cosmopolitanism.

All this still begs the question: what relation does either trend have to Borges, Beckett or Coetzee? It is something of a platitude that these writers are broadly described as 'cosmopolitan writers', because their work enjoys a certain 'universal' reception (by adherents of literary models that favour 'universalism'), because they have a certain linguistic freedom in reading and writing across a number of languages, and because they also lived in different countries.[18] But the description 'cosmopolitan writer' belies how fractious the term 'cosmopolitan' might be. Often, the term denotes a variety of traits (universal significance, linguistic competency, national porosity), without explanation of what it connotes. A detailed discussion relating either the stoic or

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Branham, 'Defacing the Currency: Diogenes' Rhetoric and the Invention of Cynicism', *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy*, ed. R. B. Branham and M.-O. Goulet-Cazé (Berkeley: California UP, 1996); John Moles, 'Cynical Cosmopolitanism', *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy*.

[18] George Steiner's *Extraterritorial* argues that Borges and Beckett are exemplars of 'the emergence of linguistic pluralism or "unhousedness" […] the more general problem of a lost centre'. While I agree with Steiner that Borges and Beckett challenge the Romantic notion that 'of all men, the writer most obviously incarnates the genius, *Geist*, quiddity of his native speech', I do not agree that this challenge heralds a new internationalism. Rather, it disrupts the sites on which either linguistic 'housedness' or internationalism might take place. George Steiner, *Extraterritorial: Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* [1971] (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), 10; 14.

the cynical to the cosmopolitan seems to be irrelevant when it appears to be a term deployed as mere description, apparently lacking critical depth.

Excavating this 'mere description' addresses an anxiety surrounding these writers, as much as it identifies 'the cosmopolitan' in their writing. The anxiety relates to the ease with which the term 'cosmopolitan' conceals concerns about belonging, identity and textual reception. For Borges, Beckett and Coetzee have enjoyed a critical response that, if not unique in its commonality (we might equally refer to Joyce, Kafka or Proust here, since many critics have), certainly has a markedly similar trajectory. Each was first received as primarily a universal writer who tests the limits of philosophical thinking in fiction that is, above all else, without context. Following the initial exegeses of their philosophical fiction, efforts were made to (re)historicise their work: the cosmopolitan philosopher-writer working in avant-garde extremes was reformulated as an uneasy national, depicting his homeland in an avant-garde fashion in order to engage with political exigencies he was not altogether comfortable addressing directly. Finally, with the apparent exhaustion of the published material, the archives of the cosmopolitan-cum-national have been mined to produce a 'final reading' of his actual philosophical influences and his real (epistolary) thoughts on his homeland.

The anxiety may be framed with the following question: in a binary system, in which writers are either representative of a national literature or exponents of an ahistorical universal literature, how are we to define writers who subvert both identities by occupying each role in a way that, if all too comfortable in itself, cannot help being uncomfortable for observers committed to one camp or the other? Here, we might raise the example of Borges, who is hailed as an exemplary Argentinian writer by the Military Junta, in power from 1976-1983, after his canonisation as anti-totalitarian post-structuralist thinker *avant la lettre* by Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques

Derrida.[19] We may also think of the paradox of division raised by Karl Ragnar Gierow during the presentation of Beckett's Nobel Prize in 1969, 'a single award being addressed to one man, two languages and a third nation, itself divided':

> Mix a powerful imagination with a logic in absurdum, and the result will be either a paradox or an Irishman. If it is an Irishman, you will get the paradox into the bargain. Even the Nobel Prize in Literature is sometimes divided.[20]

Gierow's jocular anxiety about whether the award is to an Irishman or to a great writer of 'a logic in absurdum' illustrates the endemic anxiety about both Borges and Beckett as philosophical writers, who have also been used by their nations to gain a certain literary cachet. J.M. Coetzee, whose resistance to being labelled a South African writer has done nothing to limit his reception as such, also played fast, if not loose, with national identities when he accepted both the Order of Mapungubwe for 'putting South Africa on the world stage' (2005) and Australian citizenship (2006).

These paradoxes are compounded by the 'postcolonial exotic' of these particular writers: coming from Argentina, Ireland and South Africa, Borges, Beckett and Coetzee also battle against a distinction between the metropole and the periphery.[21] Studies such as Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters,* in recreating the geographical centrality of the metropole, prove that the metropole was only ever a milieu made up of people from peripheries.[22] However, there is still the sense that reading Borges, Beckett or Coetzee as 'postcolonial authors' critiquing a 'colonial history' must come at the cost of their contribution to literature-*qua*-philosophy. Efforts to historicise the tradition of philosophical structuralism particularly complicit with the reputation of these authors as *philosophes avant la lettre*, although important in upsetting the distinction between an

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[19] This is discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.

[20] Karl Ragnar Gierow, 'Award Ceremony Speech: Samuel Beckett', *Nobelprize.org*. Accessed: 23 Apr 2014. http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1969/press.html

[21] See Graham Huggan's dilemma of 'account[ing] for cultural difference without at the same time mystifying it'. Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), 31.

[22] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007).

ahistorical metropole and a periphery all too steeped in history, still prioritise a historical truth over the distinctive form writing takes in dealing with this truth. We will find the *comment c'est* of writing by Borges, Beckett and Coetzee in a cosmopolitan response that is distinctly cynical. If their cosmopolitanism requires a more nuanced explanation, then together we must define what we mean when modifying it with the terms cynical and cynicism.

For cynicism also has a dual history. Peter Sloterdijk, following the example of Hans Probsting, has noted the difference between cynicism *(Zynismus),* in the contemporary sense of an enlightened false consciousness, and kynicism (*Kynismus*), in the classical sense of embodied critique.[23] Prior to the 18th century, the term Cynic only designated (whether positively or negatively) those Greek and Roman philosophers who followed a cynical life characterised by *askēsis* (practice)*, arête* (virtue) and *parrhesia* (frank speech).[24] To call someone a cynic was to refer to a likeness with these philosophers. Increasingly, however, the term became associated with a jaded world-weariness. In the wake of the 'eight turbulent and hard-won advances of reflective enlightenment', Sloterdijk identifies cynicism as an inevitable consequence of the insecurities these advances have brought: cynicism leads to our inurement to ideology critique, our realisation of our complicity within structures of political inequality

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[23] Following Sloterdijk's translator, the distinction between embodied critique and disillusioned disparagement is marked as kynicism and cynicism respectively. While Sloterdijk sees the two terms as being incommensurable within a single subject, Borges, Beckett and Coetzee inevitably vacillate between kynicism and cynicism. Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1987).

[24] Louisa Shea has excavated Enlightenment responses to Diogenes in French and German writing. She shows how Diogenes is initially a model for the *philosophes* but later discarded because of the moral ambiguities that arise when his lived critique is translated into writing. It is worth noting Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Denis Diderot amongst these, since Rousseau endeavours, in Book 8 of the *Confessions* (1769), to live the actual life of a kynic. Diderot, by contrast, finds that kynical bodily critique, when translated into writing, ceases to be verifiably sincere. Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew* (1763), in staging a dialogue between the sincere *philosophe* and the exploitative nephew, plays out the division of ancient cynicism into kynicism and modern cynicism. Hegel would recognise this in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, when he takes *Rameau's Nephew* as the signature text for 'the groundless self', or, in Terry Pinkard's excellent gloss, 'the cosmopolitan who attempts to live without any mediating institutions and to rely only on the force of his own talents […] the nephew is simply presenting to his noble and well-off employers only a mirror of the alienated, "pure selves" that they themselves are'. This thesis shows how Borges, Beckett and Coetzee play out the nephew's role in a far more ethical and rigorous way. Louisa Shea, *The Cynic Enlightenment: Diogenes in the Salon* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2010); Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 164.

combined with a general apathy about that complicity. This enlightened false consciousness inevitably follows a plebeian critique of authority he terms kynicism:

> In *kynismos* a kind of argumentation was discovered that, to the present day, respectable thinking does not know how to deal with. Is it not crude and grotesque to pick one's nose while Socrates exorcises his demon and speaks of the divine soul? Can it be called anything other than vulgar when Diogenes lets a fart fly against the Platonic theory of ideas - or is fartiness itself one of the ideas God discharged from his meditation on the genesis of the cosmos? And what is it supposed to mean when this philosophising town bum answers Plato's subtle theory of Eros by masturbating in public?[25]

Kynismos is a critique of ideology using the truth of the body. What legitimates it is its emergence from the relatively powerless underclass. *Cynismos*, by contrast, is a critique of ideology performed by the master class themselves: 'Modern cynicism [...] is the masters' antithesis to their own idealism as ideology and as masquerade'.[26] Where the kynical servant parodies the master, the cynical master parodies his own position to acquire precisely what little power remains to the underclass: the power of protest. The result is a particularly odious form of hypocrisy: white South Africans complaining about Affirmative Action from armchairs bought with Apartheid gold. Any kynical response risks turning, through its habituation, into a cynical response, since as a method, it may be taken up either to undermine political hegemonies or to reinforce them. But Sloterdijk also accuses stoicism, for instance, of a hegemonic cynicism, when he calls it 'a philosophy of the comfortable': 'in the later Stoa, where in matters of possession kynical principles were cited absolutely (*habere ut non*: have as if you did not have), one often did not know how it was really intended, for one indeed had'.[27] If Sloterdijk goes too far in characterising stoicism as a disavowed cynicism, he does uncover a difficult problem for any philosophy that identifies its ideals in the immanent body: without a particular system governing the body, such as stoicism, how does one

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[25] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 101.
[26] Ibid, 111.
[27] Ibid, 165.

prescribe a treatment of the self that aspires to ideals without believing in them? Borges helps us to frame a response when he notes the 'beauty' of a phrase by Marcus Aurelius, the stoic Emperor of Rome: '"It is possible to live well even in a palace'. Now, this is not to say that one may live comfortably even in a palace; it is to say one can live correctly even in a palace'.[28] Given the temptations of a palace, it becomes more difficult to live 'as if one did not have'. Borges's response does not eclipse Sloterdijk's criticism so much as invert it; Borges's rhetorical defence of stoicism creates a kynical irony.

To our already existent dialectic between stoic and cynical cosmopolitanism, we can then add a related dynamic between the stoic, kynic and cynic. Moreover, this dynamic is particularly fraught when tied to the question of writing: if the kynic is characterised by immediacy and presence, while the cynic is characterised by distance and disillusionment, then the kynical writer, always battling with the impossibility of immediacy and presence, always risks either turning to stoic systems or collapsing into cynical inurement. While Sloterdijk's distinction is useful for marking a difference between stoic governance, kynical engagement and cynical disengagement, it is not enough to say simply that kynical writers interrogate hegemonies, where stoic or cynical writers reinforce hegemonies. There must also be a sense of *how* the writer interrogates hegemonies, as with Borges's reframing of Marcus Aurelius, without simply ripping away sustaining fictions or retaining those fictions in a cynical way. We must reflect on how kynical writing and kynical action connect to a mode of speaking frankly that does not simply conform to static rules of governance.

This nexus of truth, subject, and method was developed, contemporaneously to Sloterdijk's *Critique*, by Michel Foucault. In his last seminar, over 1983-4, Foucault turned to ancient kynicism as an exemplar of *parrhesia* or a mode of frank speech that

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[28] Borges; Osvaldo Ferrari, *Reencuentro. Diálogos Inéditos* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1999), 102

did not conform to any particular discourse. Foucault was interested in kynical

parrhesia because kynicism offered a form of 'care for the self' that was particularly

focused on '*bios* [life]' and because kynical *parrhesia* offered 'an essential connection

between living in a certain way and dedicating oneself to telling the truth [...] without

doctrinal mediation'.[29]

Foucault's consideration of the kynics was primarily a historical excavation of

their practices in Ancient Greece. In his session on 29 February 1984, however, he

suggests three historical reemergences of kynicism:

> After religious movements, throughout the Middle Ages and over a long
> period, [after] political practice since the nineteenth century, I think there
> was a third great medium of [k]ynicism in European culture, or the theme
> of the mode of life as scandal of the truth. We would find it in art. And here
> again, it would be a lengthy and complex history. We would no doubt have
> to go back a long way [...] But I think it is especially in modern art that the
> question of [k]ynicism becomes particularly important. That modern art
> was, and still is for us the vehicle of the [k]ynic mode of being, of the
> principle of connecting style of life and manifestation of the truth, came
> about in two ways.[30]

These two ways are 'the modern idea that the artist's life, in the very form it takes,

should constitute some kind of testimony of what art is in its truth' and the idea that art

itself must establish a relation to reality that is not about ornamentation but one of

laying bare, the 'violent reduction of existence to its basics'.[31] One of the examples

Foucault gives, unsurprisingly, is Samuel Beckett. Yet if Foucault's evocative 'call to

arts' raises the possibility of finding, amidst contemporary cynics, modern kynics, it

runs the risk of returning Beckett (or Borges or Coetzee) to the cabinet of philosopher-

sages, who will teach us stoic 'truths' through their art. Moreover, Foucault himself

identifies this as an area that needs to be researched, since he neither justifies this claim

nor offers any further explanation as to how this writing is to be characterised. His

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[29] Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the College De France 1983-1984*, ed. A. I. Davidson, trans. G. Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011), 165.
[30] Ibid, 187.
[31] Ibid.

'laying bare' of art and the 'artistic life' are given no methodology. One reason for this, given by Edward McGushin, may be Foucault's own desire to return philosophy to a form of *askēsis* or the practice of a style of living, from its modern incarnation as a methodology or normative system.[32] When method and practice are separated, philosophy's task – 'the care of the self' – is assumed by the state in the form of disciplinary experts (doctors, psychiatrists, teachers), and philosophy begins a 'neglect of the self'.[33] Rather than suggest a methodology, our challenge is to think how writers use *style* to attempt an artistic *askēsis*. To locate a modern kynical artist, we must consider style and its relationship to politics. This style must also somehow hark back to the Ancient kynics and their style of living, without reinvigorating naive notions of presence or immediacy.

Borges, Beckett and Coetzee write late works that self-consciously critique their celebrity as established writer-sages. Modernism, according to Jonathan Goldblum, is the literature of celebrity, since modernist techniques of authorial self-fashioning are inextricably linked to cults of celebrity.[34] Our argument in this thesis is that these late modernist kynical cosmopolitans trouble the waters of celebrity fetishism, by actively exploiting their reception as celebrity author-sages. Diogenes of Sinope provides a precedent. His most famous encounter was with Alexander the Great. Alexander comes to pay his respects to Diogenes after hearing of his philosophical practice. He finds Diogenes lying in the sun. When Alexander asks the dog-philosopher what in the world he might want, Diogenes replies that Alexander should get out of his sun. If Diogenes's rejection of power exemplifies the strange dynamic that exists between the kynic and its purported ruler, he is only in the position to shirk Alexander's offer because Alexander is captivated by Diogenes's celebrity as a sage. Borges, Beckett and Coetzee are

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[32] Edward F. McGushin, *Foucault's* Askēsis:*An Introduction to the Philosophical Life* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2007), 283.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Jonathan Goldblum, *Modernism Is the Literature of Celebrity* (Austin: Texas UP, 2011).

received as public intellectuals only because people have already endorsed their celebrity wisdom.

This resemblance does not make Diogenes an 'influence' on these 20th century kynics. Although each writer has, at some point, indicated an awareness of and receptivity to the images associated with the kynics, it is more productive to think of Diogenes as a 'dark precursor' in the sense Gilles Deleuze gives the term. 'Thunderbolts explode between different intensities, but they are preceded by an invisible, imperceptible *dark precursor*, which determines their path in advance but in reverse, as though intagliated'.[35] Deleuze's dark precursor ensures a communication between different entities without 'rediscovering a privileged point at which difference can be understood only by virtue of a resemblance between the things that differ and the identity of a third party'.[36] Rather than understanding identity and resemblance with the writers as the precondition for Diogenes's function as a dark precursor, we understand them better as its effects. Precisely because the three writers are not kynics in a classical sense, we can apprehend their projects as different manifestations of a kynical attitude, germane to a particular cultural milieu and specific to a particular aesthetic project. 'Kynical attitude' describes resemblance as an effect not a cause.

There are four reasons for using Diogenes as a dark precursor for Borges, Beckett and Coetzee, and for considering the concept of the 'dark precursor' appropriate and relevant. First, it permits us to consider the heterogeneous 'kynical attitude' of Borges, Beckett and Coetzee via an antecedent that will not assume the function of an ancestor. Their kynical attitudes differ from Diogenes's (and each other's) but are only discernible in this difference. Second, the kynical cosmopolitanism we are tracing as the 'dark half' of stoic cosmopolitanism functions only by virtue of its difference to stoic cosmopolitanism. Although we are tracing a double genealogy for the two terms,

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[35] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2004), 145.
[36] Ibid.

kynical cosmopolitanism does not have substance, history or a definite progression. It is pure occurrence: local, isolated and ill-disposed to treatment by an overarching meta-narrative. Deleuze's preoccupation with this non-hierarchical, non-historical presentation of difference gives us a narrative tool for discussing kynical cosmopolitans in a way that allows for a necessary meta-narrative, while remaining wary of its potential collapse into an eschatology. Third, Deleuze's discussion of the 'dark precursor', tellingly concluded with an allusion to Borges, is anticipated by Borges's notion of precursorship, as raised in his essay 'Kafka y sus precursores [Kafka and his Precursors]'. 'Each writer', writes Borges, 'creates his own precursors' (*TL* 365). Deleuze's elaboration is important because influence in Borges's essay simply reverts to a retrospective effect, where Deleuze extends precursorship to the topic of causality: it is a causeless effect, without influence. This thesis considers what Diogenes brings into relief when Borges, Beckett and Coetzee are discussed as kynical cosmopolitans. It does not read traces of Borges, Beckett or Coetzee back into Diogenes. Nor does it excavate a direct influence of the kynics in the modern world. Instead, it attempts to recall, especially at moments in which it calls most explicitly on the priority of Diogenes, the insight of Maurice Blanchot about Greek myth in *The Writing of the Disaster*:

> The Greek myths do not, generally, say anything; they are seductive because of a concealed, oracular wisdom which elicits the infinite process of divining. What we call meaning, or indeed sign, is foreign to them: they signal without signifying; they show, or they hide, but they are always clear, for they always speak the transparent mystery, or the mystery of transparence.[37]

Diogenes does not say anything about Borges, Beckett and Coetzee, in and of himself. He does not signify or mean. Like any of the works of Borges, Beckett or Coetzee, Diogenes seduces with his incompleteness; his openness to interpretation or divination.

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[37] Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Anne Smock (Lincoln: Nebraska UP, 1995), 126-7.

As much as it reminds us of the dangers in reading modern subjectivity back into Greek myth and Greek philosophy, this insight also warns against 'deep' readings of works. Such 'deep' readings may impute too much 'meaning' to the work. Moreover, it is a warning that Borges, Beckett and Coetzee also raise allegorically in their work. Inspector Lönnrot falls into Red Scharlach's trap in Borges's 'El muerte y la brújula [Death and the Compass]' because he sees a Kabbalistic meaning in the seemingly random murders across a Paris/Buenos Aires cityscape. Lönnrot does not realise that Red Scharlach has orchestrated the Kabbalistic 'meaning' of the murders solely in order to lure him into an ambush. Moran, the certain father/investigator in pursuit of the feckless writer Molloy in Beckett's *Molloy*, is convinced he sees signs of Molloy's passing at every turn. During his journey, he degenerates into Molloy's double, so that eventually he vacillates about verifiable narratives with a Molloy-like indeterminacy: 'It is midnight. Rain is beating against the window. It was not midnight. It was not raining' (*SB2* 184). In Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K.*, the Medical Officer observes Michael K.'s decision not to eat or speak with increasing levels of anxiety. His narrative breaks off with the imaginary projection of a ridiculous pursuit of K., where K. need only lift one arm or another to indicate whether the officer's 'interpretation' has been correct or not. For each hermeneutist, the self-evident cannot rest on the surface; it must be granted significance.

The failure of hermeneutics in each example stems from the refusal to allow signals to remain on the surface; they must become signs, signifying something, and it is this 'forcing' of signification that leads to the undoing of the hermeneutist. It is a thematic trend in the creative work of Borges, Beckett and Coetzee that the hermeneutist is undone by a bifurcation of signal and signification.[38] Samuel Durrant

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[38] Following Blanchot quoted above, 'signal' is used rather than the more conventional 'signifier' because the undoing of the hermeneutist 'signals' the arbitrary connection between signifier and signified, without necessarily 'signifying' anything.

has suggested of Coetzee's 'Eight Ways of Looking at Samuel Beckett' that it is the account of a Cartesian Beckett in search of a monad, a unified body-subject.[39] This observation holds for exploratory unities in all three writers. The desire for integrity between the subject and its body is evident in Borges's librarian-turned-knife-fighter, Beckett's intellectual-turned-tramp and Coetzee's academic-turned-dog-man.[40] However, they always treat with some skepticism any absolution from thinking achieved through the pure mechanics of the body, whether through violence, habit or physical exertion. Diogenes, in this respect, serves as an interesting model because his body becomes the site of his thought, when he uses it to articulate 'truths' in specific social settings.

We opened this discussion by considering how the difference between 'greatness' and a 'merely cynical cosmopolitanism' might be discerned in steadiness and sincerity. We supplemented the distinction by thinking about how cosmopolitanism may not be cynical (i.e. it may be stoic), and, when it is cynical, how this cynicism may not be a disinterest in ideology but an engagement with the material conditions resulting from ideology (i.e. it may be kynical). By interfacing the dialectic of stoic and cynical cosmopolitanism with the dialectic of cynic and kynic, we can postulate three forms of cosmopolitanism. Stoic cosmopolitanism is marked by a holistic ethos of worldliness, or a sense of belonging both to a locality and to a world state or system. Cynical cosmopolitanism disparages this sense of belonging, by exposing it as an ideological structure that reinforces certain hegemonic inequalities. But, in assuming the position of judgment, it risks disavowing its own complicity with these structures. Finally, kynical cosmopolitanism integrates its critique of ideological structures of belonging with a

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[39] Samuel Durrant, 'Eight Ways of Looking at Samuel Beckett', Presentation at *Quilting Points Reading Group* (Leeds, 2012).

[40] Here I refer to types that recur throughout Borges, Beckett and Coetzee, although the specific examples refer to Juan Dahlmann from Borges's 'El sur [The South]', Vladimir and Estragon from Beckett's *En attendant Godot* [*Waiting for Godot*] and David Lurie from Coetzee's *Disgrace*.

reflexive critique of its complicity. It justifies its double critique through a consistency of action that keeps true to an idea of truth, without attempting to define what this truth might be. So if we provisionally assigned Borges, Beckett and Coetzee to a negative form of cosmopolitanism, rather than 'stoic cosmopolitanism', it becomes our task to decide whether they are cynical, kynical or some combination of the two.

Our concept of a kynical cosmopolitan is necessarily grounded in a socio-political structure. An example of such a structure is described in the character constellation of David Lurie, Lucy, Ettinger and Petrus in *Disgrace*. We do not ascribe an allegorical intention to *Disgrace*, since we hesitate in attributing any direct allegorical significance to Coetzee's work.[41] We merely explain, using *Disgrace*, what it is we mean when we use the term kynical cosmopolitan. The descriptive moment occurs after the focalising consciousness of the book, the disgraced academic David Lurie, has survived an attack on his daughter's farmhouse in which she, Lucy, has been raped. It is the moment when David is contemplating Petrus, Lucy's employee and neighbour, and his possible role in 'the new world they live in' (*D* 117). David, who speaks French and Italian, is a cosmopolitan in the stoic sense of a 'man of the world'. By contrast, Petrus and Lucy's other neighbour, Ettinger, both peasants, are rooted in the soil, albeit that Ettinger, a German, has less ancestral right to this soil than Petrus, a Xhosa-speaking Black South African. Lucy, by comparison, is described by David as 'chickenfeed: an amateur, an enthusiast of the farming life rather than a farmer' (*D* 117). 'Lucy is *merely a transient*; Ettinger is another peasant, a man of the earth, tenacious, *eingewurzelt*' (*D* 117; first emphasis ours). The pattern set out here is of the threat posed by the rooted to both rooted and unrooted as interpreted in the anthropology of the man of the world. Petrus, the 'stony' threat, will easily sweep aside Lucy, who is unrooted. 'Ettinger will

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[41] Derek Attridge, *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (Chicago, London: Chicago UP, 2004).

be a harder nut to crack' because he *is* rooted, despite his European origins. But, because that root has not produced similarly rooted offspring, Ettinger will be 'unrooted' when he dies. Thus, according to David, things will eventually and inevitably pass to Petrus. Property rights pass from the idealists (the Luries) to the realists (Petrus and Ettinger), but only those realists who can perpetuate their roots with seed can retain these rights (Petrus). David, only tangentially involved from his position as a 'man of the world', nevertheless believes he can understand this relation because he 'understands' that 'country life has *always been* a matter of neighbours scheming against each other', that the 'real truth' behind the attack 'is something more [...] *anthropological*' (*D* 118; first emphasis ours). In the 'country life' in 'the new world', there is a place for David (as commentator), Petrus (as recipient in the 'new order') and Ettinger (as unwilling dinosaur of the 'old order') but only a function for Lucy, since her property rights are so easily passed over. We argue, however, that it is Lucy who is the kynical cosmopolitan in this moment, though David will eventually develop aspects of the kynical cosmopolitan towards the end of the novel. By being merely a transient, Lucy avoids the imbroglio of land-ownership and the exclusive disjunctive syllogism (*either-or*) implicit in defining rootedness *or* unrootedness. Lucy, for David Lurie, is 'merely a transient' compared with Ettinger who has a more 'essential' link to the soil and she needs to realise this (i.e. become more like David). Yet, the novel suggests that Lucy's 'mere transiency' is more grounded in the realities of her situation than Ettinger's 'essential' adherence to a tradition of white land ownership in South Africa or David's understanding of the anthropology of country life. Lucy, seen by David to be a cosmopolitan by virtue of their *shared* transiency and opposition to nationalist rhetoric, is all the more kynically cosmopolitan for being able to give up her adherence to traditions of ownership by ceding her property rights to Petrus and becoming transient in a way that David cannot understand. 'Mere transiency', although intended as a

description of a shallow relationship by the deep-thinking David, becomes the means by which Lucy is able to live closer to the ground, 'like a dog'. Here we should not think of Lucy's pregnancy as the augury of a coming community – a standard trope in narratives seeking to instantiate a new nationalist future. The child, whom Lucy does not yet love, is less the cipher for some imagined community to come than a hostage to confirm Petrus's good faith. Lucy is not seeking to create a community; she is simply seeking for the means to live within the community in which she already lives.

One might find correlative kynical allegories in Beckett (*Novellas*) or Borges (*Ficciones*). But this thesis will not trace the idealised figure of the kynical cosmopolitan in the works of Borges, Beckett and Coetzee. The concern is to show how Borges, Beckett and Coetzee are themselves kynical cosmopolitans, of an etiolated, artistic sort, that communicate their kynical cosmopolitanism through their *style*. By style, we mean those impulses or habits of writing that accumulate in an oeuvre to distinguish the voice of a writer and associate that voice and that writer with a particular proper name (as an intratextual designation of a body of texts, a persona, or a textual practice and an extratextual commodity and figure of celebrity). A kynical style, then, would describe a style that has been trained or modulated by *askēsis* (practice of self-discipline), in which a writer exploits those impulses or habits that distinguish his or her voice to lay bare three practices: the aesthetic tradition to which they adhere, the community politics to which they respond and the rhetorical devices which particularly concern them. Foucault identifies this as a quality of modern art not least because modernist art is concerned primarily with stripping away its pretensions. Stripping away, as prevalent in critics as in artists, is evident in our general understanding of Borges and Beckett as writers who respond to the influence of James Joyce, even as Coetzee is generally accepted as a writer who responds to Beckett's influence. 'Response' is also an attempt to strip away this influence. But, since stripping away

another artist's influence on one's style is also the intensification of whatever is distinctive about that style, stripping away influence will not simply result in baring the material practice to critical scrutiny. The authors consciously exploit style to represent their own material practices of writing and performing. We will argue that the examples represent those moments where a career-long stylistic trend intensifies in the material practice of Borges, Beckett and Coetzee. Rather than reading the texts as organic wholes or as self-parody, we will show how the texts involve a plastic modification of stylistic preoccupations. They are exemplary of a shared tendency to redouble dominant stylistic concerns. They are often marked as texts that are typical of Borges, Beckett or Coetzee, precisely because they intensify recurrent concerns to allow a retrospective reading of the oeuvre in which this was always already what the oeuvre was about. Thus, if we follow Mercedes Blanco and Jaime Alzakaris in noting Borges's preoccupation with metaphor or enumeration, or Anthony Uhlmann and Sarah West in reading Beckett as increasingly concerned with the image or the voice, or Julian Murphet in observing Coetzee's interest in rhetoric, we can derive a trend in criticism to follow writers in reading their oeuvres as always already concerned with those stylistic devices that, by the late work, have become dominant.[42]

We focus on work written by a Borges in his late fifties when he was already blind, on plays written to order by a Beckett in his late seventies, on lectures and essays written by a Coetzee whose career has reached its apogee (with *Disgrace*) and who is in transition, physically and emotionally, from South Africa. They are all then fairly late works. Edward Said wrote that at the end of the lives of great artists 'their work and

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[42] Mercedes Blanco, 'Borges y la metáfora', *Variaciones Borges*, Vol. 9 (2000); Jaime Alazraki, 'Enumerations as Evocations: On the Use of a Device in Borges' Latest Poetry', *Borges the Poet*, ed. Carlos Cortínez (Fayetteville: Arkansas UP, 1986); Anthony Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 15; Sarah West, *Say It: The Performative Voice in the Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010); Julian Murphet, '*Diary of a Bad Year*: *Parrhesia*, Opinion, and Novelistic Form', *Strong Opinions: J.M. Coetzee and the Authority of Contemporary Fiction*, eds. Chris Danta, Julian Murphet, and Sue Kossew (London: Continuum, 2011).

thought acquires a new idiom, what I shall be calling a late style'.[43] This late style coincides with 'the last or late period of life, the decay of the body, the onset of ill health or other factors that [...] bring on the possibility of an untimely end'.[44] Deriving his term from Adorno's essay on Beethoven's late style, Said addresses 'late style' as 'a moment when the artist who is fully in command of his medium nevertheless abandons communication with the established social order of which he is a part and achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship with it'.[45] Is all late style kynical, if it 'achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship' to 'the established social order'? Perhaps, but this sense of late style might as easily be applied to any and all of the works by Borges, Beckett and Coetzee. Reading late style as a response to mortality is similarly dissatisfying. Rather, we will see that late style is characterised thematically by a self-reflexive casting of the author in a variety of roles, formally by a concern with the reception of the work, and structurally by a series of technical devices that function in a non-sublative dialectic and will not synthesise into a harmonious whole.

If the works are thematically concerned with authorial self-fashioning, this also explains why they form themselves around a demonstrable concern with the nature of their audiences. By form, we simply mean the way they are presented or communicated to their public. Borges frames *El hacedor* (1960) with a preface and an epilogue that stress the work's autobiographical nature and its contingency (it is compiled of poems written over years, rather than poems written with a book in mind) to an existing audience of Borges readers. By contrast, Beckett writes *Ohio Impromptu* (1981), *Catastrophe* (1982) and *What Where* (1983) by request and for particular occasions, the composition of the audience of which he can predict. Finally, Coetzee compiles *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) from a series of lectures given in response to invitations to

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[43] Edward W. Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature against the Grain*, Fwd. Mariam C. Said, Intro. Michael Wood (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 6.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid, 8.

perform the role of the public intellectual. He augments these oral responses with a series of 'Strong Opinions', framed by a narrative that will call into question the person behind these strong opinions, in the novel *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007).

These interventions need to challenge their audiences without alienating them completely. In other words, there is an inherently plastic relationship between their stylistic continuities and their interruption of the reader's or spectator's expectations about that continuity. So our chapters are structured around particular techniques that are recurrent concerns across their oeuvres, which reach a greater level of intensity in the particular works under discussion. Moreover, this development of technique, with its particular relationship to habit, will allow us to conclude that their cosmopolitanism is properly plastic.[46] For now, however, we should introduce, by means of example, what we mean by a kynical cosmopolitan style in Borges, Beckett and Coetzee.

In an essay that has become more quoted than read, Borges once sketched out the efforts to create a synthetic language by a 17th century speculative philosopher. 'In the universal language conceived by Wilkins […] each word defines itself' (*TL* 230). 'He divided the universe into forty categories or classes, which he then divided into differences, and subdivided in turn into species' (*TL* 230). Each species is given a vowel, each difference a consonant, each class a monosyllable of two letters. After enumerating a number of exemplary words constructed in this universal language, Borges demonstrates its inadequacy by likening it to an encyclopaedia. Suppose, he asks, we were to think of a certain Chinese encyclopaedia, which had a completely

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[46] We will conclude with Catherine Malabou's notion of plastic cosmopolitanism, rather than posit it now, because this cosmopolitanism arrives as a consequence of our findings about style, politics and artistic practice. Of plasticity, Malabou writes:

> the capacity for self re-form. Is this not the best possible definition of plasticity: the relation that an individual entertains with what, on the one hand, attaches him originally to himself, to his proper form, and with what, on the other hand, allows him to launch himself into the void of all identity, to abandon all rigid and fixed determination? Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do With Our Brain?* trans. Sebastian Rand (New York: Fordham UP, 2008), 80.

different and, some might say, irrational system of classification. He demonstrates the apparent irrationality by enumerating a series of categories that do not appear to have a single conceptual base. Just supposing such a system of classification erodes our certainty about a 'universal' system of classification, because we, within the system, are incapable of verifying it as if we were outside of the system: 'we do not know what the universe is' (*TL* 231). Borges responds to the impasse in a system of universal enumeration by using a metaphor to juxtapose it to another system. He responds to the impasse in the metaphor by using enumeration to make the second system demonstrably absurd. Metaphor and enumeration become the means by which he pushes through impasses of stoic knowledge (i.e. the confirmation of universal systems of knowledge), without simply cynically disregarding these systems of knowledge: 'the impossibility of penetrating the divine scheme of the universe cannot, however, dissuade us from planning human schemes, even though it is clear they are provisional' (*TL* 231). He is cosmopolitan because he engages with universal systems; he is kynical because he demonstrates their invalidity, or, better, provisionality.

'All Strange Away', the peculiar 1964 'rotunda' text that heralds a transition in Beckett's prose, begins with the creation of place and person. It opens: 'Imagination dead imagine. A place, that again. Never another question. A place, then someone in it, that again. Crawl out of the frowsy deathbed and drag it to a place to die in' (*SB4* 349). Place must be established, but this place is contingent or provisional. Person, too, must be established, to warrant place, but this too must be contingent or provisional. If the absence of imagination, or the death of imagination, is itself to be imagined, this imagining process must still take place in an image of place and person. No sooner has the imagination formed this image than the voice interrupts with the disparaging coda, 'that again'. 'That again' affirms the contingency of the image of place and person by distinguishing a narrative voice from the situation. Nevertheless, the voice only

functions by virtue of its relation to the image of place and person. Beckett is more concerned with an aesthetic consistency to imagining 'imagination dead' than with an *a priori* system of knowledge. We can establish that Beckett's thought requires a place and a person, but it will not accord either place or person the illusion of reality for more than a moment. Giving thought a place is a cosmopolitan idea, since cosmopolitanism establishes thought in relation to place. But disbelieving in that place means that it cannot be a stoic cosmopolitanism, because stoic cosmopolitanism seeks to establish a harmonious relationship between thought and place. Given that the cynical response would be simply to disparage the need for place, without attempting to establish it (albeit momentarily), Beckett's aesthetic rigour shows him to be kynical. The dialectic between image and voice in these opening lines suggests too much hard work to be a 'mere' cynicism.

In *Disgrace*, Coetzee's bathetic solution to the political dilemma facing post-Apartheid South Africa seems to be Lucy's 'mere transience': her willingness to forego land ownership marks her as kynical. However, if 'mere transience' is a solution to political inequalities, either we must dismiss the qualification 'mere' as a ploy to disguise Lucy's 'deeper' significance or Coetzee's rhetoric deconstructs distinctions between 'surface' and 'depth'. By adopting the latter interpretation, and dismissing the pejorative connotations of 'superficial', we open up the possibility that Coetzee, in his kynical cosmopolitanism, constructs a system of knowledge where the need to act is patent, the action required obvious, and the only dilemma is whether we are prepared to put into practice what our reason tells us.[47] Coetzee's characters speak and opine when they should 'merely' act. 'Mere act', which must be distinguished from 'bare act', is an act that is sufficient in and of itself, without an investment of either hyperbole or pathos.

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[47] See Chapter 1, 41.

Instead of 'bare acts', which tend towards a hyperbole of the negative, Coetzee's 'mere acts' invest negative rhetoric with litotes and bathos.

In our first chapter we will examine cosmopolitanism and cynicism in work by Borges, Beckett and Coetzee. In addition to those references to cosmopolitanism and cynicism the three writers make in their critical and creative oeuvres, we will draw on five scenes from Diogenes Laertius's account of Diogenes of Sinope to sketch out comparable concerns of Borges, Beckett and Coetzee. By taking these scenes as illustrative of a particular stance to politics, aesthetics and subjectivity, we will indicate how the three writers gesture in heterogeneous ways to a similar attitude to the position of the writer in relation to his world, his work and his understanding of subjectivity.

In our second chapter we will elaborate on how the concept of the kynical cosmopolitan plays across political and aesthetic concerns in Borges's *El hacedor* (*The Maker*; 1960). By contrasting Borges's ongoing engagement with metaphor and enumeration in his criticism with their appearance in *El hacedor*, we will show how Borges's kynicism occurs on a structural level within his artistic self-representations through an aesthetic act.

In our third chapter we will show how Alan Schneider's triptych of Beckett's *Ohio Impromptu*, *Catastrophe* and *What Where*, performed in the Harold Clurman theatre in 1983, stages a kynical cosmopolitanism. By demonstrating how images and voices in this triptych are consistent with a career-long development of the image and the voice by Beckett, we will argue that Beckett creates a structural kynicism in his artistic self-representations through these theatrical acts.

In our fourth chapter we will argue that the figure of the kynical cosmopolitan is critical to understanding Coetzee's ambivalence about the role of the writer, as creator of fiction on the one hand and public intellectual on the other, in *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) and *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007). By examining Coetzee's use of the words

'mere' and 'merely' in conjunction with his exploitation of genre, we will demonstrate how he raises concerns about surfaces and depth in his consideration of mere acts.

We began this introduction with the incongruous presence of Chesterton and Kipling, two of Borges's favourite writers. It is perhaps fitting to close, as Borges closes 'The Analytical Language of John Wilkins', with Chesterton's thoughts on language: a prescient consideration of the impasse at the heart of kynical cosmopolitanism in Borges, Beckett and Coetzee.

> Man knows that there are in the soul tints more bewildering, more numberless, and more nameless than the colours of an autumn forest… Yet he seriously believes that these things can every one of them, in all their tones and semi-tones, in all their blends and unions, be accurately represented by an arbitrary system of grunts and squeals. He believes that an ordinary civilised stockbroker can really produce out of his own inside noises which denote all the mysteries of memory and all the agonies of desire. (*TL* 232)

This thesis will track the way in which Borges, Beckett and Coetzee rigorously and consistently face an impasse between 'tints of the soul' and the expression of these tints in an arbitrary system of grunts and squeals. The way they face this impasse will show them to be kynical cosmopolitans.

Chapter 1
Kynical Precursorship in Borges, Beckett and Coetzee

In this chapter, we will examine kynical cosmopolitanism in work by Jorge Luis Borges, Samuel Beckett and J.M. Coetzee. First, we will consider the three writers' responses to a stoic form of cosmopolitanism. Each of the writers has made overt or implicit reference to cosmopolitanism, which they understand in the 'stoic' sense. However, these utterances also disclose a kynical disapproval with the stoic system of cosmopolitanism. By reading them as tacit critiques, we will uncover a kynical trend in their treatment of cosmopolitanism.

Second, we will review those references to the ancient kynics and contemporary cynicism in Borges, Beckett and Coetzee. To explain what they *do* as kynical cosmopolitans, we will establish how they refer to the kynics, kynicism and cynicism in their writings. This will provide us with historical and analogous bases for using notions of kynicism and cynicism to reflect on the cosmopolitanisms of Borges, Beckett and Coetzee. But it will also prepare us for our subsequent explorations into their kynical acts in their work, acts which will distinguish them as kynical even if they themselves are not kynics (in the ancient sense of the word).

Third, we will begin to address their reception of a larger artistic tradition. We will compare two notions of reception to establish the basis for these relationships: stoic tradition and kynical precursorship. In our Introduction, we argued that cosmopolitans are stoic, cynical or kynical, and that Borges, Beckett and Coetzee are kynical. In this chapter, we will find literary forebears are treated stoically or kynically (cynicism, since it dismisses influence, will not feature in our discussion), and that Borges, Beckett and Coetzee treat their precursors kynically. To illustrate the distinction between stoic and

kynical antecedents, we will compare Borges's notion of precursorship to T.S. Eliot's notion of tradition.

Finally, we will consider the direct and indirect relationships between these three authors, via the lens of this kynical precursorship. Although Beckett's influence on Coetzee has been well documented, discussion of Borges's influence on Coetzee has, thus far, been limited to generic comments on postmodernism, while efforts to construct a correspondence between Beckett and Borges have been frustrated by their apparent lack of critical commentary on each other. To turn 'influence' to kynical effect, we look for moments where each writer treats the others kynically.

A Stoic Cosmopolitanism?

In our Introduction, we made the bold claim that cosmopolitanism comes in three forms (stoic, cynical and kynical) across two modalities (positive and negative). We will show these forms and modalities at work in the comments Borges, Beckett and Coetzee make on cosmopolitanism, or cosmopolitan ethics. In reading these comments, we will find that a dialectic emerges. The three writers refer to what we have called a 'stoic cosmopolitanism'. They highlight its systemic potential as a form of world-governance. But in these references, we can also trace an immanent critique of this system. Even if they use the word 'cosmopolitanism' to refer to its 'stoic' form, the writers are critical of this stoicism in a way that we identify as kynical. In this section, we will counterpoint references to 'stoic' cosmopolitanism with brief asides to reveal that their cosmopolitan ideologies are less stoic than kynical.

Borges provides us with a starting point, since he misidentifies cosmopolitanism as a stoic 'neologism' and explicates it within stoic terms of world citizenship. Stoic cosmopolitanism, according to Borges, 'signifies the generous ambition to want to be sensitive to all countries and all epochs, the desire for eternity, the desire to have been

many, which has brought about the theory of the transmigration of souls'.[1] The stoic

belief Borges refers to here is a belief in the trans-historical continuity of form; the stoic

ideal is a universal continuity of presence, of awareness and of sensitivity. However,

Borges's cosmopolitan is always an exception to the standing order, which is, all too

often, not sensitive to all countries (space) or all epochs (time):

> We should consider what that [the word 'cosmopolitan'] means, we should
> consider that the Greeks defined themselves by the city in which they were
> born: Zeno of Elea, Thales of Miletus, later Apollonius of Rhodes and we
> should consider how strange it was that some of the stoics should want to
> change that and call themselves not citizens of a country, as miserably we
> still say, but citizens of the cosmos, citizens of the globe, of the universe, if
> it is that this universe is a cosmos and not a chaos as it often seems to be.[2]

If the stoic cosmos indicates a universal order, Borges introduces it as dialectically

linked to chaos. But Borges does not propose a stoic overcoming of chaos by cosmos.

Writing on the eve of Argentina's 1983 democratic elections, after seven years of rule

by the Junta with its *Guerra Sucia* [Dirty War] against the civilian population, Borges

observes that it is 'almost a blasphemy to think that what was given to us on that date

[the democratic election] is the victory of one party and the defeat of the other. We

faced a chaos which, that day, made the decision to be a cosmos' (*TR3* 307). This

miraculous transition from dictatorship (chaos) to democracy (cosmos) overcomes, with

'an act of faith', the illogical with the logical. However, Borges does not

unconditionally accept this stoic logic, since he qualifies his statement by declaring 'my

utopia continues to be a country or a world without a state, or with the minimum of a

state, but I understand, not without sadness, that this utopia is premature' (*TR3* 307).

Borges's apparent stoicism is undercut by his disavowal of a world state. Despite his

celebration of the cosmos, we find a veiled repetition of the difference between the

European and the Argentinian, given in 'Nuestro Pobre Individualismo [Our Poor

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[1] Borges, 'Homenaje a Victoria Ocampo', *Borges en Sur: 1931-1980* (Buenos Aires: Emecé S.A., 1999), 327.
[2] Ibid, 326.

Individualism]' in *Otras Inquisiciones* [*Other Inquisitions*] thirty years before: 'The world, for the European, is a cosmos in which each person fits intimately with their function; for the Argentinian, it is a chaos' (*OC2* 40). While the Argentinian is capable of a miraculous transformation from chaos to cosmos, this transition comes at the expense of utopia, which operates outside of the state.[3]

'Cosmos' becomes properly dialectical when Borges shifts his thoughts on democracy between 1976 and 1983. He closes his prologue to the poetry collection *La moneda de hierro* [*The Money of Iron*], dated 27th of July 1976, with habitual disavowal and damnation: 'I know myself above all unworthy to comment on political material, but perhaps I may be pardoned for adding that I do not believe in democracy, that curious abuse of statistics' (*OC3* 136). Yet, he begins the aforementioned 'The Ultimate Sunday of October' by recanting this statement: 'I once wrote that democracy is an abuse of statistics; I have invoked that opinion of Carlyle many times, that he defined it as chaos armed with ballot boxes. On the 30th of October of 1983, Argentine democracy refuted me splendidly' (*TR3* 307). Martín Plot attaches some significance to this

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[3] Borges almost certainly derives this binary from the division between 'civilisation' and 'barbarism' in the 'founding' text of Argentinian letters, Domingo Sarmiento's 1845 biography, *Facundo o Civilización y Barbarie en las pampas argentinas* [*Facundo; Or Civilisation and Barbarism on the Argentine Pampas*]. Borges's own gloss on this division, in his 1974 prologue to Facundo, is revealing:

> *Facundo* presents us with a dilemma [disyuntiva] – civilization or barbarism – which is applicable, I judge accordingly, to the entire process of our history. For Sarmiento, barbarism was the plains of the aboriginal tribes and of the gaucho; civilisation, the cities. The gaucho has been replaced by colonials and workers; barbarism is not only in the countryside but in the plebiscite of the greatest cities and the demagogue fulfils the function of the old *caudillo*, who was also a demagogue. (*OC4* 135)

Civilisation, like the cosmos, always risks collapsing to the forces of 'barbarism' or chaos. Borges's political conservatism in this regard is no more apparent than in his judgment that 'barbarism is not only in the countryside' and his references to the 'demagogue' and the '*caudillo*'. The *caudillo*, loosely translatable as 'chief' or 'boss', is a term for a figure in Argentinian history and literature who harnesses the 'forces of barbarism' to his own ends through charisma and violence. The historical proximity of Borges's *Facundo* prologue with Juan Perón's return to power in 1973, when considered alongside the antipathy Borges felt for Perón, supports a reading of Borges's comments on the *caudillo* as correlative to his criticisms of Perón as a figure of Argentinian barbarism. However, the prologue also recalls a division that operates from the very 'beginning' of Argentinian letters.

admission.[4] For Plot, the essential distinction to be made is between politics, which did not interest Borges, and the political, 'the form of society and not only the specific institutions and contingencies that characterize the sphere of politics in a given body politic'.[5] Plot shows that Borges, in refuting the previous denunciation of democracy, is consistent with his essays of the 1940s, which condemn Nazism and totalitarianism. Plot's argument is convincing, and might suggest that Borges is committed to a stoic recuperation of order from chaos. But two kynical points emerge in Borges's notion of cosmopolitanism. First, the ideality of this cosmopolitanism is inconsistent with Borges's notion of a historical generic. Second, in his openness to refutation, Borges suggests a problem with preconceived cosmopolitan ethics, since the surprising cosmos generated by historical events in 1983 refutes his earlier elitist cosmopolitanism, again by virtue of the historical generic. According to the historical generic, Borges's cosmopolitanism seems less a belief in the transmigration of souls, which progresses successively and linearly, than the retrospective emergence of a series of historical eruptions, held together by a subject. Cosmos is not order because it follows a stoic world system; cosmos is order because it is redeemed from chaos by the faithful act of a kynical subject.[6] We will return to this redemption when we unpack Borges's 'historical generic' in our discussion of his kynicism.

If Borges's fractious relationship with Argentinian politics differentiates him from the stoic cosmopolitanism he talks about (we explore this relationship in detail in Chapter 2), Beckett's understanding of cosmopolitanism must be introduced via his early satiric deprecations of the bourgeoisie. Beckett's earliest work is marked by this satiric bent. His first presentation to Trinity College's French department was a mock-

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[4] Martín Plot, 'Tlön as Political Form: Democracy and Totalitarianism in Borges and Lefort', *Constellations*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (2012).

[5] Ibid, 463.

[6] My thoughts on Borges's historical generic are indebted to Alain Badiou's phenomenology of the subject in *Logics of Worlds*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009).

analysis of the fictional artist, Jean du Chas: founder of the 'art-movement', 'Concentrisme [Concentrism]' (*Disj* 35). His earliest dramatic contribution was to the 1931 Trinity College parody of Corneille's *Le Cid*, *Le Kid*.[7] His earliest novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, parodies the bourgeois sensibilities the protagonist Belacqua encounters in his dreams across Dublin, Vienna and Paris.[8] But it is in Beckett's essay in *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* (1929), 'Dante . . . Bruno. Vico . . Joyce', that we find his kynical antagonism to bourgeois sensibility combined with some thoughts on cosmopolitanism.

In 'Dante . . . Bruno. Vico . . Joyce', Beckett addresses the 'Ladies and Gentlemen' readers of Joyce's *Work in Progress*, as 'too decadent to receive it. You are not satisfied unless form is so strictly divorced from content that you can comprehend the one almost without bothering to read the other' (*SB4* 502-3). He then goes on to coin the famous dictum: 'Here form *is* content, content *is* form' (*SB4* 503). He is addressing a complaint raised by potential uncomprehending readers: 'You complain that this stuff is not written in English' (*SB4* 503). He responds: 'It is not written at all. It is not to be read – or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*' (*SB4* 503). The value of Joyce's writing, for Beckett, is not its capacity to represent, but its capacity to demonstrate. His justification for his support comes from the linguistic aspirations Joyce's project shares with Dante's *De Vulgari Eloquentia* [*On Eloquence in the Vernacular*].

Beckett quotes *De Vulgari Eloquentia* in support of Dante's (and Joyce's) 'complete freedom from civic intolerance' and as an attack on 'the world's Portadownians':

> For whoever is so misguided as to think that the place of his birth is the
> most delightful spot under the sun may also believe that his own language

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[7] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press. 1996), 123.
[8] Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, ed. Eoin O'Brien and Edith Fournier (Dublin: Black Cat Press, 1992).

> – his mother tongue, that is – is pre-eminent among all others; and, as a result, he may believe that his language was also Adam's. But we, whose world is our homeland [Nos autem, cui mundus est patria] ... etc. (*SB4* 506-7)[9]

Here we find a stoic opposition between the parochial and the cosmopolitan: the cosmopolitan disrupts the parochial's assumed superiority by exposing its ignorance and bias. It recalls the argument between Kipling and Chesterton at the beginning of our Introduction. But two points push Beckett's use of Dante's work on synthetic language beyond stoic cosmopolitanism.[10]

First, Beckett's use of a banal etc. suggests that the remainder of the passage says nothing substantially different or interesting. But Beckett's erasure is telling. The full quote continues with a statement of cosmopolitan purpose, where Dante invokes the world as a homeland. This invocation is central to his defence of writing in a synthesis of various vulgates, instead of either Latin (the hegemonic language of scholarship, and, ironically, the language of Dante's 'defence') or the Tuscan dialect. Beckett, on the other hand, edits Dante into a critique where a misguided love of homeland simply equates to a misguided love of home language.[11]

Beckett's challenge to language leads us to a second moment of kynical cosmopolitan interest: Beckett's use of the term 'Portadownians'. Portadown, referred to by Drew Milne as 'a town at the heart of political and religious intolerance in the north of Ireland', 'proves baffling to all but the most local readings, readings which

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[9] Translation taken from Dante Alighieri, *Dante: De Vulgari Eloquentia*, ed. and trans. Steven Botterill (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 11-13 [final line adjusted]. Similarly, Borges describes all the world as the Argentinian's *patria* in 'The Argentine Writer and Tradition'.

[10] Synthetic languages are deliberate linguistic constructions. Dante, who *creates* an Italian vulgate through a composite of the Italian dialects, is invoked as a precursor to Joyce, because they both aim to create new languages. Beckett, by contrast, is more interested in evacuating tired language of its meaning:

[11] Beckett's edit justifies not including Joyce in this study of post-Joycean writers: where Joyce writes a synthetic cosmopolitan language to 'ruric or cospolite', Beckett, Borges and Coetzee unwrite and undermine existing languages. James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* [1939] (Basingstoke: Penguin Books, 2000), 309.

mistakenly return Beckett to contexts from which he is in flight'.[12] Milne interprets this attitude as a 'modernist resistance to provincialism' that, in its specificity, 'cannot [...] be assimilated to an apolitical resistance to politics or to "the political" as such'.[13] For Milne, the resolution of the problems highlighted in 'the precarious lack of context afforded by Parisian exile' lies in Beckett's decision to write in French: 'unlike Joyce, however, Beckett came to position his writing practice within the French-speaking world, and not just within the exiled English-language communities of modernist Paris'.[14] Since 'there is a residual claim for moral agency in [Beckett's] stress on the particular amoral qualities of literary language', which 'falls short of a politics', this resolution leads Milne to the logical deduction that 'Beckett's fictions still appear less assimilable to the political narratives of literary history, perhaps because the negation of language as an ethical or aesthetic system is so central to his writing'.[15] Since he chooses to write in French in later life, but his relation to language in this choice is negative, Beckett does not identify with one side or the other in the dialectic between the parochial and the cosmopolitan. Neither does he become the proponent for a universal European internationalism (as implied by the positive endorsement of language's synthetic potential that characterises the work of Dante or Joyce). He is critical of both responses, since each is likely to develop its own 'Portadownians'.

This mutual critique corresponds to a description of Beckett's cosmopolitanism by Nels C. Pearson, for whom it

> speaks less to an idealistic post-statehood cosmopolitanism than to the postponement of national belonging that is experienced within, and in transit from, the ideologically contested, unsettled terrain of a decolonising 'homeland'.[16]

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[12] Drew Milne, 'Attacking the World's Portadownians: Beckett's Early Politics', *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 9. (2000), 281.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid, 282.

[15] Ibid, 284.

[16] Nels C. Pearson, 'Beckett's Cosmopolitan Ground', *Irish University Review: a Journal of Irish Studies* (Autumn/Winter 2010), Abstract.

For Pearson, Beckett's cosmopolitanism is neither fully stoic, 'idealistic post-statehood', nor cynical, since it endorses a contestation of ideology. It occupies a kynical cosmopolitan space between stoicism and cynicism since it suspends modes of belonging. However, Pearson's use of 'postponement' suggests a weak messianism, in which national belonging may eventually be realised (as happened in the Republic of Ireland's celebrations during the Beckett centenary in 2006). Contrary to Pearson, Beckett's cosmopolitanism is characterised by a resistance to the violence inherent in systemic modes of reasoning, without recourse to this messianism.[17]

Beckett manifests this resistance since he is less concerned with the accumulation of allegorical significance than with a human figure unencumbered by 'unimportant accidentals'. 'Whether somebody has got a nice suit or not […] has nothing to do with his essential soul. And therefore if you put him into a tramp's clothes, people don't think about the suit'.[18] P.J. Murphy shows how Beckett's tramps reconfigure our understanding of this relationship between self and world in *Reconstructing Beckett*.[19] Murphy argues that

> a radically new interpretation of Beckett's prose would be possible if we
> proceeded from the ultimately more defensible assumption that he is trying
> to discover new means of integrating self and fiction and word and world,
> rather than being guided by the need to deny the power of the words to
> express, the so-called art of failure which has fascinated so many Beckett
> critics.[20]

Murphy traces Beckett's innovations of form in prose after *L'Innommable* (1953), noting particularly of *Textes pour rien* [*Texts for Nothing*] (1956), 'There is an

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[17] Ruby Cohn links Beckett to Joyce on the question of cosmopolitanism. Cohn differentiates Joyce, for whom 'Dublin becomes a cosmos', from Beckett, for whom the cosmos is 'always the monotonous human habitat': 'Joyce attempting to embrace all knowledge, all experience, all language; Beckett doubting all knowledge, all experience, all language, and doubting even the Cartesian tradition of doubt'. Ruby Cohn, 'Irish Cosmopolitans: Joyce and Beckett', *James Joyce Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1971), 390; 391.

[18] Martin Esslin, 'On his debt to Joyce', *Beckett Remembering/Remembering Beckett: A Centenary Celebration*, eds. James and Elizabeth Knowlson (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2006), 49.

[19] P.J. Murphy, *Reconstructing Beckett: Language for Being in Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1990).

[20] Ibid, xv.

unmistakeable turning towards the world and the fundamental problem of relocating the self which has fallen into the no-man's land of fictional being'.[21] Contrary to many critics, Murphy argues that *Texts for Nothing* are not 'failures' but an attempt to use language and rhetoric to 'integrate this self with the world'.[22] Like the philosopher Alain Badiou, Murphy suggests a shift in Beckett scholarship away from Beckett as an 'artist of failure' towards a more affirmatory Beckett.[23] The difference between Badiou and Murphy lies in Murphy's appeal to 'reconstructing' a link between self and world, where Badiou would understand the self/subject to be constructed *by* a new world brought into being by an event. Beckett falls somewhere between these points: however influenced he might be by Badiou's artistic Event, Beckett is not an artist who constructs a utopian system; rather, he finds ways of creating art in an already existing world. Ultimately this is not done to reconstruct a link with the world, but to *expose* the flaccidity of claims that such a link ever ceased to exist.[24]

Beckett's kynical cosmopolitan impulse to expose some already existing thing is found in his short radio piece about the Irish Red Cross Hospital in the town of Saint-Lô, written shortly after World War II for Radio Éireann and titled 'The Capital of the Ruins'.[25] This piece attempts to 'correct Irish parochialism' in 'sensible people who would rather have news of the Norman's semi-circular canals or resistance to sulphur than of his attitude to the Irish bringing gifts', and thus resonates with earlier attacks on Irish parochialism in *Che Sciagura* and 'Censorship in the Saorstat'.[26] But it extends

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[21] Ibid, 34.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Alain Badiou, *On Beckett*, trans. Alberto Toscano and Nina Power (London: Clinamen, 2003).

[24] 'For Beckett, the world is always already how it is'. Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1988), 44. Connor, in his recent reconsideration of Beckett and 'worlding', notes that 'the paradox of Beckett's writing is that, while he continues to try, or feint to try, to detach his characters from "the world", or to limn various forms of "little world" against the "big world" of the *polis*, a copular form of being-there is always necessary for him'. Steven Connor, *Beckett, Modernism and the Material Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014), 180.

[25] Beckett, 'The Capital of the Ruins', *As the Story was Told: Uncollected and Late Prose* (London and New York: John Calder and Riverrun Press, 1990).

[26] Dougald McMillan, 'Introduction', *As the Story was Told*, 15; Beckett, 'The Capital of the Ruins', 22.

beyond a simple polemic on parochialism when it notes that 'the therapeutic relation faded to the merest of pretexts':

> What was important was [...] the occasional glimpse [...] of that smile at human conditions as little to be extinguished by bombs as to be broadened by the elixirs of Burroughs and Welcome, – the smile deriding, among other things, the having and the not having, the giving and the taking, sickness and health [...] They got indeed what they could hardly give, a vision and sense of a time-honoured conception of humanity in ruins, and perhaps even an inkling of the terms in which our condition is to be thought again. These will have been in France.[27]

While Beckett links these observations to France, the insights are about a shared humanity that derides (without transcending) possession and lack. Thus their substance is not the revision of a ruined humanity into some utopian ideal. At best, it gives 'an inkling of the terms' needed to rethink our condition. 'What they get' is a vision of the world as it is, and what must be done for it.

Coetzee presents his kynical cosmopolitanism in similarly pragmatic terms, as we will find in two presentations given twenty-seven years apart: Coetzee's 1981 CNA Prize Speech and the uncharacteristically direct presentation at the 2008 literary festival Kosmopolis. Addressed to a local South African audience on the occasion of a local prize, the CNA Prize Speech might seem completely irrelevant to a speech given in Barcelona in 2008 to some transnational artists. However, a consistent ethic is present in both.

Peter McDonald's close reading of the CNA Prize Speech demonstrates Coetzee's concern with creating a provincial writer not caught between 'pitying ourselves our provincial lot, or plotting an escape to the metropolis'.[28] Coetzee's concern with provincialism, McDonald argues, proposes 'a "more constructive" alternative both to these atavistic colonialist sentiments and to the cultural nationalizer's

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[27] Ibid, 23-4; 27-8.

[28] Coetzee qtd. Peter D. McDonald, *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and its Cultural Consequences* [2009] (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 305.

politically motivated counter-project'.[29] In other words, Coetzee does not formulate the worldly cosmopolitanism of Chesterton's Kipling (see Introduction).[30] Nor does he seek to 'root' this cosmopolitanism, as Chesterton himself might. Rather than aim for 'an "authentically South African" art' – since 'demands of this kind come out of a naive, idle and typically metropolitan yearning for the exotic' – Coetzee 'was attempting to position himself on an alternative, necessarily inexact, and specifically literary map and to create space for his own metropolitan "affiliations"'.[31] Thus we may agree with McDonald's assessment that Coetzee's 'identification with a cosmopolitan modernist literary heritage [...] was considered at best contentious, at worst politically irresponsible'.[32] It ran counter to the ideals of 'critical realism' that prevailed in South African letters in the 70s and 80s. However, we advance McDonald's complex layering of fiction and history by arguing that it is precisely the 'cosmopolitan' aspect of his project that *is* politically responsible. Accepting a redefined sense of provincialism is, in 1981, a bid to rethink the provincial's relationship to nation and metropole in a way that accepts 'provincialism' as being 'without ignominy', since the real problem for writers is the more prosaic, 'daily problem of wedding subject matter, or content, to form'.[33] Coetzee's cosmopolitanism undercuts the idealities of transnational, rooted, or vernacular cosmopolitanisms by insisting that what writers really share is the daily toil of writing. Coetzee's pragmatic cosmopolitanism arises again in the Kosmopolis address, which stresses the need to approach problems (albeit problems of a more

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[29] Ibid.

[30] This contradicts those valuable studies by Robert Spencer (2011) and Katherine Stanton (2005), who establish Coetzee within a cosmopolitanism defined as a multivalent form of belonging. Spencer, who reads a demand for action in Coetzee, comes closest to the argument about 'mere acts' in Chapter 4. However, Katherine Hallemeier (2013) convincingly shows Coetzee's cosmopolitanism to be a critique of sympathy, rather than, as Spencer has it, engendering 'imaginative sympathy'. If Hallemeier's work on Coetzee's cosmopolitanism is most consistent with this thesis, the directions diverge: she examines the limits of cosmopolitan feeling, where I argue for a cosmopolitanism based in the disruption of psychopersonal wholeness and comprehensive political systems. Robert Spencer, *Cosmopolitan Criticism and Postcolonial Literatures* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 137.

[31] McDonald, *The Literature Police*, 305; 306.

[32] Ibid, 306.

[33] Ibid, 305; 304.

social, less 'writerly' nature) as part of daily life, from the ground, rather than through a rhetoric of high ideals.

In the second address, Coetzee lays out the problems facing the world as he sees them: 'the question of how we are to act in the face of global warming, rising food prices, famine and so forth'. But, Coetzee surprises us,

> the answer to [the question] is not obscure. We all know in broad terms how we should act. We should drive cars much less than we do, we should invest money in natural sources of energy like wind power, we should stop feeding grain to livestock etc etc. The sole question that remains is whether we, at an individual level and at a social and political level, are prepared to put into practice what our reason tells us? Whether we are prepared to act?[34]

Coetzee puts forward a cosmopolitan ethics that does not aspire to a utopian ideal or celebrate an already-existing cosmopolitanism. Rather, it suggests that the questions facing humanity today are not obscure or difficult to answer or abstract in their consequences. The obligation is, in fact, quite evident: a mere obligation. The question is simply how prepared 'we' are to act.[35] Coetzee's insistence on the 'concrete meaning' of such questions, and on the role that writers have in bringing 'that real meaning home to society', suggests the local concerns of the CNA Prize Speech, and how such local concerns are connected with the wider world. Moreover, the position of the writer in this relationship seems very close to that of the kynic in Ancient Greece, since it addresses precisely those 'comforts' that we are not willing to give up: this kynical responsibility to bring truths home to society defines the practice of the kynic and gives purpose to his acts.

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[34] Coetzee, 'Diari du mal any', *Kosmopolis: 2008. Centro de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona.* Accessed: 14 April 2013. http://www.cccb.org/kosmopolis/en/participant-j_m_coetzee-22441

[35] Carrol Clarkson examines how the ironic use of the 'we' in post-apartheid literature challenges dominant discursive attempts to construct community in South Africa (for instance, the reference to South Africa as 'the Rainbow Nation'). In the Kosmopolis address, Coetzee acknowledges the need to question this 'we', while making humanity an inevitable community in its need to *act*. Carrol Clarkson, 'Who are "we"? Don't make me laugh', *Law and Critique*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Oct, 2007).

Between Kynicism and Cynicism

Diogenes's most demonstrative philosophical acts are his refutation of Zeno's paradoxes and his response to the notion of Platonic forms.[36] Faced with Zeno's claim that motion was impossible, because all movement is infinitely subdivisible, he stood up and walked around.[37] When Plato described his philosophy of forms using terms like 'tablehood' and 'cuphood', he famously said, 'Table and cup I see; but your tablehood and cuphood, Plato, I can nowise see'.[38] Zeno's paradoxes and the problem of Platonic forms fascinate Borges, Beckett and Coetzee. Zeno's paradox of infinite divisibility places a gap between either individuals and groups or beginnings and endings that the writers can only leap over with an unequivocal gesture.[39] The question of Platonic forms leads to the recurrent problem with nominalism: each writer, unable to see the ideal, seems to endorse the particular at the expense of the universal.[40] At the same time, since each oeuvre evinces a particular ethos, this nominalism is not uncoupled from a belief in virtue and consistency. We will consider how this philosophical tension comes to the fore in a variety of different ways, not least in political response.

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[36] 'Achilles runs ten times faster than the tortoise and gives him a start of ten meters. Achilles runs those ten meters, the tortoise runs one; Achilles runs that meter, the tortoise runs a decimeter; Achilles runs that decimeter, the tortoise runs a centimeter; Achilles runs that centimeter, the tortoise, a millimeter; Achilles the Nimble-Footed, the millimeter, the tortoise a tenth of a millimeter, and so on ad infinitum, with Achilles never overtaking the tortoise. This is the usual version' (*TL* 43).

[37] *DL*, 6.39.

[38] *DL*, 6.53.

[39] Clov remarks on this gap in *Endgame*, when he observes: 'Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap' (*SB3* 92). When Red Scharlach kills Lönnrot in Borges's 'El muerte y la brújula', Lönnrot makes an opaque reference to Zeno's paradox of motion. This makes Scharlach's gunshot at the end ambiguous: 'He retreated a few paces. After, very carefully, he fired' (*OC1* 544). Since one of Zeno's paradoxes follows the flight of an arrow that can never reach its target, it is only the reader's assumption of a resolution that permits Scharlach's bullet to reach Lönnrot's chest. In Coetzee's *Dusklands*, Jacobus Coetzee contemplates a beetle that does not respond to its legs being pulled off: 'It is only when you pull the head off his body that a tiny insect shudder runs through him' (*Du* 96-7). This Zeno Beetle exemplifies how the secret of life regresses infinitely.

[40] Here, nominalism describes the metaphysical position in philosophy that accepts the existence of particular objects but not that of their universal or abstract counterparts. Realism, taken as the opposite of nominalism, designates a belief in universal forms, of which real objects are but shadowy imitations.

A certain political truculence in Borges may account for his interest in Diogenes's encounter with Alexander the Great.[41] This story forms the basis for our consideration of the relation between the writer and the state. But it is also part of a wider aesthetic of reduction in the work of Beckett and Coetzee, which has a direct impact on their considerations of politics and society. We find the counterpart of this reduction to essentials in Diogenes's rejection of worldly possessions, epitomised by his encounter with a small boy.[42] He sees a boy drinking water with his hand. This inspires him to break his drinking bowl, saying he obviously does not need it. This raises the theme of stripping away excess, but also of the recurrent figure in Borges, Beckett and Coetzee of the intellectual-brought-low, the beggar or the dog-man (which is to say, the kynic).[43]

Hegel dismissed the kynics as 'shameless' because of their association with dogs. While he made an exception in his lecture for Antisthenes and Diogenes as 'men of great culture', he said that 'the succeeding [k]ynics are not any the less conspicuous by their exceeding shamelessness, for they were, generally speaking, nothing more than swinish beggars'.[44] 'They deserve in its full the name dog [...] for the dog is a shameless animal'.[45] Since Hegel's diagnosis of the kynics' shamelessness stems from their flaunting of social conventions, the kynics' engagement with shame seems more complex than the simple ignorance or lack of shame. If shame is necessary, universal and ontological, as has been demonstrated by philosophers from Jean-Paul Sartre to Giorgio Agamben, then 'shamelessness' must be impossible, a disavowal or a highly

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[41] *DL*, 6.38.

[42] *DL*, 6.37.

[43] A cursory list would include Borges's Homer, Beckett's Molloy and Coetzee's David Lurie. In 'El inmortal [The Immortal]', Borges depicts a Homer brought so low that he is 'named' Argos, after Odysseus's dog. Molloy, in Beckett's *Molloy*, 'becomes' the dog of Loy or Lousse after he runs the dog over with his bicycle. Coetzee's work presents a variety of dog men, which we enumerate later in this chapter.

[44] Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Greek Philosophy to Plato*, trans. E.S. Haldane, intro. Fredrick C. Beiser (Lincoln: Nebraska UP, 1995), 481.

[45] Ibid, 481.

sophisticated engagement with that category. In a similar sense, shame problematises the subject in Borges, Beckett and Coetzee, as a number of studies have shown.[46] But, shame also presents these subjects with the opportunity to become agents, since they often assert their subjectivity by avowing their shame.[47] Moreover, it is generic to all three writers that the subject only becomes a subject by accepting intellectual humiliation through a renewed engagement with the body, an engagement that is often metaphorically associated with animals (usually dogs).

This leads us to our examination of the role of the kynic in Borges, Beckett and Coetzee. Borges makes explicit reference to Diogenes of Sinope in a parable-essay entitled, 'Dialogos del asceta y del rey [Dialogues of the ascetic and the king]'. 'A king', Borges writes, 'is a plenitude, an ascetic is nothing or wants to be nothing; people like to imagine dialogues between those two archetypes. I have here some examples, derived from Eastern and Western sources' (*TR2* 302). These archetypes appear to have an implicit universal history with a cosmopolitan ideal, as they purport to focus on the generic quality of the relationship, irrespective of cultural origin, rather than on the particularity of the parable examples Borges selects.[48] However, the examples are themselves noteworthy, since the relationship evolves from situation to situation. This suggests that Borges creates a generic that adapts to historical circumstance.

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[46] The most comprehensive is Timothy Bewes's treatment of Coetzee in *The Event of Postcolonial Shame* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011). Borges's essay relating shame to history ('El pudor de la historia [The Shame of History]') has been mentioned briefly in Kate Jenckes, *Reading Borges After Benjamin: Allegory, Afterlife, and the Writing of History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 107-8. Shame in Beckett has been considered in relation to Blanchot, Foucault and Agamben by Russell Smith (2007) and David Houston Jones (2011).

[47] See, for example, Emma Zunz's use of shame to justify her murder of Aaron Loewenthal in Borges's 'Emma Zunz', the narrator of 'Text 12' in Beckett's *Textes pour rien* [*Texts for Nothing*], whose 'old shame that kept me from living' does not keep the narrator from speaking, and Jacobus Coetzee who derides the Nama as failing to do much more in their assaults on his person than 'fall upon my shame'.

[48] Kant's 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose' develops nine theses in which history allows rational beings to discern 'a steady and progressive though slow evolution' in the appearances of the human will. Kant proposes a universal history to prove that a universal cosmopolitan condition is in a natural process of coming into being (a stoic prolepsis); Borges's universal history satirises Kant's understanding of nature, since, for Borges, any movement towards order is dialectically linked to the chaos that Kant's cosmopolitanism seeks to efface. Immanuel Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose', *Kant: Political Writings*, 41.

Borges's first example is an exchange of letters between Heraclites and Darius the Great, in which Heraclites politely refuses an invitation from Darius to visit his palace. His reason for doing so is to avoid 'palacial vanities'. Borges attaches a great significance to this 'trivial' reason. 'Beneath the trivial surface lies the obscure contraposition of symbols and the magic that zero, the ascetic, could equal and overcome in some way the infinite king' (*TR2* 302). This 'magic', Edwin Williamson glosses, 'which gives the ascete the power to equal or overcome the "infinite king" is the idea that both self and world are transient and illusory'.[49] Williamson then contextualises this response in Borges's reaction against Argentina's president of the time, Juan Domingo Perón. We will return to this context in due course, but Williamson is too quick to explain the encounter with reference to transience and illusion. Self and world are transient: the king is as aware of this as the ascetic, since it is this that fascinates him about the ascetic. The power is rather in the ability to oppose or deny the wishes of the king; that even though the self is illusory, it can still assert its agency by excepting itself from the rule of the state.

Borges develops this possibility in his second example: the famous exchange between Diogenes and Alexander, where Diogenes asks Alexander to step out of his sun. Borges uses this second example to rework his initial notion of 'overcoming' into 'identification'.[50] The opposition Borges constructs, between the ascetic (read kynic) and the king, is underscored by a secret identity. Not only is the ascetic able to match or even best the monarch, on some level the ascetic and the monarch are made one by virtue of their dialectical relationship.[51]

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[49] Edwin Williamson, 'Borges against Perón: A Contextual Approach to "El Fin"', *Romanic Review*, Vol. 98, No. 2/3 (Mar-May 2007), 276.

[50] 'This anecdote (repeated in the pages of Plutarch) opposes the two interlocutors: others, one would say, suggest a secret identity. Alexander says to the courtesans that if he were not Alexander, he would want to be Diogenes, and the day that one dies in Babylon, the other dies in Corinth' (*TR2* 303).

[51] This unity of opposites or enemies is a particularly important theme in Borges's *ficciones*, particularly 'The Theologians', 'The Waiting' and 'Three Versions of Judas', where enemies often merge or turn out to be the same person. See Eva Horn's account of how Borges dramatises this through his use of the duel.

The generic quality of the relationship is by no means fixed. Each example shifts the boundaries of the generic, which indicates that these types are not static nor do they conform to a regulative generic structure. The generic (tradition) is altered by the examples (individuals) that make it up. When this 'tradition' is translocated from a language of genus and individual to a language of universals and historical particulars, we find an interesting tension between Platonic forms and their manifestations. Any universal is necessarily in relationship with its historical manifestation. This tension between universal, realist form and its particular, nominalist example is one that occupies Borges at various points in his work. He calls it the precedent conflict between Platonists (universal realists) and Aristotelians (nominalists), a conflict Borges judges all but won by the Aristotelians.[52]

Is Borges a nominalist who cynically dismisses Platonic 'tableness' and 'cupness'?[53] Certainly, in his 1968 'Nota sobre los argentinos [Note on the Argentinians]', Borges specifically disowns the generic and declares himself a nominalist: 'To speak of the Argentinian is to speak of a generic type; I am, in the English way, a nominalist and disbelieve [descreo] generic types' (*TR3* 270). This seems to be a dissimulation, as he then 'hazards some approximate observation', albeit with 'the resigned conviction that hundreds and even thousands of objections may be raised against it', that certain qualities distinguish the Argentinian: 'imaginative penury'

Eva Horn, 'Borges's Duels: Friends, Enemies, and the Fictions of History', *Thinking with Borges*, eds. William Egginton and David E. Johnson (Aurora: The Davies Group, 2009).

[52] 'Coleridge observes that all people are born Aristotelians or Platonists […] Nominalism […] today includes all people; its victory is so vast and fundamental that its name is useless. No one calls themselves a nominalist because no one is anything else' (*OC2* 131-2).

[53] Noé Jitrik also responds to Borges's 'kynicism'.

> In reality he is not concerned with Blacks or Indians or the disappeared or Alfonso Reyes, or even the Peronists, around whom a wealth of comments has been generated, or soccer players. What he is concerned about, in moderation, is or would be the way in which he channels something, which in order to be brief, we could call his 'cynicism'. Noé Jitrik, 'Complex Feelings about Borges' [1981], *The Noé Jitrik Reader: Selected Essays on Latin American Literature*, ed. Daniel Balderston, trans. Susan Benner (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 8-9.

I discuss this further in Chapter 2.

and 'the lack of moral sense' (*TR3* 270). Although he does not believe in generic types,

he does observe that they exist as long as they have a basis in historical example.

Returning to a moment of kynical clarity in 'Nota sobre los argentinos', we see the

impact of the realist-nominalist dialectic in Borges's response to political dictatorship:

> Every hundred years, Buenos Aires engenders a dictator that is in some
> mode always the same. At the end of a variable term, the provinces – let it
> be known I am from Buenos Aires [soy porteño] – have to come to save us.
> In 1852 it was Entre Ríos; in 1955 it was Córdoba. (*TR3* 270)

History repeats itself, and this is what forms the generic for Borges. First, Buenos Aires

was ruled by Juan Manuel de Rosas (until he was overthrown at the 1852 Battle of

Caseros by an alliance between Argentina's provinces and Brazil, under the leadership

of Justo José de Urquiza of Entre Ríos). Then Argentina was ruled by Perón (until he

was overthrown by a military coup on the 19th of September 1955, organised from

Córdoba and self-styled as the *Revolución Libertadora* [*Liberating Revolution*]).

Borges, in asserting the repetition, is politically partisan. He uses the brutality of

Juan Rosas's reign (a historical given) to justify a personal antipathy to Perón.[54] Perón,

when he took power in 1946, 'promoted' Borges from the municipal library to

inspecting chickens in the market. Borges responded in a succession of texts and

interviews over the 1940s and 1950s with stories of an all-powerful ruler in conflict

with a powerless poet or thinker.[55] Sympathetic readings of Borges identify a repetition

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[54] This mutual antipathy may explain why Borges was himself temporarily won over by 'palacial vanities' in 1976. He accepted an invitation to dine at Argentina's presidential mansion, *La Casa Rosada* [*The Pink House*], from the leaders of the ruling military Junta. Borges infamously thanked General Jorge Videla, leader of the Junta, 'for what he had done for the *patria*, having saved it from chaos, from the abject state we were in, and, above all, from idiocy', and later would remark to a newspaper in Spain (*Cambio 16*) that the Dictadura was 'a government of soldiers, of gentlemen, of decent people'. Borges qtd. Edwin Williamson *Borges: A Life* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2004)*,* 422; 425. Evidence of an extremely problematic conservativism on Borges's part, these responses have been explained by his sympathisers as being less responses to the Junta than reactions against the perceived chaos of Peronism. See Beatriz Sarlo, *Jorge Luis Borges: A Writer on the Edge* (London: Verso, 1993); Daniel Balderston, *Out of Context? Historical Reference and the Representation of Reality in Borges* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1993). The Junta, between 1976 and 1983, would be responsible for the disappearances of over 8,000 people. Lindsay DuBois, *The Politics of the Past in an Argentine Working-Class Neighbourhood* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2005), 246.

[55] The examples worth noting are, on the one hand, the stories, poems and short texts, such as 'El fin [The End]' (1953), 'Parábola del palacio [Parable of the Palace]' (1956) through to the comparatively late 'El

of Borges's reaction to Perón during Perón's first presidency, from 1946-1955, in

Borges's reaction to Perón during his second presidency, from 1973-1974, and in the

aftermath of his death in 1974. But this repetition still suggests that the historical view

of Perón impinges on Borges's generic treatment of authority in particularly interesting

political and aesthetic ways, not least because the generic, for Borges, is always affected

by his own political subjectivity. Bruno Bosteels clearly marks this involvement

between the generic and political subjectivity in Borges's work.

Bosteels historicises Borges's subjectivity within a discourse of political

economy that, if it does not mention the kynics specifically, relies on the aesthetic use

of the liminal figure of the beggar.[56] Although Bosteels does not deal with Perón in

depth, he does identify a mode of political economy in Borges's 'Diálogos' that is

repeated in other work: 'beggars, like madmen or the mentally insane for the philosophy

of the modern cogito, are the limit-figures of classical political economy'.[57] Even if

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espejo y la mascara' (1976), and, on the other hand, the speeches, letters and newspaper articles Borges writes in response to his 'promotion' and to questions of systemic violence.

[56] Bosteels and Martín Plot have produced work that highlights the shift from the broadly historical and contextual work of Beatriz Sarlo, Daniel Balderston, and Jaime Alazraki to the contemporary interest in Borges's political thought. Where the historical response, prototyped by Alazraki in the 1970s, saw its heyday following the publication of Sarlo's *Borges: A Writer on the Edge* in 1993, the recent trend has been to focus that context into studies of Borges's political thought. This distinction begins to be apparent with the publication of works such as José Eduardo González's *Borges and the Politics of Form* (1998) and Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones's *Borges y el nazismo:* Sur *1937-1946* (2004), anticipated by Edna Aizenberg's examination of Borges's affinity with Judaism and political writings against Nazism (1997).

[57] Bruno Bosteels, 'Beggars Banquet: For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign in Borges', *Variaciones Borges*, Vol. 29 (2010), 14. This is particularly true, Bosteels notes, in the works of Borges, where the beggar functions as a threshold figure. Bosteels distinguishes between the treatment of the beggar as a literal threshold figure in the earlier *Ficciones* [*Fictions*] and the beggar as a representation of 'formal imbalance and social inequality' in the later parables. In 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', first published in *Sur* in 1940, Borges writes:

> Things duplicate themselves in Tlön; in the same way they tend to erase themselves and lose details when those details are forgotten by the people. The classic example is of a threshold that remains while a beggar visits it and is lost from sight at his death. (*L* 39)

The object, in Tlön, is only *possible* if there is an observer to acknowledge its existence. Bosteels interprets this beggar to be quite literally the man of the threshold at the limit of idealism and death. By contrast, he writes,

> In both 'The Mirror and the Mask' (1975) and 'On Rigor in Science' (1946) […] the beggar appears as a liminal figure in the immanent critique of the ideal of equivalence, as both mimetic correspondence and economic balance. (Bosteels, 'Beggars Banquet', 13)

beggars are the limit-figures of classical political economy, substantially more evidence would be necessary to link the subtle evolution of the Borgesian beggar to Borges's reaction to the political economy of Peronism. But Bosteels does demonstrate the increased significance the beggar had for enacting precisely the critique of hegemonic structures Borges is developing in 'Diálogos del asceta y del rey', as evinced by the third and fourth examples, which Borges takes from China and South Asia respectively, and which involve the eventual decision by the king to become a beggar. This further development of the 'universal' fable or parable occurs through the repetition of the generic in a variety of historical contexts, leading to a historicised form of universalism.

If Borges uses Diogenes to challenge political economies, Beckett's Diogenes is simply one more character in the history of Western philosophy. He first appears in Beckett's 'Interwar Notes', transcribed from Windelband.[58]

> DIOGENES OF SINOPE (413-323) [...]
> Walking through Athens at midday holding a lighted lantern: 'I am looking for a man'.
>
> Characteristic by-figure in the history of civilisation rather than a man of science. Owed his paradoxical popularity to the ostentatious jest of attempting to live in civilised Greece as if in a state of Nature.
>
> Conducted the education of the son of Xeniades, a Corinthian Sophist, according to principles of Cynic naturalism, and not without success.[59]

The beggar in Tlön permits the threshold to exist; the beggar in 'On Rigor in Science', in occupying the remnants of the giant map that once covered the whole Empire and replicated it at a scale of 1:1, uses this threshold to remind the prudent gentlemen of Suárez Miranda's *Viajes de varones prudentes* [*Travels of Prudent Gentlemen*] of discrepancies between presentation and representation in the Geographic Disciplines. Mercedes Blanco notes the similarity between 'El espejo y la máscara' and 'Parábola del palacio' in 'La parábola y las paradojas: Paradojas matemáticas en un cuento de Borges', *Borges Studies Online*. Accessed: 31 July 2012.
http://www.borges.pitt.edu/bsol/mb.php

[58] In his 'Interwar Notes', Beckett made extensive transcriptions from at least three histories of philosophy: Archibald Alexander's 1907 *A Short History of Philosophy*; John Burnet's 1914 *Greek Philosophy, Part I: Thales to Plato*; and, by far the most important, Wilhelm Windelband's 1902 edition of *A History of Philosophy*. See Matthew Feldman, *Beckett's Books: A Cultural History of the Interwar Notes* (London: Continuum, 2006). John Burnet, *Greek Philosophy, Part I: Thales to Plato* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1914); Archibald Alexander, *A Short History of Philosophy* (Glasgow: Maclehose & Sons, 1907); Wilhelm Windelband, *A History of Philosophy*, trans. James Hayden Tufts (London: MacMillan, 1902).

[59] TCD MS 10967/68 qtd. Matthew Feldman, 'Returning to Beckett Returning to the Presocratics, or, 'All their balls about being and existing', *Genetic Joyce Studies*, No. 6 (Spring 2006), Accessed: 12 April 2013. http://www.antwerpjamesjoycecenter.com/GJS6/GJS6Feldman.htm

Beckett repeats, via Windelband, generalisations we find in Hegel's lectures: Diogenes as a by-figure rather than a man of science, enjoying a paradoxical popularity while making a jest of living in Greece as if in a state of Nature. While it provides a fair reflection on how Diogenes has been received by histories of Western philosophy, this note does not provide an influence. Matthew Feldman recalls these notes in *All Strange Away* (1963), where Beckett makes sardonic reference to the significance city names have to citations of ancient philosophers, recalling our previous citation of Borges on stoic city names:

> Imagine as needed, unsupported interjections, *ancient Greek philosophers ejaculated with place of origin when possible suggesting pursuit of knowledge at some period* [....] leaving sometimes in some doubt such things as *which Diogenes*. (*SB4* 354; emphases Feldman)

Since Beckett also has a section on 'Diogenes of Apollonia', Feldman reasons that the 'Notes' play a role in the evolution of this 'monologue' about a female interlocutor who 'leaves in some doubt such things as *which Diogenes*'. She ejaculates Greek philosophers 'with place of origin when possible' to suggest 'pursuit of knowledge at some period', as if naming a philosopher were the equivalent of understanding his or her work. While it is not unreasonable to assume a relationship with the 'Notes', Beckett had also received, on the 2nd of July 1959, an honorary doctorate from Trinity College, Dublin, in which the public orator referred to him as 'a modern Diogenes'.[60] Described as 'amused' by James Knowlson, Beckett might have also wondered to which Diogenes the orator was referring. This biographical criticism opens up a nexus of subject, art and material: the transformation of Beckett's notes and/or the association made by the Trinity oration into a phrase that is less about Diogenes than about the deployment of names like Diogenes. Less influence than affinity, Beckett's use of Diogenes's name resonates with Diogenes's desire to 'deface the currency' of names like Zeno and Plato.

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[60] Knowlson, *Damned*, 470.

We find this affinity again in an earlier comment that Beckett makes, structurally equivalent to the nominalist's cynical preference for tables over the realist's tablehood. It occurs in 'La peinture des van Velde ou le Monde et le Pantalon [The Painting of the Van Veldes or The World and the Pants]', an essay on the art of the Van Velde brothers, written for *Cahiers d'art* at the end of World War II. After detailing the highfalutin 'art criticism' 'l'inoffensif loufoque [the inoffensive madman]' might be exposed to, Beckett suggests the one thing the madman would never be told: 'There is no painting. There are only paintings' (*Disj* 123). Beckett's critical response to the Platonic ideal of painting in contemporary art criticism is to say, like Diogenes, 'I do not see painting, only paintings'.

Borges's and Beckett's kynics are different. Borges's kynic becomes a metaphor for the writer's relation to politics (and to individual dictators), while Beckett's kynic is an image that exposes the failings of bourgeois culture. This difference does not mean that Beckett fails to engage with politics.[61] Links between this world in ruins, Beckett's tramp and the ancient kynic have already been made, most notably in essays by Angela Moorjani and Willie Van Peer.[62]

Moorjani and Van Peer both explore the potential explicative force that accounts of the kynics provide for understanding Beckett's work. Moorjani examines the critique of social inequalities embodied by the kynic and its correspondence in Beckett's work, but she does not commit unequivocally to a direct line of influence. She invokes Roger

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[61] Andrew Gibson has argued that Beckett's postwar texts show Beckett's nostalgia for the Third Republic and antipathy to the Fourth Republic, which emerged in the wake of Charles de Gaulle's rule from 1944 to 1946. Despite echoes in Beckett's relationship to de Gaulle of Borges's relationship with Perón, Beckett's antagonism to the Fourth Republic's *rhetoric* of rejuvenation does not evoke Borges's dialectic between the ascetic and the king. Andrew Gibson, 'Beckett, De Gaulle and the Fourth Republic 1944-49: *L'Innommable* and *En Attendant Godot*', *Limit{e} Beckett*, No. 1 (2010). Accessed: 19 April 2014.
http://www.limitebeckett.paris-sorbonne.fr/one/gibson.html
[62] Angela Moorjani, 'Diogenes Lampoons Alexandre Kojeve: Cultural Ghosts in Beckett's Early French Plays', *Drawing on Beckett: Portraits, Performances and Cultural Contexts*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Tel Aviv: Assaph, 2003). Willie Van Peer, 'Beckett's "First Love" and Cynical Philosophy', *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 7 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998).

Blin's statement that *Godot* contained everything everyone saw in it, while disagreeing with the supplementary condition that Beckett had inscribed all these meanings into the text himself.[63] Moorjani argues that while there are many strong implicatures (indirect messages) in the text, which constrain meaning to a particular context, there are also many weak implicatures, which do not do so. Moorjani identifies allusions to Diogenes and the kynic tradition in the weak implicatures of Beckett's texts: dog men, tramps, philosophising by praxis. She finds this particularly in *Molloy*, when Molloy takes the place of Loy/Lousse's dog. Van Peer suggests a stronger implicature of kynicism in Beckett's texts, arguing not only that the characters of the story 'First Love' are 'direct heirs' to the kynical worldview, but that Beckett's texts 'aim to express and pass on the [k]ynical philosophy'.[64]

This thesis will not trace kynic figures in the texts. Beckett's kynical figures are interesting, but they ultimately obscure our point, which is that Beckett's writing strategy is itself kynical and cosmopolitan. Beckett makes direct reference to the kynics in his texts. However, this is less significant for its allusive implications than for following Beckett's kynical practice. J.M. Coetzee alerts us to a (failed) kynical subtext in Beckett's writing, when he criticises Beckett's failure to 'dream up the whale' ('EWSB' 24).[65] But when Coetzee himself writes of kynicism and cosmopolitanism, the first trope comes from Beckett: the 'dog man'.[66]

In Coetzee, the most obvious evidence of the kynics is the recurrent trope of the 'dog man', in which the protagonist is likened or gradually 'reduced' to the state of a

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[63] Moorjani, 'Diogenes', 69.

[64] Van Peer, 'Cynical Philosophy', 409.

[65] Coetzee is not referring to a failure to think of a textual project as vast as a whale; for Coetzee, Beckett fails to engage with otherness as extreme as Herman Melville's white whale.

[66] Since the 'dog man' is a fairly static trope in Beckett, I have not subjected his use of it to the same scrutiny as Coetzee's. There does, however, seem to be a parallel between the gradual reduction of the narrator's body in the novellas – 'Premier Amour [First Love]' (1945), 'L'Expulsé [The Expelled]', 'Le Calmant [The Calmative]' and 'La fin [The End]' (1946) – and *Three Novels – Molloy* (1951), *Malone meurt* [*Malone Dies*] (1951) and *L'Innommable* [*The Unnamable*] (1953) – and the development of the 'dog man' in Coetzee.

dog. The protagonist may be the beneficiary of political or economic disparities brought low, such as the Magistrate from *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) or David Lurie from *Disgrace* (1999). He may already be a vagrant (Vercueil in *Age of Iron* (1991)) or a vagrant in the making (Michael K in *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983)). The 'dog man' may be a description of a function or activity (as it is for Petrus in *Disgrace*) that develops into an ontological category (as it does for David). In this developmental capacity, it affects female characters as readily as male characters: Mrs Curren is 'reduced' to the dispossessed state of Vercueil over the course of *Age of Iron* (whose classical allusions make it the most obvious point of reference for any discussion of the kynics). Since the Magistrate repeatedly likens himself to a dog, in his eating habits,[67] his whining and his only possible way of dying,[68] Coetzee's preoccupation with dog men appears to begin in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, although the first use of the specific term 'dog man' is only in *Age of Iron*, with Vercueil. Michael K is only referred to in passing as being 'like a dumb dog', but his vagrancy, and his later engagement with December (a more urbane cynic), highlights Coetzee's interest in this aspect of kynicism (*LTMK* 28). Vercueil, however, initiates a particular trajectory of the vagrant/dog man that passes through *Age of Iron* and *The Master of Petersburg* (1994), and culminates in *Disgrace*.

In *Age of Iron*, this trope remains fairly straightforward. Mrs Curren, the aging classics professor dying of cancer in Cape Town, refers to Vercueil, the homeless man she finds outside her house, as a 'dog-man' because of his dog (*AI* 52). Mrs Curren herself will become a 'dog-like' vagrant, as she suffers the vicissitudes of traumas internal (her cancer), personal (her relationship with her estranged daughter), social (her relationships with black and white South Africans) and political (her relationships with activism and the Apartheid state). The version of this doubling – of Curren to Vercueil's

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[67] He 'guzzles', 'licks' and 'bolts' his food 'like a dog' (*WB* 87; 136; 140).
[68] 'There is no way of dying allowed me, it seems, except like a dog in a corner' (*WB* 128).

'model' – presented in *The Master of Petersburg* is significantly more complex, where Dostoevski, Coetzee's character based on the novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky, finds himself becoming the 'dog-father' to the 'thing that does not concern him, a dog howling for its father' (*MP* 80). Awakened by a dog howling in the street, Dostoevski originally mistakes it for his son Pavel, whose death he is investigating in St. Petersburg. He realises that it is 'a dog, not his son' (*MP* 80). This, in a paradoxical turn of logic, becomes the reason that he 'must answer the call': '*Because* it is not his son' (*MP* 80). When he finds the dog, he frees her but he also asks himself whether he will be 'peering into the eyes of dogs and beggars' for the rest of his days. His link to dogs and beggars, to 'fathering' dogs and beggars, comes from a possible injunction he never receives from Pavel: 'Raise up that least thing and cherish it' (*MP* 81). But, if he knows that the words do not come from Pavel, working out what 'that least thing' might be is as difficult: 'Is the dog the thing he must release and take with him and feed and cherish, or is it the filthy, drunken beggar in his tattered coat under the bridge?' (*MP* 82). From *Age of Iron*'s identification with the 'dog-man', we move to the more complex task of parental surrogacy for both dog and man.

These two readings coalesce in *Disgrace*, where, after David assumes the care of dogs from Petrus, Petrus will become the surrogate father of Lucy's baby, the offspring of her rape by three youths. While Petrus originally occupies the role of the 'dog man' as a description of his work with dogs, David takes on the care of dogs, as well as 'becoming: stupid, daft, wrongheaded' (*D* 64; 146). If being a 'dog man' shifts from a work function (as a part of the labour economy) to a way of being (as exempt from, or in excess of, the labour economy), this is not simply an elaboration of the doubling motif in *Age of Iron*. Petrus's later declaration that he is 'not any more the dog-man' together with Lucy's decision to give her land to Petrus and 'to start at ground level [...] like a dog' suggest that paternal surrogacy has a particularly important political

currency in undermining 'essential' familial relationships (*D* 129; 205).[69] What was a trope in *Age of Iron* has become something more structurally integral to *Disgrace*.

Kai Wiegandt and Richard Northover have identified David as a kynic.[70] But they do not ascribe a structural purpose to the trope; the reference is understood as being purely intertextual. Stuart Taberner's more recent appraisal of Lurie as a kynic does not refer to Northover or Wiegandt, but it does make some effort to locate a structural purpose to the allusion by identifying in it a cynical cosmopolitanism.[71] Unlike Northover and Wiegandt, Taberner fails to draw on classical scholarship, which may account for why he conflates the kynics with the stoics. In fact, Taberner's cynical cosmopolitanism seems to draw on the most patronising aspects of stoic cosmopolitanism, since emotions 'scarcely matter as long as the white man recognizes both Petrus's alterity and the dignity of his belonging to existence'.[72] Apart from following a particularly Lurie-like logic of racial paternalism, Taberner's cynical cosmopolitanism recapitulates the problems inherent in philosophically naïve responses to the kynics: for Taberner, cynical cosmopolitanism 'declares citizenship of the world precisely in order to escape the claims of a particular nation' and refuses 'to concede the knowability of the self or the other', which 'is lonelier for the individual and less emotionally appealing for readers but perhaps also more respectful of the fundamental alterity of others, less colonizing and indeed more profoundly empathetic'.[73] While Taberner's optimism is to be commended, this kynical empathy may as easily become an excuse for cynical disengagement or a policy of Separate Development. Taberner

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[69] Simon bears this out in his treatment of the boy David in *The Childhood of Jesus*. Simon, of course, repeatedly and explicitly rejects his paternity.

[70] Kai Wiegandt, 'J.M. Coetzee's "Dog-man" and the Cynicism of *Disgrace*', *Anglia*, Vol. 131, No. 1 (2013); Richard Alan Northover, *J.M. Coetzee and Animal Rights: Elizabeth Costello's Challenge to Philosophy* (Pretoria: U Pretoria DLitt Thesis, 2009). Accessed: 1 May 2013.
http://upetd.up.ac.za/thesis/available/etd-05152010-234034/

[71] Stuart Taberner, 'Memory, Cosmopolitanism and Nation: Christa Wolf's *Stadt der Engel* (2010) and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999)', *Comparative Critical Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2014), 51.

[72] Ibid, 61.

[73] Ibid, 60; 50.

fails to note that the kynics primarily aimed to *challenge*, rather than *respect*, alterity. In following Lurie's logic, Taberner ignores the real kynical figure in the novel. Here, we return to Lucy as the kynical figure par excellence in Coetzee's oeuvre, not because she replays her father's becoming-dog-man, but because she challenges existing notions of ownership in her relation to the land. We find less kynicism in the 'dog-men' kynics of Coetzee than in his kynical treatment of them. Our engagement with Coetzee's allusions to the kynics gives way to an engagement with his more general response to 'cynicism'.

In *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee distinguishes between 'Cynicism', as the 'denial of any ultimate basis for values' and 'Grace', as 'a condition in which the truth can be told clearly, without blindness' (*DP* 392). This is a debate that, for Coetzee, 'is staged by Dostoevsky; the interlocutors are called Stavrogin and Tikhon'. The preference Coetzee has for the term 'stage', when referring to the exposition of ideological positions, is shared by many of his leading commentators. But it also, in this description, serves to permit Coetzee to grant Cynicism (an ephemeral, momentary 'denial') the substance to argue with Grace (a more concrete, durable 'condition').

In her PhD thesis, Michelle Kelly argues that critics have not as yet managed to account for the 'uneasy and uneven dialogue between the two'.[74] By considering this dialogue in relation to Coetzee's 'simultaneous and persisting interest in the form and conventions of the confessional narrative itself', Kelly describes 'the relationship between cynicism and grace, or confession and absolution, in terms of a fundamental discontinuity. The relationship between the terms [...] is not transformative, but iterative'.[75] Reconsidering the function of confessional narrative in its linguistic, rather

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[74] Maria Michelle Kelly, *"So I sing for my keep": J.M. Coetzee and Confessional Narrative* (York: U of York Thesis, 2008), 7.
[75] Ibid.

than spiritual, framework reframes Elizabeth Costello's notion of a 'belief without belief'.[76]

In the Eighth Lesson of *Elizabeth Costello*, Costello refers to herself as having 'beliefs but I don't believe in them' in her first defence to the Kafkaesque judges who preside over her trial in 'At the Gate' (*EC* 200). This is a response to an attempt by one of the judges to label her capability 'of holding opinions and prejudices at bay', 'negative capability'. Costello's defence precipitates further accusations by the judge as to 'this lack of belief' and 'cynicism'.[77] Where Costello has referred to her 'own emptiness' of humanity, the judge substitutes 'your own cynicism, you mean to say'.[78] This substitution recalls Coetzee's earlier definition of Cynicism, in *Doubling the Point*, but Costello modifies this sense to something closer to what we are calling kynicism:

> About myself, yes, I may well be cynical, in a technical sense. I cannot afford to take myself too seriously, or my motives. But as regards other people, as regards humankind or humanity, no, I do not believe I am cynical at all.[79]

Costello is cynical because she 'cannot afford to' take herself too seriously. Clearly, Coetzee's judge is using 'cynicism' in the contemporary sense, but Costello modifies this sense to something close to 'kynicism'. She may have opinions, but she does not wish to take them too seriously. However, Costello is not entirely kynical because she still believes in the power of the sympathetic imagination to know the other. She is pulled between this stoic knowledge and a kynical self-deprecation, while resisting accusations of cynicism.

The figure of the kynic turns into a metaphor for Borges's own politically ambivalent relationship with Perón and Argentina. For Beckett, the figure is an image to be distorted in his antagonism to bourgeois complacency. But for Coetzee, neither

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[76] Coetzee uses this syntax in his discussion of 'dignity without dignity' and 'innocence without innocence' in *Giving Offense* (15).
[77] Ibid, 200; 201.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.

metaphor nor image suffices to describe the dialectic between cynicism and grace, since Coetzee's kynic cannot defer actual political exigencies. How then can we integrate these political insights into the aesthetic acts of Borges, Beckett and Coetzee? To answer this question, we must first consider how these writers integrate themselves into literary traditions.

From Tradition to Precursorship

In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', T.S. Eliot declares:

> No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism.[80]

An artist's meaning includes an appreciation of 'his' relation to the dead. This is not a one-sided appreciation (which would categorise a 'traditional' notion of tradition), since adding another artwork to 'the existing monuments' will alter 'the *whole* existing order'.[81] But this addition does not disrupt the canon: the addition enforces the canon. Paul Lawley observes that Eliot's notion of tradition is monolithic and 'inhibits the notion of plural traditions'.[82] By contrast, Borges 'implies plurality of perspective' in 'Kafka and His Precursors'. Before we turn to Borges's plurality of perspective, however, we should interrogate the context of Eliot's utterance. Coetzee frames this, albeit in response to the Eliot of the 1940s, in his 1991 lecture 'What is a Classic?'

For Coetzee, Eliot's notion of tradition is 'an order you cannot escape, in which you may try to locate yourself, but in which your place gets to be defined, and continually redefined, by succeeding generations' (*SS* 8). Canonicity is inevitable, and

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[80] T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1920), 44.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Paul Lawley, 'Failure and Tradition: Coleridge/Beckett', *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 18 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 34.

inevitably changing, for those whose work is taken up by tradition. Tradition is, in a cultural sense, what stoic cosmopolitanism is in a political sense, since both revel in a 'transpersonal' movement to a shared goal: the cultural monolith of Eliot's tradition is a cosmopolitan ideal (a world republic of letters). But Coetzee also identifies a personal decision in Eliot's 'transpersonal order', 'to redefine the world around himself' (*SS* 8). Coetzee describes the process

> of a writer attempting to *make* a new identity, claiming that identity not on the basis of immigration, settlement, residence, domestication, acculturation, as other people do, or not only by such means – since Eliot with characteristic tenacity did all of the above – but by defining nationality to suit himself and then using all of his accumulated cultural power to impose that definition on educated opinion, and by resituating nationality within a specific – in this case Catholic – brand of internationalism or cosmopolitanism, in terms of which he would emerge not as a Johnny-come-lately but as a pioneer and indeed a kind of prophet [...] (*SS* 7)

Coetzee's analysis contextualises Eliot's 'tradition' in terms of Eliot's effort to redefine himself as a European. But Coetzee also points to three stages in any émigré writer's process of self-fashioning. First, the writer 'defines nationality to suit himself' rather than being defined by immigration, settlement or acculturation. Second, the writer imposes that definition on educated opinion, through an accumulated cultural power. Third, the definition and its imposition shift the context in which the writer is received, which affects how the writer is received. The writer uses a specific cosmopolitanism to redefine this context because it permits 'him' to impact the way in which 'his' work will be received. Rather than being passively absorbed into the canon, the writer can effectively adhere 'himself' to the tradition that most suits 'him'. Eliot is deliberately eschewing passive models of tradition – he refers to it as 'handing down' – in favour of a modification of 'the *whole* existing order' by 'the introduction of the new (the really

new) work of art'. The existing order is complete before the new artwork, and complete after.[83]

This modification is possible because of the poet's 'individual talent', an important qualifier since Eliot is working towards a theory to explain both tradition and poetic innovation. Individual talent involves both a historical sense and a catalytic quality. Eliot's 'historical sense'

> compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.[84]

The historical sense produces in the writer the perception of the 'presentness' of the past in 'his' work. It allows the whole of literature (or at least the literature of Europe) to be present together in a timeless moment. At the same time, the writer is curiously unaffected by the results of this perception, since, like a catalyst, the writer transforms experiences and feelings into poetry without being changed. Eliot's impersonal poet (and here we may recall Eliot's own fondness for Seneca) displays all the *apatheia*, or absence of feeling, desirable to the stoic, in a tradition that progresses towards a homogenous cosmopolitan ideal. But, as Coetzee's historical analysis of Eliot suggests, the writer is not unaffected by these experiences, which in turn dictate the plural traditions in which 'he' comes to be interpreted. Moreover, two essays by Borges splendidly turn Eliot's theory on its head.

In 'Kafka and his Precursors', Borges marks a difference between his initial impression of Kafka, 'as singular as the fabulous Phoenix', and his subsequent recognition of 'his voice, or his habits, in the texts of various literatures and various

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[83] Beckett, in 'The World and the Pants', parodies both notions of tradition when he enumerates the various critical positions his 'inoffensive madman' might hear about painting. The madman is told that everything good in painting 'is located on a line that leads from the caves of the Eyzies to the Gallery of France'. But, Beckett wryly remarks, 'it is not specified whether this is a pre-established line, or if it is a track that unrolls progressively, like the slime of a slug'. Tradition is either pre-established or it progresses, neither of which particularly impresses Beckett. (*Disj* 121)

[84] Eliot, 'Tradition', 44.

ages' (*TL* 363). While the 'heterogeneous pieces' Borges enumerates 'resemble Kafka', 'not all resemble each other' (*TL* 365). Borges grants more significance to this lack of resemblance, since the shared 'quality' that we see in these texts is 'Kafka's idiosyncrasy': only 'Kafka' makes sense of these diverse texts as a group (*TL* 365). While Eliot notes that it is the elements of past masters in the contemporary writer that evidences 'his' adhesion to tradition, for Borges a quality in the contemporary writer establishes a new tradition in heterogeneous, culturally disconnected texts. This leads Borges to his declaration that 'each writer creates his precursors. His work modifies our concept of the past, as it will modify the future'. This shows Borges's debt to Eliot, who similarly has his writer modifying our concept of the past. But it also marks the difference between Borges's approach and Eliot's, as may be seen in a second Borges essay: 'The Argentine Writer and Tradition'.

Borges, in his lecture 'The Argentine Writer and Tradition', refers to the 'problem of the Argentine writer and Tradition' as a 'rhetorical theme [...] an appearance [...] a simulacrum [...] a pseudo-problem' (*TL* 420). Rather than finding an authentically Argentinian form of literature, Borges argues, Argentinian writers should become aware that their tradition is 'all of Western culture, and I also believe that we have a right to this tradition, better than that of the inhabitants of one or other Western [read: European] nation' (*TL* 426). The other examples he cites of people with such rights are Jews, 'because they act within that culture and, at the same time, do not feel attached to it with a special devotion', and the Irish, who display a comparable ability 'to innovate in English culture' (*TL* 426). 'We are in an analogous situation, Argentinians, South Americans in general: we can use all the European themes, use them without superstition, with an irreverence that can have, and already has, fortunate consequences' (*TL* 426). The result: 'we must not be afraid and we must think that our patrimony is the universe' (*TL* 427). Borges here advocates a radical rethinking of

European aesthetics where trans-European literature is only possible in her colonies, reframing minor literature as a cosmopolitan ideal.[85] Our concern with Borges's polemic and his problematic cultural and national essentialism should not distract us from the way in which such an ideal comes about. This culture is not made by advocating a new state in the manner of the stoics (or the advocates for a distinctly Argentinian literature), but by recognising an already existent inheritance that may be used with impudence or shamelessness. Such impudence is only possible in people who receive a culture without a special devotion, whether the Jews or the Irish or the South Americans (or, perhaps, the South Africans).[86]

Eliot's historical sense, with its simultaneous order of apprehension, still applies to Borges's Argentinian literature, as the latter takes as its tradition 'all of Western culture'. This is still a provincial appropriation of the 'West' as a homogenous entity, and it is also a reverent inculcation of the individual talent into an existing tradition. Borges's stated irreverence perverts Eliot's historical sense into something far more kynical and contingent. At the same time, Borges's historical sense is necessarily more fragmented than Eliot's, since Borges's traditions are not only formed retrospectively (as are Eliot's) but *via* the influence of the latter-day writer on the reading of disparate, heterogenous texts. Borges's tradition is necessarily cosmopolitan because its component texts range across space and time. But it is not homogenous because these texts are only quilted together by their similarity to the particular writer.

If Borges subverts, or perverts, cultural homogeneity with his notion of tradition, Beckett similarly subverts culture in the 1949 'Three Dialogues with George Duthuit'. 'B' compares the 'Italian painters' to Matisse and Tal Coat. Their similarity is not in

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[85] Alistair Cormack usefully compares Borges's 'El escritor' to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* in *Yeats and Joyce: Cyclical History and the Reprobate Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2008), 63.

[86] This recalls Beckett's impudence in his parody of bourgeois sensibilities in 'Dante ... Bruno.Vico .. Joyce'. Here, Beckett does not aspire to receive Joyce with a special devotion; he is advocating a Joyce that has already received European culture without that devotion.

their 'mere means' of artistic production, but because 'they never stirred from the field of the possible, however much they may have enlarged it' (*SB4* 556). The only thing disturbed by the revolutionaries Matisse and Tal Coat is 'a certain order on the plane of the feasible' (*SB4* 556). B's respondent, D, asks what other plane might be possible, to which B gives the second most famous response of 'Three Dialogues': 'Logically none. Yet I speak of an art turning from it in disgust, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing' (*SB4* 556). B advocates, instead, 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', which D finds to be 'a violently extreme and personal point of view, of no help to us in the matter of Tal Coat' (*SB4* 556).[87] Now, the art that 'turns from it in disgust' is either cynical or kynical; in seeing through the value of 'doing a little better the same old thing', this art either disengages with the value of art or seeks new alternatives to it. Beckett, in his permutations that expression is without substance, without means, without origins, without force and without desire, nevertheless asserts an obligation to express. This may, rightly, be associated with Theodor Adorno's comments about the impossibility and necessity of poetry after the Holocaust, since both insist on an impoverishment of culture, even a defacement of culture, that does not simply give up on culture.[88] Unlike Adorno, Beckett acknowledges that it is 'a violently extreme and personal point of view', which involves the particular impoverished subject in his or her bodily engagement with culture.

This 'violently extreme and personal point of view' also describes Coetzee's rereading of Eliot. Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' and 'What is a Classic?'

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[87] B's phrase is quoted approvingly by Coetzee as his basis for dismissing Nabokov's hermeneutic games in 'Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and the Primacy of Art', *University of Cape Town Studies in English*, No. 6 (1974), 6.

[88] 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today'. Theodor W. Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society', *Prisms* [1967], trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson and Samuel Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 34. Adorno's regard for Beckett is evident in his intention to dedicate *Aesthetic Theory* (1969) to the writer.

seek to define a transpersonal order for our understanding of tradition, talent and the classic. Coetzee reads this transpersonal order as the product of Eliot's 'personal point of view'. Like Borges, Coetzee follows Eliot's theory closely in order to invert it. The three stages that Coetzee describes in Eliot's self-construction (alluded to earlier) are, moreover, three stages of self-construction identifiable in Borges, Beckett and Coetzee himself. First, they redefine their nationality to suit themselves, through negotiating what it means to be an Argentinian, Irish or South African writer. Second, they use their increasing cultural influence to impose this definition on existing paradigms.[89] Finally, their shifting context alters the way they are received as cosmopolitan or national writers and as theorists of world literature. These stages are kynical because the writers are not catalytic (since they are affected by this process) nor do they insist on a homogenous historical sense (or a form of stoicism). In the passages quoted, Borges, Beckett and Coetzee are all too aware of the impact of their personalities on the reception of their work and on the historical particularities of any literary canon: Western, national or otherwise.

Their kynical specificity shows in the way they treat their precursors. To follow this line of evidence, we will examine their relationships to each other. Beckett becomes a precursor for Borges and Borges becomes a precursor for Beckett, since the concerns of the one seem to slip easily into concerns of the other. Coetzee's early debt to Beckett and Borges develops into a relation of precursors when his focus shifts from an ahistorical engagement with their stylistic devices to a historical concern with the consequences of these stylistic devices. His shift in focus, in turn, modifies our reading of these two writers. Finally, these primarily subjective and aesthetic responses are

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[89] In *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), Sarah Brouillette argues that postcolonial authors critically and creatively participate in, rather than simply submit to, the marketing of their works as exotically other. This thesis extends Brouillette's thesis to argue that the personas produced by this marketing become themselves platforms for engaging with politics.

rooted in particular political concerns that address cosmopolitan ideals without wholeheartedly endorsing them.

Adopting a kynical paradigm of precursorship, which understands so-called 'influence' to be arbitrary and retrospectively enforced, is difficult to sustain as a purely theoretical enterprise, although it is endorsed by the three writers' conceptual rewriting of Eliot's 'tradition'. The remainder of this chapter will therefore seek to ground this interpretive strategy in historical points of coincidence between the writers in this study.

Borges on Waiting for Godot

Given Borges's critical role as translator and introducer of so much European, especially Anglo-Irish, literature to Latin America, his lack of response to Beckett's impact seems striking. This may account for why studies of Beckett and Borges have resorted to the two writers' interest in linguistic play, under the influence of Joyce or Dante, and common thematic concerns, via medical science or cultural conditions like 'extraterritoriality', postmodern 'exhaustion' and 'replenishment'.[90] And yet, a string of quotations indicate that Borges was not as silent about Beckett as has been thought.

In an interview between Richard Kearney, Seamus Heaney and Borges in Dublin for the 1981 celebration of Bloomsday, Kearney tries to extend Borges's panegyric on the greatness of Irish literature to a direct response to Beckett. In context, Borges's response is a surprising departure from his recognition of his debt to Irish writing, particularly to Joyce and Oscar Wilde, since Beckett proves to be an exception to Borges's admiration:

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[90] Anthony Cordingley, 'Keeping their Distance: Beckett and Borges Writing after Joyce', *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 14 (2004); Sam Slote, 'Stuck in Translation: Beckett and Borges on Dante', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2010); Ciaran Cosgrove, 'Radical Propensities and Juxtapositions: Defamiliarization and Difficulty in Borges and Beckett', *NUI Maynooth Papers in Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies*, No. 3 (February, 2002); Patricia Novillo-Corválan, 'Literature and Disability: The Medical Interface in Borges and Beckett', *Medical Humanities*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2011); Steiner, *Extraterritorial*; John Barth, 'The Literature of Exhaustion' and 'The Literature of Replenishment', *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction* (London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1984).

Kearney: And what of Beckett – perhaps Joyce's closest Irish literary disciple? […]

Borges: Samuel Beckett is a bore. I saw his *Waiting for Godot* and that was enough for me. I thought it was a very poor work. Why bother waiting for Godot if he never comes? Tedious stuff. I had no desire to go on to read his novels after that.[91]

It is easy to take this criticism as the resentful mutterings of a rival writer. But what is the kynical significance of such a rivalry? There are three kynical complexes woven into Borges's response, which echo earlier responses by Borges to Beckett's play: the role of the body, the language of stoic resignation and the connotations of names.

Borges, by his own admission, was already completely blind by 1956 (*OC3* 303) – the year *Waiting for Godot* was first performed in Argentina.[92] So his first 'sight' of the play is already metaphoric: he could not have 'watched' the play in the conventional sense.[93] This raises interesting questions about the phenomenological impact of Borges's body on his understanding of a work as rigorously particular in its visuals as Beckett's.[94] Moreover, as the work was performed in what Beckett considered an inferior Spanish translation, under the title *Esperando a Godot,* the nuances of Beckett's French or English would have been lost.

If Borges's body impedes a 'vision' of the play, his impatience with the play's tedium inverts an earlier, parodic response to *Waiting for Godot*, given when he found out that he would share the Prix Formentor with Beckett in 1961. Alejandro Vaccaro in *Borges: Vida y Literatura* [*Borges: Life and Literature*] cites this from a 1961 article in *La Razón*:

Naturally I should have to say that I feel very honoured by the company of the author of *Waiting for Godot*. But I can no less than bear it stoically

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[91] Jorge Luis Borges, Seamus Heany, Richard Kearney, 'Borges and the World of Fiction: An Interview with Jorge Luis Borges', *The Crane Bag*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1982), 74-5.

[92] Jorge Dubetti, *Samuel Beckett en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2000).

[93] While Borges's habit was to go to the theatre and the cinema with friends, who would describe the visual elements to him, one might imagine that the impoverished visuals of *Waiting for Godot* would be particularly difficult to explain, assuming he actually attended a performance.

[94] See the discussion of Beckett's use of image in Chapter 3.

[estoicamente]. You can say that in the same way, I bore, stoic and resignedly [estoica y resignadamente], the performance of that piece. And I even stayed until the third act.[95]

Borges tacitly suggests that, although he might have found it tedious, he nevertheless understands the play in terms of stoicism and resignation. But Borges alludes to this stoicism in a way that is playful and humorous. Borges invents a third act for Beckett's tragicomedy to parody his own efforts to 'bear it stoically'. But he achieves this by extending the play beyond Beckett's actual two acts. This relative impudence on Borges's part contrasts with stoic modesty, which, in David Hume's distinction, 'has a natural tendency to conceal a man's talents, as *impudence* displays them to the utmost'.[96] Borges's impudence reveals that his stoicism is, in fact, a kynical subversion of stoicism. It remains to be determined whether Borges's subversion concerns itself with 'truth' (in a kynical sense) or not (in a cynical sense). We will address this question in Chapter 2.

Borges's responses to Godot suggest a consistent critical response to the play, even if his tone varies dramatically from 1961 to 1981. To expand on this critical consistency, we find an earlier conversation recorded in the diary of Borges's lifelong friend and collaborator, Adolfo Bioy Casares: 'We speak of *En attendant Godot*. Borges: "It examines some vagabonds that wait for some guy, Godot. Godot=*God*=Dios, it's clear. Which is why there should be no surprise, Godot doesn't arrive"'.[97] Borges makes a standard associative leap that Coetzee will parody in his 'Eight Ways of Looking at Samuel Beckett': Godot is God. This leads us to a similar leap from *Waiting for Godot* to Borges's own work on the name, the third complex at

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[95] Alejandro Vaccaro, *Borges: Vida y Literatura* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2006), 574.

[96] David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary* [1742], ed. Eugene F. Miller, 1987. *Library of Economics and Liberty*, Accessed: 4 May 2013.
http://www.econlib.org/library/LFBooks/Hume/hmMPL43.html#Part III, Essay IV, OF IMPUDENCE AND MODESTY

[97] Adolfo Bioy Casares, *Borges* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Destino, 2006), 259.

work in Borges's 1981 response to Beckett (as a famous name) and to Godot (as the cipher for pointless waiting).[98]

How does the name affect a whimsical reference to Godot=God=Dios, or the equally whimsical reference to *Godot*'s missing Third Act? It is clear that the slippage to God's name from Godot's is not clear cut. Already the slippage from Godot (as a proper noun) to the English word for God and, finally, to the Spanish word for God, indicates that Borges himself is playing a dangerous game of association − attempting to fix Beckett to a particular reading of Godot that Beckett himself disagreed with. As a master fictioneer himself, Borges should have understood that it would always be possible for Beckett to say that Godot might be one thing one day but that tomorrow he could change Godot into whatever form he liked. Vladimir and Estragon make a comparable effort to locate an essence for Godot in their exchanges about Godot.

> Estragon: No use struggling.
> Vladimir: One is what one is.
> Estragon: No use wriggling.
> Vladimir: The essential doesn't change. (*SB3* 15)

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[98] In his essay, 'Historia de los ecos de un nombre [History of the echoes of a name]', Borges engages with the metaphysical consequences of the name of God. He cites three echoes of nomenclature in which broadly descriptivist linguistic strategies are employed to avoid revealing an essence behind the name. These echoes take as their point of origin the first encounter between Moses and God: when God appears to Moses in the form of a burning bush. Borges identifies Moses's first question as an attempt to gain some sort of power over God, since to know something's true name is to own it or control it. God's response, in Borges's words, 'Soy El que Soy' [I am He who I am], is a deferral of that possibility. This phrase does not work in the same way in early Beckett. In *More Pricks than Kicks*, Belacqua resigns himself at 'the end of all his meditations and endeavours' to the phrase: 'I am what I am. He had read the phrase somewhere and liked it and made it his own.' (*SB4* 200) 'I am what I am', then, fixes a person to a particular position in Beckett's early work. This will, of course, shift by the time of Beckett's *Three Novels*, when any attempt to fix the 'I am' will be radically problematised. Borges, by contrast, justifies his deferral with Martin Buber's exegesis of the phrase:

> Martin Buber indicates that *Ehych asher ehych* can also be translated as *I am that which I will be* or *I will be where I will be*. Moses, in the manner of Egyptian sorcerers, would have asked God how he was named to have him in his power; God would have answered, in fact: *Today I talk with you, but tomorrow I can change myself into whichever form, and also the forms of pressure, of injustice and of adversity*. (*OC2* 139)

Unlike Belacqua, God slips the bonds of Moses's act of naming precisely by virtue of difference: God is not fixed to a particular definition in space or time. The ontological structures of ser [to be], fixed and impermeable, give way to a being of locality and contingency, estar [to be].

There is no use struggling, wriggling, or even squirming for Vladimir and Estragon because 'the essential doesn't change', except when it does. Vladimir disavows their bond to Godot because it too is contingent: 'Tied to Godot! What an idea! No question of it. [Pause] For the moment' (*SB3* 15). The moment, like the bond, is contingent on the tramps' location and their ignorance of his location, an ignorance exemplified by Estragon's continued failure to remember Godot's name: 'His name is Godot?' (*SB3* 15). In order, however, for this deferral to occur there must be a virtual point to which it is being deferred. At some prospective to-come, there must be the possibility of meeting Godot, of finding out who or what or where he is, of relating contingency with fictional teleology. There is always already a Third Act to *Waiting for Godot*, a time after the performance where potentiality reaches its terminus in conceptual possibility, the point which, by being forecast, will never come but which leads Vladimir and Estragon to wait for Godot even unto the third act.

Beckett in Patagonia

Borges's use of time to assert a retrospective order has its corollary in Beckett's use of place. It is particularly Beckett's use of Argentina as an unlocatable location that introduces Beckett's intersection with Borges in the former's work. For, while Beckett does not respond to Borges directly in any published material, he does refer to Borges's homeland in his 1957 radio play *Embers* and his 1982 'dramaticule', *Catastrophe*, written in support of Václav Havel.[99] As we discuss *Catastrophe* (and Patagonia) in Chapter 3, let us restrict our comments to *Embers* at this point.[100]

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[99] Beckett mentions reading Guillermo de Torres's *Literaturas europeas de vanguardia* (1925), in which Borges is quoted extensively, in a 1935 letter to Thomas McGreevy (*SBL1* 264-6).

[100] *Embers*, written for radio between 1957 and 1959 and first broadcast by the BBC Third Programme in 1959, enjoyed the dubious reputation as 'Beckett's most difficult work'. Hugh Kenner, *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (London: John Calder, 1962), 174. Kenner's remark seems premature to readers of works written in or after 1961, radio-dramatic (The *Rough for Radios*, for instance) or prose (*All Strange Away*, *Imagination Dead Imagine* or *Ping*), but it did frame a general response as late as Paul Lawley's 1980

Beckett described *Embers* as depending on an ambiguity. Lawley quotes an

interview with P.L. Mignon in which Beckett said: '*Embers* is based on an ambiguity: is

the character hallucinating or is this his reality?'[101] Certainly, the main character Henry

spends much of the play talking about the sea (which is heard in the background) to

himself (or to his father) and to Ada, his wife who may or may not be dead. But Henry's

two monologues (directed at his father) bracket two dialogues with Ada, which, in turn,

are divided by a memory or hallucination of their daughter, Addie having a piano

lesson. Either Henry hallucinates his dead father and the conversation with his dead

wife (which brings on a further, internal hallucination of his daughter) or he faces the

actual memories of father, wife and daughter, while trying to raise his father's ghost.

But, while the play situates itself beside an anonymous seashore (achieved through

background noises and Henry's narration), there are also two obscure references to

Argentina. First, Henry refers to the difficulties of trying to secure money held in

probate after his father apparently drowns during an evening bathe:

> We never found your body, you know, that held up probate an
> unconscionable time, they said there was nothing to prove you hadn't run
> away from us all and alive and well under a false name in the Argentine for
> example, that grieved mother greatly. (*SB3* 198)

What it is that grieves mother greatly is ambiguous. Is it father living under a false name

in the Argentine? Is it the unconscionable time of probate? Or is it the absence of the

body?

Henry's rather antiquated reference to 'the Argentine', rather than 'Argentina',

certainly appears to be an arbitrary marker of distance, much like 'Timbuktu'. However,

a further reference by Henry to the geography of 'the Argentine' suggests that the

arbitrariness has some method to it: 'Get away from it! Where it couldn't get at me! The

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essay '*Embers*: an Interpretation'. Paul Lawley, '*Embers*: an Interpretation', *Journal of Beckett Studies*,
No. 6 (1980).
[101] Ibid, 10.

Pampas! What?' (*SB3* 203)[102] Henry, again arbitrarily, picks the Pampas as a place to get away from the sound of the sea; again an arbitrary name gestures to distance. But, since the Pampas are *within* Argentina, it also suggests that escaping the sea will be equivalent to his father's 'escape' to 'the Argentine': a correspondent 'closeness' emerges in their mutual desires to 'run away'. Moreover, just prior to the discussion of both 'the Argentine' and 'the Pampas', Henry hears the sound of hooves, which replace the otherwise constant sound of the sea that he finds so torturous, which suggests a not-so-arbitrary metonymic link between horses and the Pampas.

In the original BBC production, Henry refers to 'Venezuela' as the place to which his father runs away and to 'Tibet' as a place where he might get away from the sea.[103] In his discussion of the subsequent change to 'the Argentine' and 'the Pampas', Clas Zilliacus quotes Elmar Tophaven as saying that Beckett wanted to avoid 'undue topical associations with the Dalai Lama'.[104] As Lawley contends, 'the geographical tie-up [...] is more than just a mechanical device', since there is a direct link between 'the Argentine' and 'the Pampas', while 'Tibet' has no apparent relation to 'Venezuela' for *Embers* other than distance: distance from each other, added to the already mentioned distances from Henry and his mother (for his father) and distance from the sea (for Henry).[105] There is a stronger structural link between 'Tibet' and 'Switzerland', to which Henry admits to going also 'to get away from [the sea]' (*SB3* 198). But with the suppression of the 1959 uprising in Tibet by the People's Republic of China, and the exile of the Dalai Lama, Henry 'getting away from it' in Tibet has political connotations Beckett may have wanted to avoid. However, Beckett is not simply 'running away'

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[102] 'The Pampas' are the grasslands around Buenos Aires.

[103] In the YouTube copy of *Embers*, taken from the British Library's 2006 release of Samuel Beckett's *Works for Radio: Original Broadcasts*, it is interesting to note that Jack MacGowran pronounces 'Venezuela', 'Venezweela'. This promotes a regional, rather than universal, reception of the name. 'Samuel Beckett – Embers [1959]', *Youtube*, 23 Feb 2012, Accessed: 9 April 2013. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_wp0MDYuaQU

[104] Clas Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting: A Study of the Works of Samuel Beckett for and in Radio and Television* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1976), 89.

[105] Lawley, '*Embers*', 36.

from world politics, since he is also avoiding a parallel between Tibet and the politically neutral Switzerland. 'Living alive and well under a false name in the Argentine' could make the post-1961 reader think of Adolf Eichmann, captured in Buenos Aires on the 11th of May 1960. But Beckett made these changes in 1959.[106] Rather, Beckett's spatial use of 'the Argentine' is comparable to Borges's temporal use of *Godot*'s third act. 'The Argentine' and 'the Pampas' are virtual locations for Henry to consider, and reject, as destinations of escape. As Beckett's characters never make good the escape to which they constantly refer, this rejection is necessary. But there must be a virtual option to be rejected for the character to have some semblance of subjectivity, etiolated though it may be. Here, our argument circles round on itself, since it is precisely by opening up the 'virtual' escape route of 'the Argentine' that Henry is given the opportunity to assert his subjectivity (through choosing not to escape). This virtual space is no more arbitrary than Borges's virtual time.[107] There are internal (stylistic) and external (political) significances to Beckett's use of 'the Argentine' and the Pampas that do not need to be attached to authorial intention. First, the composite of 'the Argentine', 'the Pampas', 'the hooves' and 'living under a false name' are all aesthetically significant to a drama about escaping sound and memory, especially in a radio play, a genre Beckett described as 'coming out of the dark'.[108] Second, this composite leads to a tension between the virtual as an aesthetic device and the political implications of the virtual in performance. After all, *Godot* does seem to beg a third act for its audience and people do live under false names in 'the Argentine'.

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[106] However, Argentina was referred to as 'the Nazis' Mecca' as early as 1950 in Ada's favourite newspaper *The Manchester Guardian*. 'Escape Routes to Argentina: A Profitable Racket', *The Manchester Guardian*, 20 Feb 1950, 10. *Proquest Historical Newspapers*, Accessed: 9 April 2013. http://0search.proquest.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/hnpguardianobserver/docview/479071133/13D5547AFE42E423D55/3?accountid=14664

[107] Or, for instance, the use of 'Timbuktu' a few years after the Ahmed Baba Institute was set alight.

[108] Beckett qtd. Marjorie Perloff, 'The Silence That Is Not Silence: Acoustic Art in Samuel Beckett's *Embers*', *Samuel Beckett and the Visual Arts: Music, Visual Arts, and Non-Print Media* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 248.

Beckett makes no remarks about Borges but does, sporadically, share Borges's interest in 'the Argentine', with which he illustrates a tension between lived space and potential space. At the same time, Borges disparages Beckett in a 'violently extreme and personal' manner as an exception to his general affinity with Ireland and Irish writing. His remarks are assiduously kynical, illustrating a tension in *Waiting for Godot* between experienced time and potential time. Both Beckett and Borges capture this tension through a politically charged use of proper nouns, which, despite their rigidity, are made to slip and slide. This regard for culture, aesthetics, names and geography is intimately bound up in kynical aesthetics and the subject we are calling the kynical cosmopolitan.

Coetzee between Beckett and Borges

Coetzee's relationship with Beckett stretches from the discussions about *Waiting for Godot* and the description of reading *Watt* for the first time, recounted in *Youth*, through his PhD thesis (*The English Fiction of Samuel Beckett: An Essay in Stylistic Analysis*) at the University of Texas at Austin and early academic essays, to the strangely elliptical texts written for the Beckett centenary in 2006, 'Eight Ways of Looking at Samuel Beckett', 'Introduction: Poems, Prose and Criticism' and 'Samuel Beckett in Cape Town – An Imaginary History'.[109] N.C.T. Meihuizen observes a split between the earlier, scholarly activity on stylistics and the later quasi-historical examination of Beckett's stylistic influence.[110] Coetzee saw his earliest essays on Beckett's style in the 60s and 70s as scholarly exercises, but 'also attempts to get closer to a secret, a secret of Beckett's that I wanted to make my own' (*DP* 25). But in his later works, including this account from *Doubling the Point* (1992), the short essay 'Homage' (1993), and the Beckett centenary texts, there is a creative reimagining of this relationship as filial as

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[109] *Y* 155; Coetzee, *The English Fiction of Samuel Beckett: An Essay in Stylistic Analysis* (Austin: U Texas Thesis, 1969); Coetzee, 'Introduction', *SB4*; Coetzee, 'Samuel Beckett in Cape Town', *Beckett Remembering*.
[110] N.C.T. Meihuizen, 'Beckett and Coetzee: Alternative Identities', *Liberator*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (2011), 11.

well as stylistic. In his 'Imaginary History', Coetzee considers the possibility that

Beckett, who applied for a job at the University of Cape Town in 1937, could have

taken the job (which, in fact, he was not offered) and stayed in Cape Town. In this

alternate history, the young Coetzee might not have encountered Professor Beckett, but,

'since I would have been no less resistant to adopting Professor Beckett or anyone else

as a spiritual father than Professor Beckett would have been to adopting me as a

spiritual son […] I would certainly not have spent my time at the University of Texas

labouring over a doctoral dissertation on Professor Beckett's prose style'.[111] Critically,

Coetzee refers to the question of whether he would 'shake off the influence of that prose

style' as 'another question entirely'.[112] He repeats the anecdote in 'Eight Ways of

Looking at Samuel Beckett', an octet of theses given at the 2006 Tokyo Samuel Beckett

Centenary Conference, but he does not mention his own possible relationship with

Beckett. Rather, Beckett is transformed into an Odysseus, captivated by a 'bronze-

limbed Calypso' (in the 'Imaginary History', Beckett meets and marries 'a South

African belle'), who, after years 'instructing the daughters of the merchant class in the

rudiments of the Tuscan tongue' (his 'years of easy colonial life'), would have had no

reason 'to abandon his insular paradise and set sail again for Ithaca' (rather more

prosaically described in an 'Imaginary History' as 'he might have found a return to war-

ravaged Europe unappealing').[113] If Coetzee's version of Beckett's odyssey was more

suited to the oral nature of his Tokyo presentation, it also fits the broader context of a

talk that links writing to seafaring and exploration. Moreover, it turns a proleptic

imagined historical fact (the unappealing return) into a proleptic imagined historical

metaphor (setting sail for Ithaca) for going on, in which Beckett fails to 'try again. Fail

again. Fail better' (*SB4* 471). By observing Beckett's failure to try again, Coetzee prises

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[111] Coetzee, 'Beckett in Cape Town', 75; 76.
[112] Ibid, 76.
[113] 'EWSB' 29; Coetzee, 'Beckett in Cape Town', 75.

himself from an ahistorical debt to Beckett's style and places Beckett (style and man) into a historical moment.

In Coetzee's move from an ahistorical treatment of Beckett's style in itself to a historical engagement with the implications of this style, we may note a shift from a treatment of style as inseparable from influence to a treatment of style as separated from Beckett's historical status as a precursor: influence, taken for granted in the academic exercises of the early Coetzee, calls for mention when the later Coetzee has shaken it off in his historical development. By *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee is sufficiently removed from Beckett's influence that he can pose the question, explicitly of 'anti-illusionism' and implicitly of Beckett: 'Anti-illusionism is, I suspect, only a marking of time, a phase of recuperation, in the history of the novel. The question is, what next?' (*DP* 27). The epistemological problems of anti-illusionism are outweighed by their presence in history. Patrick Hayes, in his study of Coetzee's relationship to the history of the novel, style and politics, argues that Coetzee's writing constitutes a 'complex engagement with the form of the novel [that] should be understood as an attempt to find a way out of the assumptions made by this tradition'.[114] Rather than 'flattening' literature into politics, Hayes argues that Coetzee plays with the boundaries of political discourse: while 'on a thematic level his fiction repeatedly suggests that the condition of modernity is made up of competing, equally important, and yet incommensurate ways of imagining the good community', his prose 'tries to de-homogenise the concepts that differently positioned readers bring to the text'.[115] Coetzee's 'writing after Beckett' exposes a critical flaw in Beckett's monist/dualist dilemma: '"many things" are missing from Beckett's account of life, "of which the biggest is the whale"'.[116] Hayes contextualises this reference in 'Eight Ways' as both a criticism of Beckett's limitations in attempting to engage with

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[114] Patrick Hayes, *J.M. Coetzee and the Novel: Writing and Politics after Beckett* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 4.
[115] Ibid, 5.
[116] Ibid, 34.

otherness and a provocation for an audience in Tokyo shortly after Japan's government granted permission for whaling to continue. '[Coetzee] is a writer deeply indebted to Beckett's prose, but has had the "imaginative courage" to move it beyond solipsism, and reinterpret it in terms of the dynamics of embodied life'.[117] 'Embodied life', for Hayes, is 'the life that has to confront not only the otherness of the self, but the otherness of the beings that one lives alongside, and thus the political question of what it means to live in a community'.[118] Style, when confronted with the realities of the body, can either retreat into solipsism or engage with political questions of how to live together. Coetzee subjects Beckett to a critical, kynical revision: Beckett, as important as he may be to Coetzee as a stylistic precursor, fails, for Coetzee, to address issues of historical injustice.[119]

Although Coetzee's stylistic debt to Beckett has received ample attention from critics, not least Hayes himself, his debt to Borges has remained largely unexplored.[120] Since Coetzee himself does not 'create Borges as one of his precursors', scholars have made little more than brief asides: the late Stephen Watson called the example of Borges and Nabokov in *Dusklands*'s pseudoscholarship 'palpable' but did not explore this comparison further.[121] Given that such asides begin in the first review of *Dusklands*

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[117] Ibid, 37.

[118] Ibid.

[119] The previous discussion of Beckett's literary politics suggests that Coetzee does not do justice to the ways in which Beckett does 'dream up the whale'.

[120] Notable work on Beckett and Coetzee includes articles by Gilbert Yeoh, Derek Attridge, Paul Sheehan and Chris Ackerley. Gilbert Yeoh, 'J.M. Coetzee and Samuel Beckett: Nothingness, Minimalism and Indeterminacy', *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (2000); Yeoh, 'J.M. Coetzee and Samuel Beckett: Ethics, Truth-Telling and Self-Deception', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (2003); Derek Attridge, 'Sex, Comedy and Influence: Coetzee's Beckett', *J.M. Coetzee in Context and Theory*, eds. Elleke Boehmer, Katy Iddiols and Robert Eaglestone (London and New York: Continuum, 2009); Paul Sheehan, 'The Disasters of *Youth*: Coetzee and Geomodernism', *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 57, No. 1, (Spring 2011); Chris Ackerley, 'Style: Coetzee and Beckett', *Awakening the Countervoices: A Companion to the Works of J.M. Coetzee*, ed. Tim Mehigan (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011). Patrick Hayes and Peter Boxall have both written on fiction 'after' or 'since' Beckett. Peter Boxall, *Since Beckett: Contemporary Writing in the Wake of Modernism* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011).

[121] Stephen Watson, 'Colonialism and the Novels of J.M. Coetzee', *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Autumn, 1986), 371. Watson does, however, make the bold claim that all of European

and continue to be made into 2013, the neglect of Borges in Coetzee scholarship is a critical oversight.[122]

Indeed, Coetzee gestures explicitly to Borges the precursor in *Dusklands*. This gesture is the double death of Jacobus Coetzee's servant Klawer, which received enough attention from reviewers (including Ravan books editor, Peter Randall) that a series of letters confirmed it was intended and not a misprint.[123] Coetzee, significantly, avoids intention in his reply to Randall: 'Regarding the alternative deaths of Klawer; I do not believe in the principle of authorial explication, so what I have done is ask Crewe [...] he discusses "the disclosure of stage machinery"'.[124] Even at this early stage, Coetzee follows 'death of the author' protocols that would characterise his later reticence to remark on his work. Moreover, given the semi-private nature of this correspondence, it indicates a fidelity to the death of authorial intention, since there is no public to whom he might be representing himself. Finally, it also speaks, perhaps, to the multiple paths Coetzee intended for his novel, a member of 'the subaltern genre' as Borges would call it (*OC1* 513).

In the short story, 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan [The Garden of Forking Paths]', Borges's narrator, Yu Tsun, a spy on the run from the intelligence officer Richard Madden, finds himself at the house of Stephen Albert, a sinologist dedicated to the work of Yu's ancestor, Ts'ui Pên. Ts'ui Pên's greatest work is a 'chaotic novel'

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literature has gone into the making of Coetzee, which is remarkably congruent with Borges's claims for the Argentinian writer in 'The Argentine Writer and Tradition' – an essay Watson knew well.

[122] Jonathan Crewe, 'Review of *Dusklands*, by J.M. Coetzee', *Contrast*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1974); Jeffrey Errington, 'Review: *J.M. Coetzee, a Life in Writing* by J. C. Kannemeyer', *The Quarterly Conversation*, No. 31 (Spring, 2013). Accessed: 10 April 2013.
http://quarterlyconversation.com/j-m-coetzee-a-life-in-writing-by-j-c-kannemeyer
Errington begins his favourable review of Kannemeyer's biography by recounting a day-dream meeting between Jorge Luis Borges and Coetzee during their time at the University of Texas, Austin. 'I saw these two provincials who found a new way out of the stultified tradition of high modernism (a stultification that Coetzee captures so well in *Youth)*. After their food arrives they start to discuss the use of footnotes in Gibbon's histories, the banalities of living in a police state, far from any cultured metropole and, finally, breaking out in laughter over the absurdity of the word *realism*'.

[123] For a review of this exchange, and the broader textual history of *Dusklands*, see Hermann Wittenberg, 'Towards an Archaeology of *Dusklands*', *English in Africa*, No. 3 (2011).

[124] Ibid.

called *The Garden of Forking Paths* (*OC1* 512). Albert discloses the novel's stage

machinery, previously thought to be incomprehensible:

> The phrase *various futures (not all)* raised for me the image of the fork in
> time, not in space [...] In all fiction, every time that a man is faced with
> diverse alternatives, he opts for one and eliminates the others; in that of
> the almost inextricable Ts'ui Pên, he opts – simultaneously – for all of
> them. *He creates*, in this way, diverse futures, diverse times, that also
> proliferate and fork [...] Fang can kill the intruder, the intruder can kill
> Fang, both can survive, both can die [...] in the work of Ts'ui Pên, all the
> possibilities occur; each one is the point of departure for other forks. (*OC1*
> 512)

Ts'ui Pên writes his novel to incorporate possible times, rather than possible spaces.

Since the diverse futures proliferate and fork, it is necessary to pursue the possibilities

through to their possible outcomes: the situation where the intruder is killed, the

situation where Fang is killed etc. Klawer's double death, then, attempts to pursue the

infinite possibilities of Jacobus Coetzee's colonial imposition on the Great Namaqua

simultaneously. It seems unlikely that the 'forking paths of the inner adventure' that

Jacobus Coetzee traces 'tranquilly [...] in my heart' are not those of Borges, 'these

forking paths across that true wilderness without polity called the land of the Great

Namaqua where everything, I was to find, was possible' (*Du* 70-1). Jacobus Coetzee

has escaped the polity that grounds the kynic in her political realities; in his cynical

freedom everything is possible.

David Attwell remarks that 'there has been unnecessary confusion over the fact

that Klawer's death seems to occur twice'.[125] Attwell resolves this confusion with 'a

simple distinction' between '*sujet* and *fabula*' ('between narrative elements and their

treatment or presentation').[126] For Attwell, it is an issue of historiographical

representation: Klawer, for Jacobus Coetzee, effectively drowns in the river because he

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125 David Attwell, '"The Labyrinth of My History": The Struggle with Filiation in J.M. Coetzee's
Dusklands', *History Workshop: Structure and Experience in the Making of Apartheid*, 6-10 February
(1990), 24. *WIReDSpace*. Accessed: 10 April 2013.
http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/7581/HWS-8.pdf?sequence=1
126 Ibid.

is no longer useful; he develops the fever as a result and dies with Coetzee 'lingering sentimentally on the moment of their passing for the purpose of self-aggrandisement'.[127] 'A proper repetition of narrative elements – with a range of other postmodern devices – is developed fully only in *Heart of the Country*'.[128] Attwell's concerns are well-founded, since Klawer's second death does not actually contradict his first. But the second death also traces a second possible fork: 'Klawer is swept away' leads either to 'Klawer drowns' or to 'Klawer is rescued but contracts a fever, and is left to die'. At this level, then, Coetzee appears to be offering a small homage to Borges in the form of a technical device.

This technical debt develops in J.M. Coetzee's later work, particularly *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007) and *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013).[129] Here, Coetzee's use of Borges follows a similar pattern to his use of Beckett: a stylistic influence (such as the double death) becomes a reconsideration of philosophical and historical principles. This is evident in Coetzee's use of Ireneo Funes, Borges's extraordinarily memorious character from 'Funes el memorioso [Funes the memorious]', in both novels. In *The Childhood of Jesus*, the boy called David apparently has great difficulty learning how to read, write and count. The problem he has is with the transition from naming specific numbers, words and letters to identifying the underlying conceptual systems at work in reading, writing and counting. David does not name his numbers according to the rule of naming. He names them according to personal preference. This vignette revisits as a case example the problem JC raises in his essay 'On Zeno' in *Diary of a Bad Year*, namely: at what point does the demonstration of counting become the apprehension of

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[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid.

[129] In his review of Borges's *Collected Fictions*, Coetzee makes a pointed comment about Evelyn Fishburn and Psiche Hughes's *A Dictionary of Borges* (1990): 'a commendable work of reference which, however, fails to rise to the challenge of providing an entry for J.L. Borges, a character – fictional? real? – who appears in the story "Borges and I"' (*SS* 166). This comment is apposite for a comparable dictionary of Coetzee, whose autobiographical fictions, *Boyhood* (1997), *Youth* (2001) and *Summertime* (2009), also play with a character called John who might be fictional and/or real.

the system of counting? This point is the moment when 'the child *gets the idea*' or '*gets it*, namely gets the rule for naming the next number'; this is when 'the whole of mathematics takes off' (*DBY* 89; 90). JC's description, though apposite to David, is of Funes of 'Funes el memorioso'. For JC, the consequence of 'Borges' kabbalistic, Kantian fable' is that 'the order we see in the universe may not reside in the universe at all, but in the paradigms of thought we bring to it' (*DBY* 96). JC goes on to write that 'the whole of mathematics rests on my ability to *count*' and then explain this count as 'my ability, given the name of N, to name N+1 without knowing its name beforehand, without memorizing an infinite list' (*DBY* 96). Counting, in JC's account, is correlative with the act of naming, hence the clumsy pseudo-repetition: 'namely gets the rule of naming the next number'. The '*it*' the child gets is named the rule of naming; mathematics is the subordination of naming to this rule, the foundational axiom on which the ability to count is based. When David chooses to name his numbers, he reacts to the rule of naming as if, to him, in JC's words, 'the counting rule, and indeed the even more fundamental rules that allow us to encompass the world in language, are simply alien' (*DBY* 96).

The moment in which mathematics is subjectified has its corollary in earlier comments about perception by JC's secretary Anya. When she shares her concerns about an earlier argument about children, from the essay 'On Paedophilia', with her neo-conservative 'partner' Alan, he 'at once put[s] his finger on the weak link'. 'He is trying to draw a line between realities and perceptions, said Alan. But everything is perception. That is what Kant proved. That was the Kantian revolution' (*DBY* 90). Alan's ability is, in Anya's words, to 'cut through the crap in no time' (*DBY* 90). He cuts through 'the crap' in the opposite way to Anya. For Alan, 'everything is perception'. But Anya worries that the 'actor who looks like a child and acts the part of a child' may actually be a child. 'Get real!' she thinks (*DBY* 89). Two pages later, JC will note of

interchangeability that, while little difference would be made to the English language 'if the word *krap* were to replace the wor[d] *park*', mathematics, on the other hand, 'would be thrown into confusion if *3618* were to replace *8163*' (*DBY* 92).[130] While some things are open to reinterpretation (as with Alan's 'perception'), others are fixed to systems of thought that cannot be changed (as with Anya's 'real'). This tension in the novel suggests a complication to the vulgar Kantianism at work in JC and Alan's comments. As we shall show now, Alan's engagements with Kant bring an added significance to Borges as Coetzee's precursor, and not simply because 'Borges' kabbalistic, Kantian fable' is critiquing Kant. They also contain larger implications for the reading of Coetzee as a kynical cosmopolitan.

The significance of 'Kantianism' to Coetzee's connection with Borges becomes apparent when read alongside David E. Johnson's essay on 'Funes el memorioso' entitled 'Kant's Dog'.[131] The starting point for Johnson's comparative reading of Kant and Borges is the occurrence of a dog in Kant's chapter on schematism in *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant introduces a dog to prove that the imagination can

> delineate the figure of a four-footed animal in a general manner, without limitation to any single determinate figure such as experience, or any possible image that I can represent *in concreto*, actually presents.[132]

Funes, however, encounters dogs in a manifold without being able to delineate a generic 'Kantian' figure of a four-footed animal:

> Not only was it difficult for him to see that the generic symbol 'dog' took in all the dissimilar individuals of all shapes and sizes, it irritated him that the 'dog' of three-fourteen in the afternoon, seen in profile, should be indicated by the same noun as the dog at three-fifteen, seen frontally. (*OC1* 309)

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[130] Such examples suggest a far more structurally cohesive relationship between the three narratives in *Diary of a Bad Year* than first appears.

[131] David E. Johnson, 'Kant's Dog', *Diacritics*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Spring, 2004).

[132] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [1781], trans. Norman Kemp Smith (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1929), 183.

Funes fails to apprehend the schema of the dog.[133] Moreover, precisely because he cannot apprehend the dog as schematic in its spatial and temporal variations, Funes encounters it in a way that Kant cannot, a way that makes Funes's dog very like Coetzee's whale in 'Eight Ways'. While Kant proves that 'the schemata are thus nothing but *a priori* determinations of time in accordance with rules', Funes is unable to understand schematism precisely because he is incapable of determining whether anything is linked through time, not even the dog(s) seen at three-fourteen and three-fifteen, in profile and frontally.[134] Funes, as the archetypal hero of anti-schematism, attacks the *a priori* quality of schematism with his name/number system: his system confuses the distinction Kant is careful to make earlier in the chapter between image and schema, later concretised using the dog.

> The schema is in itself always a product of the imagination. Since, however, the synthesis of imagination aims at no special intuition, but only at unity in the determination of sensibility, the schema has to be distinguished from the image.[135]

Unlike Kant, Funes cannot distinguish schema from image, since each number in his inverted system of enumeration is inextricably linked to the image that gives it its name. Yet it is through the separation of numbers from their presentation that Kant will distinguish the image from the schema, which in turn brings our discussion back to JC's discussion of Zeno and the process of learning to count. Kant writes

> if five points be set alongside one another, thus, ..., I have an image of the number five. But if, on the other hand, I think only a number in general, whether it be five or a hundred, this thought is rather the representation of a method whereby a multiplicity, for instance a thousand, may be represented in an image in conformity with a certain concept, than the image itself. This representation of a universal procedure of imagination in providing an image for a concept, I entitle the schema of this concept.[136]

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133 Such differentiation takes an ethical turn in *Disgrace*, where the necessarily generic reference made about the ethical treatment of dogs at the Grahamstown SPCA contrasts with David Lurie's desire to accord each corpse an individual dignity.

134 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 185.

135 Ibid, 182.

136 Ibid, 182.

When the child understands the axiom of naming, which JC refers to as 'getting it', the child has internalised this schema of the concept, in which 'this thought is rather the representation of a method [...] than the image itself'. David, in *The Childhood of Jesus*, is capable of determining links between things over time, but realises that such determination inevitably discards the particular in favour of the universal. In the cases of David and Funes, and in JC's discussion, their idiosyncratic number system is not significant because the names differ from those of conventional numbers. The system is significant because it does not employ a concept, as does the standard naming of numbers, but an image without schema, an image in its 'unimaginable freedom'.[137]

Coetzee himself engages with Kant in a way that proves productive for reading his work alongside that of Borges, and may account for why he calls 'Funes' a Kantian fable. Coetzee introduces us to a Kant in *Doubling the Point*, when he ends a discussion with David Attwell on freedom by stating: 'I do not imagine freedom, freedom *an sich*; I do not represent it. Freedom is another name for the unimaginable, says Kant, and he is right' (*DP* 341). This Kant may be right, but whose Kant is it?[138] For Coetzee's Kant, the practical function of freedom gives way to its empty 'unimaginability', because it relies on presupposition. Identifying freedom's unimaginability has the opposite effect to that intended in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Kant acknowledges that 'freedom is only *an idea of reason*, whose objective reality in itself is doubtful'.

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[137] This undercuts the principles of mathematics in much the way that JC suggests at the end of his essay, 'On Zeno': 'mathematics [...] may equally well be a private language – private to human beings with human brains – in which we doodle on the walls of our cave' (*DBY* 96).

[138] Kant does write the following in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*:

> We have finally traced the determinate concept of morality back to the idea of freedom, but we couldn't prove freedom to be actual in ourselves and in human nature. We saw only that we must *presuppose* it if we want to think of a being as rational and as conscious of himself as the cause of his own actions.

Freedom is necessary for Kant's morality, but it functions as something in the future perfect: in order to achieve its purpose as the basis for morality, it *will have been* presupposed as always having been the case. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* [1785], trans. and ed. Mary Gregor, intro. Christine M. Korsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 55.

Opposing freedom to the actuality of 'natural necessity' resolves itself in 'no real contradiction […] for [philosophy] can't give up the concept of nature any more than it can that of freedom'.[139] Stating that freedom is the unimaginable has the reverse effect. It opens freedom to the possibility that the faculty of reason will fail to apprehend it as the dialectical partner of natural necessity. The effect is devastating to all Kantian morality, not least the arguments that lead him to limit cosmopolitan right to the condition of universal hospitality, since freedom's unimaginable quality needs to remain functional in order to maintain moral certitude about the limitations of rights by laws. Here, Coetzee lays the very site of freedom open to a critical scrutiny that it cannot sustain; as Foucault found in Borges's Chinese Encyclopedia, we find Coetzee disrupting the ground on which Kant will lay his *Groundwork*. Where early Coetzee was happy to take the pleasing image of the labyrinth from Borges, late Coetzee uses Borges's logic to disrupt correlationist epistemology.

We find similar transformations in Coetzee's treatment of Beckett and Borges as precursors. With both writers, Coetzee moves from a relatively faithful stylistic resonance of tropes and images to a more radical, playful, implementation of their style as a historical object and a mode of thought. Coetzee's evolution in this regard is not unique to his treatment of Beckett or Borges but it does exemplify a process similar to Beckett's thoughts on image and voice and Borges's thoughts on metaphor and enumeration. Coetzee's use of Beckett and Borges develops from a general concern with their style as such, to the manipulation of that style as itself an object. From his early concern with picking up rhetorical flourishes, his style increasingly focuses on the use of such rhetorical objects.

We began this chapter with a number of cosmopolitan statements by the three authors. These described conventional stoic forms of cosmopolitanism, but something

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[139] Ibid, 63.

in the way they were made suggested a form of kynicism. To diagnose what we mean by kynicism and cynicism, we turned to those moments when the writers refer directly to the ancient kynics. This prepared us to reconsider the writers' subversion of stoic traditionalism with kynical precursorship. Finally, we showed how this subversion plays out in their relationships with each other. Our path, then, passed from politics to subjectivity to aesthetics, since the kynical subject determines a cosmopolitan politics and a kynical subject is the aesthetic formulation comprised by the writers' works. The aesthetic formulation requires some aesthetic act, and so we will dedicate the next three chapters to examining what these writers *do* in their fictional work. For chronological reasons, we begin with Borges (b. 1899) in Chapter 2, move to Beckett (b. 1906) in Chapter 3 and conclude with Coetzee (b. 1940) in Chapter 4.

Chapter 2
Kynical Metaphor and Enumeration in Borges's parables

Jorge Luis Borges enacts a kynical cosmopolitanism in parables he writes in the 1950s, later collected in *El hacedor* [*The Maker*; first translated as *Dreamtigers*] (1960/1964). This period precedes Borges's rise to international fame in the 1960s, his 'return' to poetry with the publication of *El hacedor* in 1960, and the concomitant shift of theme, tone and diction Donald Shaw observes in the mature poetry.[1] It marks a point in Borges's oeuvre where, as Shaw notes, there are exemplary poems of two particularly important 'Borgesian' themes: 'his sense of Americanness (and especially of *argentinidad*) and the notion of a man reaching the centre of his personal labyrinth and coming face to face with destiny and death'.[2] On the one hand, Borges presents a nuanced poetic engagement with cosmopolitan questions of European and Argentinian identity. On the other, he reflects on the poetic relationship between the public and the private self, where the poet resides in this relationship and how this affects the creation of 'personal labyrinths'. Neither is reducible to the other, nor can they be considered in isolation from each other; they form together a non-sublative dialectic that is kynically cosmopolitan. Kynical cosmopolitanism is, we might recall, neither a stoic system nor a cynical disavowal of system, but a suspension of conventional narratives of belonging and exclusion. Borges achieves this state of suspension by interrogating the relation between his public and his private selves, and the fictional status he accords to both constructions of self. This interrogation is kynical and cosmopolitan because Borges integrates his critique of ideological belonging with a reflexive critique of his

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[1] Donald L. Shaw, *Spanish American Poetry after 1950: Beyond the Vanguard* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Tamesis, 2008), 45.
[2] Ibid.

complicity with belonging. He presents these twin critiques in the form of the parable, which he explores through the technical possibilities offered by metaphor and enumeration.

In reading the parables as dialogues between the public and the private responsibilities of the artist, we will depart from reading *El hacedor* as an arbitrary miscellany, 'accumulated rather than wrote', as Borges himself would claim in his 'Autobiographical Notes'.[3] Linda Maier has demonstrated the internal congruencies between the parables and the lyrics in *El hacedor* by showing how the lyrics 'double' the themes raised in the parables.[4] Maier's essay builds on early work by Zunilda Gertel and Paul Cheselka, which argued for a deliberate collective coherency in the lyric half of *El hacedor*.[5] Yet, for all this work on the coherency of *El hacedor* as a collection, the parables continue to be examined in isolation, or as illustrative of Borges's longer *ficciones* [fictions].[6] As recently as 2013, William Rowlandson could still complain that many of the 'enigmatic shorter pieces' have 'generated scarcely any critical response'.[7] While 'each piece was written for its own sake and out of an inner necessity' according to Borges (a point borne out by the publication history of the parables), they clearly form a substantive collective response to the position of the artist in relation to a public history of political identity and a more personal history of aesthetic development.[8] Moreover, by pursuing the 'political' implications of *El hacedor*, we note a further

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[3] Jorge Luis Borges, Norman Thomas Di Giovanni, 'Autobiographical Notes', *The New Yorker*, 19 September 1970, 94.

[4] Linda Maier, 'Structural and Thematic Doubling in Borges's *El hacedor*', *Variaciones Borges*, No. 32 (2011).

[5] Zunilda Gertel, *Borges y su retorno a la poesía* (New York: U Iowa and Las Américas Publishing Company, 1967); Paul Cheselka, *The Poetry and Poetics of Jorge Luis Borges* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987). Cheselka convincingly disproves Gertel's thesis that Borges 'returned' to lyric poetry in *El hacedor* after a long hiatus by showing Borges's extensive work on the lyric form between *Cuaderno San Martín* [*San Martin Notebook*] (1929) and *El hacedor*.

[6] An exception is Gene Bell-Villada, who dedicates a significant part of his chapter on Borges's later works to *Dreamtigers* in *Borges and His Fiction: A Guide to His Mind and Art*, rev. ed. (Austin: Texas UP, 1999).

[7] William Rowlandson, *Borges, Swedenborg, and Mysticism* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), 206.

[8] Borges, 'Autobiographical Notes', 94. The publication history extends from the earliest parable, 'Dreamtigers', published in *Crítica* in 1934, to 'Mutaciones [Mutations]' and 'Una rosa amarilla [A Yellow Rose]', which appear for the first time in *El hacedor* in 1960.

departure from standard readings of the collection which Borges himself would call 'his most personal' (*Dr* 93; *OC2* 248).

The 'personal' aspect of the collection is most evident in the final parable of the collection, 'Epílogo [Epilogue]':

> a man set himself the task of drawing the world. After years, he populates a space with images of provinces, of kingdoms, of mountains, of bays, of ships, of islands, of fish, of houses, of instruments, of stars, of horses and of persons. Shortly before he dies, he discovers that that patient labyrinth of lines traces the image of his face. (*Dr* 93; *OC2* 248)

A lifetime of artistic creation, aimed at an external, 'cosmopolitan', projection of the world, produces lines of intersection that retrospectively indicate patterns of thought which foreground a consistency of which the artist-subject was not entirely aware. This is by no means a new or innovative observation but it has led to a critical tendency to follow Borges in a 'personal' reading of *El hacedor*, without much reflection on the cosmopolitan task Borges's artist has set himself. In his Introduction to *Dreamtigers*, the 1963 English translation of *El hacedor*, Michael Enguídanos identifies as Borges's theme throughout his work 'simply Borges himself'.[9] Cheselka quotes Enguídanos approvingly in his analysis of *El hacedor*, adding that the parable 'El hacedor', from which Borges draws his title for the collection, dispels any doubts that the reader might have about this affirmation.[10] This insular response to Borges as a solipsistic writer has engendered a certain tradition of reading his work as autobiographical.[11] While Borges's writing is indubitably autobiographical, especially in *El hacedor*, Enguídanos and Cheselka by emphasising this aspect of his work risk disengaging it from its particularly rigorous examination of aesthetics and politics. This engagement with aesthetics and politics is important. Even Bell-Villada suspends his diatribe against the simplicity of the 'later fiction' to note the superiority of 'Los espejos velados [The Draped Mirrors]'

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[9] Michael Enguídanos, 'Introduction', *Dreamtigers*, 12.

[10] Cheselka, *Poetry and Poetics*, 150-1.

[11] The psychoanalytic tendency is well reviewed by Rowlandson in his conclusion to *Borges, Swedenborg, and Mysticism*, 227.

to its longer, *ficciones,* counterpart 'El Zahir [The Zahir]', since the parable, 'with its directness and its absence of esoteric baggage, carries far more dramatic impact'.[12] He goes on to note that 'the bitterness and immediacy of those sketches portraying aspects of the Rosas and Perón dictatorships suggests the Perón regime […] was still in effect'.[13] This critical emphasis on interwoven aesthetic and political questions, despite the apparent solipsism of *El hacedor*, indicates the shortcomings of an entirely 'personal' approach to the collection. However, an approach that sacrifices this personal element to a purely political aesthetic also fails to appreciate the complexity of this collection. The conceptual strength of the kynical cosmopolitan, in this light, is its juxtaposition of personal and political forms of disjuncture.

We focus on the parables from *El hacedor*, to the exclusion of the verse poems that make up the other half of the book, because they constitute the bulk of Borges's work in this ambiguous genre and illuminate our reading of Borges as a kynical cosmopolitan. Borges's parables – often referred to as *minificciones* [mini-fictions] or 'prose poems' – exist in the interstices between poetry and narrative. They are also the creative form favoured by Borges in the 1950s, when he was beginning to go, or had gone, blind.[14] Of the 25 parables in *El hacedor* (excluding the seven 'Museo [Museum]' texts originally published with Bioy Casares), 15 are specifically about the relationship between the artist, the poetic artwork and the means the former uses to communicate the latter. Thirteen relate to the work and the personas of particular poets, many of whom are canonical writers: Shakespeare, Cervantes, Dante and Borges are the objects of two

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[12] Bell-Villada, *Borges and His Fiction*, 248. Bell-Villada does not note that 'Los espejos velados' was, with 'Dreamtigers' and 'Las uñas [Toenails]', the earliest of the parables published (*Crítica*, No. 58, 15 September 1934). Similarities between Bell-Villada's not altogether satisfactory dismissal of the later work and J.M. Coetzee's own comments about an elderly Borges are striking. Given that Coetzee makes similar grumblings about the later work of Beckett (at least up until *Company* and *Stirrings Still*), this may just be a trope in Coetzee's response to late style; ironic, given the devolution of his own late style.

[13] Ibid.

[14] This happens before many of the poems in *Elogio de la sombra* [*In Praise of Darkness*] (1969) or his later stories, collected in *El informe de Brodie* [*Dr Brodie's Report*] (1970), *El libro de arena* [*The Book of Sand*] (1976) and *La memoria de Shakespeare* [*Shakespeare's Memory*] (1985).

parables each ('Everything and Nothing' and 'La trama'; 'Un problema' and 'Parábola de Cervantes y de Quijote'; 'Paradiso, XXXI, 108' and 'Inferno, I, 32'; 'Dreamtigers' and 'Borges y yo');[15] Leopoldo Lugones, Homer, Giambattista Marino, the poet of the Yellow Emperor and José Hernández's *Martín Fierro* are the objects of one parable each ('A Leopoldo Lugones', 'El hacedor', 'La rosa amarilla', 'Parábola del palacio' and 'Martín Fierro'). Two parables observe how figures of representation are reformed over the passage of time ('Mutaciones' and 'Epílogo'). A concern with time links these two parables to the presiding concern with forms of history in the other ten parables, of which two are elegies for women ('Los espejos velados' and 'Delia Elena San Marco'), two are metaphysical inquiries akin to those of Swedenborg and the medieval scholastics ('Diálogo sobre un diálogo' and 'Argumentum ornithologicum'), three are the imagined afterlives of figures (famous or not) in Argentinian history ('El cautivo', 'El simulacro' and 'Diálogo de muertos'), two detail the twilight of the gods ('El testigo' and 'Ragnarök') and the last is a curious examination of toenails ('Las uñas'). The parables in the collection are divided between those concerned with the writer and the writing process, and those that address the aesthetic forms in which such processes take place (the elegy, the metaphysical inquiry, the national narrative, the apocalyptic dream and the phenomenological account).

El hacedor also demonstrates a change in Borges's thought on aesthetics. By 1960, Borges claims that he had 'come to realize that fine writing is a mistake, and a mistake born out of vanity. Good writing, I firmly believe, should be done in an unobtrusive way'.[16] Nevertheless, Borges worries about an 'essential monotony' in *El hacedor*, 'this miscellany (that time has compiled, not I, and that includes past pieces that I have not dared to amend, because I wrote them with another concept of literature)' (*D* 93; *H* 248). Alí Víquez Jímenez notes of *El hacedor* that 'in the *apparent diversity*

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[15] The English titles are given as such in the original Spanish publication.
[16] Borges, 'Autobiographical Notes', 94.

there is a *real unity*'.[17] This assessment corroborates Borges's observations about the collection's consistency, albeit not to the point of complaining about monotony. However, any effort to claim a unity for the collection does obfuscate the subsequent appearance of the pieces in *El hacedor* (synchronous publication) and their original appearances in individual journals (diachronous publication). It appears that this unity is less real than retrospectively authorised by Borges's declaration in the epilogue that 'time' compiled the collection. The epilogue becomes an aesthetic act, or an act of retrospective authorisation. This aesthetic act itself gestures to the way that Borges's aesthetics intertwine with his politics in ways that are directly linked to his sense of self. This begs the question what exactly is meant by an 'aesthetic act'.

Aesthetic (f)acts

Borges refers to the aesthetic act [hecho estético] in his essay 'La muralla y los libros [The wall and the books]' in *Otras inquicisiones* [*Other Inquisitions*]:

> music, states of happiness, mythology, faces moulded by time, certain twilights and certain places—all these are trying to tell us something, or have told us something we should not have missed, or are about to tell us something; this imminence of a revelation that is not yet produced is, perhaps, the aesthetic act [el hecho estético]. (*OC2* 15)

'Hecho' may be translated into English either as 'act' or as 'fact'. At first glance, it would appear Borges is referring to an aesthetic fact: the aesthetic facticity of an imminent revelation. Borges enumerates a series of activities, moments or places in which a revelation is not produced, but is close to being produced. The situations in Borges's enumeration are linked through causality: they each lead to an imminent revelation through the intersection of time, space and perception, without the faculty of judgment. The revelation is imminent but not yet produced, which means that the faculty of judgment has not turned them into revelation. However, the revelation may be

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[17] Alí Víquez Jímenez, 'El "Poema de los dones" en *El hacedor*: La penumbra del símbolo', *Kañina: Revista de Artes y Letras de la Universidad de Costa Rica*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1994), 62.

brought from imminence to immanence through the aesthetic act of the artist. 'La muralla y los libros' conjectures the causes behind Qing Dynasty Emperor Shih Huang Ti's two most famous commands: the building of the Great Wall and the burning of all books written before his reign. That two such large operations – 'the five to six hundred leagues of stone opposing the barbarians, the rigorous abolition of history, which is to say the past' – should have been orchestrated by a single man both fascinates and unsettles Borges's narrator.[18] Yet the conclusion is not to favour one cause over another.

> It is likely that the idea itself touches us, apart from the conjectures it permits. (Its virtue may be in the opposition of construction and destruction on a large scale). Generalizing the aforementioned case, we could infer that *all* forms have their virtue in themselves and not in the conjectured 'content'. (*OC2* 15)

Here, Borges argues that the implications of an idea are less important than the idea itself, largely because of the form that idea takes. The form of the story is more important than its content because the form apprehends the connection made through the aesthetic act. Alberto Moreiras differentiates the aesthetic *fact* from literary writing: 'Literary writing is not the aesthetic fact [el hecho estético], but a response to its incomplete imminence, which then transmits the unpresentability of the Real'.[19] Moreiras links this to 'Una rosa amarilla [A Yellow Rose]' (1960), one of the parables from *El hacedor*, where, he concludes, 'there is no possibility of expression, only of allusion'.[20] This glosses Borges's description of the day the illustrious Giambattista Marino experienced the *hecho* 'that was, in truth, the last of his life':

> then the revelation occurred. Marino *saw* the rose, as Adam was able to see it in Paradise, and felt that it was in its eternity and not in his words and that we can mention or allude but not express and that the tall and proud volumes that formed a golden penumbra in a corner of the room were not

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[18] Given how often Borges foregrounds his performance as narrator, and the instability of this presence in the parables, in which narrative voice shifts from paragraph to paragraph, I explicitly differentiate the narrator from Borges for the sake of clarity.

[19] Alberto Moreiras, *Tercer Espacio, Literatura y Duelo en América Latina* (Santiago: ARCIS/LOM Ediciones, 1999), 51.

[20] Moreiras, *Tercer Espacio*, 51.

(as his vanity dreamed) a mirror on the world, but a thing added to the
world. (*Dr* 38; *OC2* 184)

This 'last day' of Marino's life is not the day he dies, or even the day he stops writing. It

is the day he realises that what he writes does not itself reflect the world but simply

becomes a thing within the world. *Hecho estético* designates a situation in which the

inexplicable takes place. Does it designate some fabulous beyond? According to

Moreiras, it does. However, Moreiras does not explicate the tension of the 'act' in

hecho, the literary creation [*poiesis*] of writing itself, preferring to consider this 'fact' a

modernist mourning of the 'unpresentability of the Real'. Bruno Bosteels, by contrast,

argues that Borges's *hecho estético* does, in fact, lead to an act, a radical declaration of

the unpresentability of the Real.

> Beyond the horizon of language, antiphilosophers indeed typically posit
> the possibility of some radical act such as [...] Borges's own 'aesthetic
> fact,' *el hecho estético*, better translated as 'act' than as 'fact', in the sense
> that *hecho* should retain the echoes of an active *hacer*, as in *hacedor*, or
> *poet*, from *poiein*. This 'act' or 'fact' does not produce a new truth but
> what matters is rather its effect on the subject, the 'thrill', which in
> principle disqualifies any systematic theoretical or conceptual purpose.[21]

While it does not produce a new truth, the radical act does not reject truth. Rather it

permits a reshaping of the subject's reception of truth. In this sense, it accords with our

understanding of the kynic's efforts to puncture the standing order or cosmos with a

new way of seeing things, and the effect this has on the subject. 'What matters',

according to Bosteels, 'is the experiential content or effect caused in the subject,

particularly as speaking subject'.[22] As early as the 1928 collection, *El idioma de los*

argentinos [*The Language of the Argentinians*], Borges would argue that this order, or

cosmos, has not, in fact, come from literature, which, as Marino realises, is just a thing

added to the world. It is erroneous to suppose that literature has already confirmed this

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[21] Bruno Bosteels, 'Borges as Antiphilosopher', *Vanderbilt e-Journal of Luso-Hispanic Studies*, Vol. 3
(2006), 6. Accessed: 6 August 2013.
http://ejournals.library.vanderbilt.edu/ojs/index.php/lusohispanic/index
[22] Bosteels, 'Borges as Antiphilosopher', 7.

order through essential presentations of the eternal; if anything, literature has failed to provide 'valid presentations of the eternal' in its obsession with 'minute belabourings'.

> We usually suppose that literature already has stated the essential words of our lives and that innovation comes only in grammaticalities and metaphors. I dare to assert the opposite: there is an overabundance of minute belaborings but a lack of valid presentations of the eternal: of happiness, of death, of friendship.[23]

For Borges, true poetic innovation requires presentations of the eternal and it achieves these through 'aesthetic acts', which, despite their apparent 'monotony', bring about an imminent revelation.

However, if the theoretical possibilities of the *hecho estético* are particularly captivating, it is important to indicate the *hecho*'s correspondence with particular rhetorical tropes in linking order or *cosmos* to poetic devices, in order to challenge a *cosmos* that is unitary in conception with the reality that it is not. This is possible through highlighting the aesthetic value of ideas (form) in constructing their implications (content). In his Epilogue to *Otras inquisiciones*, Borges notes two tendencies that he 'discovers' while correcting its proofs. The first tendency is 'to appreciate religious or philosophical ideas for their aesthetic value [valor estético]' (*OC2* 163). The second, indicative of Borges's fascination with the generic, is 'to presuppose (and to verify) that the number of fables or metaphors for which the imagination of men has capacity is limited' (*OC2* 163). The figurative devices that consistently manifest the aesthetic value of philosophical ideas – across the themes and topics that appear in Borges's limited number of fables – are enumeration and metaphor.

Enumeration and Metaphor

Enumeration, as Jaime Alazraki notes, marks the life-long influence of Walt Whitman on Borges's poetry; poetry which itself, in turn, uses enumeration as a device to

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[23] Borges qtd. Bosteels, 'Borges as Antiphilosopher', 8.

condense the poet's life. 'With the years, the list will become longer, the lines shorter,

the voice deeper, the tone calmer, but the effort to survey his whole life through

enumerations will remain the same'.[24] What Borges identifies in Whitman's use of the

device is its potential to evince the dialectic between chaos and cosmos already

established.[25] In his endnote to the poem 'Aquél [That]' in the 1981 poetry collection *La

cifra* [*The Cipher*], Borges makes this explicit:

> this composition, like almost all the others, abuses chaotic enumeration
> [enumeración caótica]. Of this figure, which Whitman enjoyed with so
> much felicity, I can only say it must appear a chaos, a disorder and be
> intimately a cosmos, an order. (*OC3* 371)

Enumeration, therefore, is the figure by which the chaos of difference can be

contemplated in cosmic sequence. Since it figures as the listing of heterogeneous

qualities, it appears chaotic; these chaotic qualities conceal an underlying order. As with

all Borges's binaries, this apparently simple division is itself undercut through a closer

reading of the work, as is demonstrated in Foucault's famous preface to *Les Mots et Les

Choses* [*The Order of Things*], when he refers to Borges's use of the bestiary of the

Chinese Encyclopedia in 'The Analytical Language of John Wilkins':

> this book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that
> shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought –
> *our* thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography
> – breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are
> accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing
> long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old
> distinction between the Same and the Other.[26]

Foucault identifies the source of this shattering laughter not in 'the oddity of unusual

juxtapositions' that characterise the Chinese Encyclopedia; rather, the landmarks of

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[24] Jaime Alazraki, 'Enumerations as Evocations', 151.

[25] Hernán Díaz has written persuasively on Borges's engagement with Whitman's poetry, particularly regarding Borges's interest in Whitman's involvement of the reader to create a democratic literary moment. Díaz follows Borges in believing that chaotic enumeration is distinguished from mere mess because of a secret order or cosmos. Hernán Díaz, *Borges, Between History and Eternity* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012).

[26] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [1966] (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xv.

thought are shattered because Borges's enumerations collapse the common ground on which such juxtapositions might be made.[27]

> The monstrous quality that runs through Borges's enumeration consists, on the contrary, in the fact that the common ground on which such meetings are possible has itself been destroyed. What is impossible is not the propinquity of the things listed, but the very site on which their propinquity would be possible.[28]

In doing away with the *site* where the enumeration might be possible, Borges, according to Foucault, makes it impossible 'to define a common locus beneath them all'. Here, Foucault uses Borges to clarify his distinction between *utopia* and *heterotopia*. '*Utopias* afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold'.[29] Utopias allow for a common ground, albeit fictional, where enumeration does not call into question the local ordering of the world. By contrast, '*heterotopias* are disturbing, possibly because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that […] they destroy "syntax" in advance […] which causes words and things to "hold together"'.[30] Borges's enumeration creates a *heterotopia* insofar as it breaks with the utopian language that allows an intimate cosmos to cohere. Moreover, this break does not simply occur in language: it also occurs in a localised conception of the world (in this particular case, Borges's China).[31]

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[27] John King, in his seminal work on the journal *Sur*, notes a similar use of enumeration by Borges in 1927 to undercut the tendency to divide Buenos Aires writers along class grounds. The Florida (middle-class) and Boedo (working-class) groups were named after particular streets or areas in Buenos Aires, but Borges redefines the divisions on linguistic (rather than geographic or class) grounds. John King, Sur*: A Study of the Argentine Literary Journal and Its Role in the Development of a Culture, 1931-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986).

[28] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xvi.

[29] Ibid, xviii.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Richard Robinson has written persuasively about a disjuncture between two notions of the 'heterotopia' in Foucault's work in *Narratives of the European Border: A History of Nowhere* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 34. First, it appears as a linguistic atopia in the 'Preface'. Later, in 'Of Other Spaces', it occurs as 'a material social reality […] for the space that is not *here*'. Between the two understandings of heterotopia, the *virtual* space of language correlates to a *reality* in the world.

For Noé Jitrik, Foucault's 'shattering laughter' demonstrates Borges's ability to act as an 'operator' or catalyst; unaffected by the ends to which his conjectures or suggestions are taken, he is employed as the impetus for paradigm shifting thought, while remaining untouched by it.[32] This is Jitrik's principal reason for calling Borges a cynic in his 'Complex Feelings about Borges'. It also leads to two important issues for enumeration, kynicism and cosmopolitanism. First, as Jitrik himself intimates, the paradigm we are dealing with in Borges is of a theoretical framework that functions as if untouched by the ramifications of the 'linguistic turn' (poststructuralism in particular), even if it is often taken up as a shaping influence of this turn. This catalytic function requires some refinement. When Foucault highlights the 'shattering laughter' brought about by Borges's text, he points to a function of the text that is desirable to Borges (as a thinker of new forms of belonging) and yet beyond his understanding (as a believer in an intimate cosmos). The success of Borges's enumeration for his Chinese Encyclopedia is not in his ability to theorise it: it is in his ability not to theorise it. He allows it to stand as 'simple' enumeration *without* attempting to co-opt it into those systems of knowledge (utopia or cosmos) he already understands. It is less the case that this theoretical framework remains untouched than that it is able to gesture to patterns of thought properly beyond its own reliance on essentialist categories. This success is complicated by a second issue. Borges, with the international fame and prestige he acquired in the 1960s, was often invited to speak about his poetry. This meant that, when he appeared on such occasions simply to be recapitulating his metaphysical concerns, he often reshaped and rephrased them. A notion such as 'cosmos', which appears to be constant, changes even as Borges himself is changed by circumstance.[33] These issues suggest that Borges is *not* as unchanged by his enumerative operations as

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[32] Jitrik, 'Complex Feelings about Borges'.
[33] See the discussion of Borges's views on democracy and cosmos in Chapter 1.

Jitrik believes him to be: he does not function as a catalyst, in the way that T. S. Eliot expects of his stoic-poet-catalyst.[34]

While enumeration has a constant aesthetic presence (if a shifting political implication) in Borges's poetic rhetoric, the metaphor occupies a far more polemical position.[35] Borges, as a young man, was involved in the *Ultraísta* movement in Spain (late 1910s to early 1920s). *Ultraísmo* like many of the movements of the time (such as Futurism, Imagism and Vorticism) sought to modernise language to comprehend the modernisation of daily life. Borges, as a young adherent of the movement in Madrid and the primary source of its brief flowering in Buenos Aires, wrote a succession of manifestos and aesthetic tracts in 1921. From the 'passive aesthetic' of the mirror, Borges proposed a movement to the 'active aesthetic' of the prism, since

> guided by the first, art transforms itself into a copy of the objectivity of the environment or of the psychic history of the individual. Guided by the second, art redeems itself, makes of the world its instrument, and forges – beyond spatial and temporal prisons – its personal vision. (*TR1* 86)

By looking for 'the *sensation in itself* [la *sensación en sí*] within his lyric energies [esfuerzos líricos]', rather than 'the description of the spatial and temporal premises that surround it', Borges the Ultraist proposed a poetry that was immanent and synthetic (*TR1* 95). The first principle was the 'reduction of the lyric to its primordial element: the metaphor' (*TR1* 126). In 1966, Borges would satirise the movement's ideals, aiming his opprobrium at this principle particularly: 'The primacy of the metaphor was its dogma. That dogma was false; in good logic, it only requires one good non-metaphoric verse to prove that the metaphor is not an essential element. I have here a stanza' (*TR3* 128). Nevertheless, his later treatment of the metaphor itself retains his early reverence;

[34] See the discussion of Eliot's catalyst and 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in Chapter 1, in which Eliot adumbrates a stoic traditionalism.

[35] The opinions Borges expresses on enumeration are not entirely unpolemical; in the 1942 essay, 'Sobre la descripción literaria [On Literary Description]', Borges complains about the use of the 'enumeration and definition of the parts of a whole' to 'coordinate them into a single coherent image'. Borges's condemnation of such use of enumeration to achieve 'a single coherent image' does not extend to lists with 'exclamatory value' or those that 'exist verbally, even though they are unrepresentable', which suggests that Foucault's 'shattering laughter' is precisely the effect Borges aims to achieve. (*TL* 234)

what shifts is the importance Borges gives to metaphoric innovation. In a 1967 interview with Ronald Christ for *The Paris Review*, Borges identifies the shift in his aesthetic thinking about the metaphor:

> when I was a young man I was always hunting for new metaphors. Then I found out that really good metaphors are always the same. I mean you compare time to a road, death to sleeping, life to dreaming, and those are the great metaphors in literature because they correspond to something essential.[36]

Borges enumerates the comparatively few generic metaphors, tying a specific theme to a specific object. Unlike the early Borges, who constantly sought to break this generic specificity, later Borges attempts to secure it as something 'essential'. Borges will go on to fictionalise this dialectic, as Mercedes Blanco has noted, in the story 'El otro [The Other]' (1976), where the older Borges realises that his alter ego expounds a theory of metaphor that he would reject years later.[37]

The dialectic develops over Borges's career. His satiric reconstruction of his position on metaphor is also perceptible in a shift in the style of essays discussing metaphors. Borges begins his earliest essay on metaphor, 'La metáfora [The Metaphor]' (1926), by considering the similarities between metaphors and phenomena, as a deliberate link made between two distinct things: 'both are a plotted link [vinculación tramada] between two distinct things, one of which is shuffled [se la trasiega] into the other' (*TR1* 114). In his work on Icelandic *kenningar*, metaphors become the means of transmitting a cultural understanding of objects: 'they define the object less by their figure than by their use' (*OC1* 395). By his 1951 essay on Pascal, 'La esfera de Pascal', Borges considers metaphor itself to provide a link to a universal history: 'Perhaps universal history [la historia universal] is the history of a few metaphors' (*OC2* 16). He partially repeats this allusion to universal history in the 1953 'Diálagos del asceta y del

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[36] Jorge Luis Borges, Ronald Christ, 'Interview: The Art of Fiction No. 39', *The Paris Review*, No. 40 (Winter-Spring, 1967). Accessed: 6 August 2013.
http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4331/the-art-of-fiction-no-39-jorge-luis-borges
[37] Blanco, 'Borges y la metáfora', 6.

rey', where universal history is the history of a few fables. From its place as a mode of connecting ideas, the metaphor becomes a generic quotient of universal history. In the Charles Norton Lectures Borges gave at Harvard in 1967 and 1968, he ironically referred to his use of 'the same stock metaphors', while emphasising that 'what is important about metaphor is the fact of its being felt by the reader or the hearer as a metaphor'. This insistence on the 'cadence' of the metaphor in the reader or hearer corresponds, in the poetry, to an emphasis on the figurative power carried by words through their accretion of cultural significance: the 'secret complexity' of the word 'luna [moon]'.[38] But the accretion of significance also contributes to a 'universal history' and a kind of 'world literature' already packaged and marketed for export.

Although he does not comment on the economics of this practice, Borges implicitly identifies the possibilities raised for world literature by a universal history of story forms in his conclusion to 'Diálogos del asceta y el rey' (on which we drew for our discussion of kynics in Chapter 1):

> Apart from their worth, which may be greater or lesser, the above texts, disseminated in time and in space, suggest the possibility of a morphology (to use Goethe's term) or science of fundamental forms of literature. Once I conjectured in this column that all metaphors are variants of a reduced number of archetypes; perhaps this proposition is also applicable to fables. (*TR2* 306)

All stories and metaphors are, perhaps, variants of a reduced number of archetypes.[39]

These archetypes do not emerge *ex nihilo*; they are derived from morphology, the study of forms. Borges's typology is less a matter of 'archē [origin]' than of 'epiphanēs

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[38] Thorpe Running considers this complexity already to

> exist in the 'complex script' of human experience. It lies in the multiple associations a word has gathered over the centuries […] it involves stripping away the word's timeworn complications in order to experience the original astonishment that fabricators of language felt when they made their first metaphorical connections between words and objects.

In fact, while the rationale of Running's response is correct – Borges moves from metaphors using the moon to considering the implications of the word 'luna' in itself – it seems incorrect to see this as stripping away the timeworn complications to experience some 'original' astonishment. Thorpe Running, 'The "Secret Complexity" of Borges' Poetry', *Borges the Poet*, 105-6.

[39] For a detailed examination of Borges's debt to Jung in thinking about archetypes, see Rowlandson's *Borges, Swedenborg, and Mysticism*.

[coming into view]', since the types emerge from his readings of texts, not *vice versa*.

As the types 'emerge' from his reading experience, he attests to their transhistorical

value despite their geographical and cultural disparities, which also justifies the

heterogeneous nature of the texts he alludes to in 'Diálogos' (as with 'Kafka y sus

precursors [Kafka and His Precursors]', Borges lifts otherwise unrelated examples from

across the world). By referring to the morphology of fundamental forms, Borges allows

for a synthetic, *a posteriori* typology that avoids empiricism by still gesturing to the

archetype. Moreover, the allusion to Goethe and the collocation of these geographically

diverse exemplars places Borges in kynical dialogue with the cosmopolitan concept of

'Weltliteratur' or 'world literature'.

The term 'Weltliteratur', also coined by Goethe, is understood by the German

writer to 'develop in the first place when the differences that prevail within one nation

are resolved through the understanding and judgment of the rest'.[40] This resolution is

possible through the identification of a literary *morphology* that dates back to the

Ancient Greeks.

> If we really want a pattern, we must always return to the ancient Greeks, in
> whose works the beauty of mankind is constantly represented. All the rest
> we must look at only historically; appropriating to ourselves what is good,
> so far as it goes.[41]

Here, Goethe navigates between strictly realist and nominalist positions by

counterpointing the ideal represented by the Greeks with whatever other cultures have

produced that can be verified as 'good' through the historical evidence of their effect.

This is nothing less than the instantiation of a canon, where an unassailable ideal form

(Greek Art) becomes the standard against which the efficacy of art in other cultures may

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[40] Goethe qtd. Fritz Strich, *Goethe and World Literature*, trans. C. A. M. Sym (London: Routledge, 1949), 349.

[41] Goethe qtd. David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 12.

be measured. This provides the ideological basis for a *universal history* and a concomitant *universal literature*.

> It is obvious that for a considerable time the efforts of the best writers and authors of aesthetic worth in all nations have been directed to what is common to all mankind. In every field, whether the historical, the mythological, the fabulous, or the consciously imagined, one can see, behind what is national and personal, this universal quality becoming more and more apparent.[42]

The universal quality, 'becoming more and more apparent', is implicitly linked to a Kantian universal history, which also directs its efforts to what is common to all mankind. Kant develops this common interest in relation to a cosmopolitan ideal.

In Borges's criticism, we may deduce a relation between the world and literature similar to that proposed by Goethe, a relation that relies on the notion of a universal history. However, Borges's universal history is best understood as a subversion of Kantian universal history, and, concomitantly, a subversion of Goethe's 'world literature'.[43] As we have seen in our discussion of 'Diálogos del asceta y del rey', Borges maintains a healthy disregard for the Kantian ideals of a Universal History, preferring to highlight the inevitable collapse of the political order (the king) when its artificiality is exposed by the scrutiny of the non-participant (the ascetic). This takes a darker turn in 'Museo', the collection of fragments at the end of *El hacedor*, with the later parable 'In memoriam J.F.K.' (published in a subsequent edition of *El hacedor* and therefore not presented in the Boyer/Morland translation). Written in response to John F. Kennedy's assassination, 'In memoriam J.F.K.' delineates a history of violence attached to the bullet that killed him – 'This bullet is ancient' – from the 1897 assassination of the president of Uruguay, via the assassination of Lincoln, the death in

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[42] Goethe qtd. Strich, *Goethe and World Literature*, 13.

[43] This subversive quality is most evident in his *Historia universal de la infamia* [*A Universal History of Infamy*] (1935). Borges's *Historia universal* is a collection of narrative prose pieces, purportedly giving biographical accounts of criminals from a variety of cultural backgrounds. When it was republished in 1954, Borges would affectionately dismiss it as 'baroque', 'the final stage of all art, when it exhibits and squanders its methods' (*OC1* 307).

battle of Gustavus Adolphus, the executions of Christ and Socrates, to the stone with which Cain killed Abel (*OC2* 247). Theodor Adorno, writing on the notion of universal history in *Negative Dialectics*, outlines a similar trajectory: 'No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the neutron bomb'.[44] Moreover, Adorno notes that 'to say that a plan for a better world is manifested through history and unites it – after the catastrophes that have happened and in view of the catastrophes to come – would be cynical'.[45] He does however qualify this:

> not to be denied for that reason, however, is the unity that cements the discontinuous, chaotically splintered moments and phases of history – the unity of the control of nature, progressing to rule over men, and finally to that over men's inner nature.[46]

Is this diagnosis germane to the Borges who constructs universal histories of violent repetition? Certainly there is a substantive similarity in their claims to a universal history of barbarity, if not infamy, and to a process of cementing chaotically splintered moments and phases of history. Yet, while any attempt to advocate a 'plan' for a 'better' world would be 'cynical', in Adorno's use of the term, and Borges does not argue for a 'plan' as such, he does highlight the active role of the subject in constituting this unity amidst historical discontinuity, even if the subject is not aware that it has this function. This resistant, albeit ignorant, subject is the kynical cosmopolitan.

A further parable from *El hacedor* exemplifies the emergence of an ignorant, cosmopolitan subject, formed retrospectively in relation to history. 'La trama [The Plot]' (1957) follows a similar pattern to other Borges parables: it is divided into two paragraphs with the first recreating a specific scene and the second considering the consequences devolving from this scene. 'To make his horror complete, Caesar, pressed to the foot of a statue by the impatient daggers of his friends, discovers among the

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[44] Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* [1973], trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1990), 320.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.

blades and faces the face of Marcus Junius Brutus' (*Dr* 36; *OC2* 182). Borges adds this first sentence to an adapted translation of 'Et tu, Brute': 'Tú también, hijo mío! [You too, my boy!]' (*Dr* 36; *OC2* 182). 'Shakespeare and Quevedo', he notes, 'revive this pathetic cry' (*Dr* 36; *OC2* 182). The second paragraph begins: 'Destiny takes pleasure in repetitions, variations, symmetries' (*Dr* 36; *OC2* 182). The repetition, variation or symmetry in question is that of a gaucho in the south of Buenos Aires province, set upon by other gauchos, who recognises a godson 'and says to him with gentle reproof and slow surprise (these words must be heard, not read), "¡Pero, che!" He is being killed and he does not know that he is dying so that a scene might be repeated' (*Dr* 36; *OC2* 182). It is difficult to translate the regional significance of the words, which 'must be heard, not read'. 'Che' – a term made famous as the sobriquet of the Argentinian revolutionary, Ernesto Guevara, and given to him because of his tendency to use it in conversation – is an Argentinian and Uruguayan dialect marker meaning 'guy' or 'hey'.[47] The phrase, '¡Pero, che! [But, guy!]', is an expression indicating indignation or betrayal in the Argentinian and Uruguayan dialect. It is a phrase that must be 'heard' because, like many such ambiguous markers, the tone in which it is said inflects it with either indignation or a more horrified sense of betrayal. Here we have a re-enactment of the scene, made famous by Shakespeare and Quevedo (and Plutarch), but in a way that has translated it into a distinctly Argentinian idiom. Moreover, this dislocation of the scene has begun to take place in the so-called archetype, where the 'Et tu, Brute' has already been hispanised as 'Tú también, hijo mío!' While the participants – the murdered gaucho, his murdering compatriots, and the assisting godson – are therefore subjects of this re-enactment, the murdered gaucho is unaware that he is dying to repeat

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[47] For a discussion of the use of *che* as simultaneously an intimate term and as a source of authoritarian 'one-upmanship', see Isolda E. Carranza, 'Discourse Markers in the Construction of the Text, the Activity, and the Social Relations: Evidence from Courtroom Discourse', *Current Trends in the Pragmatics of Spanish*, eds. Rosina Márquez-Reiter and María Elena Placencia (Amsterdam: John Benjamins B.V., 2004), 220.

a scene. History repeats itself, but this is evident only in retrospect, not to the actors repeating the scene. Goethe's development of 'world literature', as something becoming more and more apparent, is not apprehended by the actors within 'world literature': rather, 'world literature' becomes the system by which historical subjects retrospectively make sense of their existence in a cosmopolitan order *of their own making*.

The aesthetics of this tendency towards the generic and its relationship with a retrospective historical subject are developed in a lyric poem from *El hacedor*, 'Arte Poética'. Mercedes Blanco has described 'Arte Poética' as an 'anti-manifesto that marks the return of Borges to verse'.[48] Traditionally, the *Ars Poetica* is a poetic statement on poetics.[49] The authority of the poet over the poem also gives the poem an authority over meaning. For instance, Archibald MacLeish states in his 1926 'Ars Poetica' that 'A poem should not mean / But be'.[50] While this accords with our previous discussion about Borges's aesthetic act, his own 'Arte Poética' is far less prescriptive. Rather, in a succession of phrases that each begin with a verb in the infinitive, the speaker counterpoints the acts of seeing particular images ('the river made of time and water', 'death', and 'sunsets') and of feeling ('that wakefulness is another sleep / that dreams it does not dream and that death / that frightens our flesh is that death / of each night, which is called sleep'), with the knowledge that these things reflect, through art, the consistencies in our lives (*Dr* 89; *OC2* 236). But it is also an ability to see the generic poem in these events that particularly identifies the poet: 'To see in death the dream, in

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[48] Blanco, 'Borges y la metáfora', 31.

[49] Horace, in the first century before Christ, dictates what is right and what is wrong for a writer to do. Vincente Huidobro, the poet-thinker behind the early 20th century avant-guard movement, *Creacionismo* [*Creationism*], which Borges was responding to with his *Ultraismo*, countered in his own 'Arte Poética' with the phrase 'El poeta es un pequeño dios [The poet is a small god]'. Horace, *Horace: Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1929); Vincente Huidobro, *Obra Poética*, ed. Cedomil Goic (Madrid: Allca XX, 2003).

[50] Archibald MacLeish, *The Collected Poems of Archibald MacLeish* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962). Borges may or may not have read MacLeish's 'Ars Poetica' but he did have a copy of the 1932 epic, *Conquistador*.

the sunset / a sad gold, that is poetry / which is immortal and poor' (*Dr* 89; *OC2* 236).

'At times in the afternoons a face / looks at us from the depths of a mirror; / art must be like that mirror / which reveals to us our own face' (*Dr* 89; *OC2* 236). This is the poem's most prescriptive statement: it reiterates the personal, retrospective ability of the poem to show the poet or the reader their own face. We have, it seems, returned to our starting point: the solipsism implicit in a closed relationship between poet and his world (or the reader and their own face). How are we to resolve this impasse?

Borges, for Noé Jitrik, engenders complex feelings because he seems not to concern himself with the material world or its discontents. Written in 1981, Jitrik's essay accuses Borges of failing to respond to the 1976-83 dictatorship in Argentina. According to Jitrik, the practical considerations of the marginalised ('blacks or Indians'), those kidnapped and murdered by the dictatorship ('the disappeared'), the conditions of other writers ('Alfonso Reyes'), or the questionable use of the FIFA World Cup as a political crutch ('soccer players') do not seem to interest him: he is, for Jitrik, a cynic. Moreover,

> he [is] so at the cost of whomever or whatever, manipulating that 'whomever or whatever' but doing so in order to thwart his interlocutor at the same time that his attitude, focus, or manner are affirmed, and not in order to thwart that 'whomever or whatever'. In other words, taking advantage of the 'subjectified object' in order to destroy the 'objectified subject'.[51]

Jitrik's Borges is not interested in the object of discussion, apart from its utility as a means for thwarting his interlocutor. Cynicism, according to Jitrik, places far more importance on advantages afforded by the slippage of terms between different discourses than in the political ends, whether 'good' or 'evil, to which this slippage is taken. But Jitrik's references to cynicism blur into ancient kynicism, rather than dealing exclusively with contemporary cynicism, since Jitrik, in his explanation, must resort to 'truth' in order to explain his point.

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[51] Jitrik, 'Complex Feelings', 9.

> I'm beginning to think that if there is a truth about Borges, it is the truth of
> the cynic − and not even that of cynicism, which would have a more
> general, systemic scope. Rather his truth, in the final instance, has the
> subjugating attention of his intuitive character, capable of scorning all
> fundamental principles. But this is not all: like all cynics, he has the ability
> to fragment or break the apparent totalisation presented by an obstacle, and
> from that, to present a model of the world that has precisely that
> attraction.[52]

Jitrik does not assume this truth is *the* Truth, but he does refer to it as *a* truth. It is the

truth of an *operator*: 'he triggers a process in the other, and when he is not suggesting

necessary but fertile paths of differentiation, he forces us to at least re-examine

things'.[53] Borges's fiction may break with existing modes of thought, but it implements

this break in a way that maintains a certain consistency or 'fidelity' to Borges's own

truth: 'he imposes nothing personal at the same time that he destroys the personal

beliefs of the other'.[54] The destruction of the other's personal beliefs is not a reciprocal

effect of affirming his own. Instead, the question of belief itself − the categories it

contains and the assumptions it makes − is raised. Jitrik states this rather more

acerbically.

> From the history of the cynics he has extracted one element that explains
> his triumph: have the last word, which implies having created the
> conditions such that you are asked for a word, and having astutely taken
> enough time that your word appears to be the final one.[55]

The common feature of the three kynical cosmopolitans considered in our study is their

creation, in poetry, drama and the novel, of conditions 'such that they are asked for a

word' because of their status as established writers. However, Jitrik's summation does

not include the significance of virtue in either the kynics or the writers under discussion.

Jitrik's analysis of Borges does not go far enough precisely because his complex

feelings about Borges's complicity with the dictatorship bring him too close to Borges's

troubling decisions. It is difficult to reconcile Borges's behaviour during the

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[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid, 10.
[55] Ibid.

dictatorship with the questioning of totalities that he undertakes in his work, and it is therefore tempting to dehistoricise it into a formulaic response.

This formula maintains that Borges's work is structured around unreality. The landmark study in this regard, Ana Maria Barrenechea's *La expresión de la irrealidad en la obra de Borges* [*The Expression of Unreality in the Work of Borges*] (1957), has proved (justifiably) so persuasive that it led the Nobel Laureate, Mario Vargas Llosa, to claim, in 2002, that it 'continues to be the most solid and lucid on Borges'.[56] Vargas Llosa goes on to add that, 'the Borgesean universe has many unmistakeable features, but the principal and supreme one is to be unreal, to be outside of this concrete world in which we, his enchanted readers, are born, live and die'.[57] Borges's cosmos turns away from the chaos, instead of engaging with it. For Vargas Llosa, Borges is Sloterdijk's contemporary cynic: emblematic of enlightened false consciousness. For Jitrik, this unreality must be treated with more circumspection.

Jitrik attributes the cause of his 'complex feelings' to the tension between Borges's support of the dictatorship and the 'catalytic' function of his work. But he does not think his 'catalytic' with reference to Borges's historical generic. This threatens to collapse his reading into 'mere' confirmation of Borges's 'unreality'. Borges's prologue to *El otro, el mismo* [*The Other, The Same*] (1964), suggests that the catalytic is itself a historical generic in the fate of the writer, since 'the fate of the writer is curious. At first, he is baroque, vainly baroque, and over the years he can achieve, if the stars are favourable, not simplicity, which is nothing, but a modest and secret complexity' (*OC2* 252). This modest and secret complexity finds its most perfect form in Borges's parables.

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[56] Mario Vargas Llosa, '¿Por qué? ¿Cómo?', *El País*, 8 January (2002): 5-6, 5.
[57] Ibid.

Borges's Parables

In a 1977 interview with the editors of *Philosophy and Literature*, Borges differentiates

philosophical and literary temperaments by associating the former with a rigorous form

of thinking and the latter with an interest in narrative and metaphor.[58] When asked

whether a short narrative might be rigorous in a philosophical sense, he responds that

such a narrative would be a parable. As philosophically rigorous short narratives,

Borges's parables consist of two or three 'idea-clusters', often structured in individual

paragraphs. The first idea-cluster begins with a visual image, which is quickly spun into

a narrative sequence, culminating in a sudden or surprising occurrence. The second

idea-cluster introduces an element of narrative doubt, through the sudden reference to

dissenting views on the matter or on the consequence this has in a historical frame. The

result is a double estrangement: the story is given a historical arc that calls its veracity

into question, and the immediate priority of the initial narrative, the first idea-cluster, is

ruptured by the retrospective awareness of its position as just one of many possible

interpretations, another being the second idea-cluster. The third idea-cluster, when it

occurs, appears to follow the pattern of the second. However, it is as close to a 'moral'

as Borges will come – usually an exclamation or an observation of the failure of the first

two clusters to effect change, despite the obvious evidence of human failing they

present. This narrative progression has led novelist and critic, Ricardo Piglia, to use

Borges as an exemplar to show how short stories always tell two tales: the manifest tale,

and the tale of the tale being told.[59]

We favour the word 'parable' to refer to Borges's prose poems for two reasons.

The first reason is biographical. 'Parable', as Edwin Williamson notes in *Borges: A*

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[58] Jorge Luis Borges, Denis Dutton, Michael Palencia-Roth, '"Merely a Man of Letters" Jorge Luis Borges: An Interview', *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1977): 337-41.
[59] Ricardo Piglia, 'Theses on the Short Story', *New Left Review*, Vol. 70 (July-August, 2011): 63-66.

Life, was a term Borges used to refer to early short narrative pieces in a 1917 letter to his friend Roberto Godel.[60] Two of Borges's earliest published pieces were parables.[61] The term emerges again in work in the 1940s and 1950s, and several of the short narrative pieces in *El hacedor* are titled 'Parábolas'. The second reason is idiomatic and associative. The Spanish word 'parábola' may be translated either as 'parable' or as 'parabola'. While Borges's parables contain a formal juxtaposition of ideas, in a narrative, 'parable' sequence, they also function parabolically, by which we mean they have an inherent symmetry (between an opening paragraph that is imagist and narratorial, and subsequent paragraphs that are interrogative of assumptions in the first paragraph) that does not prevent their devolution into infinite implications at either their beginning or at their end (through the ambiguity of the opening image and the recursivity of the closing interpretation). The form has a generic constant, while the implications spin out into a range of intertexts and parallel readings. Borges's use of the parabolic form calls into question any attempt to tease out a strict moral teaching from the narrative: the function of Borges's parables cannot be understood pedagogically in any conventional sense of the word.

Their effect is similar to the *chreia*, or fragmentary anecdotes, Diogenes Laertius writes of Diogenes of Sinope. Although the *chreia* are short narrative accounts of moments in the life of Diogenes of Sinope, they also provide a critical 'vertex', or high point of intensity, for each of these moments. Each describes a situation that Diogenes then upsets through a pointed phrase or action. They do not continue with a conclusion or resolution for the situation. For example, when Plato gave as his definition of man, 'a hairless biped', Diogenes produced a plucked chicken, saying, 'here is your man'. As a result, Plato added 'having broad nails' to his definition. The 'vertex' in this case is the

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[60] Borges qtd. Edwin Williamson, *Borges: A Life*, 62.

[61] 'La lucha [The Battle]' and 'Liberación [Liberation]' were both published in *Gran Guignol* in February 1920 (*TR1* 32-3). For a discussion of Kafka's influence on these texts, see Daniel Balderston, 'Borges y sus precursores', *Itinerarios*, Vol. 14 (2011): 113-120.

act of producing the chicken, to which the statement 'here is your man' is supplementary. It indicates the baselessness of the definition that goes before it – man as hairless biped – without suggesting a corresponding solution. In fact, it suggests that the act of defining 'man' is itself already flawed by virtue of its reliance on association and metaphor. Plato's subsequent extension of the definition implies an infinite regress of conjecture and refutation in philosophical precision. Plato's response mirrors our own response to the action of the *chreia* itself: we attempt to co-opt it back into structures of thought we understand and find comfortable. The same logic is at work in the account of Plato, Diogenes of Sinope and the chicken. While the *chreia* can be taken as refutation of Plato's definitions, it also illustrates the indeterminacy in the analogous [parabolic] nature of such definitions without attempting to resolve or homogenise it to our epistemic structures. In other words, it allows for the laughter that, as for Foucault, shatters all the landmarks of our thought.

This indeterminacy is particularly pertinent to Borges's parables, especially when these are read in relation to their immediate antecedents, the parables of Franz Kafka.[62] While a sustained comparison with Kafka's parables is beyond the scope of this thesis, Kafka's meditation on parabolic indeterminacy in his meta-parable, 'On Parables', can hardly be overlooked.[63]

> Many complain that the words of the wise are always merely parables and of no use in daily life, which is the only life we have. When the sage says: 'Go over,' he does not mean that we should cross over to some actual place, which we could do anyhow if the labor were worth it; he means

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[62] Borges's debt to Kafka is explored by Julio Chiappini in *Borges y Kafka* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Zeus, 1991). Efraín Kristal notes that while the 1925 Spanish translation of *Metamorphosis* cannot be ascribed to Borges with any certainty, Borges did publish a translation of 'Before the Law' in *El hogar* in 1938. Borges would recall that he read Kafka in 1917, the same year that he uses the term 'parable' in his letter to Gidal. Efraín Kristal, *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2002).

[63] Michael Wood has written on the significance of this parable in relation to the space of reading. It is worth noting two points from Wood's argument. First, all parables are about parables. Second, attempting to locate a definite meaning for a parable inevitably indicates the reader's 'inaptness' for parabolic lessons. Wood's insights about this parable permit him to discuss Kafka's use of China as 'a place of infinite, elaborate, patient, uncertain interpretation'. This response resonates with Borges's own use of China, which Foucault uses in his description of a linguistic heterotopia (although Wood does not refer to it in these terms). Michael Wood, 'Kafka's China and the Parable of Parables', *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1996): 325-337.

some fabulous yonder, something unknown to us, something too that he cannot designate more precisely, and therefore cannot help us here in the very least.[64]

The division of words, on the part of the 'many', into those useful for 'daily life' and those that are 'mere parables' implies a hierarchy: parables are necessarily subordinate to daily life because they are 'of no use in daily life' and 'therefore cannot help us here' in 'the only life we have'. Moreover, inutility arises because 'all these parables really set out to say merely that the incomprehensible is incomprehensible, and we know that already'. This would be true if a parable were simply a coded message, for which we already possessed both key and moral. However, if the parable is more than its 'Aesopian messages', something that does gesture to a 'fabulous yonder' past the curtailments of morals and allegories, then we need to understand things precisely via their similars and dissimilars, without imagining that we have either a man or a plucked chicken when we refer to a featherless biped. In order to gesture to this 'fabulous yonder', there must be some effort to transfer meaning from one thing, through its similarity or dissimilarity, to another. This effort to create the transference of meaning, or a metaphor, is exemplary of the aesthetic act. It also leads us to the question central to the parables about writers: what are the aesthetic and political roles of the writer in relation to metaphoric transference?

Writerly Parables

The role of the writer forces us to ask: 'Which I [yo] compiles *El hacedor*?' 'Borges and I [Borges y yo]' (1957), the most famous of the parables in *El hacedor*, considers the relationship between 'Borges' the public figure and 'I' the private figure. Borges, in his comments on this text, distinguishes between the doubling in Robert Louis Stevenson (*Jekyll and Hyde*) and Oscar Wilde (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*), where the double is

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[64] Franz Kafka, 'On Parables', trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, *Parables and Paradoxes*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 10-11.

the pure evil counterpart of a man 'compounded, as are all of us, of good and evil', and the doubling in 'Borges y yo', where 'Borges stands for all the things I hate'.[65] It is not inconsequential that Borges begins his analysis with references to Robert Louis Stevenson and Oscar Wilde: the theme of the double as it occurs in both oeuvres exerted a considerable influence on the Argentinian.[66] But this point of departure also stems from one of the enumerations present within the text:

> I like hourglasses, maps, typography from the 18th century, etymologies, the flavour of coffee and the prose of Stevenson; the other shares these preferences, but in a vain way that turns them into the attributes of an actor. (*Dr* 51; *OC2* 197)

As Balderston notes in an interview with Borges, this is the only mention of a particular writer in the parable.[67] The name has a metonymic function, displacing the internal reference to doubling to the associated 'prose of Stevenson'. These preferences are shared with the Other (given the proper name, Borges), though the Other prefers them in a superficial way. '[Borges] stands for publicity, for being photographed, for having interviews, for politics, for opinions – all opinions are despicable I should say'.[68] 'Borges', in other words, stands for all those things represented by the enumeration; 'yo' stands for all those things presented by the enumeration. The kynical twist in this cosmos is that the ordering structure, given by the enumeration, is sufficient for understanding both Borgeses, while the manner in which this structure is received differs wildly. Political opinion is despised by the 'yo', because it *represents* a structure endorsed by 'Borges' into which the 'yo', in its 'feeling, dreaming, writing', finds itself

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[65] Borges, 'I stand simply for the Thing I Am', *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, ed. Willis Barnstone (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982), 49. Borges is the only one of my kynics who does not explicitly defer comment on his own work. He prefers to make deprecating remarks on his ability as a 'reader' of his own work.

[66] Daniel Balderston has considered the manifold implications of Stevenson on Borges's work in *El precursor velado: R. L. Stevenson en la obra de Borges*, trans. Eduardo Paz Leston (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1985). It is worth noting that, in his short note on film adaptations of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Borges refers to it as a 'dualist parable' (*OC1* 301).

[67] Borges; Daniel Balderston, 'Interviews with Borges. Buenos Aires, August-September 1978', *Variaciones Borges*, Vol. 8 (1999): 187-215, 189.

[68] Borges, 'I stand simply for the Thing I Am', 49.

unnaturally fixed.[69] Borges emphasises the problem with the fixity in a telling allusion

to Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well*. In Act IV Scene iii, Captain Parolles,

misremembered by Borges as 'Sergeant Rolles', is caught in an ambush and brought

before Bertrand to answer for his treachery. He pleads for his life, 'or let me see my

death [i.e. banishment, loss of rank, and the shame that attends such dishonour]'.[70] He is

granted this banishment − a symbolic death, a loss of representation − and the other

characters leave. He then gives a short soliloquy:

> Yet am I thankful: if my heart were great,
> 'Twould burst at this. Captain I'll be no more;
> But I will eat and drink, and sleep as soft
> As captain shall: simply the thing I am
> Shall make me live. […] and, Parolles, live
> Safest in shame! being fool'd, by foolery thrive!
> There's place and means for every man alive.
> I'll after them.[71]

Happy to 'live / Safest in shame', Parolles notes that even if he is not a 'Captain' in

rank, he will 'eat and drink, and sleep as soft'. Borges, however, is particularly

interested in the lines, 'simply the thing I am / Shall make me live':

> And that of course reminds us of the great words of God: "I am that I am."
> *Ego sum qui sum*. Well, you may think I stand simply for the thing I am,
> that intimate and secret thing. Perhaps one day I will find out *who* he is,
> rather than *what* he is.[72]

The 'intimate and secret thing', like the 'modest and secret complexity', is that critical

remainder behind the personas of the kynical writer that prevents them from lapsing into

a disconnected cynicism. While the writer is 'put on stage' in the poetry, the poetry

itself acknowledges that the voice of the writer contains 'a thing' that is lost in

representation. We can lapse into a Hegelian 'bad infinity' and insist on the infinite

reflections of the mirror, with obvious repercussions on the representation of this

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[69] Ibid.

[70] William Shakespeare, *All's Well That Ends Well*, IV iii.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Borges, 'I stand simply for the Thing I Am', 49.

presentation. What this response misses, however, is the transformative effect this pseudo-opposition has on the subject in retrospect: the subject is affected by the transformation and is not simply catalytic in its operation. This is most evident in a string of three parables, which will serve to justify our insistence on the importance of the kynical and the cosmopolitan in Borges's parables, and their relation to enumeration and metaphor.

The three parables are 'Dreamtigers', 'Argumentum Ornithologicum' and 'Mutaciones [Mutations]'. These works span the period of the composition of the parables in *El hacedor*: 'Dreamtigers' was first published in *Crítica* in 1934; 'Argumentum Ornithologicum' was first published in the first edition of *Otras inquiciones* [*Other Inquisitions*] (1952), with 'Dreamtigers' and the other two texts from *Crítica* under the title 'Inscripciones [Inscriptions]'; 'Mutaciones' was first published in the first edition of *El hacedor* in 1960. 'Dreamtigers', the third parable in *El hacedor*'s sequence, introduces a standard Borgesean trope: the tiger. Four types of tiger haunt the parable: the tiger he sees in the zoo as a child, the illustrations of tigers that serve as the basis for his value judgements about his 'vast encyclopaedias and books of natural history' and the tigers that appear in his dreams all occur in the first paragraph, and the tiger that he aims to 'cause' in his dreams appears in the second paragraph (*Dr* 24; *OC2* 171). This final effort to 'cause' a tiger fails: a creature appears, but one better suited to a Chinese Encyclopedia than any of those on the basis of which the young Borges evaluated his books. He enumerates its qualities: 'stuffed or flimsy, or with impure variations of shape, or of an implausible size, or all too fleeting, or with a touch of the dog or the bird' (*Dr* 24; *OC2* 171). Spatial qualities of shape and size are juxtaposed with temporal permanence, tactile density and an anomalous association with beast or fowl. This failure to dream a satisfactory tiger indicates the inadequacy of reading Borges as merely cynical: the cycle of presentation and representation does not

produce an infinitely reproducible image of a tiger. The experience of the tiger, reciprocally engaged with those images reproduced in encyclopaedias and books of natural history, do not permit the narrator to 'cause' a satisfactory tiger, even when compounded with those tigers already 'prevailing' in his dreams. Despite longing for a wild beast, his efforts to engender it do not produce something stable or constant. The tiger becomes a metaphor for the artist's failure to conceive, fully and deliberately, all aspects of his work. For Borges, something stabilises the dream in which the actual tiger meets its image, but this something is clearly not the 'pure diversion of my will', since he cannot produce a satisfactory tiger (*Dr* 24; *OC2* 171). While the nature of this something is not specified in 'Dreamtigers', in 'Argumentum Ornithologicum' it is called God.

'Argumentum Ornithologicum' is a parable of a single paragraph in which the narrator closes his eyes and sees a flock of birds for an uncertain amount of time (*Dr* 29; *OC2* 176). He does not know if the number of birds is definite or indefinite. If the number is definite, God exists, 'because how many birds I saw is known to God' (*Dr* 29; *OC2* 176). If it is indefinite, God does not exist. If the number is indefinite, then no whole number will solve his problem. Since he saw fewer than ten birds and more than one, but none of the numbers between, he reasons, 'that number, as a whole number, is inconceivable; *ergo*, God exists' (*Dr* 29; *OC2* 176). As soon as any single whole number is fixed on, it necessarily becomes definite; *ergo*, God exists. We might short-circuit a logical explanation by posing a semantic solution: since the number is inconceivable, it is necessarily defined as inconceivable; *ergo* the number is definite and God exists. Mathematic or semantic, Borges's 'Bird Argument' resolves the sophistical problem of assigning a definite number to the indefinite 'flock' by making 'God' the ground of observation. 'God' is a useful metaphor for a comparative ground, not least because God's qualities may be enumerated purely in response to the problem he is

being invoked to resolve: in this case, his ability to count responds to the problem of the birds. Yet the interest of the parable does not lie in God's ability to resolve the dilemma, but the dilemma's ability to generate God. If Borges's parables create grounds on which comparison may take place, these grounds are engendered by a comparison already present in the process of producing this site. For Borges, cosmopolitan grounds are created to house already existent 'arguments' formed by kynical subjectivities. Borges inevitably involves history in this debate between space and subjectivity. This history is always personal (as in 'Dreamtigers'), but often also cultural (as in 'Mutaciones').

'Mutaciones' identifies three moments in which the narrator sees three different 'inoffensive symbols' in everyday contexts. The three symbols are an arrow, a lasso and a cross. As the narrator muses in the final paragraph, these 'former tools of man' are 'debased or exalted now to the status of symbols' (*Dr* 41; *OC2* 187). Each of the three preceding paragraphs 'places' the narrator in a situation in which he observes the three objects in symbolic positions: an arrow in a hall, a decorative lasso in a photograph and a runic cross in a cemetery. These three symbols precipitate thoughts, learning and figures of these objects as tools. To divulge their use as tools, he enumerates their qualities and their histories. Their historical specificity has become disconnected from their symbolic function. The narrator wonders that he marvels at this, 'when there is not a single thing on earth that oblivion [el olvido] does not erase or memory change, and when no one knows into what images he himself will be transmuted by the future' (*Dr* 41; *OC2* 187). Again, Borges exposes the insecurity of metaphoric associations by enumerating histories erased by *el olvido* and changed by memory. This contingent approach to past, present and future does not suggest an abandonment of reality, even if it does destabilise the ground on which reality is presumed to function. The histories Borges's narrator recaptures for the three 'inoffensive symbols' are particularly bloody. This offsets the apparent arbitrariness of their metaphoric functions, since, as tools, they

were all instruments of death. Despite this common ground, the point of comparison is not their real function as tools but precisely their 'virtual' metaphoric function, which is then made contingent by mutability (the titular 'mutation' through oblivion, memory and the future). The ground, since it is virtual, shifts according to symbolic function. However, this shifting ground is always tied to a reality (a history of bloodshed). This reality is not itself sufficient to be the basis, as it is always liable to be forgotten or misremembered, but it does prevent the shifting ground from completely divorcing itself from material circumstance. The material circumstances in each of the three parables help us to define Borges as a kynical cosmopolitan, despite the apparently endless multiplication of selves identified by Alan Pauls.

Alan Pauls, in his fascinating, inventive and very funny book, *El factor Borges* [*The Borges Factor*], states that 'to find in Jorge Luis Borges the *Borges Factor*, the property, the fingerprint, that molecule that makes Borges Borges and that [...] makes the world every day a little more Borgesian: that was the original aim of this book'.[73] Yet, he confesses, what he found was 'a happy form of failure: there is not one Borges element, but many'.[74] The enumeration of possible Borgeses, with their correspondent elements, seems to be a recurrent feature of criticism. The multiplication and bifurcation of selves radiates out into a manifold of elements, each with their own critical function. Perhaps, insofar as this is a feature of kynical cosmopolitans, it also indicates the critical inability to fix a particular significance to a particular feature, text, or personality trait. This leads us inevitably to question the ethical force of such duplications and bifurcations. What is clear, however, is that Borges himself sees this dilemma as central to the role of the poet. In the discussion that follows, we will consider a number of those parables that take as their central conceit a famous writer or a famous literary character. While these parables appear to be simply the way in which Borges inserts himself into a

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[73] Alan Pauls, *El factor Borges* [2000] (Barcelona: Editorial Anagram, 2004), 7-8.
[74] Ibid.

literary canon, they challenge the dominant role poets are given in the creation of their works, appealing to a sense of literary vocation beyond the ken of the writer. These parables do not achieve this vocation by establishing a *faux* mysticism. Rather, they undercut the conceptual bases for understanding the 'intentions' of a unified cosmopolitan writer and the grounds for our assumptions about their works as exemplars of 'world literature'.

Two parables that secure a materialist dissolution of the cosmopolitan writer as a unified intentional consciousness are the eponymous 'El hacedor' (1958) and 'Everything and Nothing' (1958). 'Everything and Nothing' only mentions the name of its protagonist in the final paragraph and 'El hacedor' does not even make that concession, but, with mention of 'Anne Hathaway', 'London' and 'Iago' early in the former, and 'Odysseys and Iliads' late in the latter, the reader realises that 'Everything and Nothing' is about Shakespeare and 'El hacedor' is about Homer. Despite the enumeration of events in these parabolic biographies, both lives lack pathos in Borges's treatment (for Homer, because stoic modesty had not yet been invented; for Shakespeare, because he is overcome with disgust at adopting so many identities). Borges establishes this lack by beginning each parable with a negation: 'He [Homer] had never dwelled on memory's delights' and 'there was no one in him [Shakespeare]' (*Dr* 22, 46; *OC2* 169, 192). For both writers, writing becomes a compensation for some insufficiency; Homer 'descends into his memory' when he goes blind and Shakespeare turns to writing when acting does not suffice to prevent 'the hated sense of unreality' (*Dr* 22, 46; *OC2* 169, 192). There are differences: while Homer loses his unconditional acceptance of reality only when he goes blind, Shakespeare is always 'nothing but a little chill, a dream not dreamed by anyone' behind his face and his words (*Dr* 46; *OC2* 192). Homer turns his memories of particular aggressive and amorous encounters into the generic themes personified by Ares and Aphrodite; while 'these things we [the

readers] know', we do not know 'those that he felt when he descended into the final shade of all' (*Dr* 23; *OC2* 170). Since Shakespeare playacts at having these intimate memories, his body 'fulfilled its destiny as body', while the soul 'was Caesar […] Juliet […] Macbeth […] Nobody was ever as many men as that man, who like the Egyptian Proteus managed to exhaust all the possible shapes of being' (*Dr* 46; *OC2* 192). Shakespeare's lack of quiddity permits us to know the things he speaks of 'before or after he dies'; he tells God that he, who has been so many men in vain, 'want[s] to be one man: myself' (*Dr* 47; *OC2* 193). God responds: 'Neither am I one self; I dreamed the world as you dreamed your work, my Shakespeare, and among the shapes of my dream are you, who, like me, are many persons – and none' (*Dr* 47; *OC2* 193). Bell-Villada observes the link between this parable and a letter from George Bernard Shaw to Frank Harris (quoted by Borges in 'El enigma de Shakespeare [The Enigma of Shakespeare'): 'Like Shakespeare I understand everything and everyone; and like Shakespeare I am nobody and nothing' (*TL* 470).[75] Like the God of 'Argumentum Ornithologicum', Shakespeare and the God of 'Everything and Nothing' are empty ciphers. They provide the space in which action may take place. Their function, however, is contingent on their emptiness; a void that they seek to fill through their creations. Since, in 'El hacedor', Homer's memory is fragmented and must be plumbed before it produces 'a forgotten recollection that shone like a coin under the rain', the generic 'world literature' initiated by Homer can only be produced through the extremely particular intersection of memory and ability in the artist's psyche. A similar message emerges in the late story, 'La memoria de Shakespeare [Shakespeare's Memory]' (1983), where a Shakespeare scholar receives Shakespeare's memory but finds it no help in writing about Shakespeare's work. Memory, it seems, is of little practical value in understanding what makes a poet tick. However, the overtly

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[75] Bell-Villada, *Borges and His Fiction*, 251.

prescriptive nature of this message in 'La memoria de Shakespeare' is nuanced in the parables, primarily because they are presented with other parables where poet and work are placed in dialogue with one another. Since the biographical accounts of Homer and Shakespeare are placed in conversation with the production of works, they necessarily foreground the artist's role in producing these works. However, these artists remain incomplete, inadequate, separated from the perfection of their creations. Other parables shed more light on this particular challenge to the supremacy of the artist, by focusing on the role of the work itself as a historical phenomenon. One such parable, of particular local concern for Borges as an Argentinian writer, is 'Martín Fierro' (1957).

'Martín Fierro' is a parable that takes as its title the name of the protagonist of José Hernández's epic poems *El Gaucho Martín Fierro* [*The Gaucho Martin Fierro*] (1872) and *La vuelta de Martín Fierro* [*The Return of Martin Fierro*] (1879). *Martín Fierro* has an interesting place in Argentinian history. Leopoldo Lugones, the poet to whom Borges dedicated *El hacedor*, claimed in *El payador* [*The Gaucho Minstrel*] (1916) that *Martín Fierro* was Argentina's national epic, equivalent to Dante's *Divine Comedy* or Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Borges disagreed with Lugones: in the final chapter of his 1953 book, *El "Martín Fierro"* (written in collaboration with Margarita Guerrero), Borges argues that insisting on an epic status for the work conflates its aesthetic value [valor estética] with the moral virtue of its protagonist.[76] The significance of *Martín Fierro* for the parable 'Martín Fierro' is not simply its intertextual references: it is the poem's ability not to function as an epic. The first three paragraphs of the parable enumerate historical or mythological events. Paragraph one describes those armies that marched out of an unnamed city (Buenos Aires) and

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[76] Jorge Luis Borges, Margarita Guerrero, *El "Martín Fierro"* [1953] (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores S. A., 1979), 79. It is worth noting that Borges establishes a link between Lugones's Hellenism and his efforts to turn *Martín Fierro* into an epic: Borges's resistance to both tendencies recalls my earlier argument that Borges challenges Goethe's notion of a Hellenised 'world literature' by insisting on a more fragmented notion of 'universal history'.

'seemed great, and afterwards were, when glory had magnified them', to fight major battles in Argentinian history (*Dr* 40; *OC2* 186). Paragraph two describes, in conjunction, the tyrannies of Rosas and Perón, enumerating their abuses without naming the two dictators. Paragraph three describes the naming of all plants and birds by an unnamed man (Adam), who 'wrote in metaphors of metal the vast chronicle of the tumultuous sunsets and the shapes of the moon' (*Dr* 40; *OC2* 186). Each paragraph ends with the refrain: 'These things, now, are as if they had never been' (*Dr* 40; *OC2* 186). Whether through glorious distortion, shameful humiliation or attachment to an inaugural myth, with time all historical facticity loses its intrinsic connection to certainty, since it is also turned into art. The final paragraph notes that 'here too the generations have known those common and somehow eternal vicissitudes which are the stuff of art' (*Dr* 40; *OC2* 186). The narrator does not specify where 'here' is: the reference to *Martín Fierro* suggests it could be as easily the space of 'Argentinian literature' as Argentina itself. The paragraph continues with the refrain that concludes each previous paragraph, but qualifies it with a 'but [pero]': 'But in a hotel room in the 1860's, or thereabouts, a man dreamed about a fight' (*Dr* 40; *OC2* 186). In Mildred Boyer's translation, this 'but' begins a new sentence, while Borges's original has it compound the refrain. Boyer's translation crucially changes the fourth instance of the refrain into a fourth iteration of the mutability of 'common and somehow eternal vicissitudes' from history into myth. In the original, the 'pero' undermines this iterability because the literary work, already assumed to be 'as if it had never been', achieves a kind of veracity through the poet's 'dream' [Borges's typical metaphor for literary creation]. Borges describes, as the poet's dream, the knife fight at the end of *El Gaucho Martín Fierro*. Unlike the historical events, 'this, which once was, is again infinitely: the splendid armies are gone, and a lowly knife fight remains. The dream of one man is part of the memory of all' (*Dr* 40; *OC2* 186). The work remains something that can never be lost, precisely because of

its iterability as something that is always 'as if it had never been'. Moreover, this creation becomes, through its part in cultural memory, more real than actual historical events. This virtual reality is not epic, since it does not inaugurate a mythological state; it stems from aesthetic value uncoupled from moral judgement.

Borges engages with this dialogue between the aesthetic value of the work and the life of the poet in a series of paired parables on Dante and Cervantes.The titles of 'Paradiso, XXXI, 108' (1954) and 'Inferno, I, 32' (1955), the two parables about Dante and *The Divine Comedy*, refer to lines from the third last and opening cantos of Dante's poem. They are the starting points for two separate meditations on the life of the poet and the poem. Canto 31, line 108 of *Paradiso* reads 'or fu sì fatta la sembianza vostra? [Now was your face indeed like that?]'.[77] In context, 'Paradiso, XXXI, 108' considers the philosophical implications of wanting to experience as actual what feels like mere semblance. It describes the moment after Beatrice has left Dante in the care of Bernard. Dante, looking on Bernard's beatitude, compares himself to a pilgrim who, seeing the Sudarium of Veronica, asks himself whether this is an actual representation of Christ's face: 'Segnor mio Iesù Cristo, Dio verace, / or fu sì fatta la sembianza vostra? [My lord Jesus Christ, true God, now was your face indeed like that?]'[78] The implication of this metaphor is that he wonders how he might feel the peace that Bernard feels. Bernard advises him that the only way to feel the same peace is through turning his gaze to the inner circles of Paradise and contemplating the Queen of Heaven. Borges does not resolve this problem, as Dante does, through turning the gaze towards heaven; the parable poses the question without suggesting that any solution could be certain: 'if we truly knew what [the face of Jesus] was like, the key to the parables would be ours and we would know whether the son of the carpenter was also the Son of God' (*Dr* 43; *OC2*

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[77] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Volume 3: Paradiso*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling, intro. Ronald L. Martinez and Robert M. Durling (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 624; 625.

[78] Ibid. The sudarium is a cloth, supposedly used by Veronica to wipe the face of Jesus Christ, which carries the imprint of Christ's face.

189). While Paul, John and Teresa are enumerated as people who saw Jesus's face, 'we have lost those features, as one may lose a magic number made up of the usual ciphers, as one loses an image in a kaleidoscope, forever' (*Dr* 43; *OC2* 189). The face is not lost because it is extraordinary; it is lost because we do not remember it, and so cannot distinguish it from other faces. Insofar as the parable engages with the problem of recognising the truth behind semblance, it recapitulates the problem of fixing a reality on which to ground appearances. But it also speaks to the role of the poet's belief in securing this reality, as becomes evident when the parable is read in conjunction with another of Borges's meditations on Canto 31 of *Paradiso*, 'La última sonrisa de Beatriz [Beatrice's Last Smile]' (*OC3* 408).

Originally a lecture, and later published as one of Borges's 'Nueve ensayos dantescos [Nine Dantesque Essays]', 'La última sonrisa' explores the significance of the moment when Beatrice disappears and is replaced by Bernard. Dante looks up and sees her in the third circle. She smiles at him and then turns away. While Borges notes that Dante's poetic intention is not to lament this separation, his emotions betray him. Dante, rejected by Beatrice in life, creates a moment where they can meet in poetry. But if the scene is 'very real' for us, 'for him, it was less so' (*OC3* 410). 'Unhappily for him, happily for the centuries that would read him, the consciousness [conciencia] that the meeting was imaginary deformed the vision' (*OC3* 410). Even in fiction, Dante separates himself from Beatrice because his consciousness and his conscience (*conciencia* implies both) will not allow him to stay with her. When it comes to 'resolving' the parables (of Christ or of Borges), Borges realises in his rigorous exploration of the problem of line 108 that artistic integrity is based on not yielding to one's desire for a happy solution (the metaphorical face of Christ) at the expense of effacing the problems with such solutions.

Canto 1, line 32 of *Inferno* reads 'una lonza leggiera e presta molto [A leopard light and very swift]'.[79] 'Inferno, I, 32' engages with the relationship between the poet, the poem and the creature formed in the line. In context, the leopard is the first animal Dante encounters after he finds himself in the dark wood. Unlike 'Paradiso, XXXI, 108', 'Inferno, I, 32' does not consider any internal paradox to the line: rather, it considers the relationship between God and, first, an actual leopard, and, second, Dante. In the first paragraph of the parable, the leopard, living in a cage, is described as unable to know its desire for 'love and cruelty and the hot pleasure of tearing things apart and the wind carrying the scent of a deer' (*Dr* 50; *OC2* 196). Borges juxtaposes this enumeration of the leopard's desires with God's justification for the leopard's life: the enumeration of the steps by which the leopard will be transformed into a word in *The Divine Comedy*. God gives this justification in a dream. The animal understands the reasons and accepts his destiny, 'but when he awoke there was only a dark resignation in him, a valiant ignorance, for the machinery of the world is far too complex for the simplicity of a wild beast' (*Dr* 50; *OC2* 196). In the second paragraph of the parable, Dante, too, is illuminated with a sense of purpose by God in a dream: 'on waking, he felt he had been given – and then had lost – something infinite, something he would not be able to recover, or even to glimpse, for the machinery of the world is far too complex for the simplicity of men' (*Dr* 50; *OC2* 196). Borges doubles the leopard's 'simplicity' with the 'simplicity' of Dante to highlight their mutual inability, as created entities, to understand the workings of the 'machinery' of which they are a part. The near repetition of the final lines of the first and second paragraphs shows how close 'wild beasts' and 'men' are in their inability to understand the complexities of the world. For all their similarities, however, the leopard and Dante are treated differently by Borges's parable. While the reader is treated to the full narrative of God's justification to the leopard in

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[79] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Volume 1: Inferno*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling, intro. Ronald L. Martinez and Robert M. Durling (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), 28; 29.

the first paragraph, in the second, God simply 'declared to [Dante] the secret purpose of his life and work' (*Dr* 50; *OC2* 196). Here, Borges gestures again to a point beyond the limits of thought: a point outside his own system of thought, constituted by the word 'God' and ultimately beyond the reach of reason. The animal, which operates according to a non-human rationality, can be told his purpose through a narrative that follows the precepts of human rationality; Dante, who operates in the field of human reason, cannot be given his purpose within that field. This recapitulates the ignorance of the field that underpins the narrative consistency of 'Paradiso, XXXI, 108'. It is not for want of opportunities to see Christ's face that we fail to recognise him: we do not recognise him because we do not collectively 'remember' what he looks like. This failure of recognition is particularly important in discussing the role of the poet, since the poet does not recognise his or her purpose in any rational way. Borges engages most effectively with an extra-rational relationship between poet and creation in his treatment of Cervantes and Don Quijote.

The two parables about Cervantes and *Don Quijote* are 'Parábola de Cervantes y de Quijote [Parable of Cervantes and of Quijote]' (1955) and 'Un problema [A Problem]' (1957). In the former, Borges tells the story of an old soldier who looks for solace in the vast geographies of Ariosto. He creates a character able to find enchantments in prosaic places. 'For the two, for the dreamer and the dreamed, the plot was the opposition of two worlds: the unreal world of books of knights, the quotidian and common world of the 17th century' (*Dr* 42; *OC2* 188). What they do not realise is that this opposition would fade over time, until 'La Mancha and Montiel and the lean figure of the knight would be, for the future, no less poetic than the voyages of Sinbad or the vast geographies of Ariosto' (*Dr* 42; *OC2* 188). All presentation will inevitably become a representation. But, this does not constitute a loss of that 'intimate and secret thing' Borges is speaking about as the critical remainder behind all personas. However

the 'intimate and secret thing' is communicated, it cannot itself be translated into a representation without that representation itself containing a further 'intimate and secret thing'. In time, the subjects will be seen to have been something that they themselves could not see. What they retain is the difference between those things that they present as their interests or passions and those things that they represent as the interests or passions they should have.

'Un problema' poses a familiar Borges paradox: 'Let us imagine that in Toledo is discovered a paper with an Arabic text and that the palaeographers declare to be of the hand and letter of that Cide Hamete Benengeli from whom Cervantes derived his *Don Quijote*' (*Dr* 37; *OC2* 183). The fragment is an anecdote in which Quijote realises he has killed a man, and 'the problem is to guess, or conjecture, how Don Quijote reacts' (*Dr* 37; *OC2* 183). Borges suggests three possible responses 'for all I know [Que yo sepa]: 'nothing special occurs' and he goes on with his adventures; seeing the body 'awakes him from his complaisant dream perhaps forever'; or Quijote 'cannot admit that the tremendous act is the work of a delirium, the reality of the effect makes him presuppose an alternate reality as the cause and Don Quijote never leaves his madness' (*Dr* 37; *OC2* 183). He then suggests a response beyond 'all I know'. 'There remains a conjecture that is outside the Spanish sphere and even the sphere of the West and requires an ambit older, more complex and more fatigued [fatigado]' (*Dr* 37; *OC2* 183). Don Quijote – 'who is no longer Don Quijote but a king of the Indostan cycles' – realises when he sees the corpse that 'to kill and to conceive are divine or magical acts that notoriously transcend the human condition' (*Dr* 37; *OC2* 183). This realisation leads him to understand that all is illusion: the body, the blade, the world and himself. The three responses Borges's narrator can conceive, and the one that he cannot, all react to *Don Quijote* and its protagonist brought to a limit point: the death of an other. This death can either be subsumed into Quijote's fantasy or break it. If it breaks the fantasy,

either the fantasy is discarded or the fantasy becomes Quijote's reality. The option that he cannot know – the situation of the Indostan king – involves a conceptual framework other than that which advocates the centrality of the subject. Obviously, we should feel uneasy with Borges's wilful exoticism of 'Indostan' and its 'cycles', since this effort to make an 'oriental' pattern of thought wholly Other recapitulates the very worst stereotypes of Stevenson and Kipling. But the force of this othering process leads us to an interesting conceptual split that, even if it is riddled with crass orientalism, manages to rebound precisely onto our understanding of Borges as a kynical cosmopolitan.

For Borges is not attempting to claim any knowledge of this Other as part of the parable: the fourth possibility is beyond the conceptual capacity of his narrator. If anything, the narrator's conceptual capacities are inadequate, precisely because he cannot conceive of a de-essentialised subject. The three possibilities are all the reactions of an integral Quijote adhering to a reality, fictional or factual, according to his psychological needs. Quijote either continues in his delusion, or he completely breaks with it, or he completely surrenders himself to it, in order to maintain an integrated sense of self. However, the fourth option is not possible for an integral Quijote and is thus beyond the conceptual capacity of the narrator, though not the writer (given that he is able to mention it). This means we must distinguish between the narrator and the writer of the story, against the apparent unity of the speaking 'I'. But it also raises the question of cosmopolitanism in the negative. While the writer is able to deploy the 'Indostan cycles' in his parable, the narrator cannot conceive the consequences of this deployment. We do not have a total understanding of universal history, but we do have an awareness of different understandings of history. Borges's cosmopolitanism does not resolve problems of human difference; it perpetuates, even exaggerates them. This does not result in hospitality, understanding, or even the recognition of Otherness; it frames difference as wholly beyond the ken of the narrator. Cosmopolitanism for Borges rests

on an awareness of incommensurability. We cannot even speak, in this particular parable, of a localised cosmopolitanism because there is no exchange, no moment of 'conviviality' in Paul Gilroy's sense of the word.[80] What cosmopolitanism in this instance brings is entirely negative; it negates the apparent totalities of conceptual integrity. This negation reflects back onto the subject, which, under the force of its own inability to think the all, is radically divided across the points of understanding (narrator) and awareness (writer). The most radical of Borges's examples is the parable 'Borges y yo'.

'Borges y yo' begins with the startling revelation that it is 'To the other, Borges, to whom the things happen' (*Dr* 51; *OC2* 197). This is apparently a parable about the split between the public figure of the author (the 'other, Borges') and an essential self. The author is already displaced, since his name is taken as the name of this other. Moreover, 'things' do not happen to this essential 'I' but to this other called Borges. The 'I' is led in part by habit, but these habits are immediate to itself; the habits of the other Borges are mediated by texts: 'I walk the streets of Buenos Aires and stop myself [me demoro], perhaps even habitually [mecánicamente], to look at the arch of a doorway and the outer door; of Borges I have news by mail and see his name on a short list of professors or in a biographical dictionary' (*Dr* 51; *OC2* 197). The syntax is paratactic: at this point there is no clear relationship between the habits of the 'I' and 'Borges', except insofar as the 'I' receives 'Borges' via texts like the list and the biographical dictionary, but receives itself through the physical acts of walking, stopping and looking. The reflexive verb 'stop myself [me demoro]' halts our assimilation of this parable into a narrative dividing a public author figure from an 'essential' self. The verb literally means 'I stop myself' but has implications of 'lingering' because it does not suggest a conscious decision on the part of an active

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[80] Gilroy, *After Empire*, 9.

subject to stop. There is a supplementary split between the I that walks and the I that stops that walking, perhaps mechanically or by habit. The 'essential' subject has itself split over the question of 'habit' or 'mechanics'. The question itself remains vague, since it is only a 'perhaps [acaso]', but its consequence is clear: walking the cityscape under the *aegis* of public 'Borges' does not confer an essential identity on the 'I'. Rather, it indicates the fragmentation that the I will go on to describe: 'Little by little I am giving over everything to him, although I am aware of [me consta] his perverse custom of falsifying and magnifying' (*Dr* 51; *OC2* 197). While 'me consta' may be translated as 'I am aware of', it is worth noting that in the di Giovanni translation (the only translation that Borges himself played a part in producing), this part of the phrase is 'I have evidence of his stubborn habit'.[81] This departs from a literal definition of 'me consta' to emphasise the possible, but quite improbable, implication of 'evidence'. Andrew Hurley, the translator sanctioned by Borges's widow, Maria Kodama, translates the phrase to be 'I know the perverse way', which implies a knowledge that 'me consta' does not necessarily have.[82] But this still does not attest to the materiality of 'evidence'. If we assume that there is a materiality to the phrase 'me consta', how does that impact on our understanding of the line? Since the parable's use of prepositions is occasionally peculiar, there is the possibility that Borges's 'knowledge' of his perverse habits also evokes the reflexive form of the verb-phrase 'to consist of [constar de]'. As much as an 'awareness', 'me consta' implies an integration of the self through this awareness. This being the case, an alternative implication would then be: His perverse custom of falsifying and magnifying makes me/gives me my consistency. We do not propose this 'false' translation to replace the idiomatic meaning, since this phrase is about an awareness the I has about the habits of 'Borges'. But a specular translation allows us to

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[81] Jorge Luis Borges, 'Borges and I', trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni, *Borges: A Reader*, ed. Emir Rodriguez Monegal and Alastair Reid (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1981), 279.
[82] Borges, *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Viking Press, 1996), 324.

read the reciprocal uncertainty the I has about its own 'consistency' and the way it too is made up of 'habits'. This is why the I must identify with Borges via hourglasses, maps, typeface of the eighteenth-century, etymologies, the flavour of coffee and the prose of Stevenson, albeit that 'Borges' shares these preferences in a vain or showy [vanidosa] way that 'turns them into the attributes of an actor' (*D* 51; *H* 197). Habit becomes the guarantor of a consistent identity for the I. When this guarantor is shared with 'Borges', however, it is turned into a process for performing or mimicking this identity.

Habit in 'Borges y yo' shifts between two traditions of thinking clearly delineated by Catherine Malabou in her preface to Felix Raivaisson's *Of Habit*:

> Initiated by Aristotle, continued by Hegel [...] the first sees in habit a primary ontological phenomenon. For beings subject to change, habit is the law of being. Without a general and permanent disposition, a 'virtue', which is developed as a result of change, as resistance to this change, the finite being cannot endure [...] For such a being, being is suffused with the habit of being. The second way, initiated by Descartes and continued by Kant, sees in habit the epitome of inauthenticity, a simulacrum of being, an imitation of virtue. Pure mechanism, routine process, devitalization of sense, habit is the disease of repetition that threatens the freshness of thought and stifles the voice, repeatable but never stale, of the categorical imperative.[83]

According to the first tradition, habit provides a basic continuity for beings that change. In this sense, habit is a virtue that integrates the self. According to the second tradition, habit is a great deadener. It provides the appearance of virtue, but turns this virtue into mere mechanism and process. It is inauthentic and stifles the voice of the categorical imperative to treat humans as ends not means. For the narrator of 'Borges and I', habits that appear to integrate the self become mechanisms for a specular, public self. Moreover, these habits devolve to the specular self more and more, as the public self subsumes the private. The private self responds to this threat of 'losing myself, definitively', by trying 'to liberate myself from him and [move] from the mythologies of the slum [arrabal] to the games with time and with the infinite' (*Dr* 51; *OC2* 197).

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[83] Catherine Malabou, 'Addiction and Grace: Preface to Félix Ravaisson's *Of Habit*', Félix Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, trans., intro. & comm. Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair (London: Continuum, 2008): vii-xx, vii.

But attempting to avoid the public persona by shifting the schema inevitably fails: 'those games are Borges's now and I will have to devise [idear] other things' (*Dr* 51; *OC2* 197). The 'I' that writes must always break with those habits that identify his writing style: the recurrent themes or metaphors. As soon as they become fixed as his habits in the minds of his readers, they become the 'games of Borges'. This is the transition that is described in the final line: 'I do not know which of the two writes this page' (*Dr* 51; *OC2* 197). As soon as 'Borges and I' becomes heralded as the emblematic text of Borges's work (as it does, in combination with 'Funes el memorioso', 'El jardín de los senderos que bifurcan' and 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote'), it becomes the work of 'the other, Borges'.

The result of this appropriation for the narrator, the 'I', is that 'my life is an escape [fuga] and I lose it all and it all belongs to oblivion or to the other [todo es del olvido, o del otro]' (*Dr* 51; *OC2* 197). Borges's translators universally translate this occurrence of 'el olvido' as 'oblivion' and we should not seek to replace this desubjective noun with the more subjective 'forgetfulness'. But we should bear in mind that 'el olvido' shuttles between the subjective and the desubjective, since Borges's treatment of 'el olvido' always runs between the creation of the possibility of subjectivity and a loss of subjectivity.

Borges also considers 'el olvido' in 'Parábola del palacio [Parable of the Palace]' (1956). This parable describes the Yellow Emperor showing a poet his palace. After enumerating its qualities, they reach a series of towers that range in colour from scarlet to yellow: the gradations are so fine that the towers next to each other appear identical. At the foot of the second to last tower, the poet recites a poem that contains the palace: the emperor exclaims that the poet has robbed him of his palace and has his executioner kill him. Borges proposes a series of possible outcomes. One outcome is that the poem of the poet 'fell into oblivion [el olvido] because it deserved oblivion [el olvido]' after

its writer is killed by the Emperor for writing the poem that 'has snatched my palace from me [¡Me has arrebatado el palacio!]' (*Dr* 45; *OC2* 191). The oblivion of the artwork follows the death of the author; this is the 'all' that belongs to 'el olvido'. However, there is also a sense in which such 'oblivion' is necessary for all Borges's subjects to function. Ireneo Funes, in 'Funes el memorioso', is trammelled by his capacity to remember, since to remember, for Funes, is necessarily to remember everything.[84] It is the narrator of 'Funes el memorioso' who is able to function because he is able to forget.

The functionality provided by forgetfulness returns us to 'Borges and I'. The position of the 'I' runs between oblivion and forgetfulness. As we have already argued, Borges's notion of 'el olvido' is both subjective and desubjective. In this regard, the 'I' realises its potential for subjectivity is only in its flirtation with both oblivion and forgetfulness: 'my life is an escape [fuga]'. Fuga may also be translated as 'fugue state', the state defined by the *DSM-IV* as a confusion about personal identity that is marked by sudden travel and an inability to remember.[85] It is in this act of 'escape' from the public self, from the memories of the public self, that the writing self is able to continue functioning. The 'I' will inevitably lose everything either to 'el olvido' or to 'Borges'; its only possibility for continued existence lies in devising new strategies for expressing itself. But this is only possible insofar as it 'forgets' its prior works in favour of these new strategies; it enters into the paradox of a self-aware fugue state. The necessity of this 'self-aware fugue state' is correlative with why habit is both a blessing and a curse to the 'I': habit fills the vacuum left by essence with a framework of behaviour, but it is also the means by which the process of the writing 'I' becomes 'Borges'. The 'fugue state' allows the 'I' to forget those habits that make it 'Borges', but this also undermines its claim to an integral sense of self, since its self is more or less the sum of these habits.

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[84] See the discussion of 'Funes' and Coetzee's recent fiction in Chapter 1.
[85] *DSM-IV*-Tr, 300.13.

'Borges and I' challenges our assumptions about the place of the writing subject, in relation to personal preferences and public habits. For all its engagement with the role of the public persona of the author, there is little that links the author to their place in a particular society. While both 'I' and the public 'Borges' are clearly 'cosmopolitans' in their tastes, they appear to be quite conventionally cosmopolitan. This accusation may be levelled at all the writer-parables: they may engage critically with the places of the writers, but these places are often atopic. Where is the political real that justifies our use of cosmopolitan as a modified term?

Historical Parables

Borges's political engagement in the parables is most evident in his treatment of Argentinian history. With these overtly political treatments of Argentina and its relationship to Europe, Borges grounds his critique of writerly personas with direct reference to Argentina's history of political systems. This has the added effect of rebounding onto our reading of the more metaphysical parables. Evidence of political concerns in these parables justifies our assertions of political significance in the apparently atopic, apolitical narratives, dealing with subjectivity.

Borges makes three forays into Argentinian history in *El hacedor*, with 'El cautivo [The Captive]' (1957), 'Diálogos entre muertos [Dead Men's Dialogues]' (1957) and 'El simulacro [The Sham]' (1957). While 'El cautivo' deals with an anonymous foundling story, 'Diálogos entre muertos' and 'El simulacro' take as their subjects Rosas and Perón respectively, the 19th and 20th century politicians Borges would call Argentina's dictators in his later 'Nota a los argentinos', discussed in the previous chapter. 'El cautivo' tells the story of a young boy abducted by Native Americans of the Pampas. Years after his abduction, he is found, unable to speak his mother tongue and incapable of remembering his parents. When he is returned to his

childhood home, however, he is seized by 'a dizzying moment [instante de vértigo] when past and present became one [se confundieron]', runs to the kitchen and finds a knife he hid in the chimney before he was taken (*Dr* 30; *OC2* 177). Gene Bell-Villada rightly connects this parable to an earlier story, 'La historia del guerrero y de la cautiva [The Story of the Warrior and the Captive]' in *El aleph* [*The Aleph*] (1949), in which Borges makes a transcultural association between the 6th century conversion experience of a Lombard warrior and the 19th century regression experience of an English woman on the Pampas. As Bell-Villada argues, 'La historia' is really two distinct stories, held together by 'an intricate network of resemblances and contrasts'.[86] While broadly sympathetic to 'La historia', Bell-Villada does note that it recapitulates the 19th century anthropological dichotomy between civilization and barbarism discussed in our previous chapter. Since the warrior's experience is of a barbarian converted to civilization, while the woman's experience is of a regression to barbarism from civilization, this remains a valid criticism of 'La historia'. But 'El cautivo' does not follow the civilization-barbarism dichotomy from a vantage point of narratorial superiority. As Noemí Ulla has shown, 'El cautivo' is punctuated by the interventions of a narrator-informer who, by repeatedly stating that he would like to know [*querría saber*] things he obviously does not know, indicates his failure to understand the motivations or impulses of the captive boy.[87] As with 'Un problema', the ultimate solution is not in the hands of an omniscient narrator, but in a possible conceptual system that the narrator cannot access. Here, we have a refinement of the anthropological certainties of 'La historia'. The 'civilized' narrator-informer fails to understand the boy, who is variously described as a 'man', a 'son', and an 'Indian', and likened to an 'infant' and a 'dog'. There is no correspondent association with an

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[86] Bell-Villada, 'Borges and His Fictions', 159.
[87] Noemí Ulla, 'Notas sobre "El cautivo" de Jorge Luis Borges', *Variaciones Borges*, Vol. 13 (2002): 227-233.

uncomprehending fascination with civilization on the part of the barbarian. The dichotomy gives way to a more interesting meditation on the workings of memory and habit, and the implications for how this relates to treatments of the Other. Bell-Villada, who reads the parables of *El hacedor* as being about 'strictly literary problems and literary people', criticises Borges's later stories for their tendency to deal with only 'one single theme, one plot, or one sort of action'.[88] With 'El cautivo', we see evidence that the parables, at least, were not about 'strictly literary problems'; nor were they comparatively inferior for treating the same or similar stories with greater brevity and in isolation. If anything, Borges achieves clarity about political relations in his parables that, with their added complexity, the stories of *Ficciones* and *El aleph* seldom achieve.

This political clarity does not avoid political complexity in the longest of the parables, 'Diálogos entre muertos', which explores the political history of 19th century Argentina. As with 'El hacedor' and 'Everything and Nothing', Borges defers the naming of the protagonists to later in the parable. A ruddy, obese figure, who passes for the archetypal John Bull, arrives from England in 1877 and is received by a group of people, all of who exhibit mortal wounds. A military man steps forward and startles the new arrival. It is only after half a page that the first proper names give some context to this strange reception of an apparently English stranger by the dead: the military man refers to Santos Pérez, following which his name is given as Quiroga and then he calls the new arrival Rosas. Santos Pérez led the assassination of Facundo Quiroga at Barranca Yaco in 1835. While Quiroga and Juan Manuel de Rosas were both Federalists, and Santos Pérez was a Unitarian, Sarmiento, in his ground-breaking biography *Facundo* of 1845, suggests that Rosas conspired in the assassination, since Quiroga was his greatest political rival. Rosas, after his downfall in 1857, was exiled to England until his death in 1877, which explains both the stranger's appearance and his

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88 Bell-Villada, 'Borges and His Fictions', 254; 266.

point of apparent origin. In the dialogue that follows, four important points of difference

emerge to establish Quiroga as a stoic and Rosas as a contemporary cynic.[89]

The first difference figures the respective positions of Quiroga and Rosas as

parochialist and cosmopolitan in Argentinian history. While Quiroga identifies his 'lot'

to be 'to wage war in America's lonely spots, on poor earth belonging to poor gauchos',

he accuses Rosas of a Eurocentric cosmopolitanism: 'Your lot was to command in a city

that looks toward Europe and will someday be among the most famous in the world'

(*Dr* 33; *OC2* 180). There are two separate distinctions at work in Quiroga's

cosmopolitan/parochial binary: a national division between metropole (Europe) and

periphery (Americas), and a provincial division between the metropolis (Buenos Aires)

and the countryside (the Pampas). Rosas conforms to the generic view of the

cosmopolitan as belonging to a metropole and a metropolis and Quiroga conforms to a

more rooted notion of identity, since he belongs to an obscure periphery and the

countryside. This directly impacts on their respective understandings of fame.

The second difference centres on their understanding of fame. Quiroga, as a man

of action, insists that fame ('el recuerdo [memory]') is less important than an

honourable death. In response, Rosas argues that flattery ('el halago [praise]'), either

posthumous or contemporary, is not worth much since it may be achieved with a few

medals. Quiroga understands fame as the continued recognition of an individual through

a collective cultural, national memory (la memoria de la gente [the memory of the

people]); Rosas thinks of it as the adulation of an individual paid directly to their

person. Rosas's approach to fame is cynical, since he sees fame as entirely invested in

the person, but also something rhetorical rather than real ('flattery'). Quiroga does not

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[89] Here, a question of scale forces me to differentiate individuals, who are either idealistic or apathetic about politics, from leaders, who exploit politics for either idealistic reasons or their own ends. While much of this thesis is devoted to individuals, since it seeks to recuperate individual writers from interpretations of political apathy, here, Borges engages directly with the self-serving aspect of cynical politicians, who see political *realpolitik* as a game to be played to secure their own ends.

ascribe much personal value to fame either, but not because it is 'mere rhetoric'. Quiroga's response to fame is stoic: fame is only meaningful insofar as it relies on a real sense of cultural continuity (transmigration) and indifference to the self (apatheia).

The difference between the personal and the impersonal leads to a third point of comparison in their respective treatments of courage and fear. When Quiroga accuses Rosas of cowardice for not accepting the glorious death offered to him, the latter rejoins with the rhetorical question: 'Scared? […] Me, who busted broncs in the South, and later busted a whole country?' (*Dr* 34; *OC2* 181). For Rosas, one's resistance to fear is evidenced by the magnitude of one's political achievements; it is attributed to one, rather than being an intrinsic personal quality. Even when he does concede his own lack of bravery, he claims that bravery is unnecessary for any individual who is able to persuade others to die in that individual's place. 'Bravery', he declares, 'is a question of holding out [aguante: endurance]'; this endurance (and, by extension, bravery) is irrelevant to Rosas, as 'some can hold out more than others, but sooner or later they all give in' (*Dr* 34; *OC2* 181). For Quiroga, bravery is indistinguishable from not knowing fear: 'I do not know what fear is' (*Dr* 34; *OC2* 181). Bravery, in Quiroga's terms, is inextricably linked to a personal *apatheia*, or stoic absence of feeling, and an acceptance of fate. The responses to bravery of both Rosas and Quiroga lead to the fourth, and most important, difference in their responses to death.

Quiroga, as the discussion has illustrated, is a stoic figure. As such, he accepts that he will 'be obliterated [me borren], to be given another face and another destiny' (*Dr* 34; *OC2* 181). As our discussion in the previous chapter showed, Borges links the transmigration of souls to stoic beliefs and cosmopolitanism. Crucial to this transmigration is Quiroga's decision to accept this without fear (as a stoic accepts it with *apatheia*). Rosas, a cynic, is not satisfied with the idea of transmigration, since he is 'satisfied to be who I am […] I do not want to be another' (*Dr* 34; *OC2* 181;

translation adjusted). Quiroga responds with an unrealistic allusion to Baruch Spinoza: 'The stones want to be stones forever, too […] and for centuries they are, until they crumble into dust' (*Dr* 34; *OC2* 181). Bravery, for Quiroga, consists not in the desire to remain in one's quiddity (like a stone); it is the ability to accept the necessarily transient nature of identity. Rosas takes no notice of Quiroga's insistence that they accept change because he is distracted by the thought that he is not actually dead but is in a dream, dreamed not by himself but by someone still waiting to be born (Borges). Rather than have Quiroga confirm or deny this, Borges ends the parable: 'They spoke no more, for at that moment Someone called them' (*Dr* 35; *OC2* 181). The capitalised 'Someone' recalls our earlier discussion about God's role in Borges's parables: he is an empty place-holder that allows discourse to happen. Rosas's allusion to Borges, as the dreamer of the parable, also suggests some inter-diegetic relationship between created and creator. The net result is that the dialogue seems to be between two sides of Borges's political psyche: a localised, Argentinian stoicism as compared with a more cosmopolitan cynicism. In fact, these two aspects are not so antagonistic, if one thinks of the dreamer, or the 'Someone', as being a kynical cosmopolitan addressing both sides of the debate at the same time. The crucial failure in the dialogue is an assumption that concepts such as destiny, fame, courage and fear have a single meaning in Argentinian history. Clearly they do not: Borges illustrates this by using two archetypal figures from this history. But these figures are not *only* archetypal. They did exist, and did have certain qualities, which Borges is careful to enumerate in realist fashion. Moreover, the parable is rich in specific detail, alluding to a number of battles and people from Argentinian history. If anything, the parable risks becoming a nationalist text; it does not only because Quiroga insists on the local specificity of his encounters and battles, and Rosas cynically boasts about his ability to 'bust' a whole country. Moreover, its focus on political history is mediated by those questions of subjectivity already raised

by the writerly parables. The cosmopolitanism that emerges is dismorphic and kynical: it does not suggest a world-state but a disjunction in the apparent integrity of the nation-state.

This antagonism is more clearly kynical when translated to Borges's response to more 'recent' history. 'El simulacro [The Sham]' is the action of a confidence man who appears in a small town or village in the Chaco region of Northern Argentina on 'one of the days of July 1952' (*Dr* 31; *OC2* 178). The parable is split into two paragraphs. The first paragraph gives the description of the situation: a tall thin man 'aindiado [Indian-like]' who places a blonde doll in a cardboard box on an altar (*Dr* 31; *OC2* 178). He accepts, 'with composure [entereza] and resignation', the consolations and the money of the local populace, who pay to see the man and the doll (*Dr* 31; *OC2* 178). The second paragraph interrogates this situation and its participants. First, the narrator asks him- or herself, 'what sort of man imagined and executed this funereal farce? A fanatic, a sad wretch, a dreamer or an imposter and a cynic?' (*Dr* 31; *OC2* 178). Then, the narrator asks whether 'he believed he was Perón to play his macabre role of mourning widower?' (*Dr* 31; *OC2* 178). While the story is acknowledged to be 'incredible', it is also affirmed that 'it occurred and perhaps not one time but many, with different actors and with different locations' (*Dr* 31; *OC2* 178). What is important in this story is not simply the (possible) repetition of a generic theme in different locations, nor the tension it demonstrates as a response to the secular canonisation of Eva Duarte, Perón's wife, after her death in 1952. It is important because it shows how all such political realities are virtual, since the sham becomes a metaphor for an unreal epoch: 'It contains the perfect cipher of an unreal epoch; it is like the reflection of a dream or like that play within a play that is seen in *Hamlet*' (*Dr* 31; *OC2* 178). Even Perón and Eva become anonymous, actors 'who acted out, for the credulous love of the lower middle classes, a crass mythology' (*Dr* 31; *OC2* 178). Borges airs his anti-Perón prejudice, but the

parable critiques what Martín Plot identifies as 'the *political*' or the grounds of representation as such. The confidence man and the doll were not Perón and Eva, 'but neither was Perón Perón nor Eva Eva, but unknown or anonymous (whose secret name and whose true face we ignore) that figured in, for the credulous love of the slums [los arrabales; an Argentinian archaism that refers to the early slums of late 19th century immigrants], a crass mythology' (*Dr* 31; *OC2* 178). The 'secret thing' that Perón and Eva were, is not what is represented; the crass mythology is about figures not people. In this way, they are just as artificial as the farcical reconstruction of the confidence man. It exposes Perón and Eva, not by arguing against their politics but by showing how their politics is a matter of pure representation.

In the interview with *Philosophy and Literature* we alluded to previously, Borges refers to an idea from Ralph Waldo Emerson he would iterate throughout his work: 'Arguments convince nobody'.[90] This rather fatalistic sentiment, however, does not lead Borges to suggest there is no hope for persuading people. Rather,

> in that case, if arguments convince nobody, a man may be convinced by parables or fables or what? Or fictions. Those are far more convincing than the syllogism – and they are, I suppose. Well, of course, when I think of something in terms of Jesus Christ. As far as I remember, he never used arguments; he used style, he used certain metaphors. It's very strange – yes, and he always used very striking sentences. He would not say, I don't come to bring peace but war – 'I do not come to bring peace but a sword.' The Christ, he thought in parables.[91]

Christ has often been thought of as a kynical figure.[92] But the parallel is more significant in Borges's meditation on Christ's method: using style instead of arguments, supplementing direct statements with metaphors. Similarly, Borges's kynical method

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[90] Borges, Dutton and Palencia-Roth, '"Merely a Man of Letters" Jorge Luis Borges: An Interview', 340.

[91] Ibid.

[92] John Moles addresses the evidence for this school of thought quite comprehensively in 'Cynic Influence upon First-century Judaism and Early Christianity?', *The Limits of Ancient Biography*, ed. B. McGing and J. Mossman (Swansea: Wales UP, 2006): 89-116. His final conclusion, however, is that the argument is indeterminate; it is primarily based on the associative power of certain shared traits (poverty, *parrhesia*, homelessness), rather than verifiable evidence from the classical world. William Desmond also discusses this in his history of the Cynics, but the links he makes are mainly associative. William D. Desmond, *Cynics* (Berkley and Los Angeles: California UP, 2008).

uses parables, because arguments convince nobody. He gives us lists that do not form neat, composite wholes. He communicates these composites in metaphors that do not quite transmit all their implications in a clearly delineated way. The chaos in Borges's kynical writing does not reveal a hidden 'cosmos': it calls into question the site of the cosmos itself.

In conclusion, Borges uses enumeration to list the qualities of people, places and actions, and metaphor to relate these lists to certain canonical tropes. On the face of it, these standard rhetorical methods gesture to a conventional, privileged sense of cosmopolitanism: enumerated components forming a conventional image, to be broadcast by a universal, 'Enlightened', metaphor. Since the themes of Borges's work are both 'Argentinian' and 'European', we can identify his work as 'rooted' but 'cosmopolitan': Borges is both 'Quiroga', rooted in Argentina, and 'Rosas', looking towards Europe. However, this assessment fails to do justice to the complexity of Borges's work, precisely because Borges's enumeration and metaphor do not work with such conceptual ease.

Borges's enumeration and metaphor upset sites of understanding. These functions occur outside the polemics about enumeration and metaphor that Borges himself would wage, since his own theories remain surprisingly conservative. However, these techniques in his writing necessarily extract from Borges the conservative supporter of military dictatorships and naïve reader of Victorian adventure stories, the kynical cosmopolitan writer, whose work does challenge subjective ideologies, established political mores and pre-conceived aesthetic theories *without* giving up an adherence to truth.

As was mentioned earlier in the chapter, Borges dismissed the use of enumeration to form a coherent image, since enumeration offers the opportunity to put qualities together that might otherwise be conflicting or contradictory. Here, we may

mark our passage from Borges as a kynical cosmopolitan to Beckett as a kynical cosmopolitan, since Beckett's preferred technique is the image (and the voice) in his later work. The image and the voice, however, are no more settling than Borges's enumerations or metaphors. The question of Beckett's image and voice leads us to our next chapter: Kynical Image and Voice in Beckett's late plays.

Chapter 3
Kynical Image and Voice in Beckett's late plays

Early responses to Beckett interpreted his work as cynical.[1] Later, critics would find Beckett's response to the world stoic. In this chapter, we argue that neither response is satisfactory, which leads us to Beckett the kynical cosmopolitan. A cynical response to Beckett finds either nihilism or self-serving opportunism at work in an oeuvre that, as Shane Weller has shown, leaves its reader in no position to say whether or not it is nihilistic or self-serving.[2] A stoic response to Beckett attempts to recuperate Beckett from this impasse by defending him against accusations of nihilism. Such responses foist a philosophical system on an oeuvre which resists and ridicules philosophical systems. Weller, who sets out to read Beckett neither as a nihilist nor as a writer to be redeemed from nihilist readings, opens our discussion, since he shows how Beckett's work plays across these positions. Weller's subsequent work calls this play 'anethical', which 'troubles distinction between the ethical and the unethical'.[3] We build on Weller's work by positing the kynical. Rather than a nihilist (or cynical) Beckett, or an anti-nihilist (stoic) Beckett, we find a kynical Beckett, who maintains a consistent critique of bourgeois complacency.[4]

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[1] Philip Toynbee's review of the English translation of *Molloy* for instance: 'the whole point of the thesis that life is horrible and meaningless and nothing else must be that there is no more than this to be said about it'. Philip Toynbee, 'Molloy', *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (Abingdon: Routledge, 1979), 75.

[2] Shane Weller, *A Taste for the Negative: Beckett and Nihilism* (London: Legenda, 2005).

[3] Shane Weller, *Beckett, Literature and the Ethics of Alterity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 131.

[4] Adorno's seminal 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*' shows how Beckett resists bourgeois sentiment. For Adorno, Beckett achieves this not through an existential philosophy – 'in Beckett, history devours existentialism' – but by exposing a basic falsity in life: 'the moments when the bourgeois acts like a real bourgeois, he besmirches the concept of humanity on which his claim rests' (122; 133). Bourgeois cynicism resists existentialist critique because 'the irrationality of bourgeois society on the wane resists being understood': it may no longer be critiqued 'by its own *ratio*' because 'it has thrown this *ratio* on the junk-heap and virtually replaced it with direct control' (122). By showing how interpretation itself collapses into cynicism, and yet refusing to deal in interpretation, Adorno's Beckett manages to achieve a

He stages this critique through a technical use of the image and the voice, which we find deployed in his last three plays, *Ohio Impromptu* (1981), *Catastrophe* (1982), and *What Where* (1983), in a dialectic that does not sublate. This non-sublative dialectic permits him to critique his own absorption into bourgeois mainstream theatre, the politics of theatrical representation, and extra-theatrical politics of censorship without resorting to a stoic 'comprehensive image' or 'voice' or returning to previous models of nihilism.

By the 1980s, Beckett was a playwright of international repute, and these three works were written in response to the invitation of academics and festival organisers. This context explains why they give the sense of being written to be 'Beckett' plays.[5] In defining a 'Beckett' play, we turn to Anna McMullan's succinct description:

> Beckett's dramaturgy resists the presentation of a coherent mimetic world: rather he worked to create a non-specific, meta-theatrical environment on stage […] in which fragments of a past – that of the fictional persona and that of the author and his multilingual cultural 'appurtenances' – are articulated as memories, ghosts or echoes.[6]

McMullan's observations are exaggerated in Beckett's last three plays, which come close to parodying this resistance to a coherent mimetic world, with their emphasis on non-specific, meta-theatrical environments and their interplay between fictional persona and biographical fact. The meta-theatrical environment of Beckett's late plays becomes a 'microcosmos': the term Beckett's Murphy gives to the 'little world' where one is

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dissociation without 'pure, unpolemical, innocent pluralism' (133-4). If I agree with Adorno in what follows, my conclusion differs, since for me the result is kynical and for Adorno, *Endgame*'s 'only consolation' is 'a stoic one':

> Clov: There are so many terrible things now.
> Hamm: No, no, there are not so many now.

Rather than take this as 'consciousness' looking its 'demise in the eye', I take it as a continual kynical challenge both to consciousness and demise. Theodor Adorno, 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*', *New German Critique*, No. 26 (Spring-Summer, 1982).

[5] As early as 1956, Beckett plays with a notion of what 'Beckett' might be. In a letter to George Devine, dated December 5th 1956, he suggests that he could write another mime [Devine is planning to present *Acte sans paroles*] but that this 'would be perhaps too much wordlessness and too much Beckett' (*SBL2* 683).

[6] Anna McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 4.

'"cut off" from reality' (*SB1* 107). These memories, ghosts and echoes appear to have little external political significance, since they arise in the confines of the mind. If this is true, they are stoic, in Sloterdijk's sense of 'a philosophy of the comfortable': they gesture to impoverishment by 'having as if they did not have', but do not break the confines of this 'little world'.[7] We will show that Beckett's 'fragments of the past' are kynical because they do disrupt the limits of these microcosmoi.

To show that Beckett's late style is kynical, we explore how his treatment of art and politics in his 'microcosmos' is not cut off from reality, since he exposes basic inconsistencies in art and politics. Although he regulates the conditions of this exposure in the microcosmos of the theatre, Beckett seems to disrupt this closed space by grounding his interrogation of art and politics in extra-theatrical 'fragments of a past'.

However, we should recall that the 'fragments of the past', or biographical elements, in the last three plays follow the appearance of Deirdre Bair's 1978 biography, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, and the near contemporaneous appearance of the autobiographical *Company* (1980). John Pilling identifies *Company* as an effort to 'establish the proper conjunctions and disjunctions' between life and art after the Bair biography.[8] Bair begins her biography with Beckett's birth: 'birth is usually without ambiguity [...] In Samuel Beckett's case, even this is obscured in irony and confusion'.[9] *Company* satirises this play between certainty and uncertainty when it compares that 'small part' which 'can be verified' ('you are on your back in the dark') with that 'greater part' which 'cannot be verified' ('you first saw the light on such and such a day') (*SB4* 427). In Richard Ellmann's review of Bair's biography, 'the relation of Beckett's writings to his life is problem-ridden' which is not simply because the

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[7] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 165.
[8] John Pilling, '*Company* by Samuel Beckett', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, No. 7 (September 1982), 52.
[9] Deidre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), 3.

biography takes Beckett at his word.[10] Ellmann's conclusion is that Beckett allowed the release of the biography – he told her that he would neither help nor hinder her in its production – for Schopenhauerian reasons: 'To forbid others to act involves the pretense that one can forbid oneself, and that one knows what to forbid and what not. Beckett makes no such claim'.[11] In Ellmann's critical reading of the biography, it appears that Beckett's resignation to its publication becomes itself a form of authentic self-creation. Presented with the facticity of his fame, Ellmann's Beckett turns fame itself into an ethical exercise. Ellmann concludes that Beckett turns the biography to his own advantage:

> His ultimate reason for permitting her biography is to let his infirmities become public knowledge and so challenge [his] success. Yet the success is real and deserved. What Miss Bair has presented […] is a simulacrum, Sim Botchit rather than Sam Beckett. Happily Beckett exists somewhere else.[12]

For Ellmann, Beckett (in the cosmopolitan 'somewhere else') avoids this simulacrum ('Sim Botchit'). As we shall see, Beckett's relationship with his 'Sim Botchit' proves to be more involved than Ellmann surmises.

If Beckett's 'fragments of the past' merely reinforce preconceived conclusions about the late work, these preconceptions are also informed by the contexts for which these plays were written. As with Borges's *El hacedor*, these plays were originally written as occasional pieces and only subsequently collected into a single production, directed by Alan Schneider at the Harold Clurman Theatre in New York in 1983.[13]

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[10] Richard Ellmann, 'The Life of Sim Botchit', *The New York Review of Books*, 15 June 1978, 4.

[11] Ibid, 4.

[12] Ibid, 8.

[13] The Harold Clurman production gives a comparative basis for discussing these three 'dramaticules'. In each case, it was the first production of each piece to occur outside of the context for which the piece was originally written. While the Clurman production was aimed at a 'standard' theatre audience, the audiences for which Beckett wrote the plays were quite specific. *Ohio Impromptu* was written in English at the request of Stan Gontarski for the 1981 conference, 'Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives'. *Catastrophe* was written in French at the request of the organisers of the 1982 Avignon Festival for their Havel Night, a night of productions written in solidarity with the Czech playwright and politician Václav Havel. *Quoi où* [*What Where*, later, in German, *Wo War*] was written in French at the request of the organisers of the 1983 Autumn Festival in Graz, Austria. The diverse audiences Beckett was expecting

However, this contextual disjuncture gives us a grip on how Beckett manipulates these 'fragments of the past' and their context to make this late writing kynical. This grip takes these works as performances as well as texts.[14] Our discussion of Borges's parables highlighted the split between a manifest tale and the tale of a tale being told (theorised by Ricardo Piglia). In Beckett, the split is between the dramatic text and its performance as theatre.

We focused on Borges's use of enumeration and metaphor to bridge the manifest and reflexive tales. Here we address the visual and auditory devices Beckett uses to bridge text and performance in the theatre: namely, the image and the voice.[15] Again, Diogenes of Sinope provides us with a useful paradigm to explain the significance of the image and the voice to the kynical cosmopolitan. When Diogenes challenges Plato's definition of the human as a featherless biped by showing his plucked chicken and stating, 'here is your man', he interrupts the narrative continuity of Plato's philosophical utterance with a combination of an image and a statement. This combination is important, since the chicken without the phrase would be arbitrary and the phrase without the chicken would be nonsensical. It is the disparity between image and statement that disrupts the scene. Moreover, it is the voice that announces the image, even as the image gains significance through the statement, since it is primarily Diogenes's voice that will call attention to the significance of the chicken, and so provide image and statement with their kynical force. Denis Diderot, in his

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were Beckett scholars, opponents to censorship and state oppression, and visitors to an autumn festival. Despite this diversity, there are certain continuities, observable by their juxtaposition in the Clurman production, and readily translatable to the concerns of the kynical cosmopolitan through the image and the voice.

[14] Enoch Brater argues that Beckett's late plays redefine our notion of text, since they collapse 'our traditional way of thinking about drama as something separate and distinct from performance'. Enoch Brater, *Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in the Theater* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987), 4.

[15] Xerxes Mehta observes two significant 'images' in Beckett's late plays: visual images and sonic images. I favour 'image' over 'visual image' and 'voice' over 'sonic image' to mark a fundamental distinction between the image and the voice. The plays share a generic tendency to crystallise visual elements, which they punctuate with verbal or sonic elements. Xerxes Mehta, 'Ghosts', *Directing Beckett*, ed. Lois Oppenheim (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1997).

controversial *Letter on the Blind* (1749), theorises that Diogenes would not be a philosopher to the blind, since, for them, living in a world without sight, Diogenes's visual challenge to modesty would ultimately be of no consequence.[16] Diderot is half-right in his assessment, since he identifies Diogenes's philosophical use of visual elements but does not extend this analysis to the equally significant role played by sonic elements. To his *Letter on the Deaf and Dumb* (1751), Diderot might have added that to the deaf, too, Diogenes would not be a philosopher, because, without the signifying power of his voice, Diogenes ceases to be a commentator on community mores and becomes a mere masturbating beggar, inexplicable in his tendency to hold up chickens and throw away drinking bowls. Diogenes's dialectic of image and voice provides a paradigm for understanding Beckett's dialectic of image and voice. Diogenes's image and voice illustrate how Beckett's work is kynical (disruptive) rather than stoic (cohesive).[17] It remains to be determined why we find this kynical (ethically consistent), rather than cynical (self-serving).

Stoicism, Criticism and the 'Nothing New'

By arguing that his method is kynical, we depart from reading Beckett in the stoic tradition. Hugh Kenner opens his comparative study of Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett by referring to the Stoic:

> The Stoic is one who considers, with neither panic nor indifference, that the field of possibilities available to him is large perhaps, or small perhaps, but closed [...] he can hope for nothing that adequate method could not foresee.[18]

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16 Denis Diderot, 'Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those Who See', *Diderot's Early Philosophical Works*, trans. and ed. Margaret Jourdain (Chicago and London: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1916), 81. This has obvious parallels to Borges's analysis of *Waiting for Godot*, discussed in chapter 1.

17 In this regard, I am indebted to Laura Salisbury's reading of Beckett's style of comic timing as 'fixated on syncopations [and] hiccups'. Laura Salisbury, *Samuel Beckett: Laughing Matters, Comic Timing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2012), 3.

18 Hugh Kenner, *The Stoic Comedians: Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), xiii.

The Stoic is limited to this closed field of possibilities; after the 'Gutenberg Revolution' this aspect of stoicism becomes a necessary part of all 'literary composition'.[19] He clarifies this as the moment when writing, by virtue of its mechanisation, ceases to be mediated by the human voice.

> This means we have grown accustomed at last not only to silent reading, but to reading matter that itself implies nothing but silence [...] The language of printed words has become, like the language of mathematics, voiceless [...][20]

Stoic voicelessness, implying nothing but silence, grants no significance to the sounds that writing evokes, in part because such sounds necessarily explode the field of possibilities.

Kenner's 'Stoic Comedian' responds to this curtailment by obeying scrupulously the rules of literary composition to their point of impasse. If Flaubert and Joyce prototype this style, Kenner identifies Beckett as its apotheosis:

> Beckett has been the first writer to exploit directly the most general truth about the operations of a Stoic Comedian, that he selects elements from a closed set, and then arranges them inside a closed field.[21]

For Kenner, Beckett designates his field and its elements, and then combines these elements in this field until he has exhausted all their possible permutations. Kenner's 'stoicism' refers less to the ancient stoics than to a stylistic resignation common to Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett: the resignation that the possibilities available to one are closed. But Beckett's writing exceeds Kenner's 'stoic' resignation, since it interrupts this voiceless 'closed field', or microcosmos, with images and voices that come as if from the outside. Beckett's writing is kynical in this interruptive excess, rather than stoic (an ethics defined by a closed field) or cynical (a disengagement with the field because it is closed).

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid, xv.
[21] Ibid, 93-4.

Anthony Uhlmann shifts a stoic Beckett from the voice to the image. If Kenner's

stoic responds to the 'voicelessness' of the written word, Uhlmann understands the

stoics to be philosophers of the image: 'for the Stoics, the point of departure for

knowledge is the image (*phantasia*)'.[22] 'The "image", then, belongs to a primal

perceptual moment: in the Stoic system it is that which impresses itself upon us and

asks us to respond, to understand'.[23] Our apprehension of this 'comprehensive image',

which 'is immediately impressed on the senses like a "signet ring into wax"', leads

Uhlmann to conclude that 'wisdom can be achieved through immediate apprehension of

the object (the comprehensive image)'.[24] For Uhlmann, Beckett's work creates such

comprehensive images.

Contra Uhlmann, we argue that the voice disrupts the comprehensive image in

Beckett's late plays. Only in *Quad*, the television play where four figures silently

traverse the sides and diagonals of a square, does the voice not disrupt an apparently

comprehensive image.[25] Rather than the apprehension of his images granting stoic

wisdom, Beckett's plays kynically interrupt our reception of the image with a voice.

These references to Beckett's 'stoicism' form part of a critical focus on the

image and the voice, particularly evident in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Maurice

Blanchot.[26] In their responses to Beckett, a dialectic emerges between the image and the

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[22] Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett*, 15.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid, 131.

[25] *Quadrat I+II* was originally broadcast on the 8th of October 1981 by Süddeutscher Rundfunk. There is a shift in sound from the first part (frenetic drumming) to the second (shuffling footsteps), which disrupts the apparently comprehensive image created by the characters traversing the quad.

[26] Deleuze wrote two pieces on Beckett: a lengthy introduction to the film version of *Quad* (1981) called 'L'Épuise [The Exhausted]' and a shorter, elliptical piece that does prioritise the stuttering voice in Beckett called 'He Stuttered'. Since the point in raising this dialectic is to illustrate the play between voice and image, rather than a faithful reproduction of Deleuze's engagement with Beckett, and since 'He Stuttered', like 'The Exhausted', develops the voice into an image of language itself made to stutter, I focus on Deleuze's more extended reading of image in 'The Exhausted'. Blanchot reads the structural significance of the voice into each of his three responses to Beckett's prose work: the reviews of *L'Innommable* and *Comment c'est*, later published in *The Book to Come* and *The Infinite Conversation* as 'Where Now? Who Now?' and 'Words Must Travel Far', and the late essay 'Oh tout finir'. Gilles Deleuze, 'The Exhausted', trans. Anthony Uhlmann, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP); Deleuze, 'He Stuttered', *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*, eds. Constantin

voice. Deleuze interprets Beckett's work as progressing from the combinatory logics of enumeration and metaphor through the voice to the image. Blanchot understands the image in Beckett to be underpinned by an already present voice. Between Deleuze and Blanchot, we find a tension over Beckett's priorities: for Deleuze, Beckett's work progresses towards an image, while for Blanchot, it is founded on a voice.[27] Admittedly, if one compares the texts they are discussing, and the time at which they are writing, this tension dissolves. Deleuze's focus is the later television works, particularly *Quad*, for which his essay is an introduction. Blanchot's foci are Beckett's last two extended prose works, *L'Innommable/The Unnamable* (1953/1958) and *Comment c'est/How It Is* (1961/1964), which his essays review. Deleuze and Blanchot respond to particular works in discrete genres that do not lend themselves to comparison. We risk this theoretical clumsiness to emphasise the dialectic between image and voice, since Beckett stages his kynical resistance to voicelessness and comprehensive images in the performance of this dialectic.[28]

Beckett's late plays observe this dialectic by playing across his dramatic and prose genres. Enoch Brater argues that Beckett's late theatre is a 'genre under stress'.[29] 'The theatre event is reduced to a piece of monologue and the play is on the verge of becoming something else, something that looks suspiciously like a performance

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V. Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994); Maurice Blanchot, 'Where Now? Who Now?' *The Book to Come*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2003); Blanchot, 'Words Must Travel Far', *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1993); Blanchot, 'Oh tout finir', *Critique*, No. 519-20, August-September (1990).

[27] Since both writers ostensibly claim to respond to Beckett, I respond to the primacy Blanchot gives the voice to the primacy Deleuze gives the image, not their diverse and conflicting philosophical systems.

[28] Recent work by Sarah West and Bruno Clément also produce this dialectic. West's study of the voice has informed my reading, but she makes a productive slip in her opening sentence in insisting that 'the acts of speaking and listening are paramount in Beckett's dramatic works', while qualifying this importance with the clause, 'seeing is not enough'. Clearly, however paramount the voice may be, it always interacts with 'seeing'. In Clément, the image is similarly obliged to interact with the voice. West, *Say It*, 11. Bruno Clément, 'What is this voice', trans. James Martell, *Samuel Beckett and the Encounter of Philosophy and Literature*, eds. Arka Chattopadhyay and James Martell (London: Roman Books, 2013).

[29] Enoch Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, 3.

poem'.[30] Again, we find correlative biographical causes in the increased demand for dramatisations of his prose texts after the 1960s. But these 'performance poems' stress the *structural* difficulties in delivering a prose text coherently in a theatrical situation. Beckett's late theatre is riven between two orders of image and voice: the prosaic and the dramatic. In this rift, Beckett explores a kynically cosmopolitan relationship between the writer and his world. Here we depart from both Deleuze and Blanchot, who see Beckett's work as voiding the authorial subject entirely. Beckett does not void the authorial subject; he plays with it, and with our expectations of 'Beckett'. So if criticism tends to read Beckett as recapitulating 'comprehensive images', Beckett interrupts the 'comprehensive image' of 'Beckett' with two interrelated kynical methods. He punctuates the theatrical microcosmos with references to extra-theatrical locations or histories, and disrupts its 'comprehensive images' with voices.

Criticism tends to agree that Beckett's final three plays, *Ohio Impromptu*, *Catastrophe* and *What Where*, are exemplary 'Beckett' pieces, since little is new or different in these plays. When John Pilling remarked of *Ohio Impromptu* in 1985 that 'of course, there is "nothing new" here, nor should we expect there to be', he acknowledged the play's recapitulation of generic themes in 'Beckettian' style.[31] Adam Seelig's discussion of the *Ohio Impromptu* manuscripts begins by noting a generic process in Beckett's oeuvre, whereby 'autobiography provides the foundation for writing that then undergoes a painstaking process that purges the text of the author's identity'.[32] Angela Moorjani surmises that 'for *Catastrophe*, Beckett appears to have dipped deep down into his store of obsessive images to fashion this play solicited for the

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[30] Ibid.

[31] The 'nothing new' to which Pilling is referring is the opening sentence of *Murphy* (1938): 'The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new'. John Pilling, 'Review Article: Three Occasional Pieces', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, No. 10 (1985), 158.

[32] Adam Seelig, 'Beckett's Dying Remains: The Process of Playwriting in the *Ohio Impromptu* Manuscripts', *Modern Drama*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Fall 2000). *Samuel Beckett Resources*. Accessed: 6 December 2011. http://www.samuel-beckett.net/remains3.html#1

1982 Avignon Festival's Havel Night'. [33] Anna McMullan identifies a similar generic in

Catastrophe's Protagonist, who 'mirrors many of the personae of Beckett's late theatre

and may be seen as an ironic commentary on Beckett's own production of subjected

bodies as theatrical spectacle'.[34] McMullan also notes the repetition in *What Where*

since, like *Quad*, '*What Where* is also subject to serial patterns of repetition: the four

personae of Bam, Bim, Bem and Bom act out cycles of interrogation and torture'.[35]

Ruby Cohn calls *What Where* 'unique' but only 'in trying to translate to the stage the

problems of his recent fiction'.[36] Her summary of the play uses Beckett criticism's

staple references to split subjects, piercing holes and the stripping away of accidentals:

> The imagining self seeks distance from himself, and yet he tries to pierce
> to the whatness and whereness of that work. That process is dramatized
> through the passing seasons, as figures are stripped of individuality, down
> to the bones of their articulations. *Quoi où* [*What Where*] is also the last of
> Beckett's 'torture' pieces in which a victim is coerced to speak.[37]

Without detracting from the insight each reading brings, in the 'nothing new' of

Beckett's late plays, images 'mirror' those of earlier works while voices 'repeat' a

standard coercion to speak. The emphasis on repetition in these images and voices in the

criticism also recapitulates certain biographical associations for which, rightly or

wrongly, they are held as objective correlatives. These objective correlatives include

biographical allusions in *Ohio Impromptu* to Beckett's relationship with Joyce and their

walks along the Ile des Cygnes; analogues between Beckett's authoritarian directing

style, the Director in *Catastrophe* and the Voice in *What Where*; the resemblance

between the 'clawlike' hands of *Catastrophe*'s Protagonist, a character's failure to

thread a needle in early drafts of *Ohio Impromptu* and fibrous degeneration in Beckett's

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[33] Angela Moorjani, 'Directing or In-directing Beckett: Or What is Wrong with *Catastrophe*'s Director?', *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 15 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 193.
[34] McMullan, *Performing Embodiment*, 115.
[35] Ibid, 101.
[36] Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 2001), 377.
[37] Ibid.

hands.[38] This presents a bind. Without detailed biographical knowledge of Beckett's life, these images fail as free-standing rationales for the plays. Relying on them too greatly reduces the plays to mere 'Beckett' pieces.

The production history mirrors these biographical interferences. We have already noted that the plays were invited pieces. They were each requested of Beckett to mark an occasion, show solidarity for a cause or celebrate a festival. Understandably, occasion imprinted itself on the writing, as we will discuss below. Beckett attempts to disavow occasion in *Three Dialogues* (1949): 'the analysis of the relation between the artist and his occasion […] does not seem to have been very productive either' (*Disj* 144). But dramatic works, even when they are crystallised into visual effects, are only productive in the occasion of their performance.

Beckett's writing by invitation also raises a kynical question for stoic cosmopolitanism. If an invitation extends an offer of hospitality to a writer's work, what are the conditions of that hospitality? Moreover, how can the writer respond to this offer in a creative way while remaining consistent with their general style? Kantian cosmopolitanism (and the tensions between unconditional and conditional hospitality that Jacques Derrida draws out in his essay *On Cosmopolitanism*) concerns itself with the former question; the kynics concern themselves with the latter. How to maintain an artistic integrity (producing something new as a writer) and a recognisable style (producing something familiar)? In response, Beckett manipulates image and voice in a nexus that refers to the conditions of the invitation, maintains his audience's expectations and reconciles the constraints of production to his own politics of engagement.[39]

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[38] See Moorjani, 'In-directing Beckett'; McMullan, *Embodiment*; Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*; Seelig, 'Beckett's Dying Remains' cited above.

[39] In his response to Sartre's *What is Literature?*, Adorno argues that Beckett and Kafka produce art that makes 'officially committed works look like pantomime': they 'arouse the fear that existentialism merely talks about'; 'they explode from within art which committed proclamation subjugates from without';

John Calder captures the complexity of this politics when, in his review of the
Harry Clurman Theatre triple bill (*Ohio Impromptu*, *Catastrophe* and *What Where*), he
describes the action of the first play: 'The reader reads to his own image, is visited by
that image, reads about that image that is his own memory of being visited'. [40]

> As with *Company*, the author again returns to a theme he has portrayed
> many times, that loneliness and nostalgia are too personal, after a certain
> age, to be shared with any being other than oneself.[41]

Calder notes the critical repetition of the biographical facts, while claiming that they are
'too personal […] to be shared'. He, like Pilling, Seelig, Moorjani and Cohn, finds this
personal Beckett at the expense of any 'newness'. Beckett's late plays evince a stoic
'philosophy of the comfortable', since they do not extend themselves beyond well-worn
themes. This may explain why Jonathan Kalb considers the best responses to Beckett's
late plays to come from people who were not critics. 'Uninformed' as to the details of
Beckett's life, lay spectators of Beckett's plays are able to appreciate them as images
and as performances without carrying the baggage of Beckett's wider oeuvre. For these
audiences too, however, Beckett ceased to be the producer of works that shocked and
startled. As he was absorbed into a 'bourgeois, "well-fed" existence', he stopped being
kynical.[42]

Alan Schneider, Beckett's friend and director, commented on Beckett's
absorption into a bourgeois mainstream. He found that the people going to watch the

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'their work compels the change of attitude which committed works merely demand'. Kynical
cosmopolitans do not simply say how inoperative communities are; they take us, step by wearying step,
through a demonstration of this inoperativity. Or, in Adorno's words,

> the minimal promise of happiness they contain, which refuses to be traded for comfort, cannot be
> had for a price less than total dislocation, to the point of worldlessness. Here every commitment
> to the world must be abandoned to satisfy the ideal of the committed work of art.

Theodor Adorno, 'Commitment', *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1977), 191.

[40] John Calder, 'Three Beckett Plays at the Harold Clurman Theatre, New York, 1983', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, No. 11/12 (1989), 219.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Nicholas Royle problematises this tendency *within* Beckett studies, which he sees as giving the *name* 'Beckett' 'a crowded after-life'. Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001), 220.

1983 Harold Clurman triple bill 'are absolutely middle class, nonintellectual, nonaficionados. They get much more out of Beckett than the experts'.[43] Given that Schneider's triple bill included *Ohio Impromptu*, which he had also directed for the conference, *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives*, the negative comparison to 'the experts' is thinly veiled criticism indeed. But Schneider considered this shift an encouraging sign of changing times:

> What's interesting to me is that the ellipses of *Godot* are now transparently clear to college freshmen, where before they were baffling to all these great critics and philosophy professors. That's a matter of rules changing, and that the language of our perception is sufficient to take him in.[44]

With the changes to 'the language of our perception', the audience has become comfortable enough with Beckett to take him in; it receives him with the comfort of Sloterdijk's stoic. Jonathan Kalb glosses Schneider's comment as an important endorsement of 'illegitimate' responses to Beckett's work. An 'illegitimate' response is one dismissed as irrelevant for being made by an 'untrained mind', 'but that is an elitist position justified neither by the plays nor by their theatre histories'.[45] Kalb extends this egalitarianism to grant Beckett's spectators an understanding of the works, 'at the very deepest level, deeper even than the most sophisticated textual criticism, which all too often omits mention of the primary routes to the spectator's understanding'.[46] For this reason, Kalb objects to Martin Esslin's suggestion that 'most spectators' entire reaction (to later Beckett) is to "the *overall impact* of a single overwhelmingly powerful image"' with the suggestion that this is 'merely an initial reaction' and that meaning accrues to the play 'as its overwhelming effect wears off'.[47] In his review, Pilling anticipates Kalb's disaffection with the insensate metaphysics of the 'elitist' Beckett scholar. Given the profusion of generic 'Beckettian' images, he asks himself whether 'only the

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[43] Alan Schneider qtd. Jonathan Kalb, *Beckett in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 22.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Kalb, *Beckett in Performance*, 22.
[46] Ibid, 22-3.
[47] Ibid.

Beckettophile can derive pleasure from *Ohio Impromptu*'.[48] It may be that the '"receding stream" of analogies and allusions is a mere indulgence of Beckett's penchant for infinite regress'.[49] However, he argues, the presence on stage of 'the long black cloak' and the 'Latin quarter hat' recall us to 'the here and the now':

> The dramatic image in *Ohio Impromptu*, as indeed in all Beckett's great plays, is so riveting that not even the academic mind, the corporate academic mind in this case, can miss the fact that it is to the here and the now that it must ultimately, having exhausted itself in the vicious circles of infinite regress, retrace its steps.[50]

Kalb and Schneider defend an egalitarian, non-academic response to Beckett on the basis of the arresting effect evoked by his theatrical images, but it seems to be as comfortable a philosophical approach to Beckett as that taken by the 'experts'. This response is valid but it ignores two ancillary functions of the image for Beckett scholars, the first of which is raised by Pilling: the arresting effect of the image is something that is *returned to* after 'the vicious circles of infinite regress'. The images have a generic 'Beckett' quality that is deliberately worked over by a kynical subject all too aware of his simulacrum 'Sim Botchit'. The second, more obscure, function involves the spectators of these 'transparent', 'egalitarian' performances. Kynicism always exploits its audience. Through his use of clichéd images, Beckett pre-empts his audience's response.[51] This is not a stoic tactic, since it leads neither to voicelessness nor a comprehensive image, despite a comfortably 'Beckett' experience. Rather, the tactic suggests a certain structural violence, in which audience responses are short-circuited by this 'Beckett' experience.

By the early 1980s Beckett's theatrical *avant-gardism* has become either the preserve of the expert or bourgeois conventionalism: a comfortably 'cosmopolitan'

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[48] Pilling, 'Review Article', 159.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Elizabeth Barry's study of cliché in Beckett shows how Beckett was 'predisposed to the self-conscious cliché as verbal strategy' as cliché provides 'a form in which [one's] culture already mocks itself'. Elizabeth Barry, *Beckett and Authority: The Uses of Cliché* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 2; 3.

Beckett. In this case, his cosmopolitanism does not disrupt status quos; it is either stoic, since stoic cosmopolitanism accepts benign hegemonic structures as necessary, or cynical, since a cynical cosmopolitanism gains nothing in challenging their dominance. But Beckett does invert this status quo, since his use of 'Beckettian' themes disrupts the expectations of his audiences, academic and middle class. Beckett reflects a 'Beckett' in these plays, but the reflection is broken. Michel Foucault calls kynicism the broken mirror of ancient philosophy: 'It is the broken mirror in which every philosopher can and must recognize himself, in which he can and must recognize the very image of philosophy, the reflection of what it is and should be, and of what he is and would like to be'.[52] But this reflection is broken, insofar as it is always contains a grimace that eludes reflection. The contemporary criticism, with its stoic concern with the 'nothing new', attempts to evade this grimace. The hermetic references to previous plays spark John Pilling's concerns, but they become a common 'language of perception' for Alan Schneider. For neither, apparently, is Beckett doing something altogether different.

Cynical readings take Beckett's repetitions to be a form of self-promotion. Stephen Dilks identifies in Beckett's customary self-abnegation a form of self-marketing.[53] Dilks's argument has interesting parallels for both Borges and Coetzee who have also performed a coherent authorial persona. However, Dilks's study reduces Beckett's engagement with self-marketing to a cynical bid for prestige. Dilks posits a Beckett deliberately marketing himself for a global cosmopolitan audience. Such readings take Foucault's grimace to be self-serving. The cosmopolitan in the first, stoic instance is tantamount to an idealised universalist. The cosmopolitan in the second, cynical instance eschews idealist universalism for a network of global markets. But neither cosmopolitan does something wholly new, because it serves neither the idealist purpose nor the self-marketing schema to disrupt the way the work is already received.

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[52] Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 232.
[53] Stephen Dilks, *Samuel Beckett in the Literary Marketplace* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2011).

We will explore how Beckett disrupts this pattern, to perform a kynical cosmopolitan interrogation of idealist and materialist modes of connecting with the world. Anna McMullan testifies to this disruption with the dominant narrative of the 'Beckett' play, when she finds that Beckett's late plays are marked by a change in his treatment of embodiment. Embodiment in the late work is dialectical: the ghostliness of the characters in the plays is counterpoised by an obvious and conscious exploitation of actors as concrete theatrical devices. Although the plays increasingly represent 'ghost-like figures […] exiled between presence and absence, the present and the past, the mortal boundaries of a life and what may lie beyond,' McMullan also notes that 'the late drama is shaped by [Beckett's] concrete experience in the theatre'.[54] She finds evidence in his treatment of his actors as bodies: where the emphasis in *Godot* and *Fin de partie/Endgame* (1957/1958) had been on dialogue, 'in the later plays he had been aware of every movement of the actors even before he wrote the dialogue'.[55] So, while the identification of these plays vacillates between hermeticism and common perception, these three works actually test the limits of Beckett's ghostly themes through the practical limitations of the theatre (and, in the case of *What Where*, television).

The Image and the Voice in Beckett's microcosmos

Any encounter with Beckett's theatre, whether violent or congenial, is always intimate. A stoic cosmopolitanism, with its world-states, appears too expansive to describe Beckett's aesthetics. But might Beckett's kynical cosmopolitanism tend towards a 'microcosmopolitanism', which, if not correlative to kynical cosmopolitanism, nevertheless shares certain affinities with this localised form of 'worldliness'? After all, the kynical cosmopolitan is always more interested in the local than the global. This

[54] McMullan, *Performing Embodiment*, 104-5; 104.
[55] McMillan and Fehsenfeld, qtd. McMullan, ibid.

would misrepresent the terms of the debate. Beckett's primary concern is with closed systems, rather than with breadth of scope. Instead of correlating Beckett's 'microcosmos' to the kynical 'cosmos', we should read the microcosmos of Beckett's theatre as the ground on which cosmopolitan questions (whether stoic, cynical or kynical) may be raised. Reducing this world to the microcosmos of the mind allows Beckett to stage his challenge to the notion of cosmos as a closed system. Stoic cosmopolitanism, expansive or not, understands the world to be a closed system we should support in an ethical way. The cynical cosmopolitan also sees the world to be a closed system, but one to be exploited for various ends. Beckett responds to these closed systems by showing how some key element always exceeds it: Beckett punctures his closed microcosmos with kynical images and voices that come as if from outside.

Beckett describes the inmates at Magdalen Mental Mercyseat in *Murphy* as 'microcosmopolitans', because they are 'cut off' from reality (*SB1* 107). If treatment at the asylum 'translates the sufferer from his own pernicious little private dungheap to the glorious world of discrete particles', Murphy finds this treatment 'duly revolting' because his 'experience [...] obliged him to call sanctuary what the psychiatrists called exile and to think of the patients not as banished from a system of benefits but as escaped from a colossal fiasco' (*SB1* 107). Murphy calls the mind a sanctuary since, for him, it functions 'not as an instrument but as a place' (*SB1* 107). Murphy's refrain, 'I am not of the big world, I am of the little world', suggests that the microcosmopolitan resides within the microcosmos of their own mind (*SB1* 107).

Unlike the kynical cosmopolitan, the microcosmopolitan clearly fails to engage with structural politics. Like stoic or cynical cosmopolitans, they concern themselves with the workings of a closed system, but the microcosmopolitan shares the kynic's closeness, since both cosmopolitanisms locate themselves within the confines of the mind or body. If we imagine that Beckett stages the structure of the political within the

confines of the microcosmos as a bodily experience, we might reconcile Murphy's apparent quietism with his political condemnation of 'outer reality' as a 'colossal fiasco', while grounding this mind-based argument in an immanent body. We find the beginnings of this reconciliation in Murphy's kynical challenge to Plato's allegory of the cave. If Plato's allegory of the cave differentiates between a cave of false shadows and an outer reality of truth to motivate the philosopher to seek the latter, Murphy's manifestly kynical gesture is to ask why such a motivation should be tolerable: 'how should he tolerate, let alone cultivate, the occasions of fiasco, having once beheld the beatific idols of his cave?' (*SB1* 107) Here we find the conventional philosophical image subverted by the 'broken mirror' of Murphy's kynicism: he interrupts the allegory of the cave by questioning whether that outer reality is what we really want.

Whether one agrees with Murphy or not, his question interrogates the structural basis of Platonic philosophy: the quest for truth. However, Murphy is at best an imperfect microcosmopolitan, since he remains 'unresolved' (*SB1* 107). 'In fact', Murphy is almost a kynical cosmopolitan himself, since his desire to enter completely his own 'microcosmos' requires him to interrogate the bases of conventions that dissuade such forays into this 'pernicious little private dungheap' (*SB1* 107). Murphy firmly disagrees with puncturing the closed system of the dungheap, which is why he is ultimately not a kynical cosmopolitan, but his continued engagement with the dungheap defines Beckett's interventions into these closed systems. By the late plays, these 'pernicious little private dungheaps' are occupying the entire stage, and yet Beckett continues to puncture their closed systems with images and voices from the outside. The plays do not form discrete microcosmoi; rather they interrogate, through their consideration of the microcosmos, the conventions of so-called 'outer reality'. Since they achieve this primarily through a reflexive engagement with the image and the voice, it would seem apt to turn to Beckett's own engagement with these devices.

Beckett would comment on the image and the voice throughout his work. A younger Beckett, in his 1929 response to James Joyce's *Work in Progress*, replaces 'or' with 'and' in Stephen Daedalus's definition of the image: 'Temporal [*and*] spatial, the esthetic image is first luminously apprehended as selfbounded and selfcontained upon the immeasurable background of space [*and*] time which is not it ... You apprehend its wholeness' (*SB4* 504). The image, therefore, is as much in time as it is in space, although the background that time and space form 'is not it'. Here, we find ample evidence for reading Beckett's images as comprehensive, and therefore stoic. However, as his thought develops he opens the image up to causality, and thus to the disruption of its wholeness. 'Time and space taken together' are, by the time of Beckett's essay on *Proust*, a parenthetic description of causality. Exempting the object from causality, possible when the subject is exempt from will, results in the image being 'purified in the transcendental aperception that can capture the Model, the Idea, the Thing in itself' (*SB4* 552). Beckett derives this insight from the botanical images in Proust:

> [Proust] assimilates the human to the vegetal. He is conscious of humanity as flora, never as fauna […] And, like members of the vegetable world, they seem to solicit a pure subject, so that they may pass from a state of blind will to a state of representation. Proust is that pure subject. He is almost exempt from the impurity of will. (*SB4* 552)

Beckett's humanity is all-too-fauna, perpetually failing to achieve the desired flora-state. When Proust's pure subject, exempt from will, projects the object as 'the Model, the Idea, the Thing itself' by means of the image, this may achieve the microcosmos desired by Beckett's Murphy, but, for Murphy, the microcosmos slips out of his reach precisely because it is desired as an image. The image is not even comprehensive for the pure subject, since it evolves from 'a state of blind will to a state of representation' or from a state of *presentation* to a state of *representation*. Beckett intimates just such an evolution in his 1936 review of Jack B. Yeats's *The Amaranthers*: 'There is no symbol. The cream horse that carries Gilfoyle and the cream coach that carries Gilfoyle are

related, not by rule of three, as two values to a third, but directly, as stages of an image'
(*Disj* 90). Rather than the *symbol*, which is necessarily loaded with the meanings
imbued it by a wilful subject, the cream horse and the cream coach are 'stages of an
image', suggesting that they do not signify in themselves, but necessarily develop in
stages.

The review of *The Amaranthers* anticipates Beckett's interest in the visual arts,
and the role the image plays in lifting from the eyes 'before *rigor vistae* sets in, some at
least of the weight of congenital prejudice' (*Disj* 95).[56] In his *Three Dialogues* [*with
George Duthuit*], when remarking on the painter André-Aimé-René Masson's
contending with 'his own technical gifts', Beckett has the character 'B' respond with an
image:

> Allow me to note his concern with the amenities of ease and freedom. *The
> stars are undoubtedly superb*, as Freud remarked on reading Kant's
> cosmological proof of the existence of God. With such preoccupations it
> seems to me impossible that he should do anything different from that
> which the best, including himself, have done already. (*Disj* 141)

This is a sophisticated use of the image *qua* image. First, there is Freud's reading of
Kant, as a cosmological image. Freud does not respond to the cogency of Kant's
argument, he responds to the aesthetic quality of a philosophical image. Beckett's use of
Freud as an image of a reader implies a second transfer of the image, from reference to
the imagic quality of the stars *qua* cosmology to the presentation of philosophical
argument as 'merely' image. Beckett reflects Kant's proof, and Freud's rebuttal of this
argument, through a 'broken mirror': their cosmological philosophy is reduced to mere
image. Finally, the image represents Masson's 'dramatic predicament', articulated by
'D':

> He seeks to break through their [objects'] partitions to that continuity of
> being which is absent from the ordinary experience […] with this notable

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[56] This image, given in Beckett's review of Thomas MacGreevy's book on Jack B. Yeats's art, takes
MacGreevy's efforts to turn Yeats into Ireland's first great painter as 'overstated', since Yeats's greatness
lies in bringing 'light […] to the issueless predicament of existence' (*Disj* 97).

difference, that Masson has to contend with his own technical gifts, which have the richness, the precision, the density and balance of the high classical manner. (*Disj* 141)

Here we have an artist who is not simply preferring the oft-quoted 'B' description of Tal Coat, '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' (*Disj* 139). Indeed, 'B' does evoke this response in the Masson dialogue: 'So forgive me if I relapse, as when we spoke of the so different Tal Coat, into my dream of an art unresentful of its insuperable indigence and too proud for the farce of giving and receiving' (*Disj* 141). But 'D' stymies this reading, turning it back on 'B', when he asks:

> But must we really deplore the painting that admits 'the things and creatures of spring, resplendent with desire and affirmation, ephemeral no doubt, but immortally reiterant', not in order to benefit by them, not in order to enjoy them, but in order that what is tolerable and radiant in the world may continue? Are we really to deplore the painting that is a rallying, among the things of time that pass and hurry us away, towards a time that endures and gives increase? (*Disj* 141-2)

In other words, even if there is a need to maintain a ruthless honesty about the farce of giving and taking, should we not appreciate art that attempts to *construct* the 'impossible' transcendental signification?[57] B's response is a simple stage direction, a cue to a theatrical *image*: 'B. – *(Exit weeping.)*' (*Disj* 142). Rather than working as a strict philosophical dialogue, such as those of Plato, Beckett's dialogue parodies the possibilities of philosophical dialogue by making use of extra-philosophical theatrical images.

One example of Beckett's use of extra-philosophical theatrical language in response to philosophical interrogation occurs when D questions the inexpressive quality of Bram van Velde's painting:

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[57] On Beckett's theories of the impossible in his art criticism, see Jean Michel Rabaté, 'Bataille, Beckett, Blanchot: From the Impossible to the Unknowing', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2012), and Adam Winstanley, 'A "Whispered Disfazione": Maurice Blanchot, Leonardo da Vinci and *Three Dialogues with George Duthuit*', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2013).

> D. – One moment. Are you suggesting that the painting of van Velde is inexpressive?
> B. – *(A fortnight later)* Yes. (*SB4* 561)[58]

Beckett explains this theatrical use of temporality in a letter to George Duthuit:

> For *me*, that is the only possible answer. To answer, as I have already been cowardly enough to do, that it expresses the impossibility of expressing anything is just to march him back into line with the others. Because I have this frantic urge to fix up for myself a situation that is literally impossible, what you call the absolute, there I am dragging him along beside me. (*SBL2* 170)

This comment is of importance to Beckett scholarship in general, which has, for the most part, accorded greater significance to the generic assertion of the impossibility of expression than its 'cowardice' might merit.[59] But it also raises again the importance of the image to Beckett's work where the theatrical image apparently supersedes the spoken word. For Beckett, the theatrical *image* is more important than the philosophical message the image is meant to convey. Moreover, it requires more than the reification of 'expressing the impossibility of expressing anything'.

The image of time passing, foregrounded in the dialogue, isolates a 'shape' in the idea that the expression of the idea fails to communicate. Beckett indicates his preference for the shapes ideas have in a letter to Harold Hobson, written in 1956:

> I take no sides. I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe them. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine, I wish I could remember the Latin. It is even finer in Latin than in English. 'Do not despair: one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume: one of the thieves was damned.' That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters.[60]

The shape of Augustine's idea is formed from parallel syntax. The syntax is echoed to indicate a parallel between the clauses while the use of antonyms secures the

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[58] This is the line as it appears in published versions of *Three Dialogues*. The line Beckett quotes in the letter does not cite 'One moment', which suggests that it was inserted to give a phatic formalism (narrative realism) to the interruption that the phrase constitutes in the larger dialogue. It is also worth noting that the characters are denoted 'B' (for D) and 'A' (for B) respectively, prioritising the 'B'eckett and 'D'uthuit characters of the final piece as the speaker and the interlocutor respectively.

[59] David A. Hatch addresses the uncritical manner in which critics take up Beckett's auto-commentary in *Three Dialogues* in his PhD thesis. David A. Hatch, *Beckett in* (t)Transition*: "Three Dialogues with George Duthuit"* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Florida State University, 2003).

[60] Samuel Beckett qtd. Michael Worton, '*Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*: Theatre as Text', *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. John Pilling (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 75.

contradiction in the semantic content. Beckett's interest in the rhetorical shape of the idea, however, hovers close to the sophistry of contemporary cynicism, since he, like Borges, 'takes no sides' in appreciating the 'shape of ideas' that he may or may not believe in. The fortnight B waits might as easily be a jocular disregard for the significance of the question as a tortured attempt to come up with a significant yes. Without resorting to the letter Beckett writes to Duthuit, detailing this as the *only* way out for the dialogue, how are we to differentiate the cynical disengagement where the image is rhetorical sophistry and the kynical engagement with the image as the means of rhetorical critique? This requires a renewed engagement with the image's relationship to the *voice*.

When we return to Beckett's essay on Joyce, and particularly to his meditations on *Work in Progress* where 'form *is* content, content *is* form', we find that the work is not written merely to be read: 'It is to be looked at and listened to' (*SB4* 503). Not only is it to be looked at (in the sense of a visual object), it is to be listened to (in the sense of an aural object). 'Its adequate apprehension depends as much upon its visibility as its audibility' (*SB4* 504). In his efforts to show how the words facilitate this ('the language is drunk'), Beckett neglects to specify what kind of object *Work in Progress* actually is. Are we looking at a book or the copies of *transition* where it was first published? Are we looking at the typesetting of words on a page or the metaphorical 'shape' of those words? As difficult as the visual question is to answer, the aural question is more difficult: How are we to listen to this 'it'? What is 'its' voice?

The means by which we 'listen to' *Work in Progress* are clearly as important to Beckett as the processes of seeing or reading it, but if the latter two processes imply the reader's direct engagement with the text, the former requires the mediation of a voice (even if this voice is the reader's own). Already, we have moved far from Kenner's stoic 'voicelessness'. Beckett is unwilling or unable to identify what this voice is in

'Dante … Bruno. Vico .. Joyce', but the voice emerges once again in *Proust*, this time to confirm or suspend the narrator's pact with Habit.[61]

'Habit', Beckett writes, 'is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit. Breathing is habit. Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals' (*SB4* 515). The memories of this succession of individuals are joined together through their mutual pact with habit, since 'the laws of memory are subject to the more general laws of habit' (*SB4* 515). Beckett's awareness and exploitation of habit's ubiquity turns a universal 'life' into a 'succession of habits'. But Beckett's chain between the dog and its vomit makes this universalism kynical. Kynics consciously use their habits to foreground a conventional unconscious reliance on habit, and Beckett's upsetting metaphor challenges us to remember our own use of habit as ballast. Proust disrupts this ballast, as Beckett shows in two examples from *A la recherché du les temps perdu*. Both foreground a pact between memory and habit via a voice that eschews the comfort of the pact. In the first example the pact is 'renewed' and in the second it is 'waived'. Both make some use of a 'voice', broadly conceived, to foreground habit.

Beckett's first example comes from the narrator's first arrival at Balbec-Plage with his grandmother in *Within a Budding Grove*. The narrator is unable to sleep, because habit has not had time to familiarise the room to him, by 'silenc[ing] the explosions of the clock', amongst other things (*SB4* 518). His grandmother comes in to comfort him, and, when she leaves, 'makes him promise to knock on the partition that separates her room from his, should he require anything during the night. He knocks, and she comes again to him. But that night and for many nights he suffered' (*SB4* 518).

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[61] Ulrike Maude writes perspicaciously on Beckett and habit. Since Maude's argument tends towards a consideration of where Beckett might have developed his thinking on habit (a combination of Proust and Bergson-in-Proust), and restricts her exploratory article to a discussion of *Happy Days*, her work influences this discussion, but is not immediately relevant to my current concern. Ulrike Maude, 'Samuel Beckett and the Laws of Habit', *Modernism/Modernity*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2011).

He interprets the anxiety as coming from a refusal to accept the new surroundings without certain people he loves. 'But this terror at the thought of separation […] is dissipated in a greater terror, when he thinks that to the pain of separation will succeed indifference' (*SB4* 519). Greater than his terror at the separation, is the terror that he will no longer feel terror at the separation. This is why he will not allow himself to be habituated to the new surroundings; he is too frightened of losing his old habits not to renew his pact with these habits. The one habit he does acquire, however, is the habit of 'calling' his grandmother with a series of three knocks. These knocks serve to interrupt his suffering with a constant (his grandmother), who links his old habits to his new situation. By functioning in lieu of a voice, the knock permits the narrator a degree of control over his own suffering, since it permits him to call his grandmother and have her respond 'in which it contrived to waft to me the soul of my grandmother, whole and perfect, and the promise of her coming, with the swiftness of an annunciation and a musical fidelity'.[62] While Beckett does not explicate the narrator's desperate effort to cling to habit in terms of the voice, the scene prepares us for our discussion of the Listener's knock as a voice in *Ohio Impromptu*, and the knock's relation to memory and habit.

The 'pact' between memory and habit is 'waived' in Beckett's second example, when the narrator receives a phone call from his grandmother. He hears her voice 'in all its purity and reality, so different from the voice that he had been accustomed to follow on the open score of her face that he does not recognize it as hers' (*SB4* 519). The voice is 'strange' and 'real' but it is also a 'symbol of her isolation, of their separation, as impalpable as a voice from the dead' (*SB4* 519). Following the conversation, Proust's narrator has an irresistible urge to see his grandmother. He takes the train, arrives at her house and sees her reading her book. Since she does not know he is there, he is 'not

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[62] Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time: Within a Budding Grove*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: Random House, 1992), 720.

there […] he is present at his own absence' (*SB4* 520). It permits him to see her clearly, without the abeyance of his habitual tenderness for her. What he sees horrifies him. The woman before him becomes a stranger; the grandmother of his youth exists no longer.

Despite his assertion that such 'examples [...] abound in Proust', Beckett's choice of these scenes links them to concerns with the image and the voice in his Joyce essay. Moreover, the concerns have developed by *Proust*, since looking and hearing are now related to habit, and the suspension of this relationship has a process: the voice interrupts the regime of habit, and the image subsequently confirms this interruption to be an actual break. We find this process reiterated in the late plays where voices will interrupt the dramatic action, which collapses before a climactic image. We can identify the process by which the voice and the image interact; we have not yet addressed what this voice is for Beckett.

According to Bruno Clément, the voice is an image, since for *The Unnamable*, Beckett's most sustained interrogation of the function of the voice, 'it is solely a question of voices, no other image is appropriate' (*SB2* 340-1). Clément, following in the tradition of Deleuze, argues that all moments of the voice in Beckett primarily concern themselves with the image of the voice: the voice, in this sense, is subordinate to a stoic 'comprehensive image'. The voice is often tied to an image in Beckett's work, but this does not mean it is reducible to an image. The voice is not simply an image in the telephone conversation in Proust, since Beckett compares Proust's conversation with the hysterical telephone conversation in Jean Cocteau's *Voix humaine*, and calls the latter 'not merely a banality but an unnecessary banality' (*SB4* 519). Something in Proust's telephonic voice functions in excess of the image he shares with Cocteau. So while 'the question of voices' is the only 'image' appropriate to *The Unnamable*, clearly something is happening in Beckett's correlation of voice and image that cannot be collapsed into an identity. This means that the image is not 'comprehensive', nor is the

work 'voiceless'. Rather the voice functions as a transgressive incursion into the apparently comprehensive image or the 'voiceless' medium to destabilise their philosophical integrity. It is not stoic, but kynical.

The narrator of *The Unnamable* will speak of the voice as a possession: 'Possessed of nothing but my voice, the voice, it may seem natural, once the idea of obligation has been swallowed, that I should interpret it as an obligation to say something' (*SB2* 305). The narrator then questions whether 'it' is possible. We imagine 'it' refers to the obligation to say something, but the narrator will then invoke an image of lack: 'Bereft of hands, perhaps it is my duty to clap or, striking the palms together, to call the waiter, and of feet, to dance the Carmagnole' (*SB2* 305). If we look back to the narrator's reference to possession, we find the key to this lack in a leitmotif that will recur several times in *The Unnamable*: 'my voice, the voice'. The auto-correction is telling; 'my voice' is not 'mine'. Now syntax, 'possessed of nothing but my voice', and image, 'bereft of hands', combine to make sense. For if the narrator is possessed of the voice and is bereft of hands and feet, the voice exists in excess of a body. This is possible only because the narrator is possessed by the voice, which is not his and is, in itself, only ever 'nothing but the voice'.[63] The body is imagined in the negative to allow the voice to exceed this image. The image of the hands supplements the voice's refusal of image. If anything, the voice is a wound, or a gap, in the visual cohesion of the image. As a result, the voice and the image function in a constitutive, dialectical tension with each other, neither fully reducible to the other, nor sublative into a synthesis. We will mark this tension as correlative to a kynical resistance to stoic resolution.

The dialectic of voice and image reaches its apogée in the play, *Not I* (1972). *Not I* holds the image and the voice in a symmetrical counterpoint: the evocative image of the free-floating, continuously speaking mouth provides a point of stability amidst a

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[63] Mladen Dolar considers the voice as a Lacanian object *a* in precisely these terms. Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

rush of words, which Billie Whitelaw would describe as 'a terrible inner scream, like falling backward into hell'.[64] She and Beckett 'got back to' this scream in their discussions, despite Beckett's desire for the voice to be 'flat, no emotion, no colour, flat'.[65] The scream was 'something not acted; it just happens'.[66] Behind the 'flat' way in which the words are spoken, there is an implicit scream. But we should not think of this as a primordial scream, even though Whitelaw's initial response is to explain it with the image of a grief-stricken mother: 'It was the scream I never made when my son was desperately ill'.[67] Such a scream is not strictly primordial because, like the voice, it can only be recognised in retrospect: '… words were coming… imagine! … words were coming ... a voice she did not recognize … at first … so long since it had sounded … then finally had to admit … could be none other … than her own …' (*SB3* 408). It takes some time but Mouth eventually recognises her own voice, amidst the stops and starts of Beckett's ellipses, through '… certain vowel sounds … she had never heard … elsewhere …' (*SB3* 408). In fact, Mouth will attempt to fix the voice at various points during *Not I*; here, through accent, and later, through the mechanics of the mouth:

> … not her voice at all … and no doubt would have … vital she should … was on the point … after long efforts … when suddenly she felt … gradually she felt … her lips moving … imagine! … her lips moving! … as of course till then she had not … and not alone the lips … the cheeks … the jaws the whole face … all those - … what? … the tongue? … yes … the tongue in the mouth … all those contortions without which … no speech is possible … (*SB3* 408)

Unable to follow what the voice is saying, Mouth persuades herself that the voice is not hers. Then she discovers that she 'feels', 'suddenly […] gradually', the muscle mechanics of the lips, cheeks, jaws and tongue, which one ordinarily does not feel at all, '… so intent one is … on what one is saying …' (*SB3* 408). Habit inures us to the

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physical sensation of the voice, as well as its acoustic quality. When this habit is waived or suspended, however, our awareness of the voice as both internal (a part of us) and external (apart from us) makes it particularly difficult to define what the voice is, in excess of what it is saying.[68] When we attempt to define the voice, we must assign it a particular acoustic quality (accent) or detail the mechanics of its occurrence, since, like the image, the voice remains curiously resistant to definitions of quiddity. Instead of definition, then, the voice demands that we define a context for its use.

This is why, rather than *Three Novels*, where the speaking voice produces a series of contingent personas, the focus of this chapter turns to the emphasis Beckett's drama places on the 'situation' of articulation: the structured presentation through images and voices of the subject's position in relation to itself. Beckett's solution was, as he himself wrote, to turn to theatre to control this space:

> When I was working on *Watt*, I felt the need to create for a smaller space, one in which I had some control of where people stood or moved, above all, of a certain light. I wrote *Waiting for Godot.*[69]

If Beckett's temporary solution to this perceived impasse was to turn to a different medium – the theatre – what becomes clear towards the end of his life is the transience of this reprieve. The theatre, as the discussion of the following three plays will demonstrate, proves as susceptible to the problems of representation as prose.[70]

Beckett's later plays repeat the obsession with images and the voice, but they are susceptible to the problems of the prose because they are drifting in the direction of prose. Charles R. Lyons identifies a generic trope, present from *Not I* to *Ohio*

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[68] Mladen Dolar argues that the voice is not simply a vehicle of meaning or a source of aesthetic admiration, but also an object as a lever for thought.

[69] Samuel Beckett qtd. Brater, *Beyond Minimalism,* 176.

[70] W.B. Worthen shows how Beckett's drama 'traces an allegory of writing in the theatre, and so provides a way to reflect of the agency of dramatic writing in charting the space of the performance'. W.B. Worthen, *Drama: Between Poetry and Performance* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 196.

Impromptu, of 'an enigmatic narrative forced into a theatrical context'.[71] The resulting paradigm is 'an image of character whose consciousness processes a narrative'.[72] The question he asks is whether these works are 'inherently dramatic' or whether they are 'essentially works of prose fiction enclosed in a theatrical conceit'.[73] Lyons's modifier, 'essentially', has predisposed us to understand, and respond to, these texts as one genre masked within another. Jonathan Kalb follows this purist line of thought, when he examines the theatrical performances of Beckett's prose texts: 'the novels and stories are not dramas, they cannot stand alone as theatre, and any attempt to stage them is at least as much of a gamble as staging a new play'.[74] Kalb's response is drawn from Beckett's response to Barney Rosset, his Grove Press publisher, in a 1957 letter: 'If we can't keep our genres more or less distinct, or extricate them from the confusion that has them where they are, we might as well go home and lie down'.[75] Kalb's analysis proves more nuanced than his conclusion in showing the shifting complexity of Beckett's response to this form of adaptation. Noting the increasing number of performances of Beckett's prose texts, starting with Jack MacGowran's 1962 *End of the Day* performance of prose extracts, Kalb distinguishes between those productions that attempted to recapture the 'action' of Beckett's prose texts in a mimetic stage production, those that simply 'let the text speak for itself', and those that combine the texts or shift visual metaphors to reconsider the texts as stage productions. While he is dismissive of the first and the second types, he admires the third despite acknowledging its transgression of Beckett's wishes. However, he also finds a number of instances where Beckett contributes either to the production (as with Jack MacGowran) or to the

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[71] Charles R. Lyons, 'Beckett's Fundamental Theatre: the Plays from *Not I* to *What Where*', *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company*, ed. James Acheson and Kateryna Arthur (Basingstoke: Macmillan), 80.
[72] Ibid, 81.
[73] Ibid, 80.
[74] Kalb, *Beckett in Performance*, 143.
[75] Beckett qtd. Kalb, 118.

conception (as with Beckett's discussions with Frederick Neumann, prior to Neumann's 1983 production of *Company*). This calls into question Beckett's earlier stance on generic purity. His 1962 collaboration with Jack MacGowran produced a show in which a fairly consistent tramp-figure drew on a variety of prose texts, suggesting that the theatrical inclusion of a consistent figure overcame his objections about generic purity. Beckett objected to the Neumann production because the possibilities for staging it seemed limited as *Company* 'all takes place in the dark'. Here, Beckett's enthusiasm for the earlier production should not obscure his increasing sensitivity to the demands of the theatrical space, and to the numerous pitfalls of adapting prose pieces to this space.

In the final plays, there is a trend towards staging readings (*Ohio Impromptu*), rehearsals (*Catastrophe*) and revisions (*What Where*).[76] We may then postulate that these late 'prose-plays' form a correlative response to productions that dramatise the prose texts, in which Beckett exploits the disjuncture in the authorial persona in its translation from page to stage. There are three orders to our discussion of the three plays. First, it follows the chronological order in which they were written. Second, it follows the order of performance for the Harry Clurman production. These sequences permit us to note a third, thematic shift in this triptych, as it was written and staged, from the intimate encounter between two bodies to the structural relationship between three or four bodies. *Ohio Impromptu* stages an interaction between similarly clad actors, sat together at a table. *Catastrophe* counterpoints the intimacy of this setting with the privileged public space of a theatre during a rehearsal. *What Where* is the most alienating environment of the three, since, in its stage version, the stage is bare (apart from Voice's megaphone) and, in its television version, the faces appear and disappear as ghostly images on an otherwise black screen.

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[76] Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon's work on Beckett's 1984 'Bare Room' fragment in the 'Super Conquérant' Notebook shows Beckett's interest in the *performance* of writing. 'Bare Room' has two characters attempt to recall Shakespeare's Sonnets 71 and 116. Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, 'Performance and Beckett's "Bare Room"', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2014): v-xi.

The interplay between image and voice results in a series of dialectics in *Ohio Impromptu*, *Catastrophe* and *What Where*.[77] Each play's 'cadenza' or 'catastrophe' is the culmination of a rhythm whereby a stark contrast emerges between an image and a voice. *Ohio Impromptu* builds to the moment when the Reader will stop speaking and the two figures will sit on 'as though turned to stone' (*SB3* 476), but the image on stage is anticipated in the Reader's description of this image, in the text he reads to his Listener, and by the very nature of his voice, which Beckett likened to that of someone reading a bed-time story. The moment the Protagonist raises his head in *Catastrophe*, he subverts the Director's vision for the play with a powerful image of his own. In order for this subversion to succeed, however, the image of the Protagonist's resistance must be contrasted with prescriptions given by the Director in a voice described as irritable, plaintive and indignant. Finally, the directives of the Voice gradually eliminate Bom, Bim, and Bem from the Playing Area in *What Where*, to culminate in the image of Bam with his head bowed. But this is also the moment at which the Voice, recognisably Bam's in Beckett's production notebook, distinguishes itself from Bam, since, the moment that Bam is imagined with head bowed, the voice, 'colourless' and 'pre-recorded' to differentiate it from Bam, also says, 'I am alone' (*SB3* 504).

We can regard this sequence as a dialectical series, rather than the repetition of a single dialectical movement, because in each play the voice is more distant and the image is more alienated. In *Ohio Impromptu*, the voice belongs to the Reader, who is situated onstage. In *Catastrophe*, the voice belongs to the Director, who spends the performance either downstairs or offstage. In *What Where*, the voice is Bam's, but it would be incorrect to claim that it belongs to Bam, since it presides over the stage in the

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[77] Alan Schneider, on his first suggestion that *Ohio Impromptu* and *Catastrophe* be performed as a double-bill, justified the juxtaposition as 'an interesting contrast of vocal and physical image'. Maurice Harmon, ed. *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998), 431.

form of a megaphone and will ultimately divorce itself entirely from Bam. From *Ohio Impromptu* to *Catastrophe*, the voice gains some authority over the action on stage, as it is removed from the practicalities of bodily contact with the stage. However, it is still tied to its body (the Director), and is therefore still subverted by the Protagonist's image. By the end of *What Where*, however, the voice has completely detached itself from its body (Bam) and is able to switch itself off at will.

The images also become increasingly alienated. Beckett's stage directions describe the final image of *Ohio Impromptu* as follows: 'Simultaneously they lower their right hands to table, raise their heads and look at each other. Unblinking. Expressionless: Ten seconds. Fade out' (*SB3* 476). Here the image crystallises in an ambiguous unity between the Reader and the Listener. Both heads are raised and look at their counterpart. The lack of expression or eye movement emphasises the sense of a communion between the two actors.

By contrast, the final image of *Catastrophe* attempts to alienate audiences, imagined and real, as may be deduced from the stage directions: 'Pause. Distant storm of applause. P raises his head, fixes the audience. The applause falters, dies. Long pause. Fade-out of light on face' (*SB3* 489). The static, abject image the Director has been orchestrating in the play up to this point is subverted by the defiant moving image of the Protagonist, who raises his head. But by raising his head to challenge director and audience, the Protagonist also creates a stage image that crystallises in an attitude of defiance (rather than communion).

Beckett's stage directions describe the final image of *What Where* as follows: 'Bam enters at W[est exit], halts at [position] 3 head bowed […] Light off P[laying area]. Pause. Light off V[oice of Bam], in the shape of a small megaphone at head level]' (*SB3* 504). This image appears to represent resignation, rather than the communion of *Ohio Impromptu* or the defiance of *Catastrophe*. But it also provides us

with the clearest moment in these plays where Beckett will think of image and voice in unison. In his production notebook, Beckett describes the 'Stimme [Voice]' as his 'Hauptproblem [main problem]'.[78] We address his attempts to solve the problem of imaging the voice in our discussion of these plays.

Ohio Impromptu

Ohio Impromptu is particularly concerned with creating an authorial persona. This persona is split between a Reader and a Listener, who, although as alike as possible, are not one, even if they grow to be 'as one' through their habitual meetings (*SB3* 475). Thus, the persona operates in a dialectic that does not sublate or synthesise. This persona is properly kynical, because it does not stabilise authority in one figure or the other; it keeps the two figures in dynamic tension with each other. If the authorial dialectic operates in the relationship between the Reader and the Listener, Beckett creates this relationship by depicting the development of shared habits, a depiction he conveys through his use of image and voice. Two men, both wearing long black coats and 'as alike in appearance as possible', sit opposite each other on either side of a table, a wide brimmed hat between them. One reads aloud. The other listens. As the Reader reads his narrative, the Listener intermittently signals him to stop, repeat or continue with a knock on the table. The conceit is reminiscent of *Krapp's Last Tape*: narratives of earlier events in the subject's life are revisited with varying emphases placed on particular phrases, through repetition, interruption and punctuation. Instead of the spool tape player, however, a mirror image of the subject is responsible for reading a story, told in the third person, of a man whose departed lover sends him a reader 'to comfort

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[78] Samuel Beckett, *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Volume IV: The Shorter Plays,* ed. with an introduction and notes by S.E. Gontarski (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1999), 447.

[him]', who 'drawing a worn volume from the pocket of his long black coat' sits and reads 'till dawn. Then disappeared without a word' (*SB3* 475).[79]

The narrative of the Reader appears diegetic of the situation presented on stage. The image of the Reader and Listener corresponds to the descriptions read from the 'worn volume'. They are similar in appearance, as if 'with never a word exchanged they grew to be as one' (*SB3* 475). They also do not 'exchange' any words; communication happens only through the knocks the Listener makes to punctuate the Reader's recitation. But the Reader's story does not fully correspond to the action on stage. The description includes the repetition of the story, night after night, 'till the night came when at last having closed the book and dawn at hand he did not disappear but sat on without a word' (*SB3* 475). The night when the Reader 'sits on without a word' is the last night he will appear. He explains that the departed lover has given him 'word' that he will not come again, even if he could, because there is no further need. Following this explanation, they sit on together 'as though turned to stone' (*SB3* 476). The story is described as 'the sad tale a last time told' and the final line is 'nothing is left to tell' (*SB3* 476). The Listener, by means of his knocks, has the Reader repeat the latter twice, before the book is closed. Both Reader and Listener lower their hands to the table, and, in contrast to the end of the narrative, they look expressionlessly at each other for ten seconds. So the story includes its *arche* and its *telos*, from the last attempt to obtain relief to the final visit. The narrative stretches from the first night to the last. This is made possible by the Reader's book, which scripts all these nights and provides a constant point of reference. The book's metaleptic function, or commentary about the narrative within the narrative, counterpoints its hypodiegesis, as a narrative within the play. The continuous metaleptic 'closure' of the narrative into a definite beginning,

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[79] If *Ohio Impromptu* is thematically similar to *Krapp's Last Tape* in its treatment of memory, its concept has more in common with *Rough for Radio II*, where a stenographer will read out a record of Fox's speech, under the exhortation of an Animator. *Rough for Radio II* also anticipates the abusive triangle between the Director, Assistant and Protagonist in *Catastrophe*.

middle and end, is interrupted and interrogated by the Reader's double, who imperiously controls the hypodiegetic through his knocks. In other words, there is a dislocation between the narrative read by the Reader (highlighted by images evoked through the narrative and the Reader's voice) and the occasion of its being read to the Listener (emphasised by the image of the couple on stage and the 'voice' of the Listener, represented by the knocks).[80]

Stan Gontarski identifies this dislocation between 'narrative and stage image' as a general quality of Beckett's late plays.[81] But it is in *Ohio Impromptu* that we have 'the most striking play of action against narrative [...] where action is played not against speech or an implied text but against a text itself, against writing'.[82] Given this conflict, it is worth considering the complexities of the narrative level of the story before examining the context of its performance before the '450 or so scholars' at the conference, *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives*.

John Calder, in his review of *Ohio Impromptu*, noted that

> It is the first Beckett play to present a Doppelganger [*sic*] on stage, another Beckett pair, but this time seen as mirror images; it belongs to Beckett's ghost period, where phantoms that echo the haunting quality of memory and nostalgia in his work are seen or described on stage.[83]

While a matched pseudocouple is a feature of many Beckett plays (Vladimir and Estragon, Hamm and Clov, or Winnie and Willie), Calder identifies this as the first instance of a dramatised double (mirror images of each other).[84] The Reader and the

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[80] Edward Albee's response to the play is indicative of an anxious desire to make voice and image cohere in Beckett's theatre: for reasons of maximising audience understanding, and justified by the text's use of repetition, he repeated the sequence twice in his 1991 production of *Ohio Impromptu* at the Alley Theatre in Houston. Albee's repetition flattens out the performance, since it elides the disjuncture between repetition and singularity: the narrative repeats, through a voice, but the performance is singular, as an image. Edward Albee, Lois Oppenheim, 'Edward Albee', *Directing Beckett*.

[81] S.E. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985), 175.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Calder, 'Three Plays', 219.

[84] On Beckett's couples see Brater, Gontarski, Knowlson cited above. Mary Catanzaro characterizes coupling and partnership 'and their seeming impossibility' as central to Beckett's works. See Mary F. Catanzaro, 'The Unmediated Voice in Beckett's Couples', *Critique*, Vol 32, No. 1 (1990).

Listener are as alike as possible. They are similarly attired and mirror each other's gestures. Moreover, the parallels between the narrated events and the situation on stage mean that it is difficult not to interpret the Reader as the apparition sent and the Listener as the man to be comforted. Thus Reader and Listener gain a spectral quality in the reading because they are doubly represented through the account of the visits, 'sent by – and here he named the dear name – to comfort you,' and through the presentation of the action on stage (*SB3* 475). The apparition is sent to the man by the shade of this unnamed partner, who is designated by the phrase: 'and here he named the dear name'. There is a substitution of the name by the *leitmotif* 'and here he named the dear name'. Beckett's subject is not absent so much as tensed around an absent centre. But Beckett frustrates this tension between the internal artistic impulse (the occlusion of the name) and the translation of that into a writing practice (the manifestation of that occlusion through some substitution), when he later names his 'dear names' to his biographer, James Knowlson.

Knowlson reports that Beckett identified the departed: 'It is Suzanne […] I've imagined her dead so many times. I've even imagined myself trudging out to her grave'.[85] The hat between the actors, Knowlson confirmed with Beckett, was a reference to Joyce. This corresponds to the allusions within the narrative to the Isle of Swans (where Beckett and Joyce used to walk together and where the protagonist goes to be in an 'unfamiliar room'), the old world Latin Quarter hat within the narrative and on the table, and the scene of two characters reading to each other. These allusions provide 'fragments of a past' to ground the critic steeped in Beckett's biographical details, but they also fix the writing to a particular allegorical mode the narrative seeks to challenge.

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[85] Knowlson, *Damned*, 585.

We find this challenge most clearly in the character's response to habit. In *Ohio Impromptu*, habits are not enumerated, as we found in 'Borges y yo'; They are accumulated diegetically. So the shade offers to comfort him if he stays 'where we were so long alone together' (*SB3* 474). But 'in a last attempt to obtain relief he moved from where they had been so long together to a single room on the far bank' (*SB3* 474). This relief 'he had hoped would flow from unfamiliarity' (*SB3* 474). The attempt fails. Here, we may recall Beckett's work on Proust and habit fifty years earlier, where waiving the pact with habit seems to compound the narrator's awareness of the loss and death of his grandmother. The subsequent inclusion of 'alone' in the shade's description begins a paradoxical interrogation of the possibility of 'turning back' to familiar scenes where 'alone together so much shared' (*SB3* 474). His answer is 'no. What he had done alone could not be undone. Nothing he had ever done alone could ever be undone. By him alone' (*SB3* 474). Again, we recall Proust's sudden awareness that his loss of his grandmother is absolute and unequivocal, because 'the cherished familiar of his mind, mercifully composed all along the years by the solicitude of habitual memory, exists no longer' (*SB4* 520). 'Alone' shifts in its signification in *Ohio Impromptu*. First, to be alone is to be together with the departed one. But his leaving, 'done alone', is something done without the departed. This could never be 'undone' by him 'alone', because the departed would have to return to allow him to 'turn back' to the point where they are 'together alone'. 'Alone', without the departed, seems to mean that the man can never again be 'together alone'. This impasse is resolved when the departed sends the double to read to him, but we should pause for a moment to marvel at what Beckett's narrative has already done. It has habituated his listeners to this character's habits, through the repetition of 'alone', 'flow' and 'relief'. The character waives his pact with old habits (moving to the unfamiliar) to create a relationship with more salubrious habits from which 'relief' might 'flow'. But these 'new' habits, entrenched 'day after day' and 'hour

after hour', do not afford him the 'relief' he seeks; they merely secure the impossibility of returning to his earlier habits without the specific aloneness brought in the company of the departed.

The double's company appears to mimic this aloneness, since he does not speak to this double, as 'with never a word exchanged they grew to be as one'. In fact, it is only through the growing to be as one, through their habitual 'readings', that some stoic comfort is brought. This stoic comfort, however, comes at the price of upsetting the character's presumptions about his autonomy and his ability to take relief in unfamiliarity. Redoubling the subject kynically calls the subject into question; new habits, performed by the actors even as the narrative describes them, become images of habits on the stage to replace those images of habits described in the narrative from which the 'he' is attempting to obtain relief.

To explain this shift, Gontarski usefully divides the play into two movements: the first considers the decision to live alone and the resultant insomnia, the second 'an (apparently) successful (if mystical or imaginary) solution to the emotional turmoil, which was not solved by flight'.[86] But Gontarski's movements are more apposite to the images within the Reader's text, where the 'sad tale' is 'a last time told', than to the performance of this telling. Here we must move to the performance of the tale, to secure our understanding of what Beckett is doing in this play.

To reiterate, habit is not enumerated as much as cast into a narrative: the sequence of *Ohio Impromptu*'s narrative first waives, and then reaffirms, the narrative protagonist's relation to habit and memory. In 'Borges y yo', the habits enumerated are the basis for a certain plasticity between 'Borges' and 'yo', where we understand plasticity as the capacity of the 'yo' to lend itself to being formed into 'Borges', while

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[86] Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing*, 176.

resisting its utter deformation into 'Borges'.[87] In *Ohio Impromptu*, however, this plasticity resolves itself around the fissures between the narrative and the performance, highlighted by the voice and the image. Much as the narrative proposes that the two 'grew to be as one', neither stage image nor the Listener's periodic knocks fully endorse either seeing or hearing them 'as one'.

Beckett combines a descriptive image (in the narrative) with a visual image (presented on stage), and a narrative voice with a narrating voice. The visual image is altered periodically by the Reader turning the pages of the book, and unequivocally by the two figures lifting their heads at the end of the play. The narrating voice is interrupted periodically by the 'voice' of the Listener, in the form of the knock, and unequivocally by the final spoken line: 'Nothing is left to tell' (*SB3* 476). These successive combinations create a space between clearly defined ones and twos: the audience or reader cannot distinguish absolutely between the image described and the image on stage or the narrative voice and the voice narrating. For this reason, when *Beckett on Film*, a project dedicated to creating a film archive of Beckett's plays, made use of cut shots to have Reader and Listener played by the same actor (Jeremy Irons), Anna McMullan complained that it was 'led once again by a psychologised approach to performance'.[88] The final contradiction between the narrative ending, 'they stay on as though turned to stone', and the stage image, '*Simultaneously they lower their right hands to table, raise their heads and look at each other. Unblinking. Expressionless*', demonstrates 'an ambiguity about their relationship'.[89] Reader and Listener are embodiments of the narrated events but are not necessarily identical to them. They upset our efforts to absorb narrative and performance into a stoic, comprehensive image, or a

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[87] This paraphrases Catharine Malabou's definition of the plastic. Catharine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, Dialectic*, pref. Jacques Derrida, trans. Lisabeth During (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 9.

[88] Anna McMullan, *Studies in the Theatre: Samuel Beckett Issue*. ASSAPH 17-18 (Tel Aviv: Assaph Publishers, 2003), 231.

[89] McMullan, *Performing Embodiment*, 121.

single narrative sequence. In much the same way, *pace* Calder, they are correspondent stage presences for each other, without being identical to each other. Here, Beckett writes against his own reification as an author by relentlessly demonstrating the non-identity of the two act(or)s reading and listening.

This correspondence without identity is particularly evident in the Listener's interventions: the Listener's knocks insist that the Reader dwells on particular phrases, rather than permitting an unimpeded recitation.

> R *(reading)*: Little is left to tell. In a last —
> L *knocks with left hand on table*
> Little is left to tell.
> *Pause. Knock.* (*SB3* 473)

The Listener's knocks form an interesting pattern of interventions, since each time the Listener knocks, the Reader returns to the line he has just read, reads it again and pauses, waiting for a knock to signal that he can continue. The Listener makes seven such interventions in total. The first, quoted above, halts the Reader at the first line of the play, which signals that, if the play has just begun, it is nevertheless also about to end. The second occurs when the Reader reads, 'Then turn and his slow steps retrace' (*SB3* 474), a line that emphasises the circularity of the action, through habit, but also makes this emphasis ironic, since the Listener interrupts the narrative. The third recalls our interest in image and voice, since the Reader describes seeing the dear face and hearing the unspoken words of the departed to emphasise the advice, ignored, that the character stay where they 'were so long alone together' (*SB3* 474). The Listener's fourth interruption is not a knock, which distinguishes it from the other six interventions and marks it as the climax of the piece; it is a gesture that 'checks' the Reader's return to earlier pages (page forty paragraph four), where the symptoms of the character's habitual 'terror of the night' are described (*SB3* 475). The fifth and sixth interruptions occur when the Reader's narrative repeats lines that precipitated the first and third interruptions. The final interruption causes the Reader to repeat the final phrase of the

play: 'Nothing is left to tell' (*SB3* 476). This symmetry provides us with an interesting fugue-like series of repetitions and variations in counterpoint to the narrative continuity of the tale the Reader tells.[90] By focusing on the Listener's interruptions, rather than the Reader's narrative, a pattern emerges in which the narrative continuity is subverted by musical form. Moreover, it shows a particularly kynical propensity to interrupt narratives, even one's own narrative, to destabilise its apparent homogeneity. It breaks open the closed system of the microcosmos to form a new cosmopolitanism that is neither stoic nor cynical. If the play-as-text uses the image and the voice to subvert homogenised cosmopolitan structures, it still remains unclear what this means in the cosmopolitan context of its actual performance to an international audience of Beckett scholars.

We should recall that *Ohio Impromptu* was written at the request of Gontarski, to be premiered at a Beckett symposium at Ohio State University in 1981. The title of the symposium was 'Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives'. Brater, in *Beyond Minimalism*, provides further context. He reports that Beckett told a surprised Alan Schneider that the original audience gathered in Columbus would laugh when the curtain went up on *Ohio Impromptu*. He was right.[91] Insofar as it is possible for a playwright to 'script' an audience, *Ohio Impromptu* provided the perfect opportunity. Gontarski, in his review of *Ohio Impromptu*, noted that the play was created for the 450 or so literary critics in attendance. 'Beckett is certainly meditating in *Ohio Impromptu* on the play within the occasion, the artist speaking to his critics'.[92] Beckett could predict that the audience would laugh because the image of two mirror selves sitting across the table from each other contained enough cues to other plays in which

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[90] Steven Connor refers to this as a 'problematic iterability […] built into the structure of the narrative, and its relationship with the spectacle presented on stage'. Connor, *Samuel Beckett*, 133.

[91] Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, 126.

[92] S.E. Gontarski, 'Review: The World Première of Ohio Impromptu', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, No. 8 (1982), 133.

the internal reflective process is staged through a physical or verbal communication between two bodies. The parallels with previous plays are important because *Ohio Impromptu* is precisely an effort to write not just a play but also its representation.

Alan Schneider, the director, foregrounds this concern with representing the 'image' of a Beckett play when, in a letter on the conference performance, he emphasises that in rehearsal he 'would think that one of the actors was actually the other'.[93] Of the performance itself, he thought Beckett,

> would have been pleased with the general impact […] Very pure. Direct. Strong image of black and white. The white table strongly lit, the two mirror-figures, blackness around.[94]

The play was designed to be a study in contrast, but it also exaggerates this contrast. It is dense in biographical detail but it was also written for an audience prepared for Beckett's 'terror of the night' by Blair's biography. It presents a reader of a text, controlled by his listener, but it was also performed in front of professional listeners whose profession involves fixating on particular phrases, dictating that their readers repeat such phrases until they are satisfied that the phrases have the importance they themselves impute to them. It is a critique of universal reading and listening processes, written at the behest of Beckett's readers and listeners. Yet if it does critique the virtue of such 'cosmopolitan' activities, *Ohio Impromptu* still maintains a sense (insofar as it was written and was performed) of the virtue lurking behind them. Xerxes Mehta, in considering the relation of image, narrative and impromptu to suffering in *Ohio Impromptu*, notes that the theatrical impromptu is a specific form of meta-theatre where 'the playwright – usually through the vehicle of a play within a play – attacks his critics [and] defends his practice'.[95] Dating the genre back to Molière, he notes that Molière wrote, directed and acted in *L'Impromptu de Versailles* to turn personal humiliation into

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[93] Harmon, *No Author Better Served*, 404.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Xerxes Mehta, 'Shapes of Suffering: Image/Narrative/Impromptu in Beckett's *Ohio Impromptu*', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Autumn 1996), 110.

perverse theatre. The 'unveiling' of personal details becomes a creative act, in which personal details are reified 'into a habitation that is neither author nor audience but the place where they meet. In the process, the work displaces the confessional'.[96] Mehta argues that what Beckett was saying was: 'this is what I try to do; this is why I need to do it; this is how I fail to do it; and, critically, this is what the failure feels like'.[97] Therefore, for Mehta, this is not of a type with Molière's *Impromptu*, 'a sealed and perfect entertainment'.[98] Rather, Beckett 'leaves himself exposed up to the bitter end. *Ohio Impromptu* thus becomes a true gift of the self, claiming no special knowledge or insight, offering just those "scraps" that are available to it'.[99] Mehta's 'true gift of the self' rings false beneath the reflections on reflections. But Mehta is right to detect an excess, beyond the mere specular games of Molière or virtuosities of the musical impromptu. This excess is formed through the image and the voice, which disrupt a comprehensive, stoic narrative of the self with an interrogative, kynical performance of the self. The Reader's narrative is only apparently comprehensive in imagining a progression from 'little is left to tell' to 'nothing is left to tell'. In fact, this narrative is continually disrupted and interrupted. The dialectic of the Listener and the Reader is not resolved by ending the play (or the narrative) with a long look and a fade out. Rather, this image disrupts the possibility of a narrative resolution, already marred by the turning of pages and the knocking of tables. Page-turning and knocks upset McMullan's impossible reconciliation in the image, while the ambiguity of the long look undermines Mehta's 'true gift of the self'.

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[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid, 114.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.

Catastrophe

In *Catastrophe*, Beckett undermines the resolutions of his critics more violently than he does in *Ohio Impromptu* through the Protagonist's impossible defiance at the end of the play. *Catastrophe*, written in support of imprisoned playwright (and later president) Václav Havel, figures a Protagonist in 'old grey pyjamas', covered at first by a black dressing-gown, wearing a black broad-brimmed hat, and standing on a black block 18 inches high (*SB3* 484-85). A Director sits 'in an armchair downstairs audience left,' while his Assistant stands next to him in a 'white overall' (*C* 484). Offstage Luke is 'in charge of the lighting' (*SB3* 484). The context is the rehearsal of the 'catastrophe' for a play: D dictates his artistic vision to A who manipulates P's body and dress, and calls out technical instructions to Luke. The 'catastrophe' to which the title refers is intended to be a moment of utter abjection for P. D, when he is satisfied that P's head is bowed at the right angle, says, 'Good. There is our catastrophe. In the bag. Once more and I'm off' (*SB3* 488). But, at the final moment, P raises his head and 'fixes the audience' (*SB3* 489). The audience's applause falters and dies, there is a long pause, and the light on P's face fades out. Again, Beckett makes an unequivocal judgment on the play:

> Beckett told me that in referring to what one might describe as the "grand finale", a reviewer had claimed that it was "ambiguous". "There's no ambiguity there at all", he said angrily. "He's saying: You bastards, you haven't finished me yet".[100]

Beckett's interpretation suggests that *Catastrophe* is a humourless recapitulation of Diogenes's encounter with Alexander. Alexander asks Diogenes what in the world he desires, and Diogenes responds that Alexander should get out of the way of his sun: the absolute power of the sovereign-director is called into question by the powerless kynic-protagonist's small, yet significant, act. This interpretation is valid, if schematic, but it ignores the irruptive humour in both encounter and play. When we understand

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[100] Knowlson, *Damned*, 597.

Catastrophe to exceed this stoic comprehensive image, we find Beckett's dialectic of image and voice.[101]

'Catastrophe', from the Greek for a 'sudden turn' or 'overturning', has three potentially pertinent definitions in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The first two define it as the dénouement of a dramatic piece and as a final event (usually unhappy). Beckett himself, in a letter to Alan Schneider, uses it 'in the sense of a dénouement'.[102] The third calls it an event subverting the order of things. But is the raising of the head dénouement or subversion? Ruby Cohn observes that P raises his head only in the final draft.[103] Keir Elam refers to early manuscript versions in which the play ends 'with D's triumph: "Formidable! Il va faire un malheur. (*un temps*) Je les entends d'ici. *Un temps. Lointain tourrent d'acclamations: silence. Rideau*"'.[104] In the subsequent draft, to which the 'actual' end was added in pencil, Beckett also changed D's line from 'Bon. On tient la fin' to 'Bon. On tient notre catastrophe'.[105] Elam notes that the dramatic associations of *catastrophe* date back to Diderot's *Encyclopédie*: '*en Poésie*; c'est le changement ou la révolution qui arrive à la fin de l'action d'un poème dramatique, & qui la termine'.[106] He also points out the contradiction between what D says ('There's our catastrophe') and the lack of an actual revolution. The catastrophe that does take place (P lifting his head) subverts D's use of the term as a representation of P's suffering. It is a catastrophe of a catastrophe: an inversion of a post-Holocaust image of suffering by a quasi-

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[101] Criticism of *Catastrophe* has tended to focus on the final image, and particularly the ambiguity of P lifting his head. Peter Fifield, for instance, notes the primacy of Levinas in a number of readings. These readings address a metaleptic complicity between the audience and D; both are 'caught' by the gaze of the Other (P) in their exploitative relationship. Fifield adopts a more nuanced approach in reading the play as allegorical of the shared antipathy to representational art in both Beckett and Levinas, but his reading recapitulates this tendency to read the play as entirely about the image, with little given over to D's voice. Peter Fifield, *Late Modernist Style in Samuel Beckett and Emmanuel Levinas* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 43.

[102] Beckett, writing to Schneider about *Endgame*, interprets the line, 'The end is in the beginning and yet we go on', as implying 'the impossibility of catastrophe'. Harmon, *No Author Better Served*, 23.

[103] Cohn, *A Beckett Canon*, 373.

[104] Keir Elam, 'Catastrophic Mistakes: Havel, Beckett, The End', *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 3 (1994), 15 [Terrific! It will be a misfortune. (*pause*) I can hear them from here. *A pause. Distant storm of applause: silence. Curtain.*]

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid, 13.

humanist image of resistance. The comprehensive image is challenged by a subversive image, and the tension between these two images drives the play. However, it would be a mistake to view the play purely through this dialectic, since the visual tension is developed by a matching tension of voices: D's commands, confirmed and carried out by A, contrast with P's silence. Vocal tensions allow for the development of D's catastrophe, which makes P's catastrophe all the more discomforting, and therefore less stoic.

Moreover, as these overlapping tensions are not confined to the microcosmos of a theatrical rehearsal space, we may identify this discomfort as properly kynical. Although the link between 'ash' pyjamas and the striped uniforms of Auschwitz and Birkenau is never explicit, D's response to A raises the possibility of this interpretation:

> D: What has he on underneath? [*A moves towards P.*] Say it.
> [*A halts.*]
> A: His night attire.
> D: Colour?
> A: Ash.
> [*D takes out a cigar.*]
> D: Light. [*A returns, lights the cigar, stands still. D smokes.*] (*SB3* 485-6)

The colour of the pyjamas, described as 'ash' rather than 'grey' as in the stage directions and tied, in turn, to the metonymic lighting of D's cigar, recalls Holocaust iconography. James Knowlson, commenting on *Catastrophe*, linked the imagery with representations of the Holocaust: 'The Protagonist, dressed in old gray pajamas and reduced to an anatomical exhibit, a victim of the Director's wish to "whiten" the flesh to that of a corpse, recalls images of the concentration camp or Holocaust victim'.[107]

Certainly, critics have agreed that the figure evokes comparisons with a 'sacrificial victim',[108] a Saint Sebastian, or a Prometheus bound.[109] This may have led Stephan Meldegg, the play's director for 'Havel Night', to bind P from shoulder to

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[107] Knowlson, *Damned*, 597.

[108] Anna McMullan, *Theatre on Trial: Samuel Beckett's later drama* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 30.

[109] Moorjani, 'Directing Beckett', 194.

knee. Beckett disapproved of this liberty taken with his script. In a letter to Alan Schneider dated the 23rd of July 1982, he writes:

> July 21 Havel night seems to have been a very mixed & muddled bag. Saw a few depressing extracts on TV including a brief flash of the Protagonist all trussed up with screaming white bonds to facilitate comprehension […] Trying to persuade myself I'm past caring.[110]

The play itself predicts such an effort to overdetermine the text, when D responds to A's suggestion to gag P: 'For God's sake! This craze for explicitation [*sic*]! Every i dotted to death!' (*SB3* 487).[111] Trussing P, according to Moorjani, strongly implies certain interpretations at the expense of others. But Beckett takes issue with facilitating 'comprehension'. This is particularly poignant, given that *Catastrophe*, for all its imagic resonances, remains a play about the dangers of directorial fascism. Moorjani may be right to draw on a general iconography of 'defiant martyrdom' in describing P.[112] Beckett himself told Mel Gussow that,

> it was not his intention to have the character make an appeal […] He is a triumphant martyr rather than a sacrificial victim […] and is meant to cow onlookers into submission through the intensity of his gaze and his stoicism.[113]

But we should read Beckett's 'stoicism' and Moorjani's iconography with some care, because 'defiance' is not reducible to an iconography. This 'stoicism' does not conform to Sloterdijk's 'philosophy of the comfortable', nor does it work to a 'comprehensive', or easily comprehended, image. P is more kynical than stoic in his defiance of his audience, since his gaze disrupts the comfort with which they view him as a comprehensive image. Here, we must understand *Catastrophe* against the grain of Beckett's knowledge of stoicism and kynicism. P 'cows onlookers' as a kynical, rather that stoic, act.

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[110] Harmon, *No Author Better Served*, 432.
[111] Laura Salisbury observes that the gag in *Catastrophe* has become 'an ironic acknowledgment' of 'a familiar Beckett prop'. Salisbury, *Samuel Beckett*, 79.
[112] Moorjani, 'Directing Beckett', 195.
[113] Gussow, *Conversations*, 44.

If P's catastrophe is kynical, is D's catastrophe stoic? As D's image represents P's suffering, it may be. However, D's references to audience suggest that the catastrophe is cynical, since it exploits the image to garner applause. To understand the difference between cynical D and kynical P, we should return to the catastrophe itself. The catastrophe is represented as follows:

> D: Stop! [*Pause.*] Now … let 'em have it. [*Fade-out of general light. Pause. Fade-out of light on body. Light on head alone. Long pause.*] Terrific! He'll have them on their feet. I can hear it from here.
> [*Pause. Distant storm of applause. P raises his head, fixes the audience. The applause falters, dies.*
> *Long pause.*
> *Fade-out of light on face.*] (*SB3* 488-9)

Despite A's physical manipulations of P's body at D's instruction through the play, D's final catastrophe is composed entirely of light: the transfer of light on the body to light on the bowed head. D's recurring call for a 'light' has prepared us for this shift from bodily manipulation to luminous manipulation.[114] D evidences his inability or unwillingness to engage directly with material bodies when he directs A to manipulate P on his behalf, and when he prefers that she 'say it' when she attempts to show P's pyjamas. D disengages from the material body in favour of the body as metaphoric cypher. His catastrophe, designed to highlight the image of material suffering, is marked by his reluctance to engage with materiality. He is, after all, far more interested in having the audience 'on their feet'. At first, we proposed that the play recapitulated Alexander's meeting with Diogenes. However, D's cynical interest in an image of materiality and P's kynical interruption of that image turns the play into a dramatic encounter between the kynic and the cynic. D is a cynic because his catastrophe shows the distant, and inevitable, abjection of the subject (and serves his self-interest into the bargain). By contrast, P is a kynic, since his only 'voice' of protest manifests through the use of his body as a material object (he is, according to Beckett, 'saying' his

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[114] This interpretation is foregrounded in Harold Pinter's production of *Catastrophe*, filmed as part of the *Beckett on Film* project, where the call for light refers to a torch rather than to lighting a cigar.

defiance by raising his head). If we replace our previous reference to Alexander and Diogenes with an opposition between cynic and kynic, Beckett's stoicism changes dramatically. We are not simply seeing the dispossessed given a voice; we are seeing the difference between a director who wishes to 'have them on their feet' and an abused actor who wishes to arrest the audience in their complacent absorption in the tableau.

What significance does this dialectic between cynic and kynic have? Critics are quick to associate *Catastrophe* with Beckett's own dictatorial practices as a director. But Beckett is also protagonist (on stage and at the mercy of his critics and the directors of his work), assistant (since he is complicit in manipulating the work) and Luke (he shines a light on certain aspects of his work and not others). Here, Beckett is interrogating his own unstable position as either cynical (self-serving) or kynical (consistently critical). Philosophically, this dialectic is unresolvable, since the resolution would require the acceptance of a microcosmic, closed system in which the dialectic is sublated – that is, into stoicism (system) or cynicism (self-service). A kynical intervention requires that the dialectic not be sublated, but is this the case in the play?

The final moments of the play appear to affirm Beckett's defiance of the abject image. Against the universal 'suffering victim' catastrophe intended by D (which turns the body into a metaphor for abjection in stoic or cynical cosmopolitanism), P launches his own, particularist 'triumphant martyr' catastrophe (an interruption by a material body in a kynically cosmopolitan gesture). By raising his head, he 'says' a 'You bastards' to his spectators, whose applause then falters and dies. Although this allegorical reading comes closer to Beckett's habitual use of the image and the voice in dialectical tension with each other (and highlights the way in which these may be used either metaphorically or materially), it still maintains a structural relationship between D and P. Thus, if critical opinion on this scene is divided between interpreting it as a positive moment of affirmation or as a merely scripted defiance, this divide

recapitulates a more material antinomy between cynical distance and kynical immediacy.[115]

How can this interruption be scripted? How does the metaleptic disjuncture between P's freedom from D's script and subordination to Beckett's script affect our understanding of the play? These questions recall those we raised in our discussion of the book in *Ohio Impromptu*, albeit of a more overtly political sort. Peter Fifield has rightly argued that the audience is complicit in the dictatorial stance of D when canned applause pre-empts their own applause, and that theatre as medium is implicated, and damned, in this dynamic.[116] But if these illusions of agency undercut our ability to read P's gesture as free, or kynical, then does this negate Beckett's own kynical gesture? Here, understanding Beckett as a kynical cosmopolitan serves to rescue the play from the hermeneutical circle of scriptedness or freedom, and from Fifield's resolution that Beckett is writing an art against art. There is a concrete political aspect to this production that we must consider, since it was written for a political purpose.

The play was dedicated to Václav Havel, then imprisoned for writing against the Czech government, and Beckett wrote it for the 1982 Avignon Festival's '*Une Nuit pour Václav Havel*' in support of Havel. Yet the only directly political reference in the play is to Patagonia.

> D: For God's sake! What next? Raise his head? Where do you think we
> are? In Patagonia? Raise his head? For God's sake! [*Pause.*] Good. There's
> our catastrophe. In the bag. Once more and I'm off. (*SB3* 488)

Patagonia appears to be evoked as nothing more than the extreme end of the known world.[117] Nothing could be further removed from the political significance of Havel night than Patagonia. Perversely, this anatopic device becomes a site of shattering

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[115] Jim Hanson argues that this affirmative act simply recapitulates the *actual* script of *Catastrophe*. He does not note the comparatively late inclusion of the gesture in the script alluded to by Cohn. Jim Hansen, 'Samuel Beckett's *Catastrophe* and a Theatre of Pure Means', *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (2008).

[116] Fifield, *Late Modernist Style*, 43.

[117] As discussed in Chapter 2, Argentina has a small, yet significant, role to play in *Embers*.

laughter, equivalent to Borges's Chinese Encyclopedia. D invokes Patagonia as an extremity – lifting P's head to show his face only has a place in Patagonia. *In Patagonia* is of course the name of Bruce Chatwin's travelogue (1977), and the place Chatwin's Emigration Committee fixes on 'as the safest place on earth' in the event of nuclear fallout.[118] It was from the Patagonian coastline that Argentina would launch its ill-fated invasion of the Falkland/Malvinas archipelago some months after Beckett had started work on *Catastrophe*, but before the Avignon Festival in July 1982. The open secret is that the military dictatorship in power in Argentina invaded the archipelago to boost their failing political capital, even as the Thatcher government launched a counter-offensive for much the same reason. Patagonia distracts people from everyday political realities by presenting a distant alternative site of operation. Patagonia may be metonymic for either Argentina or Chile, but it is also designates a place that slips any fixed political identification. Like the Yucatan in North America, the Kalahari in Southern Africa and the Gobi in East Asia, Patagonia 'belongs' to nation states only by the claims of maps and isolated settlements, whose self-identification with particular political identities remain uncertain. Patagonia functions, in other words, precisely as a referent to an Other place. D does not want to show the face, the humanity, of P. He chooses rather to exploit the image of a dehumanised subject, manipulated by lighting. Are we then to interpret P's gesture as a moment of humanisation or transportation? If raising the head is constitutive of being 'in Patagonia', is it not ultimately a transportative gesture, an indication to the imagined audience (it is, after all, a recording of an audience, an audience already displaced from itself) that they are already in Patagonia, outside the limits of readily understood political boundaries?

The success of an aesthetic tableau can cause our applause to falter, not because of the triumph of the human spirit, but because of who triumphs. Material conditions

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[118] Bruce Chatwin, *In Patagonia* [1977], intro. Nicholas Shakespeare (London: Vintage, 2008), 4.

turn *Catastrophe* into something more complex than a renegotiated voice for those unjustly silenced: it becomes a true subversion of political boundaries. This is why *Catastrophe* must be staged as a rehearsal and not as the event itself. Otherwise, P's final defiant gesture may be subsumed by its symbolism. As Jim Hansen writes:

> When we leave our theater seats claiming that D is a horror and P a victim with whom we can sympathize and identify, we have entirely missed the point of *Catastrophe* and the point of Beckett's oeuvre. We have, in other words, missed the dialectical critique implicit in our own aesthetic experience and pleasure.[119]

Hansen recognises the auto-immune condition facing the metacritique of theatricality posed by a play like *Catastrophe*. P's gesture is not 'merely' a triumphant martyr cowing the audience with his stoicism, since this 'comprehensive image' is disrupted precisely by Hansen's dialectical critique. Any attempt to subvert D's theatrical authority invariably turns on the question of how Beckett has already scripted P's act. Rather than looking for an *end* to *Catastrophe*, Hansen proposes that we view it as a theatre of 'pure means': a theatre that is not interested in its results but in its processes. In this sense, it would be worth extending Hansen's work to include a consideration of the 'genre' of rehearsal.

Robert Baker-White calls *Catastrophe*, 'a play that openly dramatizes rehearsal as a dialectic of authority and liberation'.[120] The politics of the play, in this sense, are bound up in a particular dramatic genre of the represented rehearsal. Baker-White's *The Text in Play* examines drama that performs the means of its own production: 'rehearsal and performance in *Catastrophe* affirm theatrical practice itself as an intrinsically powerful, if morally questionable, medium of communication and conversion'.[121] In this sense the rehearsal genre counteracts a state of exception in the theatre itself. The critical state of exception in theatre is the exclusion on performance night of the traces

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[119] Hansen, 'A Theatre of Pure Means', 688.
[120] Robert Baker-White, *The Text in Play: Representations of Rehearsal in Modern Drama* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1999), 156.
[121] Ibid, 153.

of the performance's own rehearsal: the process of a play's production has no place in a play's performance. Like the Malvinas/Falklands War or the trials of Havel, the politics of a play's production, the testament to its internal dynamics, occurs at a distance from its eventual presentation as a finished work of art. The very artistry is itself to be found in denying the artist's hand. Representing the bodies of the dead as a mode of witness is no more 'true' than the staging of a rehearsal is the rehearsal itself. 'Truth' as such is brought against not just the limits of its own representation, but the symbolic intrusion of the image into any recollection of historical event.

Treating the play as a simple parable of victimisation and oppression has rather frightening consequences for both our concepts of victim and oppressor. It has become catastrophic in the third sense of the word: it subverts the project that even Beckett had in mind for it. If the final gesture was meant to be a defiance against 'you bastards', it remains ambiguous as to who these bastards might actually be. The rehearsal space anticipates a finished product, without expecting a flawless performance of that finished product. In this sense it is perhaps only through excavating the rehearsal space that we might find a 'Patagonia' where we might lift our heads.

It is tempting to posit this Other locality ('Patagonia') to situate P's resistance. By keeping it ambivalent and Other, resistance can be retained as such, no matter how problematic P's subjectivity. But it is precisely at this point that we must not stop in our analysis if we are to recuperate the play from our presumptions of final veracity. Resistance itself needs to be meditated on in Beckett's staging of the rehearsal space. Without a self-nullifying gesture to make his abjection 'beautiful' (meaningful) prospectively, P cannot turn his trial into a 'catastrophe'. P, subject to the machinations of his Director *and* the director of *Catastrophe*, is the victim of an artistic violence. The only way that he can take control of this situation is by actively arguing that he already is exactly what is wanted of him: a symbolic sacrificial victim. The result is a redoubled

subject, or a double reflection of the subject, whereby his true freedom is achievable only through his sacrifice to some greater ideal. If we take this as read, however, we are forcing a stoic understanding onto his act, which clearly does not take into account the gesture's formation in interruption.

P's gesture, posited already by A, is of a different order. It is directly contrary to D's orders, but this, in itself, is not what makes it so interesting. The gesture in a sense legitimates the power D only appears to have – the power, mediated until this moment through the actions of A, has only been one of voice: 'Say it', he says when she moves to expose the grey pyjamas. In positing a gesture of resistance, P is presupposing the need to resist, or so the audience themselves posit and presuppose. The difficulty is not in the subjectivity of P; the difficulty is in our subjectivisation of P. We presuppose the gesture to be an act of defiance to posit our own reflective freedom through his confinement. Projecting onto him this subjectivisation in order to posit our own freedom, we scarcely notice the disjuncture between the audience that applauds and the audience whose applause falters. The Other audience falters from the look P fixes upon them. With their 'Patagonia' reflected back on them, with the Real intruding on their presuppositions, their applause falters and dies. How might our applause falter and die, were the actor playing P, on a particular night and at his own choosing, to make the ultimate gesture of defiance and *not* raise his head? This uncertainty *is*, we should argue, of the order of kynicism, because it does not waver in its engagement with the truth of the disjunction or the virtue of the encounter. Moreover, in its fragility, the image retains its disquietening quality for the community of theatre-goers because it does not comprehensively resolve the issue.

Perhaps then it is fair to say that what remains for dialectical thinking to uncover is not the retrospective logic of sacrifice, legitimating definitions of protagonists by the facticity of their deaths. Perhaps what remains for dialectical thinking is to meditate on

the instability of the process, not in Patagonia but in the here and now – the unsteady, violent reflection of the theatrical self in the mirror, reflecting back the unsteadiness of a self reflected.

What Where

The place and politics of violence are particularly important in Beckett's final play *What Where*. As in *Ohio Impromptu*, the players are as similar as possible, with long grey hair and wearing long grey gowns. There are four characters, Bam, Bem, Bim and Bom, and a megaphone that speaks with the voice of Bam. There are two areas of the stage, the megaphone downstage left, and the Playing area. The diagram Beckett included with the piece delineates three cardinal positions in the Playing area: stage left (W), upstage (N) and stage right (E). Voice is lit and begins by describing the situation. After this, the Playing area is lit with Bam stage left head haught (Beckett's term) and Bom upstage head bowed. Voice interrupts with, 'Not good. I switch off' (*SB3* 498). The light goes off the Playing area, Voice says, 'I start again', and the opening is repeated. When the Playing area is lit, only Bam stands, head haught, to stage left. This, the Voice calls 'Good' (*SB3* 498). Bam, Bom, Bim and Bem then interact in a mime sequence reminiscent of the mathematical entrances and exits of *Quad*. Bam stands in the same space as Bom enters head bowed upstage and Bim enters head haught stage right. Bim and Bom exit stage right and Bim reenters head bowed stage right. Bem enters head haught upstage and exits upstage, followed by Bim. Bem reenters head bowed upstage and follows Bam when he exits stage left. Bam reenters head bowed stage left (*SB3* 498-9). Voice responds, 'Good. I switch off' (*SB3* 499). When Voice starts again, it is, 'Now with words' (*SB3* 499). The pattern is repeated but this time the violence implicit in the movement of head positions (from haught to bowed) is made explicit. Bam asks Bom, who has been set the task of extracting information from an

unseen subject, whether 'he' said 'anything' (*SB3* 499). The subject did not talk, despite

Bom 'giving him the works' (*SB3* 499). The subject wept, screamed and begged for

mercy, but 'didn't say anything' (*SB3* 500). Voice intercedes again, with, 'Not good. I

start again' (*SB3* 500). This time, Bam asks Bom whether 'he' said 'it' (*SB3* 500).

Voice pronounces this 'Good' and the interrogation occurs again, with 'anything' being

replaced with 'it'. When asked why he stopped 'giving the works', Bam answers that

the subject passed out and could not be revived. Bam's responds, 'It's a lie. [*Pause*] He

said it to you' (*SB3* 500). He threatens Bom with 'the works until you confess' (*SB3*

501). Bim appears and is told to give Bom the works until he confesses. When asked

what it is Bom must confess to, Bam first says, 'That he said it to him' (*SB3* 501). Voice

corrects this by stating, 'Not good. I start again' (*SB3* 501). The second time Bam adds,

'And what' (*SB3* 501). Voice announces that the season is summer. The sequence is

almost exactly repeated with Bim as the person interrogated, and Bem the person

assigned to 'give Bim the works until he confesses' (*SB3* 503), except Voice insists that

Bam change 'it' to 'where'. Voice announces that the season is autumn. Bem, in turn,

fails to extract 'where' from Bim and, after Bam threatens him with the works, follows

Bam out. Voice announces that the season is winter. Bam reappears, head bowed. Voice

announces,

> Good.
> I am alone.
> In the present as were I still.
> It is winter.
> Without journey.
> Time passes.
> That is all.
> Make sense who may.
> I switch off. (*SB3* 504)

The present is as it was, but 'we', the final five, have become 'I', alone. When 'I'

switches off, the lights fade on P, there is a pause, and the light fades on the megaphone.

What Where appears to be a political piece. The gradual elimination of the play's characters is certainly congruent with a political erosion of community through hysterical accusations against an Other. The structure of this politics presents itself at the centre of *What Where*, where the questions, 'what?' and 'where?' become the basis for Bam's elimination of Bom, Bim and Bem. He does this by ordering each successive victim to give their predecessors 'the works'. 'Give the works' is easily construed as a euphemism for torture. The description of what happens when they are given the works – weeping, screaming, begging for mercy – suggests 'the works' are by no means pleasant. Transferring the works from questioned to questioner, because they might be lying, gradually eliminates the characters making up the play's *polis*. Politics, in other words, is constructed in the negative, since the political action of the play consists in systematically excluding members from the group.

The manifest excuse for this exclusion is the search for information. Bam endorses 'the works' because he is looking for information on 'what' and 'where'. This search for information develops into parody as the cycle of 'the works' repeats itself, since each character's failure to acquire knowledge is interpreted as a refusal to share this knowledge. These contrary interpretations are evoked visually: when the character realises his failure to acquire knowledge his head is bowed; before this realisation, his head is held up, or 'haught' in Beckett's stage directions. 'Haught' here has a different significance to that in *Ohio Impromptu* or *Catastrophe*. The Reader and Listener's heads are haught at the end of *Ohio Impromptu* to depict their communion with each other, and the Protagonist's head is haught at the end of *Catastrophe* as a gesture of defiance. In *What Where*, however, the head haught represents the refusal to accept the inability to know what or where. It is those with heads downcast who realise that they have failed to extract, by whatever actual violence used, the knowledge necessary to satisfy Bam's Voice. Moreover, in failing to extract the knowledge, they realise the

underlying systemic violence of the conditions in which they exist. Whatever happens will be a failure, and this failure will serve to justify further attempts and further failures until a full cycle of the seasons has revolved, and Voice sends Bam to interrogate himself.

What Where was first written in French (*Quoi où*) but first performed for the Clurman production. It was written at the invitation of the organizers of the 1983 Steirischer Herbst, or Autumn Festival, in Graz in Austria.[122] Knowlson notes that it was inspired in part by Franz Schubert's song cycle *Winterreise*, or *Winter Journey*, which Beckett adored. Schubert composed the cycle in part during a stay in Graz and Knowlson attributes the influence in part to this.[123] Paul Lawley has shown that Schubert plays a subtle but important role in shaping much of Beckett's work.[124] Lawley notes the similarity between Schubert's preoccupation with the ghostly companion and Beckett's use of the trope in *Krapp's Last Tape*, though the stronger parallels, of course, appear with the ghostly companion in *Ohio Impromptu*. But his analysis also shows that the generic link between Schubert and Beckett is a creative preoccupation 'with journeying, with moving and "the different varieties of motion" […] Being is narration, and narration is a variety of loco-motion'.[125]

Winterreise was written towards the end of Schubert's life (1827). It is a cycle of 24 songs set to the words of Wilhelm Müller's series of poems by the same name. Lawley summarizes it as 'the aimless winter journey of a disappointed lover […] he is not on his way anywhere, he is simply on his way. There is no narrative, actual or implied, just a series of encounters and departures'.[126] Yet, in *What Where*, although by

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[122] Knowlson, *Damned*, 601.
[123] Otto Erich Deutsch, *Schubert: Memoirs by his Friends* (London: A & C Black, 1958), 105. Beckett owned a copy of this work (Knowlson, *Damned*, 742).
[124] Paul Lawley, '"The Grim Journey": Beckett listens to Schubert', *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 11 (2000).
[125] Ibid, 259.
[126] Ibid, 260.

the end 'it is winter', Voice describes 'in the present as were I still' as being 'without journey' (*SB3* 504). There are no more people to whom to give the works. There are no more journeys to be made. This shifts the focus from the possibility of companionship that is explicit in *Ohio Impromptu* and the recuperative act of defiance in *Catastrophe*, both of which require a force against which to react. There is no 'other' from whom the 'what' or the 'where' may be extracted. In the final lines of Schubert's work, as part of the section entitled 'Der Leierman [The Hurdy-Gurdy Man]', the narrator asks: 'Strange old man, / shall I go with you? / Will you play your hurdy-gurdy / to my songs?'[127] The possibility of this strange companionship has been completely eliminated in *What Where*: Voice is alone, the Other has been removed.

Aside from Knowlson, whose primary impetus is biographical precision, critics have not discussed the Schubert influence in conjunction with the references to violence and torture. Either the relationships between the characters is foregrounded, presided over by a dictatorial, directorial Voice, or the sad evocations of searching without success is noted, without much discussion devoted to the violence inherent in the searching. Beckett's revisions reduce the emphasis on bodily violence. When translating it into German for a television production in 1985, he staged the parts of Bam, Bem, Bim and Bom as disembodied heads and Voice as a distorted mirror reflection of Bam.[128] This may have been in part because he disagreed with the responses to the Harry Clurman Theatre production, which, according to Knowlson, emphasised the political dimension of the play.[129] Alan Schneider attributed this response to the proximity of the play to *Catastrophe* in the triple bill.[130] Given the importance Beckett

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[127] Wilhelm Müller, 'The Hurdy-Gurdy Man', trans. Arthur Rishi. *The Lied, Art Song, and Choral Texts Archive*. Accessed: 2 February 2012.
http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/assemble_texts.html?LanguageId=7&SongCycleId=47

[128] S.E. Gontarski, '*What Where*: Revised Text and Textual Notes', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1992).

[129] Knowlson, *Damned*, 603-4.

[130] Harmon, *No Author Better Served*, 449.

places on the image, however, we can also see this as a return to the theme of the double in *Ohio Impromptu*. The mute attendance of Listener, Protagonist and, eventually, Bam to the powers of the directorial voice may precipitate responses of resignation, defiance or defeat, but they also indicate a generic self-in-crisis or dialectical subject through their relationship with the voice. Beckett's plays perform this dialectical subject, by exploiting the tension between the image and the voice. This supplements authoritative readings of Beckett as an artist of the stoic 'comprehensive image' or the stoic 'voiceless' voice, with the simple observation that he is an artist of both image and voice, and, moreover, that the dialectic between image and voice is kynical (i.e. not sublative).

Having rehearsed our readings of the plays, we may now make the following definitive statements on Beckett's kynical, dialectical subject. *Ohio Impromptu* relies on the image of two identical figures at a table, with the voice of one reading from a book, which the other punctuates with a series of knocks. *Catastrophe* relays the construction of an abject image of a silent Protagonist in a theatrical situation by a director, who issues commands to an assistant, who punctuates the director's voice with affirmations and actions. *What Where* abstracts the abject image by referring to an action offstage by the actors, and regulating this behaviour through an abstract voice, itself offstage. The image progresses from mirroring to objectification to mirrored objectification in the three plays. The mirroring of figures in *Ohio Impromptu* and the objectification of figures in *Catastrophe* becomes a mirrored objectification in *What Where*. But this mirror is always broken, since the action turns around interrupting a central image with a voice and another, more subversive image. By contrast, the voice moves further and further away from the action: in *Ohio Impromptu* it is diegetic, as the voice belongs to one of the figures; in *Catastrophe* it is interdiegetic, as the voice of the director directs the performance of the play; in *What Where* it is extradiegetic, as Voice is removed

from the action of the play. These structural models rapidly deteriorate, since neither image nor voice remains 'pure' in these developments. The image is not simply synthesised into a mirrored objectification in *What Where*. Neither does the voice operate on strictly diegetic levels: *Ohio Impromptu* is primarily a metadiegetic description of the encounter between the two figures, while the extradiegesis in *Catastrophe* and *What Where* is still given by characters necessarily included in the production. Nevertheless, we can define a progression in structure across the three productions to see that Beckett is toying with precisely these rigid divisions of image and voice.

What does 'toying' mean for Beckett, an artist who self-consciously challenges the comfortable reception of his work? One may say of Beckett what Beckett said of Jack B. Yeats: 'the artist who stakes his being is from nowhere, has no kith' (*Disj* 149). Like Beckett, Yeats is less a stoic Irish artist (as for McGreevy) than a homeless kynic. But this conceptual narrowness does no justice to the political efficacy of this homelessness. Kynical cosmopolitans, if they can be described in *generic* terms, do not simply come from nowhere. But neither do they belong to their communities in a conventional sense. Rather, their form of belonging disrupts the microcosmoi formed by such communities. It is not that they are from *nowhere*, have no kith or kin. Rather, their decision to be artists subtracts them from their place within a community and their relations with other people. Beckett does not claim that the real Beckett is in a microcosmos happily elsewhere, while the critics muse on a 'Sim Botchit'. Beckett's response is to make this split itself the site of his late work, and to manifest its refusal to sublate by relying once more on the non-synthetic dialectic between the image and the voice.

If Beckett performs his refusal to belong through a dialectic between image and voice, the late novels of J.M. Coetzee present us with a different kind of performance.

Coetzee's late works manifest his ideological paragons, albeit paragons that he represents to avoid emulating. The technique he uses for this kynical performance of the cosmopolitan might be said to be language as such. Since 'language as such' is always also deployed rhetorically, this leads to our final chapter: Kynical Rhetoric in J.M. Coetzee's Performance novels.

Chapter 4
Kynical Rhetoric in J.M. Coetzee's Performance novels

On receiving his Nobel Prize, J.M. Coetzee remarked to David Attwell that 'the idea of the writer as sage is pretty much dead today. I would certainly feel very uncomfortable in the role'.[1] In the same year he published *Elizabeth Costello*, a collection of 'lessons' originally given as lecture-performances that centre on a writer who resists her reception as cosmopolitan sage. Four years later, he would publish *Diary of a Bad Year*, a novel comprising cosmopolitan sage essays and a framing narrative of their production. If the idea of the writer as sage is dead, Coetzee autopsies the body. But this autopsy is not directed at a stoic reinvigoration of the writer as sage. Nor does it cynically exploit financial benefits brought with the position. Rather, it exposes a general desire to invest in this 'dead idea', and it addresses the problem of its continued ideality. James Wood, in his review of *Elizabeth Costello*, called the novel's form a paradox: 'if Coetzee were merely playing it safe by dramatizing rather than propounding arguments, why make the arguments so violently unsafe?'[2] Wood anticipates a consensus that Costello is Coetzee's alter ego. This consensus will share Wood's expectation to find, beneath the surface of his interpretation, a 'real' basis for using Costello to advocate Coetzee's opinions. Either the reasons are cynical (Coetzee's self-interest) or they are stoic (Coetzee's system of ethics). Wood's phrase, 'merely playing it safe', suggests an antinomy between the apparent safety of cynicism and the actual insecurity of stoicism. In this chapter, we will eschew both the unsympathetic ('safe') and the sympathetic ('unsafe') readings of Coetzee's 'depths', by proposing a series of dialectical readings

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[1] J.M. Coetzee; David Attwell, 'An Exclusive Interview with J.M. Coetzee'. *Dagens Nyheter* 8 December 2003. Accessed: 2 April 2014.
http://www.dn.se/kultur-noje/an-exclusive-interview-with-j-m-coetzee/
[2] James Wood, 'A Frog's Life', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (October 2003).

that deconstruct this antinomy. In these 'surface' readings, we will examine Coetzee's use of the words 'mere' and 'merely'. If Wood uses 'merely' to mark the superficial reading he will dismiss, Coetzee's sustained use of 'merely' undermines easy oppositions of 'mere' superficiality and 'actual' depth. Examining what 'mere' and 'merely' are doing on the 'surface' of Coetzee's sentences will change our habitual understanding of these terms as dismissive.[3] Coetzee's kynical cosmopolitanism emerges, then, in the way that his prose challenges ethical, political or nihilistic readings at the level of sentence structure, and in the way his (mis)use of genre disrupts expectations. We will place particular emphasis on the performance-text *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) and the essay-novel, *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007). Our aim is to show how Coetzee uses language itself kynically, at the levels of sentence modification and genre, to expose, rather than conceal, linguistic relations of power.

In Borges, we found kynical cosmopolitanism manifest in his response to the issue of world literature, and in his use of metaphor and enumeration (the means of constructing a world literature). In Beckett, we found kynical cosmopolitanism manifest in his response to the lure of the microcosmopolitan, and in his use of images and voices (the means of representing the internal workings of the human brain). In Coetzee, kynical cosmopolitanism does not stretch to universal history (as for Borges), nor does it contract to the confines of the mind (as for Beckett). Coetzee's kynical cosmopolitanism traces the failures of communication between individuals. To be specific, Coetzee's kynical cosmopolitanism shows us how, for reasons of history, culture, ethnic diversity or species, people (and animals) fail to communicate in this

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[3] Sarah Nuttall, following Anne Cheng and, before her, Foucault, seeks to address the question of surface as an epistemological place in 'surface reading'. Although she concedes that Coetzee tries 'to open a space for a surface optic', Nuttall relegates Coetzee, William Kentridge and Nadine Gordimer to an episteme where the surface 'is the place that hides the political unconscious – or both hides and reveals it, through its very invocation as a cover'. Coetzee treats the invocation of cover with some skepticism, in which surface and depth function in a dialectic that does not sublate into a relationship where one 'covers' the other. Sarah Nuttall, 'Surface, Depth and the Autobiographical Act: Text and Images', *Life Writing*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2014), 3.

world, despite all efforts to the contrary. This failure of communication has marked Coetzee scholarship in both broadly sympathetic and unsympathetic ways.[4] The two principal trends in sympathetic Coetzee scholarship might crudely be divided into responses to Coetzee's 'ethical' stance towards the other[5] and the political responses, more concerned with how these ethical responses impact on the social and historical aftermaths of Apartheid and colonialism.[6] Both these trends are 'stoic' insofar as they propose an ethical system in response to either alterity or politics. 'Stoic' readings of Coetzee present the recurrent breakdown of communication with others as either an ethical response to the radical 'unknowability' of the other, or as a politico-ethical response to Apartheid and colonialism. But Coetzee's refusal to speak on behalf of the other also justified early 'unsympathetic' readings. These readings take Coetzee's work to be 'a studied refusal to accept historical responsibility', and Coetzee as lacking any 'conception of any positive values outside his own "civilisation"'.[7] Coetzee, for JanMohammed and Booth *et al.*, displays something akin to Sloterdijk's enlightened false consciousness in refusing to take responsibility and denying external positive values. We can take Coetzee's refusal to speak for the other too seriously, as a 'stoic' project of ethical or political depth, or we can take it too lightly, as a 'cynical' refusal of responsibility, values or human faults, when we should see these two positions as indicative of an anxiety about the ambivalence of the prose itself. The prose itself

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[4] See Coetzee's discussion of sympathetic and unsympathetic readings of Eliot in Chapter 1.

[5] Such readings show Maurice Blanchot, Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida to be influences or philosophical analogues in Coetzee's ethical treatment of 'Others', whether characters within the text, the text itself, or the task of speaking of and for the text as the nominal author. This summary is not to undermine the complexity of the work of Derek Attridge (2004), Stefan Helgesson (2004) and Mike Marais (2009), but to identify a rich field of study.

[6] Similarly analogous or influential readings of Coetzee alongside Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Theodor Adorno, Gilles Deleuze and the broader purview of postcolonial theory tend to consider Coetzee's work as a response to the Apartheid and post-Apartheid epochs, within an art that emerges after the Holocaust and colonialism. Again, this summary simply identifies a trend in Coetzee scholarship, rather than claiming that studies by David Attwell (1993), Samuel Durrant (2004), Laura Wright (2009) and Grant Hamilton (2011) can 'merely' be reduced to this framework.

[7] Abdul R. JanMohammed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Autumn 1985), 73; James Booth *et al.*, 'XVIII: African, Caribbean, Indian, Australian and Canadian Literature in English', *The Year's Work in English Studies*, Vol. 65 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984), 699.

'merely' acts between these two poles, challenging calls for 'deeper' meanings, and frustrating readings that dismiss it as superficial cynicism. When we discuss *Elizabeth Costello* and *Diary of a Bad Year*, we will note how their cosmopolitan protagonists repeatedly fail to deliver the lessons they are trying to teach. Only when we examine the discrepancies between the genre of these messages and their linguistic modification do we begin to realise that Coetzee is communicating through form what cannot be transmitted through pure 'deeper' meaning: the truth is presented in the dialectic between surface and depth.

This leads us to a third trend in Coetzee scholarship, which restores Coetzee's professional interest in linguistics to its proper place.[8] Coetzee's kynical cosmopolitanism grounds itself in linguistic issues, as manifested in his understanding of the cosmos. For Coetzee, the novel is always a world, or a cosmos. JC, asked by Anya why he does not write another novel, demurs: 'I don't have the endurance any more. To write a novel you have to be like Atlas, holding up a whole world on your shoulders and supporting it there for months and years while its affairs work themselves out. It is too much for me as I am today' (*DBY* 54). But if the novel is always a whole world, the world is not simply a novel. If the novel constitutes a world, this world is either supplemental to the historical, 'real' world, or it rivals the real world, going so far as to expose 'the mythic status of history' or demythologising history in a kynical way.[9] Demythologising history in a kynical way involves forms of *parrhesia*, or truth-telling. Since our concern is with the failure of communication as a structural concern of

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[8] Coetzee particularly inflects 'care' and 'charity', as in Mrs Curren's false etymology of *caritas* in *Age of Iron*: 'A lie: charity, *caritas*, has nothing to do with the heart. But what does it matter if my sermons rest on false etymologies?' (*AI* 20); A.J. Rose, *The Poetics of Reciprocity in Selected Fictions by J.M. Coetzee* (Cape Town: MA Thesis, 2007). Carrol Clarkson extends this analysis of care to consider artistic materiality in *J.M. Coetzee: Countervoices* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Maria J. Lopez also writes on Coetzee's etymological devices in *Acts of Visitation: The Narratives of J.M. Coetzee* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011).

[9] In 'The Novel Today', Coetzee describes the relationship between the novel and history as marked either by supplementarity or rivalry. Coetzee, 'The Novel Today', *Upstream*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1988), 3.

Coetzee's work, our focus will be on the form this *parrhesia* takes, particularly the diatribe (as in *Elizabeth Costello*) and the essay (as in *Diary of a Bad Year*).

However, an analysis of generic form does not seem sufficient, since Coetzee's linguistic rhetoric exposes narratological and ideological short-circuits in generic truth-telling. This may be why Coetzee disavows the 'meaning' of his opinions: 'I confess I don't find my opinions very interesting'.[10] The comment may be taken cynically or kynically; as disavowal or provocation. As a provocation, prefaced to a public reading, it has the connotations of critique: you are here to listen to my opinions, he infers from his audience's presence, and we will address them contrarily, with an opinion about opinions. This localised auto-critique positions Coetzee rhetorically as a kynical cosmopolitan. But it also catches us in a house of mirrors, as opinions proliferate upon opinions. Our challenge is not to break through the glass to find out the true opinions behind the mirror; it is to see how meaning emerges in the dialectic between this surface and its implied depth.

As with Borges and Beckett, we will focus on technique, rather than imbedded content, to explore Coetzee's kynical cosmopolitanism. We focused on the technical use of metaphor and enumeration (for Borges), and image and voice (for Beckett), to isolate their kynical rhetorics. We must find a comparable technique in Coetzee to isolate his 'surface depths'. Rather than develop a meta-language to discuss this response, which Coetzee would roundly reject, we will focus on the relations he creates through his use of modifiers, such as adjectives and adverbs. This will demonstrate how Coetzee's language forms itself into a dialectical kynical critique.

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[10] Coetzee, 'The Old Woman and the Cats', 'J.M. Coetzee reads "The Old Women and the Cats" at Jaipur Literary Festival', 28th October 2011. *Books Live*. Accessed: 2 February 2013.
http://bookslive.co.za/blog/2011/10/28/video-jm-coetzee-reads-the-old-woman-and-the-cats-at-jaipur-literary-festival/

The Diatribe and the Essay

We diagnose Coetzee's rhetoric in his apparently insignificant use of an adverb.[11] In 'Eight Ways of Looking at Samuel Beckett', Coetzee marks the adverb as a possible solution to the dichotomy between monism and dualism. Coetzee finds the dichotomy illustrated in Beckett's photographs: 'photographs of Beckett show a man whose inner being shines like a cold star through the fleshy envelope' (*EWSB* 31). 'But', Coetzee concludes his 'Eight Ways of *Looking* at Samuel Beckett', 'soul can shine through flesh only if soul and flesh are one. If soul and flesh belong to distinct realms, and the conjunction is an everlasting mystery, then no photograph will ever tell the truth' (*EWSB* 31).

Either we are monists or we are dualists. If we are monists, the photograph will tell the truth of an inner being. If we are dualists, 'no photograph will ever tell the truth'. To test our monism, Coetzee devises a laboratory, headed up by God.[12] God is in charge of an experiment, in which he tests an 'It' by dropping nuts down a tube. As the It learns to associate a particular tube with a particular door, to access the nuts, so God changes the connections between tubes and doors, since 'the universe is interested not in what you can understand but at what point you cease to understand' (*EWSB* 27). But God has missed the point:

> God thinks I spend my time waiting for him to arrive with his apparatus for testing my limits[...] But I am not seriously waiting for God [...] What God does not understand is this 'not seriously' with which I wait for him, this 'not seriously' which looks like a mere adverbial like 'patiently' or 'idly' – I am patiently waiting for God, I am idly waiting for God – not a major

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[11] Imraan Coovadia complains about Coetzee's reference to a 'metaphysical ache': 'Why can't aches and pains, and wishes be aches, and pains, and wishes, without the elevating adverb?' Notwithstanding the presence of an elevating *adjective*, Coovadia's complaint prompts me to ask why these adjectives and adverbs are necessary. Imraan Coovadia, 'Coetzee in and out of Cape Town', *Kritika Kultura*, Vol 18 (2012), 111-2.

[12] In this laboratory experiment, Coetzee plays off the popular misreading of Godot as God. Coetzee is alluding to this popular misreading in a more self-conscious way than Borges in his response to *Waiting for Godot*.

> part of the sentence, not the subject or the predicate, just something that
> has casually attached itself to the sentence, like fluff. (*EWSB* 28)

The 'mere adverbial' is apparently insignificant. God does not understand this 'fluff' because it opens a gap in God's belief that 'I am a body and a mind, miraculously conjoined' (*EWSB* 28). 'He' thinks that 'the miracle [...] of conjunction allows him to use a nut to get the mind to work' (*EWSB* 28). But, 'the creature, It, I, does not know it is a body and a mind conjoined. *I think, therefore I am*: that is not what It thinks. On the contrary, it thinks, *I am! I am! I am!*' (*EWSB* 28). With this '*I am*', the It asserts a subjectivity that God cannot understand because 'he can never know what it is to be me' (*EWSB* 28). Dualism deviates from monism when there is a disjuncture between appearance and 'inner being', but the only means of determining this disjuncture is by describing the manner of this being. Linguistically, we describe this manner of being with either an adverb or an adjective.

In the chapters on Borges and Beckett, we grounded our consideration of their author-constructs in their own theories of metaphor and enumeration, or image and voice. The device we will focus on in our discussion of Coetzee is the place of adverbs and adjectives in the narrative rhetoric of particularly pedagogic genres, namely the essay and the diatribe. However, there is an anomaly in speaking about rhetoric and the kynics that must be resolved, not simply for the case of Coetzee, but for our reading of Borges and Beckett as kynical rhetoricians. Since the kynic is a parrhesiast, and, as Foucault was quick to point out, 'the practice of *parrhesia* is opposed to the art of rhetoric in every respect', there can be no 'kynical rhetoric'.[13] Indeed, 'rhetoric, as it was defined and practiced in Antiquity, is a technique concerning the way that things are said, but does not in any way determine the relations between the person who speaks and what he says'.[14] Given that *parrhesia* is exactly the determination of a relation

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[13] Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 11.
[14] Ibid.

between the speaker, what they say and truth, rhetoric seems to obfuscate the aim of *parrhesia* to tell 'the truth without concealment, reserve, empty manner of speech, or rhetorical ornament which might encode or hide it'.[15] Yet, as Coetzee himself demonstrates quite categorically in his essay, 'Confession and Double Thoughts', there is no possibility of telling the truth 'without concealment'. Confession is possible only as a process, not as a *telos*. Rhetoric underpins any claim to truth without concealment, and must eventually be revealed, confessed in a further claim to unconcealed truth.

Claims to unconcealed truth or its connection to an unconcealed life will always fall short of their ideal. 'In the Stoic mutation', Foucault argues, 'the ideal of the unconcealed life is immediately connected, not to *anaideia* (shamelessness), but rather to *aidos* (modesty)'.[16] Kynical life in the Stoic's conception of it is unhidden because 'whoever leads the philosophical life, conducting himself according to the rules of modesty, does not have to hide'.[17] Epictetus, on whose (Stoic) account of the kynics Foucault draws for this argument, lays out the precepts for this modesty as a series of injunctions. 'You must change your present way of acting [...]; you must suppress your desires entirely [...]; you must find no young girl beautiful [...]'.[18] By contrast, Foucault's earlier account of Kynic life – unconcealment connected to *anaideia* (shamelessness) – 'deploys the general theme of non-concealment but frees it from all conventional principles'.[19] 'Applying the principle of non-concealment literally, [k]ynicism explodes the code of propriety with which this principle remained, implicitly or explicitly, associated'.[20] Kynical life is less concerned with living by an ideal (encoded in a series of injunctions), than by an 'absolute visibility'. In order to 'bring to

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[15] Ibid, 10.
[16] Ibid, 297.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Epictetus *Discourses* qtd. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 296.
[19] Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 255.
[20] Ibid.

light what is natural in the human being', it is shameless in its exhibitionism.[21] Inevitably, such exhibitionism carries with it a certain kind of rhetoric, albeit a rhetoric aimed at exposing the assumptions behind traditional codes of propriety. Therefore it is in Coetzee's shamelessly visible use of rhetoric to expose nominal traditionalism that we begin to see the workings of a kynical cosmopolitan.

Coetzee's 'Time, Tense, and Aspect in Kafka's "The Burrow"' establishes this line of enquiry. The essay concerns itself with the relation between 'the *time of narration* (the moving *now* of the narrator's utterance)' and the *time of narrative* (referential time)' in Kafka's 'The Burrow' (*DP* 210). This relation, Coetzee argues, is particularly complex because the narrative's use of a habitual, iterative present is maintained in descriptions of actions that are 'impulsive, unforeseen and unforeseeable' (*DP* 212). Coetzee proposes two explanations for this contradiction. The first, 'less radical explanation' is that 'the lack of a morphological form in German (or English) to convey iterative action' means that iterative action must be continuously emphasised through the use of iterative modifiers (such as sometimes, every day) or modality (will, used to) (*DP* 213). Kafka's speaker in 'The Burrow' describes itself accumulating its stores, allocating these to various rooms and securing its burrow for defence in an emphasised iterative present to indicate cycles of behaviour. 'Of course, the more this emphasis has to be repeated, the clumsier it sounds', Coetzee observes (*DP* 213). This leads Coetzee to conclude: 'Rather than maintain the emphasis throughout, Kafka sometimes […] *dramatizes a typical event* from the iterative cycle and so permits the reading to slip back for a while into the unmarked, noniterative mode', as when the speaker punctuates its noniterative 'periods of particular tranquillity' with an iterative 'until at last I can no longer restrain myself [bis ich es nicht mehr ertrage] and one night [eines Nachts] rush into the Castle Keep, mightily fling myself upon my stores, and glut

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[21] Ibid, 254.

myself' (*DP* 213; 212). This 'less radical explanation', Coetzee muses, is '*rhetorical*'
and 'interprets the problematic verb sequence in terms of the pragmatics of "what
works" for the reader, as manifestations of the writer's artfulness' (*DP* 213). Coetzee
expresses reservations about this explanation, observing that

> 'Success' in writing, like beauty, being essentially undemonstrable, some
> rhetorical coaxing or intimidation, or both, is required from the
> commentator to establish *any* argument that a particular strategy in a text
> 'works', that it is 'successful writing', indeed that it is a 'strategy of
> writing' at all. (*DP* 214)

As the repeated 'scare' quotes suggest, Coetzee is skeptical about evaluating writing in
terms of 'success', 'working' or 'strategy'. Moreover, he identifies as *rhetorical* the use
of linguistic pragmatics to elide grammatical interruption for the sake of an *implied*
narrative continuity. This 'mere rhetoric' ties the explanation into a larger metaphysical
loop, in which linguistic structure serves to justify narrative continuity without
acknowledging its own reliance on narrative continuity. Coetzee, participant in the
discourses of linguistic stylistics, rejects the meaning-oriented interpretive strategies of
pragmatics in favour of following the linguistic pattern as it merely presents itself.

The method, he argues, leads him to conclude that 'rather than being an obstacle
to understanding, the problematic sequences embody a conception of time that is central
to Kafka's enterprise' (*DP* 214). Time, in this second explanation, is aberrant.

> The second and more radical explanation is that the conception of time that
> reigns in 'The Burrow' is truly aberrant, that it can be domesticated only
> with a degree of rhetorical violence amounting to traduction, and that it is
> better understood as the reflection of a time-sense that does not draw a line
> between iterative and noniterative senses of the verb, or does not draw the
> line in the usual place. (*DP* 214)

The linguistic 'justification' of Coetzee's first explanation necessitates a degree of
rhetorical coercion ('coaxing' or 'intimidation'). This 'domestication' of 'The Burrow's
aberrant conception of time detracts from the possibility that the narrative rhetoric is
doing exactly what it appears to be doing: violating the 'usual' grammatical sense of the
verb to engage with a different conception of time. Here we can detect a kynical

'explosion of propriety' in Coetzee's exposure of the 'deep' pragmatic reading of implied narrative continuity to the 'surface' reading that time in 'The Burrow' is, as it appears, aberrant. Coetzee chooses to deviate from an established critical tradition in linguistic theory to argue that Kafka is doing *what he really appears to be doing*. Where it was the use of particular rhetorical devices that facilitated our explanations of Borges and Beckett, it is the consideration of 'rhetoric' as such that marks the intersection between Coetzee's critical and creative work. Whether through the development of fictional etymologies or by inflecting the different meanings of particular words in different grammatical contexts, Coetzee reveals the 'workings' of rhetoric by disrupting the narrative assumptions of his reader. If we observed Borges's kynical method in his use of metaphor and enumeration and Beckett's in his use of image and voice, our examination of Coetzee's kynical method relies on his use of genre and linguistic modification.

The particular genre that serves to highlight this in *Elizabeth Costello* is diatribe. Diatribe, in its classical sense, is defined by John Moles as 'direct transcriptions or literary developments of addresses given by Cynic or Stoic philosophers on the streets, before large audiences or to pupils'.[22] While the existence of diatribe as a discrete genre remains hotly contested in Classical scholarship, consensus about what is being contested is that the term, literally translated as 'spending of time', refers to oral philosophical expositions and their disquisition, though the latter may vary from direct transcription to 'quite elaborate literary development'.[23] Often this disquisition would take the form of a lecture. Moles notes that, even if they did not originate the written diatribe, the kynics 'are likely to have been the major contributors to that tradition'.[24] Generically, diatribe does not necessarily carry the contemporary connotations of

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[22] John Moles, 'Diatribe', *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, rev. ed., ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 463.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

invective and polemic, but most classical examples consider ethical issues in a sermonising manner (such as the diatribes of Zeno, Bion or Epictetus mentioned above) and thus anticipate the oral disquisitions that make up *Elizabeth Costello*'s 'Eight Lessons'. As with Epictetus's *Discourses*, diatribe often serves a moral, stoic end, rather than simply describing a lecture-event. Since the kynics are the speakers in diatribes and not the writers of diatribes, the diatribe tradition turned on appropriating kynic stories to stoic ends. Costello's 'lessons' are transcripts of speeches, discussions and letters, framed by the context of their utterance, concerned with an ostensible moral agenda and often engaged with polemically. However, unlike stoic diatribe, this moral polemic is accompanied with a bare minimum of argument, since the philosophical bases of argument seem wholly contrary to Costello's *parrhesiatic* impulse. In addition to being literary versions of oral address, Moles notes the following features of diatribe that might as easily describe Costello's lessons:

> They focus on a single theme; their main aim is to attack vices; they employ a vigorous, hectoring, colloquial style, with colourful, everyday imagery; they sometimes have an anonymous interlocutor, thereby providing dramatic illusion, a degree of argument and (usually) a butt.[25]

Elizabeth Costello and the lecture-performances from which it is derived are primarily descriptions of lectures, discussions, and arguments around particular themes. These themes (realism, the novel, animals, humanism, evil, love, death) are the concerns of the liberal protagonist and the descriptions involve her lecturing on the subject or listening to a lecture on the subject, and the arguments that follow these lectures. The treatment of the theme belies the academic forums in which it often takes place, with her appealing to experience, to feeling and to common sense, rather than to a development of rational, philosophical argument on the basis of clearly defined premises and facts. As Sam Durrant has argued, it is necessary to disentangle Costello's views from those

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[25] Ibid.

of Coetzee: Coetzee's arguments are not necessarily those of his creation.[26] Thinking of *Elizabeth Costello* as diatribe has two advantages in this regard. It permits us to identify a long-standing 'fictocritical' literary genre to which, intentionally or not, Coetzee is heir, and therefore eases generic concerns about the novel. It also permits us the more nuanced reading of Coetzee's relationship with Costello as suggested by Durrant. As the diatribe is the transcription of a performance, rather than the script for such a performance, it had the mimetic function of restaging a performance in Ancient Greece. However, Coetzee's diatribes challenge this conventional understanding of the mimetic since they do not recreate a previous performance. One could say that they stage their performance in order to achieve a mediated presentation of the self-as-construction. Coetzee reworks the diatribe as the transcription of a fictional oral performance by Elizabeth Costello in response to the challenges of twentieth and twenty-first century artistic mediation. The diatribe is an oral performance of personal opinions, aimed at connecting the self to these opinions via a structural belief in their veracity (*parrhesia*). This links it to the essay form, which also seeks to air personal opinions in the form of writing, a structured attempt to reveal the self to itself.

Coetzee reworks the essay form in *Diary of a Bad Year. Diary* is a novel comprising a split-page narrative: the top, a collection of essays, purportedly written by an aging South African novelist JC, and the bottom, a framing narrative involving the author, his secretary, Anya, and her boyfriend, Alan. Coetzee's use of the essay as the dominant formal genre in the novel is particularly significant. The essay is generally acknowledged to have been introduced by Michel Montaigne in the 16th century in his 'attempts' to discuss an emergent self through writing: he famously takes 'myself [as]

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[26] Sam Durrant, 'J.M. Coetzee, Elizabeth Costello and the Limits of the Sympathetic Imagination', *J.M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*, ed. Jane Poyner (Athens: Ohio UP, 2006).

the matter of my book'.[27] The most obvious difference between Montaigne's essays and JC's is that JC's 'self-as-essay-matter' is undermined by the streams of 'personal' information that contrast his 'Strong Opinions' to his relationships with Anya and with Alan. The essay depends on the integrity of the 'I writing' to validate its thinking-process. Exposing the rhetorical contingency of its moment of writing throws this integrity into disarray. This disarray is not due to genetic discrepancies. Montaigne corrected subsequent editions of the *Essais*, leading modern editions to annotate the genetic differences between the editions with an A [1580], B [1588] or C [1595].[28] Montaigne's diachronic record exposes discrepancies between the 'self-as-essay-matter' over time. By contrast, *Diary of a Bad Year* indicates a kind of impatience, in which a synchronic record must expose discrepancies in the 'self-as-essay-matter' over the space of the page, rather than over the time of successive editions. If Montaigne's *Essais* indicate a series of diachronic iterations, as has been argued by Claire de Obaldia, Coetzee develops a series of synchronic iterations in *Diary of a Bad Year*. The synchronic iteration attempts to render both essay and its context at the same time. We retrospectively interpret Montaigne's development via the genetic changes to his essays. This process is short-circuited in *Diary of a Bad Year*, where we simultaneously read the essay, its process of development and the responses of its first two critics, Anya and Alan. If Claire de Obaldia's seminal 1995 study, *The Essayistic Spirit*, establishes the essay as a kind of literature *in potentia*, then *Diary of a Bad Year* presents the *in potentia* wrapped in its critical afterbirth.

de Obaldia notes that the essay is a genre *not yet* literature and a genre particularly concerned with unwrapping a narrating self.[29] de Obaldia calls the essay *not*

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[27] Michel Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Michel Montaigne*, trans. M.A. Screech [1987] (London: Penguin, 2003).

[28] Ibid, 1284.

[29] Claire de Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit: Literature, Modern Criticism, and the Essay* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), 15.

yet literature (in the diachronic sense) to illustrate its temporal frustration of static genre divisions. She writes, 'the static difference between the literary and the extra-literary expressed by the opposition is/is not, is grasped as the temporal and therefore dynamic difference of the "is not yet"'.[30] The essay relates to a becoming of the essayist's fictional self. This fictional self never shifts from the essayist's self-definition to become a character. de Obaldia captures this performative quality: 'Its condition is to herald a state or moment which has not yet been accomplished but which also foreshadows the completion and totalization generally associated with art and more particularly, in literature itself, with narrative continuity'.[31] It subsists, in other words, in a perpetual striving towards a never-completed moment of fulfilment. To appropriate a comment de Obaldia takes from Terence Cave, 'The "suspension" of both writer and his text "between an original wholeness […] and a future reintegration" is itself permanent and thus subverts the very notion of anachronism'.[32] The essay's formal suspension of reintegration is exacerbated in *Diary of a Bad Year*, where the suspension of writer and text is presented in the draft stage of the essays' production. Not even Anya is convinced by JC's 'Strong Opinions'. Her 'opinion' serves to drive a wedge between writer and text, since JC will discard his 'Strong Opinions' halfway through the novel in favour of 'Softer Opinions'. JC's rhetoric does not persuade. It exposes itself, and JC's pretensions. Like the 'rehearsal' in Beckett's *Catastrophe*, *Diary of a Bad Year* inscribes a performance of production that leaves the text always open to revision. The conscious participation in the reception of the text by a reader indicates that we should read this rhetoric 'aberrantly', as a commentary on the life of a text and the lives of its readers. But the layers of framing narrative in both *Elizabeth Costello* and *Diary of a Bad Year* can obscure the exposition of this commentary as a form of kynical

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[30] Ibid, 16.
[31] Ibid, 18.
[32] Ibid, 30.

cosmopolitanism, since focusing on the framing narrative can return us to the tedious impasse over whether these opinions are Coetzee's or 'merely' those of his literary creations, Costello and JC. This focus ignores the primary importance the texts accord to engagements of generic form, in favour of the story 'beneath' the narrative. It also assumes that the rhetoric of linguistic modification is 'merely' the means by which Coetzee forms this story, when, we will argue, this rhetoric is itself the commentary on the manner in which the text 'lives'.

Mere Rhetoric

If we are to use the rhetoric of linguistic modification to comment on the life of a text and its readers, how can we relate its textual mannerisms to the purposes of the diatribe and the essay to reveal the self? Both Costello's 'Lessons' and JC's 'Strong Opinions' aim to reveal the writer's self. Moreover, this revelation has the particularly pedagogic purpose of using the writer's life as both the instrument of and the justification for the lessons and opinions they are advocating. Here, we might say that the ends are stoic because the respective moral crusades have ennobling, and systematic, intentions. But, insofar as the former 'lessons' are ostensibly closer to a hybrid classical form (mixing oral and writing practices) while the latter is the elaboration of a modern form of writing, the two works also create a dialectic between the moralising effects of apparently unmediated oral transcription and the ethical emergence of 'countervoices' as a result of the writing act.[33] Both novels remain ambivalent about this dialectic: Elizabeth Costello's oral defence, transcribed as part of 'At the Gate' – that she is 'a secretary of the invisible', or 'open to all voices' – is considered problematic by her judges when she refuses to judge between 'the murderer and his victim', while it is JC's equivocal 'Softer Opinions' as much as 'the 'countervoices' of Alan and Anya in the

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[33] Clarkson uses Coetzee's notion of 'countervoices' in *J.M. Coetzee: Countervoices*.

parallel narrative sections that undermine the 'authority' of his 'Strong Opinions'. There is, in other words, an establishment of authority and a disavowal of this authority, and both are achieved through what JC would call 'mere rhetoric' (*DBY* 226).[34] Stoic authority meets its kynical counterpart. When we go on to discuss *Diary*, we will have to determine whether the disavowal of authority is properly kynical or is, in fact, cynical. For the moment, however, our reading is arrested by 'mere rhetoric'. What is 'mere rhetoric'? What, indeed, is 'mere'?

Any sustained literary treatment of 'mere' must consider Wallace Stevens, whose name Costello cannot remember in *Slow Man*.[35] The 'mere' of Wallace Stevens's 'Of Mere Being' is, in the assessment of Harold Bloom, 'both a litotes and a play on the archaic meaning, which is "pure", and perhaps even carries a hint of the root, which means "flickering"'.[36] But he also suggests that '"mere" is Stevens' final trope for reducing to a First Idea'.[37] If Coetzee also 'reduces to a First Idea', then that first idea is that no final reduction is possible, whether it be in response to photographs of Samuel Beckett or Franz Kafka's temporal aberrance. He indicates as much in his early essay, 'Achterberg's "Ballad van de gasfitter": The Mystery of I and You', where he decides that the 'union of pure subjectivity with the Word' proves impossible (*DP* 75). This judgement glosses a passage from Stevens's 'Notes to a Supreme Fiction':

> the spouse, the bride
> Is never naked. A fictive covering
> Weaves always glistening from the heart and mind.[38]

It is impossible, in other words, to strip things down to their naked truths or their 'mere being'. We seem to be trapped in the house of mirrors. But, instead of trying to break

[34] Timothy Bewes, *Postcolonial Shame*.
[35] C. Kenneth Pellow, 'Intertextuality and Other Analogues in J.M. Coetzee's *Slow Man*', *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (2009), 547.
[36] Harold Bloom, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977), 371.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Wallace Stevens, *The Palm at the End of the Mind: Selected Poems*, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 405.

through these mirrors, we will follow the linguistic play at work when Coetzee invokes 'mere' to critique reductions to 'a First Idea' of 'categories'. 'Breaking mirrors' reinstates the dichotomy between a superficial appearance and its deeper meaning. Rather than exploit the difference between surface and depth, Coetzee's use of 'mere' and 'merely' challenges our desire for deeper meaning by bringing surface and depth into a non-sublative dialectic.[39] The term, and our reading of it, is necessarily bathetic. But bathos is perhaps our only possible response when, as Coetzee recognises in his kynical cosmopolitanism, the ethical question, 'what should we do?', is replaced by the more pragmatic, 'are we prepared to do what needs to be done?'[40]

While Coetzee is not averse to using 'mere' in an unmarked sense, there is an instance in which he does register the word's use as a particularly marked qualifier of bathetic lack. In his 'Kafka' interview in *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee takes umbrage at what he interprets as Attwell's efforts to homogenise 'serious White South African writing' into the category of 'late-modernism', due to his sense of 'the qualifier *merely* late-modernist hanging in the air' (*DP* 200). Coetzee's umbrage arises from what he construes as a politically charged attack on late modernism. He stages his defence in linguistic terms around the use of mere and merely. Not only does this anticipate the political-aesthetic and ethical-aesthetic traditions of criticism of Coetzee's work that would subsequently form, but it also demonstrates his rhetorical use of 'mere':

> For I do not wish to respond from the marked or negative position, to embrace ethicalism or anything else from a position in the dialogue that is already marked as the position of the negative, the position of the *mere*. So, for instance, the last thing I want to do is to *defiantly* embrace the ethical as against the political. I don't want to contribute, in that way, toward marking the ethical as the pole with the lack. (*DP* 200)

To mark a position – in this instance ethicalism – as 'mere' is to mark it as negative. Since 'marking' results in thinking ethics and politics separately, Coetzee worries that it

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[39] This recapitulates the trap of the hermeneutist, referred to in the Introduction, where the search for deep meanings brings about the undoing of the subject.
[40] See the discussion of Coetzee's cosmopolitanism in Chapter 1.

will lead to a concomitant disempowering of the ethical and an empowering of the political. Linguistic marking of the ethical in the negative, by using the *mere*, disempowers the ethical because such markers automatically indicate lack. As our discussion of Coetzee's critics demonstrated, Coetzee's fiction avoids an overly oppositional stance between politics and ethics, for the reason, as stated, that defiantly embracing the ethical as against the political inevitably leads to a simplified support of the powerless against the empowered. Kynical cosmopolitan interrogations of the ethical and the political aim to address precisely those structures that allow for a division between the ethical and political. In this sense, 'mere ethics', like 'mere politics', marks not so much the position of the negative, as a rhetorical effort to place these terms in the position of the negative. It exposes the structural tendency to use 'mere' as a rhetorical short-circuit for the position of the negative. However, to conclude that the 'mere' and the 'merely' simply mark a lack occludes a deviant narrative in Coetzee's rhetorical preoccupation with the terms in his fictional work, since 'mere' is also what Magda would call 'that which simply is'. For the terms are used at least four or five times in a variety of rhetorical ways in each of Coetzee's novels and, in the cases of *Elizabeth Costello* and *Diary of a Bad Year*, 26 and 15 times respectively. Coetzee's concern with an 'implicit' *merely* in Attwell's question raises the possibility that Coetzee's stylistic use of merely, and mere, may highlight certain rhetorical conceits at work in Coetzee's kynical method, not least for its rhetorical significance to the theme of truth-telling. The way Coetzee marks mere and the merely is particularly evident when we read the terms transversally across the novels.

We will begin our discussion of Coetzee's 'mere' by looking at its fairly conventional reduction of creatures to types or categories. We will then consider how particular examples frustrate this convention, and cause us to rethink the subjectivities of the characters who reduce creatures to types or categories. As we problematise the

mere, we find that what appears to be barely satisfactory behaviour may be sufficient, rather than excessive. From individual and interpersonal behaviour, we move to attitudes about nations to think about the role of the cosmopolitan in the nation. Again, the problematic nature of the mere subverts an apparently easy distinction between surface narratives and their underlying, 'true' meaning, by engaging in a dialectic between surface and depth.

We begin by considering people and animal behaviour. When, in the first part of *Dusklands*, Eugene Dawn segues from his analysis of 'The Vietnam Project' to observe the 'mere behaviour' of Marilyn, his wife, her behaviour parallels the 'mere behaviour' of praying mantises alluded to by Jacobus Coetzee when he kills his 'Zeno beetle' in the second (*Du* 10; 96). After she kills her father and his bride in *In the Heart of the Country*, Magda's 'wolf howls hurled into the night' remain 'mere behaviour', because there is no one to offend but the servants and the dead (*IHC* 17). 'Mere behaviour' becomes a cipher for animal activity that is not interpreted, understood or judged by an observer. Coetzee's early fiction associates people with 'mere' animals.

Subsequently, the marginalised are reduced to the category 'child'. Magda describes herself as a 'mere child' (*IHC* 43), a description that also used by Cruso, and then Susan Barton, when taking responsibility for Friday, enslaved 'as a mere child', in *Foe* (*F* 12; 23). The 'mere child', like the animal, is not granted the ability to respond to its exploitation by narrators. The phrase, like the responsibility, passes from Cruso to Susan Barton in a transaction that continues to deny Friday agency.

Mere, then, appears to describe a form of 'bare' categorisation.[41] But this reduction to bare categories is inflected with an irony that suggests 'mere' categories are more complex than 'bare' categories. When Michael K describes himself as a 'mere footloose vagrant' after his mother dies, it is precisely this quality that permits him to

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[41] As understood by Giorgio Agamben in his work on 'bare life', particularly in *Homo Sacer* (1995) and *State of Exception* (2003).

avoid scrutiny in Stellenbosch, while he waits to continue his journey to Prince Alfred (*LTMK* 39). Since a mere footless vagrancy must describe action as well as appearance and demeanour, the 'mere' inflects our response to persons, behaviours and actions. Moreover, mere vagrancy avoids scrutiny by being unobtrusive in its needs and bathetic in its affect. K's vagrancy is 'mere' rather than 'bare' because it is bathetic in its unobtrusive contentedness.

Imputing underlying reasons for this contentedness actually obfuscates surface impulses or desires. In *Dusklands* Eugene Dawn shows that writing obscenities on toilet walls achieves more than its 'mere hidden purpose'; it manages to obscure hidden purposes (*Du* 14). This becomes politically charged in *Age of Iron*, when the police come to investigate the break-in at Mrs Curren's house. Although they make the 'mere pretext' of a search, the police are actually interested in 'touching' (*AI* 169). As with Eugene Dawn's 'obscenities', the search at Mrs Curren's has a purpose: she is under suspicion because of her involvement with the child-revolutionary, John. But this purpose is less important than an overt manipulation of objects; the 'mere hidden purpose' justifies a haptic enjoyment of police power. A less ominous, more philosophical consideration of the dialectic between surface and purpose is provided at the heart of Lurie's lecture on *The Prelude*, where 'a mere image on the retina, has encroached upon what has hitherto been a living thought' (*D* 21). Lurie's obdurate class does not ask the necessary questions to clarify what Lurie means by 'a living thought', but it is clear that it relates to the usurpation of 'pure ideas' by 'mere sense-images' (*D* 22). The immediacy of sensation defers questions of a wider politico-ethical debate, in favour of an ethical-aesthetic response to the local, the focus of the kynical cosmopolitan. Lurie will find himself caught out by this immediacy of sensation, when his rape of Melanie Isaacs demonstrably underwhelms the pure idea that he is the servant of Eros. Again, depth of meaning disguises a 'mere' surface, because, as Lurie

says, 'we cannot live our daily lives in a realm of pure ideas' (*D* 22). Coetzee is more explicit about the dialectical role of mere enjoyment in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, where the Magistrate muses: 'When I was young the mere smell of a woman would arouse me; now it is evidently the sweetest, the youngest, the newest who have that power' (*WB* 49). 'Mere' sets the previous ease of the Magistrate's enjoyment against his current need for superlatives: the contentment in litotes with the need for hyperbole.

At the same time that this libidinal (and sexist) mere is in play, Coetzee develops its association with childhood. Like 'mere children' in the earlier fiction, *The Master of Petersburg* refers to a 'mere toddler' (*MP* 179). Given the violence towards children in *The Master of Petersburg*, an excessive violence that, in Dostoevski's vision of child abuse, is meant to generate 'something that goes beyond mere wincing, mere bearing of pain', the developing significance of an intertextual 'mere' grants the term 'more' meaning than the apparently synonymous 'only a toddler' (*MP* 77). *The Master of Petersburg* exposes the dialectic at work in the 'mere', and not only in the case of children. The 'mere' job of killing a 'mere' dog can also lead to an unforeseen moment of empathy with the victim, after which the 'mere job' becomes 'the blackest betrayal' (*MP* 98; 99). The 'mere formality' of Maximov's investigation, which is nonetheless necessary, is performed by a man who claims not to be 'a mere functionary' but to have Dostoevski's best interests at heart. Maximov suggests a disparity between action and person. His 'mere' actions should not be overdetermined, but his good intentions should be, since he is not the category he inhabits ('a mere functionary'), even if this role determines the 'mere formality' of his actions.

The aporia of mere formality is inverted by Dr Rassool, who protests that the issue at Lurie's hearing in *Disgrace* 'goes beyond mere technicalities' and requires more than 'simply going through the motions' (*D* 51). Dr Rassool's painful sincerity highlights the way in which the university committee cannot define their own position

in Lurie's case, since their attempts to go beyond mere formalities exceed their position as mere functionaries. Actions marked by a 'mere' operate in a dialectic between 'hidden purposes' and surface somatic effects. The negation of a 'mere' often indicates an excess emotional engagement that can as easily be interpreted as destructive as good-willed. In *Youth*, for instance, John's revulsion about writing is that the act will 'spill mere emotion on the page' (*Y* 61). The 'mere' in Coetzee's creative work exposes a dialectic between concealment and unconcealment. From these instances, we can break down its marked use into categories. It often marks automatic behavioural response. It also marks the position of subaltern figures: animals, children, women or vagrants. Automatic response becomes implicitly associated with identity and both identity and response are bathetic. Often this bathos will carry over into hermeneutic efforts to derive a deeper meaning for activities, when a more visceral, obvious explanation may work as well. It is at its most insidious, however, when its bathos marks a character's intention to present their actions as signifying more (or less) than they actually do.

Such bathos clarifies John's cosmopolitan pretensions in *Youth*. John wonders whether the 'sorry' he mutters to the man selling newspapers 'counts as speech' (*Y* 114). 'Has what has occurred between himself and the old man been an instance of human contact, or is it better described as mere social interaction, like the touching of feelers between ants?' (*Y* 114). Here we have reiteration of 'mere' behaviourism, and the association with insects, and the exposure of social interaction as a force of habit. But this interaction is also emblematic of John's failure to develop his interactions with people in London beyond a painful form of behaviourism. This failure to interact indicates the disparity between John's desire to adopt an easy form of cosmopolitanism and his actual 'behaviourist' interactions. An idealised disdain for 'mere living' is what attracts John to Henry James (*Y* 67), as well as James's purported ability to 'show one how to rise above mere nationality' (*Y* 64). John wishes to be a cosmopolitan (like

James) by rising above mere nationality, but this cosmopolitan ideal relies on two oppositions: the cosmopolitan and the national, which rests on a distinction between cosmopolitan life and 'mere living'. Coetzee's kynical treatment of John undermines his ideological rejection of nationalism and attempt to embrace cosmopolitanism. John's efforts to accept one orientation ('cosmopolitan life') and reject the other ('nationality') are continually thwarted by his day-to-day travails in 'mere living'. 'Mere living' disrupts 'cosmopolitan life', even as its depiction in *Youth* disrupts the reader's easy assumptions about cosmopolitan ideals.

If Coetzee questions a cosmopolitanism primarily focused on national identity, he also disrupts the hospitality at the heart of Kantian and Derridean cosmopolitanism in his treatment of 'mere care'. The concern of Paul Rayment in *Slow Man* is that he will become 'an object of mere nursing, mere care', when his nurse, Marijana, responds to his declaration of love with irritation after he loses his leg in a car accident (*SM* 172). Paul, Elizabeth Costello suggests, might be better off setting his sights lower than 'loving care', settling for 'mere good nursing' (*SM* 263). Here, again, the mere is associated with enjoyment, but, like the Magistrate, 'mere' contentment is insufficient for Paul; he desires the superlative and the hyperbolic. Costello reinstates the sufficiency of the 'mere', since he needs to lower his excessive expectations to 'mere living'. 'Mere living' should not be confused with Giorgio Agamben's notion of 'bare life', with its hyperbolic association to the Holocaust and the Musulman. Instead, 'mere living' is litotic and bathetic in advocating manageable expectations. Neither does it aspire to the unconditionality of Derridean hospitality, since it is about moderating the *desire* for absolute hospitality.

We anticipate Paul's refusal to accept 'mere living' in the very moment of accident that propels us into the novel. When he hits the road, the air 'goes out of him in a whoosh'. Later this leads to incomprehension: 'Could a mere gasp be interpreted as a

last thought, a last word?' (*SM* 83). The 'mere' inflects Paul's pathos with bathos. Paul

dismisses the gasp because this somehow seems too bathetic for something as important

as a last thought or word. But the narrative's bathetic treatment of this insight

foregrounds a dialectic, in which litotic 'mere gasps' oppose depths of significance or

heights of ideality. If the concern of Coetzee's narrators is manifestly to get beneath the

surface of things, or to understand the overarching ideals by which they might make

sense of their lives, these things are obdurately 'merely' manifest.

Coetzee's engagement with 'mere living' and 'mere action' moderates a 'bare'

equivalent. But we find living and action at work in verb form when we consider the

adverb 'merely'. The darkness that, for Magda, 'does not signify but merely is', when

she 'deals in signs merely', is as difficult to identify and as pitiless as the sky, which 'is

merely clear, the earth merely dry, the rocks merely hard. What purgatory to live in this

insentient universe where everything but me is merely itself' (*IHC* 10; 29; 73). Magda's

description of her world's ontological obduracy becomes more politically inflected in

Waiting for the Barbarians when Colonel Joll asks the Magistrate to account for the

wooden slips found in his rooms. Before he pretends to interpret them as a series of

missives for the barbarians in the novel, the Magistrate wonders whether the signs on

the slips have a more abstract representational significance or whether the circle 'merely

stands for circle' (*WB* 121). But an ontological obduracy of things will prove, time after

time, sufficient in itself. K, learning to love idleness on the Visagie farm, lies all

afternoon staring at the corrugations in the roof-iron, but his mind 'would not wander

[...] the rust was merely rust' (*LTMK* 115). 'Some of us', Susan Barton meditates, 'are

not written, but merely are' (*F* 143). In a narrative that plays with authorship and

authorial life as overtly as *Foe*, Susan Barton's words play with her own status as a

fictional character, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, with the pretentions of

the author (Foe and herself included) to claim to have 'written' a character such as

Friday. The narratological unease with authority occurs again in *Age of Iron* when Mrs Curren wonders whether Vercueil chose her house, 'merely' because it was the one without a dog, which would undermine her assumption that he has an angelic purpose (*AI* 12). Lucy, for David Lurie, is 'merely a transient' compared to Ettinger with his more 'essential' link to the soil. Yet Lucy's 'mere transiency' is more grounded in the realities of her situation than Ettinger's 'essential' adherence to a tradition of white land ownership in South Africa. Lucy, we may recall from our discussion in our Introduction, is all the more kynically cosmopolitan for being able to give up her adherence to traditions of ownership, her ceding of property over to Petrus. This identification of people as 'merely' occupying a position stretches back to *Dusklands*. Eugene Dawn's supervisor, the coffee-drinking Coetzee, suggests that Dawn revise the tone of his proposals to include stylistic genuflexions that indicate he is 'merely a functionary', much as Maximov does (*Du* 2). Elizabeth Costello notes that Paul Rayment's anger about Drago's photographic forgery is out of proportion to his claim to be 'merely guarding [the photos] for the sake of the nation's history' when 'Drago is part of that history too' (*SM* 220). The ideological claim to a 'mere' guardianship of history, like the claim to a 'mere' guardianship of the land or the state, exploits a bathetic relationship with the object (historical, terrestrial, bureaucratic) to disavow self-interest. Marking this 'mere' permits us to see this self-interest.

Again we may find a kynical cosmopolitanism at work, since 'merely' also strips the character's function of its allegorical power. Shorn of its allegorical significance, the character no longer functions within Benedict Anderson's imaginary community, since the rhetoric Coetzee uses to write about these characters exposes the allegory of nationhood (and stoic cosmopolitanism) to be a narrative conceit.[42] Jacobus Coetzee's

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[42] According to Anderson, the nation 'is an imagined political community […] it is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined*

death is 'merely a winter story [...] A world without me is inconceivable' (*Du* 107).[43]
The Magistrate, sceptical of his efforts to wait for a sign, decides that 'the space about
us here is merely space, no meaner or grander than the space above the shacks and
tenements and temples and offices of the capital. Space is space, life is life, everywhere
the same' (*WB* 17). The Medical Officer, eager to understand Michael K, tries to
convince himself, via his call to an imagined fleeing K: 'Your stay in the camp was
merely an allegory, if you know the word' (*LTMK* 166). But Susan Barton advises
Friday that they will never make their fortunes 'by being merely what we are, or were'
(*F* 82). Mrs Curren would like to photograph Vercueil for her daughter, but thinks he
might come out as 'merely a bad spot on the emulsion'; his allegorical meaning will fail
to be communicated (*AI* 177). Allegorical meaning is communicated when the 'joy
breaking like a dawn' Dostoevski experiences is eclipsed, 'not merely' by clouds
crossing 'this new, radiant sky' but by 'another sun [...] a shadow sun, an anti-sun
sliding across its face' (*MP* 68). Coetzee's Dostoevski, like the historical Dostoevsky,
has premonitions of his epileptic fits. But these premonitions are not allegorical. Rather,
they are somatic effects of the fits, the immediate evidence of life without the protection
of convention. This is why Dostoevski must employ a stoic-like 'modesty' in managing
'the shame of the fit' (*MP* 68). Before the impulses of his body, he can only 'manage
the episode as best he can' (*MP* 68). David Lurie presumes that Lucy wishes to occlude
connotation by sealing off the memory of 'that day', the day they are attacked, 'so that
one day she may be able to say, "The day we were robbed", and think of it merely as the
day when we were robbed' (*D* 141). What he eventually realises is that she can never
seal off the day; its effects are on her body, as they are on his. Lurie's failure to think

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Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism [1983] (London and New York:
Verso, 1991), 6.

[43] Here, the implicit reference is to Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale*, where 'a sad tale's best for winter'.
Shakespeare's play also links to 'The Vietnam Project', since both involve a jealous husband who brings
about his son's death.

through to 'the plain sense of things' is not a failure of imagination as Costello might understand it; if anything, 'thinking through things' produces an all-too-excitable imagination. It dismisses what is on the surface, the facticity of the crime, rape, and pregnancy, to infer what these things *mean*, without realising that they do not need to mean in order to be real.

Where 'mere' functions as an ironic marker of lack, indicating that which is conspicuously absent in the object it describes, 'merely' is the means by which description is reduced or raised to an obdurate quiddity, resistant to further explication. 'Mere' and 'merely' share this ambivalence about reduction, as might be expected from an oeuvre in which kenotic abnegation, the evacuation and humiliation of the self, plays such an important role. However, we consider these permutations of 'mere' and 'merely' less as a consequence of the traditional kenotic reading of Coetzee's authorial abnegation, and more as an effect of his 'austere clarity of style' (*D* Cover).

Coetzee's style, as Patrick Hayes has argued, has an important role to play in our understanding of his 'distinctive approach to the politics of writing'.[44] By exploiting the tension between the serious and the comic, inherited from Beckett,[45] Coetzee 'tries to conceive of writing instead as a type of serious, or to use the term he borrows from Joyce, "jocoserious" play with the rules and boundaries that govern political discourse'.[46] To identify how Coetzee thickens relations between literature, politics and the novel genre, Hayes reads Coetzee's relationship to the history of the novel. Here, Beckett's deadlock over *The Unnamable* becomes Coetzee's starting point; the central question of Hayes's book is one posed by Coetzee himself: 'Anti-illusionism is, I suspect, only a marking of time, a phase of recuperation, in the history of the novel. The

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[44] Hayes, *J.M. Coetzee and the Novel*, 2.
[45] Coetzee responds to David Attwell's question about Beckett's influence, and its relation to Coetzee's stylistic analysis of Beckett's novels, that his stylistic work on Beckett was a conscious attempt to 'get closer to a secret, a secret of Beckett's that I wanted to make my own' (*DP* 25).
[46] Hayes, *J.M. Coetzee and the Novel*, 3.

question is, what next?' (*DP* 27). Rather than identify Beckett's anti-illusionism as the terminus for the novel (the ontological consequence of continued efforts to 'uncover' the self that writes), Coetzee takes Beckett's *Three Novels* as a moment in the novel's history, one method among many. It is a Hegelian response to the impasse wrought by the decomposition of subjectivity in the Kantian Critique: the marking of any ontological examination as bound to the context in which it appears. But how is this continuing history of style related to 'mere rhetoric'? What, indeed, is style's relationship with rhetoric? These questions turn on a writer's 'style' becoming recognisable through the repetition of certain rhetorical devices. As readers, we are habituated to a particular writer's habits of writing or 'tics'.[47] A writer is most obviously kynical when these habits are used to interrogate aesthetic assumptions about their work, and most obviously a kynical cosmopolitan when this challenge to aesthetic assumptions correlates with a challenge to political complacency. Rather than plumb the 'depths' of this political complacency, Coetzee, as a kynical cosmopolitan, highlights its reliance on rhetorical 'surfaces', which he will juxtapose with writerly style.

Coetzee defines rhetoric as 'the discipline that investigates and describes accommodations between form and meaning in the practice of artful speech' (*DP* 149). In speaking about his 'wrong turning' towards statistical and generative stylistics, Coetzee notes that 'Beckett's prose, which is highly rhetorical in its own way, lent itself to formal analysis' (*DP* 23). By this, we might infer, without leaping too far ahead of ourselves, that rhetoric, for Coetzee, is the codified study of style, and that the study of style, in a formal sense, may draw on the conventions of rhetoric.

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[47] Coetzee refers to Beckett's prose as the product of 'a central nervous flexion which causes the tics we see on the verbal surface'. If 'mere' is similarly a 'tic' for Coetzee, it also shows how problematic any search for the 'central nervous flexion' may prove to be. J.M. Coetzee, *The English Fiction of Samuel Beckett*, 78.

Diary of a Bad Year

JC's tautological expression, 'mere rhetoric ("mere" rhetoric)', at the end of *Diary of a Bad Year*, serves as an interesting example of Coetzee's 'editorial metalanguage' in dealing with the issue of rhetoric and style.[48] The context of this quote is JC's discussion of Ivan's suicide speech from Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. Of the possible reasons that JC invokes for not agreeing with Ivan's logic, the idea that it might be 'mere rhetoric' is the only one to be accorded a parenthetic skeptical query: 'even as one asks whether it is not mere rhetoric ("mere" rhetoric) that one is reading'. As with Coetzee's reference to 'success' mentioned earlier, the quotation marks indicate Coetzee's skepticism. However, the overt marking of the 'mere' overemphasises the irony, since we are already questioning the integrity of the 'mere' as a synonym for 'only', 'simply' or 'just'. Given the inflections the word 'mere' receives throughout Coetzee's oeuvre, we can induce that the scare quotes are themselves markers of an irony already implicit in the 'mere', which JC feels he must indicate with a heavy hand (through repetition and punctuation), for fear that his own rhetoric will be dismissed as Ivan's might be, as 'mere'. JC 'shows' his hand, in this instance, to make his opinions 'merely what they are'. We might wonder about the ideology at work in this revelation. Either these are still 'opinions' and share the rhetorical pretensions of the 'strong opinions' or he must mark his irony in order to speak in his own voice. But, irrespective of his ideals, it appears that this example introduces, in the final pages of the book, a particular rhetorical device that might recursively expand our understanding of Coetzee's rhetorical treatment of some of the themes raised through litotes and bathos. Is this 'merely' the use of understatement to affirm a positive statement ironically? The

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[48] Coetzee glosses this expression in 'Samuel Beckett and the Temptations of Style', as 'a level of language at which one talks about the language of fiction. It is the language not of *cogito ergo sum* but of *cogitate ergo est*: the speaking "I" and its speech are felt not securely as subject but as object among other objects' (*DP* 44).

rendering of the statement both 'apparent' and 'self-evident' may be undercut by the irony with which it is presented (a stylistic function), but it is also autophagic; it is a style that eats itself. Both a statement about rhetoric and the performance of that rhetoric, the phrase is 'apparently' ironic about the marginal role accorded to rhetoric in communicating ideas, while also manifesting a 'self-evident' argument that Ivan's response maintains its affect, despite its argumentative and stylistic failings: the complexity leads Coetzee's stylistic irony to eat itself. In early Coetzee, we might find this affect maintained in the authority of the suffering body, as detailed by Sam Durrant.[49] In these later, etiolated works, it is confined to the *parrhesic* authority of the writer as sage, which is, itself, the object of ironic ridicule. Thus the binary opposition between the Tolstoyan 'speaking in one's own person', exemplified (for JC) by Harold Pinter, and the Dostoevskian 'ironic authorial self-dramatisation', exemplified by JC himself, becomes difficult to maintain.

In addressing the problems with this binary opposition, Julian Murphet questions whether we are to understand JC's utterances as a confessional dialectic, the univocal and direct *parrhesia* of an authorial ideology, or the opinions of an intradiegetic mouthpiece constructed for the ends of ironic authorial self-dramatisation.[50] Noting Coetzee's preferential treatment of Dostoevsky over Tolstoy (and Coetzee's association of the former with dialogic irony and the latter with 'strong opinions'), Murphet observes that the 'whole, elaborate but brittle formal apparatus of the novel stands as a working allegory of how the *parrhesic*, Tolstoyan impulse is to be outflanked by a Dostevskian polyglossia and irony today – not immanently, but extrinsically'.[51] Despite the best efforts of Elizabeth Costello and JC to 'short-circuit self-doubt and self-scrutiny in the name of an autonomous truth' – Murphet notes Costello's and JC's shared insight

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[49] Sam Durrant, 'J.M. Coetzee's Inconsolable Works of Mourning', *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (1999): 430-63.
[50] Murphet, '*Diary of a Bad Year*', 73.
[51] Ibid, 76.

that 'life is too short' for plotting out stories – they are inevitably the straw (wo)men of Coetzee's ironic challenge to authority as such.[52] Murphet is right to see this aspect of *Diary* as subordinated to the erotic truth of JC's relationship with Anya (whose correlative we might find in Costello's act of fellatio in 'The Humanities in Africa'). Where his consideration of JC and Costello leads us, however, is to the proximity of that 'ironic authorial self-dramatisation' to Coetzee himself. This is not to recapitulate Murphet's examination of Dostoevsky's form and Tolstoy's 'fixed ideas' since the tension Murphet outlines between form and ideas is 'felt as artificial and forced […] it separates out into parallel dimensions what ought to be imperfectly amalgamated on the *same* textual plane'.[53] Rather, we should consider the possibility that Coetzee constructs this ironic authorial self-dramatisation to expose a tension between telling the truth and knowing that what one tells is the truth, a tension at the heart of kynical *parrhesia*. We find Coetzee enacting this tension in the process of 'taking offense', highlighted in his work on censorship, *Giving Offense*.

Returning to the essays in *Giving Offense* provides an interesting point of comparison for our discussion of *Diary*. Although we may readily observe the similarities between texts by Coetzee and Costello (*Foe* and *The House on Eccles Street*) and the shared bibliography of Coetzee and JC (*Waiting for the Barbarians* and a collection of essays on censorship), we should also note that this is a selected bibliography. These characters do not share all of Coetzee's works (nor all of his successes). This raises the question: what is the quality in *these* books that establishes the particular kind of self-dramatisation Coetzee intends? If we discard the possibility of personal preference, which merely serves to reinforce the coincidence of author and character, *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Giving Offense* have something in common with *Diary of a Bad Year*, over and above those themes germane to Coetzee's other

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[52] Ibid, 72.
[53] Ibid, 77.

work. All three open, we find, with their privileged, intellectual, focalising characters 'taking offense'.

This requires some justification, since it is endemic to all Coetzee's narratives that his protagonists – intellectual *raznochintsy*, excepting only Michael K – 'take offense' at some point or another, usually because they reach an impasse with their positions within the status quo and cannot continue to justify their intellectual complacency.[54] It is, of course, possible to mark a shift in Coetzee's trajectory as an international writer after *Waiting for the* Barbarians, with the award of the Booker Prize for the *Life and Times of Michael K.* But *Waiting for the Barbarians* also features an intellectual of the sort outlined by Coetzee in the opening chapter of *Giving Offense*.[55] 'Rational, secular intellectuals [read stoic cosmopolitans] are not', Coetzee notes in a subheading titled 'The Intellectual', 'notably quick to take offense' (*GO* 3). He adds:

> When they do take offense, they try to do so programmatically, setting (or believing themselves to set) their own thresholds of response, and allowing themselves (or believing themselves to allow themselves) to respond to triggers only when such thresholds are crossed. (*GO* 3)

Coetzee's kynical jibes (given in parentheses) at a more conventionally cosmopolitan subjective position are made explicitly self-referential when he calls his own explanation of taking offense one of those 'well-developed explanations ("theories") of the emotions' (*GO* 3). Such barbed remarks are often present in analyses of David Lurie's self-justification in his 'service to Eros', the self-pity of Mrs Curren's letter to her daughter and the self-condemnation in Dostoevski's occupation of Pavel's life in St. Petersburg. The difference between the Magistrate, JC and Elizabeth Costello, and

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[54] 'Raznochintsy' is a term Coetzee invokes when referring to himself, in the third person, in the 'Retrospect' of *Doubling the Point*. It designated a class of lower noblemen in the Russian Code of Law, until the category was abolished in the mid-18th century. It subsequently came to refer to non-noble people who, by dint of their education, were excluded from taxable status and who were able to apply for the status of personal distinguished citizenship. Coetzee derives the term, in all probability, from his reading for his Dostoevsky essay, as Dostoevsky occupied this position.

[55] David Attwell shows that the political concerns of the manuscript versions of *Waiting for the Barbarians* shift dramatically to questions of torture and complicity after the political activist Steve Biko was murdered in detention in 1977. David Attwell, 'Writing Revolution: The Manuscript Revisions of J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*', *Life Writing*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2014): 201-216.

Coetzee's other *raznochintsy*, is their starting position. All of Coetzee's protagonists are complacent about the lives they lead to some degree or another (Lurie's solution to 'the problem of sex' is but the most striking example), but the Magistrate, JC and Elizabeth Costello are the only characters who begin as representatives of some political or cultural authority.[56] They are, in fact, the immediate authority. Here, the question of Colonel Joll emerges, and of the Magistrate's subordination to Joll. But in the opening pages of the novel, this relationship is necessarily one of an ostensible equality: Joll needs the support of the Magistrate (the local authority) and the Magistrate must support Joll (the representative of the Empire). 'Taking offense' is not then strictly a matter of their 'positions of subordination or weakness' (*GO* 3). Rather it is 'the belief in fair play (that is, the belief that under the rules of fair play they [the intellectuals] win more often than they lose) that constitutes one of their more deeply entrenched values and also encourages sympathy for the underdog' (*GO* 3). In order to have 'sympathy for the underdog', it is necessary to be 'tolerant' of the underdog's 'taking offense', though this tolerance may be 'without empathetic participation in the feeling of outrage, and perhaps even privately deeming outrage in itself to be backward' (*GO* 4). This tolerance, 'either deeply civilized or complacent, hypocritical, and patronizing', is only possible for the intellectual when 'complacent, and yet not complacent', in a position of relative authority, or, in other words, without anxiety (*GO* 4). Coetzee injects into this narrative of the complacent intellectual a confessional first person: 'I myself am (and am also, I would hope, to a degree not) an intellectual of this kind' (*GO* 5). At risk of misrecognizing a purely rhetorical gesture of Coetzee's academic writing in his hybrid academic/creative writing (*Elizabeth Costello* and *Diary of a Bad Year*), this

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[56] Many of Coetzee's principal characters start as subordinate to some immediate authority or law: Eugene Dawn to Coetzee; Jacobus Coetzee to the Cape Authority; Magda to her father; Michael K. to the Apartheid authorities; Susan Barton to Cruso; Mrs Curren to her cancer; Dostoevski to his conditions of exile; David Lurie to his marginal position in Communication Studies; Paul Rayment to his disability; Simon to his refugee status. The autobiographical fictions are excluded because they stage Coetzee's own feelings of exclusion from South African society, in a dialectical opposition to the complacent authority enjoyed by the Magistrate, Elizabeth Costello and JC at the beginning of their respective novels.

confessional skepsis seems to justify a reading of an iterative confessional narrative in Coetzee's creative work, Murphet's identification of a play between 'parrhesia' (speaking in one's own person) and 'opinion', and the possibility of using the iterative confessional form to justify a dialectical reading of the shift from *parrhesia* to opinion in its content. For if, in his critical work on censorship, Coetzee is equivocating about being a complacent intellectual – an equivocation that echoes his treatment of the intellectual complacency of the Magistrate, and foreshadows the critical responses by Costello's interlocutors in *Elizabeth Costello* and Alan and Anya in *Diary of a Bad Year* – at what point are we meant to take him 'seriously', if 'seriously' is how we are 'meant' to take him? Perhaps aesthetic questions are not meant to be taken 'seriously' at all. Perhaps they are meant to be taken *kynically*, that is to say, with a greater sense of the surface of things.

Carrol Clarkson questions what Coetzee's 'seriousness might consist in' if, following Coetzee's statement in *Giving Offense*, 'seriousness is, for a certain kind of artist, an imperative uniting the aesthetic and the ethical'.[57] While this pursuit proves productive and intellectually rewarding, it maintains a fidelity to reading Coetzee as such an artist. However, as Coetzee goes on to write, seriousness 'is also deconstructible as a feature of the ideology of so-called high art and the drive to power of the high artists'. Coetzee is, at this point in *Giving Offense*, considering a rebuttal to Catherine McKinnon's arguments on pornography by proposing a hypothetical male writer-pornographer, whose pornographic attempt to write an account of power and desire 'does not', as with Coetzee's McKinnon, 'close the book on desire (by defining its genesis and its ends), but on the contrary sees (but also does not see), in its own desire to know its desire, that which it can never know about itself'. Would the only defense from 'delegitimisation', Coetzee's male writer-pornographer asks, 'be its

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[57] Clarkson, *Countervoices*, 4.

seriousness?' Coetzee's consideration of this seriousness – within the discourse of a hypothetical male writer-pornographer able, like David Lurie, to rationalise his desire and rationalise with his desire – engages obliquely with the problems inherent in counterpointing *parrhesia* to irony. *Parrhesia* seeks to 'short-circuit' self-doubt by avowing an autonomous truth. Ironic resignation equivocates about truth in order to present argument as a form of rhetoric. Coetzee's unstated argument is that if an art is only legitimated through its seriousness, and that seriousness is always already predetermined by an ideology complicit with the notion of high art, texts that manifest their truths in a manner too humorous, popular or obvious to receive the defense of seriousness are difficult to defend. This might be the reason that, in all the studies of Coetzee, only a handful attempt to move their discussion from irony to humour, despite the deeply offensive humour that runs through Coetzee's parody of self-satisfaction in his principal characters. Rather than follow the line of ethical aesthetics that Coetzee's novels all-too-willingly provide their readers, or reconsider the dialectic implicit in Coetzee's treatment of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, we will consider the offensive truth that Costello and JC are constantly battling – that the seriousness with which they 'take offence' is itself subject to humorous consequences, raising the challenging kynical possibility that the truth is only possible when the *parrhesist* is open to rhetorical ridicule.

The clearest example of the tension between rhetoric ridicule and the *parrhesist* occurs in JC's essay 'On Harold Pinter'. Harold Pinter, too ill to travel to Stockholm to accept his Nobel Prize, 'makes what can fairly be called a savage attack on Tony Blair for his part in the war in Iraq'. JC's prognosis for this attack is negative:

> When one [by which he means the artist] speaks in one's own person – that is, not through one's art – to denounce some politician or other, using the rhetoric of the agora, one embarks on a contest which one is likely to lose because it takes place on ground where one's opponent is far more practised and adept. (*DBY* 127)

Speaking in one's own person is *parrhesia*, truth-telling: a stance antithetical to the rhetorical third person conjectural 'one' that JC uses. But such truth-telling is still a form of rhetoric: the rhetoric of the agora. The alternative is to speak through one's art; to speak in one's own person is specifically not to speak through one's art. The ideal would be to speak one's opinions through one's art, yet with regard for one's own person. Apparently this is impossible, or, at least, 'a contest which one is likely to lose'. However, Pinter does it anyway, which earns him JC's respect:

> So it takes some gumption to speak as Pinter has spoken. Who knows, perhaps Pinter sees quite clearly that he will be slickly refuted, disparaged, even ridiculed. Despite which he fires the first shot and steels himself for the reply. What he has done may be foolhardy but it is not cowardly. And there come times when the outrage and the shame are so great that all calculation, all prudence, is overwhelmed and one must act, that is to say, speak. (*DBY* 127)

At the point when calculation is overwhelmed by outrage and shame, even the artist must go beyond the rhetoric of 'one's own person', and speak, literally, as themselves. But, although this comes about through overwhelming outrage and shame, it is Pinter's 'gumption' that leads Pinter to speak 'as Pinter has spoken'. Pinter is perhaps commonsensical enough to 'see quite clearly that he will be slickly refuted'. But Pinter observes that sometimes a writer must act to 'reveal' the truth:

> When we look into a mirror we think the image that confronts us is accurate. But move a millimetre and the image changes. We are actually looking at a never-ending range of reflections. But sometimes a writer has to smash the mirror – for it is on the other side of that mirror that the truth stares at us.[58]

It is something like this act of smashing the mirror that concerns JC, since on the page facing his analysis of Harold Pinter he admits that the writer is 'because of his vocation as much interested in the liar and the psychology of the lie as in the truth' (*DBY* 126). The reflections are at least as interesting as the truth 'on the other side', and 'smashing

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[58] Harold Pinter, 'Art, Truth & Politics', *Nobel.Org.* Accessed: 29 October 2012.
http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2005/pinter-lecture-e.html

the mirror' may be tantamount to giving up the rhetorical advantage the writer has over political directness.

Coetzee apparently shares JC's attitude, since they both publish a work titled *Giving Offense* and, in Coetzee's version at least, he acknowledges the inherent theatricality of this play of mirrors when he refers to Erasmus's Folly:

> Life [...] is theater: we each have lines to say and a part to play. One kind of actor, recognizing that he is in a play, will go on playing nevertheless; another kind of actor, shocked to find he is participating in an illusion, will try to step off the stage and out of the play. The second actor is mistaken. For there is nothing outside the theater, no alternative life one can join instead. The show is, so to speak, the only show in town. All one can do is go on playing one's part, though perhaps with a new awareness, a comic awareness. (*GO* 15)

Coetzee's concern with 'illusionism' (Coetzee's alternative word for the formal mode of 'realism') is evident as early as his 1974 essay on Nabokov. Is it a response to Beckett's 'anti-illusionism', the 'what comes next' in the history of the novel? In the Nabokov essay, Coetzee juxtaposes the 'radicalism' of *Pale Fire*, which he finds 'half-hearted by the standards of such a radically impoverished aesthetic as Beckett expresses' in *Three Dialogues*.[59] But he is also quick to note that 'we will not reach the Kernel of the subject by looking behind the mirror. If the artist has left anything behind ("inside") the mirror, it is likely to be a joke. Eystein's nutshell is a joke on Realism. So is Botkin's madness'.[60] Simply breaking the mirror cannot produce any ultimate meaning. This concern perhaps explains in part Coetzee's reluctance to submit to the psychologising analysis of the interview. In a 2001 interview with Peter Sacks, Coetzee responds to a question about his literary influences by noting that 'it does one no practical good as a writer to scrutinise' the motivation to write.[61] This is in harmony with other statements by Coetzee on resisting the urge to explicate his work for his audience. While Coetzee

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[59] Coetzee, '*Pale Fire*', 5.
[60] Ibid, 3.
[61] Coetzee, 'JM Coetzee Talks to Peter Sacks', *Lannan Podcasts*. Accessed: 30 November 2012.
http://podcast.lannan.org/2010/06/28/j-m-coetzee-with-peter-sacks-conversation-8-november-2001-video/

uses this position to deflect efforts to read his 'literary paternity' (to use an expression from his 1993 'Homage'), it is internally consistent with his awareness of his own impulse to 'uncover' concealed meanings.[62]

Coetzee's conflicted language of kernels and surfaces has significance for the fictional performance of writing a collection of essays, or 'self-as-matter', in *Diary*, but it also raises pertinent questions on positioning *Diary* as a South African or Australian novel. The positions of place and self are necessarily interrelated. Coetzee is a kynical cosmopolitan, because he uses this interrelation to create a non-sublative dialectic between self and place. The self-as-South African (or Australian) finds its antithesis in the self-as-matter. We find this regional tension mixed with the tension over the self, in the Sacks interview, where he responds to a question about the place in his work of a South African 'core' by saying, 'The core of South Africa for me belongs to my childhood. I have never acculturated elsewhere'. Apparently, this resolves the tension, since his cosmopolitanism is rooted and nostalgic of a younger self (written about in *Boyhood*). But we must recall a criticism he makes about Nabokov: 'he balked at facing the nature of his loss [the reality that took Russia away from him] in its historical fullness' (*DP* 28). The difference he implicitly marks between himself and Nabokov is not the sentimentality with which they think of their childhoods, but the *unflinchingness* with which they critique that childhood. When Sacks pushes the question 'beyond questions of mere landscape', Coetzee interrupts him with the enigmatic phrase 'there's no mere landscape'.[63] This piques Sacks's interest; he asks what Coetzee means and Coetzee replies: 'there is no landscape that is mere landscape when we are talking about landscape as a formative influence', which he explains as 'a power of attachment to

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[62] In his interview with David Attwell preceding the 'Popular Culture' section of *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee notes that he is 'suspicious' of a 'certain relentless suspiciousness of appearances', because he notes a naïveté in believing that simply tearing off the clothes will produce a naked body and a laziness (as the critical practice becomes orthodoxy) in only choosing 'clothed subjects' (*DP* 106).

[63] Coetzee, 'JM Coetzee Talks to Peter Sacks'.

particular regions or particular places'.[64] This negation of Sacks's 'mere' lends authorial justification to Elleke Boehmer's argument that Coetzee's 'Australian novels' (i.e. those novels written after his emigration to Australia) indicate a sensitivity to Australian realism, as a national literary mode, and a preoccupation with describing an Australian reality.[65] Written in Australia, set in Australia and related to the political business of Australia, *Diary* should be considered an Australian novel, despite having, at its 'core', a South African novelist-émigré who, when he makes critical remarks about pending security regulations, is told 'if I didn't like Australia [I] should go back to where I came from, or, if I preferred Zimbabwe, to Zimbabwe' (*DBY* 172). While this tension about the 'Australian-ness' of Coetzee's Australian fiction is a thought-provoking line of enquiry, it evokes the national-cosmopolitan binary that this thesis is concerned to skew. After all, the negative conditional hospitality of the letter writer (i.e. 'If I didn't like Australia') arises in response to his words about state-sponsored terrorism in 1970s South Africa. The more things change, JC seems to argue, the more they stay the same.

This cliché needs to be reinvigorated: both clauses are necessary to understand the relationship between 'cores' and 'surfaces' at work in *Diary of a Bad Year*. Or, to counter Pinter's analogy, breaking the mirror might be necessary, but the mirror might also be the only thing standing between you and nothing. Both the appearance of difference and the structural similarity of the situations have their place in the analysis. JC renders as follows the justification *Realpolitik* gives to its 'real': 'If it happened that the moral law was sometimes broken, that was unfortunate, but rulers were merely human' (*DBY* 17). The pragmatics of politics require that we allow that it is flawed, that it aspires to ideals but falls flat in its realization of these ideals because people are 'merely human'. But the human flaw itself is coded into the system of justification, so

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Elleke Boehmer, 'J.M. Coetzee's Australian Realism', *Postcolonial Poetics: Genre and Form*, eds. Patrick Crowley and Jane Hiddleston (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011).

that failing politicians can trot out cynical corruptions of a Beckettian 'fail again, fail better'. JC's irony shows that 'merely' being human allows politicians to justify the non-existence of that 'merely' in their expectations and their ideological moorings; their built-in flaws permit them to make suprahuman decisions that treat humans as subhuman. This pattern of thinking is also taken up in JC's 'softer' opinions about numbers: 'Is stealing a million dollars worse than stealing one dollar? What if that one dollar is the widow's mite? Questions like these are not merely scholastic. They must exercise the minds of judges every day' (*DBY* 204). Again, Coetzee deploys a negative 'merely' to emphasise the importance of thinking these questions in a way that is not scholastic and to imply that they are usually treated as only scholastic. The allusion to the widow's mite − a term translated into the King James Version to designate the lowest contemporary unit of currency (the 'mite') − is biblical: the widow who gives two mites because she cannot afford more is more likely to enter the Kingdom of Heaven than the rich man who, though he gives more, still gives a smaller percentage of his total wealth. If Jesus Christ relativises the worth of money to what people need and can afford, JC, his acronymic heir, extends this result to establish the punishments for theft and murder.

> Six million deaths are not the same as − do not 'add up to', in a certain sense do not 'exceed' − one death ('merely' one death); nevertheless, what does it mean − what *exactly* does it mean − to say that six million deaths are, in ensemble, worse than one death? It is not a paralysis of the faculty of reason that leaves us staring helplessly at the question. It is the question itself that is at fault. (*DBY* 206)

This is the first instance where JC uses a parenthetic 'mere' to make an ironic comment on the term repeated (the second is '"mere" rhetoric'). It is reminiscent of arguments posed by Sam Durrant and Michael Rothberg in their respective introductions to *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning* (2004) and *Multidirectional Memory*

(2009).[66] Both Durrant and Rothberg stress the importance of not comparing the numbers in acts of atrocity and genocide, whether it is the Holocaust or the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Yet the problem for JC is not the pathology of reason in response to the question, but the question itself. Here, the unlikely figure of Eichmann arises: Eichmann, made to stand in for 'the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust', is condemned both to death and desecration. But if the automatic response is 'not enough', JC interestingly turns this 'not enough' on its head to show that any effort to assert equivalence or inadequacy has already fallen into what Rothberg calls 'the zero sum game'. Ultimately, this is Abraham Stern's mistake in *The Lives of Animals* and *Elizabeth Costello*: when Stern refuses to attend the banquet held in Costello's honour as a protest about her use of the Holocaust 'in a cheap way' the gesture communicates the protest in a meaningful way (*EC* 94). However, his attempt to reason this in his letter, while entirely reasonable, falls into the trap of negotiating the deaths of 'the murdered Jews of Europe' against the deaths of animals, of speaking about 'merely' the deaths of animals (*EC* 94). It is impossible for Eichmann's death to 'respond' to the deaths of the Jews of Europe not because reason is rendered pathological before the question, but because the question itself involves a pathological desire for a response.

The banality of Eichmann, according to Hannah Arendt, was the banality of a bureaucrat: his idiocies undermined the image of a monster painted by the prosecution.[67] This insight makes a retrospective examination of JC's statements about the Howard government telling: 'The American administration has raised vengefulness to an infernal level, whereas the meanness of the Australians is as yet merely petty' (*DBY* 44). 'Merely' petty in comparison to the Americans or South Africans, not even

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[66] Samuel Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison* (Albany: SUNY P, 2003); Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in an Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009).

[67] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* [1963], intro. Amos Elon (New York: Penguin, 2006).

the grand gesture of suicide can redeem the Australians from their 'dishonour lite': a faux term indicating a faux state, according to JC, as the state is absolute – 'if one is in dishonour one is in dishonour' (*DBY* 43). Again we reach an impasse in the rhetoric. Degrees of difference *should be* acceptable but are not. Any attempt at comparison negates the exceptionality of the particular atrocity. Any attempt to compensate is either not enough or too much. In this respect, the only strategy writing has left is a rhetorical strategy. The meanness of the Australians is both apparently, and insufficiently, petty. One death is both apparently, and insufficiently, one death. Questions of judicious numbers are neither apparently nor insufficiently scholastic, but are often treated as such. JC's logic, if it is a logic, is a logic that requires a patient hand to unbind it from its rhetorical casing. But this unbinding may have the same result as burying X in the earth:

> If X had been buried in the earth, the parts of 'his' body that had lived most intensely, that were most 'he', would have rotted away, while 'his' teeth, which might have felt to have merely been in his care and custody, would have survived long into the future. (*DBY* 61)

The ideas may survive long into the future but the cost would be the parts that live most intensely; the parts that cry 'in spite of myself'.

JC's final 'Softer Opinion' is on Dostoevsky. In response to the rhetorical question, 'So why does Ivan [Karamazov] make me cry in spite of myself?', JC decides that 'the answer has nothing to do with ethics or politics, everything to do with rhetoric' (*DBY* 224-5). It is not Ivan's reasoning that 'sweeps' JC along, but the 'tones of anguish' in his 'voice' (*DBY* 225). While this gives rise to a number of objections, these are simply given as enumerations of exception, formulated by the repetition of 'even as', which give way in the midst of it all to 'the space enough to think too, *Glory be! At last I see it before me, the battle pitched on the highest ground!*' (*DBY* 225). That Ivan's speech might be 'mere rhetoric' is the only objection to be queried, in parenthetic, skeptical repetition in inverted commas.

The word 'mere' is deployed ten times and the word 'merely' five in *Diary of a Bad Year*. While it would be erroneous to claim that the novel (or even the essays that form part of the novel) may be explained through the exegesis of these instances, they do provide interesting points of reference to an argument about Coetzee's rhetoric, and how it interacts with the generic purpose of the essay to write the self-as-matter. Anya quips, in response to a discussion with JC about the possibility that she might be included in his opinions, 'if you are going to use me, remember, you owe me an appearance fee', a remark she considers 'pretty smart […] for a mere Segretaria' (*DBY* 56; 57). But if Anya is deploying the 'mere' to a positive ironic effect in an interpersonal relationship, the 'mere' can also be quite devastating to any conventional sense of the self as a political entity. In considering the problem of national shame, JC compares political action to 'mere symbolic actions […] burning the flag, pronouncing aloud the words "I abhor the leaders of my country and dissociate myself from them"' (*DBY* 40). In comparing human reason to 'virus thinking', the pure drive or instinct to multiply, replicate and take over more host organisms, JC muses that reason 'has held the upper hand a mere instant in evolutionary time' (*DBY* 71). 'In the case of Guantanamo Bay', he notes, 'it is intended that when prisoners at last emerge from incarceration they will be mere shells of me' (*DBY* 113). In the essay on Tony Blair, placed prior to that on Harold Pinter, JC wonders whether 'the mere writer (to speak just of the writer)' will be able to satisfy the 'hunger (a mild hunger, it must be admitted)' felt by 'ordinary people [...] tired of hearing from their rulers [...] declarations that are never quite the truth: a little short of the truth, or else a little beside the truth, or else the truth with a spin to it' (*DBY* 126). How can the 'mere writer' satisfy this hunger when his or her grasp of the facts is incomplete, when his or her access to 'the so-called facts' occurs 'via media within the political field of forces, and when, half the time, he [or she] is because of his [or her] vocation as much interested in

the liar and the psychology of the lie as in the truth?' (*DBY* 126). These expressions of 'mereness' do not exceed their categories, as does Anya's 'mere Segretaria'. Rather, they suggest that the self-as-matter cannot exceed these categories when they are treated as political entities. Here, the 'mere' becomes the marker of shame. Given that one of the central concerns of kynicism was the workings of shamelessness (as discussed in the opening to this chapter), we need to address this relationship between 'mere' and 'shame'. Timothy Bewes, in *The Event of Postcolonial Shame*, provides one account for Coetzee's 'shame' in *Diary of a Bad Year*: that it comes from his position as a 'mere' writer who falls into the gap between his ethical claims and his actual writing.

Bewes identifies this gap in Coetzee's commentary on his work as that which subsists 'between the gesture of ethical "disavowal" and the authority that is presupposed and demonstrated in the very capacity to make such a gesture'.[68] Bewes locates this gap in the structural incongruity developed by Coetzee in *Age of Iron*, and in the response to *Age of Iron* Coetzee gives to David Attwell in one of the interviews of *Doubling the Point*:

> What matters is that the contest is staged, that the dead have their say, even those who speak from a totally untenable historical position [...] What is of importance in what I have just said is the phrasing: the phrases *is staged*, *is heard·* not *should be staged*, *should be heard*. There is no ethical imperative that I claim access to. Elizabeth is the one who believes in *should*, who believes in *believes in*. (*DP* 250)

Bewes considers this response to be disingenuous and locates 'shame' in the gap, between disavowing access to ethical imperatives and asserting the authority necessary to make such imperatives, that this disingenuity creates. While it provides a provocative counter-response to the tendency to read the passage as a meta-ethical refusal to pass judgment on the work, we will steer Bewes's reading of the passage away from its function in Bewes's wider project on 'postcolonial shame'. Shame, as Bewes argues, 'is an event of incommensurability: a profound disorientation of the subject by the

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[68] Bewes, *Postcolonial Shame*, 142.

confrontation with an object it cannot comprehend'; even those texts that are explicitly

concerned with shame in theme and form will also carry a second, unnamed, secret

shame, 'as an unspoken, embodied relation to its own actuality as a piece of writing'.[69]

While there is much to be gained from Bewes's fascinating analysis of shame, a

difficult tension emerges in his treatment of Coetzee as JC, when the former is a writer

who is careful to talk about his own treatment of shame by mediating it through the

opinions of JC. Coetzee's openness to this topic does not preclude the existence of an

'unnamed shame' in the act of writing; rather it suggests the possibility that a certain

ludic openness to the inevitability of disavowal is at work in Coetzee's texts.[70]

Moreover, it is a feature of Coetzee's criticism that it always concerns itself with the

point at which the writer reveals an unconscious desire, anxiety or 'shame' at work

when most concerned to unlock unconscious desires, anxieties or shames.[71] This would

suggest a certain 'gap' between the manifestations of shame in Coetzee's work (as

theme and as event) as Bewes reads it and the degree to which Coetzee is already

playing with the voices that articulate this shame and the place where it is 'staged'.[72]

This is evident in Bewes's identification of a conflation in Coetzee's ethical disavowal

of 'saying' and 'staging'. For Bewes reads the line 'what matters is that the contest is

staged, that the dead have their say' as tautologous: 'If all that mattered were that [...]

there would be no reason to stage either the contest or the withholding of a solution –

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[69] Ibid, 3-5.

[70] This manifests in marked use of 'mere' and 'merely', but also in Coetzee's use of parentheses, particularly *Giving Offense*.

[71] Again, Coetzee's essays on censorship are good examples of this: particularly his analysis of D. H. Lawrence's reading of Swift's 'Celia Shits' cycle of poems. It is telling that Bewes only mentions *Giving Offense* as a bibliographical referent in *Diary of a Bad Year*, without referring to the reflexive analysis Coetzee makes of Sartre and shame in that work.

[72] In her review of Attridge's *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, Carrol Clarkson notes that 'staging' is a term Coetzee prefers when talking about the differences between academic prose and the novel. She quotes Coetzee in *Doubling the Point*: 'When a real passion of feeling is let loose in discursive prose, you feel that you are reading the utterances of a madman [...] The novel, on the other hand, allows the reader to *stage* his passion'. Coetzee qtd. Carrol Clarkson, 'Review of *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event*', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol 26, No. 2 (2007), 492.

for the *work* of the novel is the staging, not the saying'.[73] But is the 'contest [being] staged' equivalent to 'the dead having their say' in Coetzee's subordination of two dependent clauses to 'what matters is'? This question also opens up a further inquiry into the stylistic function of dependent clauses in Coetzee's work, but for the moment we will focus on the implications of Bewes's analysis. The possible points of contact between the staging and the saying, the giving voice to the novelist's countervoices, would subordinate saying to staging, poetry to drama. But that also suggests a conflation of the voice with the place of the voice, that the all-too-obvious need to speak from a place means that speaking is inextricably linked to the conditions of that place. This kynical locality has been the declarative mode of much of Coetzee's oral presentations (the subject of his talk 'The Novel Today' and the concern of his 'Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech', but also evoked in the context-driven narrative of Elizabeth Costello's speaking engagements and the catachresis in 'He and His Man'). Coetzee's performances, however, have always also challenged this assumption: there is the possibility of speaking about something other than the place from where he speaks, and the proof is that he is doing just that. It is this split that is observable in the slight slippage of Coetzee's dependent clauses, from 'staging' something to 'saying' something. In the tradition of Foucault's 'stoic mutations of kynic life', Bewes seeks to 'normalise' Coetzee's treatment of shame against the (inverted) ideal of postcolonial shame: the shame postcolonial writers feel in the act of writing. Although Bewes does not distinguish between the shame of writing and the shame of publishing that writing, there is clearly something to his critique of postcolonial writing as a writing thoroughly engaged with, and held captive by, its sense of shame. However, there is a 'minimal difference' in Bewes's engagement with the shame of postcolonial writing in general, and his engagement with Coetzee. The shame of other postcolonial writers is a shame of

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[73] Bewes, *Postcolonial Shame*, 142.

form or of time, but Coetzee's shame is an 'event of shame', which, given the book's title, leads the reader to the conclusion that this is Bewes's real site of contestation. However, if Bewes can note a failure to address structural issues of shame in other writers' thematics of shame, his treatment of Coetzee necessitates an event: the reconstruction of a concealed moment that has been effaced. Bewes's ingenuity in reading an event of shameful occlusion, despite Coetzee's structural and thematic exposure of shame's function, is useful because it identifies the minimal difference between Coetzee's treatment of shame and its treatment by other postcolonial writers. This minimal difference is between the modesty of stoic ideals and the shamelessness of kynic practice. Where other writers seek to obscure a structural shame that reveals itself in their writing, Coetzee exposes the structural elements of shame precisely because they call into question traditional rules of propriety. The 'staging' of shame is not the 'saying' of shame as Bewes attempts to show, but they are connected, since speaking about shame is always intimately linked to acting it out.

We see an example of this slippage from staging to saying in an interview in *Doubling the Point*, which also serves to show a certain kynical engagement with unconcealment, need, diacriticism and shame: 'Let me add, entirely parenthetically, that I, as a person, as a personality, am overwhelmed, that my thinking is thrown into confusion and helplessness, by the fact of suffering in the world, and not only human suffering' (*DP* 248). The content of the phrase extends suffering beyond the human, which Derek Attridge identifies as sympathetic to the themes of both *Disgrace* and Coetzee's Tanner lectures.[74] However, there is something equally important happening on the level of sentence structure.

The modifying sub-clause, 'I, as a person, as a personality', registers the co-existence in the 'I' of a person and a personality. This 'I', both person and personality,

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[74] Attridge, *J.M. Coetzee*, 192.

is overwhelmed by the fact of suffering. The 'overwhelming' quality of 'the fact of suffering' is precisely the response of shame in Bewes's terms; this 'overwhelming' of the person and personality leads to the throwing of his thinking 'into confusion and helplessness'.[75] Thinking gives way to Being, especially when it is exposed to the facticity of 'suffering'. The crucial, dangerous, supplementarity of the 'fact of suffering' is that it is 'not only human suffering'.[76] Before, we may not have realised that we assumed that the adjective, 'human', came before 'suffering' in the phrase, 'the fact of suffering' because 'suffering' is always already 'human suffering' in anthropocentric universalism. After, the subordination of other forms of suffering to 'human' is all the more obvious for being noted in 'mere' supplement to the 'fact of suffering'. This supplementarity also inflects our reading of the whole passage, which, after all, is a supplement that Coetzee 'adds, entirely parenthetically'. The supplement affects our understanding of the double-term 'person-personality', and the parenthetical confession serve to justify misgivings about Bewes's reading of Coetzee's shame.

The effect of the run-on phrases, 'as a person, as a personality', appears at first to be a refinement of the holistic 'person' into the psychological 'personality'. This corresponds to the idea that the 'I', as a personality, feels overwhelmed. However, the 'feeling', though it may develop psychologically, is 'felt' in the body, which requires a broader term than simply the 'personality'. Hence, 'person' is necessary as it describes the experience of the personality within the body: the body in this case being a supplement of the 'person' – that is, the fact of the person is 'not only' the personality of the person. This is entirely congruent with Coetzee's references to the facticity of the

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[75] Bewes reads this passage as a 'a self-evidently autobiographical utterance, spoken in the first person, although framed ("I, as a person, as a personality") in such a way as to make plain Coetzee's doubts about any privileged status accorded to that discourse'. Bewes, *Postcolonial Shame*, 13.

[76] Here, supplement is invoked in the sense that Derrida gives to it in *Of Grammatology*, where the supplement 'is both "a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude", and [making] up for something missing as if there is a void to be filled up: "it is not simply added to positivity of a presence […] its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness"'. Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 48.

body, subsequent work on the body in Coetzee's work by Attwell and Wright, *inter alia*, and the embodied quality of shame as proposed by Bewes. Here we have a classical kynicism that prioritises the functions of the body. There is, however, an additional quality to this phrase that bears thinking about. For Coetzee is, by 1991, not simply a person with a personality, but also a literary personality for whom the person is 'mere' supplement: he has become a 'name'. Moreover, he is a literary personality who will lend his name increasingly in support of causes, while, increasingly, giving voice to the problems associated with literary personalities who unproblematically lend their names to causes. This is the development of a modern kynicism: the manipulation of celebrity status as itself a manifest body, manipulable through a conscious self-parody of stylistic habits and the exposure of that self to the shame of not living up to the expectations of a human being, not of a postcolonial author. This tension is caught in the anguish of Paul Rayment, when he says to Elizabeth Costello:

> In my earlier life I did not speak as freely about myself as I do today […] Decency held me back, decency or shame […] Since my accident I have begun to let some of that reticence slip. *If you don't speak now*, I say to myself, *when will you speak?* (*SM* 156)

If this confession is immediately subjected to Elizabeth Costello's criticism, it nevertheless captures something of the anxiety at work in the 'mere' shame of JC's opinions. The 'mere' exposures uncover something that Bewes, in his analysis, chooses not to recognise: that Coetzee's shame is itself a rhetorical exposure. Shame functions like an inverse confession. The more one seeks to justify it, the more it retreats away from the heart of the discussion. But it is also, by its nature, hyperbolic. 'Mere' shame is impossible, since it is necessarily overwhelming. So, if the essays, as self-as-matter, are generically overwhelmed by a sense of shame, JC's shameful treatment of the genre is rhetorically subverted by 'mere' litotes or understatement.

Clearly all these 'meres' subvert a stoic outcome, whether modest or shameful. No value system structures the freedom to speak. 'Mere' parodies the 'modesty' of the

stoic, turning the self-as-matter into a kynical exposure of both values and their obvious insufficiency. But what prevents this parody from falling into cynicism, which, as we quoted in Chapter 1, Coetzee calls the 'denial of all values'? We know that Coetzee wants to avoid cynicism when we find him asking how a 'mere writer' satisfies the need to speak a truth, when, worryingly, all that is available is a lie. But shame no longer seems like a viable source of stability, since its hyperbolic function is undercut by the litotic 'mere'. The solution that emerges for JC also returns us to our discussion of monism and dualism in the photographs of Beckett. JC considers the difference between singing and the military voice: nineteenth century art-song, 'meant to convey moral nobility', stages 'the contrast between the mere physical body and the voice that transcends the body', while the military voice uses 'the voice in a rapid, flat, mechanical manner, without pause for thought' (*DBY* 131; 132). The latter gives rise to machinic responses, such as that he receives from a librarian at Johns Hopkins University Library: 'There was nothing she sought from me in the exchange [...] not even the salving moment of mutual recognition that two ants give each other as they brush antennae in passing' (*DBY* 132). Here, not even the 'mere social interaction' described between John and the newspaper man in *Youth* takes place, so fully has the military voice taken control. But, crucially, there is a third option in which the voice does not transcend 'the mere physical body' or remain 'mere social interaction': birdsong.

> What Cartesian nonsense to think of birdsong as pre-programmed cries uttered by birds to advertise their presence to the opposite sex, and so forth! Each bird-cry is a full-hearted release of the self into the air, accompanied by such joy as we can barely comprehend. (*DBY* 132)

Birdsong is neither the mechanical voice of drive, nor the separation of the body and the 'song [...] born as soul', but integration of body and voice (*DBY* 131). We have a solution, in birdsong, to Coetzee's dilemma over the monism or dualism at work in Beckett's photographs. It 'announces itself' like the reproduction of Robert Doisneau's photograph, 'The Kiss', on the wall of a hotel room in Burnie, Tasmania: 'Their kiss is

not just one of passion: with this kiss love announces itself' (*DBY* 173). Moreover, it is an announcement that is chosen by a disembodied voice that JC echoes as follows: '*Though a mere hotelkeeper, I too believe in love, can recognize the god when I see him* – is that what its presence says? Love: what the heart aches for' (*DBY* 174). The 'mere bodies' of Guantanamo, the 'mere Segretaria', the 'mere writer', the 'mere hotelkeeper': all these are terms that highlight the various cases as being 'more than merely' or turning their expected 'mereness' into an ironic counterpart to what they are or can do. Therefore, while *Diary of a Bad Year* is undoubtedly a text concerned with the workings of 'shame', and its relationship to 'citizenship' and 'responsibility', it is also concerned with the way that characters overcome the shame of their 'mereness', the kynical unconcealment, despite traditional propriety. Only by addressing the material conditions of this shame, in the synchronic context of JC's essays as works in progress and under review, can Coetzee address written traditions of decency and shame; traditions that are also performed in the diatribes of *Elizabeth Costello*.

Elizabeth Costello

Elizabeth Costello is a proper noun that quilts together a text or series of texts that have been rather difficult to characterise. Part campus novel, part lecture series, part epistolary response, part literary homage, the text(s) appear(s) to have so many parts that constituting a *whole* is remarkably difficult. Recalling that it is a compilation of a series of occasional pieces, read as public lectures or written as contributions to essay collections, makes it all the more difficult to write about it as a single text. Responses since its publication have tended to read it as a single text, but only by using one form as an original base against which to compare the other, supplementary, form: either it is a novel, as in its 2003 published form, or it is a series of lectures *cum* readings that Coetzee stitched together to publish as a complete work after the fact of their

performance. The relatively few textual changes Coetzee made in transforming the latter into the former are noted; the respective differences of form are extolled; criticism continues with the job at hand. Yet few critics have focused on the manifestly different work the two forms concern themselves with, and when they have, this difference serves to describe a generic shift, rather than imagining a common end via different means.

One response serves as a point of departure for the effect of the lecture-readings: Derek Attridge's description of the auditorium in Princeton when Coetzee delivered the first of his two Tanner lectures (later published as *The Lives of Animals*).[77] Attridge suggests the general sense of surprise when Coetzee started to speak, though cannot recall any audible reaction. There was no break in the fictional tissue and no preliminary remarks. Gareth Cornwell makes a bolder proposition for the reception of 'He and His Man' – 'the audience must have wondered what the blazes he was on about' – though the video of the Nobel lecture shows nothing more than attentive faces. Coetzee in the latter instance did make preliminary remarks about reading *Robinson Crusoe* as a boy of eight or nine, which he begins with a gloss on the title: 'Before I read to you the lecture "He and His Man", or "His Man and He", I am not sure which […]'.[78] What is clear, however, is that little affective is said in either analysis. These diatribes do not precipitate a manifest response by the audience. The lack of an 'audible' surprise suggests a certain expectation by Coetzee's audience to the event of a 'Coetzee lecture/reading'. Surprise they may have felt, but this surprise did not translate into a more noticeable shock or anxiety. The formal innovation of the Elizabeth Costello lectures as an alternative form of pedagogic practice is not found in its shock tactics.

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[77] Attridge, *J.M. Coetzee*, 193.

[78] Gareth Cornwell, ' "He and His Man": Allegory and Catachresis in Coetzee's Nobel Lecture', *English In Africa*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2007), 97; Coetzee, 'He and His Man', *Nobelprize.org*. Accessed: 30 November 2012. http://www.nobelprize.org/mediaplayer/index.php?id=555

Michael Bell has written persuasively for their consideration as a critique of pedagogical practice.[79] Costello's arguments do not face up to the challenges posed by her fictional interlocutors and neither listener nor reader is left with any resolution to the problems raised. Bell notes that this places a text like *Elizabeth Costello* in a genealogy of European literature that begins with Goethe's *Werther*. This genealogy reacts to the utopian educational system proposed in Rousseau's *Emile* by examining the anxieties such a system would provoke in teachers. Costello's anxieties are not those of teaching the wrong lesson, but of being unable to teach the most important lesson of all: how to be sympathetic to fellow creatures. We may agree with aspects of Bell's response, not least because he identifies these texts as forming a hitherto undisclosed tradition rather than consciously striving to be part of an existing generic tradition. However, there is a crucial aspect of authorial subjectivity that supplements this pedagogical aspect which needs to be foregrounded. It plays with a certain structural irony and is premised on something coded into the texts of both *Diary of a Bad Year* and *Elizabeth Costello*, but is most apparent in the texts' presentations as lectures: a literary occasionalism. This literary occasionalism is not demonstrative, pedagogical, a straightforward form of rhetorical persuasion or an art of debate. This is what makes it *parrhesiatic* in Foucault's sense of the term. For 'we cannot situate *parrhesia* in an end envisaged by the discourse [...] or [in] the aim which the true discourse seeks to achieve vis-a-vis the interlocutor, but to the speaker, or rather to the risk that truth-telling opens up for the speaker'.[80] It is therefore as much about insisting on the risks of truthfulness for the writer, as it is about playing with an audience.

Coetzee's audiences can be played with in a way that Beckett's audience at the Coconut Lounge in 1953 could not be, but Beckett's audience at Ohio State University

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[79] Michael Bell, *Open Secrets: Literature, Education and Authority from J.J. Rousseau to J.M. Coetzee* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007)

[80] Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the College De France 1983-1984*, ed. A. I. Davidson, trans. G. Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 56.

in 1981 could: the literary creation has already been apprehended as the double of the author, because the author is already 'known'. Coetzee could reply to questions at the Tanner lectures by deferring – 'I think what Elizabeth Costello would say is that …'[81] – but this deferral is made on a superficial level; there is a disavowal that both author and audience already know the actual authorship of the lecture. Coetzee is playing at being Costello's man, when Costello is really Coetzee's woman. This argument is manifestly true and completely contradicts our attempts through this chapter to propose a Coetzee concerned particularly with surfaces. Audiences want to understand the performance of opinion, whether in lecture or essay form, as coming from beneath the surface. Coetzee recognises this in his disparagement of his own 'Opinions', since this beneath the surface is often merely what it is: the exposure of traditional values. We have a correlative disparagement in the short story 'As a Woman Grows Older'.

Elizabeth Costello is visiting her daughter who lives in the south of France. When asked whether she is writing on brain science she replies: 'No […] I still confine myself to fiction, you will be relieved to hear. I have not yet descended to hawking my opinions around. *The Opinions of Elizabeth Costello*, revised edition'.[82] In *Diary of a Bad Year*, JC has already done this. Paul Patton prefaces his essay 'Coetzee's Opinions' with an aphorism from Nietzsche's *Human, All Too Human*:

> *Final opinion* [*Meinung*] *about opinions*. – One should either conceal one's opinions or conceal oneself behind one's opinions. He who does otherwise does not know the ways of the world or belongs to the order of holy foolhardiness.[83]

This tension, as Patton goes on to show, is between the way opinions conceal the self and the way this feature is used to construct a public self: 'Concealment behind opinions is a recurrent theme in *Diary*'.[84] Only in the instance where opinion and self

[81] Attridge, *J.M. Coetzee*, 193.
[82] Coetzee, 'As a Woman Grows Older', *New York Review of Books*, 15 January 2004: 11-14, 13.
[83] Nietzsche qtd. Paul Patton, 'Coetzee's Opinions', *Strong Opinions*: 53-62, 53.
[84] Patton, 'Coetzee's Opinions', 59.

coincide (in Nietzsche's exceptional man), do opinions 'cease from being public and become something other than masks, finery and camouflage'.[85] Where opinion and self coincide, we may reach a form of 'authenticity', but we also realize there is a radical instability in such authenticity. What is authentic is the unconcealment of concealment, the veracity of habitual style, and a taut treatment of irony as a necessary tool that nevertheless runs the risk of always implying a depth.

We can observe the dangers involved in relying too heavily on irony in Johan Geertsema's consideration of Coetzee's deliberate staging of an ironic non-position.[86] Geertsema argues that Coetzee creates a non-position through his ironic deployment of people in authority, which allows him to critique politics without entering into its domain. 'Why is it so hard to say anything about politics', he quotes from an essay by JC, 'from outside politics? Why can there be no discourse about politics that is not itself political?'[87] Geertsema reaches towards the notion that Coetzee bypasses politics to address systemic problems in 'the political' by creating an 'ironic non-position'. The problem with the 'ironic non-position' is that it neglects Coetzee's desire to make a political statement: Coetzee does protest in his own words similar concerns to those uttered in *Diary of a Bad Year* and *Elizabeth Costello*, even if we find these protestations filled with anxiety about making a definitive statement. Geertsema destabilises any fixed points of protest by arguing that it is a novel that 'responds to politics without power'. The consequence of this reading is the discovery of a non-position 'beside' the surface of *Diary*. What it shuttles past is the breathtaking complexity of this surface, since, for Geertsema, the dialogic nature of the novel simply opens up this gap to the non-position beside the narrative. While Coetzee does perhaps create a literary non-position through a multivalent irony, he is doing so precisely

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[85] Ibid.

[86] Johan Geertsema, 'Coetzee's *Diary of a Bad Year*, Politics, and the Problem of Position', *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Spring, 2011): 70-85.

[87] Coetzee qtd. Geertsema, 'Coetzee's *Diary of a Bad Year*', 70.

because he *does* want to make a political statement and wishes 'merely' to make that statement on his own ground.

If the cosmopolitan purpose is particularly political in *Diary*, it spreads across the whole of human culture in *Elizabeth Costello*. For instance, Dean Arendt acknowledges that 'dietary taboos do not have to be mere customs. I will accept that underlying them are genuine moral concerns' (*EC* 89). Arendt's effort to interpret dietary taboos as more significant than 'mere customs' has its own kind of ironic blindness. By imagining them to be masking 'genuine moral concerns', he ignores the 'superficial' element of Costello's argument: that the moral concern is in the very behaviour itself. As the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre writes in defense of his *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*

> the philosophical conversation begins from, and from time to time renews an examination of, the beliefs and concepts of the social group within whose shared life the activities of philosophical enquiry are carried on. So that the philosophy both draws upon and contributes to the other activities of that particular social and cultural order.[88]

Philosophical concerns are primary to the thinking of philosophers because they are seeking to solve these concerns, but also because it is the habit of philosophers to have philosophical concerns.[89] What we should take note of here is MacIntyre's notion that ethical systems evolve in dialogue with the particular culture that produces them, rather than according to absolutist, universal values. This suggests that 'mere customs' inform the 'genuine moral concerns' of Dean Arendt, and that there is a need to engage with precisely that 'surface' material, so quickly discarded in favour of deeper meaning. The play of *Elizabeth Costello*'s lessons – *lehren* in German, which is to say, doctrine or cant – is not entirely about irony or about uncovering the received knowledge on which Costello's thoughts are based, or the process by which this doctrine is received (via

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[88] Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Précis of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Mar 1991): 149-152.
[89] Richard Northover has written convincingly of MacIntyre's influence on Coetzee in *J.M. Coetzee and Animal Rights*.

lecture or published volume), but about the surface transmission of a mere tactic or a mere question.

Costello remarks on one such literary tactic in Homer's *Odyssey*: 'The favourite ram of the king of Ithaca, so runs the story, yet treated in the end as a mere bag of blood, to be cut open and poured from' (*EC* 211). The ram may be important in the story behind the narrative, but, for the narrative surface, it is a 'mere bag of blood'. Coetzee will make use of a similar tactic in Costello's encounter with Emmanuel Egudu. Here the favourite ram is the African novel. The story of the African novel becomes 'a mere bag of blood' to be sacrificed to the narrative question of African cultural identities before colonialism. 'Is the novel possible without novel-writing', Egudu asks. 'Did we in Africa have a novel before our friends the colonizers appeared on our doorstep? For the time being let me merely propose the question' (*EC* 40). Later, when speaking of Cheikh Hamidou's claim to 'an oral tradition', Egudu sees nothing 'mystical', 'metaphysical' or 'racist' in this; 'he merely gives proper weight to those intangibles of culture which, because they are not easily pinned down in words, are often passed over' (*EC* 44). Of course, this 'merely' indicates that Egudu is using an irony as powerful as Coetzee's: the 'intangibles of culture' are evoked through the gestures of everyday life, gestures which Egudu goes on to enumerate. These gestures are obviously important in 'merely' considering Egudu's question, since they expose, rather than conceal, the way that narratives conceal, rather than expose, a tendency to pass over the significances of the *story* (i.e. the favourite ram) in favour of a narrative progression (i.e. 'a mere bag of blood'). This exposure has its corollary in the 'mere' defence Costello makes for the humanities in Africa. 'I was merely saying', Costello responds to a question about the outlook for the humanities, 'that our readers – our younger readers in particular – come to us with a certain hunger', a hunger she describes earlier as a search 'for guidance, guidance in perplexity' (*EC* 127). Of course, Costello

never 'merely' says anything, but her identification of this hunger in the reader is more interesting than its implications. Exposing this desire, characterised as a hunger, reduces it to a presentation of 'what simply is' but also detracts from the *narrative* tendency to make use of it *as if* this desire could somehow justify the place of the humanities in Africa.

We can begin to identify a connection between the desire to expose (a generic quality of the diatribe and the essay) and a desire to present things as they are (a linguistic quality of 'mere' and 'merely'). How can this be reconciled with Costello's argument for censorship in 'The Problem of Evil', when she condemns Paul West's *The Very Rich Hours of Count Von Staffenberg*? Is this a return to a 'stoic' modesty or is it a 'cynical' attack on a book that she does not like? In discussing what censorship protects the reader from, she draws a similitude with a genie in a bottle, a genie that should not be let out: 'The wisdom of the similitude, the wisdom of centuries (that is why she prefers to think in similitudes rather than reason things out), is that it is silent on the life the genie leads shut up in the bottle. It merely says the world would be better if the genie remained imprisoned' (*EC* 167). The similitude is 'merely' what it says it is: a comparable image. It has no depth of argument, nor height of intellectual abstraction. Although not arbitrary, the similitude relies on a magisterial gesture because it is its own performative justification. But, because it relies on the commitment of the magisterial gesture, and nothing else, it also gives rise to anxieties. Thus, Costello, when faced with the prospect of delivering her damning indictment of the *The Very Rich Hours of Count Von Staffenberg* to an audience including the author, is riddled with doubts about the substance of her argument. This is also why she is sure her doubts about her paper would pass if she 'could merely glance again at those pages' (*EC* 168). 'We must be wary of horrors', she will nevertheless go on to argue, 'such as you describe in your book. We as writers. Not merely for the sake of our readers but out of

concern for ourselves' (*EC* 171). She thinks of the women 'in those intimate, over-intimate photographs from the European war', who were 'not as old as she, merely haggard from malnutrition and fright' (*EC* 178). Costello's problem is that she cannot go back to the experience of reading the novel, any more than the 'merely haggard' women in the photographs, with litotic pathos, can escape from their fixity within a particular historical discourse about the Holocaust and their 'meaning' as photographic evidence.

Such litotes recurs in Costello's descriptions of alternative, animal holocausts. Looking out from MacQuarrie Island, Costello recalls what she has read about this 'hub of the penguin industry' in a similarly litotic fashion: 'not clubbed to death, merely herded with sticks up a gangplank and over the edge into the seething cauldron' (*EC* 55). The arguments of the penguin industry shift responsibility for murder from the perpetrators to the systems. Costello exposes the hypocrisy of these arguments. The 'mere herding', as with the 'merely haggard' women, undercuts many of the arguments employed against the banality of Costello's reasoning in *Elizabeth Costello* by showing that it is precisely the banality of human action that leads to atrocity. 'What if, instead of going to Cambridge, Ramanujan had merely sat at home and thought his thoughts?' she wonders (*EC* 68). This question has its correlative in Costello's decision to give her lectures and JC's decision to write his essays. Again, we might reply with Paul Rayment's words, that they do this because there is a need to respond. This need to respond requires some justification other than the academic, especially in the *agoran* of the lecture and the essay. But the immediate, irritable reaching after justification is exactly what the 'mere' short-circuits.

We find moments in which the word 'merely' deprecates the significance of academic discourse, without providing this liberatory justification. Costello asks:

> Is the difference between G.H. Hardy, on the one hand, and the dumb
> Ramanujan and the dumb Red Sally, on the other, merely that the former is

conversant with the protocols of academic mathematics while the latter are not? (*EC* 69)

'Mere' facility with the discourse of the establishment is possibly the (minimal) difference between the intellectual and the idiot, the genius and the beast. Costello is herself recipient of the critical brunt of this logic when Norma rebukes John: 'This is the ground your mother has chosen. Those are her terms. I am merely responding' (*EC* 93). Of course, Norma is not 'merely responding'. She is mounting a sophisticated philosophical argument that, in part, is designed to remind the audience attending the second Tanner lecture of what Elizabeth Costello has said in the first Tanner lecture, and, in the main, addresses the problem of claiming an embodied irrationality as an argumentative position without a lived dimension: 'the sort of thing a person would say who has never set foot inside a mental institution and seen what people look like who have *really* withdrawn from reason' (*EC* 93). Although this can be taken as an empiricist claim, John identifies it as 'rationalism', which suggests we should read it less as a claim to evidence-based logic and more as the problem inherent in any argument that simply evokes an ironic non-position to a binary like 'reason'/'outside-reason'. But Costello worries that recourse to a philosophical language about animals will not rise above debates on 'whether they have rights in respect of us or whether we merely have duties in respect of them', precisely because it does not allow itself to engage with this binary: 'Even Kant does not pursue, with regard to animals, the implications of his intuition that reason may be not the being of the universe but on the contrary merely the being of the human brain' (*EC* 67).

Kant's failure to move beyond the presence of his dog in *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* to the thinking of his dog is not a new problem to the discourse of philosophy. Even 'Descartes did not invent the idea that animals belong to a different order from humankind: he merely formalized it in a new way' (*EC* 106). But one cannot decry academic discourse as 'mere' discourse either. Or rather, one can, as long as one

is sure of the manifold significances of the word 'mere'. Philosophy cannot simply exclude the non-rational and the animal (or conflate these two distinct categories), and so does not: it attempts to explain these away as 'merely' objects within the realm of the discourse. In this, laws of philosophy about how animals function have a generic correlative in the laws of the gods about humans. The gods, according to Costello, 'cannot put us out of their minds [...] That, finally, is why they do not declare a ban on sex with us, merely make up rules about where and in what form and how often' (*EC* 189). The rules gods make up, like the conditions of Coetzee's laboratory, are conditioned in ways the gods themselves do not understand: through the adverbs and adjectives that dictate *how* these rules are carried out.

In the final lesson, 'At the Gate', Costello wonders whether the man in the lodge is her judge or 'merely the first in a long line leading to who knows what featureless functionary in what chancellery in what castle' (*EC* 194). Her first attempt at a statement of belief does not even warrant attention from a higher authority; the man at the desk 'merely shakes his head and lets the page fall to the floor'. The light she sees beyond the gate is not unimaginable, 'merely brilliant' (*EC* 196). After a book of judgements, Costello makes the surprising claim 'not to judge what is given to me. I merely write down the words and then test them, test their soundness, to make sure I heard them right' (*EC* 199). In defence of her lack of beliefs, she claims beliefs are 'inappropriate to the function' of a 'secretary of the invisible': 'a secretary should merely be in readiness, waiting for the call' (*EC* 200). 'Her books teach nothing', she realises, 'preach nothing; they merely spell out, as clearly as they can, how people lived in a certain time and place. More modestly put, they spell out how one person lived [...] the person whom she, to herself, calls *she*, and whom others call *Elizabeth Costello*' (*EC* 207-8). This particular cliché has taken 'Borges y yo' and applied it to a fictional character. But there is a link to Coetzee as well. In his opening remarks to his Nobel

Prize Lecture, he qualifies the I that read *Robinson Crusoe* in 1948 or 1949 as 'the one I call I'.[90] Coetzee has always tended to mark the instability of pronouns in his works, as has been argued by Clarkson in *J.M. Coetzee: Countervoices*. But his rigorous marking of 'I', whether against a 'he' or by subordination to 'the one', also provides us with a crucial means of understanding Coetzee as a kynical cosmopolitan: the doubling of the self is the only way established writers have of approaching the representation of presence within their texts, while maintaining an awareness of the impossibility of presence in writing. This means reciprocally that the representation of presence, insofar as it acknowledges its own impossible paradox, also lays bare as fallacious the claims of authors to an authentic presence within texts that do not operate within this anxious matrix. Even if they are failures of the performance of presence, the enactment of 'mere' rhetoric in Coetzee's oral and essayistic work shows us 'merely' what we knew already: that there is a split between an author, his creations and their opinions, where the holder of the opinions is necessarily vague. It is 'shown', not said; a 'mere' demonstration of what, ironically, we already knew.

But this cynical reading fails to satisfy, because it reduces Coetzee's project to 'mere play'. If our examination of Coetzee's consideration of 'mere action' and genre teaches us anything, it is that no 'mere' is just what it seems. Neither does it disguise a hidden, deeper purpose. Rather, Coetzee's 'mere rhetoric' forces us to reconceive the political and ethical bases upon which we receive his work, not through its high ideals, but in the dialectic between these ideals and the all-too-evident response they require.

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[90] Coetzee, 'He and His Man'.

Conclusion
Neither Stoic nor Cynic

What remains is to establish the state of our key terms (stoicism, cynicism, kynicism and cosmopolitanism). By now, we have established a common infrastructure for all three writers: the recurrence of certain technical devices (metaphor and enumeration, image and voice, genre and modification). These devices, operating in non-sublative dialectic, allow us to identify an aesthetic consistency. This consistency is infrastructural, rather than structural, since the devices are not simply repeated. In other words, the devices bespeak a strategic tendency in each writer. They are plastic; they change their form. This plasticity of device mirrors a plasticity of self-representation in the late style of Borges, Beckett and Coetzee. Plastic self-representation becomes inflected with political significance, which mutates over time. Notwithstanding, plastic self-representation retains a consistency amidst this mutability. But how does this aesthetic, political and subjective plasticity affect our reading of a cosmopolitan care for the self that concerns itself not simply with the self, but with the other?

Here, we need to think through the consequences of this plasticity for cosmopolitanism. What we have been working towards coincides with work by our subterranean companion in this thesis: Catherine Malabou. For Malabou, the tradition of cosmopolitanism that finds its definition in hospitality towards the other, the 'stoic' tradition in this thesis, resists globalisation because rather than 'originating in a substantial self-sufficiency, cosmopolitanism […] responds in its organization to a visit, the very first visit of the other person'.[1] In other words, our characterisation of hospitality's 'stoic system' proves itself anti-systemic and open to the other. Even if we

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[1] Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*, trans. Caroline Shread (New York: Columbia UP, 2010), 73.

align Kantian hospitality with a systemic treatment of the other, Derrida's cosmopolitan treatment of the other, following Levinas, seems to eschew stoic system. Why do we argue this unconditional opening of the self to the other is systemised? Malabou answers, 'Cosmopolitanism responds in its structure to the ethical injunction of the past as the fact of the other's passage, that is, as the "trace"'.[2] Here, for Malabou, cosmopolitanism is not plastic because 'form always appears to shut out otherness, to reify it, to reduce otherness to presence and evidence of the same'.[3] Plasticity, whose manipulations of form allow the self to care for itself, is wholly concerned with the self at the expense of the other. Therefore, 'hospitality defines the ethical and political place where form and trace are separated'.[4] Either one marks the trace of the other, or one shuts out otherness by manipulating it into a form of the same. This double bind appears irresolvable. For Levinas, things conceal themselves beneath form: '"Beneath form", says Levinas, "things conceal themselves".'[5] Malabou extends Levinas's position to cosmopolitan hospitality, since 'hospitality implies the possibility to have access to such a "beneath"'.[6] Otherness, seemingly, is only truly respected when it eludes the manipulations of form. However, this thesis has shown that we can think not only through relations, but through literary forms and its reformations.

Malabou gives us a further possibility, a possibility of the neither/nor. The yield of this possibility is that we do not return to an otherness 'beneath' form (as when Coetzee makes otherness play on the surface of language), nor give up our obligation to find new *forms* of expression (as when Beckett shuttles between prose and theatre), nor claim that otherness is dissociated from the imminence of its formal apprehension (as when Borges reflects on the imminence of his aesthetic acts). Having apparently

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[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid, 74.
[6] Ibid.

discarded the possibility of a 'plastic' hospitality, Malabou concludes that 'when hospitality continues to be thought as the "counter" to plasticity or, in other words, against form, it is no longer possible to distinguish cosmopolitanism rigorously from hypercapitalism'.[7] Here, the lack of stoic system means that nothing differentiates Derridean cosmopolitanism from self-serving cynicism. 'Thinking out the relation between cosmopolitanism and globalization', writes Malabou,

> requires thinking out another sort of relation between hospitality, on the one hand, and form and convertibility, on the other – a relation within which nothing escapes transformation or the operation of exchange.[8]

Plasticity does not simply bestow, take or destroy form. It also malleates form, so that form may become something other than itself. Malabou's new form of otherness *through* plasticity, this new hospitality or cosmopolitanism, does not simply respect otherness as something wholly untouchable. On the contrary, otherness must be touched to change the form of the self: 'Ethical plasticity is thus indeed what one can call the sculpture or carving of the other into the rock of his absence'.[9] We have concentrated on form in Borges, Beckett and Coetzee not to discount a 'trace' of the other, but to show how it changes its form because of the other that is the self. In a plastic cosmopolitanism, we choose neither the other nor the same, since otherness is precisely what will enable a reformation of the same.

Our discussion of neither/nor logic necessarily responds to a prior philosophical discussion. For Søren Kierkegaard, either/or defines the necessary choice between the aesthetical and ethical individual.[10] Either one remains in a state of aesthetic solipsism, or one commits oneself to ethical action. Either one disavows political agency, or one asserts that agency in solidarity with a particular cause. Either one is a cynic, or one is a

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[7] Ibid, 77.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid, 80.
[10] Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, ed. Victor Eremita, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin, 1992).

stoic. Rather than resolve this, as Kierkegaard does, with a transcendental religious third option, the kynical cosmopolitan chooses a non-transcendent materiality that is neither cynicism nor stoicism.

By asserting a neither/nor, the kynical cosmopolitan finds him- or herself properly excluded from any inclusively cynical or stoic understanding of political agency, according to the non-sublative logic of this thesis: the 'neither/nor'. We began with a question: are Borges, Beckett and Coetzee 'merely cynical cosmopolitans', or are they 'great writers'? But neither 'cynical cosmopolitan' nor 'great writer' seemed to describe them. This neither/nor appeared again in our discussions of their works. Borges's parables are reducible neither to their Argentinian concerns nor solipsistic treatments of the poet. Beckett's dramaticules are neither nihilist nor resistant to nihilism. Coetzee's performance novels seek neither to restore the figure of the writer-sage nor wholly to dismiss it. We found these thematic concerns reflected in structures of language. Neither one nor the other is sufficient to describe the writer's technique: neither metaphor nor enumeration; neither the image nor the voice; neither genre nor linguistic modification. Within the very structure of these rhetorical, performative and linguistic figures, the 'neither/nor' again emerged. For Borges, metaphor neither describes nor determines difference between the two things it links. Likewise, enumeration neither links things nor allows for a site in which they might be linked. For Beckett, the image is neither comprehensive nor rhetorical sophistry. Likewise, the voice is neither of the body nor of language. For Coetzee, genre neither heralds a truth about the self nor reduces such truths to 'mere rhetoric'. Likewise, linguistic modification neither penetrates the depths of meaning nor remains on the surface. The kynic, defined in the negative, finds its uncanny homelessness in the neither/nor.

But why, at this late stage, return to the question of hospitality, so hastily discarded when we discussed Jacques Derrida in our Introduction? This thesis has

sought to show the minimal difference between cynicism and kynicism in Borges, Beckett and Coetzee. We summed up this minimal difference as *consistency*. But consistency to what? These writers, in their late style, present themselves as other-than-themselves. What kind of consistency permits this inclusion of the other in the self? A consistent will to reform, through prevailing techniques, the work. This reformation inaugurates a plastic cosmopolitanism that seeks neither to cohere in a single form, nor pattern itself solely in reactive critique. Neither stoicism nor cynicism: this is a merely kynical cosmopolitanism.

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