FINITUDE, ALTERITY, AND THE NOVEL
NABOKOV, GADDA, BECKETT



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To Debbie and Greg Steinepreis

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Finitude has become a controversial word in French thought since Meillassoux's *Après la finitude* (2006). Beyond finitude's literal meaning ('boundedness') and its philosophical connotations, we can speak of the finitude of a literary form: the novel. Narrative manifests the desire to conclude, rushing inexorably toward its end, yet also demonstrates the desire to prolong itself, showcase infinite discourses, and exert what Barthes calls literature's 'mathetic' power ('l'écriture fait du savoir une fête'). I equate the first drive with narrative's ontological dimension, and the second with its epistemological dimension. My premise is that these twin drives vie more acutely in the novel than in any other literary form, since it is the novel which most consciously follows the trajectory and timeflow of a life, as well as the mind's accumulation of knowledge over that life. This thesis considers finitude in and of seven mid-twentieth century novels across the œuvres of Vladimir Nabokov, Carlo Emilio Gadda, and Samuel Beckett, three authors whose struggle with the finite novelistic form *becomes* their novels in a peculiarly self-conscious way. I seek to illuminate interrelationships between finitude, alterity, and the novel by drawing on philosophical concepts of finitude from Heidegger, Levinas, Blanchot, Merleau-Ponty, Derrida, Bakhtin, Nancy, and Meillassoux. Each of my five chapters examines at least one major feature of textual finitude against a corresponding figure of human finitude: from chapters on Gadda's *La cognizione del dolore*, Beckett's Trilogy, Nabokov's *Sebastian Knight* and *Pnin*, to Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, and finally back to Beckett's Trilogy. In this chiasmic return, I contemplate Nabokov's unworking of textual reality, Gadda's writing-toward-irresolution and constrained creative process, and Beckett's decomposing tendencies and attempt of 'unthinkable' analepses and prolepses across the Trilogy. Ultimately, the thesis asks whether the novel, in its pretensions to 'be' and 'know' where we are not ('que nous soyons ou pas', in Meillassoux's words), becomes something other to itself through its self-reflexive grappling with finitude.

Extended abstract

Finitude has become a controversial word in French philosophical debate since Quentin Meillassoux's *Après la finitude* (2006), yet still awaits a full-length literary study. Not to be conflated with closure, finitude refers to 'boundedness': the state of having limits. Beyond grasping what finitude means for post- or anti-Kantian philosophers like Meillassoux, I advocate that we speak of finitude's aesthetic connotations in the realm of narrative.

Narrative testifies to dual impulses: manifesting the desire to finish, and to write to conclusion, it is on one reading an inexorable movement toward death, as in the argument Peter Brooks advances in 'Freud's Masterplot'; yet it also demonstrates the desire to prolong: to delay, to digress, to showcase an infinite array of discourses, and thus 'fait du savoir une fête', in Roland Barthes's words. We might equate the first drive with narrative's ontological dimension, and the second with its epistemological dimension. My premise is that these twin dimensions conflict most acutely in that literary form which most consciously mimics the trajectory and timeflow of a life, and which emulates the mind's accumulation of knowledge over the course of that life: the novel. In a creative sense, the novel is both ontologically and epistemologically constrained. To write a novel is to recognise finitude, acknowledging the limits of our being and knowing.

Meillassoux's 2006 work re-enlivened the problem of finitude after it had resounded insistently across the work of twentieth-century philosophers including Martin Heidegger, Maurice Blanchot, Emmanuel Levinas, Maurice

Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Jean-Luc Nancy. Attempting to defy Kant's decree that we can never know the world as it is in-itself, never recover the join between now-severed being and thought, and never gain the Great Outdoors ('Grand Dehors') outside our own limits, Meillassoux suggests a possible (mathematical-Cartesian) escape route out of our imprisonment in finitude. Meillassoux's complex solution, received with excitement by thinkers including Alain Badiou, is irrelevant to this thesis. What matters is that the *problem* frustrating Meillassoux is illuminative when reading novels. That is, a student of novelistic finitude might gain insight from various philosophical debates on finitude, which in turn tap into questions of death, resolution, the body, touch, aporia, reality and the real, meaning-manifestation, speech subsiding into silence, anachrony, and temporalities which are impossible or unthinkable for us, among other possible thematics, all of which are central to the works of the three novelists in this thesis.

The mid-twentieth century, and in particular the period from the late 1930s to the late 1950s, witnessed a peak in what Meillassoux calls 'correlationism': the idea that we only have access to the correlation between being and thought, and to neither term in isolation from the other. The language of correlationism tends to seep into the literary works of this time, including explicit references to Kant's seminal *phenomena-noumena* distinction in novels by Vladimir Nabokov, Carlo Emilio Gadda, and Samuel Beckett. Inspired by the discovery of these allusions to Kant, I began to read the works of each novelist as self-conscious engagements with finitude; I now consider this engagement to be their chief commonality, among other important connections including their common historic moment, their shared instinct for plurilingualism, and their

undecidable modernist-postmodernist oscillation. From within their most productive period, I have selected novels which represent the apex of that self-consciousness in each novelist's œuvre: for Nabokov, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and *Pnin*, for Gadda, *La cognizione del dolore* and *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, and for Beckett, the three novels comprising his early Trilogy: *Molloy*, *Malone meurt*, and *L'Innommable*.

The seven texts for study are stylistically diverse. Beckett's novels, hell-bent on 'nothing' and seemingly devoid of almost all contextual markers, exhibit a painstaking minimalism, while Gadda's, spiralling into apparently endless digressions, show the stresses of maximalism (his strategy to include all). Through his artifice, game-playing instincts, and what in Chapter Three I call a 'ruse-upon-a-ruse', Nabokov introduces a possible mid-point between the other two authors, a bridging which the structure of my thesis reflects (though my conclusion complicates this view of Nabokov). In each author's work, I pinpoint an awareness of the drive toward ending which Brooks deems to be inherent in narrative (its desire to yield to its own ontological finitude), yet also identify what Barthes describes as literature's 'mathetic' power (an ability to demonstrate knowledge). If a novel were to protract itself long enough to showcase *all* possible knowledge, it would become something other than a novel, and we would not be reading it. My interest is in the peculiar balancing act the novel achieves between its ontological and epistemological finitude: between its own being and its knowledge.

The thesis initially approaches Gadda and Beckett in two chapters which investigate issues connected to ontological finitude. The third (and longest)

chapter, on Nabokov's novels, argues for the spilling over of ontological into epistemological problems of finitude. Finally, I return to Gadda and Beckett in the fourth and fifth chapters, by which point the interplay of ontology and epistemology has become undeniable. The structure may strike as unexpected; its intent is to 'explode' linear readings of each novelist. Instead of taking a chronological approach to the corpora, I am coming and going, cross-referencing between chapters in an effort to escape from chronological closure. I consider this structural resistance to closure necessary when examining novelists who themselves recognised impossible closure as an important element of their struggle with finitude. Through deconstructing and contrasting various philosophical interpretations, I am able to turn to each author's work with those perspectives which have accumulated in earlier chapters, without allowing any one perspective to take over.

In a thesis which ranges from mortal, bodily, imaginative, and symbolic, to temporal limits, I first attend to the species of finitude which most readily comes to mind when speaking of human boundedness: the finitude of death. To this end, Chapter One focuses on *La cognizone del dolore*, Gadda's first novel. Like his *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, this novel is an unresolved mystery or detective story ('giallo'), which stands out from my corpus for its all-engrossing anxiety ('ansia'). Reading this anxiety as one pursuant not to the finitude of death, but to the infinitude of dying, I analyse the nexus between mortal ending and novelistic resolution. Supporting my analysis with reference to Gadda's *Meditazione milanese*, a treatise which insists on the impossible closure of systems, I turn to Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* to illustrate how the process of being-toward-death (*Sein zum Tode*) might reappear inversely in

Gadda's process of writing an (incomplete) novel. Within the context of *La cognizione*, I then interrogate the relevance of Heidegger's concept of *Sein zum Tode* to the novelist by juxtaposing it with Levinasian and Blanchotian repliques to Heideggerian finitude. Gadda, I suggest, exhibits a writing-toward-*irresolution*: a conscious movement toward non-death.

Expanding on my first chapter's confrontation with mortal finitude, Chapter Two explores another species of finitude inextricable from mortality: the boundedness of the body. I draw on a familiar trope in which the borders of the body correspond with textual bounds, so that when we turn to Beckett's 'rhythm and syntax of extreme weakness', we might speak of both body and text *decomposing*. This imagining of a *corp(u)s*, of both textual and physical bodies interlaced together, is particularly relevant to Beckett's Trilogy. In the three novels *Molloy*, *Malone meurt*, and *L'Innommable*, characters excavate passages to each other via overlapping identities and ongoing voices not commensurate with each text's start and end. To probe the aporetic end of any novel (its simultaneous proffering of a passage out, and withdrawal of that passage) as resembling the aporia of our experience in death, I consider Beckett's vacillation between inventories, stories, and memoirs in light of Derrida's *Apories*. Here, Derrida inquires into the impossibility of writing one's death while experiencing it: a possibility which only fiction can actualise. Noting the tendency of Beckett's narratives to reverse back over each other, negating their initial pretensions toward meaningfulness, I then turn to Merleau-Ponty's concept of the 'chiasme' in *Le Visible et l'invisible*. On my reading, Beckett's narratives fold back over each other and thereby perform a touch, joining up in a chiasmic space where finitude loses its clarity. Finally, I contemplate the possibility that Beckett's

Trilogy, denying readers the kind of 'fictions of concord' we might expect from narrative as described in Kermode's seminal *The Sense of an Ending*, instead 'exscribes' its multitude of bodies on the edge of the text. Failing to posit the death of the narrative *hors-texte*, the Trilogy rather enfolds that supposed outside ('dehors') within itself. To conceive of how the narrators of Beckett's Trilogy attempt to locate death in an elsewhere beyond narrative *while still writing*, I turn to Nancy's writings on exscription, and especially his *Corpus*.

A pivotal chapter, Chapter Three marks the transitional point at which the ontological perspectives of the first two chapters begin to blend with the epistemological concerns defining the last two chapters of the thesis. At this mid-point of the thesis, I examine two works by Nabokov, reading the first (*The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*) as a necessary precursor to the later novel (*Pnin*). Both works agonise over the consequences of shattering ontological 'discreteness', yet make clear that only through 'divestment' from our intact being can we come to know the epistemologically other. Like the fictional author who is subject of the biography in *Sebastian Knight*, Nabokov self-reflexively exposes his own 'methods of composition', so that these methods themselves become the 'heroes' of his work. To explain how (and why) Nabokov exposes his own methods, patterns, and motifs, and thus 'unworks' reality, stripping his texts of layer after layer of meaning, I rely on Blanchot's concept of *désœuvrement*, or worklessness. Reflecting on what Blanchot in *L'Entretien infini* calls the book's inherent 'ruse' (its concealment of writing's inevitable drift toward absence of the book), I suggest that Nabokov self-consciously develops this Blanchotian ruse into an *additional* ruse. In his 'ruse-upon-a-ruse', Nabokov flaunts his unworking of both texts to the point at which

Sebastian Knight's story recedes into absence, and *Pnin*'s retreats into impossibility. Yet Nabokov does not end there: he also projects elements from both novels into a post-textual realm which resists finitude. As I understand his process, Nabokov's novels in turn approximate a movement toward the unknowable or the real, a movement enabled through his withdrawal of The Book (here envisaged as the summit of our ontological and epistemological achievement). In what Nabokov elsewhere declares an 'infinite succession of steps' toward reality, we read one of his novels only to realise that we must open another one in order to progress closer to the unknowable we thought we might realise within its pages.

Chapter Four rethinks the assertion that literature 'fait du savoir une fête', tempering Barthes's claim by recalling that when the carnival is over, the writer must curb epistemological abundance, or risk incompletion of the work. My focus here is on the apparently unlimited font of meaning from which novelists are forced to select when writing. I analyse the constrained emergence of discourses in Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio*, a novel which explodes its borders through a (Baroque) commitment to respect the infinitely different words of others. As well as from Gadda's collection of creative essays *I viaggi la morte*, I seek guidance from Jacques Derrida. Taking up a suggestion by Giuseppe Stellardi, I investigate whether Derrida's writing on *angustia* (the narrow passage from force to form, in which infinite meanings compete in a struggle toward the page) might elucidate the process of Gadda's writing. To shed light on the Baroque's role in Gadda's composition of novels, and specifically in the entwining of his symbolic, metonymic, and linguistic maximalism in what the author calls 'grovigli', I draw on Bakhtin's 'Discourse in the Novel' (from *The*

Dialogic Imagination), where Bakhtin explains that Baroque pathos always seeks to restore some *other* discourse which has been 'lost'. In a reflection on the burst of speech (followed by silence) which ends *Quer pasticciaccio*, I bring together both the sense of *angustia* which permeates Gadda's novel, and an understanding of how the Baroque preserves the words of others, while jeopardising novelistic finitude. Agreeing with Italo Calvino's assertion that Gadda's style is adapted to his 'complex epistemology', I suggest that Gadda's knots of meaning, ravelled up around that which is selected in *angustia*, enable the unspoken word to retain its force before the moment of irruption (which only comes in death) sends the word's allusive 'fili' or threads rolling off in infinite directions.

As the final chapter, Chapter Five circles back to Beckett's Trilogy, focusing on moments in *L'Innommable* in which the unnamed narrator momentarily moots an extratextual temporality ('l'impensable indicible'). To grasp how all three novels 'think the unthinkable' or 'say the unsayable' by accomplishing prolepses and analepses to pasts and futures where the narrator has (avowedly) never existed, nor will ever exist, I go back to Meillassoux. Beckett's 'impossible' anachrony evokes questions such as those which Meillassoux investigates in the fifth chapter of *Après la finitude* ('La revanche de Ptolémée'): in sum, what is the meaning of dia-chronic statements, or statements about events prior to or post- the emergence of human consciousness? Beckett has an answer, and it lies in a re-imagination of alterity. Through inventing other characters who the narrator calls 'vice-existers', or who might best be understood as 'unselves' (a term used by Beckett in his poem 'neither') the narrator is able to 'be' and 'know' beyond the finiteness of their own moment. Yet the analepses and

prolepses undertaken through these 'unselves' are themselves negated in Beckett's endless epanorthosis. Negated, too, is the narrator's present, so that toward the end of *L'Innommable*, we increasingly confront the withdrawal of any moment for narrative at all: that is, the narrative retracts into something like the 'livre sur rien' of which Derrida writes in 'Force et signification'. We stray, I suggest, into what Beckett in *L'Innommable* figures as an ever thinning 'tympanum' between world and thought, an in-between which might resolve that severance between world and being which disturbs Meillassoux.

Ultimately, I seek to clarify how each novelist's work engages with an alterity which itself has ramifications for, or alters, finitude. In Gadda, I call this engagement a writing-toward-irresolution; in Beckett, I call it a decomposing strategy; in Nabokov, I call it a 'ruse-upon-a-ruse' (a self-conscious exposure of unworking). We might end our reading of their novels at the point of exhaustion, toward which Gadda sometimes inclines; end in impossibility or absence, as is the fate of several Nabokov novels; or end in unthinkability, which is where Beckett leads us. But in all cases, my thesis asks whether a self-consciousness of finitude, and of alterity's role in (in)finitude, entails the novelists writing something *other* to the novel. Through the Nabokovian ruse, Gaddian digression, and Beckettian self-negation, the novel tests its finitude such that it may go beyond (or 'après', to quote Meillassoux) the novel. The contribution of my thesis lies in the exploration of this boundary between the novel and its other, informed by an aesthetic and philosophical concept we have overlooked too long: finitude.

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List of abbreviations

Samuel Beckett

GCE	*Samuel Beckett: The Grove Centenary Edition*, ed. by Paul Auster, 4 vols (New York: Grove Press, 2006)
I	*L'Innommable* (Paris: Minuit, 1953)
MM	*Malone meurt* (Paris: Minuit, 1951)
M	*Molloy* (Paris: Minuit, 1951)

Carlo Emilio Gadda

CD	*La cognizione del dolore*, ed. by Emilio Manzotti (Turin: Einaudi, 1963; repr. Milan: Garzanti, 2010)
QP	*Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (Milan: Garzanti, 1957; repr. 2005).
SGF	*Saggi giornali favole e altri scritti*, ed. by Dante Isella, 2 vols (Milan: Garzanti, 1991-92)
SVP	*Scritti vari e postumi*, ed. by Andrea Silvestri and others (Milan: Garzanti, 1993)

Vladimir Nabokov

B	*Bend Sinister* (London: Penguin, 2012)
IB	*Invitation to a Beheading*, trans. by Dmitri Nabokov (London: Penguin, 2012)
LH	*Look at the Harlequins!* (London: Penguin, 2011)
PF	*Pale Fire* (London: Penguin, 2012)
P	*Pnin* (New York: Vintage, 1989)
SK	*The Real Life of Sebastian Knight Knight* (London: Penguin, 2017)
SO	*Strong Opinions* (London: Penguin, 1973; repr. 2011)
TT	*Transparent Things* (London, Penguin: 1972; repr. 2011)

FINITUDE, ALTERITY, AND THE NOVEL: NABOKOV, GADDA, BECKETT

Introduction

Narrative testifies to dual impulses: manifesting the desire to finish, and to write to conclusion, it is on one reading an inexorable movement toward death, as in the argument Peter Brooks advances in 'Freud's Masterplot';[1] yet it also demonstrates the desire to prolong: to delay, to digress, to showcase an infinite array of discourses, and thus 'fait du savoir une fête', in Roland Barthes's words.[2] We might equate the first drive with narrative's ontological dimension, and the second with its epistemological dimension. My premise is that these twin dimensions conflict most acutely in that literary form which most consciously follows the trajectory and timeflow of a life, and which emulates the mind's accumulation of knowledge over the course of that life:[3] the novel. In a

[1] Brooks, 'Freud's Masterplot: A Model for Narrative', in *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge M.A. and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 90-112. See also: 'narrative has something to do with time-boundedness, and [...] plot is the internal logic of the discourse of mortality. Walter Benjamin has made this point in the simplest and most extreme way, in claiming that 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' (p. 22).

[2] Barthes, *Leçon inaugurale de la chaire de sémiologie littéraire du Collège de France, prononcée le 7 janvier 1977* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1978), p. 20. See also: 'à travers l'écriture, le savoir réfléchit sans cesse sur le savoir, selon un discours qui n'est plus épistémologique, mais dramatique' (p. 19).

[3] On trajectory and timeflow, see Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: An Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. by Anna Bostock (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 1971): 'the development of a man is still the thread upon which the whole world of the novel is strung and along which it unrolls' (p. 82). See Gennady Barabtarlo, ed., *Insomniac Dreams: Experiments with Time by Vladimir Nabokov* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018): 'the cardinal difference between a "short story" and a "novel" is not that the latter is a "long story" but that there are specific space demands for re-creating timeflow plausibly [...] A better term for a "novel" would be something like *chronopoeia*, a time-craft in writing, compositional time-management, the taming of time' (p. 160). On fictive emulations of the mind, see Alan Palmer, *Fictional Minds* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), whose 'thesis' is that 'narrative fiction is, in essence, the presentation of fictional mental functioning' (p. 5).

creative sense, the novel is both ontologically and epistemologically constrained. Put simply, novels have to end, and they cannot encompass the whole of human knowledge: the Total Book[4] is off-limits to the novelist. As Beckett's Molloy puts it: 'si l'on voulait tout mentionner, on n'en finirait jamais, et tout est là, finir, en finir' (*M* p. 66). To write a novel is to recognise finitude.

The word 'finitude' in its most literal sense refers to boundedness: the state of having limits.[5] I propose to examine how Vladimir Nabokov, Carlo Emilio Gadda, and Samuel Beckett grapple with the two central formal limitations of the novel: its impulses toward ontological and epistemological finitude. These limitations become discernible in thematics of ending, boundary crossing, falling short (and falling silent), anxiety and anguish, aporia, exhaustion, totality, impossibility, absence, death, and closure.

We could undertake a comparison of Nabokov (1899-1977), Gadda (1893-1973), and Beckett (1906-1989) based on their tendency toward plurilingualism,[6] the shared historic moment of their writing and publication, or their writing of novels which resist definition as either modernist or postmodernist.[7] Yet I have

[4] See Jacques Derrida, 'Force et signification', in *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), pp. 9-49 (p. 17).
[5] For the Latin origin of the term finitude, see 'finis' in Félix Gaffiot, *Dictionnaire illustré latin-français* (Paris: Hachette, 1934): 'limite', 'bornes', 'fin, cessation, terme', 'le degré suprême, le comble', 'but (fin) d'une chose', 'définition', 'mesure, proportion', http://www.lexilogos.com/latin/gaffiot.php?p=668, pp. 668-69.
[6] Nabokov and Beckett are plurilingualists inasmuch as they straddle languages (in Nabokov's case, English and Russian; and in Beckett's, French, English and to a lesser degree Italian), including translating their own works (see Juliette Taylor-Batty, *Multilingualism in Modernist Fiction* (London: Palgrave, 2013)), whereas Gadda's multilingualism is reflected in the intrusion of foreign-language words in his texts.
[7] In relation to Gadda's liminal position on this divide see, for example, Loredana Di Martino, 'From Pirandello's Humour to Eco's Double Coding: Ethics and Irony in Modernist and Postmodernist Italian Fiction,' *MLN*, 126 (2011), 137-56. In relation to Beckett and Nabokov bridging the same divide, see Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987).

selected my corpus in light of a single commonality: that the authors' struggle with the finite novelistic form constitutes their novels in a peculiarly self-conscious way. It is not just that these authors come to grips with the finitude of novels: that Nabokov recounts the life of a fictional author in fragments (*The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*), or of a Russian-American academic in instalments before narration becomes impossible (*Pnin*), that Gadda writes formally incomplete novels (*La cognizione del dolore* and *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*), begging the question of his 'opera' as a whole, or that the voices in Beckett's Trilogy never know how to finish speaking. It is rather that Nabokov's *Sebastian Knight* and *Pnin* are themselves self-reflexively composed of fragments and layered metatexts, the dying woman's 'rantolo' (death rattle) is inseparable from Gadda's *La cognizione*, and Beckett's Trilogy is dramatically written into being by the dying voices of its various 'je' figures. As Nabokov writes in *Sebastian Knight* in a mise-en-abyme, describing invented author Sebastian's 'masterpiece': 'The man is the book; the book itself is heaving and dying, and drawing up a ghostly knee. […] At moments, his personality grows conscious of itself, and then we feel that we are passing down some main artery of the book' (*SK* pp. 154-155). The seven texts I have selected for this study represent those novels in each author's œuvre in which a consciousness of finitude reaches its apex.

Outside the literal sense, finitude has become a highly charged word in contemporary French philosophical debate. In that context, finitude most strongly connotes a coming-to-terms with what Alain Badiou refers to as the

'motif désastreux de notre "finitude"':[8] Kant's designation in his seminal *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781) of the *Ding an sich*, otherwise known as the Thing-in-itself or *noumenon*, as beyond our sensible and cognitive reach.[9] More recently, a philosopher often heralded as a disciple of Badiou,[10] Quentin Meillassoux, has returned finitude to contemporary debate by challenging the post-Kantian tradition's deference to finitude in his *Après la finitude* (2006).[11]

As Meillassoux conceives of it, the philosophy of going 'after' or 'beyond' finitude is implicitly a philosophy of alterity: the project of his provocative 2006 work is to access 'le Grand Dehors', 'ce qui est que nous soyons ou pas',[12] which the post-Kantian tradition has denied us. In both ontological and epistemological terms, Kant tells us that we cannot get outside ourselves.[13] We

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[8] Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes: L'Être et l'événement II* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), p. 561. See Ian James, *The New French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), who asserts that Badiou's *Logics of Worlds* 'has as its ambition nothing less than to overturn Kantian finitude and to rethink the limits placed on knowledge by critical philosophy and by the post-Kantian tradition in general' (p. 134).

[9] Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Königlich Preussische (later Deutsche und Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 vols (Berlin: G. Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter, 1900 -), III (1904), calls it a *Grenzbegriff* ('limiting concept'); positing the *noumenon* as that which we cannot perceive, but of which we can *conceive* [B 310-11].

[10] A label which Meillassoux himself has refused: see Christopher Watkin, *Difficult Atheism: Post-Theological Thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Quentin Meillassoux* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 133, where he quotes Meillassoux, 'History and the Event in Alain Badiou', trans. by Thomas Nail, *Parreshia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy*, 12 (2011), 1-11 (p. 1).

[11] Meillassoux, *Après la finitude: essai sur la nécessité de la contingence* (Paris: Seuil, 2006). See Joseph K. Schear, 'Historical Finitude', in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger's Being and Time*, ed. by Mark Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 360-80, to the effect that 'the finitude of human understanding' is the 'cornerstone of [Kant's] system' (p. 366). Daniel Sacilotto, 'Finitude', in *The Meillassoux Dictionary*, ed. by Peter Gratton and Paul John Ennis (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 74-75, expresses finitude's peculiar significance in philosophy as 'an entire configuration of philosophical thought, roughly corresponding with the emergence in modernity of what Meillassoux names correlationism, and which becomes radicalised and reiterated throughout the twentieth century in various forms' (p. 74). On correlationism, see Watkin, *Difficult Atheism*: 'For the correlationist, "X is" means "X is the correlate of thinking": to be is to be a correlate, which is why it is impossible to conceive anything in the absolute, separate from the thinking subject' (p. 141).

[12] Meillassoux, *Après la finitude*, p. 48; 49.

[13] See Sacilotto: 'For Meillassoux, to go "after finitude" requires that we overcome both the epistemic and ontological constraints described in correlationist philosophy' (p. 75). See also a similar distinction drawn in Watkin, *Difficult Atheism*: 'The "finitude" to which Meillassoux is

might phrase the difference via emphasis: overcoming epistemological finitude (of the kind which preoccupies Kant) requires getting *outside* ourselves,[14] while overcoming ontological finitude (of the kind which Heidegger elaborates in *Sein und Zeit*)[15] involves getting outside *ourselves*. Yet if we accept Kantian-imposed limitations, Meillassoux warns, we risk a '*retour exacerbé du religieux*': that is, we must accept every system of belief's claim to the absolute, since '*il est impensable que l'impensable soit impossible*'.[16] And we can never reach 'le Grand Dehors': philosophy's equivalent of that outside of thought which Maurice Blanchot posits as crucial to the artist or the poet: 'celui pour qui il n'existe pas même un seul monde, car il n'existe pour lui que le dehors, le ruissellement du dehors éternel.'[17]

Finitude and alterity are inevitably interconnected concepts in literature, as in philosophy, but the novelistic form uniquely foregrounds their interconnection through its imitation of the limitedness of human life, and its mirroring of the

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referring in *Après la finitude* is both the temporal boundedness of a human reason for which "what is" correlates to "what is thought", and the Pascalian wretchedness of a humanity incessantly humbled by the boundedness of its will and capacities' (p. 132).

[14] See Sacilotto: 'In its germinal weak or Kantian form, the thesis of finitude designates fundamentally an epistemic limitation in the possibilities open to the transcendental subject', referring to: 'the facticity of thinking […] the foreclosure of thought given the conditions of the categories of understanding', and 'the receptivity of the senses' (p. 74).

[15] Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2006). See Steven Connor, '"On Such and Such a Day…In Such a World": Beckett's Radical Finitude', in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, 19 (2008), 35-50: 'Finitude first names that which is destined to end, rather than to endure – or rather it names the attempt to accommodate oneself to that necessity. The principal and overwhelming form of finitude for Heidegger […] is the condition of *zum Tode sein* or "being-towards-death" that is a distinguishing feature of *Dasein* and imparts its tension and tincture to the whole of life' (p. 36). This kind of finitude builds on Kant's initial concept of finitude, as Schear, 'Historical Finitude', explains: 'the finitude that Kant rests content with, the finitude of intuition, opens up the possibility of the finitude of death' (p. 368). See Sacilotto, 'Finitude', on 'what Meillassoux calls the contingency of being or the entity, that is, the possible non-being of that which is' (p. 74). See also '[c]anonically, Martin Heidegger conceives of Dasein's existence as properly individuated through the (non)-event of death, where the temporal phenomenological horizon that constitutes its being-in-the-world is definitively closed' (p. 75).

[16] Meillassoux, *Après la finitude*, p. 74; 68.

[17] Blanchot, *L'Espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 81.

boundedness of human knowledge. The novel itself, as Anthony Cascardi has noted, is a genre developing from

> a set of circumstances in which many different types of discourse came to contend with one another for legitimacy and influence [...] a genre whose component forms remain strikingly visible and in contention; it is a species of literature in which a final synthesis of forms remains fundamentally difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.[18]

That 'final synthesis of forms', as we will see over the course of the next five chapters, can be 'impossible' because components of the novel burst the seams of its formal finitude.

Andrew Gibson suggests that despite his differences with F.R. Leavis, he shares Leavis's premise that 'novels perform an ethical work, or can be made to, and it is worth trying to enable that work to take place'.[19] Gibson broaches the possibility of our

> re-imagin[ing] narrative in terms of constitutive ambivalences, exchanges and substitutions. An entity deemed to be identical with itself no longer holds the other at bay, at a 'knowing' or *scrutinizing* distance. It rather enters into composition with, is invaded by or questioned in relation to this other. Indeed, the ethical stake, here, is precisely the question of the limit, boundary, or borderline, the categorical distinction.[20]

What Gibson classes as a narrative entity's '"knowing" or scrutinizing distance' is essential to our grasping the ontological and epistemological capabilities of the novel. This distance can explain how the novel, though anthropomorphic,[21] is able to 'be' where we are not, overcoming, for example, our inability to speak

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[18] Anthony J. Cascardi, 'The Novel', in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Literature*, ed. by Richard Eldridge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 162-79 (p. 164).
[19] Andrew Gibson, *Postmodernity, Ethics and the Novel: From Leavis to Levinas* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 1.
[20] Ibid, p. 36. See also on Levinas's thought: 'The other always and definitively overflows the frame in which I would seek to enclose the other. But that means that the frame itself is broken or disintegrates' (p. 25).
[21] See Vilashini Cooppan, 'The Novel as Genre', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Novel*, ed. by Eric Bulson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 23-42 (pp. 27-28).

of our own death, given literature's paradoxical ability to speak this antinomy, as well as how the novel can 'know' (or showcase knowledge) where being is impossible, circumventing the impasse which troubles Meillassoux: that being has become opaque for thought.[22]

Simon Critchley, one of the rare critics who engages explicitly with 'finitude' in his work, suggests that 'if one had the leisure, the competence and the intelligence, one could imagine a philosophical interpretation of Beckett that might begin from [...] showing how he inherits a certain Kantian or post-Kantian philosophical world-view.' He qualifies immediately:

> Now, although such an interpretation would not be foolish or fallacious and might even offer an illuminating historical analogy between the discourses of modern philosophy and modernist literature, nonetheless one feels that even such a clever interpretation inevitably both lags behind the text that it is trying to interpret and overshoots it: saying too much and saying too little, saying too little by saying too much.[23]

This thesis remains conscious of the methodology against which Critchley warns. It does not seek to argue that any one of these authors conforms to a 'post-Kantian philosophical world-view'. My focus is on the relation between each author and the novelistic form, turning to philosophy only where it can illuminate that relation.

Though Meillassoux marks, chronologically, the most recent thinker in a line of philosophers who inform this work, my thesis juxtaposes his conception of finitude with other, intersecting definitions of the problem of finitude.

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[22] See Meillassoux, *Après la finitude*, p. 73.
[23] Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* (London: Routledge, 1997; repr. 2004), Routledge ebook, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=200735, pp. 168-69.

Stretching back from Meillassoux, I will consider philosophical concepts of finitude in Nancy, Derrida, Bakhtin, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Blanchot, and Heidegger, and their potential clarification of issues in the novels for study. Beyond philosophy, I will have recourse to key texts on narrative closure (a concept which ties into finitude, while remaining separate from it), including Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*,[24] Brooks's *Reading for the Plot*, and Gibson's *Postmodernity, Ethics, and the Novel*. My argument depends on insight into the authors' tension with novelistic finitude by reference to philosophical as well as literary-critical ideas of finitude. This is because the novels for study do not only conform to the inevitable, formal finitude of *all* novels, but are themselves saturated in the language of finitude prevalent in philosophy at the time of their composition, in the mid-twentieth century.[25]

Of the three authors, only Gadda has expressly theorised the relation of a 'dimensione noumenica' to literature, a fact which perhaps explains the scarcity of criticism on each author's interpretation of the in-itself.[26] Even when

[24] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Kermode questions 'the ways in which fictions, whose ends are consonant with origins, and in concord, however unexpected, with their precedents, satisfy our needs' (p. 5).

[25] Some examples of this language may be found in the authors' oblique reference to the Kantian noumenon: Nabokov's references in *Bend Sinister* to the 'faint ridicule of a finite mind peering at the iridescence of the invisible through the prison bars of integers' and to the 'bald noumenon' (*B* p. 203); Beckett's allusion in *Malone meurt* to 'une compréhension du Bâton, débarrassé de tous ses accidents, que je n'avais jamais soupçonnée' (pp. 133-34), and Gadda's mention in *La cognizione* of 'quella pituita somma, recòndita, noumènica' to which 'corrispondeva esternamente – gioiello o bargiglio primo fuor dai confini della psiche – la villa obbiettiva, il dato' (p. 125).

[26] See Gadda, 'Un'opinione sul neorealismo', in *I viaggi la morte*, in *SGF*, I (1991), pp. 629-630: 'Un lettore di Kant non può credere in una realtà obbiettivata, isolata, sospesa nel vuoto; ma della realtà, o piuttosto del fenomeno, ha il senso come di una parvenza caleidoscopica dietro cui si nasconda un «quid» più vero, più sottilmente operante, come dietro il quadrante dell'orologio si nasconde il suo segreto macchinismo. Il dirmi che una scarica di mitra è realtà mi va bene, certo; ma io chiedo al romanzo che dietro questi due ettogrammi di piombo ci sia una tensione tragica, una consecuzione operante, un mistero, forse le ragioni o le irragioni del fatto [...] Vorrei, dunque, che la poetica dei neorealisti si integrasse di una dimensione noumenica, che in alcuni casi da me considerati sembra alquanto difettarle' (p. 630).

recognised by major critics, this Kantian stimulus tends to consume only a few lines or footnotes. Thomas Karshan insists that 'paradoxes which Nabokov inherited from Kant' are 'central to his novels', such as that 'in aesthetic experience, the mind oscillates both between the material (phenomenal) world and the (noumenal) beyond'; Albert Sbragia reminds us that '[e]xpressionism in Gadda is always at the service of an ultimately irrational or intuitive transcendence to the Kantian "Ding an sich"'; Badiou writes that Beckett's *Textes pour rien* respond to three seminal questions of Kant's ('Que puis-je connaître? Que dois-je faire? Que puis-je espérer?').[27] Unlike Virginia Woolf's 'avoid[ance]', in Asher's words, of 'the problem faced by those philosophers who try to establish an impenetrable essence behind the realm of phenomena',[28] the authors in my study tackle the very problem that other authors leave to philosophers. My authors might exasperatedly ask, with Woolf, 'how can we reasonably posit a thing-in-itself whose very definition entails that nothing can be known about it?'.[29] But my argument is not that Nabokov, Gadda, and Beckett actually 'posit a thing-in-itself': rather, it is that they agonise over the join (the 'oscillat[ion]' of the 'mind' between phenomena and noumena, to quote Karshan). I do not claim that these three authors use Kantian-derived language uncritically, nor that it characterises the defining influence of philosophy in their work, but the fact that Nabokov, Gadda, and Beckett engage with others' notions of finitude, even if flippantly, sardonically, or aporetically, itself

[27] Badiou, *Beckett: l'increvable désir* (Paris: Hachette, 1995), p. 12; Karshan, *Vladimir Nabokov and the Art of Play* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 19; Sbragia, *Carlo Emilio Gadda and the Modern Macaronic* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), p. 97.
[28] Kenneth Asher, 'Epistemology and Ethics in Virginia Woolf', in *Literature, Ethics, and the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 111-43 (p. 133).
[29] Ibid.

deserves attention in seeking to understand their relation to finitude in and of the novel.

While my thesis does not turn on the close contemporaneity of Nabokov's, Gadda's, and Beckett's publishing and writing, it nevertheless remains alive to the possibility that the historic and aesthetic contexts of their mid-twentieth century novels have some bearing on the relation of their work to formal finitude. Each author experienced directly the fallout from social and political upheavals in Europe.[30] In prefaces and interviews, Nabokov repeatedly warns those who would force the connection between contemporary history and his works, famously proclaiming that his *Invitation to a Beheading* is a 'violin in a void' (*IB* p. ix).[31] Gadda's novels address the fascist rule in Italy at the time of writing, yet recast it satirically, either as occurring in foreign, non-existent countries (*La cognizione*) or denigrated symbolically to the level of the

[30] Nabokov fled Bolshevik Russia with his family in 1917; only to flee the Nazis from first Berlin, then Paris, emigrating with his wife, Vera (who was Jewish) to America, but losing his brother, Sergei to the Neuengamme concentration camp (see Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 3; 88-89). Beckett, protected from tumultuous years in Dublin by a relatively peaceful youth in Foxrock (see David Pattie, 'Obsessional Ireland', in *A Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by S.E. Gontarski (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), pp. 182-95 (p. 187)), travelled through Nazi Germany in the late 1930s (see Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937* (London: Continuum, 2011)), and assisted in the French Resistance from his hideout in Roussillon during World War II (see Emilie Morin, *Beckett's Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 7; 130). Gadda served in World War I, the war in which he also lost his brother, later recollecting his time as a prisoner of war in his *Giornale di guerra e di prigionia*, in *SGF*, II (1992), pp. 431-868). In Gadda's 'L'Editore chiede venia del recupero chiamando in causa l'autore', *La cognizione*, pp. 197-203, the mock conversation between editor and author which follows the text of his first novel, *La cognizione del dolore*, Gadda writes in the voice of the 'Editore': 'Le calamità catastrofizzanti che l'Europa conobbe dal 1939 al 1945 e che gli intelletti meno insani dovettero già presagire a se stessi fin dal 1934-38 avevano a un tal segno sconturbato l'animo dello scrivente da ostacolargli (fino al 1940) indi rendergli a poco a poco inattuabile ogni sorta di prosa' (*CD* p. 197).

[31] See Nabokov's 1959 'Foreword', in *Invitation to a Beheading*, pp. vii-x; and 1963 'Introduction' to *Bend Sinister*, pp. v-xiv:'the influence of my epoch on my present book is as negligible as the influence of my books, or at least of this book, on my epoch. There can be distinguished, no doubt, certain reflections in the glass directly caused by the idiotic and despicable regimes that we all know and that have brushed against me in the course of my life: worlds of tyranny and torture, of Fascists and Bolshevists, of Philistine thinkers and jack-booted baboons' (*B* p. vii).

grotesque or animality (*Quer pasticciaccio*). Beckett's interaction with history is left even more subtle, with Critchley suggesting that he '*elevat[es] social criticism to the level of form*'.[32] The chapters which follow confront the difficult, often neglected relationship between each author and historical realities, without allowing history alone to explain the authors' obsession with finitude.

The same is true when we come to position the authors within either modernism or postmodernism, since the seven texts which I have chosen represent especially liminal texts between these aesthetic movements. At points throughout this study, I do suggest that a modernist, postmodernist, or a late modernist[33] aesthetic integrates into the authors' relation to finitude, without the moment of transitionality between modernism and postmodernism itself becoming crucial to my argument. However, this thesis raises the possibility that writing at the modernist-postmodernist edge may intensify the self-consciousness with which each author copes with finitude.[34]

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[32] Critchley, *Very Little…Almost Nothing*: 'Beckett's work successfully negotiates the dialectic between the necessary autonomy of modernist art and the function of social criticism *not* by raising its voice against society or protesting against the obvious injustice of the Holocaust, but rather *by elevating social criticism to the level of form*' (p. 26).

[33] Late modernism marks the point at which modernism becomes self-conscious about being modernism. See Tyrus Miller, 'The Continuities of Late Modernism: Before and After Beckett', in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English: Volume 7, British and Irish Fiction Since 1940*, ed. by Peter Boxall and Bryan Cheyette (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), Oxford Scholarship ebook, 10.1093/oso/9780198749394.003.0011, where Miller names three characteristics of late modernism: 'an ostentatious devaluation of the category of form', which in turn 'opened up for late modernists previously foreclosed possibilities of engagements with popular, vernacular, political, and other social discourses', then the 'reflexiv[e] relation' of both of the first two features 'at the levels of narration, character, tone, and formal structure' (p. 148).

[34] Beckett is temporarily 'finished' after having written the Trilogy: see Beckett, 'Letter to Barney Rosset', 21 August 1954, in Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, ed. by George Craig and others, 4 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009-2016), II (2011): 1941-1956: '*L'Innommable* finished me or expressed my finishedness' (p. 497).

Modernist-postmodernist liminality also entails ontological-epistemological jostling. On Kafka's *Der Prozess*,[35] Blanchot writes:

> [...] la faute qu'il punit en K. est aussi celle qu'en lui-même l'artiste se reproche. L'impatience est cette faute. C'est elle qui voudrait précipiter l'histoire vers son dénouement, avant que celle-ci ne se soit développée dans toutes les directions, n'ait épuisé la mesure du temps qui est en elle, n'ait élevé l'indéfini à une totalité vraie où chaque mouvement inauthentique, chaque image partiellement fausse pourra se transfigurer en une certitude inébranlable. Tâche impossible, tâche qui si elle s'accomplissait jusqu'au bout détruirait cette vérité même vers laquelle elle tend, comme l'œuvre s'abîme si elle touche le point qui est son origine.[36]

Epistemological 'vérité', requiring holistic, multidirectional, exhaustive investigations to achieve a totality, vies with ontological 'impatience', which rushes the work toward an ending. The novel's power is that it can make us wait (through detours which display knowledge), but its 'faute' is that it will not wait for us: it presses on due to self-awareness of its finitude, of its time running out, of its textual borders, and of its imaginative, linguistic, and cognitive limitations. Ontological and epistemological impulses, as I have already suggested, interdepend in the novelistic form. Archival material on Beckett, for instance, attests to his epistemological, maximalist instincts: his collection of notebooks at Trinity College Dublin with its transcription of eclectic notes from philosophy, psychology, Italian literature, to the habits of cows,[37] might be expected more readily from an author such as Gadda, whose works themselves evince maximalism. Yet in Beckett, who decides that his way forward, as opposed to James Joyce's, is 'knowing nothing',[38] these instincts invert and

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[35] Franz Kafka, *Der Prozess* (London: Heinemann, 1969).
[36] Blanchot, *L'Espace littéraire*, pp. 78-79.
[37] See Trinity College Library Dublin, Notes on Philosophy, MS10967; Notes on Psychology, MS10971/7-8; Notes on Italian Literature, MS10965 and MS10965a; Notes on the 'Trueborn Jackeen' and 'Cow', MS10971/2.
[38] See Beckett, 'Interview', 27 October 1989, quoted in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996): 'I realised that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one's material. He was always

translate into his work as ontological minimalism. '*Knowing* nothing', it turns out, has consequences for *being*, a realisation which manifests in Beckett's *L'Innommable* as the question: how can the novel continue to exist in a space without thought?

