The Burial of the Dead:
Atrocity and Modern Memory in
James Joyce and Samuel Beckett

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A major thesis submitted for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy in English

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September 2020

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Abstract

This dissertation explores how representations of dying and the dead in the fiction of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett sheds light on the evolving responses of these modernist writers to the legacies of the catastrophes of the Great Famine and the Holocaust respectively.

The first half of the dissertation is concerned with Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914) and *Ulysses* (1922). I argue that Joyce's work testifies to the aftermath of the Famine both in its occasional allusions to the event itself and in its detailed account of the condition of post-Famine Irish Catholic culture, including changes to traditional funerary practices. With reference to Martin Heidegger's writing on "idle talk", I explore how modern print culture affects the social understanding of the individual death. This is reflected in the prominence of the newspaper obituary in Joyce's fiction. I illustrate how his work explores and parodies these new discourses about mortality.

I go on to argue in the second half of the dissertation that the trauma of the Holocaust is strikingly relevant to the suffering of the narrators and characters in Beckett's post-war prose. I begin with a reading of *Molloy* (1951) as a meditation on the dilemmas of narrating modern death. Drawing on accounts of the impact of the Holocaust by Primo Levi and Giorgio Agamben and on influential readings of Beckett by Theodor Adorno and by recent critics including Emilie Morin, I suggest that as more survivor testimony and detail about what occurred in the concentration camps emerged in the 1960s, Beckett's representation of death becomes more abstract and documentarian. The dissertation concludes with an exploration of this impulse to find ever more extreme ways to testify to the unspeakable. I suggest that

Beckett's experiments reach their culmination and also their ultimate extinction in late works including *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981) and *Worstward Ho* (1983).

Contents

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my wife Cliona without whose love and patience this project would never have been finished. Cliona has been a pillar of support throughout the whole process and her insights proved critical particularly in the final stages.

Secondly, my gratitude must go to my mother, father and brother Emmet. My family have always been immensely supportive of my academic endeavours and instilled and nurtured a deep love of words in me from the very beginning.

Thirdly, I must extend a huge thanks to my supervisor Prof. Emer Nolan. Emer's expertise, critical insight and attention to detail was matched only by her generosity with her time. I have grown not only as a scholar of Irish literature but also as a thinker and person under her tutelage.

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the funding I received from the John and Pat Hume Scholarship at Maynooth University and the Irish Research Council without which I would not have been able to complete the project.

A warm thanks must also be extended to the staff in the English Department at Maynooth University especially Michael Cronin, Sinead Kennedy, Conor McCarthy, Oona Frawley, Tracey O'Flaherty and Amanda Bent. I would also like to thank everyone at the department who generously contributed their thoughts at the yearly research reviews including Rita Sakr, Colin Graham and James Fraser. I would also like to acknowledge guidance of Joe Cleary whose advice in the early stages of my research helped shape the final direction of the dissertation.

The PhD. can be an isolating and solitary experience at times but I was lucky enough to share in this with some brilliant scholars and friends. I will never forget my time spent with Conor

Dowling, Francis Lomax, Chris Beausang and Thomas Connolly. The laughs and conversations we shared the last four years provided not only a respite from the stresses of dissertation writing but also a friendship which I will never forget. I'd like to extend a further thanks to Thomas Connolly, Chris Beausang and James Fraser for their efforts in proofreading the thesis.

Introduction: “I began at the beginning, like an old ballocks, can you imagine that?”

Death, Literature and Modernity

In his celebrated 1936 essay, "The Storyteller", Walter Benjamin suggests that the success of the novel as a form owes to our alienation from mortality in modernity. According to Benjamin, since the emergence of secularism, death, which was "once a public process in the life of an individual" (93), has been increasingly hidden from view and "has been pushed further and further out of the perceptual world of the living" (93) and into asylums, hospitals, nursing homes and hospices. Benjamin suggests that there is fundamental connection between death and the modern novel and that people read novels to attain some sense of wisdom about mortality which is ultimately denied to them in modern culture. Benjamin writes that "death is the sanction of everything the storyteller can tell" (93) and it is through the act of reading a novel that the individual can hope to attain understanding of their own death: "the reader of a novel […] look[s] for human beings from whom he derives the 'meaning of life' therefore he must […] know in advance that he will share their experience of death" (100). The reader may apprehend mortality through the figurative death of the character who ceases to exist once the novel concludes or the actual death of a character over the course of the novel. As Peter Brooks explains: "what we seek in narrative fictions is that knowledge of death which is denied to us in our own lives: the death that writes *finis* to the life and therefore confers on it its meaning" (22). Ultimately, Benjamin suggests that the reader engages with a novel in the hopes that they gain some insight and wisdom from a form which is also finite: "What draws the reader to the novel is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about" (100).

Many other critics have also suggested that natural death, once a common and public event in everyday life, became a taboo subject in modernity with the advancement of medical care and the advent of various institutions for the dying. Philippe Ariès, long regarded as one of

the leading cultural historians concerned with modern culture's relationship with death, argued in 1975 that in modernity, "death, so omnipresent in the past that it was familiar, would be effaced, would disappear" to the point where death "would become shameful and forbidden" (85). Similarly, Geoffrey Gorer argues that due to an "unremarked shift in prudery" (50) in Western culture, from the beginning of the twentieth century death replaced sex as a socially unacceptable topic of discussion or consideration: "whereas copulation has become more and more 'mentionable,' […] death has become more and more 'unmentionable' *as a natural process*" (50, original emphasis).

More recently, critics have further explored Benjamin's claim that there is a fundamental connection between human mortality and literature. Outi Hakola and Sari Kivistö, for example, suggest that "literature offers insights into death, dying and mortality" such that "death and storytelling seem to have a fundamental and existential connection" (viii). Moreover, Hakola and Kivistö argue that representations of death in literature may also be the occasion for authors to probe societal issues more generally: "literary depictions of death are […] not merely preoccupied with the painful scene of dying or individual life, but the concept of death can be understood more widely […] as a metaphor of many social issues" (viii). David Sherman suggests that literature plays an important role in how the reader attempts to understand their own mortality. He suggests that, like philosophy, literature may be considered "a preparation for death" (5) insofar as it provides us with "the images, rhetorical figures, poetics, and plots we need for working through our relation to the dead" (5). Much like Benjamin, Sherman reads the connection between death and literature as one which gains a particular importance in modernity. Sherman suggests that Modernism, as an aesthetic movement, is "a response to the

combination of technological abundance and symbolic dearth of dying" (9) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Alan Warren Friedman has also suggested that representations of death in Modernist literature have a particularly significant resonance given the cultural shift from the Victorian to Modernist periods. According to Friedman, "modernist fiction reflects society's refusal to countenance death's quotidian presence" (21) insofar as it often fails to detail or dramatize the dying process. The deathbed scene was, according to Gorer, "a set piece for the most […] eminent Victorian and Edwardian writers" (50). In contrast, death becomes an event which haunts the fringes of the past and future but which is "rarely present, confronted or mourned" (Friedman 21) in Modernist literature. Friedman suggests a number of reasons for "modernism's turn from the stable rituals associated with Victorian dying" (18). These include the "epistemological and religious incertitude" (18) which is summed up by Nietzsche's declaration of the death of God, various advances in the fields of sociology, psychology and science made by figures like Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Charles Darwin which fundamentally "changed perceptions of human existence" (23), as well as the catastrophe and mass death which resulted from two world wars.

The sense of change, upheaval and uncertainty which characterised early twentieth-century life was all-pervasive. Robert B. Pippin suggests that the conditions of modernity and "the experience of modernization" was "a kind of spiritual failure" (xi) characterised by a sense of loss. In response, Modernist literature and other modes of art in this period announce "a complex crisis of mentality [and] a deep concern with the effects of social modernization" (Pippin 39). This sense of failure and loss, Pippin suggests, is exemplified in literature by the "ironic use of ancient myth" in the works of James Joyce as well as the "nightmare worlds" in

the works of Samuel Beckett which are "dominated by mere pretensions to presence and authority" (xi-xii). Within the realm of philosophy, he regards Heidegger's philosophy "on the forgetting of Being" (Pippin xii) as another example of how modern culture responded to the sense of loss which accompanied the violent and often catastrophic process of modernization. Modernity as a "discontinuous shift" and an "adoption of new agenda" (Pippin 21) was marked by a "rejection of any rational assessment of a hierarchy of human ends, of the purposes to which the great modern technique is to be applied" (Pippin 21). According to Friedman, these factors and the consequent loss of faith in the belief systems which had underpinned human society for centuries "destabilized traditional views of death's place in the cycle of mortality and immortality" (23) and as a result death was represented in modernist fiction as being "unpredictable, incoherent […] and pervasive" (23-4).

It is a fairly commonly accepted view that there was a fundamental shift in the ways in which Western society regarded the fact of human mortality from the late nineteenth century onwards. Death had been a familiar event in everyday life; the sick or elderly would pass away in their own homes surrounded by close family and loved ones. Moreover, the funerary practices were generally taken care of by close family. However, various medical advancements meant that institutions such as hospitals, asylums, hospices and nursing homes increasingly became the locations where people died and, as a result, society's once familiar relationship with death was gradually eroded. Additionally, developments in the fields of philosophy, sociology, anthropology, science and psychology had cast doubts over the ages-old belief systems which underpinned many accepted notions of the nature of death and the existence of an afterlife. While many critics have noted a shift in attitudes towards death from the late nineteenth century onwards, that is not to say that this new attitude towards death was fixed or static. While public,

natural death had been gradually erased from everyday life, two World Wars had inaugurated a new age of violent death on an unimaginable scale in Europe and beyond. Indeed, Gorer suggests that "while natural death became more and more smothered in prudery", violent death becomes a form of cultural entertainment and "has played an ever-growing part in the fantasies offered to mass audiences" in the form of "detective stories, thrillers, Westerns, war stories, spy stories, science fiction, and eventually horror comics" (51). In the coming chapters I suggest that representations of death in the modernist works of James Joyce (1882-1941) and Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) are caught up in these shifts in attitudes towards death during this time. Joyce is writing in an age when natural death is being effaced from public life but transmitted to the wider public via the modern print culture while Beckett writes during an epoch in which violent death has become a mass spectacle after the events of the Second World War and the Holocaust. In order to better understand this distinction, I will now briefly here consider the works of both these authors within their historical contexts.

James Joyce was born within four decades of the end of the Great Famine and his fiction is set in an Ireland where the effects of the Famine are the key determinant in social and political life. After the Famine in the 1840s, the population of Ireland was left devastated. With the breakdown of social order, the proliferation of the unburied victims of starvation and disease and the complete cultural collapse of the rural, Irish-speaking communities, a power vacuum emerged which was filled by the Catholic Church in a process Emmet Larkin terms "the Devotional Revolution".[1] In this environment, the Catholic Church remained as one of the few social institutions that could still sustain itself and consolidate its authority. Cara Delay notes

[1] Indeed, Larkin notes that Mass attendance specifically rose from 33% before the Famine to over 90% in less than fifty years after the Famine (363).

that the "famine and emigration of the nineteenth century completely decimated the poor, rural, and religiously lax strata of Catholic society" leaving behind a population of "devout and disciplined [...] middle-class Catholics" (42). However, Larkin notes that while the Great Famine was a national catastrophe on an unprecedented scale (648), it would be too convenient to merely ascribe resulting cultural gains of the Church exclusively to the trauma of the Famine. While the desire for a more coherent and "civilized" cultural and national identity may have existed in the period before the 1840s, the Famine acted as a catalyst for the implementation of a more all-pervasive Catholic hegemony. In this sense, the Famine was not so much the cause of the Devotional Revolution but rather it created the conditions necessary for its blossoming.[2]

Death practices were one of the aspects of social life into which the Church extended its influence in the years after the Famine and it has been widely noted that the Catholic Church sought to homogenize and sanitize Irish death practices in the cultural climate of post-Famine Ireland. According to Lawrence Taylor, "while elsewhere in Europe the Church had made great headway in eliminating the wild wake […] these transformations […] were not accomplished in Ireland until well into the nineteenth century" (182). After the Famine, the Catholic Church instigated a series of institutional reviews concerning the administration of sacramental rites, including the funeral. Baptisms, marriages, wakes and funerals would have traditionally taken place in the private sphere of the home before the Famine. However, the Synod of Thurles in 1850 and the Synod of Maynooth in 1875 sought to regulate the practice of sacramental rites. Delay writes that the Church "set to work on unifying practices in the Irish dioceses" and "some bishops [...] also demanded that the sacraments and religious occasions, including baptisms,

[2] See Larkin p. 649 where he argues that the success of the Devotional Revolution was due not only to the mortal catastrophe of the Famine but also due to a growing national anxiety in the population about the loss of cultural identity in the mid-nineteenth century.

marriages, wakes and funerals, and confession and mass, now occur in the chapel, not in private homes" (50). P.C. Barry notes that due to a certain laxity in the administration of sacramental rites in the years preceding the Famine, the Synod of Thurles introduced a series of sacramental reforms (137). The Synod judged that future administration of sacramental rites, including those pertaining to funeral rites, take place in the church and not in the home as had been the case in the pre-Famine era (Barry 138). The merry wake, or the "grand funferall" (*FW* 13.15) as Joyce would later call it in *Finnegans Wake*, was supressed and prohibited by the Church as an offense to religious sensibilities due to the "sexuality, drunkenness, and possible violence" (Taylor 182) which often marked such events.

Recent studies into the role of the Catholic Church in post-Famine Ireland have further highlighted the recontextualization of pre-existing death practices. Ciara Breathnach and David Butler, for example, argue that after the Famine "there was a considerable elaboration of funeral customs and an emphasis on the significance of purgatory" (180). They argue that the Church extended its cultural hegemony by "recontextualising death as a church centred experience, and mediating the experience with its own rituals, discourses and objects" (180). However, these processes also contributed to Ireland's troubled or traumatic cultural modernization. The centrality of the Catholic Church as an agent of modernization in Ireland should not be ignored. Some critics such as Luke Gibbons have argued "the devotional revolution was part of an overall modernizing thrust" (qtd. in Breathnach and Butler 239) in Irish society. Taylor argues that the Catholic Church had long recognised the power that death had to "ritually invoke social units and cultural values" (182) and thus worked on contextualising death within the rituals of the Church. Through this, Taylor argues that the Church strengthened its position in post-Famine Irish society by "demonstrating its jurisdiction over the most crucial rite of passage" (182).

Thus, the Catholic Church's usurpation of death rituals after the Famine resulted in the development of what Taylor would call a "death-centred religious discourse" (182) which emphasised the importance of the Catholic Church in the passage from life to death.

In this dissertation, I will focus on the way in which print culture, especially in the form of the printed death notice and the newspaper obituary, began to colonize the realms of death and dying in Ireland around the turn of the twentieth century. Joyce, I will argue, is acutely aware of these developments and pays extensive attention to them in his fiction. The printed newspaper obituary was a practice which gained popularity with the Catholic middle-class around this time. For example, Breathnach and Butler argue that "the placement by Catholics of death notices in newspapers marked a shift away from traditional (oral) modes of communication towards print culture" (249); this, "by 1900, had become part of the pageantry of the funerals of the rising middle classes" (272). The cultural shift away from an oral narrative of death, dramatized in the wake and the keen, was facilitated by the Catholic Church because it was in keeping with the aspiration to homogenize and tame the Irish funeral in the aftermath of the Famine (Breathnach and Butler 249). The printed obituary is entirely at odds with the Dionysian energy expressed in the wake and the keen; it described sober, orthodox arrangements for the dead which "had far-reaching implications in the process of 'taming death' in the nineteenth century" (Breathnach and Butler 272). The spread of these modes of textual commemoration was facilitated by the advances in print technology in modernity. The Mass card, another innovation of this era, reflected a similar aspiration for respectful and decent commemoration of the deceased. Mary Ann Bolger underlines the importance of the role of textual technologies of commemoration in the homogenization of death rituals. She argues that "post-Famine Catholicism attempted to consolidate religious belief within the Church and to

eliminate traditional local religious practices" (239) and that "the typographic form of memorial" (237) was one example of such consolidation and standardization of death practices. The mass printed textual commemoration of the deceased was a substitute for the collective and anarchic lamentation of death which characterised pre-Famine, rural Irish culture. In the aftermath of the Great Famine, and in the context of the Catholic Church's increased influence within cultural, social and political spheres, there was a marked shift in societal attitudes towards death which was primarily promulgated by the Church in Ireland. This shift in death practices is best exemplified by the centrality of the printed memorial which in turn led to the marginalisation of pre-Famine funeral rituals such as the wake and the keen.

While little work has been done on Joyce's engagement with the Famine, a handful of critics have argued for the importance of this historical catastrophe in Joyce's works. Kevin Whelan has recently argued that Joyce's fiction "is pervasively disturbed by the presence of the Famine" (67) and the type of culture and society which emerged in Ireland as a result of the Famine. He writes that "the post-Famine condition of Ireland is the unnamed horror at the heart of Joyce's Irish darkness, the conspicuous exclusion that is saturatingly present as a palpable absence deliberately being held at bay" (67). Whelan positions Joyce as a writer who "espoused the hybrid multiplicity of a fragmented tradition" (64) as opposed to "the 'right' wing of modernism", embodied by writers such as Eliot and Pound, which he argues desired a "unified, authentic Western culture, of hierarchy and social order" (64). According to Whelan's schema, Joyce's embrace of the fractured alienation of Irish culture in modernity was due to the fact that Joyce did not believe a project of cultural retrieval was possible in the early twentieth century. Throughout Joyce's work, there is a sense of haunting and split consciousness as the spectre of a pre-Famine Ireland impinges on the social lives of his characters and the conditions of post-

Famine Ireland are portrayed as claustrophobic and detrimental to self-development. It is this "new" Ireland, where the notion of any return to an authentic pre-Famine, pre-colonisation Gaelic culture is impossible and the Church's moral hegemony reigned, that Whelan argues is the focus of Joyce's fiction. He suggests that Joyce's works "offer a sophisticated critique […] of the new Ireland that had emerged since the Famine; Stephen Dedalus rejects what is essentially the Ireland of the Devotional Revolution, of the second-hand language, of a spurious narrow nationalism" (67). Although rarely making an overt appearance in the texts, the Famine is fundamental to Joyce's fiction as it was the precursor and cause of the social and cultural milieu of paralysis which features in his work. Joyce's characters struggle within a society still bearing the trauma of this national disaster and coping with the subsequent oppressive regime of the Church.

Over the course of this study, I will be considering Beckett's work in an entirely different historical context than that of Joyce for a number of reasons. Firstly, Beckett was born some twenty four years after Joyce into an upper-middle-class Protestant family in suburban Dublin and is therefore more removed from the cultural and historical memory of the Famine than Joyce. For example, the latter's father came from Cork, close to regions which had been devastated by hunger and disease just a few decades earlier. Secondly, while both authors left Ireland for Europe, Joyce's works continue to focus on portrayals of Ireland unlike Beckett's works from the 1950s onwards which contain only fleeting and veiled references to his home country. Finally, while Joyce and his family managed to escape the conflict of World War One during their travels across the continent, Beckett was much more politically engaged by the war through his involvement in the French Resistance against the Nazi occupation of France.

Terry Eagleton is one of the foremost critics to position Beckett as a writer of post-Auschwitz Europe: "what we see in [Beckett's] work is not some timeless *condition humaine*, but war-torn twentieth-century Europe" (69). On a formal and aesthetic level, ambiguity, indeterminacy and narratives riddled with self-contradiction are all central to Beckett's art. Eagleton suggests that these traits are inherently political and represent an aesthetic opposition to the politics of totalitarianism: "Beckett's art maintains a compact with failure in the teeth of Nazi triumphalism, undoing its lethal absolutism with the weapons of ambiguity and indeterminacy" (70). Beckett's works resist asserting definitive values for fear of them becoming "ideologized" (74) in an age prone to devastating absolutism. For Eagleton then, Beckett's aesthetic, one characterized by ambiguity and contradiction, counteracts and dismantles the homogenous absolutism and perverted appeal to "reason" found in the Nazi ideology which was so destructive in the early-twentieth century.

However, Eagleton is also quick not to entirely separate Beckett from his Irish background. He argues that while the bombed-out wastelands of Beckett's works evoke the conditions of post-Holocaust Europe, they also subliminally harken back to the "memory of famished Ireland" (70-1) which suffered catastrophic trauma in the nineteenth century. Despite Beckett's historical and cultural distance from the memory of the Famine, it would not be accurate to say that Beckett's works do not in some way gesture to Irish cultural memory; rather, they enfold Irish trauma within that of modern culture more generally. David Lloyd argues that Beckett's work "neither refers to Ireland nor fails to: it constellates Irish matter with the matter of modernity more generally" (48-50). Consequently, Lloyd suggests that it is impossible to speak of a distinctly "Irish Beckett". Even though Beckett's works are constantly in the process of evoking the catastrophe Ireland faced under colonial domination, they do so while

simultaneously constellating such traumas with "diverse and disparate materials that cannot be reduced or referred back to an Irish location" (51) such as the terror experienced in many areas of Europe in the twentieth century.

Eagleton's ideas about Beckett's place in a post-war tradition are heavily influenced by the works of Theodor Adorno. Over the course of his career, Adorno continually returned to Beckett as the quintessential post-Holocaust writer. In his 1961 essay "Trying to Understand *Endgame*", Adorno argues that Beckett's works are "historio-philosophically supported by a change in the dramatic *a priori*" ("Trying to Understand *Endgame*" 120). For Adorno, Beckett's works respond to a world in which the *a priori* conditions of art have been fundamentally altered by the events of the Holocaust. Whereas Parisian existentialism had attempted to tackle the problem of history, Adorno argues that in Beckett's works, the weight of "history devours existentialism" ("Trying to Understand *Endgame*" 122). Elsewhere, Adorno even goes as far as to suggest that Beckett's art is one of the *only* appropriate responses to the catastrophe that befell Europe in the 1930s and 1940s: "Beckett has given us the only fitting reaction to the situation of the concentration camps – a situation he never calls by name, as if it were subject to an image ban" (*Negative Dialectics* 380). According to Adorno, the typical Beckettian character blindly struggling through a ruined world is representative of the trauma inflicted upon Europe as the spectre of the Holocaust is the chief, yet unnamed, determinant of the worlds these characters inhabit: "the violence of the unspeakable is mimicked in the timidity to mention it" ("Trying to Understand *Endgame*", 123). This is because after the Holocaust, "everything is destroyed […] humanity vegetates along, crawling, after events which even the survivors cannot really survive, on a pile of ruins which even renders futile self-reflection of one's own battered state" (Adorno, "Trying to Understand *Endgame*" 122).

Beckett's works stand out in the post-war years for Adorno because they do not acquiesce to abstract or arbitrary notions of individuality or subjectivity. Adorno suggests that the "catastrophies [sic] that inspire [Beckett's works] have exploded the individual whose substantiality and absoluteness" ("Trying to Understand *Endgame*" 126) underpinned the foundations of existentialist thinkers such as Kierkegaard and Sartre. Beckett's works not only register a world in which the existentialist conceptions of identity and individuality have been rendered null by the events of the Holocaust but they also expose the "bankruptcy" of existentialism as "the dreamlike dross of the experiential world" whose poetic form "shows itself as worn out" (Adorno, "Trying to Understand *Endgame*" 121). For Adorno, the problem with existentialism after the war lies in the fact that the meaninglessness of the world is always postulated from the point of view of the individual subject and the goal of existentialism, according to Simon Critchley, becomes the task of strengthening that individual subject and their claims to freedom, moral autonomy and authenticity (Critchley 148). In other words, by viewing the meaninglessness of the world from the perspective of the individual, existentialism then tasks itself with finding meaning for the individual in such a condition. Beckett, on the other hand, captures a world where the Holocaust has cancelled out the possibility of the authenticity or freedom assumed by existentialist philosophy. While Beckett accepts the inherent meaninglessness of the universe, he ultimately refuses to pursue meaning or value as a response to the absurdity of existence: he "refuses to transfigure this initial meaninglessness into a meaning for existence" (Critchley 149). Beckett's work then registers a condition in which the notions of subjectivity and individualism presupposed by post-war philosophies such as Absurdism and existentialism are denied by narrators who constantly undo themselves and their stories through paradox, contradiction and *aporia*.

Whereas writers such as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre discussed the possibility of authenticity in the wake of the Holocaust, Beckett's post-war work explores themes of absence, death and silence. Again, this is one of the reasons why critics such as Adorno championed Beckett's writing in the aftermath of the Holocaust: Beckett's art more accurately and faithfully responds to the realities of a post-Holocaust world and seems to endorse the notion that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society" 34). Furthermore, Beckett's works seem to accept not only the futility of discourse but also the risk that it will contaminate the silence which may be the only appropriate response to the horrors of the Holocaust. The fate of victims was so unthinkable that those who live in the aftermath cannot deduce "any kind of sense, however bleached, out of the victims' fate" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 361). After the Holocaust, metaphysical speculation is impossible to reconcile with the horror of empirical reality. Adorno suggests that the scale of the Holocaust was such that it infiltrated every aspect of human experience and destroyed the basis of all future metaphysical speculation: "actual events have shattered the basis on which speculative metaphysical thought could be reconciled with experience" (*Negative Dialectics* 362).

In *Being and Time* (1927), Martin Heidegger, one of the foremost thinkers on death in modernity, wrote that death is supposed to be the "*ownmost, nonrelational, and insuperable possibility*" (Heidegger, *BT* 241, original emphasis) of a person's existence. According to Adorno in *Negative Dialectics* (1966) however, one effect of the all-pervasive, totalising violence of the Holocaust was that even death has been taken away from the subject and turned into a public display of evil. Adorno suggests that the scale and technological efficiency of the Holocaust fundamentally altered the way in which humankind would relate to their mortality: "the administrative murder of millions made of death a thing one had never yet to fear in just

this fashion" (*Negative Dialectics* 362). According to Tyrus Miller, Adorno believes that after the Holocaust, "the individual's relation to mortality is not, as the existentialists would have it, primordial. In an epoch of mass death […] death now becomes an administered, impersonal, and collective fiat, in which neither the individual nor the community has any real say" (50). Moreover, Miller explains that, in this setting,

> the individual's relation to mortality derives from the social conditions that mediate between individuals and death, conditions that include […] intense political and technical domination of human beings. Within this horizon, death itself may be collectively organized and, in the case of the concentration camps, even mass produced in the interest of political and economic power (50)

In other words, the manner in which the victims of the camps were murdered was a form of death which had never been previously imagined. Never before had the world seen bureaucratically sanctioned mass murder carried out with such efficiency by the technologies of capitalist modernity. Adorno highlights two aspects of how the trauma of the Holocaust impacted on conceptions of human mortality that I believe are particularly pertinent to representations of death and dying in the works of Beckett. Firstly, Adorno suggests that in the aftermath of the Holocaust death is no longer an experience one can reconcile with life: "there is no chance any more for death to come into the individual's empirical life as somehow conformable with the course of that life. The last, the poorest possession left to the individual is expropriated" (*Negative Dialectics* 362). We find this inability to reconcile the self with death throughout Beckett's fiction but most notably in Beckett's internationally acclaimed trilogy of novels, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* written in the aftermath of the war in the 1950s.

The second way in which the Holocaust impacted on conceptions of human mortality is the way in which the victims were killed. Victims of the deathcamps were subject to humiliating processes of dehumanisation before they were eventually executed. Adorno writes that "in the concentration camps it was no longer an individual who died, but a specimen – this is a fact bound to affect the dying of those who escaped the administrative measure" (*Negative Dialectics* 362) of the Nazis. The industrial-scale mass murder of people who were viewed not as human but as "specimen[s]" in the concentration camps obliterates the notion of death as something "conformable" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 362) with life and instead transforms death into something inhumanly mechanical, not an experience but an expression of the ideology of pure identity. According to Adorno, ideologies which seek the notion of a "pure" racial identity are always pursued at the cost of the death of those who fall outside the arbitrary designations of such an identity. The guiding principal of an ideology of "pure" race is the death of all others; the Holocaust "confirmed the philosopheme of pure identity as death" (*Negative Dialectics* 362). Indeed, the figures of Beckett's fiction are never sure of their individual identities. Characters such as Molloy suffer from a sort of existential amnesia as they struggle to recall their family names and place in society as they lurch toward a death which never comes. This dehumanisation is further intensified in Beckett's post-1950s fiction, which I will discuss in chapter four, where the narrative voice moves away from describing subjective experiences of dying and instead focuses on more imagistic depictions of dehumanised bodies entombed within hermetic spaces. It is in this context that Adorno sees Beckett as a writer whose works, *Endgame* in particular, depict a world in which "there really is not much to be feared any more" in response "to a practice whose first sample was given in the concentration camps" (Adorno,

Negative Dialectics 362). Beckett emerges in Adorno's analysis as an artist writing in the aftermath of the annihilation of all values.

The connections Adorno and others have drawn between Beckett's post-war works and the Holocaust should not be considered as purely contextual. James Knowlson points out that in an early draft of *Waiting for Godot* one of the tramps was given the conspicuously Jewish name of Lévy (Knowlson 380). Knowlson also suggests that in the years before Beckett completed the *Trilogy* and *Godot*, revelations about the horrors of the concentration camps were coming to light for the general public as film footage of Belsen, Dachau and Auschwitz was released (380). Furthermore, it is suggested that Beckett would also have read accounts by those who survived the camps themselves. According to Knowlson, Mania Péron, wife of Beckett's friend and fellow resistance cell member Alfred who died as a result of his incarceration in Mauthausen concentration camp, probably lent Beckett two books written by Georges Loustaunau-Lacau. The latter was also a prisoner of Mauthausen camp and his books about his experiences included accounts of Péron who was known to recite Baudelaire and Verlaine in the midst of the horrors he faced (Knowlson 381). Emilie Morin has recently investigated Beckett's awareness of the growing archive of literature and art which dealt with the legacy of the Holocaust from the 1950s onwards including works by Charles Duff, François Maspero, Con Leventhal, Raymond Federman, Avigdor Arikha, Elie Wiesel and Alan Resnais.[3]

Other scholars have also attempted to trace how Beckett's works may intersect with accounts provided by survivors of the concentrations camps. Both David Houston Jones and Daniel Katz have argued that Beckett's works enact and dramatize the difficulties of bearing

[3] For more details on the texts listed here see Chapter 3 of Emilie Morin, *Beckett's Political Imagination*.

witness, providing testimony and archiving the experience of the deathcamps, experienced by many survivors and discussed in the works of Primo Levi and Giorgio Agamben's *Remnants of Auschwitz*. Katz, for example, suggests that Beckett emerges as the quintessential post-Holocaust writer insofar as his works dramatise some of the central lessons of survivor testimonies such as those of Levi. I will make reference to some of these works in chapter three, most notably Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved*, to discuss the extent to which the form of death and dying represented in the *Trilogy* may be said to be closely bound up with the trauma of the Holocaust. While the aforementioned work on Beckett and the Holocaust has tended to focus on the relationship between the author's narrative style and survivor testimony, I argue that there is also a material connection between Beckett's work and the Holocaust. In chapter four, I explore the connection between Beckett's short fiction from the 1960s and key historical events in post-Holocaust Europe such as the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials.

In these historical and cultural contexts, the works of Joyce and Beckett provide fascinating and productive insights into death and dying. Human mortality has long been an important question for art and philosophy. Ever since Socrates' contemplation of the nature of death before his execution in *Apology*, Western philosophy has wrestled with the question of human mortality. One twentieth-century figure contemporaneous to both Joyce and Beckett who formed much of his philosophy around his appreciation of the significance of death was Martin Heidegger. As I will be discussing Heidegger's thought throughout this dissertation, I will briefly introduce his thinking about death and forms of social discourse here.

Dasein – Heidegger's term for human existence – must co-exist with others in the world. In this co-existence with others, the human adopts a secondary, inferior form of subjectivity called "the self of everydayness" (*BT* 242). Living with others in the world, Heidegger suggests,

encourages collective and average ways of being and thinking. However, Heidegger argues that society, referred to as "the they", threatens to subsume the individual human into its collective ways of thinking and interpreting the world. Society offers Dasein a comfortable life, free from existential anguish or inquiry, in the form of established traditions and easily understood interpretations of the world. In day to day life, individuality dissolves into the "inconspicuousness and unacertainability" (*BT* 123) of the surrounding world. Heidegger writes: "being-with-one-another […] creates averageness. It is the existential characteristic of the they […] the they is essentially concerned with averageness" (*BT* 123). This "averageness" (*BT* 123) threatens the prospect of living an authentic life as it reduces the possibilities open to the human: "The care of averageness reveals […] the levelling down of all possibilities of being" (*BT* 123). However, this type of existence, one which is utterly dispersed and invested in the mores and attitudes of the crowd is, according to Heidegger, to be considered inauthentic and is distinguished from "the authentic self […] the self which has explicitly grasped itself" (*BT* 125).

One of the defining characteristics of everyday existence is a phenomenon Heidegger calls "idle talk" (*BT* 161). Idle talk denotes the forms of everyday discourse and communication between Dasein and other human beings. This form of communication is the primary way in which humans interact with and understand their world. Idle talk "constitutes the mode of being of the understanding and interpretation of everyday Dasein" (*BT* 161-2) such that it "constitutes [Dasein's] most everyday and stubborn 'reality'" (*BT* 164). But living with others encourages a particular type of discourse and language which Heidegger finds problematic. He writes: "in the language that is spoken [...] there lies an average intelligibility [...] the discourse communicated can be understood […] without the listener actually turning toward what is talked

about in the discourse" (*BT* 162). Everyday discourse is characterised and tainted by "an average intelligibility" (*BT* 162) which, according to Heidegger, discourages humans from engaging with what is being said in a meaningful way. The subject of idle talk is understood "only approximately and superficially" (*BT* 162). Heidegger concedes that "we get to know many things initially in this way" however he also points out that "some things never get beyond such an average understanding" (*BT* 163). The true danger of idle talk is that in promoting an easily understood and digestible form of discourse open to all, it also "divests us of the task of genuine understanding, [idle talk] develops an indifferent intelligibility for which nothing is closed off any longer" (*BT* 163). Idle talk lays claim to all issues without possessing or encouraging genuine understanding.

In §52 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger discusses how the idle talk of society regards being-towards-death. Since idle talk is the primary way Dasein interprets its surrounding world, these everyday discourses play a large role in how Dasein navigates its relationship with death (*BT* 242). Idle talk treats human mortality as an event experienced by others and alienates Dasein from a true understanding of the significance of death by presenting human mortality "as an indeterminate something" (*BT* 243). Death, as the most individual and subjective possibility humans can ever experience, is transformed into a "publicly occurring event" (*BT* 243) which does not bear any significance for the individual. Heidegger writes:

> The publicness of everyday being-with-one-another "knows" death as a constantly occurring event, as a "case of death". Someone or another "dies," be it a neighbour or a stranger. People unknown to us "die" daily and hourly. "Death" is encountered as a familiar event occurring within the world. As such, it remains in the inconspicuousness of everyday encounters. The they has also already secured an interpretation for this event. The "fleeting" talk about this [...] says: one dies at the end, but for now one is not affected [unbetroffen] (*BT* 243)

According to Heidegger's analysis, death is naturalized within idle talk: it is treated with a mixture of familiarity and detachment. Human mortality becomes both pervasive, in the sense that everybody else's death is discussed, and inconspicuous, since death is only ever treated as *someone else's* death, through a form of social discourse which aims at average intelligibility and discourages critical inquiry or investigation. Rather than literally expelling death from its borders, everyday society evades the significance of death by naturalizing death as a phenomenon which strikes at *someone else* in society thus providing a "constant tranquilization about death" (*BT* 243) for the individual. By treating mortality as an event which occurs to someone else, society encourages an "evasion of death" (*BT* 243). As Heidegger suggests, death is something which happens at some indeterminate point in the future and therefore bears no significance on the present.

Forms of shared public discourse became amplified in modernity with the development of new, mass printing technologies. Benedict Anderson, for example, argues that the novel and the newspaper were "two forms of imagining which first flowered in Europe in the eighteenth century" (Anderson 24). Furthermore, he argues, these forms of writing were instrumental in imaginatively projecting the formations of culture and nationhood in modernity: "these forms provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation" (Anderson 24-5). Anderson suggests that the newspaper reaffirms the human's sense of facticity and reality in the nebulous conditions of modern life: "the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life" (Anderson 35-6). Yet Heidegger was critical of printed mass media. He claims that newspapers and magazines are the platforms for idle talk. Accordingly, they perpetuate collective

interpretations of reality thereby instilling "averageness" (*BT* 123) and inauthenticity in the populace. Heidegger writes: "in the use of information services such as the newspaper, every other is like the rest" (*BT* 123). Heidegger argues that the technology of mass print media orders truth in order to perpetuate "the true dictatorship" (*BT* 123) of the industrialist ethics of modernity. If the task of the newspaper is the configuration of public opinion for the continuation of the prevailing social order, then authentic Being-towards-death, which according to Jacob Golomb "threatens to shatter the widely accepted illusions of the prevailing ethos and its elaborate schemes for fleeing death" (76), is a topic with which the newspaper is deeply concerned.

Heidegger argues that newspapers, as a ubiquitous technology of mass communication in modernity, perpetuate a set of public opinions and ways of interpreting the world. Heidegger's contemporary Benjamin also argued that the prevalence of the newspaper in modernity was one of the reasons for the erosion of the social significance of storytelling more generally. For Benjamin, both the novel and the newspaper are symptomatic of an age where "experience has fallen in value" (362) and "the communicability of experience is decreasing" (364). Whereas storytelling is "an artisan form of communication" since "it does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing" (Benjamin 367), Benjamin writes that "the new form of communication [in modernity] is information" (365) which seeks to reduce experience to its essence. Rita Barnard writes that in an increasingly mechanized and industrialist modernity "the novel is gradually replaced by 'information' – by the shards of narrative we find in the newspaper […] the fractured format of the daily news destroys our narrative abilities and depreciates experience even further" (Barnard 42). Like Heidegger, Benjamin also distrusts the instantaneity with which the newspaper transmits information:

> it is no longer intelligence coming from afar, but the information which supplies a handle for what is nearest that gets the readiest hearing […] Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation (365).

Joyce was evidently sensitive to this facet of modernity. His works depict the newspaper as a collage of dissonant narrative voices but they also expose how the newspaper helps to facilitate the homogenization and sanitization of death practices in post-Famine Ireland. This occurs especially through the mechanical reproduction of the obituary or death notice. The newspaper then, for Anderson, Heidegger, Benjamin and Joyce, is a central feature of public life in modernity. For Anderson, the newspaper is the foundational text for any imagined community, giving citizens a conduit into their culture and affirming the facticity of their society for good or ill. For Heidegger, it perpetuates the common, inauthentic interpretation of the world found in the idle talk of "the they". For Benjamin, the newspaper is symptomatic of an age where the value of communication has fallen and the desire for instantaneous information reigns. For Joyce, as I will discuss, the newspaper is the space where the public encounters death through the obituary or death notice. I suggest that the mass printed commemoration of death in the newspaper obituary, as dramatized in Joyce's fiction, perpetuates inauthentic characterizations of death that correspond to Heidegger's depictions of idle talk. Yet Joyce, acutely aware of the ubiquity and influence of the newspaper, also sees the obituary form as a site of possible resistance to the homogenization of death practices in post-Famine Ireland. Although this is not yet entirely evident in his first collection of stories *Dubliners* (1914), Joyce's later literary masterpiece *Ulysses* (1922) uses the obituary form in order to stage an authentic representation of death. In different ways, newspapers and news media more generally are also important factors to consider when discussing death in Beckett's short fiction from the 1960s onwards. As

I shall discuss in chapter four, the media coverage of the Adolf Eichmann Trial and the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials of the 1960s, as well as the subsequent debate about this coverage, provides an interesting context within which to discuss Beckett's short fiction written from the 1950s onwards.

Although the deaths in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* take place against the backdrop of a post-Famine Ireland in which the Catholic Church sought to homogenize the sacraments and social rites of passage, my argument is that Joyce's fiction also depicts the historical process of the expulsion of death from the public sphere, in a style that mirrors a broader trend in attitudes towards death in Western culture. Of course, as we have seen from Heidegger's analysis of social discourse, this "effacement" (Ariès 85) of death is perhaps more accurately described as an alienation of the individual from the fact of *their own* death, rather than a more general repression of mortality as such.

In order to detail Joyce's engagement with the relationship between death and forms of mass communication in modernity, it will be helpful to analyse the obituary form as it is dramatized in his fiction. Accordingly, the work of Joyce's German contemporary Heidegger on death in social discourse provides a productive theoretical framework when considering the obituary in Joyce's fiction.[4] I contend that the obituary, as it is quoted, mimicked and parodied in the work of Joyce, perpetuates what following Heidegger we might call common or inauthentic interpretations of and responses to death. Joyce's depictions of social death practices

[4] Cheryl Herr is one critic who has also identified the affinities between Joyce's fiction and Heidegger's existential phenomenology. In particular, Herr finds striking similarities in both writers' concern for the experience of being existentially embedded in a particular cultural formation and sociohistorical context. As Herr points out, Joyce was acutely aware that, like Heidegger, "a given individual necessarily engaged with and was reciprocally constituted by a specific historical world" (Herr, "Being in Joyce's World" 163). Herr argues that, in Joyce's fiction, the embeddedness of Being-in-the-world takes precedence in everyday life over a metaphysic of certainty (Herr, *James Joyce and the Art of Shaving* 2-3).

extend beyond the parameters of early-twentieth-century Ireland. In his commitment to innovative depictions of everyday life, he also inevitably touches on issues of broad philosophical significance. Like his existentialist contemporaries, Joyce was attuned to human traumas and dilemmas in an era of World War. The latter involved mass destruction and death in a way that chimed with nineteenth-century Irish historical and cultural experience in particular.[5]

As with Joyce, Beckett's literary explorations of death and dying draw him into an indirect dialogue with his philosophical contemporary Heidegger. Beckett endlessly returns to representations of dying and of contemplating death in his work. As the recent collection of essays *Beckett and Death* attests, although Beckett playfully "obscures the difference between a living death and a dying life" (Barfield 2), death is "so uncannily, uniquely productive" (Barfield 1) in Beckett's works that we must consider it to be a central preoccupation. Death and dying in Beckett's works are purgatorial spaces of fruitless reflection as characters meander in an existential twilight zone unsure if they have passed from one realm to next. Moreover, I suggest that the later fiction from the 1950s seems to dramatize the death of the literary form itself as Beckett's narrators lose their will and ability to give form to their narratives. Beckett's fiction, the *Trilogy* in particular, constantly calls into question the significance of death to such an extent that whether the narrators are living or dead no longer actually matters: all that persists is a constant sense of dissatisfaction with their present condition and an anxiety about the prospect of death. Death as an existential, epistemological and ontological concept suffuses the

[5] The association of the Great Famine and the Great War has been noted recently by scholars such as Joe Cleary and Kevin Whelan. Cleary argues that "the Great Famine of 1845-50, which left more than a million dead because of hunger and disease, and precipitated the emigration of a million more, arguably represented in the Irish case a pulverization of society at least as drastic and as consequential in effect as World War I was later to be for other European countries" (9).

Beckettian world with a claustrophobic and intoxicating aesthetic of anxiety, decay and fruitless speculation. Storytelling and narratives about dying in Beckett are deployed as a form of resistance to the radical unknowability of death but they also undermine any chance of foundational certainties in life. In this sense, these texts register the conditions of a post-Holocaust world as a time in which human beings' understanding of mortality has been radically disrupted.

According to Steve Barfield, the main divergence between the views of Beckett and Heidegger is that mortality does not offer the Beckettian subject anything like the same degree of certainty proposed by Heidegger: "whereas death as finitude offers the beginning of the affirmation of Dasein as proximity to Being for Heidegger, death is both more uncertain for Beckett and seemingly incapable of offering more than the phantom premise of a cessation of existence" (161). Barfield suggests that Beckett subverts the Heideggerian sense of death as finitude and consequently death as a precondition of freedom and authenticity. What results from Beckett's denial of the finality of death is "an atemporal disjunction that ensures Beckett's characters are between birth and death in [a] liminal space […] death becomes not the end of life but a possible new beginning" (Barfield 161). In a repudiation of Heidegger's idea that death is the inescapable conclusion of life, Barfield suggests that death offers the Beckettian subject a solution to the predicament of the current struggle in the form of a new beginning. More importantly, Beckett may be said to salvage some "humanist, voluntarist aspect [in the face of death] precisely where Heidegger would assume that the rigorous decidability of 'death' prevented the subject from backsliding into the everyday world of false subjectivity" (Barfield 161). For Heidegger, recognition of one's own finitude is such a powerful experience that it forces the subject to assume responsibility for authentic existence and prevents the subject from

falling into the inauthenticity of the crowd. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, however, Beckett portrays characters who have a much more ambiguous relationship with their own deaths.

Beckett's characters frequently acknowledge their impending mortality, to the extent that such an experience becomes banal and engenders a sense of apathy rather than rallying them toward the vague goal of authenticity. While I agree with Barfield's assertion that Beckett does invest his characters with a sense of agency in the face of death, I believe that this state – of being in some way capable of revolting against the obliterative totality of human mortality – is achieved through their ability to elaborate stories. Through their narratives, Beckett's characters recoup some sense of autonomy in the face of death as their ability to narrate sustains their liminal existences and staves off the inevitability of death. However, I suggest that this is not always a positive achievement as the disavowal of death through narrative results in circular and repetitive lives for Beckett's characters. Although Beckett's meditations on human mortality undermine the importance the German philosopher places on death in relation to existential authenticity, Barfield suggests that "the Beckettian texts act in an uncanny fashion with Heidegger's work" (164) to further deepen the philosophical and literary exploration of these themes in his work.

While Barfield identifies the particular ways in which the works of both thinkers seems to correlate and mirror each other, it is important to note the very concrete ways in which Beckett's conception of mortality differs from Heidegger's. Beckett's post-Holocaust fiction serves as a repudiation of continental existentialist thought on death best represented by the works of Heidegger. Beckett captures an age in which death is no longer reconcilable with the individual life and is seen primarily as a fate inflicted on groups of "othered", dehumanised people. Whereas death offers the prospect of totality and completion and thus provides a

structure through which the subject can seek an authentic understanding of Being for Heidegger, Beckett's vision of death is of an alien and indeterminable threat which impels his narrators to ceaselessly create never-ending and, ultimately, cyclical narratives.

I will argue in this dissertation that Joyce and Beckett are chiefly concerned with two distinct periods in the evolution of our understanding and presentation of mortality within the modern period. Joyce is writing in an age when natural death has been effaced from public life in post-Famine Ireland while Beckett is writing in an age when violent death has become a mass spectacle after the events of the Holocaust. Even though Joyce is writing *during* a period of massive upheaval and war in Europe, he is very self-consciously not writing *about* these events. *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* are set during a specific historic moment (1904), before the catastrophes of World War I and World War II transpire, but in the aftermath of the Great Famine and the notoriously repressive culture that the event helped to produce. Joyce responds to an age where death has been effaced by exploring, through representation, mimicry and parody, the types of texts and strategies that society deploys in its project of taming natural death, including the newspaper obituary. Indeed, most deaths in Joyce are natural deaths. Even the "unnatural" deaths of characters like Mrs. Sinico in "A Painful Case" from *Dubliners* and the suicide of Bloom's father in *Ulysses* are particularly revealing of the society which Joyce is representing. Mrs. Sinico's "unnatural", violent death becomes a form of public spectacle in the newspaper and the occasion for society to moralize about the dangers of "intemperance" and alcoholism. Rudolf Bloom's suicide is not a "natural" death, by the standards of early-twentieth century Ireland, but his death is first represented in the text as a peaceful and undramatic event as Bloom "thought he was asleep first" (*U* 80).

Beckett is similarly indirect in his treatment of post-Holocaust Europe. As I shall discuss, Beckett responds to an age of widely-disseminated images and narratives of mass, violent death in the wake of World War II and the Holocaust. While Joyce explicitly records and explores the means by which early-twentieth-century Ireland effaced natural death from everyday life, Beckett refuses to name the events and contexts which inform representations of death in his work. Instead, he considers the experience of individual contemplation and anticipation of death in his stories. Unlike in Joyce, death in Beckett's fiction is either violent, for example the murders of the woodsmen by Molloy and Moran in *Molloy* and Lemuel's brutal rampage at the end of *Malone Dies*, or unnatural, insofar as the voices of the "deceased" persist after they have died or individuals are incarcerated in tombs caught somewhere between life and death. The recent memory of atrocity equally informs representations of death in the works of both authors. In the next chapter, I will begin by discussing reports of death in Joyce's *Dubliners*.

Chapter One: Reporting Death in Dubliners

Dubliners: Backgrounds

James Joyce's first book, the collection of short stories entitled *Dubliners,* represents the author's attempt to put Dublin on the literary world stage. In the opening section of this chapter, I sketch some of the historical conditions which are the background to Joyce's stories of Dublin life around the turn of the twentieth century. I go on to discuss various key critical responses to the book and in particular to explore Pound's assertion that Joyce's talent lies in his ability to uncover "the universal element" (Pound, "'Dubliners' and Mr. James Joyce". *The Egoist,* i, no. 14 qtd. in *Critical Companion to James Joyce: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* 81-2) that underpins the action of *Dubliners*. From there, I will briefly outline the significance of death in the book within the historical context of post-Famine Ireland. In a letter to his brother Stanislaus, Joyce asserts that it is "strange that no artist has given [Dublin] to the world" (Joyce, qtd. in Ellmann, *JJ* 208). Joyce expressed a similar sentiment in a letter to his publisher Grant Richards in October 1905 when he writes: "I do not think any writer has yet presented Dublin to the world [...] the expression 'Dubliner' seems to me to have some meaning and I doubt whether the same can be said for such words as 'Londoner' and 'Parisian'" (Joyce, qtd. in Ellmann, *JJ* 208). Yet the publication of *Dubliners* was fraught with difficulties. Grant Richards, the publisher with whom Joyce had initially signed a contract, reneged when the printer rejected the book over fears he could be prosecuted for publishing indecent materials. The concerns of the printer and subsequently Richards were not baseless since Joyce himself boasted of the book's "style of scrupulous meanness" (Joyce, qtd. in Ellmann, *JJ* 210) and of "the special odour of corruption which, I hope, floats over my stories" (Joyce, qtd. in Ellmann, *JJ* 210).

Having been rejected by Grant Richards, Joyce turned to an old friend from Dublin, George Roberts, in the hopes of having *Dubliners* printed. Yet Joyce faced problems with Roberts also. Edna O'Brien suggests that the stories of *Dubliners* could be read as "anti-Irish", a sentiment which "ran counter to Roberts's aim as a patriotic publisher" (85). The naming of public houses, shops and railway stations as well as intimations of homosexuality in stories like "An Encounter" offended the solicitor whom Joyce had hired to defend his case, George Lidwell; Joyce's friend Thomas Kettle also threatened to publicly condemn the book if it appeared. The history of Joyce's struggles is detailed in the January 1914 issue of *The Egoist* in which Pound published a series of letters from Joyce whom he calls "an author of known and notable talents" (*The Egoist* 26). After some time and considerable legal wrangling, Joyce claims that the printer eventually told him that **"**the copies would never leave his printing-house, and added that the type had been broken up, and that the entire edition of one thousand copies would be burnt" (*The Egoist* 26). Joyce also claims in the article that he "left Ireland the next day, bringing with [him] a printed copy of the book which [he] had obtained from the publisher" (*The Egoist* 26). Richard Ellmann notes that, after the publication of the article in *The Egoist*, Joyce felt that "his position with Grant Richards was strengthened" (*JJ* 353) and he wrote to Richards on January 19, 1914 to again inquire about the publication of *Dubliners*. Richards replied later that month and agreed to finally publish the book. *Dubliners* eventually appeared on June 15, 1914.

The reception was mixed with many reviews deeming it "drab" (*Times Literary Supplement*, June 18, 1914 qtd. in *Critical Companion to James Joyce* 78) and bemoaning Joyce's insistence on portraying the "aspects of life which are ordinarily not mentioned" (Gould, Review of *Dubliners, New Statesman,* iii, June 27, 1914 qtd. in *Critical Companion to James*

Joyce 80). Joyce's unflinching attention to detail while depicting the seedier side of Dublin life led to a particularly damning review in the *Athenæum*: *"*The fifteen short stories here given under the collective title of *Dubliners* are nothing if not naturalistic. In some ways, indeed, they are unduly so: at least three would have been better buried in oblivion" (*Athenæum*, June 20, 1914 qtd. in *Critical Companion to James Joyce* 78). Yet some reviews also note the subtlety of Joyce's writing. One writer notes that "He leaves the conviction that his people are as he describes them. Shunning the emphatic, Mr. Joyce is less concerned with the episode than with the mood which it suggests" (*Times Literary Supplement,* June 18, 1914 qtd. in *Critical Companion to James Joyce* 78). Another review on the *Everyman* also praised Joyce's ability to capture the "undercurrents of Irish character" through a language "pregnant with suggestion" (*Everyman,* July 3, 1914 qtd. in *Critical Companion to James Joyce* 80).[6]

Joyce did eventually concede that concerns raised by his publishers and reviewers may have been well-founded when he stated that *Dubliners* may not have been entirely balanced in its depiction of the city in a letter to his brother:

> Sometimes thinking of Ireland it seems to me that I have been unnecessarily harsh. I have reproduced (in *Dubliners* at least) none of the attraction of the city for I have never felt at my ease in any city since I left it except for Paris. I have not reproduced its ingenuous insularity and its hospitality. The latter "virtue" so far as I can see does not exist elsewhere in Europe. (Letter to Stanislaus, Rome, 25 Sept. 1906, in Letters, Vol. II, 166, qtd. in Ellman, *JJ* 231)

However, *Dubliners* is not to be regarded merely as a portrait of the inertia and malaise of early-twentieth-century Dublin. Despite Joyce's insistence to Constantine Curran that *Dubliners*

[6] Both of these contemporary observations chime with Ellmann's assessment of Joyce's early works more than forty years later when he writes that the stories are "arrogant yet humble too, [they claim] importance by claiming nothing; [they seek] a presentation so sharp that comment by the author would be an interference" (Ellmann, *JJ* 84).

would be a stark portrayal of "the soul of that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city" (Joyce, qtd. in Ellmann, *JJ* 163), the thematic concerns of the book extend far beyond the local parameters of Ireland's capital. Some early critics also highlighted Joyce's ability to deal with universal themes in an often-claustrophobic provincial setting. Ezra Pound, for example, praised Joyce for his ability to portray "things as they are, not only for Dublin, but for every city […] [Joyce] is quite capable of dealing with things about him […] yet these details do not engross him, he is capable of getting at the universal element beneath them" (Pound, "'Dubliners' and Mr. James Joyce". *The Egoist*, i, no. 14 qtd. in *Critical Companion to James Joyce: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* 81-2).

One of the universal elements underpinning much of the action of *Dubliners* is the theme of human mortality. From a child's first experience of death in "The Sisters", to the anguished symbolism of death-anxiety found in "Clay", through to the epiphanies concerning loss in "A Painful Case" and "The Dead", the stories of *Dubliners* are deeply sensitive to the ways in which the characters navigate the fear associated with death and mortality. In a conversation with his brother Stanislaus, Joyce discusses how the death of an individual can cast the "significance of trivial things" (Joyce qtd. in Ellmann, *JJ* 163) in a broader context. Joyce suggests that, in a style comparable to the shock of an untimely death, his intention in writing *Dubliners* was to render the innocuous meaningful:

> Do you see that man who has just skipped out of the way of the tram? Consider, if he had been run over, how significant every act of his would at once become. I don't mean for the police inspector. I mean for anybody who knew him. And his thoughts, for anybody that could know them. It is my idea of the significance of trivial things that I want to give the two or three unfortunate wretches who may eventually read me. (qtd. in Ellmann, *JJ* 163)

Death may be universal but our understanding of the significance of human mortality varies enormously. In the half century before *Dubliners*, it can be argued that Ireland had undergone a violent inauguration into modernity in the wake of the cultural changes associated with the Great Famine, a process a briefly outlined in the introduction. The crisis and its aftermath destroyed the cultural heart of a largely rural, Irish-speaking population who were loyal to their Catholic identity but whose religious attendance was lax and who retained many elements of traditional folk belief. The Irish population became subject to an increasingly authoritarian and centralized Catholic Church. The devastation of the Famine, which resulted in a legacy of demoralization and fear in the Irish populace, led to the Catholic Church gaining unprecedented authority over its flock and all of its social rituals and rites.

Accordingly, any study of the theme of mortality in Joyce's works must take account of the shift in Irish funerary practices at the turn of the twentieth century. As I have mentioned, *Dubliners* was a book that faced many artistic and legal difficulties before eventually being published. Joyce's insistence on portraying the "significance of trivial things" (qtd. in Ellmann, *JJ* 163) led to a depiction of the grimmer and less salubrious elements of post-Famine Dublin culture including responses to death and mortality. In the next section, I will address the most significant changes in cultural attitudes towards death in the years following the Famine. I want to argue that while it is generally accepted that the Catholic Church extended its authority and influence over Irish society after the Famine, the Church also gained a greater control over sacramental rites such as funerals. The Church's usurpation of pre-existing death practices and rituals also greatly influenced wider cultural attitudes towards death and mortality.

Positioning *Dubliners* within post-Famine, post-devotional revolution Ireland, I now want to discuss the prevalence of the obituary and printed reportage of death in "The Sisters"

and “A Painful Case”. In the next two sections, I look at the connections between death and the newspaper in two stories from *Dubliners*. Firstly, I consider the juxtaposition of traditional and modern funeral rituals paying particular attention to the centrality and authority of the death notice in “The Sisters”. Secondly, I examine the report of Mrs. Sinico’s death in the story “A Painful Case”. I read the report of the inquest into Mrs. Sinico’s death as a covering over in public words of a horrible event. Furthermore, the fact that what Duffy reads in the story is a newspaper report of an inquest into Mrs. Sinico’s death represents a double-dose of distancing, euphemism and inauthenticity which essentially transforms the tragic death of a woman into a form of gossip or entertainment for those not immediately affected. I argue that James Duffy’s initial shock and disgust at the death of Mrs. Sinico is best understood as a response to the narrative style of newspaper report about her inquest than it is to her actual death. However, I also consider how the evolving complexity of Duffy’s response to the death of another begins to demonstrate how Joyce’s fiction exhibits and will continue to exploit the epiphanic potential of the newspaper form. An interesting point of contrast to note at this stage is the fact that in *Dubliners* the printed reports of death are merely quoted or reproduced within the text whereas in *Ulysses* Joyce begins to play with such forms of printed discourse by ventriloquizing and parodying these modern announcements of death. I argue that, in *Ulysses*, Joyce investigates and experiments with versions of such texts in order to confront or challenge modern attitudes towards death.

“The card pinned on the crape”: A Notice of Death in “The Sisters”

I want to return to Joyce’s earlier remark to his brother Stanislaus in which he claims that the death of an individual can result in the disclosure of the “significance of trivial things” (Joyce qtd. in Ellmann, *JJ* 163). If Joyce intended *Dubliners* to highlight “the significance of trivial

things" and convert "the bread of everyday life into something that has a permanent artistic life of its own" (qtd. in Ellmann, *JJ* 163), then, given the above comments to Stanislaus, it is interesting that the book begins with a story about trivial, merely ritualistic responses to death. "The Sisters" is a story concerned with death that also sheds light on the co-existence of traditional and modern death practices. The story was initially solicited by George Russell, also known by his literary pseudonym *Æ*, for publication in *Irish Homestead*. Russell had been an admirer of Joyce's writing, having read drafts of the autobiographical novel *Stephen Hero* (which served as the basis of Joyce's second book, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*), and Ellmann credits Russell's commission of "The Sisters" as "the beginning of *Dubliners*" (Ellmann, *JJ* 163). The poet approached Joyce and asked him to write something that played "to the common understanding and liking" (Russell qtd. in Ellmann, *JJ* 163) of the Irish reader. Although "totally uncompromising in its method" (Ellmann, *JJ* 163), according to Richard Ellmann, "The Sisters" was accepted for publication and appeared in the *Irish Homestead* on 13 August 1904.

Joyce described "The Sisters" as one of three stories in *Dubliners* which were "stories of my childhood" (qtd. in Ellmann, *JJ* 208) and the version of "The Sisters" which appeared in *Irish Homestead* would undergo several revisions before being included in *Dubliners*.[7] The plot of the story essentially involves a boy's response to the death of Fr. Flynn, a priest related to the boy on his mother's side, who acted as a mentor to the child. Critical interpretations of the story have often highlighted the epistemological and hermeneutic ellipses which characterise the text. As early as 1969, John William Corrington read the story as representing the

[7] For an extensive discussion of these revisions and changes see Florence L. Walzl, "Joyce's 'The Sisters': A Development", pp. 375-421.

relationship between the Irish people and the decaying Catholic Church which foregrounded the metaphysical nullity "not only of Catholicism but of religion generally" (22). More recent scholarship has supported readings which lean towards emphasising the importance of the unspoken in the text. Philip Herring, for example, argues that "the text is full of elliptical language filtered through the consciousness of a bewildered youth who broods over the deceased" (40). Similarly, Margot Norris writes that "The Sisters" "functions as a synecdoche, not for the book *as a whole*, but precisely for the book *as an un-whole*, a volume of incompletion, a collection of stories each of which is riddled by gaps and silences that afflict it with incompletion" (*Suspicious Readings of Joyce's Dubliners* 18, original emphasis).

This sense of absence and incompleteness is palpable from the start as "The Sisters" begins on the day of Fr. Flynn's death in the home of the child-narrator and depicts a complete breakdown and failure of language surrounding mortality and the deceased. Throughout the story, various characters, from Old Cotter to Eliza Flynn, attempt but fail to articulate coherent narratives concerning the deceased priest. The character of Fr. Flynn and his exact relationship with the boy-narrator remains an enigma throughout the story and has led to fierce scholarly debate.[8] Without wanting to wade too deeply into this debate, I suggest that both the mystery surrounding Fr. Flynn and the other characters' inability to speak clearly about the deceased are examples of the breakdown of social discourse that becomes evident when individuals are trying to deal authentically with the topic of mortality. Peter Dempsey lends support to such a reading when he suggests that the breakdown of language represents the intrusion of death itself on the narrative borders of the text: "[death] enters the rhetorical and the narrative strategies of the

[8] For more on this see chapter 1 of Margot Norris's *Suspicious Readings of Joyce's Dubliners* where she explores the different critical interpretations of the relationship between the narrator and the priest in "The Sisters".

piece, specifically through the figures of ellipsis and metalepsis" (11). We find an example of this intrusion in the first attempt to assess or describe Fr. Flynn's character which is made by Old Cotter who states "No, I wouldn't say he was exactly ... but there was something queer ... there was something uncanny about him" (*Dubliners* 7). Furthermore, he states: "I have my own theory about it [...] I think it was one of those ... peculiar cases ... but it's hard to say...." and later says that "I wouldn't like children of mine [...] to have too much to say to a man like that" since "It's bad for children" (*Dubliners* 8).

Cotter's portrayal of Fr. Flynn is characterised by a series of enigmatic ellipses and the only adjectives he eventually manages to produce, "queer" and "uncanny" (*Dubliners* 7), serve only to highlight a sense of something elusive and disturbing that cannot be denoted precisely in speech. The character of the deceased evades succinct definition as Cotter cannot find the appropriate words to describe him. Although the boy does not agree with his assessment of Fr. Flynn, deeming Old Cotter a "tiresome old red-nosed imbecile!" (*Dubliners* 9), the initial failure of language to describe the dead man mirrors the narrative's inept attempt at disclosing the details of Fr. Flynn's life and death. The boy-narrator here shares the puzzlement and in effect occupies the same position as the reader when he admits that he struggled "to extract meaning from [Old Cotter's] unfinished sentences" (*Dubliners* 9). After this enigmatic introduction to Fr. Flynn, the boy-narrator is haunted by a grotesque nightmarish image of the deceased as he tries to sleep that night:

> In the dark of my room I saw the heavy grey face of the paralytic. I drew the blanket over my head and tried to think of Christmas. But the grey face still followed me. It murmured; and I understood that it desired to confess something. I felt my soul receding into some pleasant and vicious region; and there again I found it waiting for me. (*Dubliners* 9)

Although the boy feels hurt by Cotter's assessment of Fr. Flynn, he is nevertheless terrified by the figure he conjures up. The dead priest appears to him as a horrible disembodied face. Struggling to "extract meaning" (*Dubliners* 9) from the ghost's indistinct murmurings, the boy is transported to previously unknown regions of his psyche. The disembodied spectre of Fr. Flynn is also inarticulate, murmuring an inchoate confession which never achieves a meaningful expression. From the beginning of the story, then, there is a complete hermeneutical and discursive breakdown. The living cannot convey any coherent sense of the dead; ambiguity, evasion and gaps are all symptoms of this crucial failure. The story is pervaded by a sense of disgust with the compromises of ordinary, worldly language, highlighting its inability to accurately grapple with the meaning of the death of the central, though absent, character.

The story itself seems subject to the restrictive forms of social discourse surrounding death. In a further elucidation of idle talk, Heidegger writes that such talk generates its own groundless discourse in which the "foundation" (*BT* 162) of the subject being discussed is never revealed. Instead idle talk perpetuates a series of exchanges defined by an "average intelligibility" (*BT* 162) which is repeated and recycled without ever approximating the subject in an authentic way. Heidegger writes: "one understands not so much the beings talked about; rather, one already only listens to what is spoken about as such […] one means *the same thing* because it is in the *same* averageness that we have in a common understanding of what is said" (*BT* 162, original emphasis). In doing so, idle talk prohibits authentic interpretations of its subject "since it *omits* going back to the foundation of what is being talked about" (*BT* 163, original emphasis). Indeed, we find that the story itself is repeating and recycling the same descriptions of Fr. Flynn throughout. The boy's later descriptions of Fr. Flynn's corpse at the wake echoes the language he uses to describe the appearance of the deceased in the dream.

Upon visiting Fr. Flynn's home, the boy describes the body of the deceased: "His face was very truculent, grey and massive, with black cavernous nostrils and circled by a scanty white fur" (*Dubliners* 13). The description of the corpse of Fr. Flynn as "grey" (*Dubliners* 13) echoes "the heavy grey face of the paralytic" (*Dubliners* 9) which had earlier appeared to the boy in his nightmare; the adjective "truculent" is used again later when Fr. Flynn is described as "solemn and truculent in death, an idle chalice on his breast" (*Dubliners* 17). The story continually recycles the same phrases and adjectives throughout, highlighting a sense of linguistic paralysis and a kind of robotic malfunction in language perhaps connected with the essential inauthenticity of these discursive efforts.

Herring argues that language in *Dubliners* does not appear to be able to communicate meaning effectively as the text is characterised by vacuous banality and malapropisms (43). The failure of language surrounding death is again exhibited after the boy-narrator and his aunt view the body and sit in silence with the sisters: "No one spoke: we all gazed at the empty fireplace" (*Dubliners* 14). The only words that fill the void are clichéd, supposedly consoling phrases about how peaceful and beautiful the death had been. Attempting to emphasize this, the sisters describe how Fr. Flynn had a "beautiful death" (*Dubliners* 14). They state that he died "quite peacefully […] You couldn't tell when the breath went out of him. He had a beautiful death, God be praised" (*Dubliners* 14) and that "he looked as if he was asleep, he looked that peaceful and resigned. No one would think he would make such a beautiful corpse" (*Dubliners* 14). He had received the last rites from Fr. O'Rourke who also "brought us all them flowers and them two candlesticks out of the chapel and wrote out the notice for the *Freeman's General* [sic] and took charge of all the papers for the cemetery" (*Dubliners* 15). Again, Herring highlights the vacuity of funereal language as depicted in "The Sisters". He describes the platitudes as "a ritual

dialogue of condolence that Joyce must have heard at funerals and wakes" (43). Like Heideggerian idle talk, this ritualistic language is devoid of authentic communication or understanding: "It is the gesture that is important, for the ritual words themselves are not really vehicles for communication" (Herring 43). In place of a meaningful discussion of the deceased, the parlour-wake scene is characterised by silence punctuated by banal platitudes and cliché. "The Sisters" then depicts the failure of language and discourse surrounding death: ellipses, repetition and clichés all characterise the ways in which both the characters respond to the death of Fr. Flynn and also the way in which the narrator himself struggles to apprehend the true identity of the dead man.

Another important dimension of "The Sisters" is its juxtaposition of traditional and modern death practices. This is evident from the very beginning of the story when the boy tells us that:

> There was no hope for him this time: it was the third stroke. Night after night I had passed the house (it was vacation time) and studied the lighted square of window: and night after night I had found it lighted in the same way, faintly and evenly. If he was dead, I thought, I would see the reflection of candles on the darkened blind for I knew two candles must be set at the head of a corpse. (*Dubliners* 7)

The narrator knows that once Fr. Flynn has died then the window would be lighted in a different way due to the placement of two candles at the head of the corpse. The placement of candles at the head of the corpse was a traditional wake practice in Ireland as highlighted by the American ethnographer James Mooney in a paper from 1888. He writes that "large blessed candles […] ar[e] lighted and kept constantly burning as long as the corpse is in the hous[e]" (Mooney 268). Furthermore, he writes that "the darkness of the death-chamber" was "illumined only by candles that glare upon the corps[e]" (Mooney 273). There is a sharp contrast between the faint and

even light of the gas lamp and the flickering reflections of the candles on "the darkened blinds" (*Dubliners* 7); the steady and even light of the modern gas lamp suggests that Fr. Flynn has not yet passed away whereas the shadows cast by the primitive, traditional corpse-candles indicates that death has occurred and funeral rituals have been undertaken by his sisters. Joyce is very subtly linking the modern technology of light with life and the traditional, pre-modern flickering of the candle with death. We can assume that this change of lighting in Fr. Flynn's window is how Old Cotter learns of the death, since he "was passing by the house" (*Dubliners* 8) before arriving at the narrator's home and telling them the news. So, we see how a traditional death practice, the lighting of two church candles at the head of the corpse, is the initial way the death of Fr. Flynn becomes known to society in general.

However, the traditional funeral practice of the corpse-candles is juxtaposed with another way of announcing death which was obviously to become increasingly important in the modern, urban, and more anonymous and alienated society of early-twentieth-century Ireland. One of the early features of the story which remained in the *Dubliners* version of "The Sisters" was the inclusion of the scene where the boy-narrator reads Fr. Flynn's death notice. The only changes made to the death notice were the specific year of Fr. Flynn's birth and death to coincide with landmark years for Catholicism in nineteenth-century Ireland. This would seem to be very significant given that fact that Fr. Flynn does seem intent on promulgating a particular brand of Catholicism. The boy tells us that Fr. Flynn "had taught me a great deal. He had studied in the Irish college in Rome and he had taught me to pronounce Latin properly [...] he had explained to me the meaning of the different ceremonies of the Mass and of the different vestments worn by the priest" (*Dubliners* 11). Kelly notes how the revisions Joyce made to the story after its publication in *Irish Homestead* make Fr. Flynn's life "coterminous with the revived Catholic

Church in Ireland" (*Dubliners* xxx). For example, in the version published in *Irish Homestead*, Flynn dies in 1890 whereas in the *Dubliners* version he dies in 1895. This is significant because in the *Dubliners* version of the story Fr. Flynn dies in the year of the centenary of the founding of the Catholic College in Maynooth and his birth occurs in the year of Catholic Emancipation in 1829 (*Dubliners* xxx). The version of "The Sisters" that would appear in *Dubliners* makes Fr. Flynn's life coincide more precisely with key dates in the brand of post-devotional revolution Catholicism which laid such a heavy emphasis on regulated and homogenized forms of ritual and practice.

As Breathnach and Butler have pointed out, one of the defining features of death practices during this time was the publishing of the newspaper obituary. It is unclear whether the notice "pinned on the crape" (*Dubliners* 10) of the door is a printed death notice or a hand-written note pinned to the wreath. However, the typographical style of the note, as reproduced in the narrative, mirrors the detached formality of the printed obituary:

July 1st, 1895

The Rev. James Flynn (formerly of S. Catherine's Church,

Meath Street), aged sixty-five years.

R.I.P. (*Dubliners* 10)

Furthermore, the sisters also mention how Father O'Rourke "wrote out the notice for the *Freeman's General* [sic]" (*Dubliners* 15) in the list of things customarily done for the deceased. Between the dulled glow of candled window, the death notice pinned to the door of the deceased and the obituary published in the *Freeman's Journal*, "The Sisters" registers the different symbolisations of death which may subsequently be interpreted by the society at large. Yet the

story also suggests how, by 1895, the printed newspaper obituary had become a regular and authoritative part of funereal ritual. What we have in "The Sisters" then is the co-existence of rural, traditional and pre-famine death rituals and the newer, modern death rituals. The juxtaposition of a pre-modern death ritual, the lighting of the candles at the head of the corpse, along with a modern death ritual, the death notice in the *Freeman's Journal*, reflects the acute social realism of *Dubliners*.

Yet "The Sisters" also depicts the degree to which these new death practices were accepted in Irish society at this time. The boy-narrator's acceptance of Fr. Flynn's demise is contingent on his reading the memorial note pinned to the door of the deceased. The morning after hearing about the death of Fr. Flynn from Old Cotter, the boy goes to Great Britain Street in North Dublin and reads the death notice pinned to the door of the home. The boy notes how "the reading of the card persuaded me that he was dead and I was disturbed to find myself in check" (*Dubliners* 10). Even though the boy had already been expecting the death of Fr. Flynn and that this had been confirmed through a family friend, it is only when he reads the death notice that he becomes "persuaded" (*Dubliners* 10) of the death. The significance of reporting death through the formal notice, and the significant impact of this on the social response to death, is a dominant theme in Joyce's dealing with mortality. We will discuss this in more detail in relation to "A Painful Case" and especially with regards to Paddy Dignam's obituary in *Ulysses*. For the narrator of "The Sisters", death can only be confirmed through some authoritative, standardized form of social communication.

The death notice pinned to the door of the deceased's home then has a double effect. Firstly, it finally confirms the demise of Fr. Flynn. While the boy struggled to "extract meaning" (*Dubliners* 9) from Old Cotter's words at the beginning of the story, the reading of the death

notice overrides the authority of oral communication and the time-honoured symbolism of the lighted candles. In "The Sisters", the death notice is invested with an absolute authority. While we never get to read the obituary published in the *Freeman's Journal*, we can assume that it is invested with as much authority as the death notice. Secondly, the reading of the death notice is also the occasion of the boy's reflection on his relationship with the deceased. The boy reminisces about how the priest had taught him about the various "institutions of the Church which I had always regarded as the simplest acts" (*Dubliners* 11). Finally absorbing the fact of the priest's death leads the boy to reflect on his lessons in Latin pronunciation, the meaning of the different mass rituals and the ritual questions concerning such matters as "what one should do in certain circumstances or whether such and such sins were mortal or venial or imperfections" (*Dubliners* 11). This echoes the pedagogical format of the catechism which Joyce will exploit to explore the death of Bloom's father to such brilliant effect in "Ithaca". The printing of the obituary then is explicitly endorsed by the Catholic Church in "The Sisters" since Fr. O'Rourke carries out the duty himself. In "The Sisters", face-to-face discourse and communication are divested of authority when discussing death and the deceased. Old Cotter fails to articulate a coherent view of Fr. Flynn; the wake is an exhibition of the failures of interpersonal communication. However, the obituary and death notice represent an authoritative idiom of death. In a story where the characters fail to articulate coherent narratives about the deceased, the only form of communication which carries real authority is the notice which announces Fr. Flynn's death.

"What an end!": Newspapers, Inquests and Reports of Death in "A Painful Case"

"A Painful Case" is another story in which the death of a character is reported in the newspaper. Several commentators have highlighted the importance of the intersections between reading and

death in the story. Norris, for example, argues that "on its most basic narrative level, Joyce's 'A Painful Case' is the story of an act of reading that delivers a painful shock" ("Shocking the Reader in James Joyce's 'A Painful Case'" 76). Although the story does not feature an obituary, the report of Mrs Sinico's ignominious death plays a pivotal role in the narrative of the story. Thomas E. Connolly describes the story as "the last of the individual stories before the final stories [of *Dubliners*] that deal with public life" (113). However, this story of one man also portrays how the lives of all individuals are affected by modern mass media. To this end, Stephen Donovan concludes that the real drama of "A Painful Case" lies in the intersections between the theme of death and a new print-based culture; he argues that "with 'A Painful Case', Joyce decisively entered the debate over the reading of modern newspapers, journalistic style, and the psychological impact of shocking news items" (44). Furthermore, the formal experimentation of "A Painful Case" also prefigures some of the more extreme examples of textual collage found later in *Ulysses*. Joyce's direct quotation of headlines and reportage, rather than the employment of any conventional fictional techniques for "telling the story" of a person's death, foreshadows the interruption of the narrative by headlines in "Aeolus" and the extensive use of "journalese" thereafter throughout *Ulysses* especially in "Eumaeus". This use of journalistic language is not limited to the reporting of actual events, for example when Bloom reads about the PS General Slocum disaster in "Eumaeus" ("New York disaster. Thousand lives lost." (*U* 529)), or the demise of familiar but nevertheless minor characters such as Patrick Dignam. Journalese is also used to narrate traumatic losses in the lives of characters with whom we have become intimate, such as the suicide some eighteen years earlier of Leopold's father (which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter). In these instances, the discourse of newspaper journalism "interrupts" both the character's consciousness and the narrative of the

fictional text. In a sense, these textual invasions reflect the ubiquity of the newspaper in modernity. By incorporating the newspaper into the fictional text, Joyce registers the importance of the newspaper in everyday life and reflects the infiltration of consciousness and social life by the printed discourse of journalism.

The omnipresence of the newspaper in modernity was symptomatic of the wider anonymity of urban life – it is the record of a form of "community" that is no longer rooted in face-to-face contact. Analysts of modern culture such as Anderson and Matei Calinescu have argued that one of the key features of modernity was a breakdown in the relationship between the past and the present. Anderson argues that the rise in popularity of the novel and the newspaper in the early twentieth century is rooted in modernity's loss of the "medieval conception of simultaneity" or "along-time" (24). Pre-modern communities could envisage "a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present" (Anderson 24) which was guaranteed by a belief in the eternality of God. The latter then provided a foundational underpinning for these conceptions of temporality. Anderson suggests that the novel and the newspaper represent modernity's sense of "homogenous, empty time in which simultaneity is […] transverse, cross time marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar" (24). Calinescu too argues that modernist art is fundamentally concerned with this "profound sense of crisis" and "alienation" from the previous simultaneity of time guaranteed by religious faith in which a distinct sense of time as "linear and irreversible" determined how communities perceived the world in modernity; he states that "the idea of modernity could be conceived only within the framework of a specific time awareness, namely, that of historical time, linear and irreversible, flowing irresistibly onwards" (Calinescu 13). Unlike the previous assurance of a benevolent deity and subsequent

afterlife offered as a spatial and temporal plane beyond that of the earthly, Calinescu argues that the "main constitutive element [of modernity] is simply a sense of *unrepeatable time*" (13): an awareness of time's interminable marching toward an existential terminus. Both Anderson and Calinescu then argue that one of the defining features of modernity is a reorientation of our understanding of temporality. Rather than viewing time as an unfolding of the past into the future, which is guaranteed by the eternality of a deity, modernity inaugurates a secular age in which temporality is characterised by a sense of arbitrary coincidence as well as an alienation from the past.

According to Anderson, the novel and the newspaper were the "two forms of imagining which first flowered in Europe" in the modern period (24-5). Accordingly, an analysis of their basic structure reveals for Anderson how they represent this new conception of alienated temporality or "homogenous, empty time" (25). He argues that reading the novel imbues the reader with a sense of God-like omniscience. In this way, the novel reader is able to engage in "the novelty of [an] imagined world conjured up by the author" (26). Whereas the reader's day-to-day existence may be characterised by a sense of alienated, empty time, the novel allows them to tap into a cultural consciousness and experience a social omniscience otherwise unavailable to them in an urban modernity. In this sense then, Duffy's penchant for literature and obsessive reading of the newspaper, despite his disdain for its style, represents the sense of alienation experienced in modernity. Anderson writes that as technologies of communication "created unified fields of exchange and communication" (44), people

> became capable of comprehending one another via print and paper. In the process, they gradually became aware of hundreds of thousands, even millions, or people in their particular language-field […] These

> fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in the secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community (44).

Duffy's alienation and loneliness is both assuaged and intensified by his reading of newspapers and novels. By giving him a mediated connection with his society, the newspaper divests him of the need for meaningful interaction with the world around him. For example, Duffy appears disconnected from the society around him even when he spends time in a public house. The barman "did not venture to talk" to Duffy, preferring to read the evening newspaper in peace while Duffy sat alone and "gazed" at his fellow punters "without seeing or hearing them" (*Dubliners* 129). While Duffy is connected to his imagined community by the newspaper, his isolation and alienation from his fellow citizens is also inherently facilitated by the ubiquitous newspaper: "the proprietor sprawled on the counter reading the *Herald*" (*Dubliners* 129).

For both the boy-narrator of "The Sisters", who is unfamiliar with the absoluteness of human mortality, and the adult Duffy, the detached and impersonal form of a printed report of death jolts their consciousness and causes them to consider their relationships with the deceased. The narrative thrust of "The Sisters" seems to focus on what happened to Fr. Flynn in the weeks and months before his illness and death and what exactly caused there to be "something queer" (*Dubliners* 15) about him. Yet the boy has conflicting responses to Fr. Flynn's death. Initially, the boy is terrified by spectre of the priest as it plagues his bedtime, intent on confessing something to him: "It began to confess to me in a murmuring voice and I wondered why it smiled continually and why the lips were so moist with spittle" (*Dubliners* 9). Yet later in the story, after the boy has read the death notice, the boy walks "along the sunny side of the street" (*Dubliners* 11) and remarks: "I found it strange that neither I nor the day seemed in mourning mood and I felt even annoyed at discovering in myself a sense of freedom as if I had been freed

from something from death" (*Dubliners* 11). The reading of the death notice also instigates a series of personal reflections on the catechetical teachings of Fr. Flynn and the secretive nature of their relationship. Whether this feeling of freedom indicates the negative impact Fr. Flynn had on the narrator's life is unclear but it is interesting to note the child's contradictory response to the death. On the one hand, he is horrified by death as the spectre of the dead priest haunts him, yet on the other hand the boy admits to a feeling of freedom. However, he admits being "annoyed" (*Dubliners* 11) at this feeling of emancipation as it would have been considered disrespectful to the deceased. One can only wonder whether this feeling of freedom may provide clues as to a potentially more sinister undercurrent in the relationship between the two characters.

The death of Mrs. Sinico functions in a comparable way for the protagonist of "A Painful Case". The news of her death not only causes Duffy to consider his own sense of mortality but also acquaints him with the loneliness of death in a modern city where the pre-modern sense of community has been lost to many. While the priest's character and his exact relationship to the boy remains the present-absence in "The Sisters", the "unspoken" in "A Painful Case" is Duffy's role in Mrs. Sinico's death. In both stories, there is an undercurrent of perverse sexuality. In "The Sisters", this is the potential paedophilic relationship between the priest and the boy, a theme reinforced by "An Encounter". There is also an undercurrent of "repressed" sexual feeling in "A Painful Case" but the latter is of "normal" heterosexual adultery. Duffy's role in Mrs. Sinico's death may be due to his shrinking from sexuality, due to what turns out to be his totally conventional bourgeois morality despite his posing as a radical, or – as has been

suggested by critics such as Norris and Roberta Jackson[9] – the fact that he may be homosexual and unable to admit this even to his own consciousness. Duffy's refusal of Mrs. Sinico condemns her to loneliness and misery and he now realizes that it will condemn him to a similar fate. What I want to explore in this section is the impact of the newspaper report of Mrs. Sinico's death on Duffy. I argue that, although exhibiting a sort of Heideggerian disdain for the representation of death in popular print culture, Duffy is also deeply affected by reading the newspaper report of Mrs. Sinico's death and is forced into a confrontation with his own sense of mortality.

"A Painful Case" takes its name from the newspaper headline reporting the death of Mrs. Sinico and tells the story of Mr. James Duffy. The story also introduces us to the experience of alienation in urban modernity; elements of this are also relevant to Joyce's representation of the character of Gabriel Conroy in "The Dead" and Bloom in *Ulysses,* although arguably in much less stark forms. Living in Chapelizod, on the outskirts of Dublin city, Duffy's life is described as one of ascetic austerity which is reflected in his living conditions: "He lived in an old sombre house [...] The lofty walls of his uncarpeted room were free from pictures" (*Dubliners* 119). As Connolly suggests, Duffy's room "is described as though it were a monk's cell" (108). Like the teachings of Fr. Flynn in "The Sisters", "A Painful Case" is bound up with the world of post-Devotional Revolution Ireland. On his bookshelf, his diverse literary taste ranges from the Romantic pantheism of Wordsworth to the *Maynooth Catechism* which was promoted for more general use after the Synod at Maynooth in 1882. The catechism becomes a

[9] See Margot Norris, "Shocking the Reader in James Joyce's 'A Painful Case'", pp. 63-81, Margot Norris, "The Self-Disputing Text of *Dubliners*", pp. 67-74 and Roberta Jackson, "The Open Closet in 'Dubliners': James Duffy's Painful Case", pp. 83-97.

particularly important textual form in Joyce's later works, especially the "Ithaca" episode of *Ulysses*. From the beginning of the story then Duffy is described as a character who is detached both geographically and emotionally from the city and community in which he lives. His relationship to Dublin and the wider world is primarily mediated through print culture.

Furthermore, Duffy actively rejects the idea of public life and resents Mrs. Sinico's suggestion that he "write out his thoughts" (*Dubliners* 123) for his fellow man: "For what, he asked her, with careful scorn. To compete with phrasemongers, incapable of thinking consecutively for sixty seconds?" (*Dubliners* 123). Duffy's isolated existence means that he lives "without any communion with others" (*Dubliners* 121). However he does make exceptions on two occasions. We learn that "visiting relatives at Christmas and escorting them to the cemetery when they died" (*Dubliners* 121) are the only times when Duffy feels the need to fulfil his social duties. Although Lindsey Tucker argues that these rituals "are not seen as having any sacred significance at all but have become empty conventions there only to 'regulate the civic life'" (91), it is interesting to note that Duffy's sole ties to his family involve the holiday of Christmas and attending their Christian burials. Despite his isolation from his fellow man, the pageantry of the funeral and commemoration of human mortality presumably evoke in him some residual sense of social duty and obligation. This is also an interesting example of Joyce's habit of connecting death with Christmas, as if the commemoration of the birth of Jesus reminds us of the melancholic fact of human morality. Whereas in "A Painful Case", Duffy's only sense of obligation toward his family are at the time of their death and Christmas, Gabriel's confrontation with the death of a previously unknown rival lover in "The Dead" takes place after Julia and Kate Morkan's annual Christmas party and the Christmas dinner in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is the scene of the great debate about the dead Parnell. Furthermore,

the boy narrator in "The Sisters" attempts to distract himself from the terrifying images of Fr. Flynn which plague him as he tries to sleep with thoughts of Christmas. Duffy's sense of duty to the dead also anticipates Bloom's reflection in *Ulysses* that "a fellow could live on his lonesome all his life. Yes, he could. Still he'd have to get someone to sod him after he dies though he could dig his own grave. We all do" (*U* 90). Death then is an event in the story which stirs in the protagonist a sense of duty and obligation towards his fellow human beings even though he harbours a sense of disgust at common forms of communication and understanding.

However, the occasions of Christmas and funerals are not the only events which have inspired Duffy to break his routine of social isolation. A brief romantic tryst with the married Mrs. Sinico temporarily "wore away the rough edges of his character [and] emotionalized his mental life" (*Dubliners* 124). However, he soon rejects her as her physical advances force him to declare that "every bond is a bond to sorrow" (*Dubliners* 124) and he returns to his life of ascetic routine. The story catches up with Duffy four years after he ended his relationship with Mrs. Sinico. After abandoning her, Duffy "returned to his even way of life" (*Dubliners* 124) and "every morning he went into the city by tram and every evening walked home from the city having dined moderately in George's Street and read the evening paper for dessert" (*Dubliners* 125). The consumption of the newspaper as part of the ritual of the evening meal highlights the centrality and ubiquity of the newspaper in urban modernity. The need to be connected to the network of social discourse is evidently as urgent in urban modernity as the need for an evening meal. During his dinner one evening, Duffy is shocked by a newspaper report: "His eyes fixed themselves on a paragraph in the evening paper which he had propped against the water-carafe. He replaced the morsel of food on his plate and read the paragraph attentively" (*Dubliners* 125). Again, Joyce highlights the almost primal appetite for newsprint by placing it alongside the

basic needs for food and water.[10] While not initially revealing the details of this report, the narrative describes how Duffy is stunned by what he has read in the newspaper and is unable to finish his meal. After leaving the restaurant and returning home, Duffy "read the paragraph again by the failing light of the window" (*Dubliners* 126) and the details of the shocking report are revealed to the reader.

The boy in "The Sisters" only fully accepts Fr. Flynn's death only when he reads about it. In a more extreme fashion, Duffy's existence is brutally interrupted by the report of Mrs. Sinico's death in the *Evening Mail*. This is a sign of things to come for readers of Joyce. The death notice will reappear in "Eumaeus" and the newspaper reports of loss of life will feature in "Aeolus". Mrs. Sinico had all but dissipated into distant memory for Duffy four years after he ended their unconsummated affair. Yet the reader, not necessarily sympathizing with Duffy in his own understanding of the meaning of the relationship with Mrs. Sinico, may well regard Duffy as being in "bad faith" in relation to his treatment of his former friend. Crucially, the moral message of the story does not come either from human interaction or the authors and philosophers Duffy admires; rather, it is sparked by the cold sterility of the printed report in a newspaper. The newspaper itself does not contain the moral message; rather it inspires him to a moral insight. In this sense, the news of her death mirrors his treatment of her: both are cold and impersonal. The report of Mrs. Sinico's death causes her to resurface in memory and disrupt Duffy's life only to, as Joyce would later put it in *Ulysses*, then fade back "into impalpability through death" (*U* 154).

[10] Donovan argues that Duffy's reading of the newspaper as a dessert "is an ironic comment on Duffy's view of mass cultural products as commodities as objects literally to be consumed, since what he expects to be sweet and unimportant (a mental 'dessert') turns out to be poison" (37).

The proceedings at the inquest into Mrs. Sinico's death, as reported in the *Evening Mail*, are quoted directly in the story. The title of the report represents the first switch between the fictional narrative and newspaper article in the text. Like the death notice reproduced in "The Sisters", the typographical form of the report's title creates a sense of detached formality within the story as the fictional narrative is interrupted by formulaic language of the newspaper headline:

DEATH OF A LADY AT SYDNEY PARADE

A PAINFUL CASE (*Dubliners* 126)

Donovan argues that "Joyce's meticulous imitation of the style of such articles testifies to his particular interest in the ways in which newspapers reported inquests" (39). Indeed, I think we can extend this argument. As with the headlines in the "Aeolus" episode of *Ulysses* and the obituaries in "The Sisters" and the "Eumaeus" episode of *Ulysses*, the narrative is as it were occasionally or temporarily usurped by the authoritative voice and characteristic language of the printed source.

In this sense, the adaptation of a report of death in a newspaper, be it an inquest or obituary, within the work of fiction demonstrates Joyce's particular interest in the way death is represented in newspapers more generally. The intersections between death and the newspaper is a recurrent theme in Joyce's fiction, including *Finnegans Wake*. For example, Bernard Benstock reads the passages relating to Earwicker's funeral games in Book II Chapter 3 of *Finnegans Wake*, in particular the line "You'll read it tomorrow, marn, when the curds on the table" (*FW* 374.4-5), as representing a temporal distortion in which the deceased reads of their own death in the newspaper before it has occurred. Benstock writes that the death

> having already taken place as soon as the battle has begun […] is recorded in tomorrow's morning paper […] As befits Joyce's time compression, these funeral games are also the cause of the hero's funeral; he himself is killed in the contests that are fought because of his death, and, in keeping with still another violation of chronological time, he is already reading about it in the sports section (191)

It might be argued that Joyce saw the increasing domination of society by popular print culture as emerging from and in turn intensifying a profound sense of loss and alienation. However, his recurrent reproductions of such texts also attest to his interest in their creative possibilities and in how they might be deployed within his own narratives.

The Sinico inquest is reported in a dry, sober style and is bereft of authentically emotive language (apart from the clichéd phrases in the heading and subtitle). Cóilín Owens suggests that the narrative style of the newspaper report is plagued by "professional cliché and […] journalistic euphemism" (84); and indeed the report could be described as perfunctory and even somewhat unclear. The inquest seeks to establish the "facts" surrounding Mrs. Sinico's death and the reporter in turn offers these to a curious reading public. Mrs. Sinico was a member of the respectable Dublin middle class which would have added to the spectacle of her death and the potentially horrifying details of how such a person could come to be "caught by the buffer of the engine and [fall] to the ground" (*Dubliners* 127) are only hinted at. The witnesses are invited only to report on what they saw: "A juror – You saw the lady fall? Witness – Yes." (*Dubliners* 127); "Police Sergeant Croly deposed that when he arrived he found the deceased lying on the platform apparently dead" (*Dubliners* 127). We also find what Barnard describes as the splintered "shards of narrative" (42) that she argues is typical of the daily newspaper according to Benjamin's critique of modernity. It includes reported speech from these witnesses transcribed verbatim and also a detached, neutral depiction of the events leading to her death.

The report of the inquest moves through a series of discrete units of information; first, depicting the moment Mrs. Sinico is hit by the train, then clumsily moving on to another unit of short dialogue from the inquest itself, and then returning to a more "narrative" style via Police Sergeant Croly's testimony ("Police Sergeant Croly deposed that when he arrived he found the deceased lying on the platform apparently dead" (*Dubliners* 127)). These elements are not combined into an integrated whole and instead exist independently of each other, bound together only by the mere fact that they all relate to the same event. The report is both typical of the empty language of bureaucratic modernity and a bizarre exemplification of how a death that is not imaginatively explored or understood can shatter coherent narrative.

However, these rapid transitions between different points of view are completed without any effort being made to connect the details of the report within an overarching narrative style. Like the forms of social discourse surrounding the deceased in "The Sisters", the language of the report is mechanical and ostensibly serves only to communicate the bare facts of Mrs. Sinico's death in a manner accessible to all readers of the newspaper. Yet there is also an undercurrent of smug, middle-class "respectability" in the tone of the report. Despite the purpose of the inquest being to record and explicate the details of Sinico's death, the inquest in the *Evening Mail* is littered with ambiguity as it euphemistically gestures towards Mrs. Sinico's "squalid tract of […] vice" (*Dubliners* 128). The newspaper report of her death not only records the details of Mrs. Sinico's death but also casts moralistic aspersions on the deceased. For example, the "assistant house surgeon of the City of Dublin Hospital" (*Dubliners* 127), Dr. Halpin, states that "the injuries were not sufficient to have caused death in a normal person" (*Dubliners* 127), without explaining what was abnormal about Mrs. Sinico. Similarly, the spokesman for the railway company states that "the deceased had been in the habit of crossing

the lines late at night from platform to platform and, in view of certain circumstances of the case, […] did not think the railway officials were to blame" (*Dubliners* 127). These "certain circumstances" (*Dubliners* 127) are unexplained: perhaps the official refers to the victim's state of inebriation or to a suspicion that Sinico intended to kill herself on the train tracks that night. The text implies that Sinico was an alcoholic before her death by referring to her "intemperate" (*Dubliner* 128) habits; the report also includes a rather damning personal detail from the inquest when it quotes Sinico's daughter as having stated that "her mother had been in the habit of going out at night to buy spirits" (*Dubliners* 128). These subtle moralistic judgements on Sinico serve to place the blame for the incident on the deceased and absolves anyone else of guilt. For example, the report details how, moments after hitting Mrs. Sinico, the train was brought to "rest in response to loud cries. The train was going slowly" (*Dubliners* 126). For an intelligent reader like Duffy, these allusions to Mrs. Sinico's drinking and possible suicide would have been all too obvious. The newspaper report then is the medium through which the spectre of Mrs. Sinico returns to haunt Duffy and instigates a reflection of his role in her demise. This perhaps leads him for the first time to confront the failures in himself that contributed to her terrible fate and that may make his own death equally ignominious.

As a reader well-versed in Wordsworth, Hauptmann and Nietzsche, Duffy's initial response to the report of Mrs. Sinico's death is one of aesthetic revulsion. Tucker suggests that Mrs. Sinico's death is horrifying to Duffy since "it is a death by way of words" (94). Indeed, we can see this is Duffy's initial reaction to reading the report when he exclaims: "What an end!" (*Dubliners* 128). However, his pained outburst is not merely a response to Mrs. Sinico's actual death but also to the second death she endures through her exposure by the newspaper report: "The whole narrative of her death revolted him […] The threadbare phrases, the inane

expressions of sympathy, the cautious words of a reporter won over to conceal the details of a commonplace vulgar death" (*Dubliners* 128). Duffy sees through the reporter's fastidious clichés while attacking the reporting for being "cautious" and accusing them of concealing "the details of a commonplace vulgar death" (*Dubliners* 128). Duffy's accusation that the report conceals the true details of Mrs. Sinico's death is not unfounded given the ambiguities that litter the report. In Duffy's eyes, the ignominy of Mrs. Sinico's death lies not so much in the "squalid tract of her vice" (*Dubliners* 128) which characterised her existence before the incident at the railway station but in the inane response by "phrasemongers, incapable of thinking for sixty seconds" (*Dubliners* 123) to her death. Furthermore, the fact that Mrs. Sinico is the subject of such a newspaper report is itself humiliating: the conduct of a "respectable" woman should never have attracted such attention. As a result of this, Duffy feels himself being drawn into the company of the same "phrasemongers" (*Dubliners* 123) who he had so adamantly rejected earlier in the story: "Not merely had she degraded herself; she had degraded him" (*Dubliners* 128). He now feels himself to share in her degradation and in the shame of being a person of interest to people he holds in such low regard.

Duffy has thought a good deal about literary matters and it is clear that he distinguishes between two types of writing. There is the writing of the "obtuse middle class which entrusted its morality to policemen and its fine arts to impresarios" (*Dubliners* 123) whom he accuses of being incapable of producing anything insightful or original. Yet there is also perhaps a more authentically reflective form of writing which remains unexplored: "He had an odd autobiographical habit which led him to compose in his mind from time to time a short sentence about himself containing a subject in the third person and a predicate in the past tense" (*Dubliners* 120). The more authentic forms of writing and discourse remain unexplored by

Duffy since "he wrote seldom in the sheaf of papers which lay in his desk" (*Dubliners* 125). Duffy diagnoses the newspaper as symptomatic of the inauthentic form of social discourse known as idle talk. Duffy's disdain for the narrative style of the newspaper report of Mrs. Sinico's death is due to its adherence to the hackneyed expressions of grief such as the line: "The Deputy Coroner said it was a most painful case, and expressed great sympathy with Captain Sinico and his daughter" (*Dubliners* 128), which is then followed by another absolution of guilt for anyone involved: "No blame attached to anyone" (*Dubliners* 128). This is not to suggest that Duffy is in the vanguard of any more authentic culture. He may express disdain for middle-class respectability and journalese, but he expresses equal displeasure for socialist agitators whom he regards as "timorous" and who "resented an exactitude which was the product of a leisure not within their reach" (*Dubliners* 123). In the context of his own atrophied social existence, Duffy's carefully-cultivated hauteur comes across not as genuinely antinomian or radical but merely as nihilistically misanthropic.

Duffy condemns the language of the newspaper as the idle talk of "an obtuse middle class" (*Dubliners* 123) and deems it "threadbare" and "inane" (*Dubliners* 128). We see how the idle talk of the Dublin middle classes transforms the death of Mrs. Sinico into what Heidegger calls a "publicly occurring event" (*BT* 243). Her demise is subsumed within the voracious quest for information to fuel the mass media in urban modernity. Yet the print culture into which Mrs. Sinico's death is subsumed also operates to conceal and veil certain human realities about her death. In a letter to his mother in 1903, Joyce imagined a career for himself as a journalist. He writes: "It would be quite easy for me to send any kind of news to that intelligent organ [the *Irish Times*] – motor news, dead men's news, any news – for I have all the Paris papers at my disposal" (Joyce, *Letters: Volume 2*, 27 qtd. in Donovan 29). Indeed, Mrs. Sinico is transformed

into an anonymous someone whose death is subjected to the inanity of the newspaper narrative and thus satiates society's appetite for "dead-man's news" as Joyce called it (Joyce, *Letters: Volume 2*, 27 qtd. in Donovan 29). We can see from the report of Mrs. Sinico's death how mortality is not entirely banished from modern society, since her demise features in a widely-circulated evening newspaper, but rather how she becomes a kind of scapegoat or sacrificial victim for society at large. Her death becomes the death of the anonymous someone else, as Heidegger would say, which can then be naturalized for the readers of the paper through the conventional and banal prose of an anonymous journalist. As Donovan suggests, Mrs. Sinico's death is "memorialized only in the 'threadbare phrases' of a journalist" (45) and is "the subject of an obscure and transient newspaper notice quite unremembered by a readership 'incapable of thinking consecutively for sixty seconds'" (45). Her demise is an example of how what Heidegger calls "the they" of the public provides "constant tranquilization about death" (*BT* 243) for the individual by treating death as both familiar, in the sense that it appears in a daily newspaper, but safely distanced by commonplace sentiments and empty clichés. Furthermore, the references to Mrs. Sinico's drinking habits allow the newspaper report to create a further secure and complacent distance between the individual reading the report and the inevitability of death by hinting that Mrs. Sinico's individual weakness was the cause of her demise. This allows her fellow citizens to feel that they could never succumb to a similar fate so long as they conform to the moral demands of their community.

Despite this representation of public banality and bad faith in reporting death, there is something subtly authentic about Duffy's reaction to it. When considered through a Heideggerian lens, Duffy's response to the death of Mrs. Sinico is quite complex. As we have seen, Heidegger argues that the death of others does not provide any meaningful insight into

what death might mean for ourselves. The death of another, according to Heidegger, merely sets in operation a series of rituals which reaffirm the duties of those still alive. He writes: "The 'deceased,' […] has been taken away from 'those remaining behind' and is the object of 'being taken care of' ['Besorgens'] in funeral rites, burial, and the cult of graves" (*BT* 229). The focus of the living is not on the deceased's experience of death itself but rather on the continued activity that death instigates in society in the form of funeral arrangements and mourning. Heidegger writes that "the real having-come-to-an-end of the deceased is precisely *not* experienced. Death does reveal itself as a loss, but as a loss experienced by those remaining behind" (*BT* 230, original emphasis). For Heidegger then, the death of another does not result in an authentic, existential experience of our own mortality but is experienced as a loss of one of our social acquaintances. It is because of this that the death of another "does not become accessible [to the individual]. We do not experience the dying of others in a genuine sense" (*BT* 230). Indeed, Mrs. Sinico's death is experienced by Duffy and society through the "threadbare" (*Dubliners* 128) narrative of an evening newspaper. Her "having-come-to-an-end" (*BT* 230) is experienced by society and Duffy in the form of an inquest into her death which is then printed in an evening newspaper for the general populace. The journalistic depictions of Mrs. Sinico's death depict her demise as a loss to the community which requires a whole series of ritualistic investigations and commemorations. Mrs. Sinico becomes "the object of 'being taken care of' ['Besorgens'] in funeral rites, burial, and the cult of graves" (*BT* 229) and public inquests. Of course, there is an underlying tone of misogyny in Duffy's patronizing condescension towards Mrs. Sinico in this story as he divests her of autonomy, considering her only as the subject of a piece of writing. In a display of his own vanity, Duffy condemns Mrs. Sinico for the fact that in

her death she becomes merely an object of analysis in the inauthentic middle-class newspaper and not his more authentic "sheaf of papers" (*Dubliners* 125).

Yet Duffy, despite his disgust at the inauthenticity of her death, does respond to her death in a subjectively authentic way, complicating a straightforwardly Heideggerian reading of a "herd" or commonplace mortality in this story. While Duffy had wished to repress his relationship with Mrs. Sinico, his desire to return to his routine and self-imposed exile from the city is foiled by the reading of her death in the *Evening Mail*. The report of Mrs. Sinico's death reveals to Duffy the interconnectedness of the imaginary communities of urban life in modernity despite the fractured alienation of his own life. In a way, the report of Mrs. Sinico's death reveals the futility of Duffy's desire to repress and forget the way he treated another human being. Like the reappearance of Rudolph Bloom in the "Ithaca" episode of *Ulysses*, Mrs. Sinico comes back to haunt Duffy, in this case ventriloquized through the language of the type of civic journalism which he despises. Yet the report of Mrs. Sinico's death, through its euphemistic disgust at her sordid and "intemperate" (*Dubliners* 128) end, also evokes Duffy's guilty secret: that he is some way responsible for her death. After leaving the public house at the end of the story, Duffy enters the same park he and Mrs. Sinico had frequented during their relationship and "walked through the bleak alleys they had walked four year earlier" (*Dubliners* 130). This return to a scene of their romance arouses in Duffy feelings of guilt and moral responsibility as the memory of Mrs. Sinico "seemed to be near him in the darkness" and "he seemed to feel her voice touch his ear, her hand touch his" (*Dubliners* 130). The ghostly apparition of Mrs. Sinico in Duffy's consciousness causes him to reproach himself for his role in her demise: "Why had he withheld life from her? Why had he sentenced her to death? He felt his moral nature falling to pieces" (*Dubliners* 130). At the same time, the report also brings his own repression of sexuality home

to him. The sight of "some human figures lying" (*Dubliners* 130) near the wall at the base of the slope of the park fills him with disgust at his own "rectitude" (*Dubliners* 130). However, his reaction to the lovers suggests Duffy's profound revulsion concerning sex. Reflecting his own feelings, the lovers are described as "venal and furtive" and "prostrate creatures" who "wished him gone" (*Dubliners* 130-1). This description of the lovers at once dehumanises them ("prostrate creatures") and casts a moralistic condemnation on their "venal and furtive" (*Dubliners* 130) transaction of the flesh. In both "The Sisters" and "A Painful Case", formal printed notices of death may threaten to bring to light repressed knowledge or dimensions of the unconscious self.

Owens suggests that "when reconsidering their relationship after rereading the newspaper account of her demise, [Duffy] finds himself re-experiencing the moment 'her hand touched his'" and assumes "moral responsibility for her premature end" (85). While Owens argues that the reading of the newspaper causes Duffy to accept his role in her ignominious demise, I would argue that Duffy's epiphany after reading the newspaper also has more universal ramifications. After reading the report, Duffy reflects on Mrs. Sinico's death: "he realized that she was dead, that she had ceased to exist, that she had become a memory" (*Dubliners* 130). However, Mrs. Sinico's horrible end also forces him to reflect not only on his role in her death and but also on *his* own mortality: "His life would be lonely too until he, too, died, ceased to exist, became a memory – if anyone remembered him" (*Dubliners* 130). Such a view of human mortality pre-empts Gabriel's reflection that "one by one they were all becoming shades" (*Dubliners* 255) in "The Dead". This contrasts with Heidegger's contention that the death of another does not provide a meaningful insight into the subject's own sense of mortality and only serves to furnish the living with continued activity. While Duffy laments the reification

of Mrs. Sinico's death within the columns of a circadian newspaper, her death also forces him into a confrontation with his own mortality. More importantly, the death of the other triggers the famous Joycean epiphany in Duffy as he admits to the loneliness of his life without her: "One human being seemed to love him and he had denied her life and happiness […] No one wanted him; he was outcast from life's feast […] He felt he was alone" (*Dubliners* 130-1). Despite Duffy exhibiting a Heideggerian disdain for the inauthentic reification of the dead in public discourse, represented here by the newspaper, unlike in Heidegger's account of "modern" death, the death of another also instigates an authentic response to his own mortality.

Conclusion

"A Painful Case" is a multi-layered story about mortality and mass media. The story highlights the importance and function of the newspaper in urban modernity. Despite Duffy's self-imposed exile from others in his society, he still interconnected with his imagined community through the ubiquity of the newspaper. The newspaper operates as a mass commodity which invisibly binds and informs a particular community. In this instance, the newspaper prevents Duffy from ever escaping the relationship he had with Mrs. Sinico. Furthermore, the newspaper brutally interrupts his daily life and conspires with his own repressed guilt, causing him to accept some blame for Mrs. Sinico's demise. On the one hand, Duffy exhibits a sort of Heideggerian disdain for the way Mrs. Sinico's death is portrayed in the newspaper. He initially reacts with disgust to the inauthentic representation of the death she endures in the newspaper rather than to her actual death. He attacks the dishonesty and fake respectability of the report. Yet at the same time, the newspaper report of Mrs. Sinico's death is also the catalyst for the Joycean epiphany in "A Painful Case" which is both an ethical recognition of his role in her demise and the recognition of his own isolation and the fact that, just as Mrs. Sinico has died, he too would die

alone and unremembered. The treatment of social responses to death in "A Painful Case" does not amount to a simple condemnation of the inauthentic idioms surrounding death propagated by the newspaper. Duffy, despite his particular literary tastes and criticism of the "threadbare" (*Dubliners* 128) narratives of the newspaper, not only consumes the evening paper as a "dessert" (*Dubliners* 125) with his meal but is also greatly affected by the report of Sinico's death. The degraded and degrading responses to her death appear to him to represent a distillation of mortality in its starkest form; the banal prose tells him that in the end everyone dies alone.

Furthermore, the reading of the report of Mrs. Sinico's death also attests to the alienation of life in an urban modernity. While the technology of modernity allows for Duffy to learn of Mrs. Sinico's death despite not having any communication with her for four years, this new society is also divested of the traditional sense of community which results in Duffy having to cope with the news of her death alone. By connecting all members intellectually, the newspaper alienates them physically from one another and death becomes an objective phenomenon experienced and reported through print culture. The newspaper then mediates how death is experienced by society at large. We saw this in "A Painful Case" where Mrs. Sinico's death is somehow demeaningly dismissed as an unfortunate accident which happened as a result of personal intemperance. In this sense, the newspaper is a technological substitute for a cohesive traditional society in which information is transmitted orally and in which death is at least apprehended collectively and therefore may appear to be somewhat more bearable. Of course, we could say that Duffy's extreme isolation is not typical but it is interesting that Joyce focuses on such a character living in a Dublin which is usually seen in *Ulysses* as a genial and organic community. In *Ulysses*, Bloom is also an outsider in a less extreme form than Duffy; he is a sort

of insider-outsider. Of course, Bloom is unlike Duffy in that he is warm and benevolent and well-disposed towards others and his loneliness is partly due to their xenophobia.

The newspaper report of Mrs. Sinico's death tells Duffy that everyone dies alone and becomes subject to representation in public forms of discourse. Duffy's reflections after learning of Sinico's death cause him to question his own way of living and to wonder whether or not some distant family member will accompany him to the cemetery, "if anyone remembered him" (*Dubliners* 130), as he had done for others. Mrs. Sinico's reported death is the catalyst for both a criticism of the social idioms about mortality as well as a confrontation with his own existence and eventual end. In this sense, Duffy departs from Heidegger's account of mortality as the death of Mrs. Sinico does not merely furnish his existence with another duty like the death of a family member had done, but is the occasion for serious existential reflection. Already in *Dubliners*, we can see how Joyce sees the ubiquity of the newspaper as a powerful influence on the individual and on the possibility of their authentic relationship with their own mortality.

"The Sisters" may be less complex in its representations of societal responses to death but the story nevertheless highlights the co-existence of traditional and pre-modern death practices in late-nineteenth-century Dublin. Furthermore, the brief reference to Fr. Flynn's obituary in the *Freeman's Journal* and the effect the reading of the memorial card on the boy-narrator pre-empts the intricate responses to reading about the death of a loved one in "A Painful Case" and, as I shall discuss, *Ulysses*. While *Dubliners* introduces the intricate network of association between death, society and mass print culture, it is in *Ulysses* that Joyce mimics, parodies and adapts the newspaper obituary to explore post-Famine attitudes towards human mortality.

Chapter Two: *Ulysses* and the Newspaper Obituary

Ulysses and the Obituary: Backgrounds

On January 13, 1941, an obituary appeared in *The New York Times* with an impressively succinct headline: "James Joyce Dies; Wrote 'Ulysses'". The piece goes on to offer an account of Joyce's life befitting someone of public prominence, including details about his development as a writer as well as the ensuing controversies in the United States after the banning of *Ulysses*. However, the opening paragraph is a good example of the standardised, summary form of the obituary:

> ZURICH, Switzerland, Monday, Jan 13- James Joyce, Irish author whose "Ulysses" was the center of one of the most bitter literary controversies of modern times, died in a hospital here early today despite the efforts of doctors to save him by blood transfusions. He would have been 59 years old Feb. 2. ("James Joyce Dies; Wrote 'Ulysses'", *The New York Times* January 13 1941)

We might speculate that Joyce would not have approved of the article's emphasis heavy emphasis on *Ulysses* and compete neglect of *Finnnegans Wake* given the fact he spent seventeen years of his later life working on *Finnegans Wake* before it was finally published in its entirety two years before his death in 1939. Nevertheless, I think this obituary is an interesting starting point for a discussion of death in *Ulysses* as it points to fundamental issues about style, the newspaper and the public sphere.

Ulysses is a novel consisting of eighteen episodes and is loosely based on Homer's *Odyssey*. The novel features three main protagonists who are all haunted by death. Stephen Dedalus is a student who has been summoned home to Ireland from Paris because of his mother's illness and subsequent death. The more intellectual of the two male protagonists, Stephen's ruminations on his life and future dominate the opening three episodes of the novel known as the "Telemachiad". Leopold Bloom on the other hand is generally seen as a turn-of-

the-century everyman. An Irish Jew of Hungarian heritage, Bloom is an advertiser canvasser who lives in the city with his wife Molly. Bloom's journey across Dublin on June 16, 1904 takes up most of the novel and he continually ruminates on the deaths of his father and son throughout. Molly Bloom is third main protagonist whose famous soliloquy in the final episode "Penelope" concludes the novel. Molly is an opera singer originally from Gibraltar and whose affair with Blazes Boylan is the source of much concern for her husband throughout the novel. Like Stephen and her husband, Molly's life has also been deeply affected by death as she lost her infant son Rudy eleven years before the events of the novel.

While all three main protagonists deal with the deaths of close loved ones, the novel also features on entire episode, "Hades", devoted to the funeral of a minor character known to Bloom and Stephen called Paddy Dignam. Bloom has traditionally been read as a secular outsider in relation to the Catholic funeral and his desacralized, pragmatic view of death has been regarded as a response to the ritualised theatre of the Catholic funeral service as it is depicted in "Hades". Allan Hepburn argues that "if only in imagination, [Bloom] works to naturalize death within the texture of everyday Dublin life" in "Hades" (192). Andrew Goodspeed too has suggested that "Bloom is a man apart, not only in his isolation from the traditions of the Catholic burial, but also in his greater interest in the living than in the lost" (124). Such readings of Bloom have led to a variety of characterisations of death in *Ulysses* such as those by Hakola and Kivistö who claim that Bloom is used to express "a positive and carnivalistic attitude to death in *Ulysses*, in which death has a life-affirming function" (Hakola and Kivistö *xii*). Similarly, early Joyce criticism read Bloom as a champion of life over death by being more of an observer of than a participant in the ritual of the Irish funeral service and emphasizing the practical and mundane aspects of death and burial practices. Richard Ellmann argues that "Joyce intends that Bloom

should separate himself decisively from Christian conceptions of death" (*Ulysses on the Liffey* 49). A key feature of this separation is, according to Ellmann, Bloom's focus on the living. Ellmann writes that Bloom "insists that it is folly to pamper the dead […] burial customs interest him when they express or seek affection […] Bloom's views have their force because so interfused with sympathy" (*Ulysses on the Liffey* 49). Bloom is less concerned with the rituals by means of which the departed person is honoured and commemorated and is more interested in empathizing with and expressing compassion for the bereaved.

More recent scholarship has attended to the often-overlooked importance of the theme of mortality in *Ulysses*. For example, Jibu Matthew George suggests that *Ulysses* problematizes the idea that modernist novels evade the finality and significance of death (61) advanced by critics such as Friedman. George writes that *Ulysses* not only confronts death but that the theme of mortality "occupies a pertinent place in the matrix of [Joyce's] complex and elusive philosophical outlook" (61) in the novel. Moreover, George suggests that death plays a large role as a signifier of Ireland's "history of demographic stagnation and depopulation" (69). Bridget English has also identified death as a key theme in the novel and suggests that "the plot of *Ulysses* is […] driven by a sense of death and loss, its narrative motivated by a desire for meaning and understanding of death" (38). These critics in my view are indeed correct in their assertions that *Ulysses* is a novel steeped in death. From the perspective of plot alone, the two main protagonists are both haunted by the memories of recently deceased loved ones: Stephen by the memory of his dead mother and Bloom equally so by his deceased father and son. Additionally, a funeral is the centrepiece of much of the action in the "Hades" episode as well as informing the events of later episodes and the sometimes bewildering "Circe" features a host of deceased characters resurrected. Furthermore, within a novel which deals so intimately with

how people cope with death, the newspaper obituary features quite prominently in several episodes including “Eumaeus” and “Ithaca”. I will particularly focus on the latter in my analysis in this chapter.

While agreeing with the idea that Bloom often provides a pragmatic or technological perspective on death in *Ulysses*, I find it much more problematic to link this perspective with a carnivalistic affirmation of life especially given his experience of his own father’s death as recalled toward the end of the novel. Instead, I read Bloom’s relationship to death and, in particular, the death of his father, as symptomatic of a post-Famine society which distanced itself from an intimate relationship with human mortality. Although he remains outside the Catholic rituals surrounding death, Bloom’s reflections on the death of his son and father illustrates a similar modern desire to distance himself from a meaningful confrontation with their deaths.

Furthermore, although Bloom does ostensibly remain alienated from the communal parameters established by the Catholic funeral, I do not believe this alienation demarcates a complete disconnection from the Catholic ritual nor the modern effacement of death from society. In a sense, Bloom’s alienation places him in a liminal space within which he can articulate a critical perspective on Catholic funerary practices for the reader. This is a role that could not have been taken up by any other character in the text. Bloom occupies a space in which he can narrate and reflect on the modern effacement of death from society whilst also being aware of and familiar with the post-Famine attitude towards death. Rather than an opposition between a “traditional” funerary culture and a “modern” sceptic in the text, we can trace the evolution of a communal approach to death increasingly determined by the wish to remove dying and the dead from the public sphere in the Irish Catholic culture. This is witnessed

by Bloom who graps the pitfalls as well as the supposedly emotionally liberating effect of modern attitudes to death.

While the previous chapter focussed on the appearance of printed reports of death in *Dubliners*, *Ulysses* also features lengthy ruminations on other facets of mortality: the materiality of the deceased body and the funeral ritual. Accordingly, this chapter will initially explore the literary representation of the corpse and the funeral in *Ulysses* within the context of post-Famine Ireland's attitudes towards death and burial practices. The chapter will begin by exploring death in the novel, paying particular attention to the centrality of the corpse in the historical context of a country still reeling from the trauma of a devastating famine not half a century previously. I will do this with reference to both Bloom's thoughts on the corpse in *Ulysses* and an episode from Joyce's earlier novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in which a priest leading a spiritual retreat for a group of schoolboys uses graphic and detailed depictions of the human corpse to illustrate the dangers of sin. I will then continue my analysis of the obituary form, considered here as an example of a key modern mode of textual commemoration, in *Ulysses* with particular emphasis on the writing and publication of Paddy Dignam's obituary. Finally, the chapter will discuss the suicide of Bloom's father in the "Ithaca" episode of the novel. Although Rudolf Virag's suicide haunts Bloom throughout the novel, it is only in the penultimate episode, an episode based on the style of the Catholic catechism, that Bloom finally confronts the details of his father's death. I argue that within the episode, Joyce presents the details of Bloom's father's suicide in a style which combines the form of the obituary with the style of the catechism. In doing so, I argue that Joyce presents a facticity of death in the form of a catechetic obituary which challenges the homogenization of death found in the standard modes of post-Famine textual commemoration.

Ulysses, The Corpse and post-Famine Irish Funerals

The human corpse is a significant presence in most representations of death in Joyce's works. Goodspeed, for example, remarks that "Joyce takes a virtually anatomic dissection of the processes of decay" as both "Stephen [and Bloom] feel a ghastly relish for the scientific processes of decomposition" (126). At the beginning of the "Hades" episode of *Ulysses,* Bloom remarks on "an old woman peeping [into Dignam's hearse and] thanking her stars she was passed over" (*U* 72) and thinks about the role of the women in preparing the body of the deceased for the funeral. He states: "extraordinary interest they take in a corpse [...] never know who will touch you dead. Wash and shampoo. I believe they clip the nails and the hair. Keep a bit in an envelope. Grows all the same after" (*U* 72). The emphasis on the grotesque materiality of the corpse suggests the immediacy of Irish history in Joyce's novels as the appearance of the corpse not only establishes death as a central concern but also evokes what Stuart McLean calls the "unimaginable proliferation of corpses" (94) in the era of the Famine. In *Ulysses,* the literary treatment of the dead demands to be read with reference to Ireland's historical situation which involves the recent memory of the horror of mass starvation and the ensuing homogenization of post-Famine funerary practices by the Catholic Church.

One of the more disturbing results of the Famine was the disruption caused to traditional burial rituals; this resulted in many of the dead remaining unburied or given uncoffined burial in mass graves. Describing the Famine as a form of "cultural collapse", Gibbons notes that the result of the Famine "was such that burial rites themselves fell victim to the plague, leaving corpses, in effect 'undead', ready to walk the land" (15). Christine Kinealy too writes that the sheer number of deaths caused by the famine disrupted traditional burial practices such that "rites of passage disappeared and many bodies were buried without coffins or in communal

burial pits" (93-4). Kinealy points to an 1847 article from the *Freeman's Journal* which notes the proliferation of corpses and disruption of burial rites in rural Ireland caused by the Famine. In the article, a Catholic clergyman writes that "the most pressing applications are not for food for the living, but for help to procure coffins for the dead" (2). The author then proceeds to detail how the breakdown of social order was such that bodies were strewn throughout the rural countryside: "we frequently hear of persons [dying of starvation], strangers, being found dead by the roadside. Only a few days ago a stranger was found dead of hunger on the wayside [...] he was buried without anyone having recognised him" (*Freeman's Journal* 1 January, 1847 qtd. in Kinealy). The scarcity of coffins also resulted in the burial of the deceased in uncoffined mass graves: "Funerals grow more common by the day [...] *the survivors are too miserably poor to find coffins for the dead*, and in some places [...] they begin to bury the dead without any coffins at all!" (*Freeman's Journal* 1 January 1847, original emphasis). And so the basic social function of care for the dead began to break down. McLean and others have highlighted how the Famine weakened the borders between life and death and threatened the complex series of rituals which maintained those boundaries (95). The shame of the collective failure to treat the Famine dead with proper respect lingered in the Irish historical memory in the years that followed. The experience of the Famine underlined that "the uncoffined dead [...] represent a threat to the living" (McLean 99) because they were "indicative of the ongoing disruption of social life and popular custom" (McLean 98). The unburied corpse was a reminder of the breakdown of social order and the physical presence of the dead constantly threatened any prospect of a return to some form of social cohesion. They also symbolized a traditional way of life – a world of custom and ritual – which had buckled and come apart under the pressure of the catastrophe.

Mary Lowe-Evans was arguably the first and remains one of the few critics whose work tackles the subject of Joyce and the Famine in any direct fashion. She suggests that Joyce's works are largely "caught up in the argument about population" (6) and Joyce is consequently a writer who, at least on a rhetorical level, is concerned with the effects of the Famine and its production of "a certain mode of thinking, writing, and speaking in Ireland" (7). She argues that "aside from the political and psychological implications of the Famine, it should be increasingly obvious that the very physical consequences – the humiliating distortions and decay of the body and its functions, leading to ignominious death, initiated a distinctly corporeal rhetoric" (14). Lowe-Evans is surely correct in her assertion that the Famine is a fundamental, yet relatively under-discussed, contextual framework for Joyce's work especially in relation to his treatment of death and the corpse. The corpse and the "corporeal rhetoric" (14) surrounding death is a trope established as early as the very first story in *Dubliners*. As we have already seen, the death of Father Flynn is described as "a beautiful death" as it had occurred according to the established and regulated practices of the Catholic Church: "Father O'Rourke was in with him a Tuesday and anointed him and prepared him and all [...] he was quite resigned" (*Dubliners* 14). Just as Bloom remarked upon the "extraordinary interest" (*U* 72) taken in a corpse after death in *Ulysses*, the sister of the deceased remarks that Fr. Flynn "looked just as if he were asleep, he looked that peaceful and resigned. No one would think he'd make such a beautiful corpse" (*Dubliners* 14). The sisters are perhaps over-anxious in establishing the propriety of the manner of their brother's death and the "decency" of his postmortem appearance. In their case, of course, the "shame" of the death – which must be suppressed by adherence to Catholic ritual but is at the same time "restored" by the acceptable aesthetic condition of the corpse – is perhaps linked with an unease about Fr. Flynn's priestly status. But their preoccupation is part of a

broader societal concern: fears about not being able to afford a "decent" funeral would continue to afflict the old and the poor.

The human corpse also plays a significant role in representations of death in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Fr. Arnall's Hellfire Sermon features lengthy ruminations on the fate of the human body after death in order to instil a sense of moral conformity in the boys listening. Father Arnall instructs his congregation to

> Consider then what must be the foulness of the air of hell. Imagine some foul and putrid corpse that has lain rotting and decomposing in the grave, a jelly-like mass of liquid corruption. Imagine such a corpse a prey to flames, devoured by the fire of burning brimstone and giving off dense choking fumes of nauseous loathsome decomposition. (*Portrait* 129)

They are also invited to imagine the "millions upon millions of fetid carcasses massed together in the reeking darkness, a huge and rotting human fungus" (130). Fr. Arnall deploys the image of the decomposing corpse as a way of describing the fate of the sinner. The corpse is described in disturbing detail and its fate is "to rot, to feed the mass of its creeping worms and to be devoured by scuttling plump-bellied rats" (*Portrait* 120). While the Hellfire Sermon of *Portrait* owes much of its form and content to Pinamonte's *Hell Opened to Christians*, James Doherty argues that one fundamental difference between the hellfire sermon and its source text is that "Joyce seems to have wanted to be even more graphic than Pinamonti in describing the physical horrors of hell" (113). The reports of bodily decomposition and painful death frighten young Stephen Dedalus into accepting the moral diktats of the Catholic Church. As we have seen, within these passages, death is described as a pathogen and a threat: images of decay and infection permeate Arnall's descriptions of mortality. This fear about the possible infection of

life by death reflects the modern desire to exile the dying and dead to asylums, hospitals, hospices and, ultimately, the grave.

Stephen's reaction to these images could be read as a response to the images of the unburied and uncoffined dead that resulted from the Famine. Stephen imagines his sexual impropriety in similarly graphic images of decay and decomposition whilst concomitantly recognising the need to shield this from the world of the living:

> His body to which he had yielded was dying. Into the grave with it. Nail it down into a wooden box, the corpse. Carry it out of the house on the shoulders of hirelings. Thrust it out of men's sight into a long hole in the ground, into the grave, to rot, to feed the mass of its creeping worms and to be devoured by scuttling plump-bellied rats. (*Portrait* 120)

As Hepburn points out, the grave and coffins are a way of veiling death, embodying only a "vestigial reminder of death" (188). In *Portrait*, the long passages concerning the spectacle of the decaying corpse finally conclude in the welcome and reassuring image of the coffin as the veil of death.

Fr. Arnall's representation of sin and punishment through images of post-mortem putrefaction, which effect Stephen so deeply, emphasises the grotesque physical dissolution brought out by death. Yet it also manifests a desire to distance the subject from their death by presenting it as a future punishment for moral transgression. In this sense, Fr. Arnall's reportage of death acts as a catalyst for moral conformity, since moral transgression is shown to lead to a slow death involving processes of decomposition and infection. Death in *Portrait* then is portrayed by Fr. Arnall as a strictly carnal inevitability, the moral ignominy of which necessitates exile in burial. Stephen's reflection on the hermetic isolation of the corpse in the coffin can also be read as a response to the events of the Famine and the establishment of a

homogenized, controllable practice of death in post-Famine Ireland after a traumatic event which saw mass mortality and the complete breakdown of funereal rituals. Such a view of the corpse – representing death as an affront to life – recalls the obscene proliferation of death experienced in the Famine which in turn inspired the increased desire to veil death through funerary rites.

In *Dubliners*, we have a modernizing society distancing itself from, yet ostensibly finding new, "respectable" ways to deal with, death through the mass print media culture; in turn, the Church and traditional religious authority have embraced this new culture and harnessed it to their own ends. In *Portrait*, Joyce presents us with a Church that equates the notion of moral transgression with an shameful, slow and graphic decomposition and reports the details of such as a means of instilling moral conformity. In *Ulysses* however, Bloom secularizes the Church's corporeal rhetoric about the dead by, as I shall discuss, focussing on the "practical" results of human decay while "Ithaca" experiments and plays with the literary form of the printed death notice and obituary. Bloom constantly reflects on the haste with which the living bury the dead, as when he comments on how the "white horses with white fontlet plumes came round the Rotunda corner, galloping. A tiny coffin flashed by. In a hurry to bury" (*U* 79) in "Hades". As mentioned in my previous chapter, he thinks that "a fellow could live on his lonesome all his life. Yes, he could. Still he'd have to get someone to sod him after he dies though he could dig his own grave. We all do […] First thing strikes anybody. Bury the dead" (*U* 90); and when at Dignam's gravesite, Bloom hears a donkey which causes him to consider how his father committed suicide away from his family and friends: "far away a donkey brayed. Rain. No such ass. Never see a dead one, they say. Shame of death. They hide. Also poor papa went away" (*U* 91). Bloom is aware not only of how quick society is to bury their dead but also

how the deceased, including his father, feel the need to hide their experience of dying from society. He not only considers the urgency with which the living bury their dead but also how, through the act of burial, society disavows death. Throughout these passages, Bloom repeatedly recollects a rhyme ("Rattle his bones. Over the stones. Only a pauper. Nobody owns" (*U* 79)) from Thomas Noel's *The Pauper's Drive* which not only provides an apt summary of the processes by which society refuses a relationship with or ownership of death, but also reflects a further entering of these newly abstracted rituals into the network of common discourse.[11] His reflections on the deaths of his father and son conclude with another allusion to the same remembered lines: "Verdict: overdose. Death by misadventure, the letter. For my son Leopold. No more pain. Wake no more. Nobody owns" (*U* 80) and: "Our. Little. Beggar. Meant nothing. Mistake of nature" (*U* 79). Bloom is a character who is constantly attuned to the ways in which society responds to death. He recognises that the living are quick to bury their dead, eager to forget them and keen to repress their own mortality.

Bloom, like Stephen, frequently thinks about the process of decomposition and how a decomposing corpses may sustain other forms of life. Stephen imagines this in a negative light in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* when he considers how his dead body would feed the "scuttling plump-bellied rats" (*Portrait* 120). Bloom adopts a more positive attitude as he imagines "the body sinking in the earth gives new life [...] well preserved fat corpse, gentleman,

[11] "The Pauper's Drive" by Thomas Noel was a song set to music by composer Henry Russell in 1839. The piece was also published as a poem in Thomas Noel's collection *Rymes and Roundelayes* in 1841. The song/poem describes the final journey of a pauper in a hearse on his way to the graveyard. Each stanza ends with the refrain "Rattle his bones over the stones!/He's only a pauper whom nobody owns!". Despite the rather jovial tone of the poem as it describes the pauper's final journey, the final stanza laments the loneliness of his death and modifies the refrain into a plea for empathy and care for the deceased as they are still a child of God despite their ignominious social standing: "But a truce to this strain; for my soul it is sad,/ To think that a heart in humanity clad/ Should make, like the brute, such a desolate end,/ And depart from the light without leaving a friend!/ Bear soft his bones over the stones!/ Though a pauper, he's one whom his Maker yet owns!"

epicure, invaluable for fruit garden" (*U* 89). Bloom imagines dead bodies sustaining, for example, the growth of fruit trees rather than just as food for rats. Similarly, Bloom remarks that the soil in Glasnevin cemetery "would be quite fat with corpsemanure, bones, flesh, nails. Charnelhouses. [...] Turning green and pink decomposing. Rot quick in damp earth the lean old ones tougher. Then a kind of tallow cheesy. Then begins to get black, black treacle oozing out of them. Then dried up" (*U* 89). In both *Portrait* and *Ulysses* there is a recurrent emphasis on the decomposition of the bodies of all those lost. In *Portrait*, this imagery is intermingled with religious discourses on sin and moral transgression whereas Bloom sees the decomposing corpse in almost purely practical terms.

Ulysses places far more emphasis on the details of the Irish funeral as the funeral of Paddy Dignam features heavily in the opening episodes of the novel involving Bloom and serves as the occasion for Joyce to explore the complex set of rites which constitute the modern funeral. The centrepiece of the burial ritual, the coffin, eliminates the sight of death from society; in a sense, it serves as a symbolic full stop in the relation between the deceased individual and their society. Hepburn writes that "the coffin converts the corpse into a mysterious object […] at the same time, the coffin stands for the materiality of the corpse and shields the corpse from view […] the coffin becomes a shield or shell for death – a distortion in material form of the unrepresentable corpse" (193). Joyce seems also to have been acutely aware of the processes of the funereal event and the coffin when, in *Finnegans Wake*, he praises the coffin as "a triumph of the illusionist's art" (*FW* 66.27). The spectre of the Famine resurfaces in *Ulysses* when Bloom reflects on the coffin which became a significant symbol of the deceased's social standing and economic stability after the catastrophe of the Famine decades earlier. As Dignam's coffin is lowered into the grave, Bloom thinks of how the coffin "does seem a waste of wood […] They

could invent a handsome bier with a kind of panel sliding, let it down that way" (90). While the idea of a reusable coffin may be seen as a purely pragmatic device, it is also an allusion to Famine funerals because, as the crisis intensified, coffins became increasingly scarce and expensive leading to either the use of the types of reusable coffins imagined by Bloom here or burial without them (McLean 97).[12]

In "Hades", Bloom explores the complex set of rites and rituals that the funeral represents. For him, the burial of the deceased represents a sort of communal forgetting of the deceased and their death. For example, as "the coffin dived out of sight, eased down by the men straddled on the gravetrestles" (*U* 91) Bloom remarks on how the funeral marks the moment when the deceased "begin to be forgotten. Out of sight, out of mind" (*U* 91). Hepburn supports such a reading of "Hades" when he suggests that the episode deals with how "the dead acquire anonymity" in the funeral which is facilitated by "the featurelessness of coffins reinforces" (194). As Dignam's funeral service progresses, we learn that

> the gravediggers took up their spades and flung heavy clods of dirt in on the coffin. Mr Bloom turned his face away. And if he were alive all the time? Whew! By jingo, that would be awful! No, no: he is dead, of course […] Three days. Rather long to keep them in summer. Just as well to get shut of them as soon as you are sure there's no. (*U* 91)

Bloom's turning "his face away" (*U* 91) is a significant gesture when presented with the burial of the body, since it dramatizes society's attitude toward death. There is again another vestige of the Famine burial in Bloom's reflections on the funeral here. Although Paddy Dignam is

[12] The disruption of burial practices during the Famine and the use of reusable coffins, which imply the ephemerality and disposability of the human corpse, remind us of HCE's journey to his grave in *Finnegans Wake* which is made by "coach, carriage, wheelbarrow, dungcart" (*FW* 79.25-26). The prospect of an ignominious funeral procession, in either a "wheelbarrow" or "dungcart" (*FW* 79.25-26), also evokes the mass famine graves.

afforded the luxury of the coffin which became increasingly rare as the atrocity of the Famine advanced, Bloom still envisages the dash to deposit the dead as a question of "out of sight out of mind" (*U* 91) where the living shovel "them under by the cartload doublequick" (*U* 83). The image again reminds us of the fate of the dead of the Famine years and exhibits a sort of latent Famine-consciousness in Joyce's works. As I shall discuss, these subtle allusions to the recent catastrophes of Irish history are also spliced with a commentary on modern consumerism. In many ways, *Ulysses* constellates modern death practices within a complex network of associations involving the prospect of cannibalism and modern consumerism.

The Corpse, Consumerism and Newspaper Advertisements

George Cinclair Gibson suggests that cannibalism was a common feature of ancient Irish wake rituals: "one of the fundamental yet highly stigmatized events of the [ancient wake] was the wake feast […] which at different times in its history involved ritual cannibalism in its literal or symbolic form" (154). He states further that "when a great and magnanimous Irish leader died, his character, his greatness, his beloved qualities, could be assimilated" (156) by those who attended the wake feast. The treatment of the corpse also raises a host of questions about the relationship between society and the deceased in the context of growing consumerism of modern European society. The French sociologist Robert Hertz argues that death threatens society insofar as it "destroys the social being grafted upon the physical individual [...] to whom the collective consciousness attributed great dignity" (77). In this way then death is considered as a potentially destructive event which must be contained within the political, cultural and ethical mores of the society. Accordingly, Hertz argues that society enacts a series of rituals that are supposed to demonstrate the dominance of the living over the dead and the funeral is one of the most overt examples of this. In this sense then, the cannibalistic feast represented pre-Celtic

Ireland's attempt to not only triumph over death but also assimilate the deceased back into their ranks. Thus the connection between the funeral and cannibalism then was a well-established one in the remote Irish past.

The opening chapter of *Finnegans Wake* presents the cannibalistic process by which the body politic consumes the corpse of the deceased in an act which expels the decased. At Finnegan's wake, the crowd gathers to commemorate the deceased: "sobs they sighdid at Fillagain's chrissormiss wake, all the hoolivans of the nation, prostrated in their consternation, and their duodisimally profusive plethora of ululation" (*FW* 6.14-17). Finnegan's body is arranged "with a bockalips of finiskey fore his feet. And a barrowload of guenesis hoer his head" (*FW* 6.26-27). However, the arrangement of the corpse does not resemble that of a traditional wake wherein "the body [...] is washd and drest and stretchd upon a board resting on a table or the backs of chairs [and] drest in a shroud, together with the scapular or other insignia of any religious order of which the deceasd may hav been a member" (Mooney "Funeral Customs of Ireland" 267). Instead, Finnegan's corpse is laid out as if to be consumed as part of a feast: "they laid him brawdawn alangast bed" (*FW* 6.26). The corpse is even adorned with loaves of bread and fresh ale for the company: "whase be his baken head? A loaf of Singpantry's Kennedy bread. And whase hitched to the hop in his tayle? A glass of Danu U'Dunnell's foamous olde Dobbelin ayle" (*FW* 7.10-12). The possibility of a literal cannibalistic consumption of Finnegan's body is confirmed when we learn that the corpse has been prepared so that those who attend the wake can "sink teeth through that pyth of a flowerwhite bodey" (*FW* 7.13-14). However, Finnegan's corpse mysteriously disappears before the funeral party can take part in the feast: "behold of him as behemoth for he is noewhemoe. Finiche! Only a fadograph of a yestern scene" (*FW* 7.14-15). The wake in *Finnegans Wake* represents an attempt

to assimilate the deceased back into the community through the social event of a communal meal. The disappearance of the corpse "noewhemoe" (*FW* 7.14-15) shows how, in death, the corpse is quickly expelled from the land of the living. However, the disappearance of the corpse does not allow for Finnegan's death to be properly processed by his society. The disappearance of the corpse in *Finnegans Wake* serves as a literal example of the repudiation of death in modernity but plays on both the threat of cannibalism as a result of famine and, as we shall see, an emergent consumerist drive in post-Famine modernity. In these instances, death is expelled from the realm of the living but the dead are also consumed in a grotesque parody of post-Famine modern capitalist consumerism.

Aspects of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* exhibit anxieties about the consumption of the dead by the living framed within the context of the Famine and the ever-burgeoning consumerism of modernity. Jonathan Swift's satirical pamphlet *A Modest Proposal* provides a vital context here.[13] In the essay, Swift suggests that one way the poor of Ireland could ameliorate their situation would be to sell their children to the upper-classes as food since "a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled" (7). Swift imagines six benefits for the Irish if they were to undertake this ridiculous suggestion. First, the scheme would "greatly lessen the number of Papists" (9) thus ensuring a cultural hegemony for the landowning Protestant classes of Ireland. Secondly, the poverty-stricken tenant class of Ireland would finally "have something valuable of their own" (10) thus instilling a sense of economic purpose and self-worth. Thirdly, Swift states that both the nation and the ruling classes will benefit economically: "the nation's

[13] According to Richard Ellman in *The Consciousness of Joyce*, Joyce's Trieste library featured a copy of *The Works* (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1869) by Jonathon Swift which included *A Modest Proposal*.

stock will be […] increased […] besides the profit of a new dish introduced to the tables of all gentlemen of fortune in the kingdom who have any refinement in taste […] the money will circulate among ourselves, the goods being entirely of our own growth and manufacture" (10). Fourthly, the poor of Ireland will not only benefit financially from the sale of their children, but will also "be rid of the charge of maintaining them after the first year" (10). Fifthly, the selling of children as food would stimulate economic growth and prosperity by bringing "great custom" (10) to smaller commercial businesses such as taverns and restaurants. Finally, Swift writes that this scheme would be "a great inducement to marriage" (10) as well as increasing the "care and tenderness of mothers towards their children" and "men would become as fond of their wives during the time of their pregnancy as they are now of mares in foal" (10). Despite the obvious satirical hyperbole, Swifts essay suggests a perverse form of consumerism based on infantile cannibalism. While the grotesque, hyperbolic satire of modern commodification never reaches the same pitch in Joyce's works, *Ulysses* does exhibit a similar anxiety surrounding the relationship between modern consumerism and human mortality.

Joyce plays with ideas of cannibalistic consumption of the deceased throughout *Ulysses*. During a mass service, Bloom ruminates on the cannibalistic connotations of the sacrament of communion as recorded in the Gospel of St. John. There, the sacrament of communion is described in the following way:

> So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is real food, and My blood is real drink' (John 6:54)

Observing the congregation taking communion, Bloom reimagines the sacrament with an almost Swiftean irreverence and glee:

> The priest bent down to put it into her mouth, murmuring all the time. Latin. The next one. Shut your eyes and open your mouth. What? Corpus: body. Corpse [...] They don't seem to chew it: only swallow it down. Rum idea: eating bits of a corpse. Why the cannibals cotton to it. (*U* 66)

Although communion is presented as a quasi-cannibalistic act in the scriptures, Bloom places particular stress on this aspect of the sacrament as the corpse of Jesus is cannibalistically re-assimilated into the body politic of the Catholic Church. What is traditionally viewed as a ritual of repentance and spiritual rejuvenation is envisioned starkly by Bloom as an act of consumptive assimilation. In another sense, Bloom may be said to be underlining an aspect of the Eucharist which is already established in the Catholic Church. The Catholic mass reduces what might be understood as a feast – bread and wine – into something more ascetic by omitting the wine/blood and reducing the "food" of the bread to a wafer.

The Irish are especially prey to the lure of consumerism, given the raw historical memory of hunger and want. They are especially prone to alcoholism and other forms of addiction which is something Joyce represents in the citizens of Dublin in the text. Bloom as a an advertiser is a pivotal figure in this regard – his customers are the demoralized crowds of Dublin, while his masters are those who purvey the goods and substances that will intoxicate them or produce amnesia or comfort. The prospect of assimilating the deceased into the body politic though ritualistic cannibalism recurs throughout the novel. In "Lestrygonians", Bloom criticises the placement of the advertisement for Plumtree's Potted Meats under the obituary section of the newspaper. He thinks: "ideas for ads like Plumtree's potted under the obituaries, cold meat department" (*U* 127) and "Sandwich? Ham and his descendants musterred and bred there. Potted meats. What is a home without Plumtree's potted meat? Incomplete. What a stupid ad! Under the obituary notices they stuck it. All up a plumtree. Dignam's potted meat. Cannibals

would with lemon and rice" (*U* 140). And again in "Ithaca", Joyce draws out attention to how Plumtree's potted meats is "manufactured by George Plumtree, 23 Merchants' quay, Dublin, put up in 4 oz pots, and inserted by Councillor Joseph P. Nannetti, M.P., Rotunda Ward, 19 Hardwicke street, under the obituary notices and anniversaries of deceased" (*U* 560). The ritualistic re-assimilation of the deceased into the body politic later proposed in *Finnegans Wake* is initially presented as a joke in *Ulysses*, corresponding with the chance event that the advertisement for a meat product is printed under an obituary.

In Joyce's fiction then, we find both depictions of the almost literal consumption of the deceased through acts of cannibalism as well as instances of conceptual consumption of the deceased through the reading of printed reports of death. In such instances, Joyce splices the textual commemoration of death with the consumerist advertising of modernity. Here we can read how Joyce parodies the death-driven nature of modern consumerism as a discursive world in which the notice of a death and an ad for a food product find space on the same page of the newspaper. Both the advertisement for a foodstuff and the textual commemoration of the recently deceased have been reduced to equivalent units of information in the daily newspaper. The unconscious connection drawn between an advertisement for a foodstuff and the obituary section of a newspaper also recalls the Famine which blighted the country in the 1840s: "home" is where the food is, or not; the hungry household is no "abode of bliss".

Reading literary representations of death *Ulysses* within the context of post-Famine Ireland, then, yields crucial insights into how the novel represents the spectre of historical atrocity. As we have seen, *Portrait*, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* all exhibit what Lowe-Evans calls a "distinctly corporeal rhetoric" (14) surrounding death in their concentration on the materiality of the corpse. The episodes discussed here at least rhetorically hark back toward the

Famine with their emphasis on the materiality of the corpse and Bloom's reflections on the emergency burial practices of the time, and specifically on re-usable coffins. All of these instances attest to a society still reeling in the aftermath of mass Famine where death is invoked by the Catholic Church to instil a sense of moral conformity and the living are quick to bury, forget and absolve themselves of the idea of death. Furthermore, Joyce also gestures to horrific consequences of famine in the prospect of cannibalism in both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* where the deceased are imaginatively re-assimilated into the body politic in a process of consumptive annihilation. Yet Joyce also re-imagines this process within the context of post-Famine consumerist modernity.

Joyce's engagement with death practices in post-Famine Ireland is not confined to literary representations of the funeral as Bloom's reflections on the placement of the Plumtree's potted meat advertisement establishes a connection between consumerist advertising practices and the textual commemoration of the dead in the newspaper obituary. Throughout his fiction, Joyce formulates post-Famine attitudes towards death and the deceased in terms of consumption. Whether it is Duffy's consumption of the newspaper report on the death of Mrs. Sinico, the juxtaposition of an obituary with an advertisement of a foodstuff or the literal consumption of a body at a wake, the deceased are in some way consumed by the society from which they have departed. The obituary, as a textual technology for the memorialisation and sanitization of death, provides a basis for studying Joyce's response to modern death practices in post-Famine Ireland. This chapter will now explore the relations between the modern print technologies of the early twentieth century, namely the obituary and the newspaper, and social interpretations of death. More specifically, I will apply Heidegger's work on technology to the

literary representations of death and burial practices in *Ulysses* paying particular attention to the appearance of Paddy Dignam's obituary in the novel.

Ulysses, Modern Technology and the Newspaper Obituary

Joyce is clearly highly observant of and interested in the new machines of modernity. From the tram cars in the "Wandering Rocks" episode of *Ulysses*, which Joyce describes as "Beingless beings" which "throb always without you" (*U* 199), to the "tangled glowworm of [the] lamp" (*U* 156) in "Scylla and Charybdis" or the photograph of Finnegan at his wake (a "fadograph of a yestern scene" (*FW* 7.14-15)), it is clear that Joyce registers "the velocity of modern life" (*U* 592) and all of the new technologies which defined the age. The newspaper, as a new kind of modern text, has garnered a good deal of attention from Joyceans. Declan Kiberd, for example, argues that "Joyce was fascinated by the seemingly miraculous production to a precise deadline of a daily paper" (466) and consequently "so many aspects of the action [of *Ulysses*] are mediated in some way through papers" (467). The newspaper is the material embodiment of what Kiberd calls "a form of temporal provincialism" (470) since it emphasises the present and operates according to the parameters of a circadian finitude. The modern newspaper was a text of "sheer immediacy, instantaneousness and disposability" (Kiberd 470) since "each new edition of a daily paper condemned the previous edition to the scrapheap: that was 'modernism' with a vengeance, since the succession of second, third, fourth and fifth editions denied final authority to any one" (Kiberd 467). In this section, I will consider the importance of the newspaper and the newspaper obituary in *Ulysses* in a somewhat different context.

As in *Dubliners*, death notices, obituaries, lists and various ephemeral, scattered reports of social life permeate and punctuate *Ulysses*. What is more interesting is that the presence and influence of these new kinds of texts are even more apparent in the later novel. While other

critics have discussed and highlighted the centrality of the modern newspaper in the works of James Joyce, Brandon Kershner has argued that the newspaper was a contributing factor to the structures of social consciousness in modernity (96). Kershner suggests that the newspaper implies a sort of subversion of hierarchy which is vital to understanding the importance of the newspaper in *Ulysses*. As the newspaper is essentially "an anonymous farrago of unrelated items" (Kershner 79), there is no textual hierarchy in the modern newspaper and its structure "implies that all of the items it chooses to include are important" (112). It is not difficult to see how one could also read *Ulysses* in the same vein; the novel is made up of a series of "unrelated items" (Kershner 79), episodes, narrators, styles, forms and motifs, which are often competing with one another for textual supremacy. The often-chaotic assemblage of the modern newspaper is exemplified in "Aeolus" when Bloom thinks of the "queer lot of stuff" the newspaper editor "must have put through his hands in his time: obituary notices, pubs' ads, speeches, divorce suits, found drowned" (*U* 101). Bloom ruminates over the contents of the *Telegraph* in similar manner in "Eumaeus":

> Great battle, Tokio. Lovemaking in Irish, £200 damages. Gordon Bennett. Emigration Swindle. Letter from His Grace. William ✚. Ascot meeting, the Gold Cup. Victory of outsider Throwaway recalls Derby of '92 when Capt. Marshall's dark horse Sir Hugo captured the blue ribband at long odds. New York disaster. Thousand lives lost. Foot and Mouth. Funeral of the late Mr Patrick Dignam. (*U* 528-9)

Joyce again registers the narrative dissonance typical of the modern newspaper in *Finnegans Wake* through the imaginary publication entitled the "Evening World": "News, news, all the news. Death, a leopard, kills fellah in Fez. Angry scenes at Stormont. Stilla star with her lucky goingsaway. Opportunity fair with the China floods and we hear these rosy rumours" (*FW* 28.21-24). The newspaper perpetuates a form of idle talk as the non-hierarchical clusters of

information reduce all to a transient chatter; if all information in a newspaper is equally important, then it may also be said that it is all equally *un*important. What is interesting about these excerpts from the perspective of the current study is that they all, in one way or another, make reference to death. Although Joyce highlights the variety of texts and stories found in the daily paper, from pub ads to horse races to the "China floods" (*FW* 28.24), death is a common and crucial theme. If, as Kershner claims, "a primary function of the newspaper is listing the names of citizens" (112), then we may also say that, for Joyce, another principal function of the newspaper must be the reporting, recording and listing of those who have died – be it a "fellah in Fez" (*FW* 28.21-24) or a case of accidental drowning in Dublin Bay.

We also get a sense of how transferring the remembrance of the dead into the realm of print influences the ways in which his fellow-citizens respond to Dignam's death in *Ulysses*. For example, Bob Doran misremembers Paddy Dignam's name in what can only be taken as an inauthentic display of extreme grief: "Is that a good Christ, says Bob Doran, to take away poor little Willy Dignam?" (*U* 248). Joyce also describes a state of potential alienation and metaphysical depression found in the listing of the dead in the newspaper. Describing the deaths of "Callan, Coleman, Dignam, Fawcett, Naumann, Peake" as "inked characters fast fading on the frayed paper" (*U* 75), Bloom's confrontation with death echoes the conclusions reached by Buck Mulligan in the "Telemachus" episode. Mulligan, as a doctor, sees many too dead bodies on a daily basis, as he tells Stephen, to be impressed by the seriousness of his friend's bereavement; so too the modern citizen is always conscious of countless others passing away. For Bloom, these dead people are caught up in the inconspicuous and ephemeral materiality of the newspaper and are even subjected to a kind of second death in the "fast fading" ink on the "frayed breaking paper" (*U* 75).

The new centrality of reporting and commemoration of death through the medium of print is also registered in "Cyclops" and "Ithaca". In "Cyclops", the Citizen reads from the death notices in the *Irish Independent*: "Eh? Deaths. Bristow, at Whitehall lane, London: Carr, Stoke Newington, of gastritis and heart disease: Cockburn, at the Moat house, Chepstow …" (*U* 245). Although the Citizen expresses his annoyance at the English addresses of the deceased, his callousness towards the dead also exemplifies the fate of the deceased as their demise is recorded in the daily newspaper. In these instances, the dead are listed off mechanically with little space left for reflection on the individuals recently deceased. As we have already noted, Kershner argues that "socially, a primary function of the newspaper is listing the names of citizens" (112-3) and that in this project, "newspapers curiously combine two fundamental functions of language, narrating and listing" (114). As the "ghouleaten" spirit of Paddy Dignam tells Bloom later: "Bloom, I am Paddy Dignam's spirit. List, list, O list!" (*U* 385). Although this is a reference to Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* it also reflects the imperative of enumerating the dead in lists in *Ulysses*. In all of these instances, we find an almost obsessive insistence on formulating death in terms of modernity's drive for, what Kershner calls, "mechanical comprehensiveness" (115). This obsessive listing of death attempts to order mortality within a human-made schema and is representative of an attempt to put order on an ambiguous world in which life is but "a parenthesis of infinitesimal brevity" (*U* 573). If a true reckoning with the nature of human mortality is too great a challenge, then the reporting, listing and sublimating of death within the parameters of a human-made text may be seen as an attempt to assert some control or power over the phenomenon.

Breathnach and Butler argue that obituaries and death notices were "part of a tradition with historical precedent" since "the concept of memorializing the dead through inscription has

a long history in Ireland" (253). In an era of technological modernity, the memorialization of the deceased through inscription gains an ephemeral quality as the obituary and death notice were subject to the temporal finitude of a circadian print media. Newspapers themselves are expressions of a certain temporal ephemerality insofar as every day brings with it a new edition. In an emergent modern society, "where mourning is forbidden" (Ariès 91), the publication of death notices, as lists, in the newspaper is a way of ensuring a finite expression of grief for the dead. Through the ever-growing popularity of the obituary, it may be said that the newspaper formed a new relationship with death. No longer did the newspaper merely report death but it also became the means by which an intimate, personal but also commercial (in the sense that bereaved families would pay for the obituary to be published) acknowledgment of death was communicated to society at large. Breathnach and Butler argue that between the years 1820-1900 "the publication of obituaries and death notices served a dual purpose: firstly, it represents an expression of rising middle-class Catholic aspirations, and, secondly, it assisted the Catholic Church to exert control over funerary culture" (249). The ceremonial afterlife of the deceased was shifted away from an oral culture into a disposable print culture and this shift away from an oral narrative of death was in keeping with the ultramontane leanings of the Devotional Revolution in post-Famine Ireland. The Church's project of cultural homogenization was reinforced by an emerging mass media and Breathnach and Butler point out that Ireland's thriving newspaper sector helped to popularise the obituary (253).

So we can see how the numerous and frequent instances of the dead being enumerated in lists in *Ulysses* was linked to the growing popularity of the newspaper obituary more generally at the beginning of the twentieth century. Furthermore, there are also many detailed references to the printed obituary and death notices in the novel. Indeed, the writing and printing

of Dignam's obituary punctuates the events of the opening stages of the novel. In "Lotus Eaters", Bloom meets M'Coy who asks him to "put down my name at the funeral […] just shove in my name if I'm not there" (*U* 62). M'Coy is unsure if he will be able to attend Dignam's funeral because he has to attend to "a drowning case at Sandycove" (*U* 62) but nevertheless wishes to be enumerated among the mourners in both the funeral ledger and the obituary to be published later. Later on after the burial of Dignam in "Hades", Bloom remarks on Hynes "jotting down something in his notebook" (*U* 92) which turns out to a list of those who attended the funeral to be published as part of the newspaper obituary later that evening. True to his word, Bloom asks Hynes to "put down M'Coy's name too" (*U* 92) among those who paid their respects. In the next episode, Bloom observes the publication of the obituary when he visits the *Freeman* newspaper office about an advertisement he is supposed to have published. While waiting in the office, Bloom watches a "typesetter neatly distributing type" (*U* 101) who is writing Dignam's obituary for print: "Reads it backwards first. Quickly he does it. Must require some practice that. mangiD kcirtaP" (*U* 101). In "Wandering Rocks", Joyce introduces us to Dignam's son, "Master Dignam" (*U* 206), as he is walking to the butcher and thinking about his father's obituary. The boy reflects on the prestige afforded by having his name and his father's name printed in the paper: "do they [the other people] notice I'm in mourning? Uncle Barney said he'd get it into the paper tonight. Then they'll all see it in the paper and read my name printed and pa's name" (*U* 206). The prospect of having his father's and his own name printed in the obituary will confer legitimacy on his mourning. Furthermore, the occasion of his father's death may be the first and only time that the boy will get to see his or his family's name in print, the novelty of which might assuage the grief of having lost his father. Paddy Dignam's obituary makes several appearances in three consecutive episodes in the opening stages of the

novel and throughout the novel Joyce's representation of death is intimately enmeshed in popular modes of textual commemoration.

The obituary appears in a more distorted form later in the novel in "Circe". Noted for its "outrageous experiments" with narrative form and its "expressionistic drama" (Lawrence 165), the episode takes up over a quarter of the page count of the entire novel. In the episode, the living and dead co-exist in a phantasmagoric burlesque of violence and debauchery. Ellmann describes "Circe" as "the climactic episode" of *Ulysses* which "whirls to a sepulchral close in [a] juxtaposition of living and dead" (Ellmann, *JJ* 253) as deceased loved ones return to confront both Stephen and Bloom. In "Circe", Joyce is following the example of Homer's *Odyssey*. The classical epic also features its protagonist journeying to the underworld, called Hades, where he meets his dead comrades and mother, who he did not realise had died in his absence from home. Crucially though, the dead do not actually appear in Joyce's "Hades" but return instead in "Circe". Conversely, in Homer's *Odyssey*, Circe is initially a powerful witch who entices Odysseus and his crew to remain on her island before losing her power and eventually providing Odysseus with the directions to both his home and the Greek underworld itself.

In this context, Joyce frequently uses the form of the obituary. For example, the spirit of Paddy Dignam morphs out of the body of a dog and appears in a "ghouleaten" (*U* 386) state to recite his own obituary:

> PADDY DIGNAM: *(Earnestly)* Once I was in the employ of Mr J. H. Menton, solicitor, commissioner for oaths and affidavits, of 27 Bachelor's Walk. Now I am defunct, the wall of the heart hypertrophied. Hard lines. The poor wife was awfully cut up. How is she bearing it? Keep her off that bottle of sherry. (*U* 386)

What is interesting here is that this is not a printed obituary but yet it borrows the language and form of the printed obituary. In this posthumous, autobiographical obituary, key details of his life are recounted. We have Dignam's profession, the address of his employer, his cause of death and a rather incongruous and revelatory reminiscence about his wife's weakness for alcohol which is the point at which the "respectability" of the family is compromised by Dignam's narration. Joyce is clearly interested in how the textual form of the obituary helps to mould attitudes towards death. The reappearance of the dead and the spectacle of Dignam delivering his own obituary defy the detached finality implied by the traditional printed death notice. The traditional obituary and death notice are, according to Breathnach and Butler, "public forms of writing, written about, but not normally by, an individual" (25). With "Circe" then, Joyce undermines one of the fundamental characteristics of the traditional obituary by having Paddy Dignam recount his own biographical commemoration. Despite his apparent resurrection, Dignam is unable to formulate any comment on the significance of his own life outside the parameters of the traditional obituary and instead repeats merely the same sort of information about his job and his fatal illness as we might expect to find in a newspaper, autopsy or other official document except when it is as if the narrator loses patience and inserts the "human" detail about Mrs Dignam and the bottle of sherry. It is as though the printed report of death found in the newspaper established a homogenizing style that had to be followed when discussing death. We see this inability to discuss death outside the parameters of the printed obituary developed in even complex ways when Joyce writes about the death of Bloom's father Rudolph in "Ithaca" which I will discuss in more detail later in the chapter.

After Joyce presents us with the hallucinatory image of the deceased recounting his own obituary, we eventually encounter the actual printed obituary which Bloom first caught sight of

in “Aeolus”. If Joyce once called “Ithaca” the “ugly duckling” (qtd. in Lawrence 180) of his epic novel, then “Eumaeus” may be considered the forgotten duckling of *Ulysses*. Caught between the intoxicating formal experimentation of “Circe” and the magisterial amalgamation of catechetical precision with poetic poignancy of “Ithaca”, “Eumaeus” features a deflated narrative characterised by an unending stream of banal cliché. But “Eumaeus” is a very significant chapter especially within the context of this study. In this episode, to use a cliché in the spirit of the episode, various chickens come home to roost. We not only have the most sustained realist depiction of our two main male characters in each other’s company, Stephen and Bloom, but also witness Bloom reading Paddy Dignam’s newspaper obituary for which he had collated information as early as “Lotus Eaters” when M’Coy asks him to “put my name down at the funeral” (*U* 62).

Cliché, banality and puns abound in an episode where very little is said but conversation progresses regardless as character and subjective viewpoints dissolve into a tokenistic exchange of language. “Eumaeus” is an episode where the worn-out nature of everyday language is laid bare for the reader. As Karen Lawrence writes:

> If the language of “Eumaeus” is enervated, it is not merely to reflect the fatigue of the character or a narrator but to reveal that language is tired and “old,” used and reused so many times that it runs in grooves. The language of “Eumaeus” is the public, anonymous “voice of culture” first heard in the headings of “Aeolus,” a transpersonal repository of received ideas (168)

Used and reused, language in the episode is exchanged in a series of meaningless banalities; “Eumaeus” is not so much an attempt to valorise half-drunken reflections in a late-night cabman’s shelter in Dublin than it is an assault on the “averageness” of social discourse. In this sense, we can read the style of the narrative and the dialogue between characters as a

dramatization of the Heideggerian sense of idle talk. Ideas, gossip and hollow, clichéd expressions operate in the place of authentic, genuine understanding. Heidegger writes that idle talk "communicates by gossiping and passing the word along. What is spoken about spreads in wider circles and takes on an authoritative character" (*BT* 163). This type of discourse discourages subjective interpretations in favour of those of the crowd and culture. Language becomes a self-perpetuating discourse devoid of authentic understanding or meaning. Language in "Eumaeus", as Lawrence suggests, is "patently inadequate" (171), the episode exhibits "the essential discrepancy between language and the reality it seeks to describe" (172), where speech and discourse "glances off its object. A succession of phrases is offered, none of which captures meaning fully" (Lawrence 167).

It would be impossible to identify every example of this but there are several worth noting. The introduction of Skin-the-Goat Fitzharris, for example, demonstrates the ways in which language and conjecture assumes authority through persistent circulation in public discourse. Skin-the Goat Fitzharris was a member of the Invincibles and allegedly involved in the Phoenix Park Murders of 1882, a notorious incident in which two British diplomats were stabbed to death. Upon entering the cabman's shelter Bloom "whispered to [Stephen] a few hints anent the keeper of it said to be the once famous Skin-the-Goat, Fitzharris, the invincible, though he could not vouch for the actual facts which quite possibly there was not one vestige of truth in" (*U* 508). Despite admitting that there is probably no truth to the claim that Skin-the-Goat was the proprietor of the establishment, this does not prevent Bloom from "passing the word along" (Heidegger, *BT* 163) as an unverified and unverifiable urban myth.

Throughout the episode, language is understood to be disposable and inaccurate. The obfuscation of understanding in language is initially presented as a simple inability to translate

one language to another. In this instance, the university graduate Stephen seems to be at an advantage. For example, when Bloom hears a group of Italian men arguing near an icecream car, he is ignorant of the content of the discussion hearing only the sounds: "A beautiful language [...] It is so melodious and full" (*U* 508). Stephen, as the more educated of the two, seems to be almost pained at Bloom's ignorant idle talk. He is "suffering from lassitude" (*U* 509), perhaps not just physical tiredness but weariness at inanity and idle talk. Stephen informs Bloom that the meaning of the Italians' speech belies its sound: "To fill the ear of a cow elephant. They were haggling over money" (*U* 509). As the episode progresses, the narrative grows increasingly sceptical of the language and terms employed by the characters. The descriptions of the coffee and bread roll, for example, unveil a deep-seated anxiety about the relationship between language and the reality it attempts to describe: "The keeper of the shelter [...] put a boiling swimming cup of a choice concoction *labelled coffee* on the table and a rather antediluvian specimen of a bun, or *so it seemed*" (*U* 509, my emphasis). These descriptions not only register Bloom's anxieties about the quality of the food being served to himself and Stephen, a highly-educated and relatively well-travelled member of early twentieth-century Dublin society, but they also demonstrate a reluctance and the text's part to commit to a definitive designation for coffee or bread roll, describing the coffee as "what was temporarily supposed to be called coffee" (*U* 509) and the bread roll as "the socalled roll" (*U* 509). In an episode so enmeshed in common discourse and cliché, the novel here also exhibits a deep suspicion at the fundamental task of language. It questions the immutable legitimacy of the most basic linguistic designations whilst dramatizing the authority with which idle talk speciously acquires as it circulates in Dublin society.

It is at this point that in the episode that Bloom turns his attention to a newspaper at hand where he stumbles across the obituary of Paddy Dignam. Reading the obituary, Bloom is perturbed at the cliché that Dignam's funeral was a "gay sendoff" (*U* 529). The obituary reads:

> This morning (Hynes put it in of course) the remains of the late Mr Patrick Dignam were removed from his residence, no 9 Newbridge Avenue, Sandymount, for interment in Glasnevin. The deceased gentleman was a most popular and genial personality in city life and his demise after a brief illness came as a great shock to citizens of all classes by whom he is deeply regretted. The obsequies, at which many friends of the deceased were present, were carried out (certainly Hynes wrote it with a nudge from Corny) by Messrs H. J. O'Neill and Son, 164 North Strand Road. The mourners included: Patk. Dignam (son), Bernard Corrigan (brother-in-law), Jno. Henry Menton, solr, Martin Cunningham, John Power, .)eatondph 1/8 ador dorador douradora (must be where he called Monks the dayfather about Keyes's ad) Thomas Kernan, Simon Dedalus, Stephen Dedalus B.A., Edw. J. Lambert, Cornelius T. Kelleher, Joseph M'C Hynes, L. Boom, CP M'Coy,—M'lntosh and several others. (*U* 529)

As we can see, the obituary is riddled with clichéd phrases typical of early twentieth-century obituaries. In his study of the relationship between obituaries and social identity, Gary Long writes that obituaries are products of well-established journalistic and newspaper practices and that they rely on "common, well-worn patterns of discourse" (966). What we see here is an elaboration of what Breathnach and Butler identify as the dominant features of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century obituary. They write: "some nineteenth century death notices were very detailed: the dead person was named, their full address was given, their lineage was described, and the occupations of named relatives and colleagues identified" (252). There is mention of Dignam's address, his temperament as a "most popular and genial personality" (*U* 529), as well as an extensive list of the mourners who attended the ceremony. Similarly, his cause of death is described in an off-handed manner as "a brief illness" which was "a great

shock to citizens of all classes" (*U* 529). As a textual form which operates to familiarise and detach the reader form an intimate encounter with death, this obituary presents Dignam's death as sudden and unexpected. Like the death of Mrs. Sinico in *Dubliners*, Dignam's death is described very briefly as a shock leaving little room for the reader's morbid speculation as to the details of his demise in an attempt to objectify the death as a fact that does not require further consideration. By describing the unexpected nature of Dignam's death, the obituary portrays death as something which "strikes the they" (Heidegger, *BT* 243) as a collective experience. The obituary naturalizes death within the predictable clichés of public discourse and closes off authentic interpretations of mortality as a subjective, existential possibility. The formality and cliché of the obituary is a crystallization of the public's idle talk about death as it presents "death as a constantly occurring event, as a 'case of death'" (Heidegger, *BT* 243). We see from the obituary, by emphasising the "great shock to citizens of all classes" (*U* 529) and listing the attendees of the funeral, how the public treats death as "a publicly occurring event which the they encounters" (Heidegger, *BT* 243). The life and death of Paddy Dignam is reduced to, what Long calls, the "mediated, abbreviated, stylized biograph[y]" (965) of the obituary which is written in the common, journalistic discourses of the age.

Joyce implicitly undermines the textual integrity of the newspaper and the death notice throughout *Ulysses* by presenting its fallibility when replicating names. Yet in doing so, Joyce also affirms the processes by which idle talk is circulated and imbued with authority in modern print cultures despite its fallibility. As I have already discussed, in "Aeolus" Joyce registers an example of the modern print media's ability to distort the coherence of identity when Bloom "stayed in his walk to watch a typesetter neatly distributing type. Read it backwards first. Quickly he does it. Must require some practice that. mangiD kcirtaP" (*U* 101). The backwards

reproduction of Dignam's name dramatizes the capacity of the machine to estrange us from common notions of human identity. Discussing the role of technology in representations of death in *Ulysses,* Pericles Lewis argues that, for Joyce, "technology offers an ersatz sort of immortality" (186); this is not the immortality of the soul but a sort of garbled and flawed reproduction of social identity. This capacity for the printed word to destabilize notions of identity also occurs to Bloom in "Lestrygonians" when he is confused by the throwaway and mistakes one of its printed words for his own name: "A sombre Y.M.C.A. young man, watchful among the warm sweet fumes of Graham Lemon's, placed a throwaway in a hand of Mr Bloom. Heart to heart talks. Bloo .... Me? No. Blood of the lamb" (*U* 124). These instances highlight print media's ability to bring about a sense of estrangement between the subject and the name as the ontological designator of identity. In "Ithaca", the notion of printing errors and mistaken identities occurs again when the episode imagines what would happen if Stephen and Bloom swapped places in their school years. Replacing Stephen for Bloom results in a third character called "Stoom" while replacing Bloom for Stephen results in a fourth character called "Blephen" (*U* 558). This recalls the earlier instances of misprinted and mistaken names but the potential error is confused with a philosophical investigation into the malleability of identity.

Dignam's obituary is also constantly destabilized by Bloom's interjections and by "the line of bitched type" (*U* 529) in the middle of the obituary. The line "*.)eatondph 1/8 ador dorador dourador*" which Bloom reckons "must be where he called Monks the dayfather about Keyes's ad" (*U* 529) exemplifies how technology can disrupt an accurate commemoration of the deceased in print. Furthermore, it demonstrates how language, reproduced by the automated processes of the newspaper, is authoritatively transmitted to the community at large regardless of its errors. Maud Ellmann advances this argument when she suggests that names in Joyce

play a central role in the ways in which *Ulysses* mediates its representations of death and identity. She writes that "the name survives its owner" and "the name is the ghost bequeathed to each of us at birth, insofar as it prolongs our subjectivity beyond our death" (85). Names represent the site of ontological designation and validation; they are the means by which subjectivity and identity are confirmed and sustained, whilst eclipsing the temporal finitude of the biological body. Joyce constantly highlights the fallibility of modern printing technologies especially in relation to the printing of names as is seen when Dignam's obituary highlights the newspaper's ability to destabilize orthonymic identity. The obituary not only misspells Bloom's name, "L. Boom" (*U* 529), but also includes people who were not in attendance, Stephen and McCoy. The obituary is also the site of the most egregious example of Heideggerian idle talk in the novel.

The inclusion of "M'Intosh" in the obituary is a prime example of uncritical idle talk and how it "spreads in wider circles and takes on an authoritative character" (*BT* 163). Heidegger writes that idle talk "is not limited to vocal, but spreads to what is written, as 'scribbling' [...] gossiping is based not so much on hearsay. It feeds on sporadic superficial reading" (*BT* 163). As we saw in "Eumaeus", "M'Intosh" is included in the list of attendees at the funeral, "*M'lntosh and several others*" (*U* 529), despite the fact that his true name and identity, a point of fierce debate amongst Joyceans, remains a mystery throughout the novel. In "Hades", we see the inception of the erroneous common discourse which eventually assumes an authoritative character in "Eumaeus". Hynes asks Bloom about the elusive thirteenth member of the funeral party:

> – And tell us, Hynes said, do you know that fellow in the, fellow was over there in the...
>
> He looked around.

– Macintosh. Yes, I saw him, Mr Bloom said. Where is he now?

– M'Intosh, Hynes said scribbling. I don't know who he is. Is that his name?

He moved away, looking about him.

– No, Mr Bloom began, turning and stopping. I say, Hynes! (*U* 92)

It is interesting to note that both Heidegger and Joyce use the word "scribbling" (Heidegger, *BT* 163, Joyce, *U* 92) to describe the type of writing which characterises idle talk. Although Hynes asks Bloom if he knows "that fellow in the, fellow was over there in the..." (*U* 92), he is distracted by something outside the narrative frame and is unable to finish his sentence. Not paying full attention to Bloom's response, Hynes does not realise that Bloom's response, "Macintosh" (*U* 92), is actually in reference to the guest's coat and not Bloom's name for the guest. Hynes' question, finished by Bloom, should have read: 'And tell us […] do you know that fellow in the, fellow was over there in the Macintosh?'. Yet Hynes is distracted by events outside of the narrative frame, "He looked around" (*U* 92), before delving back into his conversation with Bloom and asking "I don't know who he is. Is that his name?" (*U* 92). However, Hynes is distracted again before listening to Bloom's response: "He moved away, looking about him" (*U* 92), leaving an exasperated Bloom to try and correct Hynes' error: "No, Mr Bloom began, turning and stopping. I say, Hynes!" (*U* 92). But Hynes "disappeared" (*U* 92) and his error of interpretation is eventually transmitted to the masses in the final printed version of the obituary. Bloom, as the accepted everyman of Dublin life, is approached as an authority but Hynes is distracted by other events and plays no close attention to his words. His interpretation of Bloom's answer is fragmentary, "sporadic [and] superficial" (*BT* 163) as Heidegger would say. Bloom's words are "scribbled" down by Hynes and eventually printed in a national newspaper. The obituary, already an inauthentic response to death in that it focusses

on the impact of mortality on the anonymous crowd of society, is further delegitimized by Joyce as he dramatizes an instance when the obituary is in part assembled from snippets of erroneous and superficial forms of public discourse.

Just like the deaths of those framed within the "threadbare" (*Dubliners* 128) narratives of journalese, the obituary is one of modernity's "little deaths" (Kiberd 471) and is guaranteed a lifespan of "infinitesimal brevity" (*U* 573). The impassive, daily cataloguing of the dead guarantee a necessary but scheduled timetable for mourning since with each new day there is a new paper. The newspaper then becomes the vehicle through which the attitude of modernity towards death – the mission to familiarise the reader with death as someone else's death – is expressed through the publication of the death notice and the obituary. As Bloom remarks "every mortal day a fresh batch" (*U* 86) such that "people talk about you a bit: forget you" (*U* 91): so the modern printing press and newspaper guarantee this predictable cycle of controlled expressions of death.

Rudolf Virag, "Ithaca" and the Catechetic Obituary

Just as the printed report of death was the catalyst for a subjective reflection on Duffy's own mortality in "A Painful Case", Joyce also illustrates the potentially productive forms of the obituary in *Ulysses*. In "Hades", Bloom attempts to imagine some scenario in which there is a pragmatic relationship between technology, the living and the dead. He does this by envisaging a "gramophone in every grave" (*U* 93) as a means of telephonic connection between the living and the deceased. Bloom thinks that "they ought to have some law to pierce the heart and make sure or an electric clock or a telephone in the coffin and some kind of canvas airhole. Flag of distress" (91) to allow for those buried mistakenly to alert those above ground. How "an electric clock" (*U* 91) would help someone who was mistakenly buried escape from the grave remains

unclear but what is interesting here is how Bloom envisions telephonic modes of technology as a means of continued communication between the dead and the living. Bloom thinks that "a gramophone in every grave" (*U* 93) would be a way of remembering the deceased long after they have been buried:

> Besides how could you remember everybody? Eyes, walk, voice. Well, the voice, yes: gramophone. Have a gramophone in every grave or keep it in the house. After dinner on a Sunday. Put on poor old greatgrandfather. Kraahraark! Hellohellohello amawfullyglad kraark awfullygladaseeagain hellohello amawf krpthsth. Remind you of the voice like the photograph reminds you of the face. Otherwise you couldn't remember the face after fifteen years say (*U* 93-4)

Jacques Derrida calls this gramophone an "anamnesic machine" (276): a machine which possesses an unnatural ability to retain memory. The gramophone also has the ability to project this memory as a form of Sunday evening entertainment. The gramophone is this instance however is not the dialogic link the telephone in the grave would have been because, although it gives voice to the deceased, it does not allow for dialogue between the deceased and the living. The voice of the dead is confined to the mechanised gramophone; it was to be summoned up only when the living deem it desirable and would ultimately be subject to their whimsy. The memory of the voice, or the automated repetition of their memory, is mediated and confined to processes controlled by the living. For the gramophone is a one-way system, a system of "gramophony" which risks reducing the voice it projects to a purposeless repetition devoid of an audience, "wandering deprived of an address and destination" (Derrida 305). Bloom attempts to restore some agency to the dead through the gramophone in the grave but this proves problematic. As Derrida argues, the dead in this instance are not given a meaningful voice but, as we saw in the case of the obituary, are reified and encased within a technology which serves only to reinforce the memory of the living. Like the names of the dead in the obituary, the dead

in this instance are also subject to the threat of flawed reproduction in the process of "technical repetition" and exist without any purpose, condemned to wander without "an address and destination" (Derrida 305).

Bloom's attempt to forge a productive relationship between the living and the dead via modern technology proves fruitless. However, Joyce too attempts to envision a scenario where technology, more specifically the technological form of writing found in the Catholic Catechism, could help redress the suppression of death in modern society. In the coming section, I want to show how "Ithaca" responds to the sanitization and homogenization of the death practices in post-Famine Ireland, particularly as they are expressed through the obituary. More specifically, I will discuss how Joyce's use of the catechetic form in the episode allows for a more authentic representation of death than those found in the obituary by uncovering the details of a death previously suppressed in the text, that of Rudolph Bloom's suicide. Through an investigation into the suicide of Rudolph Bloom, Joyce presents a more authentic textual commemoration of death than permitted by the newspaper obituary by marrying the objectifying form of the catechism with the content of the obituary. This could be termed the catechetic obituary.

An article entitled "Is Suicide Ever Justifiable?" from *The Ecclesiastical Review* (vol. 53, 1915) states that "death is the greatest of physical evils, and [...] self-inflicted death is a greater moral evil that fornication or adultery" (685). Indeed, *Ulysses* reflects such a view of suicide as it is a type of death which avoided in everyday discourse in the novel. Although suicide as a scandalous form of death is possibly the *most* forbidden death, it is also alluded to repeatedly throughout the novel. The suspicion surrounding "the man that was drowned" (*U* 18) in "Telemachus" is one such example. However, Bloom's memories of his father's death are

the occasion for the most extended treatment of suicide in the novel. Rudolph Virag was a Hungarian Jew who immigrated to Ireland before joining the Church of Ireland and changing his second name to Bloom. Rudolph married Ellen Higgins to whom Leopold was born in 1866 and eventually became the owner of the Queen's Hotel in Ennis where he took his own life in 1888, sixteen years before the events of the novel. Whilst we never encounter Rudolph Bloom's actual obituary or death notice (a notable exclusion given the proliferation of seemingly ephemeral details surrounding Bloom's life and past as well as Joyce's fondness for parodying the obituary) the suicide of Rudolph Bloom haunts the fringes of the text from as early as the "Hades" episode. Despite the relative absence of the details of his death, in the coming section I argue that "Ithaca" elaborates what is ostensibly a catechetic obituary of Rudolph Bloom. The "suggested scene [...] reconstructed by Bloom" (*U* 560) regarding his father's death in the episode resembles the obituaries described earlier in the novel, especially Paddy Dignam's from "Eumaeus", yet it emphasises the details of Rudolph's death instead of providing a summary of the deceased's life. This stripping away of Rudolph Bloom's social identity means that the report of this suicide presents us with death in its barest form bereft of any communal veiling or rhetorical covering-up of the brute reality.

In "Hades", we see how suicide is concealed in the idle talk of those in the carriage. Georgina Laragy argues that suicide "was punishable by ignominious burial until 1823" (80) and that, due to this threat, "the majority of suicides reported in nineteenth-century Ireland were judged temporarily insane at inquests" (81). In *Ulysses*, Bloom reflects on how: "They have no mercy for [suicide] here or infanticide. Refuse Christian burial. They used to drive a stake through his heart in the grave. As if it wasn't broken already" (*U* 80). When Powers states that "the worst of all [...] is the man who takes his own life [...] the greatest disgrace to have in the

family" (*U* 79), Martin Cunningham attempts to excuse suicide as an act of "temporary insanity, of course [...] we must take a charitable view of it" (*U* 79). This qualification of suicide as an act of "temporary insanity" (*U* 79) is significant as Laragy points out that "after 1872 legal punishment [of suicide] no longer existed but religious prohibition remained [...] Protestant and Catholic churches in Ireland accepted the legal verdict of temporary insanity as a sign no sin had been committee and that the [deceased] could be buried in consecrated ground" (Laragy 81). Laragy quotes a letter from *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record* Vol. 23 (January-June 1908) which asks whether a recent suicide is "to be deprived of ecclesiastical burial according to the law of the Church" (99). To this enquiry, Rev. S. Luzio replies that only those "who voluntarily kill themselves *ob desperationem vel iracundiam* [because of desperation or anger]" will be deprived of an ecclesiastical burial and that, furthermore, "the decision must always be in favour of the deceased, who is presumed to have taken his life in a moment of mental aberration, and while irresponsible for his acts" (99).

Inquests into suspected suicides often employed some vague, catchall verdicts to avoid publicly announcing suicide such as "found drowned." For example, a judge at an inquest printed in *Tipperary Express* from 30 April 1864 (two years before Rudolph Bloom's suicide) stated to the inquest that: "If you think he was sane at the time he committed the deed [suicide], it is your duty to bring in an open verdict of found drowned" (qtd. in Laragy 84). In *Ulysses,* the death of the drowned man, whose identity is speculatively revealed as "Matthew F. Kane (accidental drowning, Dublin Bay)" (*U* 579),[14] is promulgated in the public forum through the

[14] Although Mark Osteen has argued that Matthew F. Kane, who was an acquaintance of Joyce and a Chief Clerk in Dublin Castle, was also the model for the character of Martin Cunningham. Kane was buried in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin and his epitaph claims that he was as an inspiration for the characters of Patrick Dignam, Martin Cunningham, William Shakespeare and Matthew F. Kane in *Ulysses*. As Osteen points out, Kane did in fact suffer a stroke and drowned while swimming at Dún Laoghaire in 1904 (168).

newspaper as we recall Bloom's thoughts about "obituary notices, pubs' ads, speeches, divorce suits, found drowned" (*U* 101), which all find their way through the publisher's hands and into print on a daily basis. While it is true that the drowned man may not have committed suicide, it is interesting to note how this term was used in cases of ambiguous or undetermined death. Similarly, Mrs. Sinico's death in "A Painful Case" is described by the report as an "accident" (*Dubliners* 127) with "no blame attached to anyone" (*Dubliners* 128) despite the report itself insinuating the possibility of suicide. Again, in "Eumaeus", "the seafarer with the tartan beard" (*U* 538) picks up a newspaper and "pored upon Lord only knows what, found drowned or the exploits of King Willow" (*U* 538). Bloom later recollects the official verdict of the inquest into his father's death which conceals the suicide behind a verdict of "death by misadventure" (*U* 80): "Thought he was asleep first. Then saw yellow streaks on his face. Had slipped to the foot of the bed. Verdict: overdose. Death by misadventure. The letter. For my son Leopold" (*U* 80). The inclusion of that last details, "the letter. For my son Leopold" (*U* 80), confirms to the reader that Rudolf's death was not in fact the result of misadventure but a suicide. Just as "temporary insanity" (*U* 79) was used to rationalise and conceal suicide, verdicts such as "found drowned" (*U* 538) and "death by misadventure" (*U* 80) were similarly employed to conceal suspected suicide when the mental instability of the deceased could not be proved conclusively.

The nature of Rudolph Bloom's death had been hinted at throughout *Ulysses*. In fact, the deaths of Bloom's father and son are formative events in Bloom's consciousness and constantly colour his ruminations at Paddy Dignam's funeral. The death of Bloom's father in particular is the cause of much social discomfort in the carriage to Glasnevin in "Hades" while the death of his son is cause for the Dubliners in "Cyclops" to question Bloom's sexual and paternal qualities. However, whereas a more traditional novel might move closer to the

emotional heart of this loss in its penultimate episode through a realist depiction of Bloom's psychological and emotional response to his father's suicide, Joyce finally explores the death of Rudolph Bloom in a form which resembles an obituary, shaped by catechetic precision. The reader is presented with an obituary, which is a form they are acquainted with at this stage of the novel having witnessed the composition and publication of Dignam's obituary in the preceding episode, through the prism of the catechism which is the dominant style of the episode. Rudolph Bloom's obituary in "Ithaca" contains details typical of an obituary such as the name of the deceased, location of death as well as a recording of the inability to accurately record the exact hour of death: "The Queen's Hotel, Ennis, co Clare, where Rudolph Bloom (Rudolf Virag) died on the evening of the 27 June 1886, at some hour unstated" (*U* 560). Yet this obituary also stresses, in great detail, what was less frequently included in the traditional obituary: the cause of death. We learn that Rudolph Bloom died

> in consequence of an overdose of monkshood (aconite) selfadministered in the form of neuralgic linament composed of 2 parts of aconite liniment to 1 of chloroform liniment (purchased by him at 10.20 a.m. on the morning of 27 June 1886 at the medical hall of Francis Dennehy, 17 Church street, Ennis) after having, though not in consequence of having, purchased 3.15 p.m. on the afternoon of 27 June 1886 a new boater straw hat, extra smart (after having, though not in consequence of having, purchased at the hour and in the place aforesaid, the toxin aforesaid), at the general drapery store of James Cullen, 4 Main street, Ennis. (*U* 560-1)

What is significant here is the fact that this recollection of Rudolph Bloom's death does not hide the fact of his suicide. Heidegger writes that the newspaper determines "public opinion" and creates "a set configuration of opinions [that] becomes available on demand" ("The Question Concerning Technology" 18). Yet Joyce challenges this in "Ithaca" and, in a sense, turns the processes of textual technology back on themselves. Rather than acquiescing to a verdict of

"temporary insanity" (*U* 79) as Martin Cunningham does in "Hades", "Ithaca" goes out of its way to detail, in all the pedantry of the episode's catechetic style, the extent of the planning and care involved in the suicide thus exploring a death whose details were previously hidden and suppressed by common social discourses.

As Breathnach and Butler point out, obituaries usually provided relevant details about the deceased's address, job, surviving family members as well as details of the funerary arrangements with the cause of death usually being omitted from the publication (252). Yet the exploration of Rudolph Bloom's death in "Ithaca" focusses solely on the details of his death. As a hallmark of the entire episode, the pedantic, overwhelming level of details serve to obfuscate any straightforward reading of the Rudolph's obituary by burdening the reader with a parodic excess of obituary-like detail. The catechetic obituary displays "the pedantic order" and "arduous particularization of data" (*Ulysses on the Liffey* 156) that Ellmann argues is distinctive of the style of "Ithaca". Taking its formal structure from the Catholic Catechism, "Ithaca" is a technological episode in the Heideggerian sense of the term since it aims at complete disclosure and objectification. Hugh Kenner writes that "abstraction, concision, itemisation [and] cadence [...] are the norms of the catechical decorum" (*Ulysses* 135) and that "the catechism not only requires the knower repeat what is known according to set formulas, it confines what he can be expected to know to such formulas" (134). To this end, Joyce uses the catechetic style as a mode of writing which fits with the traditional use of the catechism in the Catholic faith.[15] Harry Charles Staley argues that "the faith of the catechisms […] represents Joyce's first formal teleology, an explanation of nature, of all existence" (151) and thus the form

[15] Indeed Staley writes that "the catechism was the simple repository of the Roman Catholic response to the turbulent currents of the theological controversy that came to the surface during the Renaissance and culminated in the Reformation" (151).

of the catechism, the ordered presentation of Catholic "truth", are central to understanding Joyce's work more generally.

The difference between Dignam's obituary and Rudolph's is striking. Instead of registering the "great shock" (*U* 529) and brevity of the illness which ultimately killed the deceased, Rudolph's obituary instead registers the precise means by which he committed suicide. There is no mention of his social being and no discussion of funeral arrangements or who may or may not have attended his funeral. The catechetic obituary provides the reader with an account of the long-planned and much considered nature of Rudolph Bloom's death which contrasts sharply with the previous obituary's description of the "shock" of Paddy Dignam's sudden death. The obituary lists the type of poison, providing its generic name (monkshood) and its brand name (Aconite), the method of ingestion ("selfadministered in the form of a neuralgic liniment" (*U* 529)) as well as the parts-per breakdown and the poisonous solution ("2 parts of aconite liniment to 1 of chloroform liniment" (*U* 529)). In addition to these details, we also have the time and location that the poison was purchased ("10.20 a.m. on the morning of 27 June 1886 at the medical hall of Francis Dennehy, 17 Church street, Ennis" (*U* 529)) and the details of "a new boater straw hat, extra smart" (*U* 560) purchased by Rudolph on the same day. These contingencies, unnecessary as they are in the overall narrative of Rudolph's suicide, serve as what Ellmann would call an "objective distortion" (*Ulysses on the Liffey* 156). The catechetic obituary abounds with factual evidence about Rudolph's suicide unavailable anywhere in the text; this is entirely at odds with the euphemism and cliché of the traditional, "respectable" form of the obituary. Although adopting the main formal features of the obituary, Rudolph Bloom's obituary in "Ithaca" is infiltrated by an overabundance of information about the planning and execution of his suicide. The content of this obituary is far removed from what would normally

be included in the standard obituary or death notice. Rudolph Bloom's obituary combines the style of the catechism with the general form of the obituary yet its content challenges prevailing attitudes towards death and suicide.

Joyce uses the form of the catechism to explore the details of a shameful, stigmatized death in a culture which has tried to tame and efface the very presence of death. The catechism, then, rather than giving its usual formulaic answers to some of life's most difficult questions, instead becomes a medium through which the reader encounters the facticity of death. While Dignam's obituary may be said to be a problematic commemoration of the deceased, insofar as it concretises the entirety of the deceased's existence within the margins of daily newspaper, couched in the common, abbreviated language of journalese and is subject to errors of mechanical reproduction, Rudolph's obituary forgoes these inauthentic representations. Dignam's life and death are reified and become merely a text to be consumed by a mass public who do so with little thought or reflection on the nature of human mortality. Rudolph Bloom's obituary on the other hand does not exist solely to furnish the living with a mass-produced text for popular consumption; instead, the catechetic obituary serves to complicate or deepen our understanding of Bloom's past and raises many questions about the deceased. In this sense, one could argue that Rudolph's obituary as it appears in "Ithaca" is a more authentic example of commemorative writing than the traditional obituary since, although it gives an overwhelming level of detail, the catechetic obituary is nevertheless meaningful as it avoids reducing Rudolph's life to a set of formulaic and pithy statements.

Again, Heidegger provides a productive lens through which to view Joyce's use of the catechetic form in relation to the latter's presentation of the story of Rudolph's demise. In his critique of modern technology, Heidegger does not advocate a complete rejection of technology

rather a re-orientation of our existential relationship with it. He writes that technology "threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence experience the call of a more primal truth" ("The Question Concerning Technology" 28). The solution to this existential threat would be to reorientation of human's relationship with technology such that the mode of revealing inherent in technology be applied in such a way as to further our understanding of Being. In short, in a productive relationship with technology, humans would use technology to explore the mysteries of the human condition. Similarly, through the textual experiments which focus on obituary writing, Joyce does not eschew a recognisably modern representation of death rather he uses it to uncover the facticity of a previously concealed death. The details of the poison used, the inclusion of the times, the shop names, the purchase of "a new boater straw hat, extra smart" (*U* 560), all represent an authentic representation of Rudolph's suicide as they disclose emotionally-compelling details about the death previously suppressed in the novel. By using the catechism, Joyce is forgoing the clichéd obituary of Paddy Dignam and presenting a more authentic commemoration of the deceased. The traditional newspaper obituary, as evidenced by Dignam's, uses the technology of the modern printing press to turn the death of a citizen into a textual object to be consumed in the daily newspaper alongside advertisements and other ephemera and also conceals any details about the death. Rudolph's obituary, on the other hand, concerns itself solely with the facticity of death and uncovering the details of an event previously concealed in social discourses. Furthermore, Joyce's decision to write a catechetic obituary about a victim of suicide also challenges social attitudes towards death by revealing the details of an "immoral" death. Joyce applies a technological form, the obituary and more importantly, the catechetic obituary, to

depict the poignant scene of his death and thereby undermine the fleeting idle talk of those in the carriage in "Hades" about death and suicide.

Joyce proceeds to apply this new approach to the deceased throughout the "Ithaca" episode. When thinking about the people whom Bloom had met that day, Joyce provides the following list: "Martin Cunningham (in bed), Jack Power (in bed), Simon Dedalus (in bed), Ned Lambert (in bed), Tom Kernan (in bed), Joe Hynes (in bed), John Henry Menton (in bed), Bernard Corrigan (in bed), Patsy Dignam (in bed), Paddy Dignam (in the grave)" (*U* 578). While the rest of Bloom's associates from that day are quietly resting in bed, Dignam is spending his first night in the grave. The roll call of Bloom's companions ends on a poignant note, as the unfortunate Dignam is to be still numbered among them although he now a resident of the Hades of Glasnevin. Like "Hades", where Bloom read the lists of deaths in the newspaper on his way to Dignam's funeral, there is also an extensive list of Bloom's deceased acquaintances in "Ithaca". However, this time, the listing, although dispassionately medical in nature, is at the same time quite poetic and melancholic:

> Of what did bellchime and handtouch and footstep and lonechill remind him?
>
> Of companions now in various manners in different places now defunct: Percy Apjohn (killed in action, Modder River), Philip Gilligan (phthisis, Jervis Street hospital), Matthew F. Kane (accidental drowning, Dublin Bay), Philip Moisel (pyemia, Heytesbury street), Michael Hart (pthisis, Mater Misericordiae hospital), Patrick Dignam (apoplexy, Sandymount) (*U* 579)

Not only does this list represent a rather more authentic listing of death, providing the reader with the identity of the deceased as well as their cause of death, there is also a sublimated affect here as if the narrative is forlornly enumerating all the acquaintances Bloom has now lost. Some of these are individuals we first heard of as school friends playing with Bloom (such as Percy);

one (Dignam) was recently walking the same streets as he does on 16 June 1904. But they are all now victims of history or of the toll of war, disease and age on the human body.

Conclusion

It is clear then that the issue of death is pervasive in the works of James Joyce. In *Dubliners*, this theme is mediated through the journalistic reports of death. The boy-narrator of "The Sisters" needs to see the formal notice of Fr. Flynn's death in order to fully accept the demise of his mentor. In "A Painful Case" the report of the inquest into the death of Mrs. Sinico forces Duffy into a confrontation with his guilt about his role in her tragic fate, the loneliness of his own life and the prospect of his own future solitary end. Yet "A Painful Case" also exposes the wretched version of objectivity which the newspaper deploys to report death to its modern mass-readership. The details of Mrs. Sinico's death are hidden behind the formulaic journalese of a "cautious" (*Dubliners* 128) reporter and the report even subtly implicates the deceased as responsible for their her demise though a moralistic condemnation of Mrs. Sinico's "intemperate" (*Dubliner* 128) habits. These reports of death work to familiarise the readership of the newspaper with death as an event which occurs every day. Yet they simultaneously detach the reader from an intimate interaction with mortality as an inevitable subjective experience by presenting death as something which always effects someone else. Death is levelled down to the banality of everyday newspaper discourses yet Duffy is somehow able to see through the clichés of the report and confront his own mortality, as a direct consequence of the news of this death reaching him in this debased form.

Ulysses expands Joyce's treatment of mortality through its considerations of the corpse and burial. Bloom continually reflects on the modern Catholic funeral service and makes astute and insightful comments about the corpse and the haste with which society buries and forgets

its dead. Yet *Ulysses* is also deeply concerned with the ubiquity of the printed report of death, more specifically the obituary or death notice, in post-Famine Ireland. The obituary of Paddy Dignam begins to be composed, as it were, as early as "Calypso" and appears in various iterations throughout the novel. The final printed obituary appears in "Eumaeus" which is an episode characterised by its exploitation of banal and well-worn social discourses. Yet Joyce makes numerous attempts throughout the novel to undermine the authority of such printed reports and "Eumaeus" is no different, given the numerous errors featured in Paddy Dignam's obituary. After the hallucinatory obituary of "Circe" and the final printed obituary in "Eumaeus", the novel ends with a final play on the obituary in the penultimate episode. Throughout *Ulysses*, the death of Bloom's father Rudolph haunts and informs many of Bloom's ruminations on mortality but the details of Rudolph's suicide are suppressed throughout the novel most notably in the carriage journey to Glasnevin cemetery in "Hades". However, in "Ithaca", Joyce combines the form of the Catholic Catechism with the style of the obituary to uncover the details of the previously concealed suicide of Rudolph Bloom. In doing so, Joyce not only challenges Catholic opinions about the morality of suicide but also uses the obituary style to explore mortality in a detailed way – something which runs counter to the purpose of the traditional obituary. In this sense, Joyce is not only aware of the ubiquity of the obituary in modern death practices but, by using this form to treat an "immoral" death in detail, he also sees the form and style of the standardized memorial as a vehicle for exploring individual instances of death in a detailed and meaningful way. This does not simply reduce mortality to a news item to be read in the daily newspaper, to be scanned and then tossed aside. This fusion of a religious form of writing, the catechism, with modern scientific description is also part of a complex and imaginative exploration of identity, memory and human mortality.

To conclude, Joyce is not merely concerned with the individual experience of death but also with how society responds to and seals itself off from death. Furthermore, the theme of mortality in Joyce's fiction is very much determined by his acute sensitivity to the psychological conditions of a community coping with the trauma of the Great Famine and the repressive conditions of post-Famine Catholicism. However, while certain existential theories of human finitude, especially as these are explored by Heidegger, provide useful lenses through which to view Joyce's critique of Irish attitudes towards death after the Famine, it is difficult to argue that he is a distinctly existentialist writer. Samuel Beckett on the other hand appears to be a writer not so much concerned with societal responses to death but rather with the existential experience of the process of dying. Furthermore, while Joyce is a writer concerned with how a post-Famine Ireland copes with the issue of death, Beckett's fiction and drama appears to be more informed by a wider sense of European catastrophe in the midst and aftermath of the two World Wars which devastated much of the continent in the early to mid-twentieth-century.

Chapter Three: A "Frenzied Collapsing": *Molloy* After the Holocaust

Introduction

Since the 1950s, it has become a critical commonplace to suggest that Beckett's works are fundamentally concerned with the themes of death and dying. What has not been given enough attention however, is the extent to which Beckett's portrayals of human mortality may be read within the context of post-Holocaust Europe. I argue that death and dying in Beckett's fiction can be read as an evolving response to the horrors which befell Europe in the 1940s. Beckett's fiction in the 1950s focusses on voices narrating the experience of dying. Later, from the 1960s onwards, the focus of the fiction shifts to more descriptive accounts of bodies in enclosed, and later, surreal and abstract spaces. I hope to demonstrate that whereas Joyce's works captured an age in which natural death was increasingly effaced from society, Beckett's works take place in the aftermath of violent, mass death. Unlike Joyce however, Beckett never names this context and instead explores how the individual narrators represent their own experiences of dying. Yet there are subtle allusions to the recent catastrophes in Europe and Beckett's narrators are frequently drawn in to violent confrontations with unnamed others which bears a striking resemblance to the ethical ambiguity of the concentration camps as described by Levi which I will discuss in more detail later in the chapter. Moreover, I argue that in the later fiction, which I will discuss in the chapter four, the violence is replaced by an almost scientific approach to images of dead or dying bodies in an age of intense media coverage of the Eichmann Trial and the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials. During these trials, an overwhelming amount of eyewitness testimony was heard and covered by the media which helped to shape public and artistic responses to the Holocaust.

Samuel Beckett's trilogy of novels, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*, were written in French in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Knowlson suggests that the

novels were written in French because Beckett felt that English was "overloaded with associations and allusions" (Knowlson 357) and wanted to write in a more detached, objective style. While Beckett refused to attach any real significance to his shift to writing in French,[16] Knowlson argues that the move away from English may also have been "an important way of escaping from the influence of James Joyce" (357). In Beckett's eyes, Joyce was "a superb manipulator of material […] He was making words do the absolute maximum of work […] The more Joyce knew the more he could [create]" (Interview with Israel Shenker qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 162). Rather than pursuing an art which incorporated and mastered a wealth of material, like Joyce, Beckett claimed his aesthetic was one of "impotence [and] ignorance. I don't think impotence has been exploited in the past" (Interview with Israel Shenker qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 162). In a comment more directly relevant to my argument here, Bridget English reads Beckett's move from English to French as marking a shift in his thinking about the themes of death and dying. She argues that the austerity of Beckett's writing in French was connected to his broader project of "dismantling the narrative and religious structures that make sense of death and hold meaning in place" (205). Bridget English suggests that as a result Beckett "forces his readers to see the process of dying anew and challenges them to arrive at a different understanding of death than those offered by the religious promise of paradise or secular notion of oblivion" (205). Moreover, Bridget English argues that Beckett ultimately succeeds in his project to portray "the writer's inability to narrate death while also illustrating the importance of narrative as a way of coping with death" (207). While I agree with her assertion that Beckett's post-war fiction depicts the struggle to narrate the experience of dying, I am also wary of viewing the narratives as ways of coping with the

[16] Beckett stated in an interview with Israel Shenker in 1956 that he began writing in French because he "just felt like it […] It was more exciting for me" (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 161)

anxiety of death. However, I will explore here whether we can in fact consider the stories told by Beckett's late narrators as essentially concerned with managing anxiety about human mortality as such. As I will discuss in more detail, the non-progressive and *aporetic* nature of these texts makes it difficult to conclude if any of the narrators ever achieve a more profound or meaningful apprehension of any facet of their existence, including the fact of mortality or the existence of an afterlife.

Whatever the reason for Beckett's turn to French, it is obvious that the novels written after the war mark a distinct change of direction for his *oeuvre*. Beckett himself remarked that the goal of the *Trilogy* was achieving "complete disintegration" in language – a style of writing in which there is "No 'I,' no 'have,' no 'being.' No nominative, no accusative, no verb" (Interview with Israel Shenker qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 162).[17] Furthermore, the author described the subject matter of the *Trilogy* as "that whole zone of being that has always been set aside by artists as something unusable" (Interview with Israel Shenker qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 162). The novels of the *Trilogy* then are both stylistically and thematically different from Beckett's pre-war works. The events of the Holocaust threatened to undermine any optimistic faith in culture itself and it evidently demanded a radical response from artists and writers. In many ways, it could be argued that these novels attempt to respond to the sheer horror of the Nazi genocide of the Jewish population of Europe that had unfolded in the heart of the "civilized", European world.

Joyce's fiction, as I have argued, is acutely attuned to the oppressive conditions of Irish post-Famine culture in which the Catholic Church had gained an unprecedented control over

[17] Beckett is said to have disliked referring to these three novels as a trilogy. However, according to Cornwell: "Beckett would though eventually and reluctantly refer to the '3 in 1' (which he always insisted should be printed under their three titles) as the 'socalled trilogy'" (Cornwell 242).

society and its rites and rituals. For Joyce, the obituary becomes emblematic of a new attitude towards death inculcated by the Catholic Church and is a form which can be mimicked and parodied as a way of resisting the reification of mortality in modern death practices. In *Ulysses*, Joyce experiments with the twentieth-century obituary; he subverts the form in "Ithaca" in order to uncover the previously concealed and "taboo" details concerning the death of Bloom's father. On the other hand, Beckett's works respond to the conditions of post-Holocaust European culture through narratives of displacement, *aporia* and incoherence. Whereas the cultural vacuum left in the wake of the Great Famine afforded an increasingly authoritarian Church the opportunity to consolidate its power over the Irish population, Beckett and millions of others directly impacted by the war confronted a different kind of catastrophe. Many had experienced the brutality of the Nazis and many more would learn more about the atrocious nature of the concentration camps in the years following the war. While the threat of the Nazi advance had been dispelled after the Soviet victory in the Battle of Berlin, untold trauma had been inflicted upon the Jewish population of Europe. The fascist aim of racial purification had been supported by the most advanced technologies of the day in a horrifying alliance between totalitarian politics and modern science. As I shall discuss in more detail later, Adorno has suggested that the Holocaust fundamentally altered the twentieth-century European relationship with mortality. From this point of view, the works of Joyce and Beckett respectively arise from very different historical contexts. I have discussed the specific ways in which Joyce registers, critiques and explores post-Famine Irish Catholicism and its "modern" attitudes towards death. Beckett, on the other hand, is self-consciously writing in the wake of one of the greatest atrocities of modern European history and in this chapter I will explore the ways in which this event might be understood as influencing the conception of human mortality in mid-twentieth-

century European literature. Furthermore, I will also consider the ways in which Beckett's post-war fiction has been said to replicate the difficulty of survivor testimony and personal narrative after the war. Recent critics such as Katz, Jones and Morin have all suggested that Beckett's post-war fiction can be read as a dramatization of or engagement with the fraught origins of survivor testimony which began to be disseminated in the years following the war. What I am interested in is the extent to which Beckett's portrayals of the experience of dying may be viewed within this context, specifically in relation to Adorno's claims that the events of the Holocaust have fundamentally altered the way in which we understand and relate to the idea of our own death.

Rather than viewing the narratives of *Molloy* as pointing to ways of coping with the unknowability of death, as English has suggested, I argue that the potential liberation offered by the activity of storytelling is ultimately undermined in the novel. Beckett's narrators are, in a sense, successful in their attempts to escape death through their narratives; the moment of death, the obliteration of their identities as authors, is ultimately deferred insofar as, although the texts end, they do not detail the deaths of their narrators. However, this results in a sort of interminable repetition and circularity. Molloy and Moran do not die but they also do not continue in any meaningful sense as they are caught in a perpetual state of narration, of being-towards-death. Rather than die or escape into a state of existence free from the gnawing anxiety of impending death, Beckett's narrators are condemned to subsist in a deathly world which is sustained only by their own fragile drive to continue. In the coming two chapters, I will read Beckett's fiction, firstly the novel *Molloy* and then the post-1950s short fiction, as emblematic of a post-Holocaust age in which, according to Adorno, death has in a sense been eliminated from the field of human experience due to the violence of the Nazi genocide. After detailing the

ways in which the characters of Molloy and Moran may be read as representative of those who survived the events which shook Europe in the 1940s, I intend to explore the extent to which they challenge or revolt against an existence characterised by a loss of subjective identity, dehumanisation and an incapacity to achieve any kind of reconciliation with the prospect of death. Whereas Joyce's fiction deals with how modern Irish society excludes natural death from its precincts, Beckett's works take place in a time when violent death has become a mass spectacle after the events of WWII and the Holocaust. I hope to demonstrate how Beckett's representations of death, although very different from Joyce's, are equally indebted to their historical contexts and bound up in the questions about the veracity of narrative and testimony in light of mass catastrophe. Joyce's literary depictions of mortality seem to centre on "ordinary" death – for example, Paddy Dignam's – as a communal and collective event. On the other hand, Beckett's starting point explores death as a consequence of human corruption and as an extreme situation. Ultimately though, whereas Joyce writes about how modern Irish society responds to human mortality, I argue that Beckett is more interested in writing the subjective experience of dying in *Molloy*. This chapter will explore the novel *Molloy* which I suggest is a novel essentially concerned with dying characters and their experiences of their impending mortality. In chapter four, I explore how Beckett begins to explore the death of the narrative form itself. While death remains the ostensible *theme* of much of the later fiction, mortality is also enacted in the very *form* of these works as they trace the death of the narrator's ability and will to narrate.

The Origins of the *Trilogy*: From Foxrock to Occupied Paris

Samuel Beckett was born into a middle-class Protestant family from Foxrock, Dublin in 1906. After attending the private boarding school Portora Royal in County Fermanagh, Beckett

enrolled in Trinity College Dublin in 1923 where he studied for an Arts degree. In 1927, Beckett graduated with a first-class B.A. in Modern Languages and the next year he took a teaching post at Campbell College, Belfast. In November 1928, he worked as an exchange *lectuer* at École Normale Supérieure where he began a lifelong friendship with Irish modernist poet Thomas MacGreevy. During this period, MacGreevy introduced Beckett to James Joyce and other writers residing in Paris. Beckett's publishing career began in earnest in 1929 when he published "Dante … Bruno. Vico … Joyce", a critical essay on Joyce, and the short story "Assumption" in *Transition*. The 1930s proved to be a productive time for Beckett. He published *Whoroscope* in 1930 and in the same year he took up a lecturing post at Trinity College Dublin (TCD). In 1931, his study *Proust* was published along with his poem "Alba" in *Dublin Magazine*. The following year, Beckett left his post at TCD and moved to Paris, began writing the novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (posthumously published in 1992) and published the story "Dante and the Lobster" in *The Quarter*. After moving to London in 1934, Beckett published his collection of short stories, *More Pricks Than Kicks*, as well as contributing to numerous literary magazines in Dublin and London. In 1935, his collection of poems *Echo's Bones and other Precipitates* appeared in print for the first time. After a trip through Germany between late 1936 and early 1937, Beckett moved back to Paris and began work on the novel *Murphy* which was published in March 1938. Of this period in his life, Beckett would later remark that "I was in Germany, in London, I was back in Dublin. I was battering around the place. That's a very confused period in my own mind" (Interview with Israel Shenker qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 161). In 1938, Beckett began to write poetry in French for the first time. After the declaration of war in 1939, Beckett and his partner Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil, whom he would later marry in 1961, left Paris after the fall of the city in 1940 and travelled south.

The impact of the war on Beckett's subsequent works was immense which is hardly surprising given his extensive involvement with left-wing resistance movements during the German occupation of France. Initially, Beckett had volunteered to drive an ambulance for the French before having to flee Paris after the German army invaded in 1940. Having spent time in Vichy, Toulouse, Cahors and finally Arcachon, Beckett and Deschevaux-Dumesnil eventually returned to Paris where Beckett was recruited into the French Resistance movement by his close friend Alfred Péron. According to Knowlson, Beckett's role within the cell "involved the typing and translation of information reports that were brought to him in different forms and from various sources" (307). After Beckett transcribed the reports, they were then sent to another member of the resistance group who photographed and miniaturised the reports to be couriered out to the British Special Operations Executive. The risk Beckett took in becoming a member of the group was enormous. In 1942 his cell was infiltrated by a double-agent and many of its members were arrested and deported to concentration camps including Péron who died as a result of his incarceration in 1945.

Beckett and Deshevaux-Dumesnil narrowly escaped the raid on their cell and spent the rest of the war hiding out from the Gestapo most notably in Roussillon where Beckett wrote the novel *Watt*. After the war in 1945, Beckett took up a position with the Irish Red Cross in the French town of Saint-Lô following a brief visit to Ireland. Although Knowlson argues, based on Beckett's own remarks to Gwynned Reavey, that Beckett took up this position "solely as a means of getting back into France and keeping his apartment [in Paris] legally" (345), Beckett worked "indefatigably" (Knowlson 350) as a translator and member of the administrative personnel during the construction of a much-needed hospital in the region. Knowlson suggests that, coupled with his time in the French resistance, Beckett's experiences in Saint-Lô were

"vital in terms of the content of his post-war writing" (350). Beckett not only experienced great personal loss during the war as several friends – including Péron and Paul Léon, who was Joyce's secretary during the writing of *Finnegans Wake*, were captured and killed by the Nazis – but his entire perspective on humanity and European culture appears to have fundamentally altered. In a short report for Irish radio, Beckett writes that his experience with the Irish Red Cross at Saint-Lô left him with "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" (Beckett, "The Capital of the Ruins" 278). Beckett obviously considered that any future account of the human condition could not remain innocent of this revelation of the atrocious link between modern rationality and violence. The impact of the war on Beckett's writing cannot be underestimated with Knowlson arguing that "it is difficult to imagine [Beckett] writing the stories, novels and plays that he produced in the creative maelstrom of the immediate post-war period without the experiences of those five years" (351).

As I have already mentioned, Beckett's trilogy of novels in French were, according to Knowlson, written in two and a half years in the immediate aftermath of WWII between May 1947 and January 1950 (371). I will argue that *Molloy* is crucial in introducing themes relating to testimony, narrative and death in the *Trilogy* and yet the theme of death is relatively understudied in this text by comparison to *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*.[18] There were difficulties getting the novels into print as poor sales of Beckett's earlier novel *Murphy* put his then publisher Pierre Bordas off the idea of publishing either *Mercier et Camier*, another novel written in French after the war but not published until 1970, or *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*; the

[18] For example, while critics such as Bridget English, Erik Tonning and Simon Critchley have published extensively on the theme of death in Beckett, they have focussed their attentions more on *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* than *Molloy*.

task of finding potential publishers fell to Déchevaux-Dumesnil. Despite interest and praise from prominent literary figures such as avant-gardist Tristan Tzara and French publisher Robert Carlier, finding a home for the novels was still proving to be difficult (Knowlson 377). The manuscripts eventually found their way into the possession of aspiring publisher Jérôme Lindon who was instantly enamoured with the humour of *Molloy*, claiming to have "burst into hoots of laughter" (Knowlson 377) while reading the manuscript on the Métro. Lindon agreed to publish both *Molloy* and *Malone Dies* in 1950 but the process was plagued by various legal difficulties when Beckett's previous publisher, Bordas, grew anxious over the initial critical acclaim these new novels were attracting and claimed to have a right to all of Beckett's future work. The dispute was eventually resolved after three years of legal wrangling with Bordas agreeing to relinquish his claim on Beckett's works and Lindon purchasing the remaining unsold copies of *Murphy* from Bordas. *Molloy* was first published in French in 1951 and the English translation, the result of a two year collaboration between Beckett and South African poet and translator Patrick Bowles, was published in 1955.[19]

Molloy was reviewed well and received high praise from numerous French critics. The early French reviews explored the novel's philosophical and literary value as well as its place in the cultural and intellectual milieu of post-war France. One such review by Maurice Nadeau featured in a 1951 edition of *Combat*. Like many of the reviews of *Molloy* published around this time, Nadeau notes Beckett's "Kafakaesque brand of humour" which has "little meaning or includes all meanings" (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 56) and labels Beckett a "champion of the Nothing exalted to the height of the Whole" (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The*

[19] For more on Beckett as a translator of his own work see Ruby Cohn, "Samuel Beckett Self Translator", pp. 613-621.

Critical Heritage 59). Nadeau argues that *Molloy* should be considered as part of the trend of post-war Absurdism and suggests that Beckett conveys our existence "in an absurd and deliberately insignificant fashion" and that the novel insults "everything which man holds as certain, up to and including this language which he could at least lean upon to scream his doubt and despair" (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 58). Nadeau's review portrays *Molloy* as "a monument which is destroyed as it is built under our eyes and which finally vanishes into dust or smoke" (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 57) and Beckett's irreverence and defiance "is all-embracing and dynamic. It even extends to the language which […] dissolves into nothingness […] as soon as it is established" (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 57-8). Whereas traditional artistic endeavours may seek some fundamental solace for the subject against the unknowability of the world, Nadeau argues that Beckett offers no respite from the absurdity of the universe and even goes as far as to discredit the legitimacy of language as a medium through which human anguish might be expressed.

Jean Pouillon's 1951 essay on *Molloy* in Jean-Paul Sartre's journal *Temps Modernes* is another good example of the early impulse to read Beckett within the post-war existentialist and Absurdist tradition. Pouillon suggests that Beckett, unlike the absurdist philosophy of his contemporary Camus, does not seek solace from the meaninglessness of existence in the creation of humanistic values. Instead, Pouillon argues that *Molloy* invites us to recognize and explore "the lack of meaning in meaning itself" (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 71).[20] Another 1951 review by Bernard Pingaud in *Espirit* notes the similarities Beckett shares

[20] Nearly two decades later, Adorno would make similar arguments when he suggests that Beckett's plays are absurd not because a hopeless meaninglessness clashes with an unquenchable will to persist, which could produce a sort of hopeless nihilism or a feeble absurd humanism á la Camus, but precisely because they question the very concept of meaning itself: "Beckett's plays are absurd not because of the absence of any meaning, for then they would be simply irrelevant, but because they put meaning on trial" (*Aesthetic Theory* 153).

with writers such as Camus and Kafka whilst describing *Molloy* as an "excessively human […] deeply credible picture of degradation" (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 73). Furthermore, Pingaud notes that while Beckett appears obsessed with the themes of death and nothingness, this obsession is "a healthy one" since these themes are at the forefront of the novel and "are not disguised in it" (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 74).

Georges Bataille's review is worth discussing in some detail here before moving forward as it highlights the centrality and importance of the theme of death in *Molloy*. Bataille calls the novel "the most unabashedly unbearable story in the world" (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 60) which "explores with unflinching irony the extreme possibilities of indifference and misery" (64). The review suggests that *Molloy* depicts a fundamental existential anguish not dissimilar to that which pervades the works of Kierkegaard and Kafka. According to Bataille, *Molloy* represents

> reality in its pure state: the most meagre and inevitable of realities, that fundamental reality continually soliciting us but from which a certain terror always pulls us back, the reality we refuse to face and into which we must ceaselessly struggle not to sink, known to us only in the elusive form of anguish (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 60)

In this sense, Beckett's novel may be said to be getting to the heart of the post-war condition. The novel depicts a world in which an unnameable trauma has been inflicted and the foundations upon which certain accepted conceptions of reality were based have been shaken to the core. The narrators of *Molloy* thus emerge as figures of pure being for Bataille: subjects reduced to the barest terms of existence, continually facing the anxiety and anguish which results from an awareness of the opacity and meaninglessness of their lives which are constantly haunted by the prospect of their inevitable demise.

This all points towards a fundamental connection between language and death in the novel according to Bataille. He suggests that the narrator "we name through sheer impotence *vagabond* or *wretch,* which is actually *unnamable* […] is no less mute than death" (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 61, original emphasis). Much like Nadeau, Bataille too comments on how *Molloy* exhibits a desire "to make language into a façade […] that would possess the authority of ruins" (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 62). Bataille thus suggests that the language of *Molloy* represents speech freed from the requirements and order demanded by social convention, tradition and culture. In Heideggerian terms, it is a language freed from the homogeneity and banality of the "they" and of their idle talk. However, it is also a language completely divested of authority or meaning. What we face in *Molloy* then is a language which "is nothing more than a deserted castle whose gaping cracks let in the wind and rain" (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 63); these words no longer fulfil any social, political or cultural purpose. The language of the novel, according to Bataille, exists purely as an expression of the anxiety of death. Language no longer functions as a signifier but only as "the defenseless expression death wears as a disguise" (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 63). Molloy and Moran become figures of death itself – "death's equivalent on crutches" (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 63) – who stammer out nervous and depleted narratives which exhibit all the "profound apathy of death, its indifference to every possible thing" (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 63).

It is clear from the early reception of *Molloy* that the novel lends itself to a variety of philosophical interpretations. Themes of absurdity, the inescapability of death and the sublimation of language to the inauthenticity of mass culture have all been identified as salient issues in the novel from the 1950s onwards. As Jones has also pointed out, early criticism of

Beckett's work allied it with "the idea of both 'the human condition' and the absurd: the […] novels are taken […] as expressing the human predicament of life in a universe deprived of meaning" (*Samuel Beckett and Testimony* 14) following the work of contemporary philosophers like Sartre and Camus. Early critics of *Molloy* in particular were already reading Beckett as a philosophical author for whom the importance of death and its relationship to language was of paramount concern. Even without specifically mentioning Heidegger, these critics provide a starting point for a Heideggerian reading of Beckett that is in keeping with the account of Heidegger's relevance for Joycean modernism that I have already elaborated in my earlier chapters. Using the works of Adorno and Levi, this chapter will discuss the first novel of the *Trilogy*, *Molloy*, and demonstrate that Beckett's post-war fiction is emblematic of an age in which, as Adorno outlined, humankind has been deprived of its previous understanding of mortality. *Molloy* is a novel written and set in the aftermath of one of the greatest atrocities in modern human history where death was wielded as a weapon of racial ideology. While it refuses to name this horror, Beckett's apprehension of the significance of recent European history pervades the work.

As I outlined in the introduction to this dissertation, Adorno asserts that Beckett's works may be read as a vehement repudiation of post-war continental existentialism. Just as Beckett's reconfiguration of the Absurd subverts the philosophy of his contemporaries such as Sartre and Camus by negating the concept of the individual subject upon which their notions of authenticity rest, his representations of death and dying also seem to be entirely at odds with any notion of the potentially liberating character of contemplating death explored by Heidegger.

The "Concentrationary Universe": Beckett, Atrocity and Holocaust Literature

Although not a direct victim of the events of the concentration camps, Beckett's work is nevertheless responding to the conditions that produced that horror and the circumstances in which it unfolded. This is evidenced even in Beckett's earliest post-war fiction. *The End,* known in earlier drafts as *Suite* (Knowlson 358; Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* 129) and by its French title *La Fin,* is the earliest example of Beckett's fiction written in French. Begun in English in February 1946, Beckett soon switched to French in March 1946 and finished the story not long after (Knowlson 358). Although the story predates the *Trilogy*, *The End* exhibits many features which would become characteristic of Beckett's later fiction, including an indeterminate spatial and temporal setting and a narrator who documents their experiences of displacement, *aporia* and incoherence. The story is also significant due to its historical and literary contexts. Morin argues that Beckett "actively sought to align his French-language work with the newly established literature of the Resistance movement" (139) in the years following the war with *Le Temps Modernes* being one of the publications that appealed to Beckett. *Les Temps Modernes*, under the supervision of Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, appeared monthly from October 1945 and focussed on publishing accounts, testimonies and analysis of a host of issues relating to the war including Jewish and German lives during and after the war, the inner workings of the French Resistance and victims' experiences of Nazi concentration camps (Morin 139). The review had also, according to Knowlson, garnered a "reputation for publishing avant-garde literature and thought" (359) and Beckett believed that the journal would be receptive to his work. In June 1946, Beckett submitted a version of *The End* for publication in *Les Temps Modernes*. During this time, the review was publishing prose, poetry and essays by Jean Cayrol and David Rousset, both of whom were Holocaust survivors (Morin 140) and *The End* was

published alongside a report of the Nuremburg trials and an essay on the serial killer Marcel Petiot.[21]

Morin contends that while Beckett's works are undoubtedly connected to the aftermath of the Holocaust and WWII, critics have often avoided discussing "the difficult relation that the work maintains to historical testimony" (131) as well as how, despite the obscurity and historical indeterminacy of Beckett's works, these texts still evoke historical and political events. In the aftermath of the war, Jewish victims of deportation were not afforded the same attention as returning political deportees and prisoners upon their return to France after the war. As Morin writes: "upon their return in 1945, the 'racial prisoners' or 'racial deportees' […] were met with far greater unease than the 'political prisoners'" (155). This was, in part, due to the fact that the existence of these deportees dredged up questions about the French government's complicity in the rounding up and persecution of French Jewish population in the early stages of the Holocaust. Consequently, early testimonies of the Holocaust were dominated by the voices of political deportees and prisoners, chiefly Resistance fighters who had been caught by the Nazis. As Morin explains, "the majority of testimonies about the Nazi camps published in France between 1945 and 1947 were by Resistance members deported for anti-Nazi activities, not by Jewish men and women" (155). The French, perhaps in an effort to erase the anti-Semitism and Nazi collaboration of some of their own compatriots, gave close attention to the stories and testimonies of those who were part of the Resistance to the Nazi occupation of France. Furthermore, Morin points out that the most well-known works dealing with testimony concerning the Nazi camps, such as Resnais' film *Night and Fog*, made only brief

[21] Marcel Petiot used his status as a member of the French Resistance to lure his victims, many of whom were Jewish or Resistance fighters attempting to escape France, to their deaths (Morin 140).

references to the deportations of the Jewish population and does not discuss their extermination nor the collaboration of the French government (155). As such, many Jewish survivors of the Nazi camps were treated as victims rather than heroes and "their voices were given minimal representation in a public space dominated by the 'political deportees' of the Resistance, [who were] portrayed […] as saviours of the nation" (Morin 156). Jewish survivors of the Nazi camps were seen as mere accidents of the WWII and the Holocaust and their testimony was not given as much attention as the returning Resistance fighters who were venerated as national heroes.

Given the general indifference to the Jewish survivors of the Nazi camps in France after the war as well as the erasure of their stories in popular Holocaust testimony, the question then arises as to the extent to which Beckett may have been aware of their plight. Beckett's Resistance cell had no hand in hiding or moving Jewish people from Nazi deportation and Morin notes that it is unlikely that Beckett would have had an intimate a knowledge of these details at this time. However, Beckett had been following the rise of Nazis in Germany throughout the 1930s "with fascination, growing disgust and, finally, horror" (Knowslon 303). Moreover, Beckett had recognised the "the racial hatred" (Knowlson 303) which underpinned Nazi ideology and had witnessed first-hand the type of persecution to which the Jewish population of Germany were being subjected to during his trip to the country in 1936-7. If the author had been somewhat ignorant of this ideology before his sojourn in Germany, Mark Nixon argues that "Nazi sentiments were drilled into Beckett from all sides" (*Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937* 86) during his trip. Throughout diaries kept during this time, Beckett documents the growing presence of fascist ideology in Germany including Nazi photographers recording the locations of Jewish shops (*GD,* 21 January 1937 qtd. in Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937* 86) and a church inscription in which 'Grüss Gott' was crossed out

and replaced by 'Heil Hitler' (*GD*, 5 March 1937 qtd. in Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937* 86). In October 1936, Beckett notes that he had attended an event in Hamburg during which he witnessed a performance by an SS brass band, a documentary film entitled Moskau droht (Moscow threatens) and a "speech from one Lorenz", whom Nixon has identified as SS-Gruppenführer official Werner Lorenz (*GD*, 11 October 1936 qtd. in *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937* 86).22 In March 1937, Beckett attended a showing of Karl Anton's Weisse Sklaven (known as Rote Bestien after 1940), an anti-Bolshevik film envisaged by the regime as the National Socialist's Battleship Potemkin, in Munich (*GD*, 21 March 1937 qtd. in Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937* 86). Nixon notes that Beckett would have also been acquainted with many authors who were favourable to the Nazi regime, in a time of intense literary censorship, or openly supported and wrote Nazi literature including Friedrich Griese, Hans Friedrich Blunck, Gerhard Schumann, Hans Heyse and Hans Grimm (*Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937* 90).23 Moreover, details of how Hitler's political opponents were executed or sent to penal camps were reported in the Irish Times throughout the 1930s (Morin 160). This is all to say that while Jewish survivors may have faced an indifferent French public upon the return to the country after the war, Beckett may have been more acutely attuned to their plight than the average citizen given his witnessing of their persecution during his trip to Germany in the 1930s, his involvement in the Resistance and his extensive reading during these years.

[22] Werner Lorenz was a relatively high-ranking SS officer who served as the head of the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*. The *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* was a branch of the Nazi party which oversaw the colonisation of other lands and settling of Germans within the Reich (Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937* 206).

[23] Beckett is noted as having purchased Hans Pferdmenges's Deutschlands Leben (1930), which, according to Nixon, "explicitly propounds Germany's destiny of superiority" (*Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937* 91). Beckett does not seem to have been impressed by it and wrote in his diary that the book "seems NS Kimmwasser [bilge]" (*GD*, 4 November 1936 qtd. in Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937* 91).

Beckett's post-war fictions all share certain thematic concerns which may be directly related to the catastrophe which had taken place in Europe during the Nazi era including "forced displacement and dangerous journeys undertaken through a ruined landscape; blackouts, rationing and penury; encounters with police officers, war veterans and members of mysterious militias; dealings in shifting currencies; people of different nationalities and social classes looking for shelter, living under threat and involved in trafficking, spying and denunciations" (Morin 171). Because of these veiled allusions to recent historical catastrophe, critics such as Morin have argued that Beckett's post-war fiction may be said to interrogate "the remit of historical testimony in a very distinctive way" (171). Morin goes on further to explain that novels such as *Molloy* "offer an uneasy juxtaposition of historical frames […] and an uneasy fusion of genres" since the novel experiments "with the conventions of detective fiction as well as autobiography, travel narrative and testimony" (172). Of course, given Beckett's fusion of indeterminate historical contexts with disparate literary styles, it is not possible to assert with complete certainty that he intended the reader to recognise any specific references to the events of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, as Morin points out, critics such as Dominick LaCapra have argued that Beckett's work belongs to a field of literature closely related to traditional notions of testimony (Morin 130). LaCapra suggests that this field of "testimonial art" is marked by its "risky simulation of trauma in what might be called traumatized or post-traumatic writing" (105). This literary line, which arguably includes some of the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Stéphane Mallarmé, Gustave Flaubert, Virginia Woolf, Maurice Blanchot, Franz Kafka, Paul Celan, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, takes a particularized form in the works of Kafka, Celan, Blanchot and Beckett, according to LaCapra (105). Beckett, LaCapra suggests, depicts a "terrorized disempowerment" (105) which is "as close as possible to the experience of

traumatized victims without presuming to be identical to it" (106). The post-war fiction then can be read as a form of testimony, "testimonial art" in LaCapra's formulation, insofar as it registers and depicts conditions and figures who might well be read as representing victims or survivors of specific historical events. However, it is important to remember that Beckett's "testimonial art" (LaCapra 105) is always imitative and never attempts to hoax the reader into mistaking it for authentic testimony. The fusion of testimony, detective fiction and first-person narrative about events, places and peoples with some fleeting but specific historical referents helps to achieve the typical Beckettian aesthetic of obscurity and *aporia*.

According to Morin, poet and Holocaust survivor Cayrol "had grown increasingly weary of fictionalised accounts of the Nazi camps" (181) which emerged in the 1940s. Cayrol was perturbed by the works of Robert Merle, whose novel *Death Is My Trade* was a fictionalised autobiography of Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess based on his testimony at the Nuremburg Trials, and Erich Maria Remarque, who wrote a fictional novel called *Spark of Life* based on the testimony of camp survivors collected by the author, which represented "the rise of a new kind of opportunism" (Morin 181) that transformed the horrors of the Nazi camps into what Cayrol called "an image, a fiction, a fable" (qtd. in Morin 181). In response, Cayrol called for a new literature of the concentration camps which, according to Morin, was "driven by a concern for the expressive challenges that arise when survivors of deportation attempt to remember their experiences, and when writers attempt to represent historical atrocities" (182). This new type of literary narrative should be "appropriate for victims who have nothing left to express" (Morin 182), where characters experience "non-communication and non-development" (Morin 182) and where "even the most familiar events as incomprehensible, reprehensible, irritating and unrevealing" (Morin 182). Such a literature would not seek "to explicate the Nazi camps but

[convey] the enigmatic nature of a world that no longer tolerates metaphysical questions" (Morin 182) in the wake of the Holocaust. Morin argues that Beckett's work comes very close to the type of literature Cayrol imagined as an appropriate form in the aftermath of the Holocaust insofar as "Beckett writes of a history witnessed at a remove, but without ever attempting to reclaim it as his own" (183). In the same vein, critics like Alvin Rosenfeld, as Robert Cohen points out, have praised Beckett's work as an authentic representation of a post-Holocaust world. Although Beckett was "not a direct survivor of the death camps" (Rosenfeld 7, qtd. in Cohen 55), Beckett may be considered as a "survivor of the concentrationary universe" (Cohen 55). Although these "kinds-of-survivors" were never in the camps, they nevertheless "know more than the outlines of the place' (Rosenfeld 19, qtd. in Cohen 55) due to their proximity to the events or, as is the case with Beckett, their own personal losses and involvement in the Resistance. Far from a literature which embellishes the testimonial experience of the victims of the camps, Beckett's work instead dramatizes a fragmentary mode of remembrance which is "subject to an evident and relentless assault" (Morin 183).

All of this suggests that even before the *Trilogy*, Beckett's fiction was deeply embedded in the conditions and context of post-war Europe. In the years after the war, Beckett spent much of his time in Dublin before returning to France to volunteer at the hospital in Saint-Lô. During this time that press reports and images of the liberation of the concentration camps were disseminated internationally (Morin 168) as people outside France and the groups immediately affected by the Holocaust became aware of the extent of the horrors. In letters from this period, Beckett laments the loss of close friends such as Léon and Péron who both died as a result of their incarceration in Auschwitz and Mauthausen respectively (Morin 168). Although a detailed discussion of *The End* is beyond the remit of this thesis, Morin argues that "these concerns bear

heavily upon the narrative of return developed in [*The End*]" (168) and that the story addresses the uncertain fate which awaited those who were deported by the Nazis upon their return to France which was an issue conspicuously absent in *Les Temps Modernes* at the time of Beckett's submission (Morin 140). In this way, Beckett's story could be considered more radical and important than other materials published in the review as it alludes to a specific group of victims that the French intelligentsia were not concerning themselves with at the time. Morin suggests that the story ultimately exposes "the indifference of those unaffected by [Nazi] deportation" (140) towards the victims upon their return. Furthermore, different versions of the story feature what could be read as allusions to the symptoms of malnutrition suffered by victims of the concentration camps (Morin 169) as well as strange medical appointments which "recall the arrangements made by French police to stamp the identity papers of Jewish men and women" (Morin 169)[24] prior to their forced deportation in 1941 and 1942.

The End then is a pivotal moment in Beckett's post-war literary career. Not only does it mark his first serious effort to write prose in French but it also represents a one of his earliest sustained efforts to portray the life-in-death that comes to dominate the stories of the *Trilogy* and beyond. The story also establishes several themes related to death and dying which Beckett will develop over the course of the *Trilogy*. Moreover, as Morin outlined, the ways in which the story seems to play on the type of survivor testimony which *Les Temps Modernes* published exemplifies how Beckett is already self-consciously engaging with testimony writing in the wake of the Holocaust. While Beckett's work cannot be regarded as Holocaust literature per se, his post-war fiction is nevertheless a production of, what Cohen calls, "the concentrationary universe" (55). As critics such as Morin, LaCapra and Cohen have noted, Beckett's post-

[24] For a more detailed discussion of *The End*, see Morin pp. 168-9.

Holocaust stories of death, displacement and narrative atrocity do not seek to explain the horrors of the concentration camps but instead struggle to represent the incomprehensibility of a world in which these events can take place.

In the coming section, I will explore the theme of death in relation to narrative in *Molloy*. Taking my cue from Adorno's assertion that the events of the Holocaust fundamentally altered humankind's relationship to mortality, I will demonstrate how Beckett registers this condition through characters who are hopelessly stuck in a condition resembling death without ever achieving the finality offered by their demise. While *The End* opens up many questions about historical testimony after the war, *Molloy* extends these concerns in its depictions of dying characters who attempt to narrate and record their experiences to varying degrees of success. Accordingly, I will explore how *Molloy* features a circular, repetitious and non-progressive plot in which the two main protagonists experience many of the same trials and tribulations but narrate their experiences in different ways. Moreover, I will consider how, through their obsessive narration, the protagonists elide the finality of death but never escape their deathly conditions. My goal in the coming section is to demonstrate how Beckett is concerned with depicting the experiences of dying characters who are fundamentally concerned with providing testimony of their experiences.

Molloy: A Non-Progressive Plot

Molloy is the first novel of *Trilogy* and establishes the tone of anxious uncertainty that dominates the other two novels *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*. The novel itself features what Knowlson calls a "rudimentary plot" (372), divided into two sections. We begin with the eponymous Molloy and follow his trials and tribulations as he traverses his native country in a quest to find his mother. This story eventually reaches an impasse and yields to a second

narrative about a detective named Jacques Moran and his quest to find the aforementioned Molloy. Yet both narratives share several similarities: both characters engage in ill-advised sojourns into the marginal spaces of their societies during which they deteriorate both mentally and physically. Molloy and Moran also share an obsession with narrating their existence and experiences both orally and on paper. Finally, both narratives end with their protagonists back in their bedrooms where they recount the details of their journey as a sort of testimony of their struggles for the reader. However, the linearity of the novel's temporal structure is dubious as the "Molloy" narrative that constitutes the first half of the novel could also be interpreted as Moran's report on Molloy's character after he suffers a mental breakdown following his unsuccessful pursuit of Molloy in the second half of the novel. It is because of this possible confusion of narrative sequence that the reader can, according to Thomas Tresize, "regard the two parts of *Molloy* as different versions of the same story" (41). In this sense, the very structure of the novel calls into question the veracity of testimony and narrative due to the fact that the traumas experienced and voiced by Molloy in the first half of the novel are repeated by another character in the second half. Thus, the linearity and "truth" of their journeys are called into question by this repetition which also raises scepticism about the authenticity of their narratives more generally.

The novel begins with Molloy declaring: "I am in my mother's room. It's I who lives here now. I don't know how I got there. Perhaps in an ambulance […] I was helped. I'd never have got there alone" (*Molloy* 3). The sense of anxious uncertainty is palpable from the very beginning of the text as the narrator is unable to understand or explain why he occupies his mother's room nor how he ended up there. Molloy reveals that he provides the testimony which follows at the behest of a "man who comes every week" who "gives me money and takes away

the pages" (*Molloy* 3). While Molloy expresses feelings of ignorance and uncertainty in the opening passages of the novel, he does at least seem to believe that his narrative is contributing to some greater structure; the man who "takes away the pages" (*Molloy* 3) encourages his faith in some sense of a beginning, middle and end. What we get in the early passages of the novel then is a sort of metatextual commentary on the apparent material reality of the manuscript in preparation:

> It was he who told me I'd begun all wrong, that it should have begun differently […] I began at the beginning, like an old ballocks, can you imagine that? Here's my beginning. Because they're keeping it apparently. I took a lot of trouble with it. Here it is. It gave me a lot of trouble. It was the beginning, do you understand? Whereas now it's nearly the end. Is what I do now any better? I don't know. That's beside the point. Here's my beginning. It must mean something, or they wouldn't keep it. Here it is. (*Molloy* 4)

The reader is thus alerted to the status of the supposed work as a provisional, textual object; a written report of the events which transpire over the course of the novel. Yet there is also a sense in which what follows could be read as a survivor testimony. Molloy's clumsy rendering of the opening stages of his story marks him as a person who is not experienced in writing reports or narrative. This, combined with his revelation that he writes at the behest of some figure exterior to his narrative, appears to show Molloy as some sort of survivor who has been requested to document his preceding struggles despite the fact that these experiences resist being written down in any coherent or linear form.

In the second half of the novel, we are introduced to another character called Moran who also self-consciously points to the constructed nature of his narrative. Living with his son, Jacques, and his servant, Martha, Moran, unlike Molloy, lives a relatively stable life of material

comfort. However, this is interrupted one day when he is visited by an agent named Gaber, under the instruction of another mysterious character named Youdi, who tasks him with the job of finding Molloy. Moran's half of the novel takes the form of a report on his sojourn into "Molloy country" in order to find the protagonist from the first half of the novel. Moran too states that he writes his report under the instruction of these two mysterious figures Youdi and Gaber. While Molloy points to the constructed nature of his narrative at the beginning, the introduction to Moran's narrative is far more ambiguous, indicating only that the forthcoming "report will be long" and admits that "perhaps I shall not finish it" (*Molloy* 87). This contrasts significantly with the beginning of Molloy's narrative where he informs the reader that he intends to conform to the conventional structure of the novel which requires a beginning, middle and end.

After leaving his mother's home, Molloy enters a town where he is accosted by the police for riding his bicycle and not possessing the appropriate papers. Molloy is eventually discharged from the police station but proceeds to accidently kill a woman's dog and accompanies her to her home to bury the dog. Some time is then spent living in this woman's home before Molloy sets out for the seaside. Around this time, Molloy is afflicted with various ailments including a mysterious weakness in his legs. Molloy eventually leaves the seaside and finds himself lost in a forest as his physical debility gets worse. While lost in the forest, Molloy mercilessly beats a charcoal-burner to death before he finds his way out of the forest and into the plains where he is saved by unknown figures and presumably delivered to his mother's room where we first met him at the beginning of the novel. Much like Molloy, Moran also suffers from various bodily ailments which intensify as his journey to find Molloy progresses. Moran does not reveal as many details of his journey to the reader but Moran and his son eventually

reach an impasse at which point Moran sends his son away to purchase a bicycle. While his son is away, Moran encounters an anonymous figure in a forest whom he also violently kills and is also visited by a spectral Youdi. Moran's son eventually returns before abandoning his father for good as Moran struggles to return home through a hostile landscape. The second half of the novel concludes as Moran eventually makes his way home where he begins to the write the report of his sojourn to find the mysterious Molloy.

Both sections of the novel are notably repetitive and non-progressive as both characters ruminate on the nature of death as they physically and mentally deteriorate. Throughout his narrative, Moran withholds information about his journey from the reader. Moran's narrative structure seems to be in bad faith as compared to Molloy's; he is consistently willing to sacrifice detail and sequence just to reach the "conclusion" as soon as possible. For example, Moran states that "I have no intention of relating the various adventures which befell […] me and my son […] before we came to the Molloy country. It would be tedious" (*Molloy* 126). Like Molloy, Moran exhibits an awareness of the constructed nature of his narrative referring to his half of the novel as "paltry scrivening" (*Molloy* 126). Moran excuses the elisions in his narrative by comparing himself to the mythical figure Sisyphus who, while he is condemned to endless journeys up and down a mountain, does not at least have to repeat every detail of each journey:

> And it would not surprise me if I deviated, in the pages to follow, from the true and exact succession of events. But I do not think even Sisyphus is required to scratch himself, or to groan, or to rejoice, as the fashion is now, always at the same appointed places. And it may even be they are not too particular about the route he takes provided it gets him to his destination safely and on time. (*Molloy* 128)

In this way, Moran suggests that this journey to find Molloy may not be his first or his last and, as such, he is not required to recount the same details each time he retells the narrative of this

journey. Molloy's journey in the first half of the novel also echoes the absurd, cyclical journey suffered by Sisyphus. The confused journeys, sometimes to his mother and at other times away from her, culminate toward the end of his narrative when, having become lost in a forest, Molloy finds that much of his recent journey has been made in the shape of a "great polygon" (*Molloy* 84).

Moran's allusion to Sisyphus and the circularity of both character's narratives reinforces the sense of non-progression and what Eric Levy calls an antiteleological circularity (75). When one narrator "ends", we simply begin again with another iteration of the same who undertakes the same meandering journey without end. Not only are the characters condemned to persist in this tale but so too must the reader experience a sense of circularity and repetition as the events described are so obscure and never add up to a coherent, comprehensible sequence. Both narrators of *Molloy* appear caught up in a perpetual cycle telling and retelling their plights as they continually experience them. The plot of *Molloy* then is cyclical, repetitious and non-progressive and both characters provide unreliable testimonies of their experiences given the repetitious nature of their lives.

Death's Double: Two Stories About Dying

Death is, of course, a prominent theme throughout *Molloy* as both characters struggle to reconcile themselves with the prospect of their own demise despite their physical and mental disintegration. After the run-in with the police, Molloy soon finds himself in another unfortunate situation as he runs over and kills a woman's dog which, as it turns out, was on its way to the veterinary surgeon in order to be put down. After killing the dog, Molloy tries to escape but is surrounded "by a bloodthirsty mob of both sexes and all ages" (*Molloy* 28). However, the owner of the dog defends Molloy before the baying crowd can do him any harm and despite his

uncertainty about the woman's actual name, as discussed above, Molloy agrees to accompany Sophie/Lousse back to her home in order to help her to bury the dog he has just killed: "having killed her dog I was morally obliged to help her carry it home and bury it" (*Molloy* 29). Whilst burying the dog, Molloy states that "On the whole I was a mere spectator, I contributed my presence. As if it had been my own burial. And it was" (*Molloy* 32). Molloy's death is thus reduced in importance to that of an animal's as he is further dehumanised in the text.

Molloy's belief in some connection between the death of the dog and his own death is pivotal given the events that transpire after the incident. Molloy goes on to spend a prolonged period of time living with Sophie/Lousse in her home. Whether he is being detained or stays of his own free will is unclear, but he does allude to experiencing some sense of alienation during this period when he states that "I was used […] to not knowing where I was going, what I was leaving, what was going with me, all things turning and twisting confusedly about me" (*Molloy* 39). Furthermore, during his stay Molloy is unsure of his ability to write about himself; he states "my life, now I speak of it as of something over, now as of a joke which still goes on, and it is neither, for at the same time it is over and it goes on […] is there a tense for that?" (*Molloy* 31). The occasion of Molloy's death by proxy forces him to call into question his ability to narrate and report. His inability to find the correct tense for his testimony alludes to a narrative uncertainty for the protagonist and the story which follows these events seems to proceed from this zone of existential uncertainty. Molloy's inability to find the correct tense for his narrative culminates in his inability to even remember his own identity or how to live: "there were times when I forgot not only who I was, but what I was, forgot to be" (*Molloy* 44). Despite this, Molloy seems to be animated by a strong compulsion to discover the terms upon which he will

construct his narrative. In a sense, he has been buried but he struggles to find the correct tense in which to write his own obituary.

Even after deciding to eventually leave, Molloy visits the site of the dog's burial: "[I] sat down on her dog's grave, perhaps, which was mine too in a way" (*Molloy* 54). Molloy suspects his bicycle "to be the vehicle of some malignant agency and perhaps the cause of my recent misfortunes" (*Molloy* 54); he soon abandons it and again sets out in search of his mother. At this point, the purpose of his journey becomes confused and muddled as he is unsure even about recognising his home town after his figurative death in the previous passages: "[I] wandered about the town in search of a familiar monument, so that I might say, I am in my town, after all, I have been there all the time" (*Molloy* 55). It is at this stage that Molloy's legs begin to grow stiff, which will eventually leave him virtually paralysed and immobilized by the end of his narrative. Despite his knees swelling up so badly that they become "enormous" (*Molloy* 56), Molloy continues on. However, he is also plagued by uncertainty and self-doubt. He states that:

> I gradually lost interest in knowing, among other things, what town I was in and if I should soon find my mother and settle the matter between us […] And while saying to myself that time was running out, and that soon it would soon be too late, was perhaps already too late already, to settle the matter in question, I felt myself drifting towards other cares, other phantoms (*Molloy* 59)

The death and burial of the dog, along with Molloy's consequent stay in Sophie/Lousse's home, are pivotal episodes in the text. After these episodes, Molloy admits to losing interest in his pursuit of his mother. He becomes uncertain of his surroundings and envisages his desires and drives as mere "phantoms" (*Molloy* 59). These events usher in a new state of alienation and uncertainty in Molloy, with the loss of his bicycle as well as the worsening of his physical

ailments. We may well read the death of the dog as Molloy's death by proxy as the narrator loses interest in his pursuit of his mother and struggles to find the appropriate narrative mode in which to continue his narrative.

Moran not only experiences the same physical and mental deterioration that Molloy does but also shares a similar sense of preoccupation with his own mortality when he reveals that he has already purchased a plot and headstone in the local graveyard: "it is there I have my plot in perpetuity. As long as the earth endures that spot is mine" (*Molloy* 129). In this sense, the pre-emptive buying of the plot appears to be another feeble revolt against the transience of human existence. Whereas the thought of death engenders a deep anxiety in Molloy which results in his attempts to resist death through the narrative distraction of the sucking-stones episode, which I will discuss in more detail later in the chapter, Moran exhibits a morbid excitement about death. What Moran values most in his plot is its permanence, its "perpetuity" (*Molloy* 129), in the midst of his meandering, Sisyphean undertakings. The grave plot is to him an anchor that outweighs the transience and meaninglessness of his repetitive existence. Moran states that one of his favourite pastimes is to visit the grave which he describes in the following way: "the stone was up already. It was a simple Latin cross, white" (*Molloy* 129). The simplicity of the headstone reflects Moran's religious asceticism yet the headstone also reveals a point of contention between him and his society as Moran "wanted to have my name put on it, with the here lies and the date of my birth. Then all it would have wanted was the date of my death" (*Molloy* 129). However, this is forbidden: "they would not let me. Sometimes I smiled, as if I were already dead" (*Molloy* 129). In this sense, despite his rather morbid attempts to reconcile himself with his own mortality, Moran is prevented from doing so by an oppressive and

omnipotent outside force. Moran is divested of ownership of own death and is not afforded authorship of his own epitaph.

Both stories, although repetitious and non-progressive, centre on themes of death, disintegration and the will to narrate such experiences. The physical ailments suffered by Molloy eventually manifest in Moran later in the novel and mark both of their declines towards a death which never comes. Moreover, both characters exhibit a morbid fascination with the prospect of their own demise. Molloy finds a proxy for his own death in the death of Sophie/Lousse's dog while Moran, despite the comfort of his domestic life, has purchased a plot in a graveyard in preparation for becoming a corpse and even expresses a dissatisfaction at being unable to complete his epitaph and erect his tombstone.

The Holocaust, the Erasure of the "Individual" and the Breakdown of Language

If Joyce engages with the ways in which society deals with death through formalised ways of writing, then Beckett probes the failure of *all* writing in its attempt to contend with the topic of human mortality. One of the ways in which the Holocaust changed humankind's relationship with mortality was the dehumanisation of the victims of the camps. According to Adorno, the victim that died in the camps "was no longer an individual […] but a specimen" (*Negative Dialectics* 362). Similarly, Agamben and Levi also highlight how the victims of the camps were subjected to a humiliating ordeal of dehumanisation and desubjectification. Levi describes how prisoners were subjected to unimaginable humiliation and trauma as their "days were encumbered from dawn to nightfall by hunger, fatigue, cold, fear, and a space for reflection, reasoning, experiencing emotions was wiped out" (78) and they suffered "years of segregation, humiliations, maltreatments, forced migrations, the laceration of family ties, the rupture of contact with the rest of the world" (81). The result of this annihilation of humane comfort was

an almost total loss of the prisoner's sense of heritage, identity and futurity resulting in their depersonalisation: "we had not only forgotten our country and our culture, but also our family, our past, the future we had imagined for ourselves, because, like animals, we were confined to the present moment" (79).

The extent to which the experience of the concentration camp eradicated every shred of humanity in its victim was such that Levi claims that not even the survivors can be seen as "true witnesses" (89) to the exact horrors of the camps by the every fact their survival. He asserts that the "survivors are […] an anomalous minority" who must be distinguished from "those who saw the Gorgon, [who] have not returned to tell about it, they are […] the complete witnesses, the ones whose deposition would have a general significance" (89). For Levi, and later Agamben, those who died in the camps are the only ones who could provide a true testimony to the condition that obtained there. The survivors nevertheless "bear witness in the name of the impossibility of bearing witness" (Agamben 34), since they attempt to describe the depths of the horrors that they ultimately survived. In this sense, the survivors "bear witness to a missing testimony" (Agamben 34) that only the dead could have provided.

Nevertheless, as Jones points out, this does not mean that testimony concerning the camps does not exist rather that it persists despite, and possibly because, those who could provide testimony have been killed: "Testimony is not simply cancelled out but lives on in residual form in the very fact of its cancellation" ("From Contumacy to Shame" 54). In this sense, testimony of these events is "signalled by its own avowed impossibility" (Jones, "From Contumacy to Shame" 54) and Jones suggests that Beckett's narratives bear a resemblance to a key *aporia* faced by the survivors of the concentration camps. He writes that, just as the survivor's "account is always a substitute for a narrative that does not exist" (55), Beckett's

texts too "issue from their own impossibility" due to the "failure, absence or death of the narrator" (55). Moreover, Jones suggests that the failure of Beckett's characters to provide identifiably coherent narratives is fundamentally linked to their deathly states: "Beckett's narrators often occupy a no-man's land between life and death, and testify to experiences which cannot be proved to be their own" (*Samuel Beckett and Testimony* 4). This is no more evident than when Molloy struggles to find the correct tense with which to narrate his story after he experiences his death by proxy.

The persistence of the narrative voice despite the loss of identity and uncertainty surrounding its status permeates *Molloy* and is most tellingly dramatized in the narrator's strained relationship with language. In *Molloy*, both narrators struggle with language and how to properly name the world around them as they grow more feeble and approach the oblivion of death. Despite the fact that *Molloy* calls the reader's attention to the conventions of the traditional novel, what follows in the novel strays far from these conventions. The narratives of the novel portray an alienated inwardness that splinters into multiple fragments in a context where the concepts of identity and subjectivity are diffuse and the individual is subjected to various processes that dehumanise and anonymise. Both narrators begin as beings possessing subjectivity and identity but are reduced to the status of anonymous specimens as their narratives progress. This loss of identity is evinced in the narrator's inability to grasp or properly use language or names throughout the text. This is manifest early in the novel when, during a visit to his mother, Molloy reflects on the indeterminacy of language as he questions the authenticity of his name or that of his mother: "She never called me son, […] but Dan, I don't know why, my name is not Dan. Dan was my father's name perhaps, yes, perhaps she took me for my father" (*Molloy* 13). This uncertainty about names as symbols of stable identities even

extends to his own mother as Molloy states that "I called her Mag because for me, without my knowing why, the letter g abolished the syllable Ma" (*Molloy* 13). This is, perhaps, an effort on the author's part to abolish his Irish roots as the term "Ma" is a particularly Irish colloquialism for the term "Mother". In an effort to abolish his mother's oppressive identity, Molloy imagines a new name for her. Yet he remains uncertain as to "the question of whether to call her Ma, Mag or Countess Caca, she having for countless years been as deaf as a post" (*Molloy* 13). Language appears opaque and fragmentary for Molloy whose own identity is diffuse and occasionally appears to be interchangeable with that of his dying or dead mother.

Molloy's uncertainty surrounding his name also marks him as someone who exists outside the precincts of any community which might determine reality through a homogenous linguistic system and he is therefore doomed to anonymity. Quite early on in the novel, Molloy is detained by a policeman when he cannot produce his "papers" (*Molloy* 16). Upon further questioning, Molloy informs the policeman that the only papers that he carries with him "are bits of newspaper, to wipe myself […] when I have a stool" (*Molloy* 16). Molloy not only does not possess the appropriate formal documentation which would legitimise his existence and during his interrogation but also struggles to remember his name when asked by his interrogator. Despite eventually remembering his name, Molloy is suspicious when the sergeant asks if that is also his mother's name: "And your mother? said the sergeant. I didn't follow […] I thought it over […] Was my mother's name Molloy? Very likely. Her name must be Molloy too, I said" (*Molloy* 19). Later in the novel, Molloy also experiences confusion when discussing the names of people he knows. When speaking about a woman he comes to live with, he states: "The house where Sophie – no, I can't call her that any more, I'll try calling her Lousse" (*Molloy* 31). Similarly, when recounting a woman he had previously been in a relationship with, Molloy

states: “She went by the peaceful name Ruth I think, but I can’t say for certain. Perhaps the name was Edith” (*Molloy* 51). For Molloy, a person’s name is not fixed or constant, and consequently he can never be sure of either his own or anyone else’s identity. Molloy explicitly frames his alienation from society in terms of his failure to grasp language: “I had been living so far from words so long […] even my sense of identity was wrapped in a namelessness often hard to penetrate […] Yes, even then […] there could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names” (*Molloy* 27). Molloy is entirely alienated from a culture which uses language in order to interpret and extrapolate meaning from the world and even his identity is obfuscated by a namelessness which prevents proper understanding. Unable to attach meaning or identity to either himself, other or objects around him, all he has left are “nameless things” and “thingless names” (*Molloy* 27). Molloy’s testimony of his existence is constantly defined by the impossibility of his own identity.

As I outlined earlier, critics such as Barfield have found certain similarities between Beckett and Heidegger in their representations of death. Additionally, Allen Thiher has suggested that the Beckettian narrator’s struggles with the power of language recall key themes in the philosophy of the author’s German contemporary. In both Heidegger and Beckett there is a continuing concern about the power of language and its ability to adequately describe the experience of Being. For Heidegger, language, when used in the commonality of everyday life, has a tendency to reduce meaning to a series of pithy statements which are easily intelligible to all without the listeners ever in fact uncovering the truth of what is being discussed. For Heidegger, there is an authentic language separate from the denigrated form of “idle talk” (as I discussed in chapters one and two). Heidegger describes this authentic form of language as “a manifold enunciating” (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 195) and a “*presencing*” (*Poetry,*

Language, Thought 205, original emphasis) which works to name the world around us. Heidegger writes that: "naming does not hand out titles, it does not apply terms, but it calls into the word […] naming calls [and] brings closer what it calls" (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 196). Naming is not merely the attribution of concepts to object but a way of interpreting and conceiving reality itself. Thus, for Heidegger, language is capable of uniting the world with the things which inhabit the world, in an authentic space of being that he calls the fourfold: "the things that were named, thus called, gather to themselves sky and earth, mortals and divinities. The four are united primarily in being toward one another, a fourfold" (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 197).[25] Authentic modes of language uses the process of naming to unite the world of things and the world itself into a symbiotic relationship: one is no longer subjugated to the other, and thus entities are no longer viewed solely in the context of their potential technological use.

With regards to Beckett, Thiher suggests that while "Beckett's narrators are constantly playing with variations on the idea that mere naming suffices to grant existence or to offer being" (88), the role and function of language is very different in Beckett than in Heidegger. Ultimately, Heidegger and Beckett have very different views on the role of language. Whereas "Heidegger's poet may have the task of authentic naming and thus confer[s] being against the backdrop of silence", Beckett's narrators attempt to "resist the power of language to hustle [them] into existence" (Thiher 88). According to Thiher's distinction, language and naming have a powerful role in conferring purpose and clarity on the indeterminacy of being for Heidegger; however, Beckett's narrators seem to exist in a state of resistance against this. They

[25] Hubert Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall explain that the fourfold is comprised of four different regions of our existence: "our earth, our sky, our mortality, and our divinities" and these "different regions of our existence […] can contribute to giving us a particular, localized way of dwelling" (14).

protest against being defined or objectified in language, despite the fact that the only alternative is being alienated in the miasma of formless speculation and uncertainty.

Just as Molloy struggles to find meaning or coherence in the world, Moran too questions the reality of the Molloy he has been tasked with pursuing: "perhaps I had invented him, I mean found him ready made in my head" (*Molloy* 107). Despite this, Moran reveals an intimate and interior connection with Molloy even before setting out after him: "I knew then about Molloy, without ever knowing much about him" (*Molloy* 108) and he seems to have an uncanny insight into the plight of Molloy including Molloy's pursuit of his mother, his incarceration in Sophie/Lousse's home and the flight to the forest: "He [Molloy] hastened incessantly on, as if in despair, towards extremely close objectives. Now, a prisoner, he hurled himself at I know not what narrow confines, and now, hunted, he sought refuge near the centre" (*Molloy* 108). Moran comments on Molloy's apparent inability to finally pass from life into death: "I was no better able to conceive how, left to his own resources, he could put an end to it. A natural end seemed unlikely to me" (*Molloy* 108-9). The boundaries between the characters of Molloy and Moran are indistinct as Moran exhibits Molloy's inability to properly attach words to his reality. For example, just as Molloy confuses the names Sophie and Lousse, Moran is uncertain whether Molloy's true name is Molloy or Mollose: "of these two names, Molloy and Mollose, the second seemed to me perhaps the more correct" (*Molloy* 107).

At the end of his narrative, Molloy appears to completely abandon the idea that the words his speaks are his own and suspects that he is merely an instrument through which other voices might be heard:

> every time I say, I said this, or, I said that, or speak of a voice saying, far away inside me, Molloy, and then a fine phrase more or less clear and simple, or find myself compelled to attribute to others intelligible

> words, or hear my own voice uttering to others more or less articulate sounds, I am merely complying with the convention that demands you either lie or hold your peace. (*Molloy* 82)

Beckett's narrators, far from being the identifiable subject of testimony, instead portray themselves as mere vessels through which experience may enunciate itself. Such readings are supported by critics such as Jones who suggests that "the shadowy identity of the Beckettian witness [….] endlessly defers the promise of identification which is so central to survivor testimony" (*Beckett and Testimony* 4). Molloy merely adheres to "the convention that demands you either lie or hold your peace" (*Molloy* 82), and states that that which constitutes speech is nothing more than "a murmur, something gone wrong with the silence" (*Molloy* 82). He disavows the prospect that he can ever say anything original or meaningful about his condition and instead defers responsibility to the spectral army of voices which he believes he channels. In this sense, the Beckettian witness, as Jones puts it, repudiates the idea that they can properly communicate the details of their condition and instead sees their narrative as a defilement of silence which, paradoxically, may be the only appropriate way of representing their trauma. Early in the novel, Molloy states that "you would do better, at least no worse, to obliterate texts than to blacken margins, to fill in the holes of words till all is blank and flat and the whole ghastly business looks like what it is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery" (*Molloy* 9). If conventional utterances are an affront to silence then so too is the practice of writing. Despite Molloy's desire to construct a coherent narrative with "a beginning, a middle and an end" (*Molloy* 27), he also wrestles with an ambiguous urge to obliterate the text he is creating so that it resembles the blank nothingness of silence. Yet there is also an implicit diagnosis of the post-Auschwitz world as "senseless, speechless, issueless misery" (*Molloy* 9): as an exploded text is preferable to a fictional narrative which threatens to hide the truth of history. In this sense,

Molloy sees the value of silence and nothingness in a post-Auschwitz world where the horrors of the Holocaust necessitate our acquiescence to a state of senseless oblivion. To do anything else would be, in the words of Adorno, "barbaric" ("Cultural Criticism and Society" 34).

But Molloy struggles between a desire for a return to silence and nothingness and the recognition of the creative potential of language: "All I know is what the words know, and the dead things, and that makes a handsome little sum, with a beginning, a middle […] And truly it little matters what I say, this or that or any other thing. Saying is inventing" (*Molloy* 27). Molloy verges on endorsing a Heideggerian interest in language's ability to "invent"; the details of what is said is of little consequence and instead what matters is the saying itself as a creative process which possesses its own intrinsic value for the subject. But as is characteristic of much of the *Trilogy*, this is almost immediately contradicted in the next line when Molloy states: "Wrongly, very rightly wrong. You invent nothing, you think you are inventing, you think you are escaping, and all you do is stammer out your lesson, the remnants of a pensum one day got by heart and long forgotten" (*Molloy* 27). The illusion of invention soon gives way to the realisation that his own language is merely a version of someone else's text. If the creative potential of language is an illusion, then so is the ability to "escape" from the parameters of this in order to forge a more secure sense of identity for the self. When Molloy thinks he is "inventing", he is actually rehearsing dead words that have been imposed on him as a kind of punishment. Here, the notion of language as creative and original is decisively rejected and Molloy exclaims "to hell with it anyway" (*Molloy* 27).

The idea that the narrative is issuing from a complete or reliable subject is questioned here as both Molloy and Moran fail to grasp the language that they use. Moreover, both narrators exhibit uncertainty about their identities and purpose before Molloy eventually disregards the

narrative entirely believing it to be an insufficient way to document his suffering. Writing in the aftermath of one of the biggest catastrophes of the modern age, Beckett portrays dying characters for whom language, structure and coherence is failing yet this failing system paradoxically offers them some respite and distraction in the face of death. Both Molloy and Moran engage in pointless linguistic exercises as ways to graft some order and structure onto their narratives as their bodies and minds are slowly erased.

An Attempted Revolt: Molloy's Sucking-Stones and Moran's Questions

Just as Joyce may be said to challenge the homogenisation of death practices in post-Famine Ireland through his parody of the newspaper obituary, Beckett too portrays his characters attempting to revolt against an age of deathliness and expressive impossibility. After the incidents in town and his stay at the home of Sophie/Lousse, Molloy finds himself by the seaside where he is unable to escape the thought of death and reflects upon how: "death is a condition I have never been able to conceive to my satisfaction and which therefore cannot go down in the ledger of weal and woe" (*Molloy* 62). For Molloy, death is a phenomenon which exceeds the boundaries of narrative form and his story – which he refers to as "his ledger of weal and woe" (*Molloy* 62) – can only concern itself with the anxiety, uncertainty and the diffused sense of identity which stymie him as he attempts to conceive of himself as a being-towards-death. He goes on elaborate further confused speculations about the nature of death:

> I sometimes wondered […] if [death] wasn't a state of being even worse than life. So I found it natural not to rush into it […] So I crawled into some hole somewhere I suppose and waited, half sleeping, half sighing, groaning and laughing, or feeling my body, to see if anything had changed (*Molloy* 63).

In this sense, death does not represent the end of a difficult existence but an extension and intensification of the pain already suffered in life. While Molloy admits to the unknowability of

human mortality, since he cannot record it in his ledger, he also simultaneously divests death of its power to bring a close to existence. Instead, death is treated as another level of being to be experienced much like his current existence. Although Molloy states that he does not wish to "rush into" (*Molloy* 63) death, his decision to abdicate all claim to life and instead merely devote himself to waiting for his own death seems contradictory. Usually a character's rejection of death is accompanied by an embrace of life and all it has to offer yet Beckett's narrators seem content to accept a state of terminal boredom.

After these brief reflections, Molloy decides to busy himself as he waits for his inevitable death. Although Molloy admits to being unable to account for death within his narrative, he does attempt to impose some order and structure onto his testimony through writing about a system that is itself absurd and meaningless. Molloy even prefaces these passages by stating that his intention is to "blacken a few more pages" (*Molloy* 63) in order to stave off the anxiety that cannot effectively be subdued by his storytelling. He states that "I spent some time at the seaside, without incident" and it is there that he "took advantage […] to lay in a store of sucking-stones […] I distributed them among my four pockets, and sucked them turn and turn about" (*Molloy* 64). There is an almost scientific exactitude to Molloy's methodology as he explains that he distributes sixteen stones evenly among his four pockets. After doing so, he cycles through the sucking-stones so that when he removes one from the right pocket of his coat, he replaces that stone with one from the right pocket of his trousers and so on. In this manner, he maintains "four stones in each of [the] four pockets, but not quite the same stones" (*Molloy* 64).

Unhappy with such a primitive system, since it might result in him sucking the same four stones over and over, Molloy devises several more increasingly complex strategies for

circulating and evenly distributing the stones among his pockets in order to avoid sucking the same four stones *ad infinitum*. The next strategy Molloy thinks up involves transferring "the stones four by four, instead of one by one" (64). As Molloy explains, a second strategy would involve, while sucking on one stone,

> to take the three stones remaining in the right pocket of my greatcoat and replace them by the four in the right pocket of my trousers, and these by the four in the left pocket of my trousers, and these by the four in the left pocket of my greatcoat, and finally these by the three from the right pocket of my greatcoat, plus the one, as soon as I had finished sucking it, which was in my mouth (64).

Molloy soon realises that this system posed the same problems as the previous insofar it runs the risk of him sucking the same stone over and over again. Another, even more complicated solution, might involve Molloy having eight pockets in order to increase his chances of not sucking the same stone over and over. Kenner defines the sucking-stones episode as exemplary of an "impulse […] to order and tidy […] random human behaviour" (*The Mechanic Muse* 90) which is typical of the Beckettian subject who "must order names into structure" (*The Mechanic Muse* 104). If Molloy accepts that one day some unnarratable event from outside the purview of the text will destroy his narrative, then the urge to fill a few more pages with the details of an increasingly preposterous and unwieldly system for circulating sucking-stones then appears as an act of rebellion against the obliterative unknowability of death.

However, the obtuse system for circulating the sixteen stones among his four pockets is eventually abandoned as Molloy accepts the futility of his efforts. Indeed, James McNaughton notes that Beckett himself engaged in a similar activity of naming every street and location he

visited in his diaries from his trip to Germany before admitting the futility of his efforts.[26] In 1937, Beckett writes of his earlier ambition:

> The little trouble I give myself, this absurd diary with its lists of pictures, serves no purpose, is only the act of an obsessional neurotic. Counting pennies would do as well. An "open mindedness" that is mindlessness, the sphincter of the mind limply for ever open, the mind past the power of closing itself to everything but its own content, or rather its own treatment of a content (*German Diaries*, Notebook 4, 2 Feb 1937 qtd. in McNaughton 109)

Whether Beckett may have been better off "counting pennies" (*German Diaries*, Notebook 4, 2 Feb 1937 qtd. in McNaughton 109) or counting sucking-stones is difficult to judge, but it is clear that he recognises that his failure to offer an analysis of his obsessive lists ultimately dooms them to irrelevance and meaningless. What once seemed potentially like an optimistic attempt to graft order into his life in the end appears to the author as an empty exercise devoid of any political or aesthetic force (McNaughton 109). This is mirrored in an earlier novel when Beckett recognises the futility of Watt's various endeavours to systemise his uncertain existence: "even Watt could not hide from himself for long the absurdity of [his] constructions" (*Watt* 113).

Similarly, Molloy also acquiesces to the futility of his endeavours when states that "deep down it was all the same to me whether I sucked a different stone each time or always the same stone" (*Molloy* 69). Finally, he admits that the façade of order and structure offered by his system for circulating the sucking-stones was nothing more than a vain attempt to stave off the inexorable fact of mortality and his consequent anxiety:

26 McNaughton even suggests that these lists in Beckett's diary are a form of revolt against fascist historiography: "Beckett styles his German diary as a documentary exemplar to protest the idealised historical narratives he loathes" (108)

> I didn't give a fiddler's curse about being without, when they were all gone they would be all gone, I wouldn't be any worse off […] And the solution to which I rallied in the end was to throw away all the stones but one […] and which of course I soon lost, or threw away, or gave away, or swallowed (*Molloy* 69)

What initially appears to be a revolt against the encroaching oblivion of death and the destruction it will wreak on Molloy's narrative is ultimately abandoned and the futility of his efforts is admitted. Molloy recognises the threat that death poses to his narrative. He cannot contain death within the limits of his text and instead digresses into an absurdly convoluted system for circulating stones amongst his pockets in an attempt to impose some order and unity on his text, to prove that he still has some power as the author. However, this is all abandoned in the end and we revert to the same mood which inspired the digression in the first instance.

In the second half of the novel, Moran mirrors his predecessor's impulse to graft order on to his predicament but Moran's attempts to do so impinge on the content and form of the novel itself. Just as Molloy experienced doubts and anxieties about his abilities to record his death in his narrative, Moran eventually understands at an even more profound level that memory is inescapably fallible – he cannot alter this grim reality merely by scribbling notes. For example, he fails to recall what he is to do with Molloy when he catches him: "the first thing to do was to find Molloy […] then I would devise something […] the thing would come back to me when I least expected it" (*Molloy* 132). As the journey progresses, Moran begins to experience the same ailments that Molloy did earlier in the novel; he wakes one day with a debilitating stiffness in his legs which "refused to bend" (*Molloy* 134). The similarities between Molloy and Moran at this stage are striking as Moran now contends with how to continue on with this new disability. Oddly enough, whereas the paralysis of the legs forced Molloy to

abandon his bicycle in the first half of the novel, Moran believes that a bicycle will improve his mobility so he sends his son away to purchase one. It seems as though the details of Sisyphus's endless journey do, after all, vary slightly.

With his son away, Moran spends the resulting time alone, contemplating his situation and the nature of his narrative; it is at this stage that the coherence of his testimony begins to falter. Like Molloy, he alludes to the on-going process of composing his narrative and refuses to faithfully record his struggles for the reader: "I am not giving this duet in full. Just the main themes" (*Molloy* 137). While Molloy exhibits an awareness of the artificial nature of his narrative, he remains to some extent bound by the parameters of a conventional narrative which demands "a beginning, a middle and an end" (*Molloy* 27). Moran, on the other hand, deliberately withholds information from the reader and his narrative ends on a much more ambiguous note than that of his predecessor. Several times in the second half of the novel, Moran explicitly tells the reader that he is not revealing all of the details of his journey to find Molloy and instead makes references to the cyclical nature of his endeavours. Moran's earlier remarks about not feeling constrained to tell everything, since not even Sisyphus would be constrained to such rigor, instils an uncanny feeling of *déjà vu* into his narrative. Although this is the first and only time the reader will hear of his pursuit of Molloy, he hints at the unending circularity of his story. Moran expresses an explicit awareness of the repetitious nature of his journey during this time when he states: "I repeat. I repeated. I who had said I would not repeat" (*Molloy* 137). While his son is away, he also "circled the shelter several times, thinking the exercise would benefit [his] knee" (*Molloy* 139), a mirroring of the "great polygon" (*Molloy* 84) Molloy also traced in the forest towards the conclusion of his narrative, and reveals something of the nature of his pursuit of Molloy. Again, he expresses doubts about the search for Molloy; he makes

reference to “the missing instructions concerning Molloy” which he felt “stirring in the depths of [his] memory” and reveals that he “tried to remember what I was to do with Molloy, once I had found him” (*Molloy* 142, 143). During this period, Moran’s physical degeneration accelerates: “I seemed to see myself ageing as swiftly as a day-fly […] what I saw was more like crumbling, a frenzied collapsing of all that had always protected me from all I was always condemned to be” (*Molloy* 142-3). Moran seems to be succumbing to the wilderness of “Molloy country” in much the same way that his quarry did earlier in the novel. Yet Moran’s disintegration seems to be more in line with traditional descriptions of death and dying as he admits to feeling a “growing resignation to being dispossessed of self” (*Molloy* 143) and speaks of his deteriorating condition as “a kind of crawling towards a light and countenance I could not name, that I had once known and long denied” (*Molloy* 143).

Like Molloy’s attempt to distract himself or impose some sense of order on to his degenerating condition earlier in the novel, Moran engages in three sets of questions and answers in the closing sections of the novel. The first occurs after Moran murders an unnamed man – an incident to which I will return – and disposing of his body in nearby a copse; he then attempts to leave his camp. However, his physical condition makes such an escape difficult. Earlier in the novel, as Molloy’s body is close to falling apart completely as his narrative approaches what should be its ending, he ultimately abandons “erect motion, that of man” (*Molloy* 83) and begins crawling on the forest floor, “flat on [his] belly, using [his] crutches like grapnels” (*Molloy* 84). Despite once again resolving to be “on [his] way to mother” (*Molloy* 84), Molloy is caught in a repetitive, Sisyphean endeavour. He states “there was always present to my mind […] the need to turn, to keep on turning, and every three or four jerks I altered course, which permitted me to describe, if not circle, at least a great polygon” (*Molloy*

84).Whereas Molloy used his crutches as rudimentary tools with which to claw himself out of the forest, Moran commits to "rolling over and over, like a great cylinder" (*Molloy* 147). Levy suggests that both characters resorting to crawling or rolling on the ground as means of movement represents a "repudiation of the dignity appropriate to 'manhood'" (67) after they both sin and commit acts of violence. Unable to escape the forest, Moran takes refuge on a crest above the land and spends three days there waiting for his son.

In order to pass the time before the return of his son, Moran poses a series of questions which, at least on a formal level, are not dissimilar to those posed in a catechism. Just as the formal question and answer style of the catechism infiltrates and dominates the narrative form of the "Ithaca" episode in *Ulysses, Molloy* too literally replicates the question and answer style at this stage of the novel. However, in contrast to the display of omniscience on the part of the respondent in *Ulysses*, this format too breaks down when the final question in the series goes unanswered:

> *Question.* How did I feel?
>
> *Answer*. Much as usual.
>
> *Question*. And yet I had changed and was still changing?
>
> *Answer*. Yes.
>
> *Question*. And in spite of this I felt much as usual?
>
> *Answer*. Yes.
>
> *Question*. How was this to be explained?
>
> *Answer*.

(*Molloy* 148)

It is as if, in the penultimate phase of both novels, the conventions of fiction give way to a skeletal form of catechetical inquiry. The artifice of narrative eventually yields way to a questioning of self and Moran is lost in an apparently infinite series of questions and answers: "while looking for the answer […] to a given question, I found the answer, or the answers, to a question I had already asked myself […] or found another question, or questions, demanding in their turn an immediate answer" (*Molloy* 148). Losing his ability to translate himself "to the present moment" (*Molloy* 148), Moran's voice gives way to a form of catechetical inquiry in a fleeting attempt to impose some sort of order on to the mess of his condition.

Moran begins his trip home after his son returns but instead of detailing the "furies and treacheries" (*Molloy* 160) experienced on the journey, the narrative is again given over to a second list of "questions of a theological nature" (*Molloy* 160). The sixteen questions inquire about a series of esoteric and apparently irrelevant theological controversies. For example, Moran asks: "The algebraic theology of Craig. What is one to think of this?" (*Molloy* 161), "What is one to think of the excommunication of vermin in the sixteenth century?" (*Molloy* 161) and "Is one to approve of the Italian cobbler Lovat who, having cut off his testicles, crucified himself?" (*Molloy* 161). The list of questions not only reveals Moran's extensive knowledge of arcane religious matters but also demonstrates an attempt to order and systematize his increasingly fragmented mental faculties. These questions appear, at least superficially, to be formally arranged in a logical and rational way but a more detailed look at their content reveals an almost deranged disorder as no two questions appear related and the progression of the questions does not follow a clear sequence or logic. If Kershner argues that the practice of

listing in modernist print media reflects a desire for "mechanical comprehensiveness" (115), then the lists of questions which appear in Moran's narrative at the end of *Molloy* are a mocking repudiation of this drive for completeness in the face of the unknowability of death.

Ultimately, these theological enquiries eventually give way to the final series of more personal interrogations. There appears to be a more coherent or logical progression to these seventeen personal questions as Moran moves from the objective realm of religious esoterica to the more subjective realm of personal reflection:

> 1. Why had I not borrowed a few shillings from Gaber?
>
> 2. Why had I obeyed the order to go home?
>
> 3. What had become of Molloy?
>
> 4. Same question for me.
>
> 5. What would become of me?
>
> 6. Same question for my son.
>
> 7. Was his mother in heaven?
>
> 8. Same question for my mother.
>
> 9. Would I go to heaven?
>
> 10. Would we all meet again in heaven one day, I, my mother, my son, his mother, Youdi, Gaber, Molloy, his mother, Yerk, Murphy, Watt, Camier and the rest? (*Molloy* 161-2)

While the previous inquiries involving religious matters appeared disjointed and fragmentary, Moran's line of questioning here is much more focussed, and the reader can trace the progressive development of the questions. The last question in this sequence appears to be the

central concern of the *Trilogy*: "What would I do until my death? Was there no means of hastening this, without falling into a state of sin?" (*Molloy* 162). This question – the anxious consideration of how to fill the unknown amount of time that lies between the present and the moment of death – is explored in the next novel of the *Trilogy*, *Malone Dies*, as the narrator actively and overtly engages in a series of narrative exercises in order to distract himself until his long-awaited demise.

Both Molloy and Moran intentionally attempt to impose some order and structure onto their narrative in the face of their deteriorating conditions. The inevitability of their extinction renders them incapable of ameliorating their physical and mental ailments and so they both turn to storytelling as a way of asserting control over their situation. However, as we have seen, both of these attempts at order are ultimately fruitless. Molloy, in a style that is reminiscent of Beckett himself, admits that his attempts to devise a highly detailed and effective method for distributing the sucking-stones evenly amongst his pockets is ultimately in vain. Moreover, he admits that he does not even fully believe in the reasoning behind devising such a scheme as it matters little to him whether or not he sucks the same stone over and over again. While Moran does not provide as detailed a reasoning for the three lists of questions which appear at the close of the narrative – something which is in keeping with his omission of details from his narrative more generally – it is clear that Moran's decision to "kill time" (*Molloy* 148) by asking himself these questions are also an attempt to achieve some sense of order and logic as his narrative disintegrates.

A Failed Revolt: "Useless Violence" and the Devolution of Narrative Linearity

Despite these attempts to create order, both Molloy and Moran ultimately fail to escape their condition. Moreover, their narratives fail to conclude in any satisfying fashion as they

themselves inflict death upon innocent characters that they encounter. After leaving the seaside and his sucking-stones, Molloy continues to physically deteriorate and he loses the use of both of his legs: "I thought [it] had long been as stiff as a leg could be […] and at the same time [it] it was growing shorter every day […] my other leg, supple hitherto [was] now growing rapidly stiff in its turn but not yet shortening" (*Molloy* 71). Despite his increasing decrepitude, Molloy decides to leave the seaside and head inland. After being held captive by Sophie/Lousse, escaping but being distracted by a fruitless visit to the seaside, our narrator is now entirely disabled and without either his bicycle or a fully functioning leg with which to efficiently use his crutches. A description of the pain resulting from Molloy's advancing incapacity takes up most of the following pages; he nevertheless reflects on the necessity of carrying on with his story. He asserts that "though it is no part of my tottering intentions to treat here in full […] these brief moments […] I shall nevertheless deal with them briefly […] so that my story […] may not end in darkness" (*Molloy* 73). The compulsion to document, witness and archive the details of his dying persists despite the failure of his physical body.

Molloy soon gets lost in a forest where he makes very little progress in his debilitated state: "The forest was all about me […] some days I advanced no more than thirty or forty paces" (*Molloy* 77). After some time, Molloy "encountered a charcoal-burner" (*Molloy* 77) who was "born in the forest probably and had spent his whole life there" (*Molloy* 78). In *The Drowned and the Saved*, Levi describes the existence of "The Grey Zone", a zone of ethical ambiguity in the concentration camps where the lines between the oppressor and the oppressed are blurred as victims are drawn into a perverted complicity with the Nazi order. Levi writes that the Nazi regime "exercises a frightful power of corruption, against which it is difficult to guard oneself. It degrades its victims and makes them similar to itself, because it needs both

great and simple complicities" (70). This is best exemplified by the existence of the *Sonderkommandos* who were prisoners of the concentration camps tasked with running the crematoria where victims of the gas chambers were disposed of. Yet, as Levi outlines, the degradation of the victims also extended to smaller acts of complicity with the Nazi oppressors such as when experienced prisoners failed to disclose potentially life-saving information from newcomers or, in extreme cases, beat newcomers who still possessed a shred of human dignity (Levi 37).[27] Agamben highlights the importance of Levi's discovery of a "new ethical element" (21) in which "the oppressed becomes oppressor and the executioner in turn appears as victim" (21). According the Agamben, this "grey zone" represents an "incessant alchemy in which good and evil and […] all the metals of traditional ethics reach their point of fusion" (21). Moreover, Levi suggests that the Nazi regime and the events of the Holocaust inaugurated an age of unmitigated, arbitrary and "useless" violence. He writes that "the twelve Hitlerian years […] were characterised by widespread useless violence, as an end in itself, with the sole purpose of creating pain […] always redundant, always disproportionate to the purpose itself" (116).

The novel too suggests a striking similarity with this as the victims of the narrative are absorbed into a zone of ethical ambiguity and violence seems to spontaneously erupt within the stories as both narrators reach an impasse toward the conclusion of their accounts. Molloy, desperate to find his way out of the forest and continue his journey back to his mother's home, asks the charcoal-burner for directions out of the forest. As Molloy is attempting to get

[27] Levi describes how victims were often forced to eat their soup without a spoon during their first days of imprisonment because more experienced prisoners did not inform them of how to purchase utensils and extra food rations from the camp's black market. This added to a "debilitating sensation of impotence and destitution" for the newcomers as, "without a spoon, the daily soup could not be consumed in any other way than by lapping it up as dogs do" (Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* 126). Moreover, Levi states that newcomers were often charged more than experienced prisoners for items on the black market.

directions from the charcoal-burner, he is frustrated by not being able to extract any useful information from the man's answers:

> I asked him to show me the way to the nearest town, I found the necessary words, and accents. He did not know. He was born in the forest probably and had spent his whole life there. I asked him to show me the nearest way out of the forest. I grew eloquent. His reply was exceedingly confused. Either I didn't understand a word he said, or he didn't understand a word I said, or he knew nothing, or he wanted to keep me near him. (*Molloy* 78)

After the charcoal-burner grabs him by the sleeve, Molloy explodes in an act of gratuitous violence and "smartly freed a crutch and dealt him a good dint on the skull" (*Molloy* 78). Not content with his assault on the charcoal-burner, Molloy observes that "he had not ceased to breathe" and proceeds to give the man "a few warm kicks in the ribs" (*Molloy* 78). The assault on the charcoal-burner may be read an act of self-assertion for Molloy but it is the inability of the pair to communicate in any satisfactory way which is also an important contributing factor. Molloy states that "people imagine, because you are old, poor, crippled, terrified, that you can't stand up for yourself […] but given favourable conditions […] you have a good chance of showing what stuff you are made of" (*Molloy* 79). While this may be read as an example of Molloy revolting against his condition, it is a revolt tempered by the horror of the violence that he commits. As K.J. Philips writes, "Molloy's viciousness shocks us more because it is ironically turned against a helpless victim who is the only man in the book to show him any welcome" (22). In order to assert his physical autonomy, as proof of his agency in the face of the debilitating oblivion and disintegration of death, Molloy lashes out and commits cold-blooded murder against an innocent. For Beckett, it seems that the assertion of physical power and autonomy may most decisively be won at the cost of violence toward the other.

Before the conclusion of his narrative, Molloy remains lost in the forest after having committed an act of "useless violence" upon a helpless other. He subsists on "roots, berries, sometimes a little mulberry, a mushroom from time to time" (Molloy 79). It is here that the cyclical, Sisyphean nature of his narrative is underlined:

> I think I had been going to my mother, with the purpose of establishing our relations on less precarious footing. And when I was with her […] I left without having done anything. And when I was no longer with her I was again on my way to her. And when I appeared to give up and to busy myself with something else […] in reality I was hatching my plans and seeking the way to her house. (*Molloy* 81)

Indeed, this theme of circularity, repetition and mirroring is reinforced by a similar event in Moran's half of the novel. Much like Molloy, Moran also fatally assaults an anonymous figure in a wooded area after becoming stranded.

At the end of his second day following the departure of his son, Moran is visited by an unnamed man whose face "vaguely resembled my own" (*Molloy* 145). The unnamed figure is friendly towards Moran and asks him what he is "doing in this God-forsaken place" (*Molloy* 144). Yet Moran remains reticent and instead continues to tend to his campfire mirroring the lack of communication which characterised Molloy's earlier encounter with and assault of the charcoal-burner. Moran becomes gradually more and more agitated as the man's line of questioning becomes more accusatory. Eventually, Moran states that "I do not know what happened […] a little later, perhaps a long time later, I found him stretched on the ground, his head in a pulp" (*Molloy* 145). Unlike Molloy, Moran refuses to divulge the details of this attack: "I am sorry I cannot indicate more clearly how this result was obtained, it would have been something worth reading. But it is not at this late stage of my relation that I intend to give way to literature" (*Molloy* 145-6). The urge to detail, catalogue and record begins to fall apart in the

novel; this contrasts with the earlier murder in the novel where Molloy discusses the details of how he beat the charcoal-burner to death. In Moran's narrative, we are just given the "main themes" (*Molloy* 137) of events the details of which we are already privy to after the first half of the novel. In a similar fashion to how Molloy associates the burial of the dog with his own internment, Moran appears to find a proxy of his own death in his murder of the unnamed victim. When Moran investigates the body of the man he has apparently violently murdered, he finds that his leg is no longer stiff and the victim "no longer resembled me" (*Molloy* 146). When disposing of the body, Moran appears to be struck by how the man's "bony ankles" were "like my own" (*Molloy* 146) and the details of the victim's clothing after the attack "went to [his] heart" (*Molloy* 146) as he apparently identifies with the recently deceased man.

World Without End: *Molloy*'s Non-Closure

Despite death pervading much of the novel as well as the two main characters' advancing deterioration as the novel progresses, *Molloy* does not end in the death of either narrator. In fact, the novel itself does not even definitively conclude, or "die", as both narratives are revealed to be ultimately circular and repetitious. Molloy's narrative peters out as he miraculously makes his way out of the forest to witness "the light of the plain" (*Molloy* 84) where he experiences a moment of insight: "The forest ended in a ditch, I don't know why, and it was in this ditch that I became aware of what happened to me" (*Molloy* 85). He is then rescued by some unnamed citizen who comforts him: "I heard a voice telling me not to fret, help was coming" (*Molloy* 85). As Molloy's narrative ends anticlimactically, the linear structure hinted at the beginning of the novel is proven to be false: in fact, the opening scene of the novel with Molloy in his mother's room presumably takes place after he is rescued from the forest at the end of his narrative. Molloy's various revolts against death and the indeterminacy of his condition are all

fruitless. First, he tries to graft order onto his narrative, having admitted the anxiety about death, through the rather demented systematization of circulating sucking-stones amongst his pockets but he ultimately admits the futility of this endeavour. Secondly, his attempt to prove his physical autonomy despite the increasing severity of his disability ends with him committing a horrific act of violence on an innocent. Finally, his attempt to escape the forest ends with him arriving back at his starting point. All attempts to escape the encroachment of death – fear of this future event and of the physical disintegration that accompany it – are ultimately undermined.

Like Molloy, Moran's narrative closes with his attempts to escape his camp and return home although it is a journey scuppered by his ailing condition. His progress is painstakingly slow as he states that "I counted at first by tens of steps. I stopped when I could go no further and I said, Bravo, that makes so many tens, so many more than yesterday" (*Molloy* 159) but his progress eventually improves until he counts steps in orderly increments of fifteen, twenty and fifty. Moran also reveals that his journey to find Molloy has taken far longer than was initially allowed for by Youdi and Gaber: "it was in August, in September at the latest, that I was ordered home. It was Spring when I got there […] I had therefore been all winter away" (*Molloy* 159). Gradually, Moran begins to leave more and more detail out of his narrative and starts to question the authenticity of his utterances: "the last sentence is not clear, it does not say what I hoped it would" (*Molloy* 159), "I will not be more precise" (*Molloy* 159). When discussing another ailment, "intestinal for the most part" (*Molloy* 160), which has afflicted him he states that "I would have described [it] once, not now, I am sorry, it would have been worth reading" (*Molloy* 160). Again, Moran's failure to detail his condition at this stage is both a result of his physical and mental disintegration and his lack of interest in such a task given the circularity of both

narratives. Despite this, Moran lurches onward toward his home, "bent double, [his] free hand pressed to [his] belly […] and every now and then [he] let a roar, of triumph and distress" (*Molloy* 160). Again, the details of the epic journey home, bent double in pain due to the pain in his gut, paralysed in the legs and despairing and confused, are glossed over in the novel: "I shall not dwell upon this journey home, its furies and treacheries. And I shall pass over in silence the fiends in human shape and the phantoms of the dead that tried to prevent me from getting home" (*Molloy* 160).

Moran reveals that he "had a sharper and clearer sense of my identity than ever before, in spite of its deep lesions and the wounds with which it was covered" (*Molloy* 164). But, as we shall see, this is nothing but a false hope as he becomes locked in a cyclical act of writing his report at the end of the novel. Before finally reaching home, Moran details one more encounter with a mysterious figure in the hinterlands of the country. He describes how he came across a "big ruddy farmer" (*Molloy* 166) who held a shovel "to bury me with if necessary" (*Molloy* 166) given Moran's proximity to death. In a muddled interaction between the two, Moran initially requests a cup of tea from the farmer to aid him in his journey. However, after the farmer invites Moran back to his home, Moran rejects him and proclaims, "I cannot, I cannot […] I have sworn to make a bee-line to her!" (*Molloy* 167) which mirrors Molloy's brute drive and insistence on returning to his mother in the first half of the novel. This subtle allusion to Molloy's quest to see his mother is further reinforced when Moran states that "my knee is not better. It is no worse either. I have crutches now" (*Molloy* 169). The drives and physical descriptions of both characters now blend and merge in the concluding sections of the novel.

As the novel winds to a close, Moran indicates that it is his conscious decision to end the narrative when twice in the concluding pages, he states "now I may make an end" (*Molloy*

168). Yet Moran is evidently not talking about the prospect of suicide here as was previously suggested during his interrogation of self in the preceding sections. Instead, Moran seems to be consciously drawing attention to the possibility of concluding the novel. It is interesting that he assumes responsibility and authority for this aesthetic closure while, at the same time, he seems unable to find a way to hasten his death without committing sin. Furthermore, the fact that the anxious dying-narrator persists in *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* further attests to the impotence of Moran's intent to put an end to his narrative. Before the conclusion of the novel, Moran again returns to his plot in the local graveyard and underscores the importance of its "perpetuity" (*Molloy* 168): "it is a great thing to own a plot in perpetuity, a very great thing indeed. If only that were the only perpetuity" (*Molloy* 168). The thought of death and the permanence of his plot in the graveyard provides Moran with small comfort before the novel concludes with his acceptance of the language of the they. Moran tells the reader that "I have spoken of a voice telling me things. I was getting to know it better now, to understand what it wanted" (*Molloy* 169). At the conclusion of the novel, Moran ultimately submits to this voice of authority and acquiesces to the structures of its language: "in the end I understood this language […] it told me to write the report" (*Molloy* 170). The novel ends with a Sisyphean echo of the beginning of Moran's narrative, it is once again midnight and "the rain is beating on the windows" (*Molloy* 87, 170).

Conclusion

Molloy may be said to represent a first stage in representations of death in Beckett's fiction in which the focus is on narrating the subjective experience of dying. The novel essentially gives narrative form to the "frenzied collapsing" (*Molloy* 143) of its protagonists as they approach the oblivion of death. In this sense, especially in light of the post-1950s fiction, I suggest that we

may categorise *Molloy* as a novel about the death of the character. *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* explored how modern Irish society responded to a new age in which death was, in a sense, professionalised and commemorated through mass produced cultural texts. While Joyce explores these texts in his fiction as a means of addressing the wider societal changes in attitudes towards death that they represented, Beckett seems more interested in how the characters of Molloy and Moran relate to the idea of mortality in the aftermath of mass genocide and war.

Despite the self-consciously ahistorical and apolitical nature of *La Fin*, the story is deeply embedded in and influenced by a series of contemporary debates about the legitimacy of survivor testimony in the aftermath of the Holocaust. This helps to contextualise the further reading of *Molloy* in this chapter. Although a novel ostensibly concerned with ending, disintegration and death, I hope to have demonstrated that the novel fails to achieve anything remotely resembling finality by time the reader reaches its "ending". The non-progressive plot, the repetitive nature of the two protagonists' stories as well as the circular, Sisyphean "conclusions" of both narratives all create a sort of paradox in the novel. Both characters are dying and their narratives chart their continuing struggles to document the experience and their desire for a conclusion which will allow them an escape from the perpetual suffering. Yet the "ending" of the novel denies any sense of closure for the two characters. Both return to the beginning of their stories; Molloy presumably ends up in his mother's bed after escaping the forest, while Moran's report of his journey ends with the same words that began it.

There is also a distinct sense in which these narratives about dying characters echo the fraught origins of survivor testimony of the Holocaust as has been suggested by Morin and Jones. Critchley suggests that *Molloy* represents something of a paradox as the novel attempts, by means of narrative, to capture and record "that which narration cannot capture, namely the

radical unrepresentability of death" (160). In this sense, both Molloy and Moran set themselves the impossible task of narrating that which is inherently un-narratable. Critchley goes on further to suggest that the drama of *Molloy* is found in the gap between the time in which the stories that Molloy and Moran tell are set and the "time of dying" in which they tell the stories: "the dramatic tension of the *Trilogy* […] is found in the disjunction that opens up between the time of narrative, the chain of increasingly untellable and untenable stories, and the non-narratable time of the narrative voice, […] the time of dying" (161). Moreover, this gap between the time in which the stories are told and the time of their telling is what underpins the symmetry of the novel's two narratives: "the symmetry resides in the narrative form of both parts of the novel, where each protagonist writes from a position outside the events described in the narrative" (Critchley 162). The impossibility of these narratives, where the narrator records the events from outside the frame of their story in some impossible time, bears a striking resemblance to the origins of survivor testimony as theorized by the likes of Levi, Agamben and Jones. As I have already outlined, both Agamben and Levi contend that those who died in the camps are the only ones who could provide a true testimony of that experience. Consequently, the survivor testimony of the concentration camps "bear witness in the name of the impossibility of bearing witness" (Agamben 34) to a horror which the authors of the testimony ultimately survived. The testimony of the Holocaust then is an account of "a missing testimony" (Agamben 34) that only the dead could have provided. Much like Critchley's assertion that there is a disjunction between the time of the stories Molloy and Moran tell and the "the non-narratable time" (Critchley 161) of their dying in which they tell these stories, Jones suggests that Beckett's texts too "issue from their own impossibility" due to the "failure, absence or death of the narrator" (55) and that they

"testify to experiences which cannot be proved to be their own" (*Samuel Beckett and Testimony* 4).

In the next chapter, I will explore how Beckett's representations of death and dying evolve in his later fiction with a particular emphasis on the short fiction from the 1960s onwards. Whereas *Molloy*, and by extension the other two novels of the *Trilogy*, may be said to chart the experiences of dying characters as they attempt to provide testimony of their demise, I argue that Beckett's fiction from the 1960s onwards instead adopts a more objective yet abstract view of human mortality. As I will demonstrate, the short fiction of the 1960s is written in a crucial period in post-Holocaust Europe when trials like the Eichmann Trial and the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials were the subject of intense media coverage. A massive amount of detailed survivor testimony was heard at these trials and debate raged about the media's coverage of survivor stories and the Holocaust trials more generally. I suggest that this context is reflected in Beckett's move away from subjective narrators giving form to their struggles and toward more objective and dispassionate narrators who provide almost scientific descriptions of bodies, tombs and decay. The shift away from subjective accounts of dying which characterised *Molloy* culminates in the *Nohow On* trilogy of novellas in the 1980s in which the narrators begin to lose not only their subjective voices but also the authoritative, objective voice which characterised the fiction of the 1960s. Instead, the *Nohow On* trilogy sees not so much the death of characters – although the stories of this period are also *about* dying in ways which parallel the earlier fiction – but of the narrator's will and ability to narrate and thus finalises Beckett's move away from representing the death of the character and toward the death of the form itself.

Chapter Four: Documentary and Death: Beckett's Short Fiction 1950-1983

Introduction

The immediate post-war years had been an extremely productive time for Beckett. Between 1946 and 1953, Beckett completed *The End*, *Mercier et Camier*, some shorter pieces such as *The Expelled*, *First Love*, *The Calmative*, his first full-length play *Eleutheria*, *Waiting for Godot* and the *Trilogy*. *Endgame* appeared not long after in 1957. However, Beckett reached something of an impasse following the completion of the *Trilogy* and Knowlson suggests that the author "felt a growing sense of frustration at his inability to write anything new" (418) in these years. Apart from his continued efforts to translate *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* into English, Beckett abandoned fiction during this period and focussed instead on theatre and radio plays. In a 1961 interview with Gabriel D'Aubarede for *Nouvelles Littéraires*, Beckett was asked if he had been doing a lot of writing recently to which he responded: "Not a thing. A little gardening. Odd jobs. No writing though" (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 239). When pressed on this, Beckett admitted that he had in fact written "some very short pieces, sort of short stories" (qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 239). These pieces represented an attempt to move beyond his previous work as Beckett felt constrained by his previous achievements and admitted as much in the same interview when he suggested that, after completing the *Trilogy*, "I wasn't at all sure what I had left to say. I'd hemmed myself in" (Interview with Gabriel D'Aubarede qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 239).

In this chapter, I want to demonstrate that Beckett's exploration of the relationship between death and narrative in fiction did not stagnate following the completion of the *Trilogy* in the 1950s; indeed, I argue that this relationship becomes a primary obsession of the later works. While it is true that Beckett never wrote another fully-fledged novel after the 1950s, the shorter prose pieces which are written in the nearly forty years before his death are remarkable

for their narrative style and linguistic inventiveness. In particular, this chapter will aim to trace a distinct evolution of Beckett's representations of death and dying in the post-1950s fiction. I suggest that the short prose of the 1960s and beyond moves away from the subjective narratives about the experience of dying which characterised the novels of the *Trilogy* and instead concentrate on increasingly abstract, imagistic and compressed depictions of bodies housed in hermetic spaces. A number of critics have also noted a distinct shift in Beckett's fictional aesthetic from the 1960s onwards. Rubin Rabinovitz, for example, suggests that the "governing principle" of Beckett's late work is "not meaninglessness, but compression" (53). Rabinovitz suggests that Beckett's works become increasingly abstract as "the expansive accounts of travels in strange lands" which characterised novels like *Watt* and *Molloy* "give way to succinct descriptions of figures circling about in abstract settings" (52). I have decided to focus on a selection of works from each decade from the 1950s until the author's death in 1989. Accordingly, I will discuss *Texts for Nothing* (1950-52), *All Strange Away* (1963-64) and *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1965), *Fizzles* (1973-75) and finally the *Nohow On* trilogy of novellas comprised of *Company* (1980), *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981) and *Worstward Ho* (1983). To say that this transformation in Beckett's writing about death was complete and total would of course overstate the case. However, a fundamental shift is nevertheless clear between the trilogy of novels in the 1950s and the trilogy of novellas written in the 1980s. The short fiction of the 1960s appears to be crucial when discussing this shift in Beckett's aesthetic of death. The obvious change in Beckett's representations of mortality coincides with a series of significant historical events, such as the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials, which, as I will discuss later, took place in Europe in the early 1960s.

In chapter three, I argued that Beckett's treatment of death in the earlier fiction like *Molloy* focusses on characters narrating their experience of dying. I will here go on to suggest that the narration of the experience of death continues in different forms in *Texts For Nothing*. From the 1960s onwards, however, I suggest that Beckett moves away from this narration of dying and toward the documentary-style treatment of bodies which are trapped in closed spaces. This change in representations of death occurs in an age of intense media coverage of the Holocaust trials of the 1960s which in turn led to some public debate about the form and significance of survivors' testimony to Nazi crimes. Finally, I will discuss how the final novellas of Beckett's life exhibit a relentlessly sceptical investigation of language and fictional form. All of these "stages" of representing death can be linked to the atrocity which took place in the 1940s. In the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, Beckett uses the narration of physical suffering and dying to capture the immediacy of the trauma. Nearly ten years later, as more and more details and survivor testimony about what happened in the concentration camps was covered by the press, Beckett turns his attention to the depiction of incapacitated bodies which are subjected to violent oscillations of light and heat as they are trapped in tombs and rotundas. While it becomes more difficult to trace historical referents in later works which do not feature any discernible setting in time or space, such as *Fizzle 8* and *Ill Seen Ill Said*, it is nevertheless possible to read oblique interpretations of a post-Holocaust world in these texts. Moreover, a sense of catastrophe still haunts these final stories, reflected in the breakdown of language and the fictional form in texts like *Company* and *Worstward Ho*.

The Missing Voice: *Texts for Nothing* and the Disappearance of the Speaking Subject

Texts for Nothing is probably Beckett's most celebrated fictional work in the period after the *Trilogy*. This is a collection of short stories that are all concerned with issues relating to death

and identity and, according to Ruby Cohn, move in the direction of "rest, nothing, nonbeing, or death, which may be but are not necessarily synonymous" (*A Beckett Canon* 195). The collection is significant for several reasons. Firstly, these texts are written in a crucial period after the publication of what many consider to be the high-point of Beckett's experiments with the form of the novel or novella. According to Nixon, Beckett began writing *Texts for Nothing* shortly after the death of his mother on Christmas Eve 1950 and finished the work in December 1951. Although the significance of *Texts for Nothing* is often overlooked, Nixon argues that "in important ways [*Texts for Nothing*] enabled Beckett to move beyond the Trilogy to the works of later years" (*Texts for Nothing and Other Shorter Prose 1950-1976* xi) insofar as the texts represent a break from the loose "plot" of the *Trilogy* in favour of a mode of "disintegration that the monologue […] is unable to remedy" (*Texts for Nothing and Other Shorter Prose 1950-1976* xi). However, Beckett himself felt that he struggled to move beyond the explorations of death and disintegrative subjectivity which dominated the novels of the *Trilogy*. In 1953, he wrote to George Reavey claiming that, since the completion of *The Unnamable* in 1950, he had "only succeeded in writing a dozen very short abortive texts in French and there is nothing whatever in sight" (Letter to George Reavey 12 May 1953 qtd. in Knowlson 397). Beckett may have been unduly dismissive in his description of the "short abortive texts in French" (Letter to George Reavey 12 May 1953 qtd. in Knowlson 397) which would later be published as *Texts for Nothing* but the author nevertheless regarded the collection as a necessary exercise in order to progress as an artist. In an interview with the *New York Times* in 1956, Beckett described *Texts for Nothing* as "an attempt to get out of the attitude of disintegration" which had characterised the *Trilogy* but admitted that the collection "failed" in this regard (Interview with Israel Shenker in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 162). Beckett repeated this sentiment

in a later interview when he suggested that *Texts for Nothing*, which he described as "those short texts, those little stories", represented his attempt "To try to break loose" from the patterns established in the *Trilogy* (Interview with Gabriel D'Aubarede qtd. in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 239).

It is fair to say that one could devote an entire chapter to the themes of narrative and death in *Texts for Nothing*. While this chapter is more concerned with exploring the shift in Beckett's writing in his representation of death which occurs in the prose fiction from the 1960s onwards, *Texts for Nothing* is worth discussing insofar as it represents a continued struggled to move beyond the subjective narratives about dying which characterised the *Trilogy*. Indeed, *Texts for Nothing* represents something of a distillation of the Beckett's major works up to that point and the twelve short texts which comprise the collection exhibit a retrospective critical awareness of the author's *oeuvre*. Numerous characters from *Watt*, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *Waiting for Godot* all make appearances throughout. For example, "Text IV" refers to the "vulgar Molloy" and "common Malone, those mere mortals, happy mortals" (*TFN* 18) while "Text V", with its Kafkaesque theme of judicial inquiry, questions "Why did Pozzo leave home, he had a castle and retainers" (*TFN* 21). There are also some oblique biographical references throughout. "Text I" seemingly makes reference to the death of Beckett's mother just four months before he began work on the piece: "A tale, it was a tale for children, it all happened on a rock, in the storm, the mother was dead" (*TFN* 6).

Texts for Nothing was written less than a year after the completion of the last book in the *Trilogy* and it is not surprising that these texts can be considered as ruminations or re-considerations of the previous work. As Cohn points out, the first line of *Texts for Nothing* seems to be an ironic denial of the final sentence of *The Unnamable* (*A Beckett Canon* 195).

While *The Unnamable* ends with the line: "where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on" (*The Unnamable* 407), *Texts for Nothing* seems to almost respond to this: "Suddenly, no, at last, long last, I couldn't any more, I couldn't go on" (*Texts for Nothing* 3). Yet *Texts for Nothing* is also important when trying to understand the uneasy relationship Beckett's post-war fiction has with survivor testimony that I outlined in the previous chapter. Jones suggests that the fact that *Texts for Nothing*'s opening refutes the conclusion of *The Unnamable*, proves that "testimony in Beckett is not singular but serial and regressive" (*Beckett and Testimony* 20). Moreover, Jones argues that the "tortured epistemology" (*Beckett and Testimony* 20) of Beckett narrators sheds a light on the forms of survivor testimony of the death camps that Agamben explores in *Remnants of Auschwitz*.

If the voice at the end of the *Trilogy* is ironically silenced directly after declaring that it must continue, then the voice at the beginning of *Texts for Nothing* is ironically *sustained* immediately after declaring "I couldn't go on" (*TFN* 3). The persistence of the voice in spite of the narrator's desire to end recurs at the conclusion of *Texts for Nothing* when the narrator tells us that "were the voice to cease quite at last, the old ceasing voice, it would not be true, as it is not true that it speaks, it can't speak, it can't cease" (*TFN* 53). This absurd inability to go on and simultaneous inability to *not* go on is of course present throughout the earlier *Trilogy* but the paradox gains a manic intensity in *Texts for Nothing* and this contradictory state is again linked to the characters' proximity to death.

The first text of the collection wastes no time in throwing the reader into a series of cyclical and repetitive reflections on the process of dying. Unlike *Molloy*, there is no contextualisation, no artifice of narrative or plot which helps to ease the reader into the themes

of the text or the nature of the dying consciousness which narrates throughout. There is also a sense of space, locale, landscape and nature in this first text which is in stark contrast to the desolate planes of pseudo-existence which characterise the conclusion of the *Trilogy* and the later sections of *Texts for Nothing*. The narrator describes how they inhabit "the top […] of a mountain, no, a hill, but so wild, enough. Quag, heath up to the knees, faint sheep-tracks, troughs scooped deep by the rains" (*TFN* 3). While we initially believe the narrator has ascended the hill, he soon reveals that he is in fact buried there: "I am down in the hole the centuries have dug, centuries of filthy weather, flat on my face on the dark earth sodden with the creeping saffron waters it slowly drinks. They are up above, all round me, as in a graveyard" (*TFN* 4). The description of this traditional burial suggests death as a process of returning to the earth. The corporeal form appears to have been returned to the land to begin its process of decomposition and regeneration into "the dark earth" (*TFN* 4). Yet, as is typical with Beckett, there is an almost immediate contradiction of this interpretation as the narrator notes no change in their mental state despite their apparent death: "I listen and it's the same thoughts I hear, I mean the same as ever, strange" (*TFN* 4). Nothing is certain in this grave on top of a mountain, not even the length of time the narrator has been there: "How long have I been here […] And often I could answer, An hour, a month, a year, a century, depending on what I mean by here, and me, and being" (*TFN* 4).

Texts for Nothing pursues some of the main thematic strands established in the *Trilogy* including the idea of the voice persisting even after its apparent death, the epistemic uncertainty which arises out of such a condition and the awareness of the existence of some other voice the origin of which is unknown. "Text I" then places the collection firmly within the Beckettian trope of life-in-death. We are led to believe that death for Beckett is a process which never

begins, since his dying characters are *always* in the process of dying. But by the same token it never seems to end: the anxious narrative voice goes on interminably in spite of the countless pleas for the relief and tranquillity of oblivion. The narrator describes how he has wished for and willed death an infinite number of times: "I've given myself up for dead all over the place, of hunger, of tedium" (*TFN* 5). Yet this wish for death, paradoxically, at the same time inspires a continued enthusiasm for existence: "nothing like breathing your last to put new life in you" (*TFN* 5). These observations are of course characteristic of Beckett's dying narrators who are subject to "muttering, the same old mutterings, the same old stories" (*TFN* 5) interminably. If Beckett's narrators are all in some way dead or already dying then their chief activity in this space is "muttering" (*TFN* 5) old stories to themselves and the reader. They create and deny various narratives about themselves, and about others, real and imagined, so as to undercut any sense of the epistemological or phenomenological certainty of death or of the process which immediately precedes it.

As I briefly outlined earlier, Critchley suggests that Beckett's fiction "takes place in the impossible time of dying, and it is into this ungraspable temporal stretch that the voice gives itself the possibility of telling stories" (164). For Critchley then, Beckett's dying narrator "is an identity minimally held together by a series of stories" (164). While Molloy and Moran struggled to properly name the world around them and suffered a confusion about their identities, the events of the novel still, more or less, take place from the perspective of two identifiable narrators. This is not the case with *Texts for Nothing* which Kateryna Arthur suggests is characterised by "the inability to […] locate the speaking subject" and a "general confusion about place and identity" which is compounded by "sudden shifts in point of view, grammatical dislocations, disruptions of time and space" (139). *Texts for Nothing* records an

experience of dying that involves a radical dislocation of voice and identity which had been merely gestured towards in earlier novels like *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*. As we saw with *Molloy,* a characteristically Beckettian irony arises from the situation of characters who attempt to narrate their experience of dying but, in so doing, construct an almost infinite series of narrative distractions which fail to provide any knowledge or certainty. At the same time, these narratives also serve to repress what is supposed to be the only certain fact about existence: death. The voices of *Texts for Nothing* are constantly suspicious of how useful "the same old mutterings" (*TFN* 5) about death are. On the one hand, these narratives serve as a form of consolation – a way of keeping at bay the solitary end of dying in a grave in "the absence of others" (*TFN* 8) as in "Text II" ("Yes, to the end, always muttering, to lull me and keep me company" (*TFN* 6)). However, on the other hand, these narratives also sustain the narrator's sense of eternal entrapment in the agonizing loneliness of dying: "So long as the words keep coming nothing will have changed, there are the old words out again. Utter, there's nothing else, utter, void yourself of them, here as always, nothing else" (*TFN* 8). The capacity to create stories, or at least produce language, is also considered to be the one thing saving the voice from slipping into the final silence of death. The voice admits that "it's the dread of coming to the last, of having said all, your all, before the end, no, for that will be the end, the end of all, not certain" (*TFN* 8). Rather than fearing he will run out of words before eventually passing away, the voice admits that it is only when they have run out of words that extinction will come. The connection between the voice's ability to speak and their existence is again reiterated a couple of lines later when the narrator states: "better be silent, it's the only method, if you want to end, not a word but smiles, end rent with stifled imprecations, burst with speechlessness" (*TFN* 8).

The narrator(s) of *Texts for Nothing* envision narrative as both a distraction from their fear of death and a possible means of reaching an end.

Jones suggests that *Texts for Nothing* "is a study in desubjectification" (*Beckett and Testimony* 25) and is characterised by a "constant disappearance of the speaking subject" (*Beckett and Testimony* 25). While the narrators cannot be present for their own disintegration, they are somehow able to persist and narrate the experience *in absentia*. In this sense, Beckett's narrators are mere spectres of a once secure identity as they bear witness to the breakdown of their own subjectivities. "Text IV" opens up in an apparent state of existential confusion as the narrator poses a series of questions which initially appear to be directed at the self; however, the questioning eventually gives way to a disorientating uncertainty about the very existence of such a self: "Where would I go, if I could go, who would I be, if I could be, what would I say, if I had a voice, who says this, saying it's me?" (*TFN* 17). The narrator continues: "It's the same old stranger as ever, for whom alone accusative I exist, in the pit of my inexistence, of his, of ours, there's a simple answer" (*TFN* 17). The disintegration of self is such that the notion of a singular "I" who can narrate such an event is dissolved and the self is intermingled with an undefined otherness, or what Cohn calls "a Chinese box of voices within voices" (*A Beckett Canon* 197). Jones argues that "the equivocation which lies at the heart of *Texts for Nothing* between 'I' and 'he' is consequently manifested as an evacuation of the self into a series of secondary identities" (58). Cohn too suggests that "Text IV" features "a confusing conflict" between "a third-person and a first-person pronoun, each attempting to devour the other" (*A Beckett Canon* 197). In "Text IV", the narrator even alludes to other works as he seeks substitute identities in characters found in Beckett's other works such as Molloy and Malone: "His life, what a mine, what a life, he can't have that, you can't fool him, ergo it's not his, it's not him,

what a thought, treat him like that, like a vulgar Molloy, a common Malone, those mere mortals" (*TFN* 18). This suggests a definitive link between the narrator of *Texts for Nothing* and the narrators of the *Trilogy* and Jones argues that passages such as this exemplify "the attempt to constitute a viable 'I' in the present" but this enterprise is "constantly undermined by, and fuses with, the otherness of the past [selves]" (*Beckett and Testimony* 29). The narrator attempts to salvage some sense of identity towards the end of the text when he asks, "What am I doing, talking, having my figments talk, it can only be me" (*TFN* 18). He gains a momentary sense of calm in the midst of the barrage of jostling voices and identities: "there are moments, like this moment, when I seem almost restored to the feasible" (*TFN* 19). However, this momentary respite gives way to another flood of uncertainty and anxiety at the end of the text: "Then it goes, all goes, and I'm far away again, with a far story again, I wait for me afar for my story to begin, to end, and again this voice cannot be mine" (*TFN* 19).

In "Text VII" and "Text VIII", the voice of the dying narrator and his anxious desire to appease his impending doom persists. The narrator(s) of *Texts for Nothing* fail to escape the "phantoms" of Beckett's previous novels which "mingle with the dying" only to eventually "come back and slip into the coffin" (*TFN* 24) of the present narrator. The spectres of the previous works "grovel round […] gloating on the corpse, but I have no more success dead than dying" (*TFN* 25). Through all of this a voice persists, intent on creating a narrative which is simultaneously about the physical death of the speaking subject and the death of language itself: "to know that this thing has no end, this thing, this thing, this farrago of silence and words, of silence that is not silence and barely murmured words" (*TFN* 27). The one thing that persists in the moribund conditions of all of these protagonists is the compulsion to create stories: "I'll close my ears, close my mouth and be grave. And when they open again it may be to […] tell a

story […] a little story, with living creatures coming and going on a habitable earth crammed with the dead" (*TFN* 28). For the narrator(s) of *Texts for Nothing*, language is the only means with which they can experience any sense of agency: "only the words break the silence, all other sounds have ceased" (*TFN* 33).

In many ways, *Texts for Nothing* is a necessarily failed attempt to create something new while also giving the reader a glimpse of the direction in which the later prose would evolve. While *Texts for Nothing* is still ostensibly concerned with the consciousness of a character and his or her experiences of dying, we also begin to see the breakdown between the dying narrator and his narrative that reaches its conclusion in Beckett's *Nohow On* trilogy. In this sense, the text is a quintessentially transitional one as Beckett's moves from the death of the narrator and toward the death of the form itself. The most interesting aspect of *Texts for Nothing* and its most radical break with *Molloy* is our inability as reader to locate or identify the speaking subject. What Jones identifies as the "constant disappearance of the speaking subject" (*Beckett and Testimony* 25) in *Texts for Nothing* is further intensified in the next two texts which I will discuss, *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead Imagine*, where an anonymous narrator provides dispassionate and depersonalised accounts of bodies trapped in tombs and rotundas. In these texts, the "I", which has been threatening to disappear completely in *The Unnamable* and *Texts for Nothing*, is finally eradicated as the narrator adopts a more objective and abstracted language and his or her traumas are represented by the voiceless others whom they describe.

Closed Space Documentary: Beckett's Short Fiction and the Holocaust Trials of the 1960s

So as we have seen, *Texts for Nothing* is regarded by the author and critics alike as representing an inadequate attempt to move beyond the death of the character portrayed in earlier novels like

Molloy. I have qualified this reading by suggesting that while *Texts for Nothing* features a more radical dislocation of the identity of the speaking subject, it still retains some salient features of the earlier novels in its portrayal of a narrator unable to move beyond his or her anxious storytelling in the time before death. However, *All Strange Away* and its companion piece *Imagination Dead Imagine* certainly herald a distinctive new period in Beckett's fiction. Dirk Van Hulle suggests that while *Texts for Nothing* represents something of a "break with the journeys that structured most of Beckett's prose up until the trilogy" (255), *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead Imagine* represent a "real departure from this departure-and-return structure" (255) which *Texts for Nothing* attempted but failed to achieve. In many ways, there is a radical shift in Beckett's fiction after the *Trilogy* and *Texts for Nothing* as representations of the dying narrator become less central and prominent. While the *Trilogy* and *Texts for Nothing* were characterised by protracted internal monologues which were often adrift from any clearly-realised setting, the shorter fiction written from the 1960s onwards exhibits a return to more specified spaces and locations. In a sense then, we move from the perspective of a victim who attempted to give form to the experience of catastrophe to a narrative constructed by a witness who now narrates their observations of a ruined world. As a witness of a trauma now passed, the voice of these later stories adopts a more objective, almost clinical tone when delivering a testimony in which there is no longer a discernible first-person narrator. Beckett's short fiction from the 1960s onwards could then be read as post-catastrophic work in both an aesthetic sense, given Beckett's move from narratives about subjective experiences of dying toward more externalized, abstract depictions of death, and also in an historical sense, as greater detail about the events of WWII and the Holocaust were brought to light in this era.

The writing of these stories in the early 1960s coincided, as Miller points out, with Beckett's emergence as a significant cultural figure in Germany – in part due to the central position Beckett assumed in Adorno's work during this time – as well as with two major historical developments in post-Holocaust Germany: the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials which began in late-1963 (44). After the Nuremburg Trial in 1947 and the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials, organized by the public prosecutor's office of Hesse in West Germany, sought to prosecute those accused of involvement in the mass murders which took place at Auschwitz (Wittmann 2). Twenty-four defendants were charged in the indictment including SS lieutenant Robert Karl Mulka, SS lieutenant Karl Höcker, SS staff sergeant Wilhelm Boger and SS major and camp commander Richard Baer who died in custody before the trial began (Wittmann 131). Another camp commander in Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss, had been tried and executed for his role in the Holocaust at the Nuremburg Trial. An overwhelming volume of survivor testimony was heard over the course of the trials – in total, over 250 witnesses gave first-hand accounts of what they witnessed at Auschwitz which, according to Rebecca Wittmann, was crucial to the prosecutions which resulted from the trial. Wittmann suggests that "by recounting the horrors of Auschwitz and reconstructing the actions of the accused at the camp with painstaking accuracy […] the survivors could provide the court with extraordinary details of the activities of the camp guards" (144). The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials were one of the few occasions since the Nuremburg Trial of the late 1940s that there was mass dissemination of survivor testimony, most of which was horrifying in its detail and accuracy.

Cohen suggests that the media coverage of the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials, as well Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem in 1961, helped to shape a new literature of the Holocaust in the

1960s. He argues that the "unlimited access to facts and data provided by the media, especially by the emerging omnipresence of television" created a public that was "ready for artistic communication in the language of facts" (52). Indeed the extensive media coverage of both trials has been widely noted as having an enormous impact on perceptions of the Holocaust in Germany and the rest of the world. Judith Keilback writes that the Eichmann Trial was "one of the first global media events on television" with the events of the trial being broadcast in 38 countries (17). Toby Axelrod similarly highlights the importance of the Eichmann Trial as a transnational media event and argues that the trial had a profound impact on perceptions of the Holocaust as a whole: "until the trial, many Germans had dismissed the few books about the Holocaust as biased. Teachers largely had avoided the subject. Once the broadcasts of the Eichmann trial began, however, they could ignore it no longer […] dozens of new books about the Holocaust were written" ("How the Eichmann Trial and TV Changed Perceptions of the Holocaust"). The testimony of survivors was one of the aspects of the trial that attracted comprehensive media coverage and had a large impact on perceptions of the Holocaust around the world. Witnesses called at the Eichmann trial included Yehiel De-Nur, author of *House of Dolls* which he wrote under the pen name Ka-Tsetnik 135633, who provided testimony of the many horrors he witnessed as a prisoner in Auschwitz.[28]

The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials which began two years later were a similarly significant media event. Devin Pendas writes that the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials were subject to "ubiquitous media coverage" (*The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial, 1963-1965: Genocide, History, and the Limits of the Law* 254). Elsewhere, he notes that the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials were

[28] Please see the Massuah Museum's virtual exhibition *The Eichmann Trial: Witnesses Perspective* (http://eichmanntrial.massuah.org.il/) for more video clips and audio of survivor testimony heard at the trial.

"a press event *par excellence*" in Germany and garnered 933 stories in the four major German newspapers between 1963 and 1965 ("The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial and the German Press, 1963-1965" 421). The media coverage of the trial and the testimony of the survivors was not always well-received however. Pendas argues that the press often focused on the horrific details of the survivor testimony and, in doing so, "unintentionally displaced attention from the Holocaust as a historical process with continued implications for German society onto Auschwitz as an infernal, largely incomprehensible netherworld" ("The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial and the German Press, 1963-1965" 422). Shayla Swift has also argued that while the trial was a significant international event that had a huge impact on international perceptions of the Holocaust, the press's decision "to concentrate on the excessively graphic aspects of the proceedings" (4) came at the expense of providing the public with a fuller picture of the legal components of the trials – a fact all the more damning since many of the graphic details recalled by victims was inadmissible in court under German law.

These concerns match those of contemporary critics such as the novelist and playwright Martin Wasler. In an essay published in the first issue of the German literary journal *Kursbuch* in 1965, Wasler writes that because those ultimately responsible for the conception and execution of the Final Solution, such high-ranking SS officers Heimlich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich, were not the ones on the stand, the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials threatened "to become a monstrous jumble of murder trials" (qtd. in Pendas, "The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial and the German Press, 1963-1965" 400) which would merely provide the newspapers with shocking headlines. He suggested that such media coverage served only to turn the German public into "consumers of shrill headlines" which would be "forgotten as soon as they are replaced by new headlines" (qtd. in Pendas, "The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial and the German Press, 1963-1965"

400). Wasler feared that the media's focus on the shocking details of the survivor testimony portrayed Auschwitz as an isolated incident carried out by a small number of evil men. This focus on the horror stories which emerged from Auschwitz created individual "monsters" of the perpetrators and allowed the public to distance themselves from the Holocaust as a state-sanctioned genocide supported by monopoly capitalism's indifference to life in the pursuit of profit.[29] Due to media coverage of the trials, Auschwitz threatened to become a transitory headline which would disappear as soon as the newspapers found the next tragedy to report on. Moreover, such media coverage failed to account for the Holocaust as the culmination of a historical process which had far-reaching ideological and political implications for Europe and the world. As Pendas explains, Wasler decries "the detailed, often almost voyeuristic recounting of atrocity stories in the press" which he suggests "allowed the public to distance themselves from what had happened, and perhaps more significantly, from the perpetrators of these atrocities" ("The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial and the German Press, 1963-1965" 400). These debates surrounding both the nature of the trials and the media coverage of such also had an impact on art and literature in the years that followed. Literature was once again forced to reckon with the ethical and aesthetic limits of representation in the wake of these trials and the problematic media coverage of them.

Cohen notes Peter Weiss's 1965 play *The Investigation* as a prime example of a type of Holocaust literature informed by the media coverage of these events.[30] According to Cohen,

[29] Both Wasler and communist commentators criticised the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial for failing to call the board of directors of IG-Farben which they saw as an example of how West Germany ignored the role of capitalist industry in the Holocaust. IG-Farben was the chemical and pharmaceutical company responsible for the mass production of Zyklon B which was used in the gas chambers at Auschwitz. For more on the communist critiques of the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials see Pendas, "The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial and the German Press, 1963-1965", pp. 424-426.

[30] Knowlson notes that in 1964, Edward Albee remembers going for drinks with Beckett, Harold Pinter and Patrick Magee, the latter of which was due to perform in Peter Brook's production of Weiss's *Marat/Sade* (514).

The Investigation belongs to a genre of post-Holocaust German theatre known as Documentary Theatre which included the work of other dramatists such as Rolf Hochhuth (51).[31] Although this type of theatre made use of historical records, Cohen insists that "it does not try to repeat or reproduce reality" (51). Instead, Cohen argues that its use of historical documents and records represents a turn toward a more materialist aesthetic and "became the […] preferred strategy for communicating with a public unable and unwilling to face its recent past" (51). Weiss attended the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials himself and *The Investigation* is based on the evidence and testimony heard at the proceedings. Written in a plain style and divided into 33 parts, the play features details from many of the testimonies heard at the trial.

Given the detailed nature of these accounts, Cohen argues that the focus of the play is "the destruction of the human body" (Cohen 47). As such, Cohen suggests that "Weiss's narration of physical suffering crosses into a territory where no linguistic code is readily available" (48). The details of the physical suffering of the victims heard at the trial and foregrounded by the play highlighted the stark reality of the horror inflicted at the camps. Around this time, Adorno argued that after the Holocaust "the course of history forces materialism upon metaphysics" (*Negative Dialectics* 365) by foregrounding "the wretched physical Existence" (*Negative Dialectics* 366) as "the stage of suffering, of the suffering which in the camps, without any consolation, burned every soothing feature out of the mind, and out of culture, the mind's objectification" (*Negative Dialectics* 365). In other words, philosophy and art were no longer able to retreat to the relatively comfortable confines of "reason" and the human mind after the Holocaust and were instead forced to reckon with the physical suffering

[31] Beckett is noted for having spent some time with Hochhuth in Berlin in 1967 although Knowlson states that they "only exchanged a few words […] in passing" as Beckett "usually sat down at the table alone, absorbed in a newspaper" (551-52).

inflicted upon the human body. Indeed, Cohen suggests that this new focus on the suffering of the human body is what produces the greatest sites of trauma in Holocaust literature: "being reduced by torture to a mere physical presence, a body, is the trauma which […] superseded all others" (48). Although Cohen is speaking specifically about Weiss's *The Investigation*, a text radically different from anything Beckett ever wrote in both style and how specific the play is about its subject matter, I believe that many of these arguments can be extended to a discussion of Beckett's short fiction of the 1960s. Texts like *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead Imagine* are striking in their objective, neutral language and their focus on the materiality of the human body as it is trapped within a confined space and subjected to harsh conditions; this is in the context of media coverage of events like the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials which had inspired a new kind of interrogation of the representation of the Holocaust in language. As I will discuss, the image of the human body which emerges in these texts seems to support Cohen's claims that the Holocaust literature of the 1960s is marked by a "narration of physical suffering" which crosses "into a territory where no linguistic code is readily available" (48).

All Strange Away and *Imagination Dead Imagine* are pivotal in Beckett's fiction in this regard and were written between 1963-5 as part of a novel in French preliminarily titled *Fancy Dying*. As we have seen, Van Hulle notes that *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead Imagine* represent a definitive shift from the form of the earlier novels of the *Trilogy*. Similarly, C.J. Ackerly and Gontarksi argue that these texts "turned from stories featuring motion toward stillness or barely perceptible movement" (*Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett* "Closed Space"). Other critics such as Cohn and Rabinovitz also suggest that the two shorter stories which resulted from the uncompleted *Fancy Dying* represent a shift in Beckett's writing and anticipate much of the fiction which will follow in the next three decades. Cohn argues that

"Beckett's new narrators would try to imagine simplified figures in an enclosed space" (*A Beckett Canon* 285) while Rabinovitz suggests that the setting of these stories is "unearthly; the chronology is atemporal; the prose is spare" (52-3) and that there is "little dependence on conventional novelistic devices" (53) such as plot, characterisation or action. Gontarski argues that the post-1950s fictions were "stories that focused on a single, often static image", born out of the "continued impossibility of long fiction" (*The Complete Short Prose* xv) that Beckett faced following the completion of the *The Unnamable*.

The narrative "I" which the *Trilogy* and *Texts for Nothing* threatened to abolish disappears in these later stories and is replaced by an impassive voice which observes and records. As such, *All Strange Away* marks a shift away from the "disembodied voices" of *The Unnamable* and *Texts for Nothing* and toward the representation of "voiceless bodies" (Gontarski, *CSP* xv). In a sense then, we move from a state of narrative *aporia* which characterised the *Trilogy* and *Texts for Nothing* and into a distinctly Beckettian mode of documentary. In these texts, Beckett's narrators adopt a more generalised and objective view of human mortality which signals a new emphasis on the materiality of the human body which is portrayed as deceased or mortally incapacitated. Gone are the cerebral, existential ruminations on the processes of dying which dominate *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable* and *Texts for Nothing* and instead we are presented with images of corpses enclosed within a tomblike structure.

The change in Beckett's fiction discussed above can be traced back to a text called "Faux Départs" – sections of which eventually evolved into *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead Imagine*. Nixon points out that four passages of writing, three in French and one in English, that belonged to "the compositional process" ("'All The Variants'" 38) of *All Strange Away* and

Imagination Dead Imagine, were published as "Faux Départs" in the first issue of *Kursbuch* in 1965. John Pilling elaborates further on "Faux Départs" and explains that the English passage relates to the opening of *All Strange Away* while the three French passages are versions of *Imagination Dead Imagine* (169). It is difficult to ignore the significance of the fact that "Faux Départs" was published in the inaugural issue of *Kursbuch* alongside Wasler's aforementioned critique of the media coverage of the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials. In many ways, both *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead Imagine*, although very different aesthetically from the Documentary Theatre that Cohen argues represents a new type of Holocaust literature in the 1960s, resonate with contemporary debates about representing the events of the Holocaust. These stories, with their colourless, almost scientific depictions of the human body seem to gesture to Adorno's claims that Auschwitz marks the violent intrusion of the material body into the world of art and culture. They also exhibit Beckett's proximity to, and potential dialogue with, the critiques of writers like Wasler who warned that the press's emphasis on the horrific details of survivor testimony estranged the public from a true understanding of the Holocaust and instead turned events like the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials into a media spectacle. Just as Wasler argued that the focus on the horrifying details of survivor testimony at the trials distanced the public from a fuller understating of Auschwitz as the culmination of a historical and political process, these texts, with their striking new focus on the human body, also work to estrange the reader from an understanding of the processes of dying that had been so fiercely established in the earlier fiction. Beckett is writing in the midst of debates about how we approach and understand the details of survivor testimony in relation to our understanding of the events of the Holocaust as a whole.

All Strange Away opens with the declaration "imagination dead imagine" (*CSP* 169). Human imagination may be dead like the bodies which appear in the story, but the ghostly narrator still forces himself to continue the narrative – in a similar style to the narrators of the *Trilogy*. Rabinovitz suggests that while the opening statement of the story "is an admission of defeat, the confession of a loss of artistic power", it can also be considered as "a behest to go on creating even in the face of overwhelming difficulties" (54). However, there is also a third issue raised by the opening statement of the story, according to Rabinovitz; if the narrator of *All Strange Away* is dead, then "the next step is to invoke its shade and see what dead imaginings it can conjure up" (54). The opening statement can be interpreted in three ways: as describing the demise of the creative processes, the will to carry on despite this, or as a sort of thought experiment to imagine what a deceased narrator might imagine in the underworld. Cohn suggests that *All Strange Away* is a text which is defined by simultaneous denial and affirmation: the voice states that images are impossible to describe whilst they detail a tomb inhabited by bodies; silence is valorised but the voice continues to speak; and the human body is both tortured and laid to rest (*A Beckett Canon* 286). Indeed, this is an extremely important feature of survivor testimony after the Holocaust according to Agamben. If the only authentic testimony of the death camps can be that provided by the victims, then the survivor can provide testimony only when they assume "the charge of bearing witness in the name of the impossibility of bearing witness" (34). Similarly, the opening declaration of *All Strange Away* and by extension the narrators of these later Beckettian texts persist despite their repeated declarations of entropy, demise and ruin. These stories act as a form of testimony insofar as they are aware of their own impossibility; the narrators are dead, dying or incapacitated but their voice persists in spite of this.

There is also a fourth thematic possibility offered by the opening statement of *All Strange Away*: the declaration "imagination dead imagine" (*CSP* 169) may also be the author's way of admitting defeat in his previous efforts to represent the experience of death. If Beckett failed in his artistic enterprise with those texts, then the "imagine" of this opening statement is a call to forge a new aesthetic of death, one where the author sets aside a preoccupation with the individual experience of dying in order to represent instead a more objectified image of the human body and its painful mortality. Gontarksi supports such a reading as he suggests that *All Strange Away* marks a new movement in Beckett's aesthetic where the essence of his previous works is distilled and compressed into an array of images that the voice struggles to present in a unified narrative (*CSP* xv). Another point of departure from earlier texts lies in a new focus on the physical human body. According to Gontarski, whereas *The Unnamable* and *Texts for Nothing* represented "the dispersal of character and the subsequent writing beyond the body" (Gontarski, *CSP* xv), *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead* feature the return of the human body as a material object. In these texts, there is a "refiguration" (Gontarski, *CSP* xv) of the previous relationship between the body and the voice in Beckett's work. This new aesthetic marks the focus on the human body and "its textualization, the body as [a] voiceless, static object […] unnamed except for a series of geometric signifiers, being as mathematical formulae" (Gontarski, *CSP* xv). In this sense, *All Strange Away* chimes with Adorno's claim that the human body becomes "the stage of suffering" after the Holocaust which "burned every soothing feature out of the mind, and out of culture, the mind's objectification" (*Negative Dialectics* 365). In an attempt to portray a more objective view of death, the human body is described using increasingly scientific and abstract language and terminology.

All Strange Away does not feature an identifiable plot or narrative. Instead, an impassive voice struggles to describe an image of lifeless human bodies trapped in a tomblike structure located somewhere in the netherworld: "A place, that again […] A place, then someone in it, that again" (*CSP* 169). The reiteration of the word "again" of course evokes the Sisyphean endeavours of Beckett's earlier narrators in *Molloy*, reinforcing the theme of circularity. The crypt is described as being "five foot square, six high, no way in, none out" (*CSP* 169) and is illuminated by an alternating light with "no visible source" which is "spread all over, no shadow, all six planes shining the same" (*CSP* 169) giving everything a "bonewhite" (*CSP* 171) appearance. The space contains meagre furnishings including a "Stool, bare walls when the light comes on" (*CSP* 169). The interior of this enclosed tomb is described as decrepit with "flaking plaster" on the wall and a "floor like bleached dirt" (*CSP* 171). The space soon shrinks around an unnamed body to "three foot square, five high" and the paltry furnishings of the space are removed: "no stool, no sitting, no kneeling, no lying, just room to stand and revolve" (*CSP* 170-1). The syntax and phrasing of the story are frustrated and exhausted as the voice attempts to present an image of the body which inhabits this space for the reader: "The back of his head touches the ceiling, say a lifetime of standing bowed. Call floor angles deasil a, b, c and d and ceiling likewise e, f, g and h" (*CSP* 171). The bodies which inhabit this space are then given names: "say Jolly at b and Draeger at d, lean him for rest with feet at a and head at g, in dark and light, eyes glaring, murmuring" (*CSP* 171).

The proliferation of detail and the mathematical attempts to describe the ways in which the bodies inhabit this space make any conventional notion of story impossible here. In this new phase of Beckettian prose, the narrator is no longer able to consider death from a first-person perspective or portray the type of subjective anxieties around death which dominated the earlier

fiction. Instead, there is an obsessional focus on the materiality of the corpses he is attempting to describe:

> Physique, flesh and fell, nail him to that while still tender, nothing clear, place again. Light as before, all white still when at full, flaking plaster or the like, floor like bleached dirt, aha. Faces now naked bodies, eye level, two per wall, eight in all, all right, details later (*CSP* 171).

As we can see, the narrative "I", which struggled so desperately to carve out a space for itself in the midst of its impending death in the earlier fiction, has disappeared almost completely here. The anxiety and uncertainty of death is no longer the sole focus of these later stories. Instead, with the anxious voice of dying is replaced by images of the dead. These corpses and their ghastly, indeterminate resting places are now the focus of Beckett's explorations.

Given Beckett's growing awareness of the horrors of the concentration camps in these years as outlined by Morin and the contemporary debates about the coverage of survivor testimony at the Eichmann Trial and Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials, it is difficult not to read the space in which Jolly and Draeger find themselves within this context. In *The Drowned and the Saved*, Levi describes how the remains of those who were murdered were later repurposed as building supplies used in the construction and maintenance of the very camps where they had been exterminated. Levi describes how "the human ashes coming from the crematoria" (139) were eventually used as "fill for swamp lands, as thermal insulation between the walls of wooden buildings, as phosphate fertiliser; and […] they were used instead of gravel to cover the paths of the SS village located near the camp" (139). The horror which befell the victims of the camps was compounded by the desecration of their remains after death. The remains of the victims were used as mere material out of which to create the fabric of the place in which other human beings were incarcerated and tortured. One of the more striking images of *All Strange*

Away is that of the eight faces which appear on the wall of the crypt and then morph into a female character called Emma. At this point, the voice shifts its attention from the unnamed male body to the figure of Emma while the space of the tomb contracts again so that she is now trapped in a "perfect cube" (*CSP* 173) of three by three feet. Emma both constitutes and is constituted by the space of the tomb; her being is bound to the space of her pain and confinement much like the fate of the victims as described by Levi.

Jones suggests that one of the central themes of the story is the narrator's struggles "to pick out a figure from the all-consuming ground" (*Beckett and Testimony* 80). The voice continues to struggle in its attempt to describe the arrangement of Emma's body in this restricted space: "call floor angles deasil a, b, c and d and in here Emma lying on her left side, arse to knees along diagonal db with arse towards d and knees towards b though neither at either because too short" (*CSP* 173). The complexity of these descriptions is such that towards the end of the text, Beckett encourages the reader to sketch an illustration of these bodies by writing the word "Diagram" (*CSP* 177) as the title of a new paragraph. This diagram never appears in the text itself but its inclusion hints at the extratextual nature of this scene described, as if the proper depiction of these bodies in the tomb requires a medium other than writing. Moreover, the inclusion of this title recalls Cohen's claim that the work of the Holocaust literature of the 1960s is characterised by a "narration of physical suffering" which "crosses into a territory where no linguistic code is readily available" (48). In this space, there is no narrative ornament or plot – only the configuration and perpetual, anxious reconfiguration of these bodies.

This appeal to the image is extremely interesting in the context of Beckett and the Holocaust. As Jones points out, in *Images in Spite of All*, a study of the four known photographs depicting acts of genocide in Auschwitz, Georges Didi-Huberman makes specific reference to

the opening line of *All Strange Away* when explaining the necessity to imagine the events of the Holocaust in spite of how unfathomable they may appear: "Beckett would say: 'Imagination dead' – but to bring us back *in spite of all* to the injunction: 'Imagine'" (181, original emphasis). The four photos in question were clandestinely taken from inside from Auschwitz by a prisoner known only as Alex in August 1944 (Didi-Huberman 12). Two of the off-centre, blurred photos capture members of the *Sonderkommando* burning the bodies of recent victims of the gas chambers in an open-air crematorium, a third photo depicts a group of naked women being led to gas chambers while a fourth photo captures the top of some birch trees which probably occurred when the photographer, who was shooting the photos from the hip, aimed the lens too high. For Didi-Huberman, Jones argues that the opening statement of *All Strange Away* "functions as an imperative: the imaginary construction of the scenario must proceed despite the destruction of its conditions for being" (*Beckett and Testimony* 83). According to Didi-Huberman and Jones, the images of the death camps and those portrayed in Beckett's late works have "shared characteristics" insofar as "the skewed focus of the Auschwitz images recalls the struggle to focus in *Imagination Dead Imagine*: the vagaries of the mechanical gaze in that text anticipate the off-centre images" (Jones, *Beckett and Testimony* 84) in the photos of Auschwitz. While not necessarily agreeing with Didi-Huberman or Jones's claims that *All Strange Away* somehow anticipates the images of genocide which emerged from the death camps, it is difficult to ignore Beckett's turn to the image in this later fiction, especially when considering how the subject matter seems to reach the limits of what can be conveyed in language. This turn to the image is also another indication of the ways in which these later texts enact and dramatize the insufficiency of narrative and begin, as it were, to announce the death of literature itself.

The sense of desperation in the sterile space of the tomb is such that even when the voice attempts to imagine the presence of "a dying common house or dying window fly" he immediately disavows this detail: "no image, no fly here, no life or dying here but his, a speck of dirt" (172). Life in the tomb is reduced to dirt; this hauntingly recalls Levi's accounts of what happened to the remains of those murdered in the camps. With imagination dead, fancy becomes a mental faculty which could offer some respite for these tortured bodies. However, any sense of hope is erased from the text when the voice reveals that these corpse figures have no chance of solace or peace: "Fancy is her only hope, or, She's not here, or, Fancy Dead" (*CSP* 174). Rabinovitz suggests that Beckett's use of the term "fancy" after the imaginative faculties have been extinguished echoes Samuel Coleridge's distinction between "imagination" and "fancy". In *Biographia Literaria,* Coleridge defines imagination as the force behind all great poetry. Imagination is "the living power and prime agent of all human perception" which "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate" (Chapter XIII). Imagination breathes life and energy into the world of the poet in order to help them create: "it is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead" (Coleridge, Chapter XIII). If Beckett is harkening back to the Coleridgean sense of imagination, then the opening statement of the text takes on a particularly poignant meaning as the narrator wishes to reanimate the dead that he observes with the help of his imaginative faculties. Fancy, on the other hand, is not capable of recreating something out of the inanimate but deals only with these "fixities and definites" (Chapter XIII) according to Coleridge. More interestingly, fancy is said to be inferior to imagination insofar as it is "no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space" (Chapter XIII). Rabinovitz suggests that "given that Beckett is working to liberate his art from the strictures of time and space, fancy […] becomes the 'only hope' for Beckett's figures" (55).

With both imagination and fancy declared dead, the narrator cannot reanimate the dead he observes before him nor can he recall any memory of them. Despite this, imagination and fancy are both explored as viable mental faculties and, as Rabinovitz argues, no matter how hard the narrator tries to destroy the imaginative faculty, "a perverse remnant refuses to die" (56); and so the narrative continues, despite how non-progressive it appears to be.

At the close of the text, the voice cancels out its own narrative and declares that all that has been described is "gone now and never been" and, more damningly, was "never voiced" (*CSP* 180). The connection between existence and narrative or text is reiterated at the end of *All Strange Away* as the true tragedy of these spectres is not that they have "never been" but that they were "never voiced" (*CSP* 180). In this sense, the existence of these fictional characters is confirmed only by their inscription in the text. This points to an inherent contradiction in the text as it, like traumatic testimony more generally according to Agamben, comes into being in spite of its own impossibility. So while the narrator at the end of the story claims that these images have "gone now and never been" since they were "never voiced" (*CSP* 180), they still act as a form of testimony insofar as they exist in spite of the impossibility of their creation. The figures depicted in the tomb could never provide their own account of that experience, and so their testimony must exist through the narrator; in a parallel way, Levi suggests that the surviving victims of the camps "speak in their [the deceased's] stead, by proxy" (90). At the close of the text, death again intrudes as the narrator is left "dead uncertain" in the "dying fall of [this] amateur soliloquy" (*CSP* 180-1). As Cohn points out, despite the claim that all is gone and has never been, the text concludes with a figment of human companionship (*A Beckett Canon* 289): the voice imagines a "faint memory of lying side by side" (*CSP* 181) which is a position never described in text before now.

Imagination Dead Imagine is generally considered to be a companion piece to *All Strange Away* and is another off-shoot of the unfinished novel *Fancy Dead*. The similarities between *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead Imagine* are striking and both texts cover much the same ground. For example, Barfield and Philip Tew highlight the impasse of *Imagination Dead Imagine* and, by extension, its predecessor *All Strange Away*, when they suggest that the story implies "a deathly, transitional state" (*Beckett and Death* 5) in which the narrator struggles with a consciousness that persists despite his repeated attempts to imagine it extinguished. As is typical with many Beckettian texts, the story opens with another self-contradicting statement which echoes its predecessor: "No trace anywhere of life, you say, pah, no difficulty there, imagination not dead yet, yes, dead, good, imagination dead imagine" (*CSP* 182). In the opening statement, the voice of *Imagination Dead Imagine* attempts to cancel out the voice of *All Strange Away* by declaring "imagination not dead yet" (*CSP* 182). However, the narrator soon submits to its predecessor's invitation to "imagination dead imagine" (*CSP* 182).

Along with sharing similar thematic concerns, the setting of *Imagination Dead Imagine* also closely resembles that of *All Strange Away*. As Cohn outlines, the story details "Beckett's unstable, impersonal narrator" and its "attempts to build an edifice" (*A Beckett Canon* 292) within which it will imagine, conjure and describe human bodies in various states of being – all of which of course resembles the project set out in *All Strange Away*. The tone and voice of *Imagination Dead Imagine* are immediately recognisable to the reader as the narrator begins to describe a rotunda with "no way in" with a diameter of "three feet" and a height of "three feet from ground to summit of the vault" (*CSP* 182). The interior of this rotunda is demarcated in a similar manner to the crypt in *All Strange Away*: "two diameters at right angles AB CD divide

the white ground into two semicircles ACB BDA" (*CSP* 182) while there is also a light with "no visible source" which causes everything to shine "with the same white shine, ground, wall, vault, bodies, no shadow" (*CSP* 182). Furthermore, the rotunda is also inhabited by "two white bodies, each in its semicircle" (*CSP* 182). Much of the text is concerned with outlining the ways in which these bodies are arranged in the rotunda; for example, the voice describes the arrangement of one of the bodies "against the wall his head at A, his arse at B, his knees between A and D, his feet between D and B" (*CSP* 184). One difference between the crypt in *All Strange Away* and the rotunda of *Imagination Dead Imagine* is the way in which temperature and light oscillate. As opposed to the pendulum-like switching between light/heat and dark/cold in *All Strange Away*, "the variations are swift and unpredictable" (Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* 293) in *Imagination Dead Imagine*. For example, the voice describes how "pitch black is reached at the same instant say freezing-point. Same remark for the reverse movement, towards heat and whiteness" (*CSP* 183). This image of these incapacitated bodies trapped in a confined space and subject to violent oscillations of heat and light resembles the fate of the gas chamber victims who were disposed of in the crematoria furnaces which was so horrifically captured in two of the four *Sonderkommando* photos discussed above. Didi-Huberman uses similarly specific language when describing the images of the dead captured in the photographs: "the smoke, behind, comes from the incineration pits: bodies arranged quincuncially, 1.5 meters deep, the crackling of fat, odours, shriveling of human matter-everything of which Filip Müller[32] speaks is there, under the screen of smoke that the photograph has captured for us" (14-5). In an age

[32] Filip Müller was a *Sonderkammando* and Auschwitz survivor who provided testimony to the first Auschwitz trial in 1964 as well as Claude Lanzmann's 1985 documentary *Shoah*. He also wrote a report entitled *Sonderbehandlung: Drei Jahre in den Krematorien und Gaskammern von Auschwitz* (later published as *Eye Witness Auschwitz*) which was the first German-published testimony of the horrors of Aushwitz-Birkenau. The text covers his experiences as a *Sonderkommando* and as a Krematoriumskommando tasked with the disposal of victims in the crematorium (Andreas Kilian and Peter Lande. "Obituary: In Memoriam: Filip Müller.", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, Fall 2015, pp. 348-350. *Project Muse*, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/588998).

when survivor testimony was thrust to the fore of the public consciousness, Beckett's fiction turns away from narratives of non-closure and *aporia* and adopts a more objective, documentarian style.

The narrator of *Imagination Dead Imagine* is also concerned with how the bodies are arranged in the rotunda where they are housed: "with their left hands they hold their left legs a little below the knee, with their right hands their left arms a little above the elbow" (*CSP* 184). Furthermore, the voice later comments on how the bodies are "neither fat not thin, big nor small, the bodies seem whole and in fairly good condition" (*CSP* 184) and how they "seem to want nothing essential" (*CSP* 184). Despite the condition of their bodies and the faint signs of life, including the fact that if one were to "hold a mirror to their lips, it mists" (*CSP* 184), the voice reveals that they are not in fact sleeping but suspended in a state of deathlessness: "it is clear however, from a thousand little signs too long to imagine, that they are not sleeping" (*CSP* 185). These bodies, these victims, are described as frozen in time and Cohn suggests that they represent a "residual human life" which is "condemned to a deathlike immobility in fetal position" (*A Beckett Canon* 293).

After these details about the bodies, the voice begins to break down and withdrawn its claims, as if the direct description of the bodies had almost entirely exhausted it: "Only murmur ah, no more, in this silence […] leave them here, sweating and icy, there is better elsewhere" (*CSP* 185). The voice concludes with the cancellation of another of its own previous assertions when it admits that "No, life ends and no, there is nothing elsewhere" (*CSP* 185). The final sentence of the story conveys a sense of forlorn loss as the voice expresses a complete disconnection from the figures it had attempted to describe throughout the text and admits that there is "no question now of ever finding again that white speck lost in whiteness, to see if they

still lie still in the stress of that storm, or of a worse storm, or in the black dark for good, or the great whiteness unchanging, and if not what they are doing" (185). This sense of disconnection between the narrator and the narrated becomes all the more significant in the later novella *Ill Seen Ill Said* and exhibits Beckett's growing suspicions about the limits of aesthetic representation.

All Strange Away and *Imagination Dead Imagine* thus represent a new approach to death in Beckett's fiction. In the two stories which emerged from the abandoned *Fancy Dying*, the dead are enclosed in a sterile, hermetic space and are subject to a pseudo-scientific narrative which fails to provide any details typical of the conventional novel but instead merely mechanically notes the positioning of these figures within the space. Whereas the novels of the *Trilogy* and the short pieces which constitute *Texts for Nothing* focus on a narrative "I" and its search for a stable identity in the midst of the physical and mental disintegration of death, *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead Imagine* feature an anonymous, disembodied voice attempting to apprehend how dead bodies are positioned in a non-realist space. The texts themselves can hardly be said to constitute "narratives" and more closely resemble a frustrated attempt to produce a documentary which constantly repeats, revises and ultimately cancels itself out. Yet a very distinct image of the human body, caught somewhere between life and death, trapped in an enclosed space and subjected to violent oscillations of light and heat, ultimately emerges in both of these texts.

Despite the abstract and surrealist nature of these stories, one can also see how their historical context informs their subject matter. The image of voiceless, frail human bodies trapped in alien and inescapable spaces harkens back to the victims of the concentration camps. Furthermore, the mathematical descriptions of the bodies and how they inhabit these spaces also

hints at the inhuman, technological "rationality" of the Holocaust. However, just as Beckett invokes the idea of a "Diagram" in *All Strange Away*, while never actually providing any such image of the bodies' suffering, the oblique representations of these bodies in *Imagination Dead Imagine* recall Adorno's claims that Beckett represents the only "fitting reaction to the situation of the concentration camps" (*Negative Dialectics* 380) as these stories gesture towards but never explicitly present their subject matter as that of the Holocaust. Thus the death camps remain "a situation [Beckett] never calls by name" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 380) but which is nevertheless here invoked through this extreme form of artistic testimony. These later texts also dramatise Adorno's claim that no one can die anymore – or rather, no one can possess the experience of their own death. In the world after Auschwitz, bodies are trapped within a state of forced deathliness and bereft of a voice with which to narrate their experiences. Beckett's turn toward a more objective, sterile and documentarian approach to mortality represented in these stories also occurs at a time when Europe and Germany was coming to terms with the Holocaust and survivor testimony via the media coverage of the Eichmann Trial and the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials. Yet the author is not able to sustain this new approach to death either. As I shall now discuss, Beckett's short fiction from the 1970s begin to move further away from historical referents and represents a further, ever more radical, subversion of narrative form itself.

"Scattered ruins same grey as the sand": *Fizzle 8* and the Loss of Narrative Authority

Fizzle 8: For to end yet again is more explicit about its setting in the aftermath of some catastrophe and strongly hints at the idea that we are meant to imagine here a complete loss of authorial control over the text. The story is dominated by three images of death and decay: a skull on a board surrounded by an impenetrable void; a small, rigid grey body; and two dwarves

who labour tirelessly through the dust and sand of a post-apocalyptic landscape (Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* 329). The story opens with a stark image of a skull "alone in a dark place pent bowed on a board" (*CSP* 243) placed against a vast, expansive void of darkness. A grey, desolate landscape, heralded by a "leaden dawn" (*CSP* 243), soon emerges from the void. This ruined, post-apocalyptic landscape is covered in a "sand pale as dust" which is deep enough "to engulf the haughtiest monuments" (*CSP* 243). The apocalyptic dust is omnipresent in the landscape and has "engulfed so much it can engulf no more" (*CSP* 245).

Much like in short fiction of the 1960s, images slowly emerge: a body called "the expelled" (*CSP* 243) stands "stark erect amidst […] ruins" (*CSP* 243). A third image of "two white dwarfs" who are "so alike the eye cannot tell them apart" (*CSP* 244) are glimpsed in the distance by the narrator. The only indication of their presence in the grey landscape is their slightly lighter forms: "amidst the verges a light in the grey two white dwarfs" (*CSP* 244). The two dwarfs struggle through the grey landscape carrying a stretcher of some sort: "Bone white of the sheet seen from above and the shafts fore and aft and the dwarfs to the crowns of their massy skulls" (*CSP* 244). Their movements are minimal: the narrator's description of the pair is limited to noting how they occasionally drop the stretcher and pick it up again in perfect unison ("from time to time impelled as one they let fall the litter then again as one take it up again without having to stoop" (*CSP* 244)). The narrator describes the dwarfs as possessing "monstrous extremities including skulls stunted legs and trunks monstrous arms stunted faces" (*CSP* 244). Despite the grotesque, dehumanising description of the dwarfs we may infer that they are remnants of an old order of medical workers: they work in perfect unison carrying a stretcher through a destroyed landscape and are distinguished by their white appearance – the colour of medical coats. The ruined landscape of *Fizzle 8: For to end yet again* resembles the

state of post-war Europe and may be read as Beckett's re-imagining of his own experiences of helping to set up a hospital at Saint-Lô which, according to Beckett, was "bombed out of existence in one night" (*CSP* 277). The apparition of the white dwarfs is deemed astonishing by the narrator as they have "sprung from nowhere motionless afar in the grey air where dust alone is possible" (*CSP* 245).

The narrative "I" is once again absent and the perspective of the narrator is confusing, as neither the skull nor the expelled seem to be in a position to comment on the dwarfs' actions. The narrator questions whether or not "the […] expelled amidst his ruins […] can ever see" the dwarfs and, if so, even "believe his eyes" (*CSP* 245). The expelled eventually collapses "and lies back to sky full little stretch amidst his ruins" (*CSP* 245) after an indeterminable amount of time spent scanning the void it inhabits. The same specific language used to describe the bodies in the earlier texts is also employed when describing the expelled as it lies on the ground: "feet centre body radius falls unbending as a statue falls faster and faster the space of a quadrant" (*CSP* 245). The expelled becomes lost amongst the ruins and the narrator states that no eye "shall discern him now mingled with the ruins mingling with the dust" (*CSP* 245). The expelled, relieved of its duties to scan the horizon of the void after having fallen over, now lies prostrate upon the dust-strewn floor of the wasteland, still holding its original position: its "marble still little body" remains "at attention […] as in the days erect" (*CSP* 246).

In its conclusion, the text returns to the image of the "sepulchral skull" (*CSP* 246) and what was once presented as an ornament of the desolate wasteland is now considered as the one who sees it all. The narrator questions if the image of the expelled and the white dwarfs in a vast, leaden post-apocalyptic landscape might have been imagined by the skull all along and represent "its last state" (*CSP* 246). This confusion about whether the setting of the story exists

only in the imagination of the narrator or in some objective sense is reiterated in the later novellas which I will discuss in more detail below. The image of the deathly landscape inhabited by the expelled and the white dwarfs is extinguished in the end ("dark falls there again that certain dark" (*CSP* 246)) as the text heralds in "a last end" that "absolutely had to be" (*CSP* 246). In these later texts, the relationship between fictional landscape and the figures who inhabit these spaces is fluid and ambiguous. More interestingly, the relationship between the narrator and the characters they describe is fragile and fluctuating. These narrators admit a disconnection between their power to observe and record and the bodies they take as the subjects of the narrative.

Fizzles 8 seems to demonstrate a further diminishment of the narrator and their authority over the narrative. If *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead Imagine* saw the narrative voice shift from the first-person to that of a more objective and almost scientific point of view, then *Fizzle 8* sees a loss of confidence in such a narrative style. The authoritative and commanding narrator of the *Fancy Dying* texts is replaced by a narrator who can barely muster a coherent image for the reader and instead seems to be a powerless subject caught in the very scenes he describes. While the narrators of the *Fancy Dying* texts remained wholly outside the frame of the narrative, in *Fizzle 8* we begin to see how the narrator seems uncertain of his own place within the story and wonders whether or not he himself may be included among the images he describe.

The Beginning of the End: The Absence of Space and Narrative Authority in *Company*

As the *Trilogy* of the 1950s first won international recognition for Beckett, then it is quite fitting that his career in fiction concluded with another trilogy of novellas in the 1980s. In the decade before his death, Beckett wrote and published three novellas, *Company* in 1980, *Ill Seen Ill Said*

in 1982 and *Worstward Ho* in 1983, which were later published together as the *Nohow On* Trilogy. Critics have suggested that the three novellas of Beckett's later years represent the outcome of his further ruminations about the relationship between death and narrative. For example, Steven Matthews writes that "Beckett's late work […] extends and intensifies the issues of identity" (199) in relation to mortality which characterised the earlier work. Moreover, Matthews suggests that these final prose pieces are attuned to the intricacies of mortality in ways more oblique and subtle than the novels of the *Trilogy*: "these last prose works weave an intricate, necessarily inconsistent, and moving refraction of the varying cadences of death" (202). Yet the reflections on death in these three pieces are also very much in keeping with the aesthetic established in earlier short stories such as *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead Imagine*; in these stories, a consciousness attempts to envision and describe figures who inhabit nebulous and poorly-lit spaces but struggles to forge a meaningful connection with the figures or with any story involving them. Matthews suggests that while most of Beckett's novels and short prose works are alert to ideas of "death in writing, writing as the death of the subject, texts as posthumous to the experience they describe" (194), the later works highlight the ways in which the death of the narrator is reflected not only in the images being presented but also in the great sense of strain and hesitancy with which these images appear in the text: "posthumous writing and reading are the principles which generate not only the ill seeing of the concentrated images presented, but also of their being ill said" (Matthews 195).

Company was begun in 1977 as a prose piece initially known as "The Voice" or "Verbatim" (Knowlson 651). Although this text was eventually abandoned, Beckett incorporated sections of it into *Company*. The story features three distinguishable figures: a man who lies on his back in a dark, expansive void, a voice which speaks in the third-person, and

another voice which speaks in the second-person. The "plot" essentially involves the man lying on his back attempting to listen to the voices which, according to Beckett, each fulfil different roles. The voice which speaks in the third-person is "erecting a series of hypotheses, each of which is false", while the voice which speaks in the second-person is "trying to create a history, a past for the third person" (Beckett qtd. in Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* 349). Whether or not these voices which speak in the third- and second-person perspectives are unique and distinct subjects or whether they are just iterations of the man in the dark's consciousness is unclear from the beginning of the story; nevertheless, the interactions between these voices provide the action of much of the novella. Enoch Brater has suggested that the piece is driven by the conflict between "subject and object, text and countertext, voice and action, and memory and presence" (107). This conflict is intensified in the text by a "dialectic between second and third person, this text's elusive 'he' and this script's ambiguous 'you'" (Brater 107). The confused origin of narrative testimony which was initially established by the dual narrators of *Molloy* is further complicated in this story as there is no longer any clear relationship between the narrator, the protagonist and the two voices which plague him throughout.

Knowlson suggests that *Company*, along *With Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, is one of Beckett's most autobiographical texts. The story revolves around the second-person narrator relaying fifteen scenes from the past to the man in the dark: seven from childhood, two scenes from adulthood, four scenes from old age, one scene from an undesignated time and another scene from the day of birth (Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* 350). Many of the memories dredged up by the voice correspond to events in Beckett's own life such as the details of his mother's labour, his father's absence at his birth, learning to swim with his father and the memory of the boy jumping from a fir tree (Knowlson 652). As is typical with Beckett's later

fiction, the text is still suffused with allusions to and meditations on the anxieties of human mortality. As early as the second paragraph, the voice states that the coming narrative will only contain the "occasional allusion to the present and more rarely to a future" before informing the man in the dark that "you will end as you are now" (3). In this way, much like dramatic works such as *Krapp's Last Tape*, *That Time*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby*, we encounter a protagonist, in the loosest sense of the word, who is suspended in the infinite time before death and plagued by images and memories of the past. There is no prospect of a future, and very little hope for the present, only a never-ending suspension between the moment of death and a ceaseless voice which sustains a degraded existence.

Interspersed with these reflections on the past is the search for clarity about the protagonist's present situation. Early on in the text, the second-person narrator wrestles with his own uncertainty about the nature of the voice which is heard by the man in the dark: "if the voice is not speaking to him it must be speaking to another. So with what reason remains he reasons. To another of that other. Or of him. Or of another still. To one on his back in the dark whether the same or another" (*Company* 6). The identities of the two voices and the man are unstable and the origin of the voice which plagues the man with memories of the past is also uncertain. Later still, there is another questioning of the voice which can be heard: "whose voice is asking this? Who asks, Whose voice asking this? And answers, His soever who devises it all […] Who asks in the end, Who asks?" (*Company* 15). The voice which harangues the hearer can be read as a disembodied dramatization of his own consciousness and the entire tension of the story is founded on the dislocation between the protagonist's identity and his subjectivity. Despite Beckett's attempts to move beyond *The Unnamable*, the answers to these questions lead back to familiar territory. The search for the origin of the voice does not uncover any secure

answers and so we return to "the unthinkable last of all. Unnamable. Last Person. I" (*Company* 15). It soon becomes apparent that the voices that the protagonist hears are in fact figments of his own consciousness: "Deviser of the voice and of its bearer and of himself. Deviser of himself for company […] He speaks of himself as of another" (*Company* 16).

A sense of deathliness pervades the novella and the protagonist's situation. At one stage, the voice imagines "a rat long dead" as an appropriate companion for the protagonist: "A dead rat. What an addition to company that would be!" (*Company* 17). Like *All Strange Away*, the voice imagines the presence of a fly in another effort to populate the void in which the protagonist finds himself. However, even this fly would mistake the protagonist for dead: "Let there be a fly. For him to brush away. A live fly mistaking him for dead […] What an addition to company that would be!" (*Company* 18). The voice eventually ascribes a name to the protagonist: "Let the hearer be named H. Aspirate. Haitch. You Haitch are on your back in the dark. And let him know his name" (*Company* 20). Yet certainty is never achieved and this is evident as the voices and the protagonist struggle to come to terms with the space in which they find themselves. The voice(s) eventually attempt to quantify or measure the space in which the hearer finds himself:

> From above and from all sides and levels with equal remoteness at its most remote. At no time from below. So far. Suggesting one lying on the floor of a hemispherical chamber of generous diameter with ear dead centre. How generous? Given faintness of voice at its least faint some sixty feet should suffice or thirty from ear to any given point of encompassing surface (*Company* 20).

And then attempting to figure out the material composition of the "hemispherical chamber" (*Company* 20): "Basalt is tempting. Black basalt. But reserve for a moment" (*Company* 21). These passages of course evoke the similarly demarcated spaces of *All Strange Away*,

Imagination Dead Imagine and *The Lost Ones*. However, in *Company*, the descriptions of this location are never quite precise.

No attempt to clarify the situation is successful. The protagonist remains on his back in the dark devoid of insight and existing in a minimal sense only: "Mental activity of a low order. Rare flickers of reasoning of no avail. Hope and despair and suchlike barely felt. How current situation arrived at unclear" (*Company* 29). All that remains is his ability to imagine, devise and conceive "yet another then. Of whom nothing. Devising figments to temper his nothingness […] Devised deviser devising it all for company" but he remains locked "in the same figment dark as his figments" (*Company* 30). Toward the end of the novella, the "bonewhite flesh" (*Company* 38) of the protagonist is imagined huddled in a pose of despair: "Head resting mainly on occipital bump aforesaid. Legs joined at attention. Feet splayed ninety degrees. Hands invisibly manacled crossed on pubis" (*Company* 38). The narrative concludes after accepting the necessity to end despite not making much progress. The second-person narrator states that "somehow at any price to make an end when you could go out no more you sat huddled in the dark" (*Company* 40). However, the protagonist eventually returns to his position lying on his back in the dark: "the various parts set out. The arms unclasp the knees. The head lifts. The legs start to straighten. The trunk tilts backward" (*Company* 41). The second-person narrator informs the protagonist that "you now on your back in the dark shall not rise again" (*Company* 41), whilst admitting that his efforts to imagine a new life through narrative will fail: "I know this doomed to fail and yet persist" (*Company* 41). The ending of the narrative is uncharacteristically gentle as it offers the protagonist a sense of escape from the voices which plague his liminal existence. The second-person narrator heralds in the end of the story by describing how language itself is closing in: "finally you hear how words are coming to an end. With every

inane word a little nearer to the last" (*Company* 42). Once the voice and the words cease, the protagonist will no longer exist for the reader. Only the external voice sustains the life of the listener.

Although it becomes more difficult to place these later texts in relation to atrocities of the Holocaust, there is nevertheless an intensification of Beckett's aesthetic enterprise which began in the post-war years. In *Company*, the confusion about the identity of the speaking subject and the failed attempts to describe a body as it inhabits an indeterminate space are also accompanied by a further weakening of the narrative form itself. In the *Fancy Dying* texts of the 1960s, we find a move away from the subjective narrative perspectives of *Molloy* and towards a more abstracted, objective voice; later, *Fizzle 8* represented a turn away from this also, in an even more radical disruption of narrative voice. In *Company*, there is a constant confusion over who is speaking, and to whom, as well the notable absence of any discernible space or location in which we can say the story takes place. Beckett further explores the death of the narrative form itself in the next text from the *Nohow On* trilogy: there, the lack of any specified locale seems to be linked with the ultimate erosion of the narrator's "authorship" in relation to the narrator's capacity to speak with confidence to or about the protagonist.

"Times when she is gone. Long lapses of time": *Ill Seen Ill Said*'s Unruly Protagonist

According to Knowlson, Beckett began work on *Ill Seen Ill Said* in October 1979 and the novella was eventually published in 1982 (668). The story of *Ill Seen Ill Said* is relatively straightforward, involving a narrator who relays their visions of an elderly woman living in a cabin located at the "inexistent centre of a formless place" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 46). The cabin is also described as being located in a "zone of stones" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 49) which "form a roughly circular whole" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 46). Like *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead Imagine*,

the locale of *Ill Seen Ill Said* appears to be some kind of liminal or infernal zone; the space which the old woman occupies is surrounded by twelve spectral figures who are "all about […] afar. Still or receding" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 50).

The story is composed of a series of short paragraphs that could almost stand alone as discrete or unconnected units. Yet these all seem to describe various states between life and death. Brater argues that the story tracks "with varying success the borders between the world of the living and the world of the dead" (127). Rather than representing a coherent narrative about the final days, weeks, months or even years of its protagonist, *Ill Seen Ill Said* is rather concerned with "the rituals of writing, the complex rites of seeing, saying, and hearing" (Brater 126) which all pertain to the dying and the dead. While both Knowlson (669) and Cohn (*A Beckett Canon* 365) have noted numerous biblical allusions in the story, there are also more oblique references to the catastrophe of the Second World War. For example, the narrator makes a veiled allusion to mass death and industrial-scale cremation when he reveals that there was "no trace of the fallen where they fell" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 76) which could be read as an ambiguous references to the millions who died during the Second World War. Lines like this of course evoke similar ambiguous references to mass catastrophe such as Vladimir's mournful lament in *Waiting for Godot*: ("Was I sleeping, while the others suffered?" (*The Complete Dramatic Works* 84)), or Hamm's claim that "outside of here it's death!" (*CDW* 126) in *Endgame*.

As ever, death is central to this story. The narrator refers to the protagonist as an "old so dying woman" who is also "so dead" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 53). Her face is described as an "ancient mask" which resembles "those worn by certain newly dead" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 56). The protagonist's face is later described as being "shocked still by some ancient horror" or by the mere fact of "its continuance" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 58). Much of the action of the story involves the

protagonist visiting a tomb with an armful of dead crocuses during which time her black garment and her white hair is described as "dead still" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 59). Her hands are described as "dead still" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 60) as they rest on her hips; later she is referred to as "Dead still. Evening and night. Dead still on her back evening and night" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 65). At one stage, the narrator's eye falls on the protagonist as she is laying in the pasture. Unsure of if she is alive or not, the narrator says "no shock were she already dead. As of course she is. But in the meantime more convenient not. Still living then she lies hidden" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 66).

Despite the lack of any discernible place or locale in the story, there is a possible source for these descriptions of the old woman in the Irish funeral wake tradition as it is documented in the work of photographer John Minihan. Minihan spent years photographing everyday life in his home town of Athy, Co. Kildare. On one such trip to the town in February 1977, Minihan photographed the wake of a local woman named Katy Tyrrell who had recently passed away. The black and white photos capture Katy Tyrrell as she lies in her deathbed surrounded by family and friends. Minihan describes his photos of the wake as records of "the poignant stillness of her face at peace, her body dressed in the Legion of Mary burial shroud, the mirror covered with a white sheet, the clocks stopped, the fires put out" ("The Broader Picture: First Love, Last Rites"). One of the more striking photos of the collection is a close up of Katy Tyrrell on her deathbed wearing her burial shroud with a set of rosary beads carefully interlaced between the fingers of her crossed hands. Katy Tyrrell's wake is reportedly the last of its kind to take place in Athy and, consequently, the photos of her wake stand as a testament to the "irrefutable truth of what happened during those days and nights of preparation. And for

generations in Ireland to come, evidence of a way of life already being forgotten" (Minihan, "The Broader Picture: First Love, Last Rites").

Minihan contacted Beckett around the time he was writing *Ill Seen Ill Said* in 1980 with the details of his Athy project in the hopes of taking some portraits of the author. Beckett responded and expressed his desire to view the wake photos in particular ("A Visual Essayist"). Beckett was impressed by Minihan's work and is reported to have called the photos of Katy Tyrrell's wake "important" ("John Minihan Tells All About His Famous Samuel Beckett Photograph"). Minihan went on to take several famous photos of Beckett in London and Paris in the 1980s. The visual aspects of Beckett's description of the old woman in *Ill Seen Ill Said* resemble Minihan's close up portrait of Katy Tyrrell as her body was laid out in her home. The description of the protagonist's face as an "ancient mask" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 56) in the story recalls the stark and weathered quality of Katy Tyrrell's face as it is captured in Minihan's photographs. Beckett's focus on the woman's "dead still" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 60) hands and, later, her "old frantic fingers" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 75), also suggests the prominence of Katy Tyrrell's hands posed in the sign of prayer in Minihan's work. Moreover, the repetition of "dead still" to describe the old woman's hair, hands and posture recall the peaceful dignity of Katy Tyrrell's body as captured by Minihan. Beckett's story seems to echo Minihan's photographic record of the dying tradition of the Irish wake. The portrayal of the old woman who lingers somewhere between life and death in *Ill Seen Ill Said* of course already raises questions about her liminal existential status but reading the text in conjunction with Minihan's images suggests a connection with the Irish funeral tradition of the wake which is difficult to ignore.

The story unfolds in a perpetual evening that is described by the narrator as the "death again of a deathless day" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 65). At one stage, the narrator expresses a desire to

> close the eye for good and see her […] Close it for good and all and see her to death. Unremittent. In the shack. Over the stones. In the pastures. The haze. At the tomb. And back. And the rest. For good and all. To death. Be shut of it all. On to the next. Next figment. (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 59)

Gone are the autobiographical narrators of the *Trilogy* and even the relatively confident narrative voice of *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead Imagine*. In one of Beckett's final texts, these voices are replaced with a narrator who possesses no power over their protagonist. Instead, the narrator exists in the same deathly twilight as the old woman and is unable to conclude the narrative or direct the figure depicted in any way. There is a sense then that the events of *Ill Seen Ill Said* take place beyond the realm of the living though not quite definitively in the underworld. Death pervades every moment, action and posture while the author remains wholly unsure of the unfortunate creature that he observes.

Nevertheless, in these late fictions the narrators still struggle to retain control over the characters depicted. Unlike the subjective accounts of dying in the *Trilogy* and the detailed visions of the dead in the prose pieces of the 1960s, the protagonist of *Ill Seen Ill Said* is completely untethered from the rule of the narrator's eye. This is evident when the woman leaves her home to lay a bunch of "withered crocuses" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 59) at the tomb of some unnamed, deceased loved one. Matthews suggests that it is the protagonist's visits to the tomb in *Ill Seen Ill Said* which "take her out of the gaze" (196) of the narrator who attempts to tell her story; Cohn notes "inside or out, in crocus time or snowfall, [the protagonist] erupts suddenly and cannot be summoned at the narrator's will" (*A Beckett Canon* 365). The narrator bewails the times when he can no longer conjure up the image of the old woman:

> Times when she is gone. Long lapses of time. At crocus time it would be making for the distant tomb […] But she can be gone at any time. From one moment of the year to the next suddenly no longer there. No longer anywhere to be seen. Not by the eye of flesh nor by other. (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 51)

During these times, the narrator admits that all he can do is "wait for her to reappear. In order to resume" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 51) the narrative. Yet the narrator appears uncertain of what it is that he needs to resume once the protagonist has finally reappeared: "resume the – what is the word?" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 51). Just when hope seems to fade for the narrator, the protagonist always reappears from the margins of the scene: "at first sight little changed. It is evening […] she emerges at the fringe of the pastures and sets forward across them" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 55). Whereas the bodies of the *Fancy Dying* texts were confined to tombs which the narrator could observe at all times, the protagonist of *Ill Seen Ill Said* seems to exceed the scope of the narrator's vision and he struggles to retain her as a "pure figment" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 53). The division between the creator and the created begins to blur and any notion of a relationship based on the narrator's authority begins to crumble. Just as the protagonist is caught somewhere between life and death, "this old so dying woman" who is also "so dead" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 53), the story itself is suspended between these two states. Cohn suggests that the result of this "simultaneous dying of a character and a story" (*A Beckett Canon* 366) is that "the whole story seethes with outrage against human mortality" (*A Beckett Canon* 368).

The protagonist continues to fade in and out of the narrator's vision throughout the story. As the narrator loses control over the comings and goings of the protagonist, his grasp of language also fades. Cohn suggests that the narrator eventually "absorbs the death wish of its protagonist" (*A Beckett Canon* 367) and this is nowhere more evident than at the point when the narrator expresses a wish to scrap the narrative about the woman, "all the ill seen ill said"

(*Ill Seen Ill Said* 72), since the story's "eye has changed" along with its "drivelling scribe" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 72). Towards the end of the story, the protagonist disappears from view once more. In her absence, the narrator attempts to describe the chair which she occupies only to find that the physical world he has constructed is slowly dissipating along with the character: "she suddenly no longer there. Where suddenly fled. Quick then the chair before she reappears. At length. Every angle. With what one word convey its change? Careful. Less. Ah the sweet one word. Less. It is less. The same but less" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 73). When the narrator attempts to describe the "glare" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 73) of the scene, he finds that language itself is faltering and his struggle to enunciate is likened to a patient who experiences difficulty urinating: "Less. It is less […] See now how words too. A few drops mishaphazard. Then strangury" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 73). All the narrator can conjure up now are "a few drops" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 73) before he experiences a linguistic impasse. Yet the narrator welcomes this loss of language as a "divine prospect" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 73) since it will hasten the termination of the protagonist's existence and of his own narrative: "To say the least. Less. It will end by being no more. By never having been" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 73). Much like earlier Beckettian narrators, the narrator of *Ill Seen Ill Said* attempts to conclude their observations and achieve some sense of finality in the void (Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* 367).

Buoyed by the prospect of this ending, the narrator tries to hurry onward and bring the story to its conclusion: "Enough. Quicker […] Minimally less. No more. Well on the way to inexistence […] And of her? As much. Quick find her again" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 74). Earlier in the story, "a scrap of paper" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 64) found in an old "antique coffer" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 62) contained a fragment of writing "in barely legible ink" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 64). The fragment consisted of "two letters followed by a number" which the narrator reckons might be

"Tu 17. Or Th. Tu or Th 17" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 64). Apart from what looks to be a potential day and date, the page was "otherwise blank. Otherwise empty" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 64). Before the conclusion of the story, the narrator returns to this scrap of paper and imagines it between the tips of the protagonist's "old frantic fingers" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 75) before she proceeds to "hack [it] into shreds" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 75) with a knife. The destruction of the scrap of paper represents both an annihilation of time, given that the scrap contained a rudimentary record of a date, and the narrative itself. This destruction of blank paper seems to signify a wish that no more stories will be written down. Not long after the destruction of the page the narrator calls for "a great leap forward into what brief future remains" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 75). In the concluding pages, the narrator further doubts the language he uses to construct the narrative as he deems the words "too weak […] Too wrong" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 77). A couple of paragraphs later the narrator struggles to form a coherent sentence that would accurately describe his current disintegration and instead quotes a phrase from the opening line of *Fizzle 8*: "what is the wrong word? For the last time at last for to end yet again what the wrong word?" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 77-8). Matthews suggests that this incoherence is a result of death itself invading the boundaries of the text. He argues that "even when death is not the ostensible subject of these late works […] it keeps coming back through its disruption of formal coherence" (189). Simultaneously, the iris of the narrator's eye begins to blacken "as if engulfed by the pupil" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 77) until all that is left are "two black blanks" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 77). As the narrative vision clouds and darkens, the narrator worries over whether or not they will be able to finally repudiate the story of the old woman in the zone of stones: "And what if the eye could not? No more tear itself away from the remains of trace. Of what was never" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 77).

The narrator attempts to abandon these lofty ruminations in the concluding passages when the narrator repeats the line "On earth's face" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 77) twice in the penultimate paragraph which of course also recalls Hamm's declaration that "you're on earth, there's no cure for that!" (*CDW* 118) in *Endgame*. A sort of resolve is reached and the narrator forces himself to bid adieu to what remains of his protagonist: "quick say it suddenly […] say farewell. If only to the face" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 77). Eventually the images recede from the narrator's eye, they dispel "a little very like the last wisps of day when the curtain closes […] by slow millimetres or drawn by a phantom hand" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 78), and all that is left for them to do is to say "farewell to farewell" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 78) and embrace the "first last moment" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 78) of death. Yet there is still an impulse to play the role of author and creator. Instead of destroying the story, the narrator promises to let only enough of the story remain so that it will devour the rest ("grant only enough remain to devour all"). However, then he appears to falter and wish for "one moment more. One last. Grace to breathe the void. Know happiness" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 78).

Whereas *Company* abolished any sense of location or space from the story, *Ill Seen Ill Said* pursues this enterprise further by exploring the death of the voice's ability to narrate. While death remains the ostensible theme of *Ill Seen Ill Said*, the breakdown of the relationship between the narrator and the narrated exemplifies Matthews' claim that death itself informs the very structures of these later texts. *Ill Seen Ill Said* also features what could be interpreted as more direct allusions to a historical setting than the other texts in the *Nohow On* trilogy. The "zone of stones" (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 49) in which the woman lives can be read as the shelled out ruins of a European settlement of which she is the sole survivor while the twelve spectral figures who surround the woman could be seen as the ghosts of the recently killed or, in a more sinister

tone, as some unseen, invisible authority which threatens the woman's feeble existence. While the prospect of atrocity is no longer as imminent here as it was in the novels of the 1950s or the *Fancy Dying* texts of the 1960s, its presence can be felt in the catastrophe of fiction; these stories feature a loss of formal coherence and of authorial control over their subject. In the final text from the *Nohow On* trilogy, there is a further failure of the narrative form as language and the narrator's will to continue his task appears to disintegrate.

"Nothing Else Ever": *Worstward Ho* and the Final Struggle With Language

Knowlson claims that Beckett began work on the final novella of the *Nohow On* trilogy, *Worstward Ho*, in August 1981 with the now famous lines "Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Fail again. Fail better" (*Worstward Ho* 81). In a sense, these lines could be read as Beckett's reflections on his own post-*Trilogy* fiction. Perhaps Beckett believed himself to have been unsuccessful in his task to break free from the subjective narratives about death or the other aesthetic aims that underlay the *Trilogy* but resolved to forge ahead, to "fail again. Fail better" (*Worstward Ho* 81), once more with the final story of the *Nohow On* trilogy. *Worstward Ho* may bear some similarities to the other two novellas of this period; indeed Cohn notes how the story is typical of Beckett's late prose as "the narrator attempts to summon a body in a place; an 'it' in a dim light whose source is unfathomable" (*A Beckett Canon* 375), but it also demands attention as an example of the complete failure of the narrative enterprise as it has been understood up to this point. The first draft, written in English, took Beckett seven months to complete and was the source of much anguish for the author who admitted that he was "struggling with [the] impossible prose" of the story (qtd. in Knowlson 677). Knowlson suggests that, much like *Ill Seen Ill Said*, *Worstward Ho* is ostensibly concerned with "the failure of language: when anything is said, it must inevitably be missaid" and where "language

is deliberately pared down" and confused as "nouns are used as verbs, verbs as nouns, adverbs as adjectives" (675). The story is "a bold encounter with language, infinity and the void" which portrays a consciousness which is irreparably ruined but "still alive" (Knowlson 676-7). Whereas *Ill Seen Ill Said* maintained some semblance of an external world which featured the woman, a tomb, pastures and a cottage, *Worstward Ho* is a deeply internalised story resembling the bleak and indeterminate setting of *Company*. Brater suggests that *Worstward Ho* eschews representation of an external reality in order to portray "the profoundly internal mystery that is deeply embedded in the act of saying anything at all" (135). Indeed, Brater's suggestion that the language of Beckett's final trilogy "has been threatening to close in on itself" (138) is nowhere more evident than in the opening passages of this final story where the narrator appears hemmed in by the constant intrusion of the word "on": "On. Say on. Be said on. Somehow on. Till nohow on. Said nohow on" (*Worstward Ho* 81). Although "on" may be read as a declaration of progress, its constant intrusion in the text actually prevents the narrative from moving toward something more fruitful and reinforces themes of non-progression and futility.

Much like *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead Imagine*, the story begins with the narrator attempting to summon an image of a body within a space: "Say a body. Where none […] A place. Where none" (*Worstward Ho* 81). The narrator seems to wrestle with what was ostensibly Beckett's fictional obsession from the 1960s onwards until he becomes tired of this enterprise: "First the body. No. First the place. No. First both […] So on. Somehow on. Till sick of both" (*Worstward Ho* 81). Three figures eventually emerge from the narrator's pained attempts to create. While the narrators of the *Fancy Dying* texts exhibited a documentarian drive and were able to conjure up images of fully formed bodies in an age of intense press coverage of the testimony provided by survivors of Auschwitz, the narrator of *Worstward Ho* seems

remote from such engagements. Although a place and a time are no longer discernible here, the human body remains a constant although now it can only be imagined in a reduced form. The voice of *Worstward Ho* struggles to document fully formed bodies and instead tries to imagine bones: "Say bones. No bones but say bones" (*Worstward Ho* 82). The voice here also struggles to imagine a fully formed setting for this meagre body to inhabit: "Say ground. No ground but say ground" (*Worstward Ho* 82). What we are left with in *Worstward Ho* is an author admitting that all they can hope to achieve is "at most minimum. Meremost minimum" (*Worstward Ho* 82).

It is difficult to identify any story or action in *Worstward Ho* but it becomes clear that the narrator conjures up three figures. The first figure is in constant pain so they must rise and stand: "the bones may pain till no choice but stand […] Pain of bones till no choice but up and stand. Somehow up. Somehow stand" (*Worstward Ho* 82). Next, the narrator impels themselves to "say another" and envisages a figure with "head sunk on crippled hands" and "eyes clenched" (*Worstward Ho* 83). This second figure is imagined as the creator of the scene, the "germ of all" (*Worstward Ho* 83), but is condemned to be a "shade with the other shades. In the same dim. The same narrow void" (*Worstward Ho* 87) as their creations. This huddled figure soon stands "in the dim light source unknown" while the narrator struggles to articulate the appearance of the figure's stature with a frustrated and obstructed syntax: "downcast eyes. Clenched eyes. Staring eyes. Clenched staring eyes" (*Worstward Ho* 83). Finally, an image of "an old man and a child" who are "hand in hand" emerge from the "dim void bit by bit" (*Worstward Ho* 84). With their "backs turned" and "both bowed", the old man and the child "plod on as one. One shade" (*Worstward Ho* 84) before the narrative returns to the second figure with its "head sunk on crippled hands" (*Worstward Ho* 84). The three figures disappear and

reappear with little warning or pattern over the next few passages: “Fade back. Now the one. Now the twain. No. Sudden go. Sudden back. Now the one. Now the twain. Now both” (*Worstward Ho* 85). The “germ of all” (*Worstward Ho* 87) emerges as a sort of protagonist of the piece as many of the disappearances, reappearances, conjectures, reflections and struggles of the narrator all return to this figure. Later, the narrator describes “the sunken skull. The crippled hands. Clenched staring eyes. Clenched eyes clamped to clenched staring eyes” (*Worstward Ho* 89) and impels themselves to “be that shade again. In that shade again. With the other shades” (*Worstward Ho* 89). Further evidence that the figure with “clenched staring eyes” (*Worstward Ho* 89) may be considered a sort of narrator-protagonist is found later in the story when they are described as “scene and seer of all” (*Worstward Ho* 90).

The space where the story takes place is the typical “unchanging” (*Worstward Ho* 86) Beckettian void but now the narrator seems exhausted of all desire or will to accurately describe it. In *Company*, the narrator makes some attempt to describe the space in which the protagonist finds himself such as when he imagines him “lying on the floor of a hemispherical chamber of generous diameter with ear dead centre” (*Company* 20). However, by the time we reach *Worstward Ho*, the narrator struggles to even attempt a description of the space these figures find themselves in: “The void. How try say? How try fail? No try no fail” (*Worstward Ho* 86). Here we see the death of even the narrator’s will to fulfil their role as narrator; if they do not try, they will not fail like their previous efforts. At other times, attempts to describe the void only end up recycling descriptions from other Beckettian texts. For example, one attempted description resembles the rubber tube inhabited by the legions of undead in *The Lost Ones*: “Say a pipe in that void. A tube. Sealed. Then in that pipe or tube that selfsame dim. Dimly seen” (*Worstward Ho* 90). In this sense, the author seems to have entirely lost his creative faculties;

either he refuses to attempt a description of the void or he rehashes descriptions from previous texts. What is left then is a narrator who will "know no more. See no more. Say no more" (*Worstward Ho* 87).

The narrator urges himself to go on "somehow on. Anyhow on" (*Worstward Ho* 91) since "all cannot go" (*Worstward Ho* 91). Soon, he begins to question the source of the words he is speaking. Much like Molloy's uncertainty surrounding the originality of his testimony, there are also question marks over the origin of the language of *Worstward Ho*; early in the story the narrator questions "whose words" he speaks, but admits that he asks "in vain" (*Worstward Ho* 88). The central dramatic tension of the story is revealed in the final third when an internal debate about the meaning and legitimacy of language takes centre stage (Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* 376). The narrator admits that their story continues "anyhow on" but with "worsening words" (92). With the disintegration of their ability to use language, the narrator even questions what would happen if they were to somehow run out of words: "What when words gone? None for what then. No words for what when words gone" (*Worstward Ho* 93). Eventually there is a complete breakdown of language which effects the syntactical and grammatical structure of the story itself:

> Enough still not to know, not to know what they say. Not to know what it is the words it says say. Says? Secretes. Say better worse secretes. What is the words it secretes say […] No knowing what it is the words it secretes say. No saying. No saying what it all is they somehow say (*Worstward Ho* 93-4).

The image of language being "secreted", rather than enunciated, by an ailing subject is reiterated toward the conclusion of the story, when speech is described as oozing from "some soft mind" (*Worstward Ho* 95).

The narrative of *Wostward Ho* now seems unable to move beyond these impotent attempts to ascribe detail to the void in which the shades find themselves. But this time, the narrator focuses on the failure of such an enterprise rather than trying to achieve any success: "Ooze on back not to unsay but say again the vasts apart […] say seen again. The vasts of void apart. Of all so far missaid the worse missaid" (*Worstward Ho* 97). All that has been achieved by both author and narrator is a fundamental "missaying" of situation, subject and place as both Beckett and his narrators have only succeeded in the failure of their literary enterprises. With the realisation of the failure of language comes the acceptance of this failure, "said is missaid. Whenever said said said missaid" (*Worstward Ho* 97), such that all meaning is evacuated from language: "the say? The said? Same thing. Same nothing. Same all but nothing" (*Worstward Ho* 98).

The narrator struggles to conjure up any remaining images before the conclusion of the story. Although these shades "cannot go" (*Worstward Ho* 99), they can drift in and out of focus ("Shades can blur" (*Worstward Ho* 99)), and it is due to this that the narrator struggles to retain authorial control over their subjects. Like the narrator of *Ill Seen Ill Said*, the narrator of *Worstward Ho* begins to lose focus and sight of their shades. The old man and child appear only as "blurs in stare" (*Worstward Ho* 101) to the "two black holes" (*Worstward Ho* 101) where eyes once were. The pained bundle of bones from the beginning of the story reappears this time with "legs gone" (*Worstward Ho* 102). The narrator's attention oscillates between these figures: "one blur. One clear. Dim clear. Now the one. Now the other" (*Worstward Ho* 102). Even the omnipresent void which permeates much of Beckett's later prose is called into question at the end of *Worstward Ho*: "All save void. No. Void too. Unworsenable void. Never less. Never more. Never since first said never unsaid never worse said never not gnawing to be gone"

(*Worstward Ho* 100). Despite recognising the futility of their narrative and meaningless of their language, the narrator still notes the presence of these shades who still persist in the void: "nothing but ooze how nothing and yet" (*Worstward Ho* 102). The final image to appear before the narrator is the clearest and recalls the protagonist from *Ill Seen Ill Said.* In the end, the narrator disintegrates into a "black hole agape on all" who is "inletting all" and "outletting all" (*Worstward Ho* 102) and they describe a woman "old and yet old" who is "on unseen knees" (*Worstward Ho* 102). A certain poignancy is achieved as the final and clearest image of the entire story is that of an old woman mourning at the grave of loved one. Even though the identity of the deceased and their dates of birth and death have long been erased by the void, "Names gone and when to when" (*Worstward Ho* 102), the old woman remains "Stooped as loving memory some old gravestones stoop. In that old graveyard […] Stoop mute over the graves of none" (*Worstward Ho* 102). In the final paragraph, the narrator and three shades are reduced to "three pins. One pinhole" (*Worstward Ho* 103) doomed to forever occupy the "dimmost dim. Vasts apart. At bounds of boundless void" (*Worstward Ho* 103). The story concludes with a verbal tongue twister as the narrator attempts to sum up their experience of narrating the void: "Best worse no farther. Nohow less. Nohow worse. Nohow naught. Nohow on. Said nohow on" (*Worstward Ho* 103).

Conclusion

Beckett's representation of death and dying have dominated much of the critical discussion of his work going back as far as the initial reviews of *Molloy* in the 1950s. Recent criticism has also exhibited a fascination with the author's obsession with dying narrators, dead protagonists and all those Beckettian voices who find themselves somewhere in between. It is easy to see why themes of mortality have dominated discussions of Beckett from the very beginning; all of

his major fictional works have featured some iteration of a dying or possibly dead narrator who relays their experiences, uncertainties and anxieties about the status of their identity as a mortal being. Much of Beckett's drama and radio plays also feature characters navigating their way through a world of decay and disintegration. From *Waiting for Godot* to *Endgame* and *Happy Days*, the exact existential status of the main characters of Beckett's drama is uncertain and one interpretation would suggest that they all exist in some purgatorial afterlife ignorant of their apparent deaths. Another reading of the desolate settings of the dramatic and fictional works, forwarded most notably by Adorno, asserts that Beckett's works takes place in the aftermath of some unnamed mass catastrophe. For Adorno, and many later critics such as Jones, the catastrophe that Beckett leaves as the unnamed context of his work is WWII and the Holocaust. Considering these events as the setting for Beckett's works, critics such as Jones and Morin have explored the extent to which the author's fiction can be read in this context especially in relation to the forms of testimonial writing and accounts of victims which emerged in the years after the war.

In *Molloy*, we have identifiable narrators who give form to their experience of disintegration and death and who also exhibit a compulsion to record their thoughts and reflections in a relatively coherent narrative. Although Moran's half of the novel begins to omit several details of his story that Molloy deemed to be important earlier, this is explained by the numerous hints about the ultimately non-progressive, Sisyphean nature of their stories. In this respect, the narrative recounted can be regarded as the testimony of a victim; identifiable narrators recount their traumas in a style resembling a historical testimony or a personal journal. In this first phase of death in Beckett's fiction, we have subjective narratives about the experience of dying which, according to Morin, combine "the conventions of detective fiction

[with those of] autobiography, travel narrative and testimony" (172). The identifiable narrator who provides first-person, subjective accounts of their experience of dying begins to disappear by the time we reach to post-*Trilogy* fiction. Novels like *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*, with their continually expanding host of voices, characters and narrators, complicate the relatively coherent first-person testimonies of Molloy and Moran in the earlier novel. The disintegration of the narrative "I" which had been threatening to abolish the conventions of the traditional novel in the later texts of the *Trilogy*, finds its fullest expression in *Texts for Nothing*. Death and dying remain the ostensible concern of this collection of short texts but they also impact on the form of *Texts for Nothing* due to the "constant disappearance of the speaking subject" (Jones, *Beckett and Testimony* 25) and subsequent loss of narrative coherence.

The absence of an identifiable narrator becomes characteristic of the short stories which were born out of Beckett's failed novel *Fancy Dying* in the 1960s. As discussed earlier, these texts are extremely significant in any discussion of Beckett and post-Holocaust Europe as they are written during a time when there was intense media coverage of the testimony of concentration camp survivors provided at the Eichmann Trial in 1961 and the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials in 1963-65. Moreover, a version of these two stories appeared alongside Wasler's critique of the media's focus on survivor testimony in *Kursbuch*. In *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead Imagine*, Beckett dispenses with the subjective accounts of dying which characterised the earlier texts and portrays a more objective and abstract narrative voice which attempts to describe bodies as they inhabit tombs and rotundas in a development that almost seems to mirror or anticipate the descriptive language and testimony heard at the trials. These two texts usher in a new treatment of death in Beckett's fiction characterised by a greater distance between the narrators and their subjects. Beckett makes a discernible attempt to

distance his work from the earlier subjective accounts of dying and adopts a more observational and abstract view of the human body as it is mortally incapacitated. The spaces of these texts are very carefully detailed and the entire dramatic tension rests on the narrator's struggles to arrive at what they consider to be an adequate or accurate depiction of the bodies and how they occupy this space. In this sense, Beckett moves beyond the narrative *aporia* of the earlier fiction and exhibits a more documentarian drive in his works.

It becomes less clear how contemporaneous historical events may be registered in the short fiction of the 1970s and 1980s although many of the aesthetic features developed in the 1960s continue to evolve in these later texts. The obsession with the carefully described spaces, an aspect of Beckett's later work also exhibited in texts like *The Lost Ones*, is seemingly done away with in *Fizzle 8*. Instead of the careful and detailed descriptions of bodies in tombs, *Fizzle 8* is more abstract and surreal in its setting. A skull sits alone on a plank in a vast, post-apocalyptic desert which is occupied by a small, grey body and two white dwarfs who meander about the scene with a stretcher in hand. While death is not necessarily a central theme of *Fizzle 8*, indeed it would be difficult to discern *what* the ostensible theme of the text actually is, the story exemplifies Matthews' claims that mortality impinges on Beckett's later texts through its disruption of formal and narrative coherence. Rather than serving as a testimony of a dying character's final days or a more objective exploration of images of human bodies, *Fizzle 8* dramatizes the breakdown of Beckett's fictional enterprise. Death is evident in the very setting of the story – the desolate post-apocalyptic wasteland – and the ambiguous and uncertain relationship between the three figures in the story. In a sense, *Fizzle 8* pre-empts the complete disintegration of the relationship between the narrator and the story that occurs in the *Nohow On* trilogy.

The *Nohow On* trilogy traces the final disintegration and termination of Beckett's fiction. The first novella of the trilogy, *Company*, sees the disappearance of a discernible space and locale in stark contrast to the carefully detailed spaces of *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead Imagine*. Instead, *Company* takes place in a featureless void in which the narrator struggles to perceive specific physical detail of any kind. *Ill Seen Ill Said* sees a further disintegration of the fictional form as the narrator loses authority over the protagonist that he narrates. While the story takes place in a more identifiable, although still ambiguous and otherworldly, setting, the protagonist comes and goes independent of the wishes of the narrator and her disappearance is the source of much anxiety and anguish resulting in the narrator's loss of trust in the power of language to call the inexistent into being. *Worstward Ho* concludes the *Nohow On* trilogy and dramatizes the death of all the constituent elements of fiction. The language is decayed and ruined, unable to progress beyond the monosyllabic obstacle of "on". The narrator admits to losing all will to continue their narrative and the text eventually dissipates into a formless "black hole" (*Worstward Ho* 102), which is in no way conducive to any exercise of human critical or imaginative faculties but is instead "agape […] Inletting all. Outletting all" (*Worstward Ho* 102).

Conclusion: “Oh all to end”

The theme of human mortality pervades the works of many prominent Irish modernists such as Flann O'Brien, Elizabeth Bowen and Máirtín Ó Cadhain. Much of the action of Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* (published posthumously in 1967) takes place after the death of its protagonist, Bowen's *The Last September* (1929) is haunted by the prospect of doom and destruction while Ó Cadhain's Irish language novel *Cré na Cille* (1949, later translated into English as *Graveyard Clay*) takes place in the grounds of a local graveyard where the dead, lying in their coffins, spend their time gossiping about their lives and those still living above the ground. Given how important death is in Irish modernism, this thesis initially sought to find the parallels, convergences and similarities in how Joyce and Beckett represented human mortality in the aftermath of historical atrocity in their fiction. Yet, as we have seen, these writers approach the topic of death from vastly different perspectives and, consequently, represent different kinds of dying.

For Joyce, death is a communal event in a modernising, post-Famine Irish culture. In *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*, Joyce recreates a society coming to terms with the new ideas, technologies and worldviews of modernity. Yet the Ireland of these texts is also one deeply influenced by the ideology of a repressive Catholic Church which had garnered even greater control over the Irish populace in the years after the Great Hunger. In this context, the newspaper obituary became an innovative way of memorialising the deceased which was in keeping with both the growing ubiquity of modern print culture and the Church's attempts to find more respectable ways of commemorating the deceased than the traditional Irish wake. Throughout *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*, death seems inseparably linked to modern print culture as the living read about the deceased in death notices, newspaper reports and obituaries. In *Dubliners*, the printed report of death has huge ramifications for the boy narrator of "The Sisters" and Duffy in "A

Painful Case". *Ulysses* further explores and imaginatively exploits the connection between material print culture and death. The novel records the writing and publication of Dignam's obituary; it also demonstrates how profoundly impactful ways of writing about death can be. Bloom's final reflections on his father's death in the penultimate episode of the novel merges the form of the obituary with the precise language of the Catholic Catechism and the scientific textbook. The mechanical listing of the deceased and the details of their deaths occurs a number of times throughout the novel. This shows how the formal conventions of the newspaper obituary impinged on the very ways in which these characters deal with the news of human mortality. While I have suggested that the memory of the Famine is present more so in Joyce's depictions of the type of repressive Irish culture which resulted from the events of the 1840s, the spectre of the famine, with its threat of unburied dead, reusable coffins and food shortages, still hauntingly intrudes on Joyce's representations of Irish life, particularly in episodes like "Hades" and "Lestrygonians", some sixty years after the Great Hunger.

Yet the Irish funeral wake, which the church fought so hard to eliminate in the years after the Famine, persists to this day albeit in more respectable and constrained forms. The wake not only survived the Church's attempts to erase it from Irish funerary practices but it has also remained a centrepiece of representations of death in Irish cinema, photography and literature. As discussed earlier, some of Minihan's most famous images from his Athy project include those of the wake of Katy Tyrrell in 1977. More recently, Kevin Toolis's *My Father's Wake* (2017) describes the persistence of wake practices on Achill Island including the deathbed vigil and the keening woman, the *bean chaointe*, whose role is to lead the decades of the rosary (201). Twenty-first century Irish novels such as *The Gathering* (2007) by Anne Enright and John McGahern's *That They May Face The Rising Sun* (2002) also feature extended wake scenes in

which many of the traditions of the past are observed. This all goes to show that, far from being eliminated from the cultural consciousness, the wake remains a focal point for how we think about and represent death in Irish culture.

The newspaper obituary which was supposed to represent a more civilized way of commemorating the deceased also continues to be a vital aspect of funerary practices in Ireland. Moreover, the advent of the internet in the 1990s and 2000s saw further innovations in modes of commemorating the deceased. In 2005, the website RIP.ie was set up as a sort of modern development of the traditional death notice and obituary. The website publishes death notices of the recently deceased from all around Ireland and features a complete database of entries searchable by location, name or date. Additionally, the site also features a directory of funeral service providers, a section on practical advice for grieving families and an online memorial gift shop. The popularity of RIP.ie in an age where the internet has replaced the newspaper as a ubiquitous source of information in Irish society attests to the continued influence formalised ways of writing about death have on how we learn about and cope with human mortality.

Beckett's representations of death are informed by an entirely different sense of historical atrocity. However, there is always the danger of eliding the importance of Ireland when reading Beckett's fiction in the context of European history. It is true that Ireland is an obscured and transient presence in Beckett's works only gestured at in fleeting references and veiled allusions. Yet it would not be fair to say that the author's home country did not play an important role in his development as a writer. As Eagleton and Lloyd pointed out in the introduction, while Ireland is rarely dealt with in an explicit manner, the "memory of famished Ireland" (Eagleton 70-1) remains deeply embedded in the confused country sides, desolate wastelands and suffocating, closed spaces of Beckett's fiction. Indeed, Michael Wood suggests

that traces of Ireland can be detected even in the "placeless world[s]" (171) of Beckett's late work in a mode of "semantic suggestion rather than parallel relation" (173). Of course Beckett would never definitively return to a clear depiction of Ireland in his later work but the various autobiographical details and, as Wood points out, the reference to Erse, another name for the Gaelic language, in *Company* at least hint towards the country of his birth.

Ireland also seemed to be on the author's mind as he approached his own death. In a recent article in *The Guardian*, Edna O'Brien recalls a particularly poignant exchange with Beckett in which "Beckett's true feelings about Ireland – so complex, and so long buried – came to light" (McCrum, "Another Side of Samuel Beckett"). O'Brien recalls the encounter:

> I said, "Where are you going to be buried?" He said: "Here in Paris." I said: "Not Ireland? Your works are strewn with Irish graves." He said: "No, no. I'm not going back." He was very determined. I said: "I am. I own a grave, a lovely grave." He was most puzzled and almost disapproving: "So you're going back for an eternal dose of disgust?" Even though Ireland was in his blood and his bones, he was full of little vengeances ("Another Side of Samuel Beckett").

Beckett's aversion at the thought of being buried in Ireland is ironic given Edna O'Brien's observation that his work is full of Irish graves. Of course, Beckett's exile from Ireland would be complete and eternal and the fact that his resting place is not included among those Irish graves that litter his work is perhaps the only fitting conclusion for an author who struggled to clarify his relationship with his home country.

John Montague too recalls visiting Beckett in the months before his death when the author spoke his ailing health with a particular "Irishism" which did not escape his visitor. Montague writes:

> he is now slowed, slowed considerably, to the dragging gait of one of his own characters […] "And how are you?" I ask. "I'm done." A phrase I have not heard since my aunt Mary lay dying, but the Irishism comes as naturally to him. […] "I'm done," again, with the same vehemence. "But it takes such a long time […] I sat beside my father when he was dying. Fight, fight, fight, he kept saying. But I have no fight left ("A Few Drinks and a Hymn: My Farewell to Samuel Beckett")

Even in his final days, it would appear that "Ireland was in his blood and his bones" ("Another Side of Samuel Beckett"), as Edna O'Brien would put it. Despite his wishes to be rid of Ireland forever, Beckett could not avoid the intrusion of a particular Irish idiom when discussing his own impeding death. Critics like Eagleton and Lloyd may be correct in their assertions that, while we cannot speak of an "Irish Beckett", Ireland nevertheless looms large over the author's work.

That being said, I have read death in Beckett's works within the context of the Holocaust of the 1940s. While it is not immediately clear how representations of death in Beckett's fiction can be read in relation to the atrocity of the Holocaust, he was, nevertheless, a "survivor of the concentrationary universe" (Cohen 55) and the memory of that atrocity heavily informs representations of death in his fiction. Early versions of *The End* include allusions to the plight of Jewish victims of the concentration camps upon their return to France and was published alongside reports of the Nuremburg Trials in *Les Temps Modernes*. *Molloy* and, by extension, the other two novels of the *Trilogy*, depict the "frenzied collapsing" (*Molloy* 143) of its protagonists as they struggle to document their experiences of dying. The confused states of these characters and their relation to their own mortality endorses Adorno's contention that the industrial-scale mass murder in the concentration camps destroyed the notion of death as something "conformable" (*Negative Dialectics* 362) with life. Building on the works of Morin and Jones, I have argued that these narratives also represent the impossible origins of survivor

testimony of the concentration camps. Just as those who survived the camps had to recall their experiences in the place of those died, the narratives of *Molloy* too seem to issue from an impossible time just before, during or after death. *Texts For Nothing* represents an even more radical dislocation of voice and identity as the concept of a singular narrator almost entirely dissolves after the *Trilogy*.

Representations of death shift in Beckett's fiction from the 1960s onwards. Whereas the novels of the 1950s focus on the disintegration of a singular voice as it attempts to narrate the experience of dying from the impossible the standpoint of the moment of death itself, the short fiction of the 1960s instead moves toward more abstract and documentarian depictions of bodies. This shift in Beckett's fiction coincides with the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials and the debates surrounding the trial and media's focus on the horrifyingly detailed survivor accounts of what happened in the concentration camps. Beckett's fiction in this period appears to respond to these new details of the camps by purging the texts of the subjective experience of dying and adopting a style of alienated clinical objectivity.

In the works of both of these authors, the spectre of recent historical atrocity can be acutely felt in their representations of human mortality. In Joyce, the memory of the Famine persists in both veiled allusions to the famished dead and in his representation of the type of Irish culture which resulted from the catastrophe. The change in death practices and social attitudes towards human mortality is registered in Joyce's playful commentary on and parodic use of the modern newspaper obituary. In Beckett's fiction, the Holocaust bears heavily on the deathly states of his protagonists and narrators. In the 1960s, as more survivor testimony and details about what occurred in the concentration camps became public knowledge, Beckett's fictional representation of death changes. That is not to say that Beckett literally represented

these events and details in his work but the shift in the author's depictions of death suggestively relate to these events as the narrators of these stories become more documentarian in approach and style. Yet this impulse or impetus in Beckett's fiction eventually fades too, as the narrators of the later fictional works lose their capacity to impose any kind of narrative form on such liminal experience.

Finality is something we will all have to face be it the death of a loved one, the sense of anxiety felt at the prospect of our own mortality, or even the conclusion of a Ph.D thesis. Indeed, human mortality has preoccupied authors and artists for thousands of years. As Hermann Hesse writes in the novel *Narcissus and Goldmund*, the fear of death may well be the source of all art:

> the fear of death was perhaps the root of all art, perhaps also of all things of the mind. We fear death, we shudder at life's instability […] when artists create pictures and thinkers search for laws and formulate thoughts, it is in order to salvage something from the great dance of death, to make something that lasts longer than we do (72)

While death as an unknowable and inevitable force of finality has remained a constant throughout history, the ways in which we apprehend death nevertheless change depending on our particular socio-historic moment. Death registered in the works of Joyce is very different from the death we find in the works of Beckett, despite the fact that they were both born in Ireland a mere twenty four years apart. While both authors remained exiles from Ireland, Joyce's work retains the memory of a domestic atrocity which ravaged the country in the 1840s while Beckett's work responds to the European catastrophe of the twentieth century. In the end, the final word should be reserved for Bloom whose remark that "once you are dead you are dead" (*U* 87) is the only known certainty on the subject.

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