For Brian McHale, the ontological and epistemological impulses cannot share 'dominance' in a novel: one always surmounts the other. He reads the 'dominant' of modernism as the 'epistemological',[39] while postmodernist fiction's 'dominant' is 'ontological'.[40] He admits that in this two-fold distinction,

> [i]ntractable epistemological uncertainty becomes at a certain point ontological plurality or instability: push epistemological questions far enough and they 'tip over' into ontological questions. By the same token, push ontological questions far enough and they tip over into epistemological questions – the sequence is not linear and unidirectional, but bidirectional and reversible.

Pinpointing certain novels by his authors for study as the transitional moments between these 'dominants', and between modernism and postmodernism, McHale admits: '[a] philosopher might object that we cannot raise epistemological questions without immediately raising ontological questions,

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adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realised that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding' (p. 352). See also Dirk Van Hulle, *Manuscript Genetics, Joyce's Know-How, Beckett's Nohow* (Gainesville: Florida University Press, 2008), Florida Scholarship Online ebook, who refers to Knowlson (p. 119).

[39] McHale suggests that the modernist dominant asks questions such as: 'What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?; How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability?; How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?; What are the limits of the knowable?' (p. 9).

[40] Ibid, p. 10. On McHale's understanding, the postmodernist dominant asks questions such as: 'What is a world?; What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ? What happens when different kinds of worlds are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured?' (p. 10). Note that Gibson, *Postmodernity, Ethics, and the Novel*, partly challenges this characterisation of the postmodernist dominant: 'With postmodernity [...] epistemology presses forward as, if not the defining instance of a narrative ethics, at least intimately connected with one' (p. 54).

and vice versa, and of course he or she would be right.'[41] This hypothetical 'objection' also comes to the fore in Patricia Waugh's *Practising Postmodernism/Reading Modernism*, where she argues that 'the aesthetic is both an epistemology and an ontology'. On her view, both Romanticism and postmodernism 'attempt to articulate a mode of being in which mind and body, subject and object, may be seen to be inextricably part of each other. The aesthetic offers a form of non-conceptualising embodied language as an alternative way of knowing and being.'[42] While not advocating that we deem Nabokov, Gadda, and Beckett as exclusively postmodernists, I am probing the 'articulat[ion]' of 'a mode of being' which combines ontology and epistemology in their novels. Though the utterance of this 'mode' is prone to parody, scorn, and outright failure in the works of these novelists, the novels' self-reflexive commentary about this utterance is material here.

The three authors for study have not featured in any major tri-author study to date,[43] and the concept of finitude rarely features in the critical body of work on

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[41] McHale, p. 11.
[42] Patricia Waugh, *Practising Postmodernism/Reading Modernism* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992), p. 15.
[43] Beckett and Gadda are together the subject of a useful study (albeit dealing with different themes to my own) by Katrin Wehling-Giorgi (*Gadda and Beckett: Storytelling, Subjectivity and Fracture* (Oxford: Legenda, 2014)), as well as shorter studies by Nicoletta Pireddu ('Scribi del caos: Carlo Emilio Gadda, Samuel Beckett', *Comparatistica: Annuario Italiano*, 6 (1994), 105-120, and 'Bussola e cornucopia: La caccia al tesoro di Gadda e Beckett' in *La linea longobarda*, ed. by Luigi Ballerini (Saratoga, C.A.: ANMA Libri, 1996), pp. 77-89). Norma Bouchard, *Céline, Gadda, Beckett: Experimental Writings of the 1930s* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000) undertakes a time-restricted study of works by Beckett and Gadda earlier than those studied here (not critiquing, for example, Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio*), while Beckett and Nabokov have been the subject of several comparative studies such as Sylvia Paine's *Beckett, Nabokov, Nin: Motives and Modernism* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1981), McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, and Meghan Vicks, *Narratives of Nothing in 20th Century Literature* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2015), but the relation between Gadda and Nabokov remains understudied. Kathryn Hume, *Calvino's Fictions: Cogito and Cosmos* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), footnotes a potential point of comparison between these authors and her own chief author for study: 'In "La sfida al labirinto" Calvino associates the maze with industrial culture and with the chief problem facing writers: creating a literature adequate to the second phase of the industrial revolution. Literature reflecting this labyrinth has been written by Robbe-Grillet, Borges, Gadda, Nabokov, and Grass' (p. 43).

any of the individual authors.[44] Those critical studies which do explore finitude in and of novels by Nabokov, Gadda, and Beckett tend not to employ finitude in the simultaneously aesthetic and philosophical senses which underly my thesis, but rather one or the other.[45] Explorations of philosophical finitude in these authors' works have concentrated on less contemporary philosophers than Meillassoux. Simon Critchley's *Very Little…Almost Nothing* contemplates the relevance of philosophers such as Blanchot, Levinas, and Derrida to literary finitude, and like Leslie Hill's *Radical Indecision*: *Barthes, Blanchot, Derrida, and the Future of Criticism*,[46] draws on Beckett to substantiate theoretical points, but neither work concentrates on the novelistic form. Philosophy in the novel has sustained little direct criticism, with studies focusing largely on realism,[47] or arguing for the literary value of philosophical content in the novel,[48] as distinct from my project, which also considers the philosophical

[44] Exceptions include articles written by Natalie Reitano, '"Our Marvelous Mortality": Finitude in *Ada, or Ardor*', in *Criticism*, 49 (2007), 377-403, Robert A. Rushing, '"La sua tragica incompiutezza:" Anxiety, Mis-Recognition and Ending in Gadda's *Pasticciaccio*,' *MLN*, 116 (2001), 130-49, and Connor, 'Beckett's Radical Finitude'.

[45] Gadda critic Gian Carlo Roscioni, for example, has examined formal finitude of Gadda's novels and corpus with reference to Gadda's philosophical underpinnings in *La disarmonia prestabilita: studio su Gadda* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), whereas Beckett critics including Leslie Hill, Thomas Trezise and Steven Connor have engaged with philosophical perspectives on finitude to explain elements of Beckett's work, but not in studies revolving around finitude as a central concept. A major debate within critical studies on Nabokov, ranging from Vladimir Alexandrov, *Nabokov's Otherworld* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), to Don Barton Johnson, *Worlds in Regression: Some Novels of Vladimir Nabokov* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985), David S. Rutledge, *Nabokov's Permanent Mystery: The Expression of Metaphysics in his Work* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2011), and Brian Boyd regards Nabokov's relation to the 'postustoronnost" (otherworld), but as Boyd recognises in *Stalking Nabokov* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), much remains to be achieved in researching Nabokov's relation to metaphysics: 'we need to look, for instance, at Pascal, Leibniz, Kant, Schopenhauer – although in view of our ignorance of *what* Nabokov read *when*, and Nabokov's reluctance to cite sources and his inclination to find his own terms, this seems likely to remain contested territory' (p. 61).

[46] Hill, *Radical Indecision: Barthes, Blanchot, Derrida, and the Future of Criticism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

[47] Peter Jones, *Philosophy and the Novel: Philosophical Aspects of Middlemarch, Anna Karenina, The Brothers Karamazov, À la recherche du temps perdu, and of the Methods of Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

[48] Alan H. Goldman, *Philosophy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

status of novels.[49] When it comes to analysing literature in relation to contemporary philosophy, few literary critics have considered Meillassoux's theoretical relevance, however, James Corby's 'Style is the man: Meillassoux, Heidegger, and finitude',[50] gives an indication of the direction in which author studies making use of Meillassoux might lead.

The thesis initially approaches Gadda and Beckett in two chapters which investigate issues connecting to ontological finitude. The third (and longest) chapter, on Nabokov's novels, argues for the spilling over of ontological into epistemological problems of finitude. Finally, I return to Gadda and Beckett in the fourth and fifth chapters, by which point the interplay of ontology and epistemology has become undeniable. The structure may strike as unexpected; its intent is to 'explode' linear readings of each novelist. Instead of taking a chronological approach to the corpora, I am coming and going, cross-referencing between chapters, in an effort to escape from chronological closure. I consider this structural resistance to closure necessary when examining novelists who themselves recognised closure as an important element of their struggle with finitude. Through deconstructing and contrasting various philosophical interpretations, I am able to turn to each author's work with those perspectives which have accumulated in earlier chapters, without allowing any one perspective to take over.

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[49] See Cascardi, 'The Novel', with whom I concur that 'the novel sheds light on the *formation* (discursive and otherwise) of the insights that philosophy regards as achieved and, with that, articulates those things that philosophy tends to leave largely unspoken' (p. 167). Cascardi's definitions of the novel draw on Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*.

[50] Corby, in *Style in Theory: Between Literature and Philosophy*, ed. by Ivan Callus and others (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), Bloomsbury ebook, pp. 163-86.

Chapter One investigates how Gadda's *La cognizione del dolore* manifests a writing toward an imperfect death in a philosophical sense. To understand what I call Gadda's writing-toward-irresolution[51] which fails to conclude his text, I reference Gadda's own *Meditazione milanese*,[52] noting its insistence on the impossible closure of systems. I then consider Gadda's irresolution in light of Heidegger's Being-toward-death (*Sein zum Tode*) and its reworkings by Blanchot and Levinas. Chapter Two, on Beckett's Trilogy, shifts the focus from death of the mind to material, both textual and bodily, endings (using the double-entendre of physical and textual 'decomposition'). I read the Trilogy novels as narratives which cross between inventories, stories, and memoirs, which effect a 'touch' on each other through Beckett's repetitions and recycling, and which seek to 'exscribe' death as a finality outside the borders of the text.[53] Chapter Three, on two novels by Nabokov, bridges from the originary, ontological concerns of the first two chapters to the wider concerns of the second two, by taking into account the competing, epistemological impulse of the novel. It suggests that Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and *Pnin* expose their own unworking,[54] through Nabokov withdrawing the 'realities' that he initially proffers in both novels (where this withdrawal might be read as a precondition for accessing the in-itself). Chapter Four, on Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio*, considers the anguish of dealing with infinite possible discourses when writing a novel. Having recourse to Derrida's deployment of

[51] The term 'irresolute' has a specific meaning in the context of Heideggerian finitude, one which I clarify in the chapter on *La cognizione*.
[52] Gadda, *Meditazione milanese*, in *SVP*.
[53] Writing *exscribes* a body, according to Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Paris: Métailié, 2000), p. 76. I will discuss the concept of exscription in Chapter Two.
[54] Chapter Three investigates the concept of *désœuvrement* or 'unworking', drawing on Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 622.

the notion of *angustia*,[55] it inquires into how the ethical relation instigated by the novel entails a responsibility to the other's word, the expression of which is constrained by formal finitude. The final chapter, Chapter Five, returns to Beckett's Trilogy texts, probing how the narrators' 'unthinkable' analepses and prolepses, or statements about events before or after their supposed consciousness begins or ends, rethink temporal finitude of the novel. In that chapter, I draw an analogy between temporality in the Trilogy and Meillassoux's invocation of 'énoncés dia-chroniques' in *Après la finitude*[56] in order to understand how extratemporal 'knowledge' tests the novels' limits.

In conclusion, I will address tensions and frustrations which have arisen in discussions of these separate kinds of finitude in individual novels, and canvas more globally both the utility and the limitations of each philosophical perspective employed in earlier chapters, in a comparison of the three authors' works. Gadda's digressions cast out the narrative thread, unravelling narrative; Nabokov's withdrawal of texts' reality leaves only their unworking behind; Beckett's self-contradictions negate everything but negation itself. These authors make manifest their grappling with finitude such as it *becomes* their novels. But in that process, might the novel also become something other to itself?

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[55] See where Giuseppe Stellardi, *Gadda: miseria e grandezza* (Florence: Cesati, 2006), hypothesises that we can locate 'il nucleo centrale del rapporto fra Gadda e la scrittura' in the 'transizione dalla forza alla forma' (p. 53), in other words, in Derridean *angustia* (see Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, pp. 18-19).

[56] Meillassoux, *Après la finitude*, p. 168. See also '[p]our caractériser en général de tels énoncés, portant sur les événements antérieurs ou ultérieurs à tout rapport-terrestre-au-monde, nous emploierons donc le terme de dia-chronicité – visant de la sorte l'écart temporel entre le monde et le rapport-au-monde engagé dans la signification même de ce type de discours' (p. 168).

Chapter One

Writing Toward Irresolution: Gadda's *La Cognizione*

> Il testo de *La Cognizione del dolore* deve considerarsi come ciò che rimane, 'quod superest', di un'opera che circostanze di fatto esterne alla volontà consapevole, al meditato disegno di lavoro, e però alla responsabilità morale dell'autore, gli hanno indi proibito nonché di condurre a compimento (perficere) ma nemmeno di chiudere.
>
> Gadda, 'L'Editore chiede venia del recupero chiamando in causa l'autore', *La cognizione del dolore* (p. 197)

> [...] alludo altresì alla indeterminatezza derivante dalla impossibile chiusura d'un sistema: qualcosa rimane sempre di inspiegato: qualcosa di cui ci si chiede perché, sia esso l'Io di Fichte; o il Dio di Spinoza; o la Forma aristotelica o il Noumeno della critica, o la monade bruniana o la leibniziana [...] solo un sistema che abbia coscienza della impossibilità di questa 'chiusura ermetica' è valido in quanto sistema.
>
> Gadda, *Meditazione milanese*, in *SVP* (p. 741)

Bearing out the 'impossibile chiusura' to which he alludes in his 1928 philosophical treatise, the *Meditazione milanese*, Gadda's first novel, *La cognizione del dolore*, focuses explicitly on the kind of limitation which most readily comes to mind when 'finitude' is mentioned: the originary, ontological finitude of human mortality and death. Even the main character of *La cognizione* passes for a corpse when stretched out before his doctor in 'una figurazione di ingegnere-capo decentemente defunto': 'il morto si preparava all'auscultazione' (*CD* p. 58). Interrupting that dialogue between Gonzalo Pirobutirro and his doctor, a bodiless voice proclaims: '[t]utto doveva continuare a svolgersi, e adempiersi: tutte le opere' (*CD* p. 67). This imperative suffuses both the style and structure of Gadda's novel, a metanarrative statement testifying, with pulsing repetition, to an

impetus toward self-fulfilment present in 'tutte le opere': both life's works and works of literature. Yet *La cognizione*, which alludes repeatedly to that residual 'inspiegato' which Gadda mentions in his *Meditazione*,[1] is an unfinished, and, therefore, unfulfilled work in a formal sense. The novel's final chapter details the aftermath of an attempted murder, but we are left neither with a corpse nor with revelation of the culprit. Despite the text's lack of a resolution, Gadda's writing and subject matter both insinuate a restless desire for finitude. This impetus toward closure, reverberating in the novel's digressions as strongly as in its diegesis, supports Giuseppe Stellardi's assertion that 'nell'opera di Gadda tutto tende al romanzo, il quale a sua volta è un surrogato del sistema (filosofico), ed entrambi sono impossibili'.[2] If, for Gadda, both novel and philosophical system share a failed striving toward impossible and unsayable ends, we can elucidate this author's pursuit of novelistic finitude (of the fulfilment of his literary work, or, by way of analogy, his writing toward resolution, the ontological end of the novel)[3] through a reading of Gadda informed by philosophical conceptions of finitude.

The novel, published in 1963 after serialisation in *Letteratura* from 1938-41,[4] is composed of element after element which keeps resolution open: the detours for which Gadda is famed, his Baroque enumeration, overlay of metaphor on metaphor, dying characters who refuse to die, antiphonal conversations

[1] See *La cognizione*'s references to the noumenon (*CD* p. 125), the monad (*CD* p. 76), Aristotelian power and act (*CD* p. 35), and extensive rant regarding 'io' (pp. 73-76).
[2] Stellardi, *Gadda: miseria e grandezza*, p. 43.
[3] See Robert S. Dombroski, *Creative Entanglements: Gadda and the Baroque* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), who draws on Emilio Manzotti's interpretation of *La cognizione* as 'a search for the ontological foundation of a single life, seen as the life of *everyman*' (p. 74). See also Emilio Manzotti, 'La cognizione del dolore di Carlo Emilio Gadda', in *Letteratura italiana*: *Le Opere,* ed. by A. Asor Rosa (Turin: Einaudi, 1992-1996), IV/2: Il Novecento. La ricerca letteraria (1992), pp. 201-337 (p. 208).
[4] See Emilio Manzotti, 'Nota biobibliografica', in Gadda, *La cognizione del dolore*, ed. by Manzotti (Turin: Einaudi, 1970; repr. 1987), pp. liii-lxi (p. lx). It was published again in 1970 with two additional tratti (p. lxi).

threatening to continue forever, hanging references, and remainders from 'tratti' which might have been included in the published novel. We find, too, an 'Appendice' at the end of the book (including Gadda's already-quoted 'L'Editore chiede venia') which blurs borders of the textual body, prefigurations which have us constantly anticipating a later finality that might resolve them, intertextual allusions which spiral away from the plot, and metatexts which disrupt our understanding of what the story is. Cumulatively, these elements constitute techniques which problematise finitude, and many of them recur across not just Gadda's novels, but Nabokov's and Beckett's. While Gadda insists that 'circostanze di fatto esterne' (*CD* p. 197) thwart the conclusion and closure of *La cognizione*, the unavoidable paradox remains that those elements which make conclusion impossible, impelling us toward irresolution, are precisely those Gadda cannot do without, ethically speaking.

Drawing on René Girard's reading of Blanchot, that '[l]'impossibilité de conclure, nous dit Maurice Blanchot, est une impossibilité de mourir dans l'œuvre et de se délivrer de soi-même dans la mort', Stellardi pauses on the words 'se délivrer de soi-même dans la mort' which are, in his view, apt in Gadda's case.[5] In this chapter, I take up Stellardi's suggestion, examining the ways in which Gadda in *La cognizione* attempts to shed the self and 'se défaire de soi', in Blanchotian terms, yet actually precludes finitude through a writing which affirms the life that it seeks

[5] René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris: Grasset, 1961), p. 345, translated into Italian and quoted in Stellardi, *Gadda: miseria e grandezza*, p. 41. See also: 'In Gadda viene meno (anzi non c'è mai stata) la possibilità di "liberarsi da sé nell'opera", di accettare la morte propria e affrancarsi dal peso della vita, di accettare per la scrittura la dimensione dell'opera, e cioè la dimensione finita e compiuta, di rinunciare a un'oscura, prepotente tensione verso un'inaccessibile verità assoluta a favore dell'imperfetta (perché irrimediabilmente limitata) ma luminosa verità dell'opera' (pp. 41-42).

to suppress.[6] I question how Gadda's writing might open up the possibility of 'l'immortalité littéraire [...] le mouvement même par lequel [...] s'insinue la nausée d'une survie qui n'en est pas une, d'une mort qui ne met fin à rien',[7] that is, of a supposed death or resolution which progressively reveals itself as a non-death or irresolution. Given the extent to which Martin Heidegger shapes Blanchot's thinking on how writers confront finitude in their works, my inquiry into Gadda's writing toward impossible conclusion also draws on Heidegger's *Sein zum Tode* (Being-toward-death),[8] since both processes imply a consciousness of the end which alters every moment of the writing or Being in question. I also consider how Emmanuel Levinas's *Le Temps et l'autre*,[9] as a reworking of Heidegger's concept of ontological finitude, might illuminate the role of alterity – as the 'qualcosa [che] rimane sempre di inspiegato', preventing closure of the system – in *La cognizione*'s lack of resolution.

La cognizione's two-pronged 'ansia': time-boundedness and 'gli altri'

Gadda's novel begins in the realist vein, depicting the setting of fictive South American state Maradagàl with its entropic crop failures (due to 'siccità', 'pioggia persistente', or 'la carovana delle malattie' (*CD* p. 9)), the aftermath of war, including the emergence of 'sordi di guerra' (*CD* p. 10), between Maradagàl and its rival state Papadagàl ('[o]gnuno dei due paesi sostiene di aver vinto la guerra e ne

[6] See Blanchot, 'La Littérature et le droit à la mort', in *La Part du feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), pp. 291-331: 'L'écrivain qui écrit une œuvre se supprime dans cette œuvre, et il s'affirme en elle. S'il l'a écrite pour se défaire de soi, il se trouve que cette œuvre l'engage et le rappelle à lui, et s'il l'écrit pour se manifester et vivre en elle, il voit que ce qu'il a fait n'est rien' (p. 327).
[7] Ibid.
[8] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 235. Further references to the English translation are taken from Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010).
[9] Levinas, *Le Temps et l'autre* (Paris: Quadrige, 1998).

addossa all'altro la terribile responsabilità' (*CD* p. 10)), and the option given to the country's landowners to join the nightwatch, or 'Nistitúos provinciales de vigilancia para la noche' (*CD* p. 9). The novel's first chapter historicises the landscape from which its antihero, Gonzalo, will emerge. Yet *La cognizione* increasingly strays away from realism toward a metaphysical dimension in which Gonzalo's 'ansia indicibile sul giro del gàstrico, dov'è il duodeno, come piombo' (*CD* p. 63), predominates, resonating with anxieties of finitude voiced by Heidegger, Blanchot, and Levinas. My reading of *La cognizione*'s 'ansia' and its role in irresolution profits from an understanding of the points of divergence between Heideggerian *Angst* and Levinasian or Blanchotian *angoisse*. As a starting point, I seek to explain how irresolution ensues from the tension between Gadda's realist and self-reflexive tendencies,[10] with reference to a distinction Heidegger makes in *Sein und Zeit*. When we come face to face with our finitude, in what Heidegger dubs a *Grenzsituation*,[11] we have two possibilities. Either we are resolute: time-creators, able to grasp the finitude of our being, and willing to act accordingly. Or we are irresolute: time-wasters, defiant of our inevitable limitedness, distracted by all we encounter, moving through life like sleepwalkers. The distinction also applies to literature, since writing a novel means confronting the *Grenzsituation par excellence*: a grappling with, in Schear's words, 'the

[10] This tension is embedded in the metatext of Gonzalo as budding novelist: 'sapeva benissimo che [...] il romanzo, legato a dei personaggi veri e a un ambiente vero, era stupido quanto i personaggi e l'ambiente. Stai fino!' (*CD* p. 169). The novel also includes a number of Italianisms, as though the fictive setting is left behind: see 'la nostra indimenticabile Brianza' (*CD* p. 9), the comparison to Manzoni's Resegone (*CD* p. 13), the citation of Spanish names with the clarification 'come chi dicesse Pasquali e Peppini' (*CD* p. 20), a mention of Giosùe Carducci (*CD* p. 158) and of Camillo Sbarbaro (*CD* p. 159), as well as an explanation of Gonzalo's familiarity with Italian literature, at least Boccaccio and Ariosto (*CD* pp. 88-89). See also Raffaele Donnarumma, *Gadda modernista* (Pisa: ETS, 2006), where he notes Gadda's 'dialettica irrisolta e vitale fra autoriflessività e spinte realistiche' (p. 16).

[11] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 308; trans. by Stambaugh: 'limit-situation' (p. 295). See Schear, 'Historical Finitude', for an explanation of the 'limit-situation', otherwise known as the 'existential situation', as 'one in which the limitedness of one's form of life has come to the fore' (p. 373).

finitude of death *made concrete* in the midst of life'.[12] If any novelist's work resembles the irresolute-ness of the *Man-selbst*[13] for whom Heidegger reserves his criticism, it is Gadda's,[14] with his digressions, Baroque transports,[15] and inability to ignore the trivial things nearest to him given their infinite symbolic ramifications. Gadda goes so far as to recognise novelistic irresolute-ness in 'L'Editore chiede venia':

> La natura e la storia, percepite come un succedersi ai tentativi di ricerca, di conati, di ritrovati, d'un Arte o d'un Pensiero che trascendono le attuali nostre possibilità operative, o conoscitive, avviene fàccino a lor volta un passo falso, o più passi falsi che nei loro conati, vale dire nella ricerca e nell'èuresi, abbino a incontrare la sosta o la deviazione 'provvisoria' del barocco, magari del grottesco (*CD* p. 199).

The 'passi falsi' which make up 'la deviazione "provvisoria" del barocco', are, according to Gadda, inevitable in a world which is itself Baroque.[16] Whereas Kermode defines crisis as the state in which the end or resolution is present at every moment,[17] in Gadda's writing, I argue, it is the anxiety of irresolution, or, in other words, the threat of 'immortalité littéraire', which is present at every point in

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[12] Schear, 'Historical Finitude', p. 375. See Critchley, *Very Little…Almost Nothing*, where he asks 'whether and to what extent [Blanchot] is giving an ontological privilege to the writer […] the only being capable of authentic *Dasein*' (p. 43) when in 'De l'angoisse au langage', *Faux pas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), pp. 19-23, Blanchot wonders whether 'l'angoisse, qui ouvre et ferme le ciel, ait besoin pour se manifester de l'activité d'un homme assis à sa table et traçant des lettres sur un papier' (p. 12).
[13] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 129; trans. by Stambaugh: 'they-self' (p. 125).
[14] See, for example, Gadda's self-reflexive and fragmentary *Cahier d'études* in *SVP*, pp. 381-613.
[15] See Dombroski, *Creative Entanglements*, who, when reading Gadda's *Giornale di guerra e di prigionia*, suggests that 'the otherness of the world is energized through enumeration, a technique which, while intent on capturing a non-essential, fragmentary reality, shows that the speaking subject is incapable of mastering that reality, imprinting his identity on it, and thus attempting to exhaust it of its expressive potential, at the very moment it eludes the subject's grasp, folding out, or regressing, infinitely' (p. 25). Dombroski here draws on Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity* (London: Sage, 1994), where she uses the term 'regress of reality' to describe how 'the Subject, stability of representation, the Centre, Totality – are undermined from within by a logic of extremes, paradox and non-dialectical neutralization of opposites, such as they appear in oxymoronic writing' (p. 134).
[16] See 'L'Editore chiede venia': '[…] barocco è il mondo, e il G. ne ha percepito e ritratto la baroccagine' (p. 198).
[17] See Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*: 'No longer imminent, the End is immanent' (p. 25).

time, or at every 'passo falso' of the novel, and which constitutes a specific kind of ontological crisis.

Anxiety in the Heideggerian sense (*Angst*),[18] emerges at the juncture of two ways of Being-toward-death: *Unentschlossenheit* (irresoluteness), or *Entschlossenheit* (resoluteness),[19] as Heidegger writes:

> The irresolute person understands himself in terms of the events and accidents nearest by that [...] urge themselves upon him in changing ways. Busily losing *himself* in what is taken care of, the irresolute person *loses his time* in them, too. [...] Just as the person who exists inauthentically constantly loses time and never 'has' any, it is the distinction of the temporality of authentic existence that in resoluteness it never loses time and 'always has time'.[20]

For a novelist, as I have just implied, this juncture is not merely ethical, but structural: a distinction between *resolution* and *irresolution*. I am not suggesting that Gadda's capitulation to an unresolved text, when his novel cuts away at the end of its ninth 'tratto' with '[i]l gallo', 'perentorio ed ignaro, come ogni volta', rousing the new dawn (*CD* p. 193), indicates that his irresolution is premeditated: after the publication of *La cognizione*'s seven original 'tratti', and the further two published in 1970, a segment was found in draft form that edges even closer to, but still falls short of, finality.[21] What the text's incompleteness does indicate, however, is that for Gadda, irresolution is part and parcel of Being-in-the-world as well as of literary creation and its journey toward finality, just as Stellardi

[18] See Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*: 'Das Sein zum Tode ist wesenhaft Angst' (p. 266); trans. by Stambaugh: 'Being-toward-death is essentially anxiety' (p. 254).
[19] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 299, trans. by Stambaugh, p. 286.
[20] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 410; trans. by Stambaugh, p. 391.
[21] See Gadda, *La cognizione del dolore*, ed. by Emilio Manzotti (Turin: Einaudi, 1970; repr. 1987). Roscioni, *La disarmonia prestabilita*, stresses the involuntary nature of non-fulfilment in Gadda's novels: 'Restano due fatti indiscutibili. Il primo è che per Gadda il libro esige una chiusa e il pasticcio deve essere sbrogliato; il secondo è che la chiusa non c'è, e che il pasticcio rimane tale' (p. 92).

suggests: the 'incompiuto' or 'imperfetto' should, in Stellardi's view, be considered as

> una categoria in senso filosofico e anzi kantiano, nel senso cioè di una struttura fondamentale e irriducibile della percezione, del pensiero o dell'azione [...] non solo della creazione artistica, ma contemporaneamente anche, e prima di tutto, del rapporto col mondo, dell'essere al mondo [...].[22]

The entire publication history of *La cognizione*, as a novel undergoing transformations between its serialisation and later editions, might indeed be considered a testament to the magmatic nature of Gadda's literary activity. Gadda's three-part 'Appendice' to *La cognizione*, containing 'L'Editore chiede venia', 'Autunno', and 'Chiarimenti indispensabili', marks another example of the author's ambiguous (incomplete and imperfect) movement toward finality. In one sense the appendix provides closure, and in another sense might constitute the 'residuo o errore di chiusura' inherent in every imperfect system (*SVP* p. 743) which ensures his text is never sealed. My suggestion is that Gadda's attempts to defy formal infinitude, or 'tamponare le falle del sistema' (*SVP* p. 741) by supplementing his novel with extra segments and perspectives, are precisely what condemn his text to irresolution.

The emptiness which in Gadda's novel manifests as the 'vacuità degli spazî senza senso' (*CD* p. 112), or the 'nullità stupida dello spazio' (*CD* p. 115), could conceivably connect to the 'nothing in particular',[23] or 'nothingness' which gives rise to *Angst* in the Heideggerian sense. Yet 'la fifa di morire' (*CD* p. 34), that common fear with which the doctor misdiagnoses Gonzalo in *La cognizione*'s

[22] Stellardi, *Gadda: miseria e grandezza*, pp. 39-40.
[23] Critchley, 'Being and Time, part 5: Anxiety', *The Guardian*, 6 July 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/jul/06/heidegger-philosophy-being.

exposition, definitively cannot be *Angst*, since *Angst* possesses no object.[24] Instead of a mere fear of death, the *Angst* of contemplating our mortality in Heidegger derives from the 'withdrawal of what-is-in-totality, which then crowds round us in dread [...] The only thing that remains and overwhelms us whilst what-is slips away, is this "nothing".'[25] Simon Critchley usefully imagines *Angst* as an immersion in the sea which recedes to reveal the self:

> Inauthentic life in the world is completely bound up with things and other people in a kind of 'groundless floating' [...] like being immersed in the sea and drowned by the world's suffocating banality. Anxiety is the experience of the tide going out, the seawater draining away, revealing a self stranded on the strand, as it were.[26]

As Gonzalo's all-encompassing emotion morphs into '[u]n senso di noia, di irritazione [...] nel suo sangue: un'ansia indicibile sul giro del gàstrico, dov'è il duodeno, come piombo: una figurazione di colpa, di inadempienza, nel suo contegno' (*CD* p. 63), we appreciate that Gonzalo's concern is not finitude itself, but anxiety that the situation which forces his finitude upon him actually has neither end nor fulfilment, only 'inadempienza'. Even a literature concentrated on Heidegger's 'withdrawal of what-is-in-totality', or on what Blanchot terms suppression, could not dissolve into 'néant', since what happens after the tide goes out is that this totality 'crowds round us in dread', or is reaffirmed in its non-death, and we realise that nothingness itself is unerasable.

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[24] See Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 186; trans. by Stambaugh, p. 180: 'Anxiety "does not know" what it is anxious about'.
[25] See Heidegger, 'Was ist Metaphysik?', in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1978), pp. 1-19: the 'Wegrücken des Seienden im Ganzen, das uns in der Angst umdrängt [...] Es bleibt nur und kommt über uns – im Entgleiten des Seienden – dieses "kein"' (p. 9). Translation in Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics?', trans. by R.F.C. Hull and Alan Crick, in *Existence and Being*, ed. by Werner Brock (London: Vision Press, 1949), pp. 353-92 (p. 366).
[26] Critchley, 'Being and Time, part 5: Anxiety'.

I therefore propose to explain *La cognizione*'s anxiety of finitude by reference to something more akin to Gonzalo's 'figurazione [...] di inadempienza' than Heidegger's self-revelatory *Angst*. In Gadda's philosophical treatise, the *Meditazione milanese*, Gadda ruminates:

> Il bene o realtà si attua per la coincidenza di una enorme dovizia di relazioni ed è quindi manifestazione centrale, o convergenza; o quadrivio; o fibra centrale del tessuto. Il male si ha per gradi procedendo verso l'esterno o limite periferico dove la convergenza delle relazioni è sempre minore finché il tessuto si dirada, il fiume diventa sponda (*SVP* p. 689).

Here the question of irresolution of the 'tessuto' (both fabric and text, of course) becomes an ethical dichotomy, split into 'il bene' on one side, and 'il male' on the other, the latter becoming uncontrollable as we spiral out from the centre of a system, or narrative. Gadda's 'male', of which *La cognizione* is painfully conscious, is that his novel too often resembles the scattered weave of an infinitely fraying text. Far from conforming to the expectations of the hardboiled detective genre by concluding the novel's various threads, *La cognizione* leaves the murder victim still alive, the chief suspect's whereabouts unknown, and the reason for the crime unclear. The above passage of the *Meditazione*, instructive when it comes to Gadda's literary work, finds an echo in Levinas's insistence that '[l]'être est le mal, non pas parce que fini, mais parce que sans limites':[27] in other words, that the unlimitedness of being motivates our anxiety. When Levinas translates Heidegger's *Angst* into the French *angoisse*, he contends that the latter corresponds not to the prospect of our dying, but rather to the fact that this death is impossible: '[l]'angoisse, d'après Heidegger, est l'expérience du néant. N'est-elle pas, au contraire, – si par mort on entend néant, – le fait qu'il est impossible de mourir?'[28] Logically, Levinas argues, we cannot experience death (that is the whole

[27] Levinas, *Le Temps et l'autre*, p. 29.
[28] Ibid.

point of death),[29] but if anxiety is the experience of nothingness, and if death is nothingness, then anxiety must correspond to *the experience of* our inability to die. This is the genre of experience, I argue, to which the novel's 'cognizione del dolore' alludes.

In the imperfect tense of *La cognizione*'s 'martello del maniscalco a battere, battere [...] Dall'antro della fucina rendeva la percossa al monte: il rimando del monte precipitava sulle cose, dal tempo vuoto deduceva il nome del dolore' (*CD* p. 152), we can read 'cognizione' as an ongoing, interminable process, rather than as a completed action, and 'dolore', unnamed to us, as unlimited. Suffering, then, must default to our presage of 'l'impossibilité du néant' as in Levinas's *Le Temps et l'autre*,[30] and not the 'néant' itself. *La cognizione*'s central dramatic situation begins with this kind of terminal yet interminable 'dolore': a 'rantolo'; it also ends with a 'rantolo', leaving beginning and end indistinguishable. Each death rattle emanates from a woman. The first flows out from the Pirobutirro's domestic, la Battistina, who speaks to shape our perception of Gonzalo as culprit before we have even met him: 'il respiro della donna s'era fatto più corto, asciutto: il cipollone che le ribolliva dentro la gola pareva, a furia di cuocere, che gli fosse venuto meno il suo sugo. Dal gozzo, enorme, quel rantolo affaticava la tristezza del parlare' (*CD* p. 51). Gadda here connects the gossip's death rattle to a fatigued kind of speech-toward-death. This speech will be cut short in the last part of the novel, when Gonzalo's mother lies dying, unable to speak the name of her attacker: '[r]espirava ora con pena, la lingua pareva essersi affossata nel palato, un rantolo,

[29] As Levinas, ibid, points out, 'Quand la mort est là, je ne suis plus là, non point parce que je suis néant, mais parce que je ne suis pas à même de saisir' (p. 59), in turn echoing Epicurus (see also Iain Thomson, 'Death and Demise in *Being and Time*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Being and Time*, ed. by Wrathall, pp. 260-90 (p. 265; 280) on Heidegger's use of Epicurus).
[30] Levinas, *Le Temps et l'autre*, p. 56.

col respiro, ne usciva' (*CD* p. 191). Though the first woman is not dying as fast as the second, her rasping breath serves as a precursor to that of Gonzalo's mother in the novel's conclusion: the first woman's accusatory 'rantolo' prematurely names Gonzalo as aggressor, yet the second woman's cannot. Written between two death rattles, Gadda's entire novel resembles the tide going out in *Angst*, an exhaling away of the world in its totality, or a wheezing out commensurate with the author's anxiety of expression, which foreshadows the narrative's impending death. Yet these death rattles also exemplify the movement of Blanchot's 'immortalité littéraire'. In seeking to suppress itself or 'die' in the finitude of death, the novel instead affirms the infinitude of an unspeakable non-death: the 'rantolo' which never ends, and which we cannot help but hear. The novel's second death rattle is so provoking not because it directly precedes death, but because we know that it separates us from death as long as it continues.

The possibility of (the impossibility of) saying: I[31]

> Let us think for a moment of death, ideally, not as an interruption, but as the accomplishment of a process. Let us imagine life as the desire to rest, to die. All that which is vital wishes to die, but not before its own time; it wishes to die, and can rest (like Samuel Beckett's voices), only after the exhaustion of all its given possibilities.
>
> Stellardi, *Heidegger and Derrida on Philosophy and Metaphor*[32]

Gadda's novel evinces this 'desire to rest, to die' and hence to suppress itself, but since, as Chapter Four will probe more fully, Gadda's creative work also aspires to

[31] See 'la sovrana coscienza della impossibilità di dire: Io' (*CD* p. 193).
[32] Stellardi, *Heidegger and Derrida on Philosophy and Metaphor: Imperfect Thought* (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2000), p. 253.

totality and the elusive Total Book, the novel must necessarily end 'before its own time': that is, before the authorial process of voicing infinite possibilities is resolved. Before 'that which is vital' dies, however, the experience of facing up to our finitude presents us with one last resort. When Gonzalo, an emblem of this experience within the novel, hesitates on the parapet, '[i]nsaccato nelle spalle, intento a guardare, il figlio aveva le due mani alla balaustra di legno, le braccia divaricate ed aperte, come stanche ali', to contemplate his and his mother's mortality ('Mia madre è invecchiata [...] Sono anni...sono disperato' (*CD* p. 67)), what is he? In other words, when the sea goes out and leaves us on the shore, on the *limen* of life and death, what is left behind? For Heidegger, 'death [...] is the possibility of the impossibility' ('die Möglichkeit der Unmöglichkeit') 'of every mode of behaviour toward' and of 'every way of existing'.[33] This is a possibility of impossibility which Iain Thomson envisions as, crucially, 'a naked "thrown projection," a brute' 'that it-is-and-has-to-be' which is 'not only "naked thrownness" but also naked *projection*, in other words, pure "ability-to-be" (*Seinkönnen*) deprived of all "being possible" (*Möglichsein*)'.[34] To paraphrase, the naked self experiencing anxiety may be shorn of all its worldly possibilities, just as Gonzalo at this moment of the novel hears 'l'ora da una torre' which 'sembrò significare "gli atti sono tutti adempiuti"' (*CD* p. 67), the striking of the hour serving repeatedly as a reminder of mortal finitude in *La cognizione*. Yet the stripping down of the self nevertheless represents a rare creative opportunity in which pure *Seinkönnen* can explore impossibility, *as* possibility. For Levinas, however, Heidegger's characterisation of our encounter with death as 'die

[33] See Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*: 'Der Tod [...] ist die Möglichkeit der Unmöglichkeit jeglichen Verhaltens zu ..., jedes Existierens' (p. 262). Translation in Stambaugh, p. 251.
[34] Iain Thomson, 'Rethinking Levinas on Heidegger on Death', *The Harvard Review of Philosophy*, 16 (2009), 23-43 (p. 31).

Möglichkeit der Unmöglichkeit' is better conceived of as 'l'impossibilité de la possibilité': '[l]a mort est, chez Heidegger, événement de liberté, alors que, dans la souffrance, le sujet nous semble arriver à la limite du possible. Il se trouve enchaîné, débordé et en quelque manière passif'.[35] Gadda's portrayal of 'lo hidalgo [...] rivendicando a sé le ragioni del dolore, la conoscenza e la verità del dolore', for whom 'nulla rimaneva alla possibilità. Tutto andava esaurito dalla rapina del dolore' (*CD* p. 142) resonates more strongly with Levinas's depiction of entrapment, overwhelmedness, and passivity than with Heidegger's *Seinkönnen*, since not even death remains as a possibility for Gonzalo here. Gonzalo on the parapet, like the self shivering and suffering on the shore of mortality, appears to be out of all options – at least, as we will see, he has exhausted all options which come from within himself, but this does not mean that his voice can 'rest'.

What remains of Gonzalo if he has exhausted all self-derived possibility? Blanchot, a reader of both Heidegger and Levinas, draws closer to the latter's 'l'impossibilité de la possibilité' with the avowal that literature 'n'est pas non plus la mort, car en elle se montre l'existence sans l'être, l'existence qui demeure sous l'existence, comme une affirmation inexorable, sans commencement et sans terme, la mort comme impossibilité de mourir'. Literature as 'l'existence sans l'être' designates a possibility insofar as it names 'le procès par lequel ce qui cesse d'être continue d'être'.[36] Chapter Two will deepen an analysis of 'l'existence sans l'être', reconsidering Blanchot's insistence that fiction is a strange space in which something other than a mere living or mere dying is going on: that 'survie qui n'en

[35] Levinas, *Le Temps et l'autre*, p. 92; pp. 57-58.
[36] Blanchot, *La Part du feu*, p. 317; 322.

est pas une',[37] in which we are neither alive nor dead. Beckett's *Molloy* approaches this question of fiction's ontological status:

> Ma vie, ma vie, tantôt j'en parle comme d'une chose finie, tantôt comme d'une plaisanterie qui dure encore, et j'ai tort, car elle est finie et elle dure à la fois, mais par quel temps du verbe exprimer cela? (*M* p. 57).

The Trilogy goes on to explore the nature of existence metaleptically, but Gadda's *La cognizione*, faced with the same conundrum, turns to the oneiric. So too does Critchley when reading Blanchot, and identifying two kinds of night in which we might say 'ce qui cesse d'être continue d'être'. The first, Heideggerian, is 'sleep as mastery, as virility unto death', and the second is Blanchot's '*autre* nuit':[38] not that which is 'a reserve of possibility', but in which 'one can neither go to sleep nor unto death, for there is something stronger than death, namely the simple facticity of being riveted to existence without an exit, what Blanchot calls *le mourir* in opposition to *la mort*: the impossibility of death'.[39] In *La cognizione*, Gonzalo's dream of a 'notte [...] una sera spaventosa, eterna, in cui non era più possibile ricostituire il tempo degli atti possibili' (*CD* pp. 70-1), falls within the scope of this 'other' night: night as the petrification of possibility, in other words, as the impossibility of possibility.

Blanchot also dubs this 'autre nuit' the 'spectral night', the night in which 'l'existence privée de monde',[40] perhaps akin to 'l'io di ombra' (*CD* p. 76) evoked by Gonzalo, continues to exist. Literature persists in this night where there is no being, speaking the thoughts of the dead as they were when the dead were still

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[37] Ibid, p. 327.
[38] See Blanchot, *L'Écriture du désastre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980): '"Je" ne veille pas: on veille, la nuit veille, toujours et incessamment, creusant la nuit jusqu'à l'*autre* nuit où il ne saurait être question de dormir' (p. 82).
[39] See Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing*, p. 36, where he also cites Blanchot, *L'Écriture du désastre*, p. 81.
[40] Blanchot, *La Part du feu*, p. 322.

vital. Like the example of Banquo's ghost, a dead presence which intrigues Levinas,[41] characters killed off in Gadda's text only return stronger following their negation through fictive death. Perceiving 'una figura di tenebra' in his nightmare, deprived of all worldy being ('al di là d'ogni dimensione, d'ogni tempo' (*CD* p. 71)), Gonzalo tries to write this spectre out of life back into literature, as 'la madre immobile di Coriolano',[42] but fails, as the spectre is his own mother 'come rivenuta dal cimitero' (*CD* p. 71): 'il velo non mi ha tolto la mia oscura certezza' (*CD* p. 71). Even as the possibility of death looms largest in Gadda's novel, with Gonzalo's mother on her deathbed, we confront her as the epitome of literature's 'mort comme impossibilité de mourir':[43] she is, as Dombroski notes, never fully dead: '[si] accorsero che respirava, che solo le mani erano così, quasi fredde: tardo, debolissimo, il polso batteva ancora' (*CD* p. 190).[44] The un-dead of *La cognizione* define its suffering, giving rise to both Gonzalo's own 'accoramento inspiegabile' (*CD* p. 61) and the work's overall 'cognizione del dolore': just as 'souffrance', according to Levinas, emanates from 'l'impossibilité de fuir et de reculer [...] Elle est le fait d'être acculé à la vie et à l'être'.[45] Suffering and grief here derive from our inability to conclude life and seal it within a discrete form, just as *La cognizione* suffers from an incapacity to negate 'existence' along with 'être'.

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[41] See, for example, Levinas's discussion in *De l'Existence à l'existant* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1986) of Banquo's ghost: 'une expérience décisive du "sans issue" de l'existence, de son retour fantômatique à travers les fissures par où on l'avait chassée' (p. 101).
[42] See Christina Luckyj, 'Volumnia's Silence', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 31 (1991), 327-42, for an examination of the widely differing dramatic portrayals of Volumnia (mother of Coriolanus in the Shakespeare play). Luckyj reminds us that in the theatre, Volumnia and Coriolanus are 'equally prominent and dramatically interdependent' (p. 329).
[43] Blanchot, *La Part du feu*, p. 317.
[44] Dombroski, *Creative Entanglements*, reads Gonzalo's mother as undead because 'her accident signals her entry into the complex workings of a material cosmos, into the web of causes and subcauses, into the infinite dimensions of the universe, into the chain of events, actions, thought, determinations; in sum, into an infinitude of creative possibilities' (p. 94).
[45] Levinas, *Le Temps et l'autre*, pp. 55-56.

In *I viaggi la morte*, Gadda's collection of creative essays, he admits that

> [c]ose, oggetti, eventi, non mi valgono per sé, *chiusi nell'involucro di una lor pelle individua* […]: mi valgono in una aspettazione, in un'attesa di *ciò che seguirà*, o in un richiamo di *quanto li ha preceduti e determinati* (my emphasis) (*SGF*, I, p. 629).

This passage marks a subtle shift from ontology to ethics: from resolved beings 'chiusi nell'involucro di una lor pelle individua' to *another* existence which is other than being, a 'ciò che seguirà' or a 'quanto li ha preceduti e determinati'. Davies describes how we effect a similar 'turning' or movement from the ontological to the ethical through Levinas's 'impossibilité de mourir';[46] equally, I would suggest, we can make this turning through the 'other' night. Moving from a 'mort sans mort'[47] to a 'ciò che seguirà', we discover an existence which is not ours, but marked by the 'sovrana coscienza della impossibilità di dire: Io' (*CD* p. 193). The novel's realisation of this impossibility hints at the one exit allowing us to circumvent 'impossibilité de mourir', cutting short the infinitude of the death rattle: one which altogether leaves behind the saying of 'io'.

Virile conclusion and irresponsible irresolution

When, in the course of that first medical consultation, Gonzalo imagines

> una sera spaventosa, eterna, in cui non era più possibile ricostituire il tempo degli atti possibili, né cancellare la disperazione… né il rimorso; né chiedere perdono di nulla… di nulla! Gli anni erano finiti! In cui si poteva amare nostra madre… carezzarla… oh! aiutarla… Ogni finalità, ogni possibilità, si era impietrata nel buio… (*CD* pp. 70-1),

[46] See Paul Davies, 'A Linear Narrative? Blanchot with Heidegger in the works of Levinas', in *Philosophers' Poets*, ed. by David Wood (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 37-69, where he employs 'Levinas's characterization of Heidegger's thought as "ontology"' to enumerate 'three ways in which thought is exposed and vulnerable': 'to nothingness', 'to the *il y a* (to the impossibility of nothingness)', and 'to alterity, to the Other', and explains that the 'second names the turning of the first (ontology) into the third (ethics)' (p. 55).
[47] Blanchot, *La Part du feu*, p. 327.

his insistence that the 'tempo degli atti possibili' is out of reach amounts to disclaiming responsibility. If the statement '[i]l tempo era stato consumato' (*CD* p. 71) is true, there remains nothing further for Gonzalo to accomplish but to sink into passivity, and relinquish himself to death. Stellardi posits *La cognizione*'s 'tempo degli atti possibili' as an ideal: 'ciò che il tempo *dovrebbe* essere: è il tempo della vita operosa, della fattività individuale e collettiva',[48] clarifying that this time never coincides with Gonzalo's present.[49] Instead, the time of all possibility is always already in the past, so that when Gonzalo looks forward he sees death as the only extant outcome: '[g]li anni irrepetibili li aveva dissolti il dolore. La demenza dei tutori aveva straziato il bimbo. Rimaneva la morte' (*CD* p. 80). His awaiting of death is not the Heideggerian 'anticipation of death' (*Vorlaufen zum Tode*),[50] which Corby transposes to the literary context as 'Dasein's anticipation of its end, its awareness of the possibility of the impossibility of its possibilities' which 'animates and reinvigorates its sense of its own potentiality',[51] activating the self's condition for creativity. Lacking an anticipation of its end, *La cognizione* suppresses the 'tempo degli atti possibili', but this suppression, once articulated, paradoxically results in an affirmation which subsumes Gonzalo's dead time in 'immortalité littéraire' without revitalising it as potentiality.

When we read a novel, our anticipation of its conclusion is also what allows us to recognise the novel as such: the expectation of an ending outlines the trajectory of

[48] Stellardi, '"Il tempo degli atti possibili": qualche riflessione sulle dimensioni della temporalità in letteratura, a partire dalla *Cognizione del dolore*', in *Letteratura e filologia fra Svizzera e Italia: Studi in onore di Guglielmo Gorni*, ed. by Maria Terzoli and others, 3 vols (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2010), III, pp. 231-48 (p. 240).
[49] Ibid, p. 241.
[50] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 302; trans. by Stambaugh, p. 290.
[51] Corby, 'Style is the man', p. 179. See also Critchley's interpretation in 'Being and Time, part 6: Death', https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/jul/13/heidegger-being-time. that this attitude 'mobilises mortality as the condition for free action in the world'.

the literary work to us, and allows us to bestow meaning on its constituent parts. As Stellardi notes, drawing on Girard,

> La conclusione di un romanzo è dunque, oltre che la risoluzione dell'intreccio, anche la metafora, o talvolta la rappresentazione occulta, di un momento di sublime e fatale lucidità e abbandono e rinuncia di sé, a partire dal quale soltanto lo scrittore ha potuto iniziare, portare avanti e concludere in quanto opera la scrittura. Senza quel momento, senza quella possibilità, l'opera è destinata non solo all'assenza di conclusione ma anche all'incompiutezza radicale, al difetto ontologico strutturale di ogni suo momento.[52]

Gadda's *La cognizione*, which finishes without ending, lacks 'lucidità', that 'horizon against which all of our possibilities show up *as* possibilities'.[53] Aside from lacking any resolution of the 'giallo', the text leaves all its characters indefinite, ending *in medias res*. The novel, as a continuous movement of *le mourir*,[54] is missing *la mort*, the species of death which Levinas identifies 'dans l'existence authentique de Heidegger' as 'une lucidité suprême et, par là, une virilité suprême': 'l'assomption de la dernière possibilité de l'existence par le *Dasein* [...] qui rend par conséquent possible le fait même de saisir une possibilité'.[55] Even the embedded metatext of Gonzalo as author, in which he reflects on friends who '[l]o incitavano a dar termine ad un suo lavoro, ch'essi in perfetta buona fede, supponevano fosse un romanzo', is denied lucid termination.[56] In the encounter with death, the writerly figure of Gonzalo, 'un tal fanatico della libertà, che avrebbe voluto scegliere, costruire il proprio destino di minuto in minuto' (*CD* p. 88), is inundated with infinite choices. But where

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[52] Stellardi, *Gadda: miseria e grandezza*, p. 42.
[53] Corby, 'Style is the man', p. 179.
[54] See Blanchot, *L'Écriture du désastre*: 'Il y aurait dans la mort quelque chose de plus fort que la mort: c'est le mourir même – l'intensité du mourir, la poussée de l'impossible indésirable jusque dans le désiré' (p. 81).
[55] Levinas, *Le Temps et l'autre*, p. 57.
[56] Paralleling Gadda's, Gonzalo's prose is esoteric: 'forse lambiccava rabbioso dalla memoria una qualcheduna di quelle sue parole difficili, che nessuno capisce, di cui gli piace d'ingioiellare una sua parola dura, incollata, che nessuno legge' (*CD* p. 54). Without either understanding or readers, Gonzalo's 'distacco dai vivi' is reinforced in his failed authorship.

Kermode theorises that for the novelist, 'every choice will limit the next',[57] Gadda's writing opens up infinite additional choices with every new movement toward conclusion *delaying* that conclusion. Both Gadda's novel and the metatext of Gonzalo's writing-toward-death infinitely postpone and thus lack the moment of lucidity (and writing-toward that moment) which would reopen the lost 'tempo degli atti possibili' (*CD* p. 70).

Through subtle intrusions into the doctor's and the Pirobutirro mother's stream of consciousness, Gonzalo's 'male' is linked to the 'male invisibile' of which fictional author López writes in the metatext 'Mirabili Maragdagali':[58] 'la strana favola propalata dai conquistadores, cui fu dato raccogliere le moribonde parole dello Incas. Secondo cui la morte arriva per nulla, circonfusa di silenzio, come una tacita, ultima combinazione del pensiero' (*CD* p. 45). Given that 'la morte arriva per nulla', the only unexpired possibility for Gonzalo is to await death, suffering all the while instead of virilely assuming an ending. As he waits, however, he converts his failed responsibility into an irresponsibility which is not altogether irresponsible, if we turn to Levinas. The irresponsible stance toward death, as Levinas intimates, is characterised by a form of yielding, release, or passive capitulation:

> là où la souffrance atteint à sa pureté, où il n'y a plus rien entre nous et elle, la suprême responsabilité de cette assomption extrême tourne en suprême irresponsabilité, en enfance. C'est cela le sanglot et par là précisément il annonce la mort. Mourir, c'est revenir à cet état d'irresponsabilité, c'est être la secousse enfantine du sanglot.[59]

[57] Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p. 141.
[58] As Sbragia notes, 'the *Mirabilia Maragdagali* of a certain Father Lopez would appear to be nothing other than Gadda's own *Le meraviglie d'Italia*' (p. 81).
[59] Levinas, *Le Temps et l'autre*, p. 60.

Being *is* 'souffrance', becomes the sound of the sob, in the last moment of dying. In *La cognizione*'s incomplete death, the novel's final sob dies out in a finale akin to what Gadda himself calls an 'apocope drammatica'[60] – omission of the final syllable – 'davanti a un dolore che non può essere detto compiutamente'.[61] *La cognizione* ends as 'sommesso, venutogli dalla remota scaturigine della campagna, si cancellava il disperato singhiozzo' (*CD* p. 170). Gonzalo's refrain, '[o]ra sono stanco, sono malato' (*CD* p. 80), expels the 'sanglot' of irresponsibility: a renunciation of possibility, an appreciation of impossibility, or an acceptance, above all, of suffering. Whereas, in Heideggerian virile responsibility, we grasp the ungraspable,[62] in irresolute irresponsibility we instead 'acknowledg[e] finitude by backing away from it', as Schear puts it.[63] That is, in the act of reading *La cognizione*, we too can respect the process of writing *le mourir* rather than focus all our energy on resolution or *la mort*, and consequently succumb to irresolution without compromising ourselves ethically: that is, without claiming a virility we no longer own.

When being breaks its doors and windows down

The exposition of *La cognizione* focuses not exclusively on the subject, but introduces a community, or at least introduces the option of entering into a community: the decision 'd'aderire o di non aderire alle associazioni provinciali di vigilanza per la notte' (*CD* p. 9), which turns out to be an existential decision akin

[60] Gadda, *Per favore, mi lasci nell'ombra: Interviste 1950-1972*, ed. by Claudio Vela (Milan: Adelphi, 1993), p. 149.
[61] Donnarumma, *Gadda modernista*, p. 25.
[62] See Critchley, *Very Little…Almost Nothing*, where he contends that 'Death, or, rather, dying, is by definition ungraspable; it is that which exceeds intentionality' (p. 85).
[63] Schear, 'Historical Finitude', p. 369.

to Hamlet's undecidable question, and one on which the entire plot turns. Gonzalo's fatal failure 'di aderire' separates him out from the community: 'quel figlio, così appartato, così lontano da tutti' (*CD* p. 34), who the doctor diagnoses with a 'distacco dai vivi', noting that this is a '[d]istacco [...] più forse patito che voluto' (*CD* p. 56). Just as 'L'Editore chiede venia' identifies 'gli altri' at the source of Gonzalo's 'ossessione',[64] Gonzalo both mocks and feels assailed by other humans in this community, 'quella pluralità sconcia' (*CD* p. 167): the peon, the small boy his mother tutors, the guests who make offerings at their villa in a 'turpe invasione della folla' (*CD* p. 170). Even the offering itself, 'il pesce morto, fetente [...] enorme, giallo, con gli occhî molli e cianòtici dopo l'impudicizia e la nudità' (*CD* p. 165), impenetrable and dead, encounters Gonzalo as 'visage': in Levinas's words, as 'the other before death, looking through and exposing death'.[65] Despite facing off against the other in visions of death granted by others, Gonzalo continues to envisage death as a final solitude, and expresses his monadic conception of death as ontological finality to his doctor:

> Quando l'essere si parzializza, in un sacco, in una lercia trippa, i di cui confini sono più miserabili e più fessi di questo fesso muro pagatasse...che lei me lo scavalca in un salto...quando succede questo bel fatto...allora...è allora che l'io si determina, con la sua brava mònade in coppa, come il càppero sull'acciuga arrotolata sulla fetta di limone sulla costoletta alla viennese...Allora, allora! È allora, proprio, in quel preciso momento, che spunta fuori quello sparagone d'un io... (*CD* pp. 75-6).

Yet this outburst represents a plea, rather than an assertion. Even Gonzalo himself derides his impossible dream of the monad – the emergence of a fully-formed,

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[64] See Gadda: 'La ossessione di Gonzalo non sembra avere per limite, per punto di deflagrazione, un "delirio interpretativo della realtà", o un sogno gratuito alla don Quijote: nasce e discende invece "dagli altri", procede dagli altrui errori di giudizio e dalle altrui, singole o collettive, carenze di contegno sociale' (*CD* p. 202).

[65] See Levinas, 'Ethics of the Infinite', in Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 1984), pp. 49-69 (pp. 59-60), and Levinas, *Éthique et infini: Dialogues avec Philippe Nemo* (Paris: Fayard and Radio France, 1982), pp. 77-78.

individuated 'io' – since it remains a 'bel fatto' which *La cognizione's* 'impossibile chiusura' will not permit into reality.

Echoing the *Meditazione*'s vision that '[l]a mia monade e il mio io sono delle baracche sconquassate rispetto alle pure sfere d'acciaio di Leibniz e hanno mille finestre e fessure' (*SVP* p. 832), the boundaries of Gonzalo's monad are only an idealisation: the 'confini [...] più miserabili e più fessi di questo fesso muro pagatasse' of an imperfect system, which can be overcome with little effort. Gadda's novel, though misanthropic and desirous of solitude, conceives of death as that which breaks down the tenuous solitude of life, rather than an event which converts us definitively into monads.[66] Once we are in contact with that which is wholly other, the monad has no meaning, no boundaries, and no 'càppero sull'acciuga arrotolata sulla fetta di limone sulla costoletta alla viennese' (*CD* p. 76) to demarcate our being from the other's being. Because of the alterity encountered in death, the seal on Gonzalo's idealised monad, as an individuated and discrete ontology, whose form of life is fully disclosed to the novel's readers, will always come unstuck.

If we return to Critchley's metaphor of the tide drawing out to leave us disclosed, we can perceive death's individuating potential: '[a]s the world slips away, we obtrude'.[67] As we die and disengage from the world, we express our virility through conclusive power, yet at the same moment enter into a contradiction, since we simultaneously lose the ability to call that conclusion our own. While Gonzalo

[66] See where Levinas corrects the idealism of a monadic death by reminding us that '[j]e suis monade en tant que je suis. C'est par l'exister que je suis sans portes ni fenêtres' (p. 21).
[67] Critchley, 'Being and Time, part 5: Anxiety'.

envisages death's finality as '[d]elle ricevute [...] che tutto, tutto era mio! mio!', as though he has inherited all, including himself with death, he also receives a receipt for something else that is equally his: 'il rimorso' (*CD* p. 71). The taint of remorse, in what would otherwise denote a triumphant self-affirmation, points to the irruption of an unknown event in death, an otherness which prohibits any flawless individuation. *Angst*, Heidegger famously contends, confirms death's mine-ness, or *Jemeinigkeit*:[68] '*as the end of Dasein, death is the ownmost, nonrelational, certain, and, as such, indefinite and insuperable possibility of Dasein*',[69] since '[i]nsofar as it "is," death is always essentially my own'.[70] Yet Levinas would rewrite this formulation as the following: we become ourselves only by relating properly to the alterity which death forces upon us. It is not so much the case that, until we die, we must behave well, as Gonzalo muses, '[f]ino a che i gerani, le màmmole, ci premiano della nostra buona condotta... della nostra bontà definitiva...' (*CD* p. 69), but that death is the time when we must conduct ourselves *the most* ethically, since, as Levinas insists, 'la mort c'est la mort d'autrui'.[71] Gonzalo, dreaming that '[...] io rimanevo solo. Con gli atti...scritture di ombra...le ricevute...nella casa vuotata delle anime [...]' (*CD* p. 71), deals neither with Heideggerian *Jemeinigkeit* nor with a Levinasian ethical relation to alterity:

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[68] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 42; 240.
[69] See ibid: 'als Ende des Daseins ist die eigenste, unbezügliche, gewisse und als solche unbestimmte, unüberholbare Möglichkeit des Daseins', since 'Der Tod ist, sofern er "ist", wesensmäßig je der meine' (pp. 258-59); trans. by Stambaugh, p. 248.
[70] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 240; trans. by Stambaugh, p. 231. See Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing*: 'The infinite time of dying evades the writer's grasp and he or she mistakes *le mourir* for *la mort*, dying for death. Death is disclosed upon the horizon of possibility and thus remains within the bounds of phenomenology, or what Levinas would call "the economy of the Same". To conceive of death as possibility is to conceive of it as *my* possibility' (pp. 86-87).
[71] Levinas, 'L'autre dans Proust', *Noms propres* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1976), pp. 149-56 (p. 154). Thomson, 'Rethinking Levinas on Heidegger', explains the meaning of Levinas's enigmatic expression that 'death is the death of other people' as '*through the experience of death we encounter the alterity of the other person*' (p. 33).

Gonzalo's receipts from others are dead things, connoting a residual obligation lasting beyond the grave.

Like Gadda, who intimates a 'qualcosa [...] di inspiegato' (*SVP* p. 741), Levinas recognises an unfathomed element which goes beyond the finitude of ontology. For the latter, 'dans le phénomène de la mort, la solitude se trouve au bord d'un mystère':[72] something which comes from beyond the subject, a something which, to judge by the word 'mystère', confounds the subject. In this moment, the subject arrives at the edge of its possibilities *as subject*. At this limit, we lose what *La cognizione* identifies as the self-defining possibility to 'dire io'. When Gonzalo laments, '... I think; già: but I'm ill of thinking...' (*CD* p. 74), he seems momentarily to open himself up not only to a foreign influx (of English), but to the wholly other which could complicate his 'io', welcoming death as the event which overturns subjectivity: in Levinasian terms, 'un événement par rapport auquel le sujet n'est plus sujet'.[73] Connecting 'nostra impotenza a predicar nulla di nulla' to subjectivity, Gonzalo knows that the 'io' and the 'tu' cannot remain discrete entities into the future:

> ...Il solo fatto che noi seguitiamo a proclamare... io, tu... con le nostre bocche screanzate... con la nostra avarizia di stitici predestinati alla putrescenza... io, tu... questo solo fatto... io, tu... denuncia la bassezza della comune dialettica... e ne certifica della nostra impotenza a predicar nulla di nulla... dacché ignoriamo... il soggetto di ogni proposizione possibile... (*CD* p. 74).

What is this 'soggetto di ogni proposizione possibile', which could ostensibly replace the 'io' and 'tu', but of which we remain ignorant? The doctor asks this question on our behalf, but Gonzalo dismisses it without answering, detouring

[72] Levinas, *Le Temps et l'autre*, p. 20.
[73] Ibid, p. 57.

away from the doctor's question: 'È inutile ch'io lo nòmini invano…' (*CD* p. 74). Far from enacting the individuation of 'io' and 'tu', Gonzalo cannot even individuate a well-formed sentence, let alone liberate a new subject *beyond* the subject. *La cognizione* cannot countenance any new subject forged out of the encounter with alterity and which would possess the potential to surpass ontological and epistemological finitude in an existence other than our own.

Critchley stresses the liberating potential of Heidegger's *Angst* as 'the mood that launched a thousand existentialist novels':[74] a freeing of self from world which occurs when the tide goes out, leaving behind a *Seinkönnen*, or purest of all beings. Thomson, also reading Heidegger, asserts that this being is 'deprived of […] all the positive projects one usually projects oneself into and understands oneself in terms of (teacher, husband, father, citizen, pet-owner, and so on).'[75] We could argue that all literary work constitutes a *Seinkönnen*, since the blank page is as close to naked potentiality that we can get,[76] apparently granting Gadda an opportunity to shed his persona of

> Dio liberi!, uno scrittore: uno scrittore arzigogolato e barocco, come Jean Paul, o Carlo Gozzi, o Carlo Dossi, o un qualche altro Carlo anche peggio di questi due, già così grami loro soli; buono magari di adoperar la guerra, e i dolori della guerra, per cincischiarne e sottilizzarne fuori i suoi ribòboli sterili, in punta di penna (*CD* pp. 16-17).[77]

In transporting his drama to the imagined Maradagàl, Gadda has already freed himself from Milan: but some authorial masks, and some stylistic limitations,

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[74] Critchley, 'Being and Time, part 5: Anxiety'.
[75] Thomson, 'Rethinking Levinas on Heidegger', p. 31.
[76] See Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*: 'all novels imitate a world of potentiality' (p. 138).
[77] Both references overlay parallels with Gadda: Carlo Dossi is a major Italian author also prone to digressions (see Olivia Santovetti, *Digression: A Narrative Strategy in the Italian Novel* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007)), while Carlo Gozzi is a writer of theatre involving masks (see James H. Johnson, *Venice Incognito: Masks in the Serene Republic* (Berkeley and L.A., C.A.: University of California Press, 2011), Ebook.

follow him everywhere. Gadda, though he has deprived himself of his own worldliness in inscribing the blank page, cannot help but reintroduce a 'Carlo' of some kind into his work. His novel is not a *Seinkönnen*, since Gadda will always be recognised for himself in his work: 'scrittore arzigogolato e barocco', the writer of a 'romanzo della pluralità', 'psicopatico e caravaggesco' (*SVP* p. 462; 411), unable to dissociate himself from a multifarious world, unable to 'mourir dans l'œuvre',[78] and therefore to self-liberate.

A man intent on 'scrivere una postilla al *Timeo*, nel silenzio, per gli stipendi di nessuno' (*CD* p. 45), Gadda's creation Gonzalo would seem the perfect candidate to uphold Heidegger's stance of '*anticipatory* resoluteness' ('*vorlaufende* Entschlossenheit'),[79] desperate to actualise what Thomson paraphrases as the Heideggerian movement of breaking 'the grip of the world upon us [...] in order that we may thereby gain (or regain) our grip on this world'.[80] But Gonzalo, as we will see, will never coincide with Heidegger's purest of all beings, separated from the world, and the realisation of this fact only reinforces his cognition of 'dolore'. Undoubtedly, Gonzalo feels besieged by what he perceives as the intrusive presence of others, and would love nothing better than to break their grip on his mother's time:

> ...Dentro io, nella mia casa, con mia madre: e tutti i Giuseppi e le Battistine e le Pi... le Beppe, tutti i nipoti ciuchi e trombati in francese o in matematica di tutti i colonnelli del Maradagàl... Via, via! fuori!... fuori tutti! Questa è, e deve essere, la mia casa... nel mio silenzio... la mia povera casa... (*CD* p. 77).

[78] Girard, *Mensonge romantique*, p. 345; quoted in Italian in Stellardi, *Gadda: miseria e grandezza*, p. 41.
[79] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 382; trans. by Stambaugh, p. 364.
[80] Thomson, 'Rethinking Levinas on Heidegger', p. 29.

Yet above all he is overrun by himself, just like the novel is saturated by his 'ansia'.[81] In an authorially self-reflexive confession, Gonzalo wrestles to be free of all markers of the self:

> I pronomi! Sono i pidocchi del pensiero. Quando il pensiero ha i pidocchi, si gratta, come tutti quelli che hanno i pidocchi… e nelle unghie, allora… ci ritrova i pronomi: i pronomi di persona… (*CD* p. 74).

Gonzalo struggles with 'io' precisely because it affirms a self he would rather suppress, but it is simultaneously a deficient affirmation which is missing 'qualcosa […] di inspiegato' (*SVP* p. 741), the absence of which he grieves without being able to name it:

> Ah! il mondo delle idee! che bel mondo!… ah! l'io, io… tra i mandorli in fiore… poi tra le pere, e le Battistine, e il Giuseppe!… l'io, l'io!… Il più lurido di tutti i pronomi!… (*CD* p. 73).

The novel cannot shed its consciousness that 'io' will never be self-sufficient[82] as a closed system: others are reviled by Gonzalo, but remain necessary. His obsession with 'gli altri' falls into the category of 'deviazione "provvisoria"' (*CD* p. 199) which characterises Gadda's Baroque. It is from within this category that the missing something, absent from the imperfectly individuated 'io', emerges in *La cognizione*'s 'Parte Seconda'.

(M)other and son: potency and act[83]

If Gadda's text suffers from immortality, it is in part due to the opening of the 'impossibile chiusura' through which its intertextual links are made. The

[81] Dombroski, *Creative Entanglements*: 'there is no doubt that Gonzalo is the thing narrated, the "supreme" object, lost to itself, but nonetheless ubiquitous. It is Gonzalo's being that pervades the text with all its perverse and masochistic movement' (p. 77).
[82] See Donnarumma, *Gadda modernista*, on the 'insufficienza dell'io' in Gadda (pp. 25-6).
[83] See the doctor's rumination in *La cognizione* to the effect that 'potenza ed atto son madre e figlio, nel nostro aristotelico mondo' (*CD* p. 35).

declaration in Chapter V of *La cognizione* that Gonzalo's mother 'non era più persona, ma ombra' (*CD* p. 121) recalls the words of Dante to his guide as he enters the *Inferno*: 'Miserere di me…qual che tu sii, od ombra od omo certo!'[84] Dante's guide through Hell is Virgil, a shade, who Dante greets as his 'maestro'.[85] This intertextual understanding is central to grasping Gadda's unique concept of the relation between self and world at the point when the self is about to be torn asunder from the world. We can read Gadda's understanding of this moment against Heidegger's assertion of the authentic self's ability to rejoin the world on its own, as well as against Levinas's insistence on the need for another, an interlocutor, to complete the process of reuniting with the world after the *Angst* of death has dissipated. While Heidegger believes, as Thomson explains, that after the self-confrontation in death, 'we find a way, through what [Heidegger] calls "resolution," to reflexively reconnect to the world lost touch with in death',[86] 'Levinas […] believes that the self can reconnect to the world only by giving itself over to another person – paradigmatically a "teacher" or "master" – with whom this self can grope, in conversation, toward a future it cannot yet comprehend.'[87] The role of the other with whom to 'grope […] toward a future' as yet unknown to it is precisely that filled by Virgil in the *Commedia*, and it is also the role that Gonzalo's mother, who comes from a pedagogical background ('Aveva imparato, insegnato' (*CD* p. 119)), could fill if her protégé were as willing as Dante Alighieri. Though not an exception to the other women of *La cognizione*, who are objects

[84] Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. by Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Doubleday, 2000), I.i.65-6.
[85] Ibid, I.i.84.
[86] Thomson, 'Rethinking Levinas on Heidegger', p. 29.
[87] Ibid, p. 30. See also: Levinas determines that 'one simply cannot get oneself out of the depression-like phenomenon […] one's only hope is to be saved by someone else, through […] "love" or *Eros*' (p. 34).

invoking ridicule,[88] the grotesque,[89] or pathos mixed with sarcasm,[90] Gonzalo's mother nonetheless evokes a higher realm of causality, in a philosophical reflection of the doctor's prior to his first encounter with Gonzalo: 'potenza ed atto son madre e figlio' (*CD* p. 35). She herself is conscious that self-fulfilment can only be achieved through conversation with the other: 'Vagava, nella casa, come cercando il sentiero misterioso che l'avrebbe condotta ad incontrare qualcuno' (*CD* p. 112). We could consider Gadda's *Meditazione milanese* as an example of an antiphonal conversation which moves, in didactic unison, toward enlightenment,[91] and Bertone has indeed already acknowledged Gadda's treatise as the point from which the author's work

> si orienta sempre piú vistosamente verso il perfezionamento dei meccanismi di integrazione della *voce dell'altro* nel discorso, senza peraltro che la realtà della scissione di sé in quanto soggetto e la non-omogeneità della materia che ne risulta cessino di affliggerlo.[92]

This 'voce dell'altro' arguably re-emerges in the 'decostruito (nelle note che si vogliono *costruttive*) e non terminato *La cognizione del dolore*'.[93] As an imperfectly assimilated alterity, the voice of the other chafes at the author's subjectivity across his œuvre, keeping his texts open to the 'qualcosa [...] di inspiegato' (*SVP* p. 741) lurking outside ontology.

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[88] See the footnote to *CD* p. 171 ('mediante una sapiente manovra combinatoria di questi 3 vocaboli, la donna pastrufaziana riesce ad esprimere una qualunque delle sue 22 idee. Naturalmente alla grave bisogna soccorre il fatto che delle 22 idee 18 sono fisse. Le rimanenti 4 meravigliosamente articolate').
[89] Peppa in *La cognizione* fulfils this role, occupied by Menegazzi in *Quer pasticciaccio*.
[90] See the doctor's responses when Peppa details her fears about Gonzalo (*CD* pp. 48-53).
[91] See also Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*, for an example of this antiphony; as well as Nabokov, *Sebastian Knight*: 'Two modes of his life question each other and the answer is his life itself, and that is the nearest one can ever approach a human truth' (*SK* p. 121).
[92] Manuela Bertone, *Il romanzo come sistema: molteplicità e differenza in C.E. Gadda* (Rome: Riuniti, 1993), p. 30.
[93] Ibid, p. 34.

Gadda's famed metaphor to describe the relation of books on a shelf to each other is instructive in elaborating his concept of how alterity and finitude interact:

> Vediamo che la 'verticalità' dei volumi è nettamente reale al centro del gruppo, dove l'uno sostiene l'altro polarmente (cioè l'uno respinge la caduta dell'altro verso di sé e la rende impossibile) mentre è gradualmente meno reale a mano a mano che progrediamo verso le due estremità, o periferia. Lì la verticalità scompare addirittura e diviene non verticalità ma orizzontalità: (che è il non essere della verticalità) (*SVP* p. 679).

The books are able to remain upright due to their mutual dependence, which also discloses the whole of the bookshelf as a collective. Guglielmi's interpretation of this passage of the *Meditazione* indicates a useful link to Levinas:

> As long as the books support each other they are in a dialectical relation; where that relation does not hold we are at the limit: nothingness (error, darkness, death), determined not by the finiteness of understanding nor by the shortsightedness of theory, but rather by the finiteness of our capacity to act. Reality fades into darkness at the point at which we can no longer act.[94]

This 'point at which we can no longer act', and at which the 'dialectical relation' must collapse, sounds like a repetition of Levinas's '[c]e qui est important à l'approche de la mort, c'est qu'à un certain moment nous ne *pouvons plus pouvoir*; c'est en cela justement que le sujet perd sa maîtrise même de sujet'.[95] Here we can understand that in Gadda, relationality is a fundamental condition of our possibility to enjoy any other kind of possibility. Without the self's release of mastery, no future potency is possible. The difference, we will see, is that whereas alterity remains salvational in Levinas's work, it will eventually disappoint (or, rather, be disappointed) in Gadda's.

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[94] Guido Guglielmi, 'Gadda and the Form of the Novel', in *Carlo Emilio Gadda: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Manuela Bertone and Robert S. Dombroski (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 25-42 (p. 38).
[95] Levinas, *Le Temps et l'autre*, p. 62.

In an analepsis in Part VII, we comprehend that Gonzalo has refused, from his mother's hand, the very gift that would propel him into the unreachable, as yet incomprehensible future: the 'orologio' (*CD* pp. 148-9). The importance of this rejected watch is underscored by its repeated apparitions in the text: as the heirloom which the son tramples in a fit of rage, denying parental continuity its due ('ha voluto schiacciar sotto i piedi un orologio, come fosse uva…che era un ricordo di famiglia: e poi, subito dopo, ha distaccato il ritratto del suo povero Papà, che è appeso in sala da desinare…e ci è montato sopra coi piedi…a pestarlo…' (*CD* p. 52)), as the missed opportunity for which 'non aveva mai trovato *in sé* l'energia morale necessaria all'acquisto' (my emphasis) (*CD* p. 148), and as the ideal watch that Gonzalo imagines someone, a female companion perhaps, giving to him before he dismisses the idea: 'visto che nessuna donna ci aveva pensato, mai: nessuna donna? la mamma, la povera mamma' (*CD* pp. 168-9). Having snubbed the other's gift of the passage through time to the future,[96] Gonzalo has lost what Levinas deems the other's promise of what is '*not yet*',[97] which is why possibility does not live in his present.

Gonzalo, figured as perpetrator (actor), has likewise stolen this possibility from his mother, figured as victim (from whom the potency to act stemmed). As 'ombra' she is consigned to Purgatory, though earlier she identified Gonzalo as the one person capable of saving her, since her son remains: 'il bel nome della vita! una continuità che s'adempie' (*CD* p. 118). And she is equally the one person capable of saving him in the 'notte […] eterna' (*CD* pp. 70-1), cultivating 'la lucernetta a

[96] See *Le Temps et l'autre*: 'l'avenir, c'est ce qui n'est pas saisi, ce qui tombe sur nous et s'empare de nous. L'avenir, c'est l'autre' (p. 64). Critchley, *Very Little…Almost Nothing*, argues that 'Dying […] opens the possibility of a future without me, an infinite future, a *future which is not my future*' (p. 89). The latter formulation, as he acknowledges, is a borrowing from Davies.
[97] Thomson, 'Rethinking Levinas on Heidegger', p. 36.

petrolio' (*CD* p. 123) for their nights like a Virgil who goes on into the abyss carrying the light at his back, and thus demonstrates to his follower where to walk, if we recall Statius's praise of Virgil in *Purgatorio*: 'Facesti come quei che va di notte/che porta il lume dietro e sé non giova,/ma dopo sé fa le persone dotte,/quando dicesti: "Secol si rinova;/torna giustizia e primo tempo umano,/e progenïe scende da ciel nova."'[98] The progeny of Gonzalo's mother, however, finds Dantean 'pietà' too alien a concept to justify following his would-be teacher into the unknown beyond ontology.

As *La cognizione* approaches its final page, prefigurations accumulate which accuse Gonzalo of the violent attack on his mother. As in Gadda's other major novel, *Quer pasticciaccio*, the victim leaves the page with their arms outstretched to 'gli altri', the unnamed, and perhaps unnameable, others: '[l]e due povere mani levate, scheletrite, parevano protese verso "gli altri" come in una difesa o in una implorazione estrema' (*CD* p. 190), just like the branches of the almond tree which reach out when the two nightwatchmen go to check on the Pirobutirro villa: 'Il vento, a folate brevi [...] agitava i poveri rami dei mandorli [...] bracci scheletriti dal digiuno' (*CD* p. 185), the 'mandorli' being those trees on which Gadda's ejaculations fixated in Chapter Three ('ah! l'io, io...tra i mandorli in fiore [...]' (*CD* p. 73)). Once discovered, lying half dead in her bed, the mother's 'visage' appeals directly to a male blood relative: '[q]uel viso, come spetro, si rivolgeva dal buio sottoterra alla società superna dei viventi, forse immaginava senza sperarlo il soccorso, la parola di un uomo, di un figlio' (*CD* p. 115), but this face has already been lost as 'visage' to the son who has abandoned her, become 'il viso della

[98] Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. by Hollander and Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), II.xxii.67-72.

mamma, pallido nelle sue rughe, come dietro sbarre del tempo finito' (*CD* p. 147). Though she is unable to speak, two details of her 'volto ingiuriato' (*CD* p. 192) whisper that Gonzalo is the assassin. The first is 'la lingua' which 'pareva essersi affossata nel palato [...] giù, afflosciata nel retrobocca' (*CD* pp. 191-92), recalling the tongue of the sea urchin on which Gonzalo nearly choked in the legend ascribed to him by local lore, or what the doctor calls 'barocche fandonie' (*CD* p. 39): '[c]he la coda poi gli scodinzolò a lungo fuor dalla bocca, come una seconda lingua che non riuscisse più a ritirare, che quasi quasi lo soffocava' (*CD* p. 39). The second is the 'due fili di sangue' which 'le colavano dalle narici, le scendevano sulla bocca semiaperta' (*CD* p. 190), which feature in Gonzalo's stream of consciousness just prior to his abandonment of his mother in Chapter 8 as he re-imagines his brother's death in wartime: 'con due fili rossi sui labbri dalle narici, e gli occhi aperti, aperti, dentro cui si spegneva il tramonto...Coi labbri pareva voler ribere il suo stesso sangue...perché non sta bene...dal naso...il sangue...due fili rossi...dal naso' (*CD* p. 166). This death at sunset prefigures, too, the novel's final image as the dying mother's head is bathed at dawn ('E alle stecche delle persiane già l'alba' (*CD* p. 193)). Each pair of prefigurations reminds us of the close relation between the former potency of the 'tempo degli atti possibili' and that which follows after, the 'sera spaventosa, eterna' (*CD* pp. 70-71) in which 'gli atti sono tutti adempiuti' (*CD* p. 67), but a sense of 'inadempienza' (*CD* p. 63) lives on after the single-word sentence which brutally summarises the mother's fate: 'Abbandono' (*CD* p. 192).

We can, therefore, connect Savettieri's claim that 'il futuro [...] è il vero tempo perduto del romanzo'[99] to Levinas's 'l'avenir, c'est l'autre': the future is indeed lost

[99] Cristina Savettieri, 'Il racconto del tempo nella *Cognizione del dolore*', *Italianistica: Rivista di letteratura italiana*, 31 (2002), 237-52 (p. 247).

because the other, too, is lost in *La cognizione*. Just like 'il tempo degli atti possibili' is always already in the past, others are always already separated from Gonzalo: '[t]utte le anime erano lontane come frantumi di mondi; perse all'amore… nella notte… perdute… appesantite dal silenzio, conscie del nostro antico dileggio… esuli senza carità da noi nella disperata notte…' (*CD* p. 71). Gonzalo's prescience of his inability to move into the future alone ('andare soli verso la notte' (*CD* p. 142)), leads him to the climactic point where '[a]vrebbe voluto inginocchiarsi e dire: "perdonami, perdonami! Mamma, sono io!"', but instead he tends to the other extreme: 'Se ti trovo ancora una volta nel braco dei maiali, scannerò te e loro' (*CD* p. 175). This is the point at which Gonzalo brings his nightmare to fruition, at which he bypasses the possibility of 'chiedere perdono di nulla… di nulla!' (*CD* p. 70). At this point, Gadda is willing to admit relationality into his ethics of finitude, but casts out from his novel the notion of a salvational other who never materialises.

Rejoining the ancient flux of possibility

> Oh!, lungo il cammino delle generazioni, la luce!…che recede, recede… opaca…. dell'immutato divenire. Ma nei giorni, nelle anime, quale elaborante speranza!…e l'astratta fede, la pertinace carità. Ogni prassi è un'immagine,… zendado, impresa, nel vento bandiera… La luce, la luce recedeva… e l'impresa chiamava avanti, avanti, i suoi quartati: a voler raggiungere il fuggitivo occidente… E dolorava il respiro delle generazioni, de semine in semen, di arme in arme. Fino allo incredibile approdo.
>
> *La cognizione del dolore* (p. 42).

Gadda's novel, beginning with 'le leggi di Maradagàl', which allow landowners the discretion to join (or not to join) the nightwatch, seems to return full circle when

we learn that the book Gonzalo leaves open on his desk, glanced at by a community-member entering the house on suspicion of criminal activity there, reads: 'Ma le leggi della perfetta città devono […]' (*CD* p. 188). *La cognizione* depends on community, envisioned here as a multiplicity of alterity, to intervene in the narrative of solitude, absorb the victim of injustice back into the fold, and end the narrative. Gadda's imagination of a future in which Gonzalo's mother reconnects to the 'flusso antico della possibilità' (*CD* p. 119) in death extends her 'rantolo' to the 'respiro delle generazioni, de semine in semen, di arme in arme', so that all of fascist society – whether that of fictive Maradagàl, or of its model, Italy – inherits the death rattle. Gadda's cycle ironises any Heideggerian-style fulfilment through continuous reproduction of *Dasein*'s projects, a movement which Thomson describes as a 'revolution back to self': the process in which

> the authentic self becomes itself fully by seizing its 'fate' and thereby helping to shape the communal 'destiny' of its generation […] through a creative 'repetition' of projects drawn from the past which enable this self to establish the relatively continuous identity of itself and its community.[100]

One such 'creative "repetition"', though scorned by Gadda, might include Gonzalo's mother's donation of filial blood (her other son) to the Republic: 'perché ne disponessero, gli strateghi della Repubblica, del suo sangue più bello!' (*CD* p. 118) in a society which has already prompted the wry observation 'il tessuto della collettività, un po' dappertutto forse, nel mondo, e nel Maradagàl più che altrove, conosce una felice attitudine a smemorarsi' (*CD* p. 11). By contrast, Thomson describes Levinas's trajectory through the confrontation with death as an '*eccentric* passage': that is, we self-fulfil through 'being reborn as another person, a person who is radically different from his or her previous self-conception […]

[100] Thomson, 'Rethinking Levinas on Heidegger', p. 35, referring to Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (pp. 384-86).

accomplished through a "transubstantiation" in which I am reborn as the "son" of myself and so transformed into a radically *other-directed* self.'[101] We can link the idea of Levinas's alterity-focused community, rejuvenated by transubstantiation, to the *Meditazione milanese*'s intertwined relations: '[n]on è possibile pensare un grumo di relazioni come finito, come un gnocco distaccato da altri nella pentola. I filamenti di questo grumo ci portano ad altro, ad altro, infinitamente ad altro' (*SVP* p. 645),[102] but in *La cognizione* there is, as we will see, no 'eccentric passage' out of the Gaddian 'gnommero' or 'groviglio' (*QP* p. 4).

Community takes over at the end of Gadda's novel, when the mother's

> capo, tutto sangue, fu dolcemente deterso, senza rimuoverlo, senza strapparne un cappello [...] L'ausilio dell'arte medica, lenimento, pezzuole, dissimulò in parte l'orrore. Si udiva il residuo d'acqua e alcool dalle pezzuole strizzate ricadere gocciolando in una bacinella. E alle stecche delle persiane già l'alba. Il gallo, improvvisamente, la suscitò dai monti lontani, perentorio ed ignaro, come ogni volta. La invitava ad accedere e ad elencare i gelsi, nella solitudine della campagna apparita (*CD* pp. 192-3).

The cleansing of Gonzalo's mother's skull represents a ritual of community regaining control, and allowing the mother, though unconscious of her transubstantiation, to be again 'ripresa nell'evento, nel flusso antico della possibilità, della continuazione, come tutti, vicina a tutti' (*CD* p. 119), as she earlier wished to be.[103] She is not forgotten or 'condotta dove si dimentica e si è dimenticati, oltre le case ed i muri, lungo il sentiero aspettato dai cipressi' (*CD* p. 118), in an image which recalls the exhortation to bury and commemorate the dead

[101] 'Rethinking Levinas on Heidegger', p. 35.
[102] See Rushing, 'La sua tragica incompiutezza', to the effect that Gadda sees alterity as an essential feature of systems, and one reason to appeal 'for a philosophy and a literature that would mirror the world's endless multiplicity' (p. 133).
[103] This serves as an apt example of Critchley's reading, in *Very Little...Almost Nothing*, of the community which Heidegger imagines in *Sein und Zeit* as 'a community of death, where commonality is found in a sharing of finitude, where individual fates are taken up into a common destiny, where death is the Work of the community' (p. 87).

in Ugo Foscolo's *Dei Sepolcri*: 'All'ombra de' cipressi e dentro l'urne/confortate di pianto è forse il sonno/della morte men duro?'.[104] In the renewal of dawn, the mother 'dolcemente deterso' (*CD* p. 192) is reborn, through an imperfect assonance, as her 'decentemente defunto' (*CD* p. 58) son, but the rooster's song to end the novel, 'perentorio ed ignaro', links this proclamation of finality with ignorance. Like the irrevocably open system of which Gadda writes in his *Meditazione* (*SVP* p. 743), the mother's 'corpo', metonym for conclusion and death, is left open: just like her parted 'labbra insanguinate e semiaperte' from which 'un rantolo, col respiro, ne usciva' (*CD* p. 191). Instead of embellishing the individual's potentiality, the novel contextualises the '*flusso* antico della possibilità' (my italics), and thus the dying mother, herself an uncloseable system, is absorbed into a 'rantolo': a stream of consciousness without start or end, but one which conforms neither to Heidegger's self-involved programme of individual-directed 'destiny', nor to Levinas's approach toward the salvational other through 'eccentric passage'. 'Flusso', Gadda's chosen metaphor, is indeterminate and irresolute, like his novel in its entirety: beings in flux, caught between two death rattles, do not reach a destination.

Conclusion

> Nessuno conobbe il lento pallore della negazione.
>
> Gadda, *La cognizione del dolore* (p. 141)
>
> à réaliser le vide, on crée une œuvre, et l'œuvre, née de la fidélité à la mort, n'est finalement plus capable de mourir et, à celui qui a voulu se préparer une mort sans histoire, elle n'apporte que la dérision de l'immortalité.

[104] Ugo Foscolo, 'Dei Sepolcri', in *Poesie e Sepolcri*, ed. by Donatella Martinelli (Milan: Mondadori, 1987), pp. 145-53 (i-iii).

Blanchot, 'La Littérature et le droit à la mort' (p. 328)

When we probe what Stellardi calls the 'difetto ontologico strutturale' of key moments in Gadda's novel,[105] we find that the 'difetto' lies in an openness in the writing of each of these moments. In each instance, a responsibility to alterity, rooted in Gadda's moral and philosophical convictions, manifests in irresolution. *La cognizione*, 'née de la fidélité à la mort' like the work to which Blanchot refers above, in full prospect of a resolution (if we accept Gadda's 'L'Editore chiede venia'), draws only 'la dérision de l'immortalité'. It is Gadda's writing *itself* which keeps resolution open: a writing informed by Gadda's philosophy of the impossible closure of systems. While Gadda allows a certain resoluteness toward finitude to speak through the beleaguered voice of Gonzalo, as in Chapter III's tirade following the medical 'auscultazione', he does so ironically. As Gadda's novel strives toward self-suppression, it seeks out virility-affirming finitude, but cannot ultimately recognise, as Heidegger does, the purity of *Seinkönnen*, nor the potency of death as a possibility of impossibility, nor the essential *Jemeinigkeit* of death without qualification. Gadda's pursuit of novelistic finitude instead culminates, to use the language of Blanchot, in an affirmation precisely of that which it was meant to negate: 'réaliser le vide'.[106]

Yet despite Gadda's antithetical relation to Heideggerian finitude, and his tendency to recognise alterity in his novel's many turns from ontology to ethics, he also refuses a Levinasian elevation of the other into myth and inaccessibility. That is to say, Gadda's writing-toward-irresolution is always relational, but not so

[105] Stellardi, *Gadda: miseria e grandezza*, p. 42.
[106] Dombroski, *Creative Entanglements*, recognises 'the ethical dilemma at the heart of [*La cognizione*]' as 'to negate or not to negate' (p. 76).

relational that the other allows us a passage out of irresolution. Gadda's philosophy of 'impossibile chiusura' and writing toward impossible conclusions ultimately lead him to conflict with both Heidegger's and Levinas's premises. *La cognizione* finally jars with Heidegger's insistence that we can only conceive of death as our own, as well as with Levinas's thought of the 'absolument autre', according to which death is the unknowable other's alone. The crux of *La cognizione*'s irresolution is that, in its non-death, the novel fails to individuate itself as a discrete, closed work, not least because the existence of serialised, edited, and supplemented texts of *La cognizione* serve to remind us of Gadda's 'residuo o errore di chiusura' (*SVP* p. 743). The novel simultaneously fails to revive itself in what Blanchot calls an 'existence qui n'est pas la sienne'[107] through its encounter with alterity. The novel cannot get outside itself, but can still signal to that outside through the 'filamenti di questo grumo' which 'ci portano ad altro, ad altro, infinitamente ad altro' (*SVP* p. 645), all the while evincing the dolorous 'cognizione' of its own lack of fulfilment.

[107] Blanchot, *La Part du feu*, p. 327.

Chapter Two

Aporia and Finitude of the Corp(u)s: Beckett's Trilogy (1)

> ce que je voyais ressemblait plutôt à un émiettement, à un effondrement rageur de tout ce qui depuis toujours me protégeait de ce que depuis toujours j'étais condamné à être.
>
> Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* (p. 247)

The trajectory described by Jacques Moran in the above epigraph from *Molloy* is not unique to him, since protagonists in Beckett's so-called early Trilogy of novels (*Molloy* (1951), *Malone meurt* (1951), and *L'Innommable* (1953)) share in the same 'émiettement'. For each character, 'ce qui depuis toujours me protégeait' edges closer to 'ce que depuis toujours j'étais condamné à être', as Beckett whittles away at the space intervening between these terms to the point where the two may be said to touch. This 'émiettement', by which Beckett crumbles the transitional space in-between, works by means of his oscillating rhythm of affirmations followed by negations, what Beckett himself called a 'rhythm and syntax of extreme weakness'.[1] Developing work by Hill, Weller, and Connor, among others, on aporia, bodily passage, and finitude in Beckett, I seek to understand how the Trilogy's syntactic 'effondrement rageur' disintegrates bodies, decomposing both *corps* on a thematic level and *corpus* on a structural level. The end of narrative confronts us with an existential aporia: how to stop speaking, end narration, and move into silence, an

[1] See Beckett, 'Letter to Barbara Bray', 11 March 1959, in *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, III (2014): 1957-1965: 'I'm struggling along with the new moan, trying to find the rhythm and syntax of extreme weakness, penury perhaps I should say' (p. 211). See also Critchley, *Very Little…Almost Nothing*, p. 27.

aporia which, this chapter will argue, emulates that at the end of life.[2] If we rely on the aporias at the end of narrative and end of life mirroring each other, then decomposing involves a double entendre: the physical decomposition moving toward death, which afflicts the various 'je' figures of Beckett's Trilogy, but also the act of decomposing a text.[3] The 'double bind' of which Jean-Luc Nancy writes in *Corpus* in relation to speaking our corporeal finitude ('c'est un double échec qui est donné: échec à parler du corps, échec à le taire. Double bind, psychose'),[4] may be useful in explaining how Beckett cannot but compose as he decomposes. That is: in the Trilogy, the 'échec à parler du corps' signifies a failure to identify the body or to access one text distinct from others in the tangle, correlating to a failure to isolate the self and its embodied limits. But the failure *not* to speak of the body also remains a constant throughout the three novels, because any discourse at all, even one intended to decompose, produces a body.[5] As the 'je' of *L'Innommable* proclaims, '[l]a recherche du moyen de faire cesser les choses, taire sa voix, est ce qui permet au discours de se poursuivre' (*I* p. 21). Or, as Molloy enigmatically pronounces, '[d]écomposer c'est vivre aussi' (*M* p. 39): decomposition in the literary sense prolongs the life of Beckett's texts.

[2] The preceding chapter investigated this aporia more fully in the context of Heidegger's *Sein zum Tode*.
[3] Or un-wording it: see Shane Weller, 'Unwords', in *Beckett and Nothing: Trying to Understand Beckett*, ed. by Daniela Caselli (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 107-24, where Weller references Beckett's 'unwords': 'words that work against what in the letter to Kaun [Beckett] terms the "veil" (*Schleier*) of language in order to disclose that which lies beyond language, "be it something or nothing" […]' (p. 108). See also Beckett, 'Letter to Axel Kaun', 9 July 1937, in *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, I (2009): 1929-1940: 'On the road toward this, for me, very desirable literature of the non-word, some form of nominalistic irony can of course be a necessary phase' (p. 520). See also Weller, *Language and Negativity in European Modernism: Toward a Literature of the Unword* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), where he writes of 'linguistic self-decomposition' (pp. 90-125).
[4] Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 52.
[5] Writing *exscribes* a body, according to Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 76.

Several studies focus on the body in Beckett,[6] and many others comment on it obliquely, but my intent here is to investigate how corporeality in Beckett gives rise to dramas of finitude. In clarifying Beckett's expression 'syntax of weakness', Critchley goes on to link this aspect of the author's style to 'the weakness of our relation to finitude, the articulation of a physical feebleness, a dwindling, stiffening corporeality'.[7] In conjunction with this syntax, I would suggest that it is the Trilogy's structure of embedded, obscurely connected textual worlds (peopled with bodies which fail to coincide with subjectivities), and the spatially and temporally problematic possibility of moving between these worlds, which together dramatise a link between aporia and finitude akin to that which Jacques Derrida exploits in *Apories*.[8] Aporia, as Derrida explains, denotes both passage and non-passage in a philosophical sense.[9] The first novel of Beckett's Trilogy opens with a focus on passage: Molloy has arrived at a destination, yet is unsure as to how his arrival there was achieved ('[j]e ne sais pas comment j'y suis arrivé' (*M* p. 7)). But this incipit is not exceptional: Beckett writes novels cluttered with problematics of passage. According to Hill, who has written extensively on aporia in Beckett, these are 'moments of intellectual crisis, by which key distinctions are both maintained and efface themselves'.[10] In three novels which centre on crumbling identities, narratives,

[6] See, for example, Ulrika Maude, 'Beckett, Body and Mind', in *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Dirk Van Hulle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 170-84 (p. 170); and Peter Boxall, 'The Novel Body', in *The Value of the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 71-92.
[7] Critchley, *Very Little…Almost Nothing*, p. 199.
[8] Derrida, *Apories: Mourir – s'attendre aux "limites de la vérité"* (Paris: Galilée, 1996). See also Leslie Hill's definition of aporia specific to Beckett, in Hill, *Beckett's Fiction: In Different Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 'In Beckett's text, as in its etymology, aporia comes to mean a peculiar kind of discontinuous or circular movement, a crossing of navigable verbal territory into uncharted and disorientating non-space […] a moment of passage that is somehow both impossible and yet inescapable if the writing is to articulate itself and thus continue' (p. 63).
[9] Derrida, 'Prière d'insérer', *Apories*, p. 1.
[10] Hill, *In Different Words*, p. 62.

and bodies,[11] aporia constantly acts to 'unsettl[e] and unbalanc[e]' 'oppositional pairs'[12] like the pair of terms in the epigraph from *Molloy* above, alternately permitting or precluding the possibility of passage in and out of the textual worlds of *Molloy, Malone meurt*, and *L'Innommable*. The aporetic passage out of the self is also important to Meillassoux's concept of going beyond finitude, which involves '*sortir de soi-même,* s'emparer de l'en-soi, connaître ce qui est que nous soyons ou pas'.[13] Part of the thrust of this chapter is indeed to locate Beckett in relation to Meillassouxian finitude, and to grasp how Beckettian finitude diverges from this contemporary philosopher's conception.

Where Chapter One explored the novel's ability to imagine a death which is possible for us to experience only as an impossibility (in other words, possible for us only in literature), Chapter Two countenances the potential passage or (non-passage) out of that bind. If death is to mark a passage out of any given novel, establishing the identity of the dying is essential. Yet this individuation is taxing in Beckett, where narrators are liable to deny their own voices: the protagonist of *L'Innommable* claims 'je ne dis rien, je ne sais rien, ces voix ne sont pas de moi, ni ces pensées, mais des ennemis qui m'habitent' (*I* p. 101). Thomas Trezise posits these 'voice(s) haunting the subject(s) of Beckett's trilogy' as one of the 'ways in which the twentieth century has sought to think an intersubjective alterity at once constitutive of and irreducible to the phenomenological universe of same and other.'[14] My own study of

[11] See Shane Weller, *A Taste for the Negative: Beckett and Nihilism* (London: Legenda, 2005), to the effect that '[*Molloy*] is a novel in which all identifications, judgements, measurements and nominations fail to hold' (p. 98).
[12] Hill, *In Different Words*, p. 102.
[13] Meillassoux, *Après la finitude*, p. 49.
[14] Trezise, *Into the Breach: Samuel Beckett and the Ends of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). Other concepts Trezise mentions in this list include 'Heidegger's *das Man*, the anonymous, public "they"; Lévinasian *il y a*; Blanchot's theory of impersonality; the Deleuzian *moi passif* and *je fêlé*; Derrida's concept of "*écriture*"' (p. 66).

alterity relies on an interpretation of Beckett as an author writing at the mid-point of the twentieth century, whose post-war Trilogy speaks to aspects of late modernism,[15] but who rewards our reading his works through the lens of postmodernism, and particularly through the perspectives of philosophers such as Derrida, Merleau-Ponty, and Nancy. In Chapter One of this thesis, the strand of 'intersubjective alterity' with which I was most concerned was how literature engages with death as 'la mort d'autrui'.[16] In the current chapter, however, I turn to other theoretical perspectives to explore the relation between alterity and ontological finitude, none of which alone fully explains the texts, but the juxtaposition of which can further both our understanding of Beckett's conception of finitude and how he portrays any possibility of going beyond it. The plural voices of which Trezise writes are vital: by contradicting each other's possibility of dying out, they keep death in Beckett's Trilogy from being the death of each voice unto itself. For instance, the unnamed 'je' of the final Trilogy novel, *L'Innommable*, hesitates on the threshold of a transitional point:

> je suis peut-être devant la porte, ça m'étonnerait, c'est peut-être moi, ça a été moi, quelque part ça a été moi, je peux partir, tout ce temps j'ai voyagé, sans le savoir, c'est moi devant la porte, quelle porte, ce n'est plus un autre, que vient faire une porte ici (*I* p. 212).

Yet the transcendent potential of this opening, the doorway, is belittled by an uncertainty as to continuity of the 'moi': if this 'moi' passes through the threshold, the 'moi' in question may no longer refer to the same subject, jeopardising the significance of the transitional moment. Analysing moments like this one, I seek to comprehend how the final 'je' of the Trilogy becomes overwhelmed by the failures of

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[15] See Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1999), Ebook: late-modernist 'texts dramatise a particularly violent discombobulation of body and thought, a mirthless comedy of bodily discomposure' (p. 20). Though Miller concentrates on an earlier period of Beckett's work, his comments on the body breaking up provide an instructive context.
[16] Levinas, *Noms propres*, p. 154.

other voices to effect a passage out, just as the possibilities envisaged by preceding characters reveal themselves to be dead ends for later protagonists.

To understand the interstices between the Trilogy's plurality of voices as 'intersubjective alterity', and the concepts of aporia and finitude, this chapter employs Derrida's 'logique plurielle de l'aporie'. According to this logic, we have three central figures of aporia, all of which speak to the (im)possibility of passage. The first figure corresponds to an unsurpassable boundary or limit, the second to the lack of a limit (or the existence of too porous a limit), and the third to a breakdown of the first two figures such that there is no longer any space for passage, place to step, nor pathway for '*trans*- (transport, transposition, transgression, traduction, transcendance même)'.[17] Crucially, for Derrida, any 'partage entre de multiples figures de l'aporie n'oppose pas les unes aux autres mais installe la hantise de l'une dans l'autre'.[18] Bearing in mind Derrida's assertion that where identity is compromised, passage becomes a problem,[19] my chief contention is that it is Beckett's crumbling of the space holding apart identity and alterity which provokes aporia in the Trilogy. The novels' unfinishing, decomposing impulse, evinced in their repetition of aporia within aporia, in turn determines the finitude – or lack of finitude – of Beckett's *corp(u)s*. The current chapter investigates how the three figures of aporia just mentioned haunt each other along boundaries of the Trilogy, analogous to the way in which the voices of Molloy, Moran, Malone, and the

[17] Derrida, *Apories*, p. 47. See also: in the first case, we have 'une frontière infranchissable'; in the second, 'pas de limite', 'plus de frontière' or the 'limite est trop poreuse'; in the third, 'pas lieu pour une aporie déterminée comme expérience du pas ou du bord […] [p]lus de cheminement ou de trajectoire, plus de *trans*- […]' (pp. 44-47).
[18] Ibid, p. 44.
[19] See ibid: 'là où se voit compromise l'identité ou l'indivisibilité d'une ligne (*finis* ou *peras*), l'identité à soi et donc l'identification possible d'une bordure intangible, le passage de la ligne devient un *problème*' (p. 30).

unnamed narrator of *L'Innommable*, among others, haunt each other *within each other* without standing in any binary opposition. I probe whether Beckett's aporetics – his affirmations-negations, reversals, and strategies for decomposition – might be said to open up, or rather to close off, passage through the three novels.

In true postmodern style, Derrida's 1994 work on aporia proceeds by 'antanaclasis'[20] of the word *finis*,[21] collating its various meanings and demonstrating how difference inhabits repetition when it comes to the concept of finitude. It becomes evident from this antanaclastic process that aporia, beyond the Aristotelian definition which Derrida cites initially,[22] designates more than just an impasse. Aporia is intrinsically linked to ontological finitude, a condition 'qu'il faut endurer pour qu'une décision, une responsabilité, un événement ou une hospitalité, un don soient possibles,'[23] including the event of death or, I would suggest, the ending of a literary text. Where ending (whether bodily or textual) is concerned, this condition can be broken down into three preconditions which underly this chapter's structure, each of which depends on boundaries holding, or (paradoxically) not holding. To examine aporia's effect on finitude in the Trilogy, I am using a formulation from *Molloy*, that is, the eponymous character's declaration of intent at the beginning of the novel: '[m]oi je voudrais maintenant parler des choses qui me restent, faire mes adieux, finir de mourir' (*M* p. 7). Though this declaration is followed by 'Ils ne veulent pas' (*M* p. 7), which seems temporarily to stall the narrator's plan, Molloy and later Malone somehow go on to attempt all three parts of it. Speaking of one's remaining

[20] Waugh, *Practising Postmodernism/Reading Modernism*, defines antanaclasis in Derrida as 'repeating a word but using different senses of it' (p. 12).
[21] Derrida, *Apories*, pp. 21-22. See 'finis' in Gaffiot, pp. 668-69.
[22] Derrida, *Apories*: 'une certaine *impossibilité* comme non-viabilité, comme non-voie ou chemin barré: il s'agit de l'impossible ou de l'impraticable (*diaporeô* est ici le mot d'Aristote, il signifie "je suis dans l'embarras, je ne m'en sors pas, je ne peux rien faire")' (p. 33).
[23] Derrida, 'Prière d'insérer', *Apories*, p. 1.

possessions, saying farewell, and finishing dying are all necessary preconditions for death, each entailing a separation, whether from objects, from others, or from life itself, which can only function if the terms of same and other are also separated, thus this declaration of intent usefully frames the interrelationship between finitude and alterity in Beckett's Trilogy.

The chapter's first section, 'Parler des choses qui me restent: inventories, stories, memoirs', concentrates on the boundary separating the self from objects, or between 'the human and the non-human, articulateness and engulfment', as Hill characterises it.[24] It raises the trope of the inventory in Beckett, and how an enumeration of objects tends to ghost the narrative traditions of story and memoir, so that Beckett's blurring of these conventions inhibits storytelling's momentum. The second section, 'Faire mes adieux: narratives touching and touched', examines how the self divides from others before death. It focuses on a crossing-over between subject and object (or between the narratives of the ambiguous figures A and B in *Molloy*, of other 'pseudo-couples' in the Trilogy, and of ancestor-descendant relations), that is, on textual instances which resemble what Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *Le Visible et l'invisible* calls the chiasm,[25] a crossing-over which confounds finitude. The third section, 'Finir de mourir: decomposing bodies', will investigate how voices from the Trilogy strive to move from speech into silence, as the self disconnects from life in the conclusion of the dying process. It draws on Jean-Luc Nancy's *Corpus* to wonder whether Nancy's concept of 'excription' might clarify Beckett's writing of the body as text, or text as body, as a possible exit point to the Trilogy as a whole. Inspired by reflections

[24] Hill, *In Different Words*, p. x.
[25] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Notes de Travail', in *Le Visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964): 'Le chiasme, la reversibilité, c'est l'idée que toute perception est doublée d'une contre-perception (opposition réelle de Kant), est acte à deux faces, on ne sait plus qui parle et qui écoute. Circularité parler-écouter, voir-être vu, percevoir-être perçu' (p. 318).

on aporia, touch, and the body in Derrida, Merleau-Ponty, and Nancy, my conclusion takes into account how narratives in the Trilogy 'touch'[26] by folding back over each other, undergoing a kind of reverse composition which has implications for novelistic finitude in Beckett.

'Parler des choses qui me restent': inventories, stories, memoirs

> …mourir sans laisser d'inventaire, puis-je vraiment me résigner à cette possibilité?
> Donc mes histoires d'abord et en dernier lieu, si tout va bien, mon inventaire.
>
> Beckett, *Malone meurt* (p. 11)
>
> Quand j'aurai fait mon inventaire, si ma mort n'est pas prête, j'écrirai mes mémoires. Tiens, j'ai dit une plaisanterie.
>
> Beckett, *Malone meurt* (p. 15)

Malone's admission mid-Trilogy that the writing up of an inventory is 'un très vieux projet' (*MM* p. 10) speaks both analeptically and proleptically to readers of the three novels. The inventory is already old from a point of view which retains memory of *Molloy*, and will be old news for the 'je' of *L'Innommable*, in the sense that the 'je' has no possessions, and any project of inventorying has ceased by that novel's beginning. Malone, meanwhile, is determined to divide his time into strict subsets, allocating the first portion to his 'état présent', the next to his 'histoires', the last to his 'inventaire', and then (in jest, he clarifies) to his 'mémoires' (*MM* p. 15). The protective boundaries between these diverse forms begin to yield, as I will detail,

[26] In employing ideas by these three philosophers to understand touch in Beckett, I will consider both the immediacy of touch, depicted as a way of joining subjectivities across the Trilogy, as well as the interruptory force of touch as a way of separating these subjectivities.

where inventory, story, and memoir collide in testamentary literature.[27] A testamentary narrative might be said to work against the latent forgetfulness which afflicts narrator-writers in the Trilogy, who are obsessed with recording what happens, or more accurately what 'fails to happen' (the latter also a preoccupation of Derrida's, to which I will return later in this chapter).[28] In an ongoing parody of testamentary narrative, based on the collision of the diverse forms mentioned above, Beckett's Trilogy disrupts the testament's promise of finality. Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet explains that testamentary literature lends itself to parody: '[l]e testament littéraire met [...] en scène deux pôles de l'écriture: une face sérieuse voire solennelle qui lie un code, le droit et un thème, la mort, et une face comique à visée satirique qui parodie le code et fait rire du thème.'[29] In Beckett, this parody works partly through its disintegration of not just the 'code', but the 'je' in question, as is common in the subgenre: '[le] *je* reçoit alors une coloration, une épaisseur qu'il ne faudrait pas trop s'empresser pourtant de lire comme autobiographie. Le testament est une composition, sur la décomposition, la personne, une *persona*'.[30] The idea of composition superimposed upon decomposition, voiced not by a person but by a *persona*,[31] helps to clarify how the Trilogy's separation of the self from objects

[27] See Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, *L'Écriture testamentaire à la fin du Moyen Age: Identité, dispersion, trace* (Oxford: Legenda, 1999), where she refers to texts which 'adoptant le moule juridique, répartissent des biens, les dispersent sur un mode le plus souvent satirique' (p. 3) and theorises that '[c]e qui fait lien dans le testament est la forme testamentaire même: un moi qui se recueille, se rassemble et médite avant la dispersion finale de la mort ou la métamorphose de l'autre vie' (p. 16).
[28] See Derrida, '"This Strange Institution Called Literature": An Interview with Jacques Derrida', in Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 33-75 (p. 34): where Derrida, responding to Derek Attridge as to whether his primary interest lies in literature or philosophy, explains that 'Still today there remains in me an obsessive desire to save in uninterrupted inscription, in the form of a memory, what happens – or *fails to happen*.' The negative potential inherent in recording what 'fails to happen', I would argue, forms an integral part of Beckett's 'syntax of weakness'.
[29] Cerquiglini-Toulet, p. 2.
[30] Ibid, pp. 6-7.
[31] Helen J. Swift, *Representing the Dead: Epitaph Fictions in Late-Medieval France* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2016), suggests that Cerquiglini-Toulet's use of the word persona refers to a 'mask' in the context of a 'dramatic self-projection' (p. 50).

contributes to a disintegration of boundaries between inventories, stories, and memoirs.

The fear of 'mourir sans laisser d'inventaire' vexes characters throughout the Trilogy. Narrators all too often end up writing anti-memoirs replete with once lost, almost forgotten, but inevitably recurring objects. Yet Malone's anxiety over whether he will be able to '[se] résigner à cette possibilité' (of dying before the inventory is complete) is paradoxically undermined by all the ways in which Beckett implies that dying without first inventorying is *not* a possibility for the protagonists of the Trilogy. Why is death without first compiling an inventory an impossible death? I would suggest that the urge to 'parler des choses qui me restent' is connected to the characters' compulsion to devise an 'attitude vis-à-vis des objets' (*I* p. 8) before death, that is, to the Trilogy's attempts to define the human in contrast to the non-human in order to pass through the threshold of human mortality, as it is the privilege of humans alone to apprehend their own death.[32] Since we cannot carry objects with us into death (remembering from Chapter One the naked and pure potentiality of *Dasein*, when this entity is left bereft as the tide rolls back in *Angst*),[33] the prospect of a stable attitude toward objects offers hope for separating the human self from worldly possessions in order to move that self closer to death. Molloy's hat, for instance, confirms to him that he is alive: '[j]'ôtai mon chapeau et le regardai. Un long lacet le relie, depuis toujours, à ma boutonnière, toujours la même, quelle que soit la saison. Je vis donc toujours' (*M* p. 19), while Malone foresees giving one last glance to his possessions, mementos of his former vitality, before death:

[32] We should note, however, that philosophers including Derrida, *L'Animal que donc je suis* (Paris: Galilée, 2006), contest this privilege. See also Jean-Michel Rabaté, *Think, Pig: Beckett at the Limit of the Human* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016) on Beckett's definition(s) of the human, read through the lens of a number of philosophers of finitude.
[33] Thomson, 'Rethinking Levinas on Heidegger', p. 31.

> J'ouvrirai les yeux, je me regarderai trembler, j'avalerai ma soupe, je regarderai le petit tas de mes possessions, je donnerai à mon corps les vieux ordres que je le sais incapable d'exécuter, je consulterai ma conscience périmée, je gâcherai mon agonie pour mieux la vivre, loin déjà du monde qui se dilate enfin et me laisse passer (*MM* p. 24).

Since the world only dilates sufficiently for the self to pass through, objects used in more vital years get in the way of death. Distracted from the business of dying by his possessions, Malone consumes his time with descriptions of an ever increasing list of items while he pokes about with the 'bâton'. Yet, as the 'je' of *L'Innommable* expresses in the contemplation of 'la possibilité d'un débarras par voie de rencontre', it is only by listing things that we can be rid of them: 'Mais doucement. D'abord salir, ensuite nettoyer' (*I* p. 22).

Listing emerges through 'anxiety', Kathryn Hume suggests, as an attempt to postpone the failure of human rationality, and to give a sense to our existence among the 'divisible but ultimately uncontrollable nature of things' by representing chaos to ourselves.[34] We could say that for Beckett, inventorying is unavoidable if a narrative is to cut through the chaos and end, but the literary list is seemingly also antithetical to narrative. When Malone provides an example of the kind of entry he will make in the inventory ('[m]e voilà dispensé de m'appesantir sur ce cahier, au moment de l'inventaire. Je n'aurai qu'à dire, Item, un cahier, en en indiquant peut-être la couleur' (*MM* pp. 58-59)), his intention appears to be a simple enumeration of items, devoid of detail. The lack of 'kinèse'[35] inherent in an inventory, in which little apparent stylistic effort is made to segue from one item to another, is one of the ways in which Beckett withdraws the place for transitional passage in his Trilogy, allowing

[34] Hume, *Calvino's Fictions: Cogito and Cosmos*, p. 53.
[35] Derrida, *Apories*, explains that in the third figure of aporia, there is no longer space for 'quelque chose qu'on puisse appeler passage, pas, marche, démarche, déplacement ou remplacement, kinèse en général. Il n'y a plus de chemin […]' (pp. 46-47).

the characters' creative possibilities to contract, their narratives subsumed into lists, just as his text physically expands. But the literariness of a Beckettian inventory also defies the definition of list: leaving unstated the moment of passage from one item to another, the list indicates a blockage, but passage beyond the block nonetheless remains implicit.

Writing on classification systems, Michel Foucault cites the extreme example of Jorge Luis Borges's 'El idioma analitico de John Wilkins',[36] in which Borges discusses an unexpected taxonomy. Foucault insists that a list is itself aporetic on a surface reading, but that the difficult parataxis in an incongruous list, and ensuing search for a missing common denominator, results in a subversive parody of the act of listing.[37] In Beckett, it is less a case of extremes placed together in parataxis, and more a case of unrelated items joined in presupposed relation, but the lesson from Foucault (and Borges before him) remains relevant. The nexus between Molloy's 'bâton', bicycle, and sucking stones, for instance, never becomes clear. This lack of clarity is hindered by the way Moran's and later narratives in the Trilogy recycle objects (and is even further obfuscated by the difficulty in pinpointing which of these should be read as *later* narratives),[38] so that the absence of clear relation between these disjointed elements stalls the plot.

[36] See Borges, 'The Analytical Language of John Wilkins', in *Other inquisitions*, trans. by Ruth L.C. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), pp. 101-5.
[37] Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966):'on sait ce qu'il y a de déconcertant dans la proximité des extrêmes ou tout bonnement dans le voisinage soudain des choses sans rapport; l'énumération qui les entrechoque possède à elle seule un pouvoir d'enchantement' (p. 8).
[38] Another dilemma ensues: should we regard the objects as the same, and the narratives as different, or the narratives as the same, and the objects as different?

Seeking out the fictional links between seemingly unconnected 'factual' items can also inhibit the end of narrative.[39] As I have suggested above, the trope of the inventory constitutes its own aporia, a paralysing instance of (non-)passage where literary continuation becomes unfeasible except by means of stepping outside fiction (Malone's stories) into 'fact' (his list of items). But for Weller, this transgressive step also precludes narrative death, since the narrator-writers in the Trilogy cannot write their narratives to conclusion if the identity of these narratives *as* narratives is in question. Weller suggests that '[n]arration must be the production of either the purely factual (autobiography; Malone's recounting of his present state) or the pure fictional (the story of Sapo/Macmann). For as long as this distinction holds, the art of dying is on track.'[40] On this interpretation (which is the literary antithesis to Levinas's 'la mort c'est la mort d'autrui'),[41] stories must end as stories, just as one must always end as oneself in order to end,[42] so that Beckett's bleeding of inventory into story and memoirs may therefore be said to derail the 'art of dying'.

Yet we must remember that the list in Beckett retains a parodic function, and that the narration of lists in the Trilogy, though these lists signify ostensible 'non-fiction' intruding into metafictional narratives, remains fictive. The significance of items listed lies less in the objects themselves than in their slightly varied repetition. Parody marks a key feature of medieval testamentary narrative, but as Waugh suggests, it can also emerge from '[t]he postmodern self-conscious awareness of the

[39] I use 'fact' and 'factual' here in contrast to moments in the diegesis of *Malone meurt* which are avowedly fabulation.
[40] Weller, *A Taste for the Negative*, p. 103.
[41] Levinas, *Noms propres*, p. 154.
[42] See Weller's formulation, in *A Taste for the Negative*: 'one has to remain oneself in order to die' (p. 102).

finitude of the material and the plasticity of the imagination.'[43] Beckett's concern with the imagination's 'finitude' and 'plasticity' manifests itself both in the recycling of textual objects across individual novels and in the osmosis of conventions across literary list, story, and memoir, both strategies contributing to the flawed structural integrity of the textual body of, and bodies within, the Trilogy. Since these are novels in which the 'effondrement' rather than the development of protagonists takes centre stage, the narratives rather portray the degeneration of their protagonists. Molloy, Moran, Malone, and Mahood, who palimpsestically limp around on the limbs of their predecessors, become dependent on the 'béquilles'[44] which transform each ensuing subject, linking their would-be life stories. Instead of Bildungsromans, the Trilogy's digressive stories dwell in a place of self-reflexivity which halts passage: narrators self-censor: '[c]e n'était pas le moment d'amener un autre motif' (*M* p. 238), self-critique: '[n]on, je ne vais pas commencer par une exagération' (*MM* p. 9), and self-congratulate: '[q]ue tout cela est vraisemblable' (*MM* p. 42). Beckett's parody of the novel of growth, with his self-reflexive re-use of objects, heightens the awareness that his are novels of disintegration rather than growth, but a disintegration which fails to allow for definitive exit out of the Trilogy.

To take one example of an object interwoven in this palimpsest, which speaks to a thwarted inventorying as well as a failed assimilation, we might examine the

[43] See Waugh, *Practising Postmodernism/Reading Modernism*: parody is 'a mode which explicitly speaks through the reformulation of an existing discourse [...] Postmodernism is nearly always parodic, acknowledging its implication in a pre-existing textuality, creating through decreation, displacing that secure perspective of a stable vantage point from outside' (p. 11).
[44] Moran inherits Molloy's crutches: 'Peut-être que je rencontrerai Molloy. Mon genou ne va pas mieux. Il ne va pas plus mal non plus. J'ai des béquilles maintenant' (*M* p. 291); Malone inherits them next: 'j'essaie de parler de l'époque où je marchais encore sans bâton et à plus forte raison sans béquilles' (*MM* p. 123); and finally the Unnameable, in the guise of Mahood, succumbs: 'Après chaque coup de béquille je m'arrête, le temps de dévorer un narcotique et de mesurer le chemin parcouru, le chemin à parcourir' (*I* p. 49).

reappearances of a 'bâton' throughout the Trilogy. In a slippage from inventory to inventing, from 'vivre' to 'inventer',[45] Molloy's narrative of A and B marks the first appearance of the 'massue', an exaggerated sort of 'bâton' which dwindles into a 'crayon' when it recurs in *Malone meurt*. Whether read as functional, psychoanalytic, or philosophical, the stick never quite succeeds at fulfilling any one of these readings. Narrators never know just what to do with this stick and its potential for both creation and destruction, nor how to grasp its possible relation to their corporeal finitude as they advance into death. For Hill, the Trilogy's '[o]bjects are not forgotten, but recur like ghosts. Mourning seems never completed [...] [i]nstead, the fantasy of incorporation is endlessly repeated.'[46] The murderous 'massue' cannot itself be annihilated by means of this 'fantasy', nor by its repetition. The kernel of the detective story in *Molloy*, it persists as an object which haunts other characters. Though Molloy's suspicions surrounding the 'massue' are left unresolved, Malone later adds it to his own inventory, aiming merely to list it, and not to taint it with fiction:

> Cet inventaire non plus je ne l'achèverai pas, un petit oiseau me le dit, le paraclet peut-être, au nom de psittacidé. Ainsi soit-il. Une massue en tout cas, je n'y peux rien, il faut dire ce qui est, sans chercher à comprendre, jusqu'au bout (*MM* pp. 124-5).

This act of saying without thinking will also become the ambition of narrative in *L'Innommable*, but at this point in the Trilogy, thought continually interrupts speech, interjecting into the inventory so that there is no end to Malone's listing.

Malone therefore fails in his hope merely to list the 'bâton' without exploring its significance within stories, since the culpability which surrounds the 'bâton'-'massue'

[45] 'Vivre et inventer. J'ai essayé. J'ai dû essayer. Inventer. Ce n'est pas le mot. Vivre non plus' (*MM* p. 33).
[46] Hill, *In Different Words*, p. 71.

extends from the forest in *Molloy*, where Moran meets a stranger carrying the stick, into Malone's text and ensnares the latter as well, drawing him headlong into Moran's mystery:

> Cette massue est à moi, un point c'est tout. Elle est tachée de sang, mais insuffisament, insuffisament. Je me suis mal défendu, mais je me suis défendu (*MM* p. 125).

While the 'massue', symbol of violence in the Trilogy, finishes off a few of Beckett's characters and their narratives, like the 'bâton' in the hands of Lemuel in *Malone meurt*, it is also by association the 'crayon' which prolongs narrative, though writ large: Lemuel, 'le responsable', 'ne touchera jamais plus personne [...] ni avec son crayon ni avec son bâton ni' (*MM* pp. 190-91), we learn as the novel comes to its dismembered ending. Dual objects like the club, stick, and pencil link us to life and activity, and so cannot be our 'viatique' (*MM* p. 172), as Malone realises when he is closing in on his journey into death. He considers whether he should pile his possessions around him in the bed: 'Si je faisais venir toutes mes possessions telles quelles et les prenais avec moi dans le lit? Est-ce que ça servirait à quelque chose? Je suppose que non' (*MM* p. 128). There is no guarantee that he will find a use for these already useless objects on the other side, but while in one sense Malone cannot take them with him across the passage of mortality, in another sense the next Trilogy text may take his possessions up: Malone's hat, for example, will indeed recur in the exposition of *L'Innommable*. As we approach (but perhaps never reach) the point at which Malone 'meurt', he will irrevocably confuse his inventory with Macmann's story: 'Macmann, mon dernier, mes possessions [...]' (*MM* p. 190), dealing a final blow to storytelling. As objects leak metatextually through the pages of the Trilogy, their recurrence complicates their pre-established identity, muddying the memory of them, and temporarily blocking narrative.

Failed by his inventory and stories, does Malone succeed in writing memoirs? Only if he has a sharper memory than Molloy, who tends to fictionalise his recollections: '[j]'invente peut-être un peu, j'embellis peut-être [...] Mais c'est peut-être là des souvenirs' (*M* p. 10). Hill employs the term 'anamnesis' to describe in Beckett's Trilogy 'a remembering which does not resurrect the past *in its identity with itself* but rediscovers what it was that was forgotten in order for Beckett's narrators to become who they are' (my italics).[47] Taking Hill's analysis one step further, we can ask whether what was forgotten ever actually occurred, and consider more closely the Trilogy's ambiguity as to whether events happened or not. Malone's 'mémoires', if ever written, would on Hill's reading 'resurrect the past' as an alterity, and be composed of what has been forgotten, not what has been remembered. In other words, they may be more aptly dubbed anti-memoirs. What has been forgotten is not quite akin to what has actually occurred, if we consider the logic which underlies these novels: 'je ne voi[s] pas très bien comment une chose jamais ressentie peut s'effacer de la mémoire, et cependant cela arrive couramment' (*M* p. 26). This thought of memorialising the forgotten, but never actualised, bears some resemblance to Derrida's declared interest in recording what 'fails to happen',[48] and more broadly in literature's ability to voice the non-event. In *Déplier Ponge*, Derrida provides a useful formulation to encompass a happening which continues to haunt what 'fails to happen': '[n]'est-ce pas à cette condition qu'il y a de l'événement? Que ça arrive, en n'arrivant pas à *s*'arriver?'[49] But by the conclusion of the Trilogy, Beckett's conundrum has gone beyond the Derridean, since what 'fails to happen' has

[47] Ibid, p. 83.
[48] See Derrida, 'This Strange Institution', in Attridge, ed., *Acts of Literature*, pp. 34-35. Derrida counters Attridge's question as to whether his real interest lies in literature or philosophy by offering the word 'autobiography' and responding: 'Still today there remains in me an obsessive desire to save in uninterrupted inscription, in the form of a memory, what happens – or *fails to happen*' (p. 34).
[49] Derrida, *Déplier Ponge: Entretien de Jacques Derrida avec Gérard Farasse* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Septentrion, 2005), p. 34.

multiplied unmanageably. The 'je' of *L'Innommable* summarises a series of non-events which compose the narrator's story: '[j]e n'ai jamais désiré, ni cherché, ni subi, jamais rien connu de tout ça, jamais eu d'objets, jamais d'adversaires, jamais de sens, jamais de tête. Mais laissons tout ça' (*I* p. 65). The narrators overlay anti-memoirs on top of memoirs, never quite conforming to the formal imperatives of memoir-writing.

The ending of *Molloy* perhaps represents the most striking instance of an event that 'fails to happen', where Moran muses, '[c]'est elle qui m'a dit de faire le rapport. Est-ce à dire que je suis plus libre maintenant? Je ne sais pas. J'apprendrai. Alors je rentrai dans la maison et j'écrivis, Il est minuit. La pluie fouette les vitres. Il n'était pas minuit. Il ne pleuvait pas' (*M* p. 293). Where Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* canvasses just such a moment as this seeming contradiction, in the Hegelian statement 'The Now is night' reread at noon, we understand that a truth can be implicitly negated simply by dint of being written in the present tense, but after the fact.[50] Since it is written in recollection, Moran's report contains untruths which may have been true in the moment Moran experienced them. Clark, interpreting the passage from Hegel, writes that '[l]anguage itself, as the game with writing shows, is inseparable from negation': musing that on subsequent rereadings, terms will be susceptible to future negations, so that eventually we are left with an 'ideality'[51] instead of a truth or untruth. In Moran's case, this ideality prevails over negation, just as a form of happening persists in a tale full of failures to happen: even though Moran's report contradicts rain and midnight in a sense contemporary to the time of

[50] G.W.F. Hegel, *Selections*, ed. by M. J. Inwood (New York: Macmillan, 1989), p. 162.
[51] Timothy Clark, *Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot: Sources of Derrida's Notion and Practice of Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 70; 72.

writing, their presence persists negatively (recalling Blanchot's 'ce qui cesse d'être continue d'être').[52] Contrary to the characters' complaints of poor memory, we cannot forget what 'fails to happen' in the Trilogy, since the overlay of anti-memoirs constantly reminds us of the idealities left in the wake of these failures.

In the Trilogy, the abrupt negations of a preceding 'truth' make it difficult to establish 'what happens last', which Connor nonetheless identifies as a chief concern of Beckett.[53] If we could establish whether we are reading testamentary narrative, inventory, memoir, or novel, we might know in which order we should read the events they describe, and which of these events comes last of all, developing our 'sens de l'avant-dernier' (*M* p. 9). But through Beckett's confusion of generic and temporal boundaries, an infinite pattern of aporia within aporia works against that sense of impending closure: the contradictions involved in determining object, owner of the object, story in which the object features, conventions of this story, and so on, inhibit the transitional potential of narrative as much as they gesture toward that narrative's liminal space. For storytelling to progress, we have to devise ways of circumventing the blockage which inheres in the literary list, as well as ways of rationalising the passage between different stories and memoirs. Yet means of stepping around the blockage fail, since they necessitate a step outside the domain of storytelling, into inventorying and memorialising. Once outside, we lack the possibility of novelistic conclusion, or at least can only experience conclusion as a Levinasian impossibility of a possibility.

[52] Blanchot, *La Part du feu*, p. 322.
[53] Connor, 'Beckett's Radical Finitude': 'Where an ordinary reader might wonder "what happens next?", Beckett always defaults to the question "what happens last?" or "how will the last thing of all happen?" It is in this sense that Beckett is a secular, or vernacular, eschatologist inclined always to the *eschaton*' (p. 36).

‘Faire mes adieux’: narratives touching and touched

> Le toucher, c’est la finitude, un point c’est tout.
>
> Jacques Derrida[54]

Saying farewell, in *Molloy* along with the other Trilogy texts, requires not just parting words but an interpersonal act: a taking leave or a handshake of some kind,[55] whether literal or metaphorical. If we subscribe to Ulrika Maude’s insistence, coinciding with the recent burst of phenomenological criticism on Beckett, that Beckett’s is a ‘literature of the body’,[56] and if we consider, with Derrida, that the finitude of the body manifests in touch, Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the ‘chiasm’ between *touchant* and *touché*[57] may be useful when understanding the subject’s points of departure from others in the Trilogy. In his classic example of the chiasm, Merleau-Ponty explores touch as something reversible:

> [q]uand ma main droite touche ma main gauche [...] je me touche touchant, mon corps accomplit ‘une sorte de réflexion’ [...] la main touchée devient touchante, et je suis obligé de dire que le toucher ici est répandu dans le corps, que le corps est ‘chose-sentante’, ‘sujet-objet’.[58]

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[54] Derrida, *Le Toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy* (Paris: Galilée, 2000), p. 160. See Kas Saghafi, ‘The Desire for Survival?’, in *Desire in Ashes: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, Philosophy*, ed. by Simon Morgan Wortham and Chiara Alfano (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 139-60, where Saghafi writes that this quip comes from ‘a voice in Derrida’s text [which] half-jokingly, some would say sarcastically, refers to Nancy’s notion of touching or *le toucher* as simply a thought of finitude’ (p. 144).

[55] See Geoffrey Bennington, ‘Handshake’, in *Not Half No End: Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), on the handshake as ‘a gesture which is, after all, one of *closure* as much as one of opening’ (p. 67).

[56] Maude, ‘Beckett, Body and Mind’, in Van Hulle, ed., *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, p. 170.

[57] In a discussion of corporeality and pantextuality in mid-twentieth century philosophy, Edith Wyschogrod, ‘Towards a Postmodern Ethics: Corporeality and Alterity’, in *Ethics and Aesthetics: The Moral Turn of Postmodernism*, ed. by Gerhard Hoffman and Alfred Hornung (Heidelberg: Winter, 1996), pp. 53-68 singles out Merleau-Ponty’s work on the ‘chiasm or crossing over between touching and the touched’ as a necessary precursor to the third wave of phenomenological thinking which turns toward the tactile body (p. 64).

[58] Merleau-Ponty, *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 210.

Within Merleau-Ponty's aporia of touch, we notice a structure analogous to that of Derrida's three figures of aporia haunting each other. First, since a single self cannot be both subject and object simultaneously, we have what Merleau-Ponty calls an 'écart';[59] since both hands nonetheless belong to the same self, we seemingly have an ontological 'coïncidence';[60] and since the two hands may swap with each other, reversing the *touchant-touché* relation, we have 'reversibilité'.[61] It is the chiastic space between the above terms, I argue, which Beckett exposes in the Trilogy, crumbling the alterity innate to 'écart' (an uncrossable border, as in the first figure of aporia identified by Derrida), and the sameness of 'coïncidence' (where there is lack of a border, or a porous border), to weaken any space between them where meaningful transition could occur from one to the other, filling it instead with reversals of dubious import.[62] These reversals are creative enigmas of the kind which ask: what does it matter if one hand switches from touching to touched? Or, as Molloy ponders, if the moon is going around the room, instead of the other way around:

> [c]ar la lune allait de gauche à droite ou la chambre allait de droite à gauche, ou les deux à la fois peut-être, ou elles allaient toutes les deux de gauche à droite, seulement la chambre moins vite que la lune, ou de droite à gauche, seulement la lune moins vite que la chambre (*M* p. 62).

[59] Merleau-Ponty describes this 'écart' more extensively in relation to the distinction between *voyant-visible*, in *Le Visible et l'invisible*: 'le tissu de possibilités qui referme le visible extérieur sur le corps voyant maintient entre eux un certain *écart*. Mais cet écart n'est pas un *vide*, il est rempli précisément par la chair […]' (p. 326).
[60] Ibid: 'Il n'y a pas coïncidence du voyant et du visible. Mais chacun emprunte à l'autre, prend ou empiète sur l'autre, se croise avec l'autre, est en chiasme avec l'autre' (p. 314).
[61] Ibid: 'La poignée de main aussi est réversible, je puis me sentir touché aussi bien et en même temps que touchant' (p. 187).
[62] Bennington, 'Handshake', canvasses the difference in approach Derrida perceives in Merleau-Ponty's theory of touch and Nancy's: Merleau-Ponty claiming 'a kind of continuity between the experience in which I touch one of my hands with the other…and the experience in which I shake another's hand' (pp. 68-69), and Nancy 'stress[ing] the "non-coincidence" part of the second-level equation of coincidence and non-coincidence' and 'radically *expos[ing]* the thought of touch to the type of alterity we have been talking about, especially in the directions of exteriority, the inhuman, the inorganic, the graft and (thereby and essentially) the technical' (p. 78).

To canvas how Beckett's fluctuations between affirmation and negation themselves decompose the chiastic space between 'écart' and 'coïncidence', I examine interpersonal acts in the Trilogy which fall under the Merleau-Pontean distinction between *touchant-touché*, active-passive, and perceiving-perceived. To this end, I will consider how Beckett's tropes of 'pseudo-coupling', intercorporeal understandings shared among Trilogy characters,[63] and the novels' ancestor-descendant dynamic, together set in motion the aporia of touch.

The Trilogy's crisis of tactility (including its characters' many failures to make contact) relates not just to the division within the self between *touchant* and *touché*, but to the possible reversal of the two terms.[64] To be clear, touch here means not just literal touch in the Trilogy,[65] but also touching in the sense that the narratives touch each other, as the writing that takes place at the extremities of each makes contact with another. *Molloy*, *Malone meurt*, and *L'Innommable*, based on their titles, purport to be narratives of single selves. Yet our expectation of (three-fold) singularity is crushed as the narratives unfold,[66] from the exemplificatory narrative of A and B onwards, where the problem of bidding farewell to a plurality of others

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[63] I draw here on Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'intercorporéité', in *Le Visible et l'invisible*: 'Si ma main gauche peut toucher ma main droite pendant qu'elle palpe les tangibles, la toucher en train de toucher, retourner sur elle sa palpation, pourquoi, touchant la main d'un autre, ne toucherais-je pas en elle le même pouvoir d'épouser les choses que j'ai touché dans la mienne?' (p. 185).

[64] See ibid: 'Toucher, c'est se toucher' (p. 308). See J. Hillis Miller, 'Touching Derrida Touching Nancy: The Main Traits of Derrida's Hand', *Derrida Today*, 1 (2008), 145-66, where he explains that '[t]he *se toucher*, self-touching the untouchable self, becomes *toucher l'autre*, touching the untouchable other' (p. 160).

[65] By literal touch, I mean instances in which physical touch becomes important thematically: for example, Molloy rapping his mother's head to make her understand him (*M* p. 26), Lemuel at the end of *Malone meurt* of whom the final detail given is 'il ne touchera jamais plus personne' (*MM* p. 191), or *L'Innommable*'s 'ce sentiment d'être enfermé entièrement, sans que rien me touche, est nouveau' (*I* p. 97).

[66] Ulrika Maude, 'The Body of Memory: Beckett and Merleau-Ponty' in Richard Lane, ed., *Beckett and Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 108-22: 'If […] it is the material body that forms the ultimate foundation of identity, by constituting that self that is both singular and, in its perpetual complexity and mutability, always plural and indecipherable, then it is Beckett more than any other writer who deals with this predicament' (p. 108).

(separating these others from a potentially 'singular', finitude-bound self) first emerges in the Trilogy. Just before Molloy, the observer, watches A and B, the observed, he leaps from the thought of bidding farewell to objects to that of bidding farewell to people undifferentiable from himself: 'quelle magie dans ces choses obscures auxquelles il sera temps, à leur prochain passage, de dire adieu [...] Il passe des gens aussi, dont il n'est pas facile de se distinguer avec netteté' (*M* pp. 9-10). In the failed juxtaposition between A and B ('[i]ls se ressemblaient, mais pas plus que les autres' (*M* p. 10)), one sets off from town first, the other sets off later, the first 'las ou se rappelant une obligation', retraces his steps, they meet, and their routes thus overlap: 'le moment vint où ensemble ils dévalèrent vers le même creux et c'est dans ce creux qu'ils se rencontrèrent à la fin' (*M* p. 10). A and B serve as a prime example of the *touchant-touché* metaphor as it appears in Beckett, though Molloy's tale dissolves into something like the undecidable space of what Merleau-Ponty calls 'l'intouchable' (the point at which touching crosses into touched),[67] since there is nothing about the juxtaposition that is material to narrative. As Hill writes, between A and B 'there is no hermeneutic orientation to the contrast [...]. The contrast becomes both crucial and indeterminate, significant yet devoid of meaning'.[68] Molloy's earnest recounting of the story, along with his earlier noted suspicions, insinuate that this metanarrative does indeed matter. Yet in this Molloy is himself indistinguishable from a horde of characters across the Trilogy who repeatedly point toward the meaningfulness of a gap between terms erected in opposition, only to lose themselves in the meaninglessness of a later overlap between those terms.

[67] Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible*: 'Ils ne coïncident pas dans le corps: le touchant n'est jamais exactement le touché [...] Il faut quelque chose d'autre que le corps pour que la jonction se fasse: elle se fait dans l'*intouchable*' (p. 307).
[68] Hill, *In Different Words*, p. 62.

When the final Trilogy novel's exposition echoes the initial narrative of A and B through the memory of a meeting at which the 'je' was present, *L'Innommable* folds back over *Molloy*. First, a 'cri' is attributed to 'une chose qui se brise, deux choses qui se heurtent' (*I* p. 15), then the 'je' appears to confirm the latter as actuality, reflecting on an 'incident qui ne s'est produit qu'une seule fois':

> J'en attends le retour sans impatience. Deux formes donc, oblongues comme l'homme, sont entrées en collision devant moi. Elles sont tombées et je ne les ai plus vues [...] La prochaine fois qu'elles entreront dans le champ, allant lentement l'une vers l'autre, je saurai qu'elles vont se heurter, tomber et disparaître, et cela me permettra peut-être de les observer mieux. Ce n'est pas vrai (*I* pp. 16-17).

These two figures are an accelerated, more violent couple than the A and B of *Molloy*, but the comparison gathers momentum since narrators in both novels claim to know what will happen on the witnessed couples' next meeting: Molloy guesses that '[ils] se salueront, même au plus profond de la ville' (*M* p. 11); the 'je' of *L'Innommable* predicts that they will collide and fall, before retracting the prediction. Noting the narrator's hypothesis that this collision is associated with the 'pseudo-couple Mercier-Camier' (*I* p. 16), Rabaté refers to these paired figures as 'transitional subjects'. Though he does not define this particular term, Rabaté's earlier definition of 'transitional objects' indicates that he means subjects which stand in synecdochically for something apparently simple, yet remain 'symbols of finitude'.[69] The 'je' of *L'Innommable* complicates the narrative by adding:

> La seule rencontre dont j'aie été témoin, il y a fort longtemps, ne s'est pas renouvelée encore. Ce fut peut-être la fin de quelque chose. Et je serai peut-être débarrassé de Malone et de l'autre, non pas qu'ils me dérangent, le jour où je les verrai ensemble, c'est-à-dire en collision (*I* p. 21).

[69] Jean-Michel Rabaté, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 61. See D.W. Winnicott, 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena', in *Playing and Reality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 1-34. See also Jean Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, 2nd edn (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), to the effect that in psychoanalysis, the transitional object 'constitue un moment de passage vers la perception d'un objet nettement différencié du sujet' (p. 296).

The implication that the points of contact between others – their 'pseudo-coupling', or touching of their narratives – might enable ridding oneself of them also recurs in *L'Innommable*, when the 'pseudo-couples' are proposed as potential substitutes for the narrator (an issue I analyse more fully in Chapter Five). Yet there is a subtle, potentially significant difference from A's and B's narrative when *L'Innommable* retells it, which we will encounter later when analysing the reversibility of sexual difference in Beckett. More broadly, the witnessing and rewitnessing of 'pseudo-coupled' figures perform reversals of the A and B metanarrative which splinter identity, substituting couple after couple of Beckett's earlier writings into each novel, and evoking singularity only to break it down.

Beckett's 'pseudo-coupling' lays the foundation for a possible intercorporeity, a concept used by Merleau-Ponty to describe a collective sensibility among different subjects,[70] but which in a literary sense might denote one character's world opening onto another's via the author's representation of sensorial experiences shared between those characters. In Beckett, any intercorporeity shared by the various narrators is not taken for granted, but remains subject to constant disruption. Where Malone declares in *Malone meurt*, interrupting his writing, '[o]n est venu. Ça allait trop bien. Je m'étais oublié, perdu. Ce n'est pas vrai. Ça allait. J'étais ailleurs. Un autre souffrait. Alors on est venu. Pour me rappeler à l'agonie' (*MM* p. 157), it is unclear if '[u]n autre souffrait' refers to someone else suffering in a room like Malone's, or to the fact that someone was suffering in the story Malone had been telling prior to the interruption ('ailleurs'), that is, was made to suffer by Malone (as the author who wields the pencil), before Malone is returned abruptly to reality by

[70] Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible*, p. 185.

whoever 'est venu', and made to feel 'l'agonie' himself. At the limit where Malone separates from his characters, peripeteias are at work to demonstrate the fortunes of narrator and narrated reversing back over each other. These reversals persist into *L'Innommable*, the narrator of which disclaims Malone's authorial tendencies: 'je n'ai fait souffrir personne, je n'ai mis fin aux souffrances de personne, personne ne viendra mettre fin aux miennes' (*I* p. 156). The intercorporeal connections between Trilogy characters hinge not just on the repetition of one's situation in another's, but on the ways in which a kind of 'intercorporéité' drives narrative forward, so that readers feel compelled to find meanings which link the narratives, to identify a coherent body, and thus to advance plot.

The extent to which plot in the Trilogy capitalises on a sense of intercorporeity also extends to the sexualisation of its bodies. While the metanarrative in *Molloy* begins with 'je vis A et B aller lentement l'un vers l'autre' (*M* p. 10), in *L'Innommable* we instead have 'allant lentement *l'une* vers l'autre' (my italics), the feminine referring to a 'forme' instead of the earlier 'homme'. If we consider Hill's view that the feminine, in the form of the 'voix', serves as a 'ghostly reminder of the figure of the mother in *Molloy*',[71] this slight replacement gestures to the space of the A and B encounter in Beckett as one of reversing sexual difference. Hill has written extensively on the relation between aporia and passage into and out of the text (and the body) in Beckett, and examined sexual distinctions in the representation of that passage. Considering again Kermode's theory of 'concord' fictions from Chapter One,[72] we can surmise that narratives formulating concordant fictions are traditionally dependent

[71] Hill, *In Different Words*, p. 69.
[72] See Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*: 'Men, like poets, rush "into the middest," *in medias res*, when they are born; they also die *in mediis rebus*, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems' (p. 7).

on sexual difference to the extent to which they are always inevitably narratives of birth as well as of death: for example, making meaning of our death, in the Christian sense, pivots on the birth of Christ.

While on face value the Trilogy foregrounds the experience of one male character after another, as Jeffers notes in *Beckett and Masculinity*, Beckett criticism has tended to ignore the 'indifference' Beckett's works sometimes demonstrate toward the heteronormative.[73] As Beckett erodes the chiastic space between the terms of mother and father in the Trilogy, androgyny threatens narratives of both birth and death, and thwarts finitude, since the uncategorisable idea of this in-between sparks endless questions from Molloy. He dubs himself and his mother 'un couple de vieux compères, sans sexe, sans parenté' (*M* p. 24), and later wonders in relation to his lover: 'si elle n'était pas plutôt un homme ou tout au moins un androgyne [...] Ne te tourmente pas, Molloy, homme ou femme, qu'est-ce que cela peut faire?' (*M* p. 91). Hill points to the conspicuous lack of father figures in *Molloy*, the absence of which renders 'redemption' impossible, so that

> the body hangs suspended from the cross like a disembodied mass of flesh still awaiting birth. Crucifixion in Beckett's texts does not end, for the paradoxical reason that, like birth, it is not an event that has ever taken place [...] the narrator of *Molloy*, in his journey to Golgotha, does not aspire even to the aporetic divinity of Christ.[74]

In arguing that the decomposing body in Beckett is 'still awaiting birth', Hill's analysis supports Critchley's view that Beckett engages in a 'radical de-creation of [...] salvific narratives [...] an acknowledgement of the finiteness of the finite'.[75]

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[73] J. Jeffers, *Beckett's Masculinity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 78.
[74] Hill, *In Different Words*, p. 97.
[75] Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing*, p. 211. See Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, M.A. and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), in which he presents a key argument against reading literature as redemptive, and specifically in relation to 'Beckett's extraordinary effort to stop remembering, to begin again, to protect writing from cultural inheritance' (p. 170).

Androgyny is paradoxically a place of potential passage out of the 'aporetic divinity' of Christ, who is bound to mother and Father. The androgynous space encapsulates the dynamics and reversibility of the touching and touched, naming and named, birthing and birthed, calling into question what might otherwise be stable conceptions of corporeality, identity, gender, genealogy, and mortality. Yet androgyny repeatedly returns readers to the 'finiteness of the finite' in the Trilogy, since there can be no 'salvific' death to the androgynous figure in Beckett, who is written as lacking a familial birth narrative to make any story of their dying possible.

To Hill's reflection on the 'indeterminacy' of the third Trilogy novel's title,[76] and on how birth and death are 'both acts of naming',[77] I would add that the ambiguity of the title of *L'Innommable* corresponds with a moment of specifically pre- or post-partum unnamed-ness: in regressing backwards from *Molloy*, we have progressively lost the possibility of the stable identification and relationality naming offers us. Hill reads Beckett's Trilogy as a 'mock dynastic novel',[78] for which the carriage of a male name would historically be necessary. But I would suggest that from the first, the dynasty disintegrates due to impossible naming, since Beckett implies that Molloy's name will not suffice to uphold any definite genealogy of ancestor and descendant: '[i]l ne me manque plus qu'un fils. J'en ai un quelque part peut-être. Mais je ne crois pas' (*M* p. 8). We discover as much about this name as the police do when interrogating Molloy, which is that Molloy could be *prénom, surnom*, or perhaps neither. Along with this ambiguity, the softness of names murmured throughout the Trilogy (Molloy, Mollose, Molloc, Moran, Malone, Macmann, Mahood, and so on) marks one

[76] Hill, *In Different Words*: 'From the form of the title it is not possible to decide whether the referent is animate or inanimate, masculine or feminine' (p. 56).
[77] Ibid, p. 105.
[78] Ibid, p. 80.

of the many techniques through which Beckett facilitates the dissolution of identities into each other.[79] Yet all that is holding bodies apart, in the end, is their names and their (sometimes barely differing) narratives. We do not know which story to read first, whether a prehistory exists for each narration, nor who gives birth to whom, since the potential reversibility of the order of the three novels' narratives checks the Trilogy's forward motion. If we take a key moment of this birthing-naming confusion, the fractured conclusion of *Malone meurt*, the retrospective framing of Malone's death in terms of his birth[80] indicates the 'je' of *L'Innommable* is yet to be born, though he is also yet to die: '[à] moi maintenant de faire la mort, à moi qu'ils n'ont pas su faire naître […]' (*I* p. 64). As the 'impensable ancêtre dont on ne peut rien dire' (*I* p. 110), the 'je' of *L'Innommable*, in characteristic reversals (and here in the guise of Mahood), laments the lack of 'mes enfants nés pendant mon absence' (*I* p. 51), and insists 'c'est là que mes chers absents m'attendent' (*I* p. 52) just prior to the revelation that the 'je' is now 'orphelin, veuf, sans héritiers et tout et tout, d'un seul coup' (*I* p. 60). The dynasty is proliferating just as it disintegrates, inflated by the narrator's affirmations of family connections, but just as quickly deflated by the weakening of these bonds.

That movement toward death is conditional on birth determines an ongoing aporia in the Trilogy, where the intersections of ancestor-descendant, birthing-birthed, and naming-named falter repeatedly until we arrive at unnamability. The reversals between these terms, comparable to that which Merleau-Ponty describes between

[79] Repetition, according to Steven Connor, *Repetition, Theory and Text* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 60, appears to have an 'ontological dimension', marking 'the place where the self divides itself from and confronts its "other".' This collapse contributes to what Connor calls the 'problematic relationship of *near-identity*' (p. 58).
[80] See Hill, *In Different Words*, who notes that 'the fact that the narrator's end is couched in terms of being born leaves the nature of that end indeterminate' (p. 56).

touchant and *touché*, operate in the Trilogy via intra-Trilogy allusion: one which does not supplement nor build up narrative, but which breaks it down, to destabilising effect. The tropes of 'pseudo-coupling', the Trilogy's own version of an 'intercorporéité', and the role reversal of ancestor and descendant are where junctures are made in the Trilogy, as *touchant* and *touché* meet in 'l'intouchable'.[81] Narratives in the Trilogy are indeed reversible, folding back over each other and joining up in the space of the chiasm, but this folding over complicates narratives so that they can be read neither as identical nor as other. To the question *L'Innommable* poses: '[c]ette voix qui parle [...] qui ne s'écoute pas, attentive au silence qu'elle rompt, par où peut-être un jour lui reviendra le long soupir clair d'avent et d'adieu, en est-elle une?' (*I* p. 34), we can answer that when it comes to the interpersonal acts of meeting and taking leave, coming and going ('avent' and 'adieu'), and the touch implicit in the novels' many figurative handshakes, the voice which narrates the Trilogy's long sigh of reversibility is not 'one'. The philosopher to whose work I will now turn, Nancy, like Beckett, engages with the status of voice as inscribed in texts, and the paradoxical touch or contact ensuing from voice's struggle to embody itself and to separate out identities. The voice heard in *L'Innommable* may be said to touch on others' voices via interconnected narratives, providing continuity between *Molloy, Malone meurt* and *L'Innommable*. Yet it also continually undercuts intra-Trilogy resemblances, performing a reversibility which disorders all three narratives.

[81] Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible*, p. 307.

‘Finir de mourir’: decomposing bodies

For death to occur, we must endure Derrida’s ‘aporie ultime’: we must finish finishing.[82] But the problem, as Jean-Luc Nancy phrases it, is that even in texts which depict and mimic physical decomposition, writing toward the finish exscribes a body.[83] This exscription in turn prevents an end which effaces *corps* and *corpus*. Nancy’s writings on exscription are extensive, and I will pinpoint the relevant aspects of exscription in this section, but Christopher Watkin’s assemblage of Nancean definitions in his *Phenomenology or Deconstruction* is useful: ‘the inscription of the un-inscribable in inscription itself, inscription’s constitutive excess which is the final truth of inscription […] and an *écart* between writing and signification’.[84] On both its formal and thematic levels, the Trilogy enacts a process of exscription: going beyond touch (which narratives effect on each other) toward embodied limits, through which nothing passes except the exscribed body.[85] The only passage through, Nancy writes, is

> [L]’*excription* de notre corps, voilà par où il faut d’abord passer. Son inscription-dehors, sa mise *hors-texte* comme le plus *propre* mouvement de son texte: le texte *même* abandonné, laissé sur sa limite […] il n’y a plus qu’une ligne in-finie, le trait de l’écriture elle-même excrite, à suivre

[82] See Derrida, ‘Prière d’insérer’, *Apories*, where he refers to Heidegger’s ‘possibility of impossibility’ (see Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 262): ‘L’aporie ultime, c’est l’impossibilité de l’aporie *comme telle* […] La mort, en tant que possibilité de l’impossible *comme tel*, ou aussi bien du *comme tel* impossible […]’ (p. 2)). To turn back to Blanchot, *L’Écriture du désastre*, we could say that the movement of dying, *le mourir*, must be resolved before we can reach death or ‘the finish’ itself, *la mort*: ‘Il y aurait dans la mort quelque chose de plus fort que la mort’ (p. 81). On ‘finir’, see also the last words of Beckett, *Soubresauts* (Paris: Minuit, 1989): ‘Oh tout finir’ (p. 28), and Blanchot on Beckett’s legacy in Blanchot, ‘Oh tout finir’, *Critique*, 519-20 (August-September 1990), pp. 635-37: ‘À Samuel Beckett a été confié ce mouvement de la fin qui n’en finit pas’ (p. 635).

[83] Nancy, *Corpus*: ‘Le corps, sans doute, c’est *qu’on écrit*, mais ce n’est absolument pas *où* on écrit, et le corps n’est pas non plus *ce* qu’on écrit – mais toujours ce que l’écriture *excrit*’ (p. 76).

[84] Watkin, *Phenomenology or Deconstruction: The Question of Ontology in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur and Jean-Luc Nancy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 149.

[85] Nancy, *Corpus*, where Nancy asserts that ‘L’écriture touche aux corps…*selon la limite absolue* qui sépare le sens de l’une de la peau et des nerfs de l’autre’, but ‘[r]ien ne *passe*, et c’est là que ça touche’ (p. 13).

> infiniment brisé, partagé à travers la multitude des corps, ligne de partage avec tous ses lieux: points de tangence, touches, intersections, dislocations.[86]

In this section, I examine how a concept of writing as 'excription' of a body (or bodies) might function in three novels which disintegrate toward the point where the 'je' in *L'Innommable* declares '[j]e ne parlerai plus de corps et de trajectoires, du ciel et de la terre, je ne sais pas ce que c'est' (*I* p. 62). In a close reading of *Corpus*, Maclachlan finds that for Nancy, 'a silent bodily exscription is not *in* writing as the hidden interiority subjacent to external inscription, but right there, contiguous with writing's surface or limit',[87] suggesting that this 'excription' involves contact between the concepts of body and text. To understand how touch's interruptory force goes beyond touch's immediacy in Beckett's texts, I will make use of the passage in *Le Toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy* in which Derrida challenges the meaning of 'contact', and implicitly critiques Nancy's focus on contiguity:

> Qu'est-ce qu'un contact s'il *intervient* toujours *entre* deux *x*? Une interruption cachée, scellée, celée, signée, resserrée, comprimée, réprimée? Ou l'interruption *continue* d'une interruption, la négation relevante de l'intervalle, la mort de l'*entre*?[88]

This section of the chapter concentrates on the boundary between body and text: that is, what happens to 'l'intervalle' or 'l'entre' in Beckett's novels so that bodily decomposition and textual decomposition might touch. In other words, how might the end of the body happen together with the ending of the text?

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[86] Ibid, p. 14. See also Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), to the effect that Derrida sees a continuity persisting in Nancy's discontinuity: 'However fragmented or discontinuous the touch invoked by Nancy might be, Derrida suggests, it may imply a touch which, in interrupting itself as itself, ultimately maintains the horizon of unity and continuity which is being called into question' (p. 120).

[87] Maclachlan, 'Contingencies: Reading between Nancy and Derrida', *Oxford Literary Review*, 27 (2005), 139-58 (p. 146), referring to Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 47.

[88] Derrida, *Le Toucher*, p. 12.

Edith Wyschogrod theorises that the twin strains of corporeality and pantextuality in postmodernism 'can on occasion merge so as to constitute a single discourse of the body', explaining that while the body remains legible for postmodernists, '[a]t the same time the pain and death to which bodies are subject remain an *hors texte*, an unsurpassable negation both inside and outside the field of meaning.'[89] While Nancy and Wyschogrod each use *hors-texte* in their own contexts, we could say that if writing in general displaces the body's inscription outside the text, as Nancy describes, in a process which abandons the text itself and reaches beyond enclosure, Beckett's texts dramatise the aporetic struggle to inscribe 'the pain and death to which bodies are subject' *hors-texte*, in Wyschogrod's words, without ever completing this movement. Pursuant to Beckett's strategies for decomposition, 'le trait de l'écriture [...] partagé à travers la multitude des corps', I contend, is traced and effaced by the exscription of too many bodies which overwrite any possible exit from the Trilogy, so that the final text comes to resemble the purgatorial mise-en-scène of Beckett's 1970 *Le Dépeupleur*.[90] If we read Derrida's 'il n'y a pas de hors-texte' as insinuating that what we take to be outside the text is always enfolded in the text itself,[91] we can understand how attempts by Trilogy narrators to move beyond the text tend to return them to the bounds of the text. In this overwriting process, death in and of the narrative cannot truly move *hors-texte* and is instead locked on the border of writing, on the outer limits of the Trilogy as *corpus*.

In a discussion which also interweaves corporeality and pantextuality, Hill brings attention to Beckett's identification of text with body, and the processes of

[89] Wyschogrod, 'Towards a Postmodern Ethics', in Hoffman and Hornung, p. 53.
[90] Beckett, *Le Dépeupleur* (Paris: Minuit, 1970).
[91] Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), p. 227.

'assimilation' and 'expulsion' to which both *corps* and *corpus* are prone.[92] If we consider Beckett's rhythm of absorbing and expelling in light of Kermode's work on 'fictions of concord',[93] we can understand that the starting point of Nancy's *Corpus*, '*Hoc est enim corpus meum*',[94] is ironically inverted in Beckett. Writing of our 'désir de voir, de toucher et manger le corps de Dieu, d'*être* ce corps et de *n'être que ça*' which 'font le principe de (dé)raison de l'Occident. Du coup, le corps, du corps, *n'y a jamais lieu,* et *surtout pas quand on l'y nomme et l'y convoque*', Nancy concludes that '[l]e corps, pour nous, est toujours sacrifié: hostie.'[95] The first part of this formulation of Nancy's, the idea that the body 'happens' least when it is named or addressed, is evident in the Trilogy's manifestations of failed Eucharist. This ritual of consuming the body and blood of Christ fails Moran before he begins his mission to find Molloy (partly, perhaps, because he has drunk a fictional brand of beer first: '[m]'accorderait-on le corps du Christ après un pot de Wallenstein?' (*M* p. 161)), as he admits: '[i]l faut dire que l'hostie ne passait pas' (*M* p. 170). If we read *Molloy* in conjunction with *L'Innommable*, it seems that an ironic, hollowed-out form of Eucharist predominates whereby each narrator, invoking their own body, actually invokes someone else's:

> [q]uelquefois je me dis que moi aussi je suis dans une tête, c'est l'effroi qui me le fait dire, et le désir d'être en sûreté, entouré de toutes parts d'os épais. Et j'ajoute que j'ai tort de me laisser effrayer par les pensées d'un autre, sabrant mon ciel de lueurs inoffensives et m'assiégeant de rumeurs ne signifiant rien (*I* pp. 106-7).

L'Innommable here echoes Malone's already-voiced suspicion that he is inside a skull not his own: 'Vous direz que c'est dans ma tête […] que ces huit, non, ces six

[92] See Hill, *In Different Words*: 'Throughout the trilogy, speaking and writing are referred to insistently in terms of ingestion, excretion, vomiting, or spitting' (pp. 116-17).
[93] Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p. 59.
[94] Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 7.
[95] Ibid, p. 9. See also 'nous sommes obsédés de montrer un *ceci*, et de (nous) convaincre que ce ceci, ici, *est* ce qu'on ne peut ni voir, ni toucher, ni ici, ni ailleurs' (p. 7).

parois sont en os massif, mais de là à dire que c'est ma tête à moi, non, ça jamais' (*MM* p. 78). Assimilation and expulsion, to expand on Hill's analysis, coincide with the back and forth rhythm of Beckett's contradictions. Their incessant overlapping denies Eucharist, as well as its promise of a 'dehors' to the Trilogy, its proper functioning. Just as the Eucharist, body of Christ, 'ne passait pas', the *hors-texte* of the decomposing body or *corps* also does not pass definitively through the borders of the text itself, which allow only for an incomplete expulsion.

But if, in these attempted Eucharistic moments, *corps* slips further away, how can literary production continue to occur without a body, or, in Nancean terms, how to write the body, the (*corpus*), without a body with which to write (*corps*)?[96] The 'je' of *L'Innommable*, physically fixed in position, connects writing with embodiment:

> Comment, dans ces conditions, fais-je pour écrire, à ne considérer de cette amère folie que l'aspect manuel? Je ne sais pas [...] C'est moi qui écris, moi qui ne puis lever la main de mon genou. C'est moi qui pense, juste assez pour écrire, moi dont la tête est loin (*I* p. 24).

The deictic repetitions which here insist on the agency of the 'je' are immediately contradicted by the sentences which follow them, and I would suggest, evoke questions similar to those raised by Derrida in *Apories*. Asked also (but implicitly) in the preceding chapter on Gadda, these questions prompt us to ask how a 'je' can experience death as a possibility, or write their own death while experiencing it, an impossibility which the end of *Malone meurt* performs. The 'je' of *L'Innommable* appears to interpret this bind as an impossibility, declaring '[j]e ne dirai plus moi' (*I* p. 113), but this marks a doubling back on his words ('[i]l fallait parler seulement de

[96] The dilemma is not only Nancean, if we recall Beckett, 'Three Dialogues', in *GCE*, IV: Poems, Short Fiction, Criticism: 'there is nothing to express, *nothing with which to express*, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express' (my italics), pp. 555-63 (p. 556).

moi' (*I* p. 28)). As Weller expresses the dilemma, 'one has to remain oneself in order to die':[97] but this creates the logical bind that one must therefore remain alive in order to die (since one is only oneself while alive). Weller proposes the alterity available through narrative as a passage out of this aporia: 'narrating the story of another will also be a form of departing absolutely from the self that anticipates the departure of death [...] Fiction, pure fiction, therefore, has an essential role to play in the rendering possible of death.'[98] Yet Malone's narratives do not keep to the strict divide of fact and fiction, so can we truly say, on Weller's interpretation, that 'Malone meurt'?

Connor, developing a related point, argues that 'Malone has to find a way to inhabit and to speak his own death, and he does this by using language, not to embody himself, but to repudiate himself.'[99] The problem, however, is that this 'departure' (Weller) or 'repudiat[ion]' (Connor) disappoints: Malone cannot free death from the bounds of his narration by exscribing the *hors-texte* by means of another's narrative, since in that case '[l]a mort doit me prendre pour un autre' (*MM* p. 167). Malone can only die if he remains Malone, so we could similarly venture that where *L'Innommable* decides 'finir serait merveilleux, qui que je sois, où que je sois' (*I* p. 26), the 'qui que' and 'où que' implicitly negate the possibility of the narrator's 'finir'. Both Weller's and Connor's would-be narrative passages out of the Trilogy's aporia of death, as both critics recognise, create their own aporia. Exscription remains incomplete, as the attempt to exscribe another's body, one not the narrator's, obscures a way through the limit via narration.

[97] Weller, *A Taste for the Negative*, p. 102.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Connor, *Repetition, Theory and Text*, p. 66.

Conclusion

Returning to Cerquiglini-Toulet's identification of testamentary narrative as 'composition, sur la décomposition',[100] we can now elaborate on the aporia central to this chapter: that of composition within, or ensuing from, a decomposing body. Throughout Beckett's Trilogy, voices haunt each other, identifying and taking on a body, but the boundaries erected by these voices to fortify their identities, bodies, and narratives come crumbling down. Beckett's 'émiettement' of terms consists of his characters' indulgence in memorialising what 'fails to happen', the implicit negation of 'truths' upon our rereading them (or rather upon reading later Trilogy texts), and the haunting of aporetic figure within aporetic figure, the effect of which is to decompose the body in and of the text. Yet just because the body decomposes does not mean that passage through or out of its borders is finally unproblematic: decomposition, as I indicated in my introduction, plays a role in prolonging narrative. Disembodied voices assume a body in these novels precisely when voicing their disembodiment.

For Beckett's voices, the passage into death is dependent on withstanding aporia, but that passage relies on separations holding: between the self and, alternately, objects, others, and life, each of which erodes across the Trilogy. Worrying the boundaries between inventories, stories, and memoirs, Beckett's parody of testamentary narrative foregrounds the aporia inherent in the literary list, and its often difficult parataxis. As in the first section of this chapter, this parody eventually disintegrates in the Trilogy so that failed memory obscures objects' identities, and storytellers'

[100] Cerquiglini-Toulet, p. 7.

criss-crossing between narrative forms complicates subjects' identities, so that ending narrative *as* narrative becomes an impossibility. The second section covered yet another dissolve into the meaninglessness of a gap between ideally meaningful, distinct terms. Here, the chiasm between narratives which touch and are touched leaves the 'transitional subjects' of the Trilogy somewhere between subject and object, experiencing what Merleau-Ponty might describe as an intercorporeity across their narratives, and sharing of sensual experiences and peripeteias. In this space of dissolution, the dynasty of Trilogy characters is composed by virtue of its decomposition, while the reversibility of sexual difference in Beckett interferes with any conventional idea of 'concord' fictions and their potential to provide satisfactory ends to narrative. Writing to conclusion, rather, as the third section of this chapter illustrated, means exscribing a body if the writer is to pass through the limit of the text, and leave the text behind after the end of narrative. But Beckett's text, confined in the aporia of a body which never happens, since the Trilogy's narrators can only ever partake in a failed Eucharist, prevents the end of that body from occurring together with the ending of the text, so that ultimately it cannot be exscribed *hors-texte*.

Connor, considering the possibility that repetition eventually opens up difference within the texts of the Trilogy (as though, perhaps, the Trilogy texts are themselves antanaclastic), quotes Derrida on the theoretical reversal of texts back over themselves:

> Dès lors que le cercle tourne, que le volume s'enroule sur lui-même, que le livre se répète, son identité à soi accueille une imperceptible différence qui nous permet de sortir efficacement, rigoureusement, c'èst-à-dire

> discrètement, de la clôture. En redoublant la clôture du livre, on la dédouble.[101]

The act of 'finir de mourir' requires that of exscribing the body, but this exscription does not finish: rather, the rolling up of the Trilogy in exscription overwrites the points of potential passage and the possibility 'de sortir […] de la clôture' of bodily finitude. The repeated exscription of others' bodies in Beckett's writing, which works via the blurring of conventions, touching of narratives, and self-decomposing texts, manifests in a mass of exscribed bodies which efface any exit, covering over each others' openings. Molloy's possibilities are Moran's impossibilities, the unnameable narrator's plans are Malone's memories, while Moran's endings are Molloy's beginnings. There is no path forward from the space of the 'émiettement' or 'effondrement' because the overwriting of narratives obstructs passage, and yet crumbles the narratives in so many places that to speak of the Trilogy as a cohesive, insular set of novels remains, as always, impossible too. Turning back to Meillassoux, we could say that Beckett shares the sense of suffocation that we cannot get outside finitude to claim 'le Grand-Dehors',[102] but Beckett's implication throughout the Trilogy is that we cannot lay claim to the finite either. If the *hors-texte* is inaccessible to us, so is the *texte*: the Trilogy demonstrates the aporia inherent in not just moving beyond, but also in firmly identifying and grasping *corps* and *corpus*.

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[101] Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, p. 430, quoted in the English in Connor, *Repetition, Theory and Text*, p. 4. Trezise, *Into the Breach*, phrases a similar idea in these terms: 'the closure responsible for the success of literary representation is predicated upon the anachronistic repetition of its own failure' (p. 119).

[102] In drawing a parallel between Beckett and Meillassoux here, I remain cognisant of what Connor, 'Beckett's Radical Finitude', dubs Beckett's 'desire not to infinitise finitude' (p. 49), a desire distinct from Quentin Meillassoux's quest for 'le Grand Dehors' in *Après la finitude*, and one which I will explore in Chapter Five.

Chapter Three

Reality Unworked: Nabokov's *Sebastian Knight* and *Pnin*

> I do not know if it has ever been noted before that one of the main characteristics of life is discreteness. Unless a film of flesh envelops us, we die. Man exists only insofar as he is separated from his surroundings. The cranium is a space-traveler's helmet. Stay inside or you perish. Death is divestment, death is communion.
>
> Nabokov, *Pnin* (p. 20)

'Death is divestment, death is communion,' the narrator of *Pnin* decides in a short, unexpected diatribe, just as titular character Pnin realises he is on the wrong train (catching up with the rest of us, who were already in on the secret).[1] We encountered refractions of this '[d]eath is divestment' maxim in Chapters One and Two. It informs Gonzalo de Pirobutirro's imagination of death as the 'sovrana coscienza della impossibilità di dire: Io' (*CD* p. 193) and his desire to scrape all personal pronouns out from underneath his fingernails. It explains why the voices of Beckett's Trilogy, hesitating in the aporia of speaking in order to end speech, anticipate a moment in which '[j]e ne dirai plus moi' (*I* p. 113). Nabokov has already developed the divestment-discreteness theme in *Invitation to a Beheading* (1935), but it resurfaces in his *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941) and later in *Pnin* (1957), where the issue of ontological 'discreteness' confronts that of epistemological unknowability. If we remain inside a 'space-traveler's helmet', we live, but forfeit our chance to know others fully, and therefore to circumvent the finitude of our own experience. If we

[1] See Michael Maar, *Speak, Nabokov* (London: Verso, 2009), who asserts that 'Nabokov knew well that it [the 'death is divestment' principle] had been noted before and that he was only creating new metaphors for Schopenhauer's old *principium individuationis*' (p. 55).

instead sacrifice discreteness for epistemological transcendence, we die: a death which the novel cannot fully encompass.

'Death is [...] something to be achieved; it is a Work,' Critchley writes with reference to 'all systems of thought that take seriously the question of finitude and the problem of nihilism'.[2] Death is a Work outside the bounds of the novel, but what the novel can encompass is a movement which is the opposite of work: worklessness, or *désœuvrement*, which for Maurice Blanchot is synonymous with writing.[3] *Désœuvrement* does not merely denote the text's undoing itself,[4] but rather the text's 'affirm[ing]' within itself 'the worklessness that exceeded it [...] the absence of all possible books'.[5] *Désœuvrement* connotes infinitude. In 'L'absence de livre', the conclusion to his *L'Entretien infini*, Blanchot effects a separation, in Hart's words, between the 'finite work' and the 'infinite movement of writing',[6] indicating that the gap between the two terms is akin to that between death (*la mort*) and infinite dying (*le mourir*). This infinite dying-unworking, like the playing of a 'jeu insensé', strives toward absence of the finite work: the book becomes a 'ruse par laquelle l'écriture va vers *l'absence de livre*'.[7]

[2] Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing*, p. 162.
[3] Blanchot, 'L'absence de livre', in *L'Entretien infini*, pp. 620-36: '[é]crire, c'est produire l'absence de l'œuvre (le désœuvrement)' (p. 622).
[4] See ibid: 'L'absence de livre n'est pas le livre qui se défait, même si se défaire est en quelque sorte à l'origine et la contre-loi du livre. Que le livre toujours se défasse (se désarrange) ne conduit encore qu'à un autre livre ou à une autre possibilité que le livre, mais non à l'absence de livre' (p. 630).
[5] Leslie Hill, 'The Disappearance of Literature: Blanchot, Surrealism, Futurity,' *Nottingham French Studies*, 50 (2011), 117-27 (p. 127). Hill notes in *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), that 'absence d'œuvre' is increasingly substituted in Blanchot's later writing for 'désœuvrement' (p. 185).
[6] Kevin Hart, 'Blanchot's "Trial of Experience"', *Oxford Literary Review*, 22 (2000), 108-31 (p. 120).
[7] Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*, pp. 620; 623.

In Old French, the meaning of 'ruser' includes 'se retirer, reculer'.[8] That Blanchot's 'ruse' secretes a movement of withdrawal is central to my argument in this chapter. Yet Nabokov deploys an additional ruse upon the Blanchotian ruse in the two novels for study. *Sebastian Knight* progressively reveals not the biographical subject but the absence of that subject,[9] while *Pnin* evaporates as the novel we know it to be when its last chapter renders the entire novel's narration impossible. Both evince palpably the 'creusement' of reality which Blanchot posits as integral to *désœuvrement*.[10] My argument in this chapter is that Nabokov engages with the ruse deployed unconsciously by all writers; but beyond that, Nabokov, aware of this ruse which runs unwittingly through all literature, also deploys it self-consciously, baring it to readers. Hill gives Blanchot's *L'Arrêt de mort* as an extreme example of self-reflexive unworking, wherein 'Blanchot's narrator, in a state of intense désœuvrement, first writes down his story, only then to destroy it immediately afterwards'.[11] As in Blanchot's novel, Nabokov's 'ruse-upon-a-ruse' *exposes* the way in which writing's 'hollowing-out' opens us up to exteriority and alterity. Exacerbating what is inevitable in literature (which is, in general, 'attiré vers […] son irréalité'), the ruse whittles away at the novel[12] until there is nothing left but the infinite movement toward the work's absence:[13] only the unworking of reality remains. In a novel of

[8] See 'ruse', *Trésor de la langue française*, https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/ruse.
[9] See, for example, Conrad Brenner, 'Introduction', in Nabokov, *Sebastian Knight* (New York: New Directions, 1977), pp. vii-xvi: to the effect that the novel 'was written to prove there is no book here'; quoted in Gennady Barabtarlo, 'Tana Naita: Narrative Stance in Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*', *Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, 6 (2008), 57-80 (p. 73).
[10] See Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*: 'Créatrice peut-être [la littérature], mais ce qu'elle crée est toujours en creux par rapport à ce qui est et ce creusement rend seulement ce qui est plus glissant, moins sûr de l'être et, à cause de cela, comme attiré vers une autre mesure, celle de son irréalité où, dans le jeu de la différence infinie, ce qui est s'affirme cependant en se dérobant sous le voile du non' (p. 592).
[11] Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary*, p. 146, referring to Blanchot, *L'Arrêt de mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948).
[12] Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*, p. 592. See the Beckett chapter preceding the current chapter on the movement of 'émiettement'.
[13] See Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*: 'passage d'un mouvement infini, allant de l'écriture comme opération à l'écriture comme désœuvrement; passage qui aussitôt empêche' (p. 623).

embedded metatexts, the defining mise-en-abyme of *Sebastian Knight* (including in its reach the novels written by author Sebastian, the biography of Sebastian attempted by V, and overarching novel written by Nabokov), is that the 'heroes' of Sebastian's novel *The Prismatic Bezel* are the 'methods of composition' themselves:[14] 'It is as if a painter said: look, here, I'm going to show you not the painting of a landscape, but the painting of different ways of painting a certain landscape, and I trust their harmonious fusion will disclose the landscape as I intend you to see it' (*SK* p. 82). Exposing the methods and conditions which make narrative possible has the same effect across both Nabokov's novels:[15] it releases the force of *désœuvrement* through metafictive irony (although *Pnin* waits until the end to release this force, whereas it comes out gradually in *Sebastian Knight*). I suggest that the ruse in Nabokov operates as follows: first, he pares back the novel's semblance of ontological finitude to threaten its discreteness, enabling us to wrench layers of narrated 'reality' from *Sebastian Knight*, in which authorial masks abound, as well as from *Pnin*, in which the narrator's presence eventually drives that of eponymous Pnin out of the text, the 'work' as we knew it withdrawing with Pnin. Once finitude of ontology comes under suspicion, the next question is whether the texts' thematic investigation of 'divestment' might open them up on a formal level to an external unknowability,

[14] See Dale Peterson, 'Knight's Move: Nabokov, Shklovsky, and the Afterlife of Sirin', *Nabokov Studies*, 11 (2007-8), 25-35, where he reflects on Vladislav Khodasevich's description of Sirin as 'an artist of form, of the writer's device… [he] reveals on the very spot the laboratory of his miracles' (from Khodasevich, 'On Sirin', trans. by Michael H. Walker, ed. by Simon Karlinsky and Robert B. Hughes, in *Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations and Tributes*, ed. by Alfred Appel, Jr. and Charles Newman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp. 96-101 (p. 97)). See also Will Norman, *Nabokov, History and the Texture of Time* (New York: Routledge, 2012): '*Sebastian Knight* marks the clearest point of intersection between modernism and Russian Formalism for Nabokov, for in this novel the Shklovskian baring of the device is taken to its logical extreme, where literary structures take themselves as their own object, and begin to offer us the kind of self-reflexivity Nabokov located in *Ulysses*' (p. 48).

[15] Such conditions might include the disclosure of prior meetings between the narrator and *Pnin*, which purportedly make that text's narration possible.

like 'space-traveler's helmet[s]' opened up to a beyond which would otherwise hover out of reach of either novel's narration.

Knowability, with its promise of mastering another's life in all its breadth and vitality, is the aspiration around which metafictional biography revolves.[16] *Sebastian Knight* overtly engages with the conventions of this subgenre, while *Pnin* does so far more subtly.[17] The biography is a task which requires epistemological probing, but cannot avoid ontological concerns. Nabokov stresses its precariousness in a 1937 essay on 'Pushkin: the Real and the Plausible': '[i]s it possible to imagine the full reality of another's life, to relive it in one's mind, and set it down intact on paper?'[18] The tripartite demands of biography seem like linear steps, but actually impede each other: knowing the 'full reality' of another being is one matter, but the ontological impossibility of reliving that reality and preserving it in 'full' is another. As Gadda recognises in his own *Meditazione milanese*: 'conoscere è inserire alcunché nel reale, è, quindi, deformare il reale' (*MM* 249). In Nabokov's metafictional biography, the aspiration to replicate a supposedly finite ontology dissipates, conceding to this deformation. An unwriting of what we know of each text both constitutes and thwarts the biographer's epistemological project, whether the biographer is 'V' in

[16] See Barabtarlo, 'Tana Naita': '*The Real Life* is transformed into a book about V's composing *a novel* about Sebastian' (p. 64). See also M. Keith Booker, 'Fiction and "Real Life": Vargas Lllosa's *The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta* and Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 35 (1994), 111-27, to the effect that the 'mode of biographic metafiction', which for Booker 'specifically questions the ultimate knowability of the human subject', 'can be found in numerous postmodernist works' (p. 114); and where he writes that 'the difficulty of grasping reality through epistemological investigation is a standard topic in much modern literature' (p. 114).
[17] See Paul Grams, '*Pnin*: The Biographer as Meddler', in Carl R. Proffer, ed., *A Book of Things About Vladimir Nabokov* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1974), pp. 193-202.
[18] Nabokov, 'Pouchkine: le vrai ou le vraisemblable' (Paris: Mesures, 1937), trans. by Dmitri Nabokov as 'Pushkin, or the Real and the Plausible', *The New York Review of Books*, March 21 1988, pp. 38-42. The Nabokov essay continues: 'I doubt it: one even finds oneself seduced by the idea that thought itself, as it shines its beam on the story of a man's life, cannot avoid deforming it.' Norman, *Nabokov, History and the Texture of Time*, notes that this essay of Nabokov's emerged from his interest in the 'status and artistic possibilities of biography in the absence of verifiable truth' (p. 48).

Sebastian Knight or 'V.N.' in *Pnin*, precluding structurally the novels' discreteness or intactness.

Both *Sebastian Knight* and *Pnin* have been recognised as some of, if not the most thematically dense works across Nabokov's œuvre,[19] and I have chosen them for study chiefly because a compression of themes, patterns, and designs intensifies any novel's relation to *désœuvrement*. Describing how Nabokov creates worlds through patterning, Robert Alter argues that the 'key to reality' lies in the '*perception* of pattern' (my italics), so that 'as consciousness integrates more and more patterns', it 'encounters reality, or makes the world around it at last real.'[20] I would add that patterning, with its potential to enhance a sense of reality, competes as organisational impulse against Nabokov's ruse (where this ruse is his self-conscious exposure of 'methods of composition', which themselves detract from that sense of reality). In other words, I seek to discern how this counter-impulse, or de-patterning, unworks reality through five mechanisms in the novels.[21] In the first section of this chapter, I focus on Nabokov's disruption of ontological 'discreteness' throughout both novels. The second section inquires into the opening up of these novels to a possible exteriority which, Nabokov insinuates, awaits beyond the text. The third raises the issue of levels of narration: how clashing perceptions (of what Nabokov's short story 'Signs and Symbols' calls a 'hole in the world')[22] unwork the texts through layering narrative perspectives in an 'infinite succession of steps'.[23] In the fourth

[19] See, for example, Maar: 'there are few [of Nabokov's works] that so densely compress so many themes as does *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* – only the innocent *Pnin* rivals it in this respect (p. 44).
[20] Robert Alter, *Motives for Fiction* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 64.
[21] Patterning might here be considered a byword for 'working', and 'methods of composition' a term denoting unworking.
[22] Nabokov, 'Signs and Symbols', in *Nabokov's Dozen: Thirteen Stories* (London: Penguin, 2017), pp. 44-50 (p. 45).
[23] See Nabokov: 'You can get nearer and nearer, so to speak, to reality; but you can never get near

section, I deal with how unreality supplants the notion of the book in both novels, concentrating on the withdrawal of textual reality into absence in the case of *Sebastian Knight*, and into impossibility in the case of *Pnin*. Finally, in the fifth section I turn to the post-text[24] of both novels as a space into which cognitive activity is cast beyond the book, one definitively denying ontological 'discreteness', and reinforcing the existence of an unknowability beyond the texts.

This chapter is therefore a transitional one in which the ontological considerations of the first two chapters begin to collide more conspicuously with epistemological concerns. Yet in a sense, the first two chapters also dealt with 'unworkings': Chapter One considered how Gadda's *La cognizione* manifests a *thematic* unworking in its irresolution, whereas Chapter Two detailed how Beckett's Trilogy demonstrates a *linguistic* unworking in its epanorthosis, with both authors' works manifesting movement toward a self-negation in death. Nabokovian unworking might best be described as structural (depending on narration, genre, and the interplay between the two), although I acknowledge overlap between thematic, linguistic, and structural unworking across all three authors, as well as the integral role of negation in each author's method of unworking. The final two chapters continue the trend of reading simultaneously for ontological and epistemological finitude, as well as reconsidering unworking with regard to Gadda and Beckett. Chapter Four, on Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio*, centres on the passage into language of the infinite discourses which express knowledge, while Chapter Five, on anachrony in Beckett's Trilogy, focuses on

enough because reality is an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms, and hence unquenchable, unattainable' (*SO* p. 9).

[24] I borrow this term from Don Barton Johnson, '"Terror": Pre-Texts and Post-Texts', in *A Small Alpine Form: Studies in Nabokov's Short Fiction*, ed. by Charles Nicol and Gennady Barabtarlo (New York and London: Garland, 1993), pp. 39-64; acknowledging that it has a different and unrelated meaning in genetic criticism. Johnson uses the term to describe how 'themes first articulated [in "Terror"] reverberate in [Nabokov's] mature fiction' (p. 59).

the (im)possibility of thinking (and knowing) where being is not, turning back to Meillassoux's overarching dilemma, which inspires his *Après la finitude*: the severance of being from thought, which keeps us from 'ce qui est que nous soyons ou pas'.[25]

Hardback covers and space-travellers' skulls

When Cincinnatus C is first left alone in his cell in Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading*, the finite ontology of Cincinnatus's life is made commensurate with the finite ontology of the novel in which he exists: entwining it in two metaphors, Nabokov likens the expiration of life to a reader feeling the pages of a book thinning beneath their thumbs,[26] and to a writer feeling the lead of a pencil shorten over time.[27] Cincinnatus nonetheless starts to write. Why write a book, if narrative and the life it describes are both destined to run out? Yet every significant character in *Sebastian Knight* and *Pnin* is writing one: Pnin, who is at work on a 'Petite Histoire' of Russian culture;[28] V.N., the narrator of *Pnin*, who is a published writer in Russian émigré circles; V., who is writing his half-brother's biography; and Sebastian, the renowned author and subject of that biography, whose last novel, *The Doubtful Asphodel* has as its premise that '[t]he man is the book' (*SK* p. 154). Books are studded throughout both novels, which focus on bookshelves (*SK* p. 33), names in

[25] See Meillassoux, *Après la finitude*, p. 49. He points to a paradigm shift between Kant's day and our own: 'Cet écart – de l'inconnaissabilité de la chose en-soi, à son impensabilité – suppose en effet que la pensée en est venue à légitimer *de son propre mouvement* le fait que l'être lui est devenu si opaque qu'elle le suppose capable de transgresser jusqu'aux principes les plus élémentaires du logos' (p. 73).
[26] Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading*: 'The right-hand, still untasted part of the novel, which, during our delectable reading, we would lightly feel, mechanically testing whether there were still plenty left (and our fingers were always gladdened by the placid, faithful thickness), had suddenly, for no reason at all, become quite meagre' (*IB* p. 4).
[27] Ibid: '[…] lay a beautifully sharpened pencil, as long as the life of any man except Cincinnatus'.
[28] 'He contemplated writing a *Petite Histoire* of Russian culture, in which a choice of Russian Curiosities, Customs, Literary Anecdotes, and so forth would be presented in such a way as to reflect in miniature *la Grande Histoire* – Major Concatenations of Events' (*P* p. 76).

which the word 'book' is encoded,[29] and volumes presumed checked out from the library (*P* p. 74). On an extratextual level, the cover of *Pnin* anticipated by Nabokov was to feature Pnin himself holding a book emblazoned with the Russian letters for '*Pnin*' and 'V. Nabokov'.[30] Together, the flurries of writing and reading across *Sebastian Knight* and *Pnin* bear out the 'Nabokovian device' identified by Patricia Merivale, which centres on 'the book that, in whole or in part, explicitly imitates another book: a "discovered manuscript," a fictitious confession, a book about imaginary books, or a book that parodies such an already conventionalised structure as the detective story, the scholarly commentary, or the literary biography.'[31] Critics have made readings of both Nabokov novels dependent on recognising them as multiple books in one,[32] or on identifying the characters within them as a composite of other characters.[33] 'À lire, à écrire, toujours déjà écrit, toujours déjà transi par la

[29] See Norman, *Nabokov, History and the Texture of Time*, to the effect that the name Knight is 'a distorted reflection of the Russian "*kniga*," meaning "book". This last conceit confirms what we might have suspected all along – that Sebastian is not a person, but a book. More precisely, Sebastian is a collage of books, a collection of literary fragments marshaled from diverse periods of history with no concern for their sequence' (p. 37).

[30] See Catriona Kelly, 'Nabokov, *snobizm* and selfhood in *Pnin*', in Jane Grayson and others, eds., *Nabokov and His World*, 2 vols (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002) II: Reading Nabokov, pp. 117-40: 'The fact that *Pnin* was intended to be read as a narrative within a narrative is suggested also by Nabokov's desire to have on the cover of the novel a picture of Pnin holding a copy of a book bearing on its covers the words [in Russian: Pnin/V. Nabokov]' (p. 131). Kelly here cites Nabokov, 'Letter to Jason Epstein', 1 October 1956, *Selected Letters: 1940-1977*, ed. by Dmitri Nabokov and Matthew J. Bruccoli (San Diego: Harcourt, 1989), p. 191. The 1957 Doubleday book cover is reproduced in Leonid Livak, 'Jewishness as Literary Device in Nabokov's Fiction', in *Vladimir Nabokov in Context*, ed. by David M. Bethea and Siggy Frank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 228-39 (p. 236).

[31] Patricia Merivale, 'The Flaunting of Artifice in Vladimir Nabokov and Jorge Luis Borges', in L.S. Dembo, ed., *Nabokov: The Man and His Work* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), pp. 209-24 (p. 209).

[32] For example, Maar: '*Sebastian Knight* contains half a dozen books in one. It's a portrait of an artist that not only makes claims about its protagonist's art, but also presents it. It's a pseudo-biography and a parody of a detective story. It's a sort of chess match, composed of knight moves, queen sacrifices, and bishops slain along the way. It's a meditation on the compulsion of the past, on eros and agape, on a son's love for his mother, and on failed brotherhood' (p. 44).

[33] Nabokov's *Dar* (New York: Chekhova, 1952), translated as *The Gift* (London: Penguin, 2011), his last Russian novel, is a precursor to this collage effect, paying homage to the greats of Russian literature rather than the more global (or at least European) span of *Sebastian Knight*'s bookshelves. Leonid Livak, 'Russian Modernism and the Novel', in *A History of The Modernist Novel*, ed. by Gregory Castle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 110-33, writes that *The Gift* is 'an encyclopedia of "Russian modernism and the novel"', and a 'survey couched in a metafictional, autobiographically motivated story of an émigré's artistic, philosophical, and sentimental education' (pp. 129-30).

lecture', these novels which assert themselves as epistemological investigations of individuals (of Sebastian and Pnin), herald 'the book' as that which *must* be written, as the necessary 'condition pour toute possibilité de lecture et d'écriture',[34] much as Blanchot envisages the book in *L'Entretien infini*.[35] Without the biography to show for V's work, and without the inscription of Pnin's life in narrative, the epistemological achievement of both novels' narrators would be thrown into doubt. Books, in both texts, are markers of existence: whether the characters', the narrators', or the novelist's; they are affirmations of ontology which promise access to previously undisclosed epistemology through the tell-all biography.

Yet the over-abundant presence of 'the book' in these two Nabokov novels is a cover, a distraction, a ruse with which to lay bare the fragmentation of the book. The book fragments into something which can no longer be conceived of as a coherent 'work' or ontological finitude: it succumbs to its own movement toward unreality. The premise of Nabokov's *Sebastian Knight* is simple: out of the remnants of a dead author's life, his half-brother exerts himself to write an 'exhaustive study of Knight's life and work' (*SK* p. 50). The tragedy of *Pnin*, we read in Nabokov's letter to an editor at an early stage of writing, is to die with 'everything unsettled and uncompleted, including the book Pnin had been writing all his life.'[36] Totality goes hand in hand with the fragmentary, as Rodolphe Gasché reminds us, pointing to the late twentieth-century 'assumption that an inescapable fragmentation has always already gotten the best of the idea of totality associated with the book, the *œuvre*, the

[34] Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*, p. 621.
[35] Blanchot, ibid, has three conceptions of the book: 'le livre empirique' (as 'dépôt et réceptacle du savoir'); 'le livre: condition de toute lecture et de toute écriture;', and finally 'le livre: totalité ou *Œuvre*'.
[36] Nabokov, 'Letter to Pascal Covici', 3 February 1954, *Selected Letters*, p. 143. It would seem that the book's 'uncompleted' nature is fatal to Pnin in this initial plot design of Nabokov's.

opus, and so on'.[37] Gasché's words hold true for these novels. On the one hand, they valorise exhaustiveness and completeness,[38] elevating the idea of the 'livre comme dépôt et réceptacle du savoir';[39] on the other hand, the notion of 'the book' in both texts is *a priori* either fragmented or at risk of scattering. *Sebastian Knight* chronicles V's futile attempt to 'solder' (*SK* p. 26) into an intact narrative what Julia Kristeva describes as the 'souvenirs en lambeaux'[40] left in Sebastian's wake. V's quest to fuse the pieces of the author back together vies with the author's bodiless, 'disseminated' absence, as Kristeva describes it,[41] which resists his half-brother's soldering. Metaphors of fragmentation remain implicit and therefore even more powerful in *Pnin*, dotted as that novel is with what Catriona Kelly calls 'images of frail domes as vessels for separateness [...] the egg, the skull, the bowl,'[42] like pressure points throughout the narrative which retain an inherent shattering potential. As the final flight of its protagonist makes clear, the novel is perennially threatened with dispersal.

Despite the discreteness (*Pnin*) and intactness (*Sebastian Knight*) to which these texts aspire, reality cannot be recorded unbroken. To know reality in full, we must invade another's privacy, fracturing the bounds of their individual existence. As Rodgers and Sweeney note in their *Nabokov and the Question of Morality*, Nabokov

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[37] Gasché, 'Foreword: Ideality in Fragmentation', in Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. vii.
[38] See J.H. Garrett-Goodyear, '"The Rapture of Endless Approximation": The Role of the Narrator in *Pnin*', *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 16 (1986), 192-203, to the effect that Victor, Pnin's spiritual rather than biological son, and a figure who is perhaps emblematic of the text in this respect, is fascinated with 'formal completeness' but 'also drawn to what cannot be fully perceived or articulated: the ineffable' (p. 198).
[39] Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*, p. 621.
[40] Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1988): 'Nocturne, ce Knight qui a faussé compagnie à la famille des observateurs et ne laisse aux autres et à soi-même que des souvenirs en lambeaux' (pp. 52-53).
[41] Ibid: Un '"soi-même" disséminé...'.
[42] Kelly, 'Nabokov, *snobizm* and selfhood in *Pnin*', in Grayson, II, p. 139.

is sometimes mistaken for a writer unconcerned with ethics,[43] but I suggest that in *Sebastian Knight* and *Pnin*, at least, Nabokov's ethics emerge in structural decisions as he plays with the conventions of biography, a genre which entails privacy concerns.[44] *Pnin*'s fragile 'space traveller's helmet', analogous to the skull, keeps its wearer safe from others as well as from death, but precludes 'communion' (*P* p. 20) with alterity before death. The helmet metaphor epitomises Kelly's observation that *Pnin* obsesses with 'the unresolvable tensions between privacy and the need to explore unknowable interior worlds of consciousness'.[45] *Sebastian Knight*, too, is structured around such a contradiction: in one of the novel's most frustrating ironies, V burns Sebastian's letters to Nina on the author's request, then goes in pursuit of precisely those facts which the letters would have afforded him. When it comes to writing biography, it is clear, the ethical imperative to know another's 'full reality' demands that the other's reality cannot be preserved intact. Biographical investigation becomes an infinite unworking, at once incompatible with finite ontology and unable to fit within the bounds of the text.

Unworking here also denotes splitting into two, since the key trope through which Nabokov demonstrates the impossibility of ontological intactness is that of the double. We can never determine with certitude who to read in *Sebastian Knight* as a character and who to read as a mere foil, a phenomenon which culminates in the novel's theatrical conclusion, when V declares, 'Thus – I am Sebastian Knight. I feel

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[43] Michael Rodgers and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, *Nabokov and the Question of Morality: Aesthetics, Metaphysics, and the Ethics of Fiction* (New York: Palgrave, 2016), pp. 1-2.
[44] Paul Bruss, *Victims: Textual Strategies in Recent American Fiction* (London: Associated University Presses, 1981), names Grams and Carroll as two of the critics of *Pnin* who have addressed the ethics of literary biography (p. 34).
[45] Kelly, 'Nabokov, *snobizm* and selfhood in *Pnin*', in Grayson, II, p. 135. See Kelly also on the text's 'sensitivity that discretion and discreteness are at once essential to identity, and a trap to its expression' (p. 135).

as if I were impersonating him on a lighted stage' (*SK* p. 180), as Knight's 'mask clings to [V's] face' (*SK* p. 181).[46] Knight has somehow evaded both scenes of 'play', theatre and chessboard, 'as the light fades gently' (*SK* p. 181), and he instead escapes into the homonym for his name: that 'other night' of which Blanchot writes, and of which I made mention in Chapter One, on Gadda's *La cognizione*. As in *Sebastian Knight*, it is the narrator-usurper in *Pnin* who discloses the text's trope of doubleness to us, claiming that he and Pnin share acceptance of the 'disturbing but seldom discussed fact that on any given college staff one could find not only a person who was uncommonly like one's dentist or the local postmaster, but also a person who had a twin within the same professional group' (*P* p. 148).[47] Toward the end of *Pnin*, it is hard to say which of its primary 'twins' is more real, and which occupies the night-time realm of the text: Pnin, who escapes the suffocating text for a world outside it, or V.N., who has migrated from that outside world to subsume himself in fiction.

In neither text is the doubling simply a case of a dichotomisation of one character into two.[48] *Pnin*'s narrator insists to us that 'there were as many as six Pnins, besides the genuine and, to me, unique article', an insistence which uncannily echoes a line of Beckett's *Molloy*, the archetypal modernist tale of the double which was published in the United States just two years before Nabokov's *Pnin*: 'Il y avait en somme trois,

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[46] See Merivale, 'Flaunting of Artifice', in Dembo: 'Nabokov is never more Borgesian than in the concluding lines of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*' (p. 215).
[47] The misidentification of Mr T. Wynn reinforces this trope: 'a person whom Pnin knew as Professor Thomas Wynn, Head of the Ornithology Department [...] was not always Professor Wynn. At times he graded, as it were, into somebody else, whom Pnin did not know by name but whom he classified, with a bright foreigner's fondness for puns as "Twynn" (or, in Pninan, "Tvin")' (*P* pp. 149-50). When T.W. Thomas, the guest Pnin actually invites to his dinner party, wonders aloud why Pnin has called him 'Vin', Clements answers slyly: 'He probably mistook you for somebody else [...] And for all I know you *may* be somebody else' (*P* p. 165).
[48] Hazel Cohen, 'Nabokov's *Pnin*', *English Studies in Africa*, 26 (1983), 57-70, reads the cardiograph as a statement regarding Pnin's mutually exclusive fictive selves (p. 62).

non, quatre Molloy. Celui de mes entrailles, la caricature que j'en faisais, celui de Gaber et celui qui, en chair et en os, m'attendait quelque part. J'y ajouterais celui de Youdi' (*M* p. 191). Both Beckett's and Nabokov's formulations draw attention to the fictive generation of multiplicity (which, as we will see, becomes even more prominent in Gadda), in itself a philosophical obsession for both novelists. Priscilla Meyer, in her *Nabokov and Indeterminacy: The Case of the Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (the first full-length study dedicated to this novel), suggests that philosophy indeed underlies doubling in Nabokov: in both *Sebastian Knight* and the Nabokovian novel which preceded it, *Despair*,[49] the 'pseudo-doubling of art and reality is the focus of Nabokov's parody of the doppelgänger theme.'[50] In this thematic doubling, the trope does not just apply to the half-brothers V and Sebastian, or the rivals Pnin and V.N., but also applies to the book, ever present motif in the works. If we recall Merivale's claim that Nabokov continually foregrounds the 'book that imitates another book', then the effect of all this doubling might be to complicate ontology by blurring the finite work of the novel with that of the human life. It also opens up the borders of a series of 'books' mirroring each other, just as though we are opening up ontologies onto an outside beyond their own versions of reality.

The uncontained: novels turned inside out

> The three of them stood for a moment gazing at the stars.
>
> 'And all these are worlds,' said Hagen.
>
> 'Or else,' said Clements with a yawn, 'a frightful mess. I suspect it is really a fluorescent corpse, and we are inside it.'

[49] Nabokov, *Despair* (London: Penguin, 2012).
[50] Priscilla Meyer, *Nabokov and Indeterminacy: The Case of the Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018); see also Meyer, 'Black and Violet Words: *Despair* and *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* as Doubles', *Nabokov Studies*, 4 (1997), 37-60.

> Nabokov, *Pnin* (pp. 165-66)
>
> Years later Sebastian wrote that gazing at the stars gave him a sick and squeamish feeling, as for instance when you look at the bowels of a ripped-up beast.
>
> Nabokov, *Sebastian Knight* (p. 122)

Both Nabokov's novels paint the external world inside bodies, depicting the outer landscape as the characters' interior ones so insistently that we know that the texts must have latent potential to turn themselves inside out again. In the author Sebastian's last novel, *The Doubtful Asphodel*, the Everyman character of the 'traveller' through life first

> […] realiz[es] that the wild country he surveys is not an accidental assembly of natural phenomena, but the page in a book where these mountains and forests, and fields, and rivers are disposed in such a way as to form a coherent sentence […] Thus the traveller spells the landscape and its sense is disclosed, and likewise, the intricate pattern of human life turns out to be monogrammatic, now quite clear to the inner eye disentangling the interwoven letters (*SK* p. 157).

The 'interwoven letters' which pattern our lives, written both within and without, allow a join between human, book, and landscape. This join (phrased in *Invitation* as 'that invisible umbilical cord that joins this world to something – to what I shall not say yet […]' (*IB* p. 49)) exposes us to a 'dehors' which bodes something of that extra understanding, beyond the senses, inherent in the Meillassouxian 'Grand Dehors'. Ambrose Gordon Jr. pinpoints *Pnin*'s cardiograph, which 'outlined fabulous mountain ranges and indicated a dozen fatal diseases that excluded one another' (*P* p. 20), as that novel's 'signature': one which connotes 'violation, penetration', [51] a visceral invasion of privacy at the core of the book. The cardiograph reveals 'a mountain range where no mountain range should be', in Gordon Jr.'s, words, and

[51] Ambrose Gordon Jr., 'The Double Pnin', in Dembo, pp. 144-56 (p. 147).

'becomes an even more rickety graph, the subjective correlative of intolerable noise from the outside [...].'[52] This metonymic image evokes the wider expanse of both works: both novels purport to give intimate details, while gesturing to an externality that is also key to understanding the human beings within them, whether via Pnin's extraordinary cardiograph, or V's claim that Sebastian is a 'crystal among glass, a sphere among circles', 'his slightest thought or sensation' possessing 'always at least one more dimension than those of his neighbours' (*SK* p. 57).[53] For Blanchot, writing inevitably implies a dimension external to it: 'extériorité'.[54] It is writing's innate movement of opening onto the outside in *Sebastian Knight* and *Pnin*, collateral of the novels having 'invaded' an interior world, which Nabokov's ruse emphasises, and to which this section turns.

Samuel Beckett's works, among them *L'Innommable, Happy Days*, and *Le Dépeupleur*,[55] envision characters, or at least consciousnesses, held in apparently literal containment, subsisting in enclosures which at times separate being from thought, as Chapter Five will contend. In Nabokovian criticism, meanwhile, Gordon Jr. names 'a certain bafflement about outsides and insides, the container and the thing contained' as an obsession contemporary to Nabokov's writing of Pnin.[56] Nabokov's grappling with the limit between inside and outside may be less overt than Beckett's, but as I signalled in the previous section on ontological finitude and its inherent potential to fragment or shatter in *Sebastian Knight* and *Pnin*, both novels

[52] Ibid.
[53] This metaphor is reminiscent of Kinbote's description of Shade in the foreword to *Pale Fire*: '[...] his head, containing a brain of a different brand than that of the synthetic jellies preserved in the skulls around him' (*PF* p. xxviii).
[54] Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*, p. 632.
[55] See Beckett, *Happy Days* in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986; 2006), pp. 135-68, and *Le Dépeupleur*.
[56] Gordon Jr., 'The Double Pnin', in Dembo, p. 144.

dramatise the process of opening up narratives, liberating ontological 'discreteness' in order to access an unknowable, routinely figured in Nabokov as the epistemology of the other. Both novels perform this opening, unsealing, or unlocking of narrative onto an 'outside' which might correspond to the Kantian noumenal realm, Meillassouxian 'Grand Dehors', or perhaps even more closely to the Lacanian 'real': what Belsey describes as 'that silent or silenced exteriority which is also inside us, and which we cannot symbolize, delimit, specify or know.'[57] I am less concerned here with how Nabokov represents this 'outside' or 'real' – in fact, I do not believe he attempts to represent it – than I am with how his texts self-consciously write into being their own opening onto exteriority.

Nabokov is able to gesture to an exteriority beyond novelistic borders chiefly by means of what Shapiro dubs his 'authorial presence', a technique on which Nabokov himself commented when reading Shakespeare and Joyce.[58] The 'V' of *Sebastian Knight*, though not coterminous with Vladimir Nabokov, does inscribe his presence,[59] while the V.N. of *Pnin* recalls not just the actual author's initials, but hearkens back to *Sebastian Knight*'s 'V', forging an intertextual link which unworks the earlier, already ambiguous link between 'V' and Nabokov, and which will be called up again when 'Vadim Vadimych N' narrates Nabokov's final novel, *Look at*

[57] Catherine Belsey, *Culture and the Real* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 14. Belsey acknowledges that she borrows her concept of the 'real' from Lacan (p. xii). She then goes on to integrate Heidegger's observation (see Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Rowe, 2001), p. 71), that 'while it indicates what is sayable, language also brings the unsayable into the world […] That unsayable, the shadow cast by the vertical images of things, demarcates – but does not try to delineate – the real' (p. xii).
[58] Gabriel Shapiro, 'Setting his myriad faces in his text: Nabokov's authorial presence revisited', in *Nabokov and His Fiction: New Perspectives*, ed. by Julian Connolly (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 15-35 (p. 15).
[59] The enigmatic letter 'V' has perplexed critics including Samuel Schuman, '"Which is Sebastian?": What's in a (Shakespearean or Nabokovian Name)?' in *The Goalkeeper: The Nabokov Almanac*, ed. by Yuri Leving (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2010), pp. 193-200: 'If V is Viola, seeking her lost brother, V is also Vladimir' (p. 199); and Maar: 'Who this V really is constitutes the great riddle of the novel' (p. 46).

the Harlequins! (1974).[60] Manifesting 'authorial presences' to poke holes in, and dig tunnels across one's *œuvre* is a technique used even more brazenly in Beckett, whose murderous 'Lemuel' in *Malone meurt* obliquely recalls, as Hill reminds us, the author's own Hebrew name,[61] and in Gadda, whose *La cognizione* alludes to a 'scrittore arzigogolato e barocco, come Jean Paul, o Carlo Gozzi, o Carlo Dossi, o un qualche altro Carlo anche peggio di questi due, già così grami loro soli [...]' (*CD* p. 16). In both *Sebastian Knight* and *Pnin*, it is not 'Nabokov', but 'Sirin' who appears: like Beckett (exchanging Samuel for Lemuel) and Gadda (complicating his Carlo Gadda with 'Carlo Gozzi' and 'Carlo Dossi'), Nabokov accomplishes his authorial appearances at a slight remove from reality.

'Sirin', Nabokov's pseudonym throughout his Russian years, evokes a mythological bird, typically an owl,[62] the symbolism of which comes to the fore in these authorial appearances. An apparently unmediated reference to 'Sirin' as a topic of conversation in *Pnin* momentarily pierces the fictiveness of that text:

> Émigré Russians – liberals and intellectuals who had left Russia around 1920 – could be found swarming all over the place. You would find them in every patch of speckled shade, sitting on rustic benches and discussing émigré writers – Bunin, Aldanov, Sirin [...] (*P* p. 117).[63]

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[60] See Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!*, but note that the narrator apparently takes pains to distinguish himself from Nabokov: 'I know nothing about butterflies' (*LH* p. 29). See also *Pnin*: '"Pity Vladimir Vladimirovich is not here," remarked Chateau. "He would have told us all about these enchanting insects." "I have always had the impression that his entomology was merely a pose"' (*P* p. 128) and Joan Clements on an unnamed novelist: 'But don't you think – haw – that what he is trying to do – haw – practically in all his novels –haw – is – haw – to express the fantastic recurrence of certain situations?' (*P* p. 159).

[61] See Hill, *In Different Words*, to the effect that '[t]here is here an oblique reference to Judaism, and to the Jewish origin of the name, Lemuel, which resonates significantly with Youdi, the name of the Jew in *Molloy* [...] the reference to Judaism brings to the margin of the text another name, which the name, Lemuel, recalls and half repeats, and which, similarly, is a Biblical, and therefore Jewish name [...] That other name is the name: Samuel' (p. 107).

[62] See Shapiro, 'Setting his myriad faces in his text', in Connolly, ed., *Nabokov and His Fiction*: 'Nabokov employs for self-encodement all of the following associations of the name: Sirin as an owl; Sirin as a mythical Russian bird of Paradise, Siren as "a Greek deity"' (p. 20).

[63] See Maar: 'The empirical Vladimir Nabokov only appears twice in the book. Once it's in a discussion of the exile author "Sirin," under the pseudonym of his early years. The second time he's hiding in the

Nabokov, however, takes the authorial intrusion to another level by instituting a mode of what Milbauer calls 'autocriticism' in *Sebastian Knight*, whereby Sebastian's novels echo those written by 'Sirin' in the 1920s and 1930s.[64] For the reader cognisant of Sirin's past, it is as though the reality of Nabokov's published works supplants that of Sebastian's fictive works, drawing the fiction into a further 'irréalité' beyond fictiveness. Shapiro concentrates on the meaning of 'Sirin' as owl to explain the subtle symbol of the author's presence in the 1941 novel at a moment when '[a]s in Byron's dream, again the picture changes [...]. Sombre mass on sombre mass and somewhere an owl hooting [...] A last change: a V-shaped flight of migrating cranes [...]' (*SK* p. 122), noting the letter formation in the cranes' flight which reinforces the allusion to Nabokov.[65] The authorial-owl, once literalised in the text, sends the fictional birds that surround it flying, just as the authorial intrusion that Nabokov initially intended for the end of *Pnin* was to displace its protagonist even more firmly: 'I, V.N., arrive in person to Waindell College to lecture on Russian literature, while poor Pnin dies [...].'[66] The author's materialisation re-enacts the usurpation that is already taking place in the narrative between fictive writer and subject. For the stretch of the authorial intrusion, Nabokov temporarily withdraws creation to signal its creator.

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description of the little blue butterfly that Pnin and his Russian colleague Chateau find by the river on their vacation. It is a *Lycaeides melissa samuelis Nabokov*' (p. 83).

[64] Asher Z. Milbauer, *Transcending Exile: Conrad, Nabokov, I.B. Singer* (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1985): 'All of Sebastian's novels to some extent resemble in theme and structure the novels that Nabokov wrote in Russian in the late 1920s and 1930s [...] It appears that Nabokov, by writing his first English novel, was summarizing his own career as a Russian writer, practising, with the help of his invented narrator, the well-established mode known as autocriticism' (p. 49).

[65] Shapiro, 'Setting his myriad faces in his text,' in Connolly, *Nabokov and His Fiction*, p. 28.

[66] Nabokov, *Selected Letters*, p. 143. See Quentin Anderson, 'Nabokov in Time', *New Republic*, 154 (1966), 23-28.

The ability of any character, even one with authorial tendencies, to 'tear a hole in his world and escape',[67] undermines the text's reality *as* text. Holes are torn in these worlds by writing, as Nabokov entrenches structurally their opening onto exteriority, much as his 1947 novel *Bend Sinister* depends on a 'rent in [the] world' (*B* p. x): *Pnin*'s chapter sequencing allows for structural entrances and exits,[68] while Sebastian, as chessboard knight, has what Peterson dubs 'biplanar' potential which introduces another level into the text.[69] Able to leapfrog other chess pieces, as Hyde too notes, the knight 'leaves the board intermittently, in order to attack or (more often) defend, and in doing so enters momentarily some obscure dimension outside the planometric conventions of the game'.[70] In one of the earliest indications of Sebastian's possible hand in the biographical process, the L-shaped moves which govern Sebastian's life also reappear structurally in chapter endings throughout the 1941 novel.[71] More than those of any other Nabokov novel, the chapter endings of that novel function as dramatic unworkings: chapters end with U-turns, cliffhangers,

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[67] Nabokov, 'Signs and Symbols', in *Nabokov's Dozen*, p. 45. Andrew Field, *Nabokov: His Life in Art: A Critical Narrative* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967) contrasts the son's desire to commit suicide in 'Signs and Symbols' with the 'real artist' who 'can *draw* a hole in the world and return unharmed and exhilarated' (p. 180). See also Phyllis A. Roth who refers to Field in 'Introduction', in Roth, ed., *Critical Essays on Vladimir Nabokov* (Boston: Hall, 1984), pp. 1-38 (p. 15).

[68] See Barabtarlo, *Phantom of Fact: A Guide to Nabokov's 'Pnin'* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1989): 'the whole structure of the novel describes a full thematic circle [...] But then every chapter of *Pnin* forms a smaller spheroid of its own. The two glaring exceptions are the fringe chapters One and Seven, both because they serve as the novel's entrance and exit [...] and because these chapters are not only outward-facing but also facing each other' (p. 18).

[69] See Dale Peterson, 'The Afterlife of Sirin' : '[o]nly the knight is able to move from the horizontal to the vertical plane and vice-versa, which is to say that this one piece has a biplanar or bi-dimensional mobility, much as poetic discourse can accrue meaning through both metonymy and metaphor.'

[70] See G.M. Hyde, *Vladimir Nabokov: America's Russian Novelist* (London: M. Boyars, 1977), p. 85. See also Karshan, who reminds us that the knight, for the Formalist Viktor Shklovsky in *Knight's Move* (Normal, I.L. and London: Dalkey Archive, 2005), epitomises 'radical uncertainty', where Shklovsky draws a parallel between the decision as to forked direction the chess knight must make, and the exile's need to choose what to believe, among possible narratives, about the Russia left behind (p. 99n42).

[71] Note Sebastian's advertisement, found by V in his fragmented papers, to send material to an '[a]uthor writing fictitious biography' (*SK* p. 32). As Yulia Pushkarevskaya Naughton, '"Diaphanous Irony": Ironic Masquerade and Breakdown in Vladimir Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and Gaito Gazdanov's *Night Roads*', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 51 (2014), 466-90, asserts, the fact that Sebastian also signals intent 'to write a (fictitious) biography is an early signal' that V's pursuit of Sebastian's 'real life' 'may also be a process of (re)inventing fragments of reality' (p. 473).

and detours.[72] In both texts, the figure of the author, who ultimately is not synonymous with anyone, constitutes a metafictional opening mechanism, resisting any resolution of the text into a finite study of another's life. We might say that the embedded entrances of Sirin, V, V.N., the owl and so forth enact a 'creusement', in Blanchot's terms, which instead of making the text more real, excavate its passage to 'irréalité': if Sirin can enter in from without, then characters, animals, and objects can equally escape from within to an exterior world awaiting them outside the texts.

Tears in narration: layering perception

Stephen Blackwell, in his study of the interrelationship between science and art in Nabokov, refers to Nabokov's 'essentially Kantian position on ungrasped things', yet asserts that Nabokov still offers 'the possibility [...] that by detecting irregularities such as patterns in the shape of a life [...] one can intuit the presence of "the reverse of the weave," or the world's "unusual lining"'.[73] The 'weave' or 'lining', akin to 'methods of composition' (the threads that if unpicked, disclose the overall design), only emerge if one 'can perceive, even indirectly, gaps and tears in reality's texture.'[74] Wielding the power of perceiving any possible exteriority therefore depends on which narrative layer of the novel a perceiver occupies. My concern in this section will be with how *perception* of 'gaps and tears in reality's texture', or in what *Pale*

[72] Chapter 1 ends with the outcome of Sebastian's father's duel ('My father's orderly was sobbing in the hall' (*SK* p. 9)), Chapter 5 with a voice querying V out of the mist ('Who is speaking of Sebastian Knight?' (*SK* p. 43)), Chapter 11 with an aggressive challenge to Sebastian over his treatment of long-term partner Clare ('What have you done to her?' (*SK* p. 96)), Chapter 19 with the mid-journey 'shock' ('I had left Sebastian's letter in my desk and did not remember the address he had given' (*SK* p. 168)), all the way to Chapter 20's 'I am Sebastian, or Sebastian is I, or perhaps we both are someone whom neither of us knows' (*SK* p.181)).

[73] Blackwell, *The Quill and the Scalpel: Nabokov's Art and the Worlds of Science* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009), Ebook, https://muse.jhu.edu/book/27784/, p. 168. See Blackwell also as to an 'insistence that there will always be a domain beyond the ken of human consciousness in its present form' (p. 167).

[74] Ibid, p. 168.

Fire calls the 'underside of the weave' (*PF* p. xvi), diverges among character, narrator, author, and reader. By dramatising the epistemological dilemma of how to surpass knowledge when confined only to one's own plane, the novels demonstrate how biographical and creative methods, in which these perspectives converge, unwork novelistic finitude.

Blackwell gives an example of what he means by 'irregularities' which enable us to detect 'the reverse of the weave', explaining that '[b]eginning with *Invitation to a Beheading*, Nabokov deliberately included narrative anomalies that disrupt the regular flow of the reader's experience.'[75] Such 'anomalies' in his Russian-era novel might include the epanorthotic 'Cincinnatus did not crumple the motley newspapers, did not hurl them, as his double did (the double, the gangrel, that accompanies each of us – you, and me, and him over there – doing what we would like to do at that very moment, but cannot…)' (*IB* pp. 17-18), the moment when Cincinnatus seems to have escaped from prison, and on the verge of entering his own home, yet steps back into his own cell as unreality melts back to reality (*IB* pp. 12-13), and even the unexplained substitution of 'gnostical turpitude' for 'gnoseological turpitude' in the text's translation (*IB* p. 70) (completed by Nabokov's son Dmitri, but overseen by Nabokov himself).[76] These 'irregularities' might be described as holes in narration: contradictions which only transpire if we read the text on another level. Barabtarlo favours this view in relation to *Pnin*, conceiving of contradictions in Nabokov's work as implicitly occupying different levels of reality, and imagining that on a level

[75] Ibid, p. 179. Blackwell writes that 'the "cast" of characters "enacting" Cincinnatus's bizarre incarcerating world makes various sorts of mistakes, accompanied by a complete breakdown in the laws of language, logic, and even physics'.
[76] See Nabokov, *Priglashenie na kazn'* (St Petersburg: Azbuka, 2014), p. 58, and Don Barton Johnson, 'The Alpha and Omega of *Invitation to a Beheading*' in *Nabokov's 'Invitation to a Beheading': A Critical Companion*, ed. by Julian Connolly (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 119-40 (p. 135).

'outside [the narrator's] fiction' 'all contradictions will cohere. On the novel's plane, they point to that higher modus of existence infinitely beyond the characters' comprehension.'[77] Whichever text we examine in his œuvre, the key to Nabokov's infinite layering ('infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms' (*SO* p. 9)), which accompanies the infinite movement of writing, is that only certain characters are able to perceive the contradictions, holes, gaps, or tears in their own reality. Characters' consciousnesses usually extend only to the layer on which they themselves exist; yet we are repeatedly and tantalisingly reminded of the existence of additional layers by means of Nabokov's metatextual tendencies.

In both texts, layering accrues complexity as the novels continue, unworking the works via metaleptic openings and endings. Best elucidated with recourse to Gérard Genette's narratological terminology, this mental challenge has perplexed readers and critics.[78] Rimmon has written of a deep-seated meta-meta-metadiegesis in *Sebastian Knight*, observing that Genette's 'key notion of the diegetic level or *récit premier*' becomes 'vulnerable' 'since the novel appears to yield two alternative primary narratives'.[79] That both novels depict an aspiration toward truth is evident even in their titles: the 'Real Life' does so obviously,[80] while *Pnin* sets out, much like

[77] Barabtarlo, *Phantom of Fact*, p. 38. Rutledge, *Nabokov's Permanent Mystery*, links this higher mind to both the author and the realm beyond the author: 'The real author is the highest possible level on *this* side, and through imagination and creativity can connect somehow with the ultimate mystery of the other side' (p. 88).
[78] Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972).
[79] Shlomith Rimmon, 'Problems of Voice in Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*', in Roth, ed., *Critical Essays*, pp. 109-29 (p. 109). To work back through the levels Rimmon identifies, we have the letters Sebastian's characters write to each other within his novels, the novels themselves, his life, and V's quest, in addition to the surfeit of documentary evidence V uncovers. If we follow an analogous process in *Pnin*, we unearth the letters back and forth between Pnin and V.N., the narrator; publications by Pnin and the narrator, Pnin's and V.N.'s separate lives, and V.N.'s recounting of Pnin's life, complete with extra metatexts such as Jack Cockerell's impersonation of *Pnin* which ends the novel.
[80] See David Shields, 'Autobiographic Rapture and Fictive Irony in *Speak, Memory* and *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*', *The Iowa Review*, 17 (1987), 44-54, to the effect that the title suggests 'we're going to get the goods on a writer's "real life"; as if the life of an artist were to be found anywhere except in his work' (p. 44).

Beckett's *Molloy*, to tell the formative story of the title character, and purports to be going about that task in the realist mode. In both cases, the epistemological search for truth endures until metatextual layering imperils the diegesis: that is, until the narrators of *Sebastian Knight* and *Pnin* demonstrably insert themselves into Sebastian's and Pnin's realities, and through this ruse, make their supposed main subjects' realities less real.[81] While as readers we can access any of the metatexts, the fact that the characters cannot draws attention to the nature of the novel in general, here defined by Cascardi, as working 'in a field of obliquely angled fragments and partial accounts,' which 'cultivates a palpable sense of anxiety about the demand for any "true" account to be authoritative and complete.'[82] Toker, by contrast to Rimmon, focuses on Nabokov's use of paralepsis, in which 'the narrative temporarily deviates from the dominant focalization and provides more information than is available to the focal character.'[83] The crux of paralepsis is that the narrative depicts the narrator knowing more than they ought to know, based on their identity as it has been built up to that point of the text. She clarifies that the ambiguity in *Pnin*, as well as in Nabokov's short story 'Recruiting',[84] arises from the clash between 'intradiegetic narrators' who have 'avowed responsibility for the pseudo-omniscient passages as well as to their admission [… oblique in *Pnin*] of their cognitive unreliability'.[85] The narrators themselves appear unaware or unconcerned by that

[81] See Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*: 'when [the narrator] introduces himself as Pnin's friend, everything in the story starts to subside and tilt, as a house built on permafrost turns its foundation to a bog by its own inner heat' (p. 277).
[82] Cascardi, 'The Novel', p. 164.
[83] Leona Toker, 'Self-Conscious Paralepsis in Vladimir Nabokov's *Pnin* and "Recruiting"', *Poetics Today*, 7 (1986), 459-69: 'Paralepsis ranges from the focal characters' detailed accounts of episodes about which they heard from others but which they did not witness themselves […] to their invention or imaginative reconstruction of episodes on the basis of circumstantial evidence alone' (p. 459). See Garrett-Goodyear, 'The Role of the Narrator in *Pnin*', to the effect that the narrator in a text such as *Pnin* is both 'limited' and 'omniscient', with one foot in the world of the character, and another in the world of the author (p. 195).
[84] Nabokov, 'Recruiting', in *Collected Stories* (London: Penguin, 2012), pp. 615-22.
[85] Toker, 'Self-Conscious Paralepsis', p. 460.

contradiction, which comes to light only on the level of the reader or the author, but on our level it unworks *Pnin* to the point at which we wonder whether the idea of *Pnin* is to grant us insight into the Russian-American academic by that name, or rather to tease us out of aspirations to know a mythological alterity by revealing the author's earth-bound 'laboratory of […] miracles', to quote Khodasevich on Sirin.[86] To combine Rimmon's and Toker's analyses, meta-metadiegesis and paralepsis play a role in unworking: they expose the entrails of the textual body, or inner workings of the text, by recalling its composition. This 'laboratory' outside the text, where the weave was first made, or the lining laid down, comes to replace the initial epistemological object of the unknown life: the life of an author is, Nabokov insists, a more enthralling unknown.

Differentiating between the world of the laboratory and the world of the text poses a challenge, given the confluence of real and invented references within them, a phenomenon at its most explicit in *Sebastian Knight*, but also evident in *Pnin*. At the interlacements between layers of narrated reality, we (and sometimes the characters) suffer what Garrett-Goodyear calls the 'impossibility of knowing with any certainty where the boundary between observed experience and created interpretation falls'.[87] Barabtarlo concurs that the boundary is blurry due to Nabokov's tendency to transform 'realia into *realoria*', including 'true citations […] intersprinkled with entirely fictitious ones',[88] and due to Nabokov's even more disturbing blend between real and unreal characters: for example, the appearance of Mr Silbermann, who

[86] Khodasevich, 'On Sirin', in Appel and Newman, p. 97.
[87] Garrett-Goodyear, 'The Role of the Narrator in *Pnin*', p. 195.
[88] Barabtarlo, *Phantom of Fact*: 'the author injects into this world a dose of accurate references to authentic sources which can be checked by the reader: to the Vengerov edition of Shakespeare in Russian, to a book by Samuel Sloan, or to an even more obscure monograph by one Dr Chistovich' (p. 17).

recalls a character from Sebastian's *The Other Side of the Moon*, to assist V on his quest in *Sebastian Knight*,[89] and the various mutations which the recurrent characters 'Christopher and Louise', 'Christoper and Louis', and 'Chris and Lew' undergo in *Pnin*.[90] The end of *Pnin* implies that Pnin himself, suffering from the same epistemological quandary as the novel's readers as to knowing where the line between imagination and real life falls, develops a sense of being trapped within another's literary creation,[91] and thus reiterates his own freedom by tracking out of the story.

To develop on Goodyear's and Barabtarlo's interpretations, Nabokov's cramming of reality and unreality into an individual character's consciousness explodes levels so that narrative cannot continue after the explosion. What Nabokov describes in *Speak, Memory* as the 'utter degradation, ridicule, and horror of having [...] an infinity of sensation and thought within a finite existence'[92] here manifests as infinity bursting the bounds of the finite novel. The explosion can be momentarily illuminating, as Barabtarlo writes in relation to *Pnin*: 'when an "actual person" meets a figmental one on the latter's ground, the point of contact is a light-emitting chink, but also a source of contradiction, for it at once emanates credibility and incongruity'.[93] These 'light-emitting' moments in a sense make up for what is otherwise a 'dazzling succession of gaps' (*SK* p. 28) in both novels, whereby fictionality seeps in to 'solder' together the disparate moments, or thread together a

[89] See Booker, 'Fiction and "Real Life"': this reinforces the danger of 'Nabokov's narrator [...] writing a "real" biography based largely on Knight's fiction' (p. 114).
[90] The doubing of real and unreal characters has been noted by Hazel Cohen, 'Nabokov's *Pnin*', who writes that 'Nabokov draws his reader's attention to the duality-oneness paradox by the self-conscious devices of recurrences, coincidences, word-play, and by the use of doubles or twins. *Pnin* literally abounds in twins' (p. 61).
[91] See Barabtarlo, *Phantom of Fact*, p. 58.
[92] Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* (New York: Vintage International, 1989), p. 297.
[93] Barabtarlo, *Phantom of Fact*, p. 17.

narrative out of a largely unknown life. Yet the issue is who, and on what level, can see the joins in narrative, and can return to pinpoint the parts where it remains weakest (where the gaps and tears once existed), for, I argue, it is this self-reflexive return, enacted through self-conscious, ironic disclosure of 'methods of composition', which draws the text toward 'irréalité', and drives plot toward its inescapable end.

The pursuit (and withdrawal) of reality

> How much more dreadful it would be if the very awareness of your being aware of reality's dreamlike nature were also a dream, a built-in hallucination!
>
> Nabokov, *Transparent Things* (p. 89)

Meghan Vicks, who also studies Beckett's negations, writes of a 'bountiful nothing' which is 'a pure blankness of action and being' in Nabokov's work 'that does not eliminate or limit existence, but rather permits infinite potential "realities" to come into being'.[94] She argues, based on a close analysis of *Sebastian Knight*, 'that nothing is at the heart of all Nabokovian patterning, the defining activity of the artist and the madman that creates all "realities"'.[95] I concur with this thesis of the Nabokovian nothing as generative (though this is not the same kind of nothing which preoccupies Beckett's Trilogy, as Chapter Five will make clear), but would rewrite Vicks's thesis in the following terms: that Nabokov's 'defining activity' is unworking texts (withdrawing their realities toward the 'nothing [...] at the heart of all Nabokovian patterning') by exposing the 'reverse of the weave',[96] or 'methods of composition', which ultimately themselves come to constitute the text (thereby 'creat[ing] all

[94] Vicks, p. 76.
[95] Ibid, p. 77.
[96] Blackwell, *The Quill and the Scalpel*, p. 168.

"realities"'). In this section, I test out the revised thesis in the context of both novels, as well as reading *Sebastian Knight* as an important precursor to *Pnin*.

There is an obverse of Nabokov's tendency, already noted, to infuse fictive characters with real world possibility, one Vicks identifies as a trend in which characters instead 'turn out to be impossible, should careful readers decipher the full range of details about them.'[97] The first Nabokovian tendency is mirrored in V's quest in *Sebastian Knight*, which seeks to imbue an absent Sebastian, himself a 'collage of books',[98] with 'real life'; the second trend is exemplified by the narrator's progressive emergence in *Pnin*, which drives Pnin himself toward impossibility, enabling Nabokov, on Vicks' view, to gesture to 'the non-existence of reality without quotation marks'.[99] Equating 'reality without quotation marks' to the 'real laid bare', she suggests that the 'real', for Nabokov, is instead 'nothing'.[100] My argument here agrees with Vicks's description of how Nabokov's revelation of his ruse thrusts realities into impossibility. Yet I take a different view when it comes to whether the two novels for study equate the real with 'non-existence', nothing, or absence. I assert that 'absence', in and across these Nabokov novels, does not *denote* the real so much as it marks a precondition preceding that real, which remains impossible for us. This section of the chapter focuses on Nabokov's self-conscious withdrawal of textual realities, so that in both

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[97] Vicks, p. 94. Hazel Cohen, 'Nabokov's *Pnin*', addresses an example of this in the cardiograph, which she reads as a figuration of Pnin's mutually exclusive 'fictive selves' (p. 62).
[98] Norman, *Nabokov, History and the Texture of Time*, p. 37.
[99] Vicks, p. 94. She refers here to Nabokov, 'On a Book Entitled *Lolita*', in *Lolita*, ed. by Alfred Appel Jr. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970; repr. 1991), where Nabokov writes that 'reality' is 'one of the few words which mean nothing without quotes', pp. 311-17 (p. 312). He returns to this quip at the end of *Transparent Things*: 'Another thing we are not supposed to do is to explain the inexplicable. Men have learned to live with a black burden, a huge aching hump: the supposition that "reality" may be only a "dream" […] We have shown our need for quotation marks ("reality," "dream")' (*TT* p. 89).
[100] Vicks, p. 77. See also Vicks in relation to *Sebastian Knight*'s ending: 'V's conception of a stable, transcendent, pre-signified real is abandoned – this kind of real does not exist, it is nothing, or at best it remains unknown and inaccessible – and in its place an understanding of the real as comprising shifting and infinite reflections takes centre stage' (p. 87).

novels, the trace of withdrawal is shown to supplant 'the book' as receptacle of what we *do* know: our versions of reality, accumulated in the patterning process which Alter identifies. Absence, I argue, is depicted not as endpoint, but as a necessary step in the movement toward epistemological alterity, or toward the unknowable real beyond all fictional realities.[101]

More than one critic has located absence at the core of *Sebastian Knight*, including Barabtarlo, whose investigation of the anagram of absence encoded in Knight's name[102] strengthens his reading that by the end of that text, 'athwart all expectations, there is no Sebastian Knight waiting'.[103] Absence and impossibility are inextricable, too, in *désœuvrement* as Hill interprets it, who suggests that

> [a]bsence [...] is proffered as an exteriority beyond the book, and which the book, by definition, cannot incorporate within itself; and in this sense, once more, with regard to the book itself, the absence of the book, in Blanchot, functions as a simultaneous condition of possibility and impossibility.[104]

This concept of absence as 'condition' (a crucial step toward the impossible or unknowable) informs this section of the chapter and differentiates my analysis from Vicks's, who equates absence with the real rather than envisaging it as a precondition

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[101] Chapter Five, on Beckett, will take up this line of thought, referring to Blanchot's affirmation of literature's potential to 'créer du vide autour de nous': see Blanchot, 'Le Mythe de Mallarmé', in *La Part du feu*, pp. 35-48 (p. 46).

[102] Gennady Barabtarlo, *Aerial View: Essays on Nabokov's Art and Metaphysics* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), persuasively argues with reference to Nabokov's anagrammatic play and extended metaphors that '[t]he letters composing "Sebastian Knight" can be rearranged into "*Knight is Absent*," with only the indefinite article left on the emptied rack' (p. 215). This anagram is further confirmed when the former husband of Sebastian's mistress greets V clutching a 'black knight which he has just removed from the chess board' (p. 72).

[103] Barabtarlo, *Aerial View*: 'One of the possible interpretations of the novel's meaning and workings may be that, as the wrappings around Sebastian's "real life" are unwound, his essence becomes more vaporous, and he wanes to naught when the last layer is removed', noting that 'This method is similar to one described in Knight's first novel, *The Prismatic Bezel*' (pp. 214-15).

[104] Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary*, p. 185. Absence is one of the terms Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing*, links with alterity in relation to Blanchot's work: 'writing produces itself *ironically* and *wittily* as a refusal of comprehension, an enactment of a field of fragmentation that produces an alterity irreducible to presentation or cognition, an alterity that can variously be named with the words absence, exteriority, the night, the neuter, the outside, dying, and, as we will see, the il y a' (p. 39).

to it. *Sebastian Knight* both precedes and lays the groundwork for *Pnin*: from its generic biographical conventions, emphasis on doubling, and protagonists straddling English and Russian worlds, to the heart health issues each suffers. Yet critical studies rarely undertake a sustained comparison of these two texts, despite *Pnin*'s elaboration of themes arising in the 1941 novel. My contention is that if the texts are read together, the absence embedded in *Sebastian Knight* might be understood as the precondition enabling a later text such as *Pnin* to travel a little further along the road to the impossible: the direction in which Pnin himself appears to be headed on the novel's final page.

In both novels, protagonists, and the books associated with them, go missing. The author Sebastian Knight's movement through V's text corresponds to that of a sporadically illuminated wanderer: the knight-errant,[105] in more senses than one. Knight's surname at once connects his exile to the chess knight's temporary deviation from the game board, to the wandering of an armoured knight, and to night-time oblivion.[106] At intervals in the text, Sebastian is as unlocatable as the book at the centre of Sebastian's shelves: H.G. Wells's *The Invisible Man*.[107] Even historic context can go missing: in *Sebastian Knight*, which does not delve far into the bloodshed of the World War contemporaneous with its publication (nor into the one preceding it), the horror of these years is found only in allusion, and at its most explicit becomes a blur of words graffitied on a wall: 'Who were those idle idiots who wrote on the wall "Death to the Jews" or "*Vive le front populaire*," or left obscene

[105] See Kristeva: 'l'écriture du chevalier errant Knight' (p. 51).
[106] See Shields: 'In a book about half-brothers, "Sebastian" must be taken as a reference to Viola's twin brother in *Twelfth Night*, and "Knight" is a triple pun on "night", "chess knight," and "dubbed knight"' (p. 44).
[107] Maar: 'The title applies not only to Sebastian Knight, whose life is refracted into a thousand fictions, but also to the narrator' (p. 46); referring to H.G. Wells, *The Invisible Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

drawings? Some anonymous artist had begun blacking squares – a chess board, *ein Schachbrett*, *un damier* …' (*SK* p. 174). Recalling that Nabokov swore to Edmund Wilson that 'there is *no "chess-idea" in the development of the whole book*',[108] I consider chess more crucial to patterning than Nabokov's letter suggests, yet agree with Barabtarlo that chess '[…] turns out to be a diversion, small game in a big hunt.'[109] I read the blackening of squares, which V observes on the wall, as an encoded swastika (the symbol to accompany the slogan), since it would make more sense, contextually, and since we only learn that squares are *blackened*, not outlined. Chess is the versatile 'method of composition'[110] which Nabokov uses to signify multiple subtexts of *Sebastian Knight*: the game of elimination which is used to evoke historical bloodshed, the game of pursuit which is akin to love, and the literary game,[111] which Blanchot would call the 'jeu insensé' of writing.

Chess is also a game in which characters disappear off the edges of the play, absconding to an outer realm of unclear status. The borders of *Sebastian Knight* are peopled with such uncertain absences, like chess pieces waiting in the wings: this is how the 'chess' and 'theatre' motifs, apparently unconnected, come together in the finale of *Sebastian Knight* as each of the set of chess pieces[112] reappears with Sebastian 'on a lighted stage, with the people he knew coming and going' (*SK* p. 180).

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[108] Nabokov, 'Letter to Edmund Wilson', 21 October 1941, in *Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya: The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, 1940-1971*, ed. by Simon Karlinsky (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 58.
[109] Barabtarlo, 'Tana Naita', p. 63.
[110] See Barabtarlo, *Insomniac Dreams*: Barabtarlo's concept of chess is instructive here: 'In a chess game, as in life, ground rules forbid taking moves back; but in a retrograde chess problem one is supposed to, indeed must, take moves back, one by one, all the way to the beginning, a solid metaphor for the notion of reading backward, as it were: retracing one's steps' (p. 172).
[111] See Karshan: 'Each of Nabokov's novels asks to be considered as a game or form of play with its own secret rules, and there is a precise relation between the games that each novel describes and the way in which it is itself playful or game-like' (p. 2).
[112] See Barabatarlo, 'Tana Naita', who canvasses the 'persistent paronomastic references' in the novel 'to all but royal chessmen: Knight, Bishop, Rook (Toorovetz)' and to 'chess moves, as in Roquebrune (*roquer* means "to castle")' (p. 63).

Even V's presence is subject to scrutiny ('to readers of Goodman's book I am bound to appear non-existent – a bogus relative, a garrulous impostor' (*SK* p. 2)), like the corpse of G. Abeson, who turns out to be the innocuous Mr Nosebag in Sebastian's anagrammatic *The Prismatic Bezel*, a 'rollicking parody of the setting of a detective tale' (*SK* p. 80).[113] Nabokov's 1941 novel *exposes* the body, but only ever in its disappearance: Sebastian's body reappears, but on reappearance it is another's,[114] the body of Monsieur Kegan (the phonetic anagram of *kniga*, Russian genitive for book, which Knight's own name almost mimes).[115] The novel's ending, too, has all the hallmarks of a 'Knightian twist' (*SK* p. 139), evoking our suspicion that this last curve might have been pre-written by Knight himself. In Kristeva's words, the writerly figure points to 'cette ironie de l'origine et de la mort dans son roman *Objets trouvés*, comme une écriture prémonitoire de sa propre mort introuvable'.[116] *Sebastian Knight* unworks itself into absence through its own authoriality coming to the fore, leaving us only with the shadow of disappeared characters as the text ends.

The central figure in *Pnin*, too, is prone to disappearances, or more specifically, re-emergences as an impossible alterity. In one episode, he returns a book urgently to the library for use of another reader, but '[t]he other reader proved to be Timofey Pnin; Volume 18 had been requested by him the Friday before. It was also true that this Volume 18 was already charged to this Pnin' (*P* p. 74). *This* other Pnin, twin of

[113] See Barabtarlo, *Aerial View*, where he probes Nabokov's 'paronomastic games', including the central mystery of *The Prismatic Bezel* in which the missing corpse, 'G. Abeson', turns up in the form of living 'Mr Nosebag': 'the corpse whose looming presence was taken for granted at the novel's beginning turns out to be the main suspect in disguise' (p. 215).
[114] Kristeva interprets the moment when V rushes to the body of his half-brother as follows: 'le demi-frère biographe se trompe de cadavre et, au lieu de veiller S.K., il assiste à l'agonie d'un autre. Sébastien n'a donc pas laissé de mémoire cernable et, pire encore, son corps même échappe aux recherches familiales' (p. 55).
[115] See Barabtarlo, 'Tana Naita', p. 71, and Norman, *Nabokov, History and the Texture of Time*, p. 37.
[116] Kristeva, p. 56.

the one we think we know, like the 'shadow behind the heart' (*P* p. 126) which comes up on Pnin's X-rays, prefigures the materialisation of the narrator later in the text. The narrator is the figure who points to the infinitude of unworking in that text, since the novel ends as the narrative turns toward the narrator's trajectory, substituted in for Pnin's, which is bound to continue past Pnin's disappearance.[117] In an earlier episode which speaks to the metaphorical and structural impossibility of completion in this novel, as well as the unlocatability of the self in death, Nabokov has Pnin read out Pushkin to his class, simultaneously translating aloud:

> '"And where will fate send me," imperfective future, "death," declaimed inspired Pnin, throwing his head back and translating with brave literality, "in fight, in travel, or in waves? Or will the neighboring dale" – *dolina*, same word, "valley" we would now say – "accept my refrigerated ashes", *poussière*, "cold dust" perhaps more correct. "And though it is indifferent to the insensible body…"' (*P* p. 68).

'Imperfective future' is the appropriate tense for death in these novels which allow bodies to go missing so easily, and withhold the precise date and time of our 'future anniversary' with death, as in Pnin's Pushkin anecdote. Each character in both *Pnin* and *Sebastian Knight*, we could surmise, has some impossible double of unknown identity who has checked out from some allegorical library 'the book' as receptacle of knowledge: Sebastian withdraws the potential biography from under V's fingertips, the narrator withdraws the book in which Pnin exists, while Pnin withdraws the possibility of a future narrative regarding the escapades of the Russian department from his narrator (newly elected head of that department). 'The book' in each text withdraws, ostensibly to clear potential passage to something other to it: whether this is the real, the 'Grand Dehors', or outside of thought.

[117] This new narrative presumably begins with Jack Cockerell's promised performance of the episode in which Pnin travelled by train 'to address the Cremona Women's Club and discover[ed] he had brought the wrong lecture' (*P* p. 191)), one which directly contradicts the opening episode of the novel as described by the narrator (*P* p. 28).

In an apparent deflection of history, *Sebastian Knight*'s V, insisting that '[t]ime for Sebastian was never 1914 or 1920 or 1936 – it was always year 1' (*SK* p. 56), lays the foundation for Pnin to go further from this point of absence toward intuiting the impossible, unknowable, or unassimilable. The ethics of both novels revolve, as Maar writes in relation to *Pnin*, around the 'black heart'[118] which is the undeniable need to write of World War II's atrocities, and above all of the Holocaust. But even the 1957 novel *Pnin*, which becomes markedly more explicit than *Sebastian Knight*, is not able to countenance that reality for long. The text itself only briefly imagines the death in Buchenwald of Pnin's love, Mira Belochkin: 'since the exact form of her death had not been recorded, Mira kept dying a great number of deaths in one's mind, and undergoing a great number of resurrections, only to die again and again' (*P* p. 135). Like Pnin's mutually incompatible selves in the cardiograph, the mutually exclusive deaths of Mira combine in impossibility, and leave us without her real story, but with the unfathomable remainder, or what Gadda might call the 'qualcosa […] di inspiegato' (*SVP* p. 741) that is the fact of her death. The 'cold dust' of that Pushkin poem which Pnin reads out to his class flutters in the wind, and as Maar notes, becomes the ashes of Mira Belochkin, who reveals herself, like Sebastian Knight, to be undiscoverable in death.[119] However, the horror permanently threatens to break out from the narrative of Pnin's new life, since as Pnin himself recognises, 'The history of man is the history of pain!' (*P* p. 168). As Michael Wood notes, the end of this phrase is taken directly from lectures Nabokov gave in 1952 on the work

[118] See Maar on *Pnin*, p. 81.
[119] See ibid: 'Mira's ashes are omnipresent – in Pushkin's mournful verses on the "refrigerated ashes", and even in the speck of coal dust that enters the narrator's eye and has to be removed by Pnin's father' (p. 82).

which is often touted as the first modern novel: *Don Quixote*.[120] The 'pain' even rises back up, in a metaphorical anagram, at the end of *Pnin*, when the narrator is about to witness Pnin driving out of town: 'The thunder of trucks rocked the house every two minutes or so [...] and through the parody of a window shade some light from the street reached the mirror and dazzled me into thinking I was facing a firing squad' (*P* p. 190). We realise the inverse of what Nabokov writes in *Transparent Things*: 'all dreams are anagrams of diurnal reality' (*TT* p. 76). The atrocities of war, experienced by both narrator and Pnin, bob back up in a suburban setting, as the mirror separating life from art shatters momentarily, artifice and grotesque reality competing for authority, as is the case in Pnin's imaginaton of Mira's murder. The persistence of Mira's ashes, which endure in Nabokov's œuvre beyond *Pnin*, will be discussed in the next section, but for now I suggest that the reason they persist is because they are never fully integrated into *Pnin*. Knowledge of the Second World War's atrocities remains off-limits to both texts, which only delineate their absence (*Sebastian Knight*), or briefly countenance them before deflecting them into impossibility (*Pnin*).

Sebastian Knight starts off with absence as premise, concealed even within its title, and discloses its own posthumousness, with Sebastian's absence eventually exposed when the novel's tenses start to run together. *Pnin* delineates the opposite movement: we are confronted with a memorable, ostensibly realistic presence in Timofey Pnin, who is suddenly drawn toward unreality in the novel's final chapter. We could say that *Sebastian Knight* is the absence from which *Pnin* is born, that is,

[120] Michael Wood, 'The Western Literary Canon', in *Vladimir Nabokov in Context*, ed. by Bethea and Frank, pp. 131-38 (p. 134); referring to Nabokov, *Lectures on Don Quixote*, ed. by Fredson Bowers (San Diego: Bruccoli Clark, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), p. 56.

the first unworking of the novel into nothing which in *Pnin* becomes an unworking into impossibility. This unworking is a clearing out of all possible, clashing fictional realities before we can attempt an approximation of 'the real' which still waits for us beyond the edges of the novels: beyond the chessboard in *Sebastian Knight*, or past the hill over which Pnin departs on the last page of Nabokov's later novel.

Projecting cognition post-text

In Belsey's words, what we do not know, the real, '[…] enlists speculation. […] And it enlists desire'.[121] This 'speculation' laid bare is what remains after Nabokov's self-aware unworking of *Sebastian Knight*'s narrative into absence, and *Pnin*'s into impossibility. Yet the real is never revealed at the end of a Nabokov text, which only uncovers the speculation which inclines toward that real.[122] Consciousness in Nabokov cuts out before the ending:[123] almost the opposite of what happens in Beckett's endings in the Trilogy, where the continuation of voices resists the formal closure of the text, or the phenomenon in Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio*, of 'apocope drammatica',[124] whereby the final syllables or words form an implied presence lasting beyond the text. In Nabokov, the pattern of consciousness ceasing suddenly before the realisation of 'something that will change all our concepts' (*SK* p. 156) is described most clearly in the metatext of fictional author Sebastian's last novel, *The Doubtful Asphodel*, but is common to a number of Nabokov's own novels, most notably *Invitation to a Beheading* and *Bend Sinister*. In light of Nabokov's repeated

[121] Belsey, p. xii.
[122] See also Vicks: '*Speculation based on nothing tangible*, on nothing real, driven by a permanent futility, but nevertheless producing along the way fancy, philosophy, and poetry, is an apt description of V's narrative' (p. 89).
[123] See, for example, Barabtarlo, *Phantom of Fact*, p. 39.
[124] See Gadda, *Interviste 1950-1972*, on 'apocope', p. 149. 'Apocope', meaning the loss of the final sound or syllable in a word when pronounced, will be discussed in Chapter Four.

cutting-out of consciousness before conclusion, this section will consider Nabokov's resurrection of characters, symbols, and situations in post-texts, and how this resurrection both dispels the possibility of the initial text's finitude, and affirms movement toward the real without disclosing the unknowable.

Consciousness does not continue long enough to expose the real, but speculation can still endure beyond the borders of the text into a post-textual domain. Delving into the relation between Nabokov's works and cognition, Sweeney writes that Nabokov's 'novels teem with hypothetical, speculative, counterfactual, or paradoxical scenarios. Readers are not only invited to believe in such impossibilities, but must actually conceive of them in order to complete the text's implicit patterning.' It is in this way that we witness Nabokov's fiction 'acknowledging, duplicating, and dramatizing how the human mind works:'[125] a doubly mimetic and 'mathetic' activity which I would stipulate that all three authors of this study undertake.[126] Back in the 1970s, Hyde suggested that one of the few commonalities shared between Nabokov and the Formalists was the conception of art as 'a mode of cognition (not a mirror held up to nature)',[127] and Blackwell and Kuzmanovich also endorse the thesis that Nabokov's novels work to stimulate readers' minds.[128] It is via the theme of disseminated, confused, displaced authorship, and the cognitive game of speculation hidden within it that Nabokov entices readers toward the post-texts of *Sebastian Knight* and *Pnin*.

[125] Susan Elisabeth Sweeney, 'Thinking About Impossible Things in Nabokov', in Will Norman and Duncan White, *Transitional Nabokov* (Oxford and New York: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 67-80 (p. 67).
[126] See Barthes, *Leçon inaugurale*.
[127] Hyde, p. 90.
[128] See Stephen Blackwell, 'Nabokov's Fugitive Sense', in Norman and White, pp. 15-29: 'Nabokov's works are beautifully crafted narratives, and they also, perhaps more emphatically than those of many authors, seek to stimulate readers' desire to know and understand them [...] They reward the effort, too, with complicated structures and hidden puzzles that, once worked out, resolve "with an almost audible click," as Zoran Kuzmanovich aptly puts it' (pp. 22-23) (referring to Kuzmanovich, 'From the Editor', *Nabokov Studies*, 10 (2006), viii.

V's nightmare, dreamt just prior to Sebastian's death, is perhaps the episode of *Sebastian Knight* most overlooked by criticism. Its bodily breaking-up of authorship incites us to challenge whose hand has wielded the pen in the narrative to that point. V dreams of Sebastian:

> Suddenly I noticed that he wore a black glove on his left hand, and that the fingers of that hand did not move, and that he never used it – I was afraid horribly, squeamishly, to the point of nausea, that he might inadvertently touch me with it [...] I saw him undoing his black glove and slowly pulling it off; and as it came off, it spilled its only contents – a number of tiny hands, like the front paws of a mouse, mauve-pink and soft – lots of them [...] (*SK* p. 166).

As well as recalling chess's 'touch-move' rule of which Maar writes (since V does not want to be touched by his dying authorial brother and dragged down into the grave),[129] V's nightmare is one of dissemination: the authorial hand is disseminated in a proliferation of 'a number of tiny hands'. V, who has sought to gather the threads of Sebastian's life together, or 'solder' its 'fragments', in his dream-panic seeks to flee the room in which Sebastian's hand is disseminating itself: this laying bare of the 'methods of composition' is too raw to confront. Despite V having pursued Sebastian relentlessly to this point, V's dream demonstrates that he now desires an exile of his own from the narrative,[130] which is, however, less successful than Pnin's breakaway exit from the later novel. V has laid bare the mechanism of writing in all its dispersed potential, and now his half-brother's spectre torments readers' cognitive powers by demonstrating (quite literally) a hand in the narrative just when we were relying on

[129] Maar, p. 44.
[130] In one of the novel's allusions to Lewis Carroll, *In the Looking Glass* (London: Harper Press, 2010), to which Hyde, *America's Russian Novelist*, and Meyer, *Nabokov and Indeterminacy*, devote attention, this dream recalls Alice's lament, quoted by Hyde: 'I don't like belonging to another person's dream' (p. 94).

the idea that V's hand held the pen.[131] It is V's pursuit of Sebastian's 'real life', *intact*, which ironically – and infinitely – disseminates the trace of Sebastian's authorship.

The authorial trace reappears as one of those disseminated hands which also goes to work in *Pnin*: the narrator's, which undoes the text's narration, but via epistemological impossibility this time, rather than 'ontological confusion'.[132] *Pnin* ends with its eponymous character dissolving into what Connolly has deemed 'fairytale':[133]

> Then the little sedan boldly swung past the front truck and, free at last, spurted up the shining road, which one could make out narrowing to a thread of gold in the soft mist where hill after hill made beauty of distance, and where there was simply no saying what miracle might happen (*P* p. 191).

Where does Pnin go? He does not die as per Nabokov's original plan, although his German-sounding new address, 999 Todd Road, presages death ('der Tod').[134] It is only from future Nabokov novels that we deduce Pnin's magical passage across texts (like that of the protagonists Molloy and Malone resurfacing in the last text of Beckett's Trilogy).[135] If we concur with Rowe that the 'speck of coal dust' removed

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[131] See Blanchot, *L'Arrêt de mort*, the ending of which also insinuates the (un)working of a ghostly hand in the narrative.
[132] Booker, 'Fiction and "Real Life"', p. 118.
[133] See Connolly, '*Pnin*: The Wonder of Recurrence and Transformation', in *Nabokov's Fifth Arc: Nabokov and Others on his Life's Work*, ed. by J.E. Rivers and Charles Nicol (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), pp. 195-210: 'Pnin drives off toward a realm of possible miracles, a fairytale realm whose aura he has already felt in his contact with Victor and in his possession of the marvellous bowl. Behind him he leaves a world of lifeless imitation, smugness, and falsehood' (p. 209).
[134] See Patricia Meyer, 'Dolorous Haze, Hazel Shade: Nabokov and the Spirits', in Grayson, I: The Shape of Nabokov's World, pp. 88-103 (p. 91), and Barabtarlo, *Phantom of Fact*, on whose reading Pnin here 'reaches to what geometers call the *gnomon*, in our case, the outer range of the book, the infinitesimal but untraversable space that separates N-'s fiction from Nabokov's' (p. 38). See γνώμων" in Franco Montanari, ed., *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:3653/search#dictionary=montanari&id=26367>: the gnomon is the 'rod, marking the hours [...] of a sundial'.
[135] Another, even more self-conscious example of this 'resurfacing' of characters in Nabokov's œuvre include the episode in *Look at the Harlequins* in which the trick in *Sebastian Knight* by which V uncovers the ability of supposed Frenchwoman, Nina Lecerf, to speak Russian (through her starting at the undertone revelation, in Russian, that she has a spider on her neck) is refracted in the narrator's uncovering a woman's ability to hear, despite her purported deafness: 'At that moment the telephone rang in the drawing room behind us, and she quickly turned around [...] In the meantime Ivor had

from the narrator's eye by Pnin's father (*P* p. 174) might be 'the same "speck" removed by Humbert from Lolita's "left eye"',[136] a link reinforced by the narrator's musing: 'I wonder where that speck is now? The dull, mad fact is that it *does* exist somewhere' (*P* p. 176), we can also logically justify Pnin's resurgence in *Pale Fire* as Head of Russian at Wordsmith College (*PF* p. 146). Rowe reflects:

> [...] within the strangely expanding confines of Mr Nabokov's world, his individual works may be seen as separate vertical planes, intersected by horizontal ones (therefore) composed of haunting interconnections. And while a particular character may vaguely sense that some sort of controlled pattern informs his vertical (intrabook) existence, he must remain unaware of his (interbook) horizontal potential. (Presumably, a character could only achieve such a perspective through either madness or death.)[137]

Pnin somehow survives the misdirection with which Jack Cockerell pledges to continue the narrative: 'And now [...] I am going to tell you the story of Pnin rising to address the Cremona Women's Club and discovering he had brought the wrong lecture' (*P* p. 191), a remembrance which does not accord with the narrator's own coverage of that episode at the start of this cyclical text, in which Chapter Seven (the final chapter) mirrors Chapter One. Through Cockerell's mis-steering of the narrative, or attempt to grab at the wheel, we discover that the spiral of fiction can splinter off into further unrealities which tempt us away from the epistemological unknowability we initially set out to discover. *Pnin* implies its post-text for the same motive that *Sebastian Knight* signals its own: by the end of the novel, we do not know who has been holding the pen. As Nabokov undermines our trust in each narrator, and withdraws the book we were ourselves reading into absence, impossibility, and unreality, the need for *another* book arises.

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already skated phoneward across the parquetry to hear what Nina Lecerf or some other neighbor wanted' (*LH* p. 12).

[136] William W. Rowe, 'Pnin's Uncanny Looking Glass', in Proffer, pp. 182-92 (p. 189). See also Maar, who cites 'the diabolical, fairy-tale qualities of the speck of coal dust' (p. 82).

[137] Rowe in Proffer, p. 190. This recalls the reflection by Hill, *In Different Words*, on the need to read Beckett 'in a recursive act which is tabular as much as linear' (p. 58).

Conclusion

> […] the greatest surprise being perhaps that in the course of one's earthly existence, with one's brain encompassed by an iron ring, by the close-fitting dream of one's own personality – one had not made by chance that simple mental jerk, which would have set free imprisoned thought and granted it the great understanding […]
>
> Nabokov, *Sebastian Knight* (p. 157)

Both *Sebastian Knight* and *Pnin* do not only threaten the ontologies of the characters within those texts, but the whole notion of 'the book' as condition for writing and reading. The biographical book, as we have seen, represents its own peculiar paradox: in it, the ethics of privacy conflict with the ethics of knowing others fully. Seeping into these fictive biographies, the trope of the double clouds our concepts of the ontologies within them: proffering an exterior alterity as an alternative to characters in the diegesis, it tests our perception of reality in the process. As the novels manifest their movement of opening up to this alterity via authorial appearances, 'autocriticism',[138] and the authoriality of certain characters who are able to rend holes in their fictive worlds, the novels pose an epistemological challenge: among the layers of perception amassed by Nabokov, on which level are we able to detect the authorial 'weave', 'lining', 'irregularities', 'anomalies', or quirks in method? By raising the possibility of a realm beyond all metatexts in *Sebastian Knight*, and beyond the winding narration of *Pnin*, layered narratives in each Nabokovian text drive their versions of reality toward 'irréalité'. Nabokov's 'ruse-upon-a-ruse' wears down the space of fictive reality with an unrelenting exposition of

[138] Milbauer, p. 49.

'gaps and tears', those parts of the weave through which we might glimpse an exterior reality. Ironically confessing their novelistic methods, the texts skid from presence and reality toward absence and unreality: enabling the first step of Nabokov's 'infinite succession' toward the real.

The entire text, then, becomes identical with a withdrawal into unreality by means of its weave simultaneously floating to the surface. This withdrawal, whether denoted by the disappearing authorial body in *Sebastian Knight*, or by the increasing impossibility of narration in *Pnin*, we then understand, is not itself the real for Nabokov. Withdrawal is rather the precondition to the unknowable: it must supplant 'the book' if we are to 'set free imprisoned thought' (*SK* p. 157) and progress to the real beyond the many versions of reality the texts offer us. The legacy of Nabokov's unworking is speculation,[139] that conjecture which our intuition of an off-limits real inevitably generates. Although consciousness does not last long enough in either text to let us into the secret, the speculative stream of thought projects after consciousness apparently ends.[140] The post-text seems to mark just another step in the spiral,[141] the 'infinite succession of steps' toward the 'unquenchable', 'unattainable' real (*SO* p. 9), inciting us to pursue the writer through their 'jeu

[139] For me, this is akin to what Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary*, reading Blanchot, calls 'the alterity of "désœuvrement", of worklessness or unworking – which is irreducible to all dialectic, and survives only as a residue that cannot be taken into the process of negation, mediation, and work' (p. 114).

[140] We might even consider *Pnin* as *Sebastian Knight*'s post-text (as I have already considered *The Gift* and *Despair* are *Sebastian Knight*'s pre-texts, and *Pale Fire* the post-text of *Pnin*), or ponder *Pnin* as itself an unworking of *Sebastian Knight*.

[141] See Sweeney, 'Impossible Things', in Norman and White: 'Perhaps the quintessentially Nabokovian image of the spiral [...] will lead you to realize – as it did me – how often, and how insistently, Nabokov describes one thing blending into or combining with another. His novels refer again and again to spirals, spectra, rainbows, syntheses, metamorphoses, doublings, mistaken identities, resemblances, shadows, and reflections, as well as to moments when one thing is perceived as something else' (pp. 74-75). See also L.L. Lee, 'Vladimir Nabokov's Great Spiral of Being', in Roth, pp. 74-86: 'The spiral is the figure of space and time unified, but a figure that allows multiplicity in its unity' (p. 75).

insensé' into another textual world, and another, and another, with the eventual promise of reaching the real in the next text, or in the one after that.

Chapter Four

Infinite Discourses and *Angustia*: Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio*

> Come scrittore, Gadda – considerato come una sorta d'equivalente italiano di Joyce – ha elaborato uno stile che corrisponde alla sua complessa epistemologia, in quanto sovrapposizione dei vari livelli linguistici alti e bassi e dei più vari lessici.
>
> Italo Calvino, 'Molteplicita'[1]

Gadda's novels, like Nabokov's, are susceptible to infinite layering. But what is the unique complexity of Gadda's knowledge-system, to which Calvino alludes? Calvino hints that Gadda's epistemology involves attending to the words of others across registers and vocabularies, a suggestion indeed reflected in Gadda's multilingual style, and reinforced by Gadda's own resolution that the voice of the 'piccolo-borghese [...] non può doventare la legge, l'unica legge'.[2] Gadda's 'Meditazione breve', written a decade before his 'giallo' *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*,[3] clarifies how an author might go about respecting the infinitely diverging discourses of others:

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[1] Italo Calvino, 'Molteplicità', *Lezioni americane: sei proposte per il prossimo millennio* (Milan: Garzanti, 1988), pp. 99-120 (p. 104). The theme of the conference at which Calvino was speaking was: 'il romanzo contemporaneo come enciclopedia, come metodo di conoscenza, e soprattutto come rete di connessione tra i fatti, tra le persone, tra le cose del mondo' (p. 103).

[2] Gadda, 'Lingua letteraria e lingua dell'uso', in *SGF*, I, pp. 489-94 (p. 494).

[3] See Maria Antonietta Terzoli, 'Breve presentazione del *Pasticciaccio*', in *Commento a Quer pasticciaccio brutto di via Merulana di Carlo Emilio Gadda*, 2 vols (Rome: Carocci, 2015), I: the novel was published in 'Letteratura' in five instalments from January-December 1946, then came out in a volume published by Garzanti in 1957, divided into 10 chapters. The third edition, published 1958, is regarded as the definitive text (p. 11).

> […] incastonar le parole nella necessità del momento, sì con un certo senso del limite loro, e del pudor nostro: e della credibilità de' fatti: e del 'dolore del mondo', sto frescone, e delle contrastanti possibilità […].[4]

Embedding others' words within their own finitude demands we recognise not only their limitations, but ours. It is a painful recognition for Gadda, who admits elsewhere 'non riesco ad essere […] uno scrittore su misura'.[5] Yet facing up to the infinitude of 'contrastanti possibilità' demands 'pudore', precisely because inscribing the finite form of a novel entails an ethical choice between competing creative possibilities. This chapter examines that necessary choice through a Derridean lens, taking up a suggestion by Giuseppe Stellardi that the *angustia* of which Derrida conceives, the anguish bound up in the emergence of meaning through language,[6] might be key to explaining Gadda's relation to writing.[7] The central question in this chapter is how Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio*, renowned for overrunning its borders, evinces the pressure of finitude which *angustia* imposes on a text, all while seeking to actualise the author's 'complessa epistemologia': a responsibility toward the infinite discourses of alterity.

The ethical component of selecting what to write is crucial in Derrida's 'Force et signification', which inquires into *angustia* as 'le moment où il faut *décider* si nous graverons ce que nous entendons. Et si graver sauve ou perd la parole'.[8] This moment of selection is inevitable in the creative process because the 'Livre total',[9] the idealised book in which all is written, must always be an impossibility, out of the

[4] Gadda, 'Meditazione breve circa il dire e il fare', in *SGF,* I, pp. 444-54 (p. 454).
[5] Gadda, 'Come lavoro', in *SGF*, I, pp. 427-43 (p. 440).
[6] Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, pp. 18-19.
[7] Stellardi, *Gadda: miseria e grandezza*, who proposes 'angustia' as 'il nucleo centrale del rapporto fra Gadda e la scrittura' (p. 53).
[8] Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, p. 19.
[9] Ibid, p. 17.

novelist's reach: Gadda, though he strives to complete a 'romanzo della pluralità',[10] cannot capture the totality of voices actually heard out in the streets of Rome (or Milan) when inscribing those bubbling up outside the fictional 'delitti' at via Merulana 219. Assuming a kind of 'pudore' ('la responsabilité de cette *angustia,* de ce passage nécessairement resserré de la parole contre lequel se poussent et s'entr'empêchent les significations possibles'), the writer chooses between meanings, which

> [s]'entr'empêchent mais s'appellent, se provoquent aussi, imprévisiblement et comme malgré moi, en une sorte de sur-compossibilité autonome des significations, puissance d'équivocité pure au regard de laquelle la créativité du Dieu classique paraît encore trop pauvre.[11]

I contend in this chapter that despite the loss inherent in the passage of meaning to the page (described in Stellardi as 'il momento di transizione dalla forza alla forma' in Derrida's concept of *angustia*),[12] Gadda's novel preserves some of the 'sur-compossibilité autonome des significations' via the peculiar technical implications of Gadda's 'grovigli'. Through these associative knots of meaning, Gadda is able to signify additional meanings by ravelling them into a single word, which is variously iterated, and sometimes even left unspoken.

Impelling the movement of meanings, which clamour for attention as they spill forward onto the page, is 'force', a notion Clare Connors probes in *Force from Nietzsche to Derrida*.[13] Connors notes that '[i]n its initial formulation, this idea of writing as *angustia* comes very close to a Romantic model of expression: the venting of feeling into words, a pushing outwards from a wordless but force- and meaning-ful

[10] Gadda, *SVP* p. 462.
[11] Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, p. 18. God, as Gadda writes in his 'Meditazione breve', is unlimited, but '[o]gni atto o fatto del mondo è finito, anche se noi lo possiamo desiderare infinito' (*SGF*, I, p. 454).
[12] Stellardi, *Gadda: miseria e grandezza*, p. 53.
[13] Clare Connors, *Force from Nietzsche to Derrida* (London: Legenda, 2010).

interior', referencing Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Kubla Kahn' as a metaphor for the process.[14] Though the creative font to which the writer has access is apparently unlimited, time-boundedness restricts the flow of meaning to the page, thereby compressing alterities within meaning and constraining language in what Connors, reading Derrida, describes as a 'throat-choking anxiety'.[15] She explains:

> Derrida describes signification as a temporal process, and argues that meaning cannot take place all at once [...] any meaning will only be made at the expense of another one [...]. *Angustia* is precisely not 'un Dieu classique', but the mark of human finitude.[16]

The anxiety which accompanies force corresponds to the potential for loss. Force, in Stellardi's words, denotes 'la riserva infinita delle possibilità di senso insite nel rapporto con l'esperienza, con il mondo, con la lingua, e dunque – per esempio – con il testo letterario', while 'form' represents the manifestation of force on the page, as the 'momentanea stabilizzazione del senso e sua necessaria condizione', but at the same time 'perdita di senso, riduzione del possibile, smarrimento della verità'.[17] Ontological limitations, in other words, contract epistemological aspirations of the novelist.[18] Not only do we know that meaning cannot happen all at once, but some meaning cannot be expressed at all: both the novelistic form and the time of the human are finite.

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[14] Ibid, p. 104.
[15] Ibid. See Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*: 'Parler me fait peur parce que ne disant jamais assez, je dis aussi toujours trop. Et si la nécessité de devenir souffle ou parole étreint le sens — et notre responsabilité du sens —, l'écriture étreint et contraint davantage encore la parole' (pp. 18-19).
[16] Connors, *Force from Nietzsche to Derrida*, pp. 104-5.
[17] Stellardi, *Gadda: miseria e grandezza*, p. 53. See also Connors, *Force from Nietzsche to Derrida*: 'since force disappears once it is actualized, so its utterance risks, indeed needs, something like failure' (p. 12).
[18] See Sbragia: 'In Gadda the rage is epistemological. It is born from the impossibility of a hypersensitive subjectivity to organize the multiplicity, flux, and deformation of an impossibly complex phenomenal reality, to forge "system" from "method"' (p. 27).

This phenomenon and the anxiety which ensues from it might be applicable to any writer, yet arguably is felt especially keenly, and made visible, in the works of Gadda. His *Quer pasticciaccio* is a detective novel: a genre which, as Rushing notes, lends itself particularly to 'epistemological resonance [...] concerned, perhaps first and foremost, with knowledge and the lack of knowledge, with coming-to-know, finding out'.[19] Merivale and Sweeney, in their study of the metaphysical-detective subgenre (which concerns itself with 'questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot'), split novels into those descending from the minimalist tradition, and those from the maximalist.[20] *Quer pasticciaccio*, prone to lengthy digressions and shifts in consciousness which displace the narratorial voice, transporting us from central Rome to the Alban hills, falls within the maximalist category. Maximalism optimises the epistemological reach of a novel, allowing exploration outside the space and time of the crime. This wide-ranging exploration is imperative if, as this novel's detective Don Ciccio Ingravallo claims:

> le inopinate catastrofi non sono mai la conseguenza o l'effetto che dir si voglia d'un unico motivo, d'una causa al singolare: ma sono come un vortice, un punto di depressione ciclonica nella coscienza del mondo, verso cui hanno cospirato tutta una molteplicità di causali convergenti (*QP* p. 4).[21]

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[19] See Rushing, 'La sua tragica incompiutezza': 'It is almost necessarily concerned, either implicitly or explicitly, with the major problems of both classical and post-classical epistemologies: justification, deception, and belief in the case of classical epistemology; the effect of the observer on observation (uncertainty), the impossibility of complete knowledge (unknowability), and the uncontrollable increase in relations between epistemic objects (indeterminacy) in the case of "post-classical" epistemologies' (p. 135).

[20] Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, 'The Game's Afoot: On the Trail of the Metaphysical Detective Story,' in *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism,* ed. by Merivale and Sweeney (Philadelphia, P.A.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 1-24 (p. 2). They identify Gadda among the maximalist lineage of detective writers in their 'tentative genealogy' of the subgenre (p. 18). Manuela Marchesini, 'Literature as the Experience of Boundary Crossing: Gadda's Descent to Hell and the Solution to "That Awful Mess of Via Merulana"', *MLN*, 119 (2004), 109-34, suggests that Gadda 'makes us experience literature as a *mode of knowledge*' (p. 114).

[21] Gadda, *Meditazione milanese*, pp. 101-3.

The totalising impulse in *Quer pasticciaccio* reveals itself in the novel's digressions into modern and ancient Roman history, geography, geology, eroticism, and mythology, as well as contemporary culture, politics, and science. Overflowing at the seams, this work represents the clash in which Gadda's obligation to 'rompere regolarmente il limite dell'opera', as Stellardi phrases this excess, counterposes the author's tendency to recognise a 'divieto di accesso a quel salvifico limite'.[22] Like Ingravallo's need to consider a multiplicity of factors in his criminal investigation, Gadda must consider the 'molteplicità di causali convergenti' if he is to grasp the 'necessità del momento'.

In the course of the two separate, perhaps connected 'delitti' in Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio* (the burglary of the Contessa Menegazzi's jewels, and murder of Liliana Balducci), we encounter 'il patema testimoniale': the straining voices of those who offer impromptu witness statements. 'Patema', sometimes used as a synonym for *angustia*, is what detective Ingravallo feels in his confrontation with the 'groppo o cespo di umani e di vegetables' (*QP* p. 27), a symbolic clump for the novel, jostling to be heard. In a movement analogous to Derrida's description of meanings encroaching on each other in the emergence of language,[23] the 'epos' this 'groppo' eventually musters works its way out of the tangle of voices[24] in all its 'contrastanti possibilità', and onto the page of Gadda's novel: 'la ragione della folla raccoglieva i trefoli delle testimonianze iniziali, dei "giuro che l'ho visto": principiava a intortigliarli in un epos' (*QP* p. 17), just as the 'debilitata ragione del mondo' emerges

[22] Stellardi, *Gadda: miseria e grandezza*, p. 53. This represents a similar duality to 'pudore' and 'complessa epistemologia'.
[23] See Derrida, 'Force et signification': 'Or la pure parole n'exige-t-elle pas l'inscription un peu à la façon dont l'essence leibnizienne exige l'existence et se presse vers le monde comme la puissance vers l'acte?' (p. 18).
[24] Note Gadda's use of the verb 'intortigliare', from the French 'entortiller', to coil, suggesting a repository of force (see 'intortigliare', *Treccani*, http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/intortigliare/).

from the 'molteplicità di causali'.[25] Guglielmi insists that Gadda 'always re-produces the word of the other in ways that range from parody to high-mimetic stylization [...] The word is never pure; it never aspires to an original or absolute resonance [...] it can thus be regarded as pragmatic and ethical'.[26] But if the discourses of the other are infinite, as is demonstrably the case in this novel, how can a writer 'reproduce' all words of the other, and cope with the overpopulated passage from force to form?

To understand how Gadda seeks to balance his ethical 'pudore' with epistemological and aesthetic 'pluralità', I turn to Derrida and Bakhtin. The first part of this chapter considers the 'sdoppiamento amebico' which pervades *Quer pasticciaccio*'s structure in light of Derrida's notion of 'force différentielle'[27] and its potential to destabilise 'form'. The second moves to the 'grovigli' of meaning which result from Gadda's splitting of narrative. In the third part, I analyse the interaction between discourses in this novel with recourse to Bakhtin's thinking of the confrontation between 'authoritative discourse' and 'internally persuasive discourse', as well as Bakhtin's concept of the Baroque.[28] The fourth and final part returns to Derrida to consider the 'irruption' of an 'autre parole', a word spoken (or left unspoken) by figures of alterity in *Quer pasticciaccio*. I suggest that Derridean and Bakhtinian readings of the novel can help to clarify how words emerge which, while remaining within the novel's borders, offer points of internal resistance to its formal finitude.

[25] On his philosophy of a multiplicity of causes, see Gadda, *Meditazione milanese*: 'L'ipotiposi della catena delle cause va emendata e guarita, se mai, con quella di una maglia o rete ma non di una maglia a due dimensioni (superficie) o a tre dimensioni (spazio-maglia, catena spaziale, catena a tre dimensioni), sì di una maglia o rete a dimensioni infinite. Ogni anello o grumo o groviglio di relazioni è legato da infiniti filamenti a grumi o grovigli infiniti' (*SVP* p. 650).
[26] Guglielmi, 'Gadda and the Form of the Novel', in Bertone and Dombroski, p. 35.
[27] Derrida, *Force de loi: le 'Fondement mystique de l'autorité'* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), p. 20.
[28] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael J. Holquist; ed. by Holquist (Austin: University of Texas, 1981), p. 342; 394-96.

Two forms concealing force: 'groviglio' and 'sdoppiamento amebico'

In its Baroque overreaching, *Quer pasticciaccio* sets out to test the epistemological potential of the novel. From the text's incipit, which initially seems to head in the direction of hard-boiled detective fiction, don Ciccio Ingravallo is admired for his knowledge: 'una certa conoscenza degli uomini: e anche delle donne' (*QP* p. 3), and 'memoria pronta, anzi infallibile' (*QP* p. 6); envied for his familiarity with 'dei libri strani: da cui cavava tutte quelle parole che non vogliono dir nulla, o quasi nulla' (*QP* p. 5); and famed for his ability to distil the wisdom of the greats, notably his suggestion we should '"riformare in noi il senso della categoria di causa" quale avevamo dai filosofi, da Aristotele o da Emmanuele Kant, e sostituire alla causa le cause' (*QP* p. 4). We are subtly invited to conceive of the 'molteplicità di causali' as Ingravallo does: as 'nodo o groviglio, o garbuglio, o gnommero, che alla romana vuol dire gomitolo' (*QP* p. 4). This 'groviglio' or knot of 'causali' also connects to the novel's Baroque title, according to Terzoli: 'pasticciaccio' indicating 'il groviglio conoscitivo' as well as 'in prospettiva metatestuale […] le modalità di costruzione del romanzo […] una mescolanza di parti non omogenee, antiche e moderne'.[29] Such a 'mescolanza' of diverse components would seem essential if Gadda's 'complessa epistemologia' is to embrace the words of others.

Wrapped up within the word 'groviglio' itself is the potential to drift off into different contexts, both metaphorical and linguistic, as when Gadda shifts from omniscient narration into Ingravallo's direct speech: '"Già. Si me chiammeno a me…può stà ssicure ch'è nu guaio: quacche gliummero…de sberretà…" diceva, contaminando

[29] Terzoli, *Commento*, p. 12.

napolitano, molisano, e italiano' (*QP* p. 5).[30] But the 'groviglio', a recognisable textual 'form' (and metaphor, as multiple critics have noted, for the entire text) also symbolises 'force'. Where the word 'groviglio' appears also in Gadda's 'Come lavoro', the author reflects:

> Ognun di noi mi appare essere un groppo, o un nodo, o groviglio, di rapporti fisici e metafisici [...] Ogni rapporto è sospeso, è tenuto in equilibrio nel 'campo' che gli è proprio: da una tensione polare. La quale, è chiaro, può variare d'intensità nel tempo, e talora di segno: può spengersi (*SGF*, I, p. 428).

Tying the knot in the first instance requires energy, an anterior exertion of force which is no longer evident in the form of the 'groviglio' which we can perceive. Yet the knot retains potential to unravel when the tension between nodes dissipates. If we consider Roscioni's interpretation of the Gaddian 'groviglio', that 'non è altro che il convergere e intrecciarsi di relazioni diverse da cui scaturisce un evento, un oggetto',[31] we find the key to the knot metaphor, which lies in its potential to 'scaturisce' (a Latin-derived word signifying 'to bubble like a spring; to scatter, pour, flow').[32] To paraphrase Gadda, when the 'tensione polare' which holds each of us in place dies out, pent-up force is released, and the 'fili' (*QP* p. 11) involved in this 'groviglio' first unravel, and then lead onward and outward in new directions,[33] resulting in an infinitude seemingly at odds with the writing of a novel.

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[30] See ibid, where Terzoli analyses the divergent provenance of elements of this sentence, which are the first words of the novel to be 'riportate in forma di discorso diretto': 'Un tratto napoletano si aggiunge all'identità del commissario, oltre all'italiano e al molisano d'origine [..] Qui convivono tratti centro-meridionali ("quanno", l'accusativo preposizionale "a me", ecc.), tratti riconoscibilmente napoletani ("è nu guaio": "è un brutto affare", D'Ascoli; "ssicure", "gliuommero", "chiammeno", che tuttavia potrebbero anche essere almeno in parte molisano-occidentali) con varie italianizzazioni nelle desinenze e nella fonetica' (pp. 45-46).

[31] Roscioni, *La disarmonia prestabilita*, p. 77.

[32] See George William Lemon, *English Etymology* (London: G. Robinson, 1783), https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015031030722, p. 34.

[33] 'Fili' might be a useful word for examining the digressions in Gadda's text. See also the claim by JoAnn Cannon, 'The Reader as Detective: Notes on Gadda's *Pasticciaccio*', *Modern Languages Studies*, 10 (1980), 41-50 that the text exists 'entirely in that textual space characterized as "detour"' (p. 48).

Besides 'groviglio', the other metaphor Gadda uses to describe the multiplicity of causes, 'sdoppiamento amebico' (*QP* p. 134), also conceals a silent force. When we speak of the passage from force to form, Derrida reminds us, we are speaking 'toujours de la force différentielle'[34] which acts at the stage of meaning-selection, before words spill onto the page in a 'Kubla Khan'-esque vortex of pressure:

> [i]l fattaccio era l'effetto di tutta una rosa di causali che gli eran soffiate addosso a molinello (come i sedici venti della rosa dei venti […]) e avevano finito per strizzare nel vortice del delitto la debilitata 'ragione del mondo' (*QP* p. 5).

'La force,' Derrida tells us, is 'l'autre du langage sans lequel celui-ci ne serait pas ce qu'il est'.[35] This Derridean definition, connecting force with alterity in the process of creative expression,[36] underlies Connors's insistence that 'force' can 'clarify [our] own contextual, philosophical, and political commitments'.[37] The 'sdoppiamento amebico' which the already-double story (of two crimes) undergoes in the hands of the police, then the carabinieri, names a movement which characterises more of Gadda's novel than just the two pursuits undertaken by these law enforcement bodies:[38]

> […] sdoppiamento amebico: metà me, metà te. L'unicità della Storia si deroga in una doppia storiografia, si devolve in salmo e in antifona, s'invasa in due contrastanti certezze: il rapporto della questura, il rapporto dei carabinieri. L'uno dice sì, l'altro dice no. L'uno dice bianco, l'altro dice nero […] (*QP* p. 134).

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[34] Derrida, *Force de loi*: 'il s'agit toujours de la force différentielle, de la différence comme différence de force, de la force comme différance ou force de différance […] il s'agit toujours du rapport entre la force et la forme […]' (p. 20).
[35] Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, p. 45. See Derrida, 'Deconstruction and the Other', in Kearney, pp. 107-25, where he refers to 'The other, which is beyond language and which summons language' (p. 123).
[36] Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*: 'Parce que parler, c'est savoir que la pensée *doit* se rendre étrangère à elle-même pour se dire et s'apparaître' (p. 19n1).
[37] Connors, *Force from Nietzsche to Derrida*, p. 102.
[38] See Elio Gioanola, *L'uomo dei topazi: interpretazione psicanalitica dell'opera di C.E. Gadda* (Milan: Librex, 1987). As Gioanola realises, '[o]gni situazione narrativa, ogni comparsa di personaggio è la reduplicazione variata di un'identica azione o figura' (pp. 220-21). At the core of this infinite 'sdoppiamento', that is, '[a]l centro…di tutto il sistema…tolemaico…' (*QP* p. 8), we find Assunta, who becomes the suspect most definitively accused of Liliana's death.

Splitting and doubling *Quer pasticciaccio*'s narration paradoxically enables Gadda to respect 'contrastanti possibilità' seemingly outside the narrative, as demanded by his own edict in the 'Meditazione breve'. Yet the problem is that once initiated, the force of doubling floods through the novel, gaining in momentum through each chapter. In this thematic, structural, and linguistic 'sdoppiamento amebico' (itself a process of 'degeminazione' (*QP* p. 134) in a novel obsessed with fertility), differential force works through language to disrupt the expected distance between subjects, resulting in what Bertone dubs a 'doppio linguaggio dell'immedesimazione e del distanziamento'.[39] Characters are constantly dichotomised yet kept uncomfortably close to each other: the stream of consciousness divides between Ingravallo, emblematic 'poliziotto' in Rome, and his rival Pestalozzi, 'carabiniere' in the 'Colli Albani'; Liliana is juxtaposed with her 'nipoti' Gina and Virginia, as well as the servant Assunta; both Balducci and Ingravallo are posited as foils to Valdarena; and Zamira emerges as the ultimate obverse of Liliana. No one is allowed to remain discrete in their 'groppo'. The thematic interconnections between 'groppi' are infinite, so that the words spoken by each character lead into the allusive 'grovigli' of others.

Symbols of *angustia*: nieces and jewels

To demonstrate how force performs the compression of a 'riserva infinita delle possibilità' in its narrow passage toward the final 'form' of *Quer pasticciaccio*, I examine two instances in the novel, each of which dramatises the process of meaning-selection in *angustia*: the figure of the 'nipote', the faux-niece with whom

[39] Bertone, *Il romanzo come sistema*, p. 171.

Liliana and Remo Balducci make up for their 'incompatibilità gamica dei due spiriti' (euphemised as the inability to conceive) (*QP* p. 9), and the 'gioielli', the treasures stolen from Contessa Menegazzi in the first 'delitto', but which reappear in suspect Camilla Mattonari's house. The appearance of the niece in the Balducci's home and the reappearance of the jewels both mark moments in which a 'molteplicità di causali' twists itself into a particular event. Beyond their evocation of meaning-manifestation as the anaphoric rush of something pouring out, I choose these two motifs for three reasons: for their pivotal role in plot, because they are both expressly dubbed 'grovigli', and because each represents a different aspect of the dual 'pulsione di morte', identified by Stellardi and already introduced in Chapter One, on *La cognizione*:

> L'accumulo è rappresentato per esempio dalle numerose, lunghe liste di nomi o cataloghi di oggetti per lo più assurdi, comici o maniacali: la (paralella) compulsione all'esaustione consiste nel voler esaurire il possibile, tutte le forme del possibile.[40]

By examining Gadda's digression on the 'nipote' as a 'compulsione all'esaustione', and his extensive descriptions of 'gioielli' as a 'compulsione all'accumulo', we can gauge whether exertions of force, enacted alternately via exhaustion and accumulation, convulse the structural finitude of the text.

Liliana Balducci's initial tragedy, linked to the later tragedy of her death, is that she cannot fall pregnant. Ingravallo ascribes this heartbreak to her husband, Remo Balducci: 'non avesse valutato, non avesse penetrato tutta la bellezza di lei [...] i figli non erano arrivati' (*QP* p. 9). Infertility pervades the entire landscape of the novel:

> Per lei, dal Tevere in giù [...] c'era, sui colli e sui monti e nelle brevi piane d'Italia, come un grande ventre fecondo [...] [d]i quando in quando dal grande Ovario follicoli maturati si aprivano, come ciche d'una melagrana: e rossi chicchi, pazzi d'un'amorosa certezza, ne discendevano ad urbe, a incontrare

[40] Stellardi, *Gadda: miseria e grandezza*, p. 32.

> l'afflato maschile […] E a via Merulana 219, scala A, piano terzo, ci rifioriva la nipote […] (*QP* p. 12).

Ingravallo's musing, which combines mythology with biology, connects the appearance of young Gina at the lunch table with the novel's broader drama of infertility. To compensate for their lack of children, the Balducci couple invites one girl after another to stay, each introduced as 'nipote' when Ingravallo goes to dine at their house: '[d]'anno in anno … una nuova nipote: quasi a simboleggiare, nel cuore, i successivi natali della prole' (*QP* p. 12). The alert detective, on meeting 'Gina', recalls the former 'nipote' Virginia, who remains an absent, yet erotic, presence throughout the text: '[q]uella dell'ultima volta […] era una nipote per modo di dire', her physical features '[d]a sognarseli di notte' (*QP* p. 6). Ingravallo embarks on a wine-fuelled train of thought, starting out with semi-investigative jargon, and fracturing into colloquiality: 'Dietro quel nome "nipote", ci doveva star nascosto tutto un groviglio…di fili, un ragnatelo di sentimenti, dei più rari…delicati', because '[c]cà ce sta una nepote cchiù 'mbrogliata' (*QP* p. 11). Ingravallo's internal monologue motions to a web of motivations concealed behind the word, which do not make it onto the page, just as the improper word which comes to Ingravallo's mind while thinking about the phenomenon of successive 'nipoti' does not: '[g]li venne un pensiero, con una parola irriverente: era il vino' (*QP* p. 12). As Terzoli notes in her *Commento*, this word is difficult to pinpoint.[41] It does not matter what the word might be for the purpose of my analysis: its unspokenness concealed by the 'groviglio' is what constitutes force in the knot, since the word remains a potentiality, precluding any finitude of meaning through exhaustion of the niece's allusiveness.

[41] Terzoli, *Commento*, p. 72. My suggestion for this word would be 'incest', given the subversive eroticism with which Ingravallo's internal monologue charges this scene (as well as the internal relations between the lexical family of words which his digression calls to mind).

'Ma avete tentato [di sparare]', Ingravallo suggests to Menegazzi's neighbour, signor Bottafavi, who displays some courage in the course of the first crime. 'Tentato: tentato è una parola' (*QP* p. 23), Bottafavi replies. The idea of multiple meanings hiding behind the word that manifests itself for the reader echoes Gadda's 'Un'opinione sul neorealismo': '[c]ose, oggetti, eventi [...] mi valgono in una aspettazione, in una attesa di ciò che seguirà, o in un richiamo di quanto li ha preceduti e determinati' (*SGF*, I, p. 629). Conforming to this Gaddian directive, his mulling propelled onwards by the effect of a 'bianco secco', Ingravallo thus excavates behind 'nipote' to understand the proliferation of nieces in the Balducci household, and the possible future relevance of this incongruent word, which Liliana and Remo insist on using.[42] Ingravallo's internal monologue extends backward from 'La nipote!' to equate her with '[l]a nepote albana, fiore dell'eterna gente sabellica...L'afflato dei predatori,' referring to an ancient myth by which the Sabine women are taken by Romolo to reproduce on behalf of Rome:[43] '[g]ià. Le sabine non c'era più bisogno di toglierle [...] Le albane ci pensavan loro, oggi, a scegne a fiume. E il fiume andava, andava, superati i clamori, a raggiungere, al lido, l'indefettibile attesa dell'eternità' (*QP* p. 12). Before considering the past, present, and future meanings of the 'nipote' which Ingravallo's digression seeks to exhaust, we might take into account Gadda's recognition that the 'differenziale semantico' of a word can denote competing meanings:

> Buon gusto, impegno o necessità narrativa, ci inducono a rivivere *parodisticamente* i ventitré, uno dei ventitré, uno alla volta: o invece a rifuggire dalla parodia conferendo un significato nuovo al vocabolo, per un arbitrio inventivo che resulterà poi, alla pagina, più o meno saggio e felice

[42] See Goffredo Ripamonti, 'Finito e non finito in *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*', *MLN*, 94 (1979), 1-15: 'Le ambigue adozioni delle ragazze della campagna romana – germinaio della vita chiaramente opposto alla decomposizione, dilatazione mortale che la città sembra fino a un certo punto chiamata a significare – non hanno fatto altro che favorire la formazione del vortice' (p. 8).
[43] Terzoli, *Commento*: 'lontana eco dall'episodio del ratto delle Sabine che non avvenne però durante la festa dei Lupercali' (p. 59).

(*SGF*, I, p. 437).

How does Gadda confer 'nipote', then, with its 'significato nuovo'? First, he considers the word in its everyday sense, rejecting this. He turns to the fictional past of the 'nipote' as the product of a reproductive cycle which generates Rome (the city which has also given rise to the crime), then associates the coming of the niece to via Merulana with the historical descendance of the Sabine women from Lazio, and in so doing reaches 'eternity'. The 'nipote' stands in, eventually, for a need to exhaust the possibilities of a word given by various dialects, contexts, legends, and actors in the story, necessary if a word is to be interpreted ethically for the sake of '[b]uon gusto, impegno o necessità narrativa'. New meaning emerges firstly if we parody the word's additional meanings one by one (since *angustia* determines that we cannot engage with all meanings at once), but also and only if we retreat from our parody in time to leave an entirely new meaning in its wake: that in which the 'diffusa e delicata ovaricità' of the niece combines with the force of myth to explain, proleptically, the coming of crime to via Merulana.

Like the 'nipote', the jewels are described as a 'groviglio' which must be unravelled in order to achieve both epistemological finitude and resolution of the novel's two mysteries. Introduced early in *Quer pasticciaccio*, '[e]picizzate, concupite, chiamate in causa o ogni momento dalla invidia e dalla fantasia delle donne, dei pupi' (*QP* p. 39), the objects belong to the 'signora Menecacci: che a cacciaje na mano in quarziazi posto ne veniva fori oro, perle, diamanti: tutta la roba più de valore che ce sia' (*QP* p. 7).[44] The excess of these jewels which gush out from the Menegazzi's person into 'mito' symbolise not only Gadda's compulsion to accumulate, but in their

[44] Menegazzi's name is fetishised as though it were itself a jewel: 'Sui loro labbri stupendi quel nome veneto risaliva l'etimo, puntava contro corrente, cioè contro l'erosione operata dagli anni' (*QP* p. 39); 'L'anafonèsi trivellava il deflusso col perforante vigore d'un'anguilla' (*QP* p. 39).

reappearance on the grandmother's 'lettino' (*QP* p. 217), they also intensify the problem of progressive description in a novel. As Levinas writes, the 'relationship with the other is *time*: it is an untotalizable diachrony in which one moment pursues another without ever being able to retrieve it, to catch up with or coincide with it.'[45] I will leave an exploration of dia-chrony and its relation to finitude to the next chapter, on Beckett's Trilogy. What matters for now is that the jewels at the centre of *Quer pasticciaccio*, themselves emblematic of infinitisation, 'smottaron giù quasi confortandosi a vicenda nella inaspettata uscita e caduta' (*QP* p. 217), in a movement evoking *angustia*'s outpouring of meanings, as imagined by Derrida: 's'entr'empêchent mais s'appellent, se provoquent aussi': '[i]mpigliate le une nelle altre' (p. 218), the gems tussle on the bed for Pestalozzi's attention in a time-constrained infinity 'd'ogni più color curioso e d'ogni forma' (*QP* p. 218).

Since each jewel can only catch the light for a moment in what must be a finite account of their rediscovery, the accumulation of detail in this passage (which threatens to overtake the narrative itself) must be curtailed: '[o]gni atto o fatto del mondo è finito, anche se noi lo possiamo desiderare infinito' (*SGF,* I, p. 454). In their transparent reflection of their past, the jewels perform the same function of disclosing hidden meaning as the objects seen by the all-seeing, plural narrators of Nabokov's short novel *Transparent Things* (1972):

> When *we* concentrate on a material object, whatever its situation, the very act of attention may lead to our involuntarily sinking into the history of that object. Novices must learn to skim over matter if they want matter to stay at the exact level of the moment. Transparent things, through which the past shines! (*TT* p. 1).

Every jewel is linked to another story outside that of their burglary: 'un bel

[45] Levinas, 'Ethics of the Infinite', in Kearney, p. 57. See also Levinas, *Le Temps et l'autre*: 'Le temps signifie ce *toujours* de la non-coïncidence, mais aussi ce *toujours* de la *relation*' (p. 10).

cilindretto verde nero lustro, da tirarne oroscopi i sacerdoti stronzi ad Egitto più che farneticazioni Pitagora dall'apotema del pentagono', 'un grosso anello a cilindro d'oro fasciante [...] trafitta da tutti i raggi un poco del mattino equinoziale come le chiare carni del martire dalle sue centonovanta quadrella' (*QP* p. 218). This is because the gems collectively represent 'memoria, ogni gemma, ed opera individua dentro la memoria lontanissima e dentro la fatica di Dio' (*QP* p. 219), a memory which is composed of linguistically diverse components, deriving from other memories, languages, jargons, and discourses, as I will suggest in the next section, which disperse narrative out of their tangle on the bed. Force here acts in such a way that 'il groviglio dei molti nodi fu districato da ungulazione pervicace' (*QP* p. 217): the movement of unravelling memory, here dependent on allusion calling up additional references, itself brings out the Gaddian neoformation, 'ungulazione'.[46] Past enables future meaning, as 'fili' lead away from the dissolved knot.[47]

The force of 'sdoppiamento amebico', ever present in this text, breaks down the ensemble of jewels into even smaller parts. If we consider carabiniere Pestalozzi's dream of the topaz, which precedes the finding of the other jewels:

> Aveva veduto nel sonno, o sognato...che diavolo era stato capace di sognare?...uno strano essere: un pazzo: un topazzo. Aveva sognato un topazio [...] un disco maligno che gli sfuggiva rotolando innanzi e pressoché al disotto della ruota della macchina, per muta magia [...] s'era involato lungo le rotaie cangiando sua figura in topaccio e ridarelleva topo-topo-topo-topo [...] il topo-topazio s'era derogato di rotaia, s'era buttato alla campagna nella notte verso

[46] 'Ungulazione' refers to 'insistito lavorìo di unghie', as Terzoli, *Commento*, notes: 'Il sostantivo è neoformazione gaddiana' (p. 798).
[47] Robert S. Dombroski, 'The Foundations of Italian Modernism: Pirandello, Svevo, Gadda', in Peter Bondanella and Andrea Ciccarelli, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to the Italian Novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 89-103 (p. 102). As Dombroski writes, each jewel is 'unveiled in all its chemical qualities and geological history, its associations extending outward to the whole of creation'. See also Dombroski, *Creative Entanglements*: '[t]hings within the tangle are alienated from their own material form at the very moment they are known, that is, given to the consciousness of others, which initiates the flow of differentiation' (p. 47). See Roscioni, *La disarmonia prestabilita*: 'Ogni pietra ha dunque una sua documentabile storia, microcosmica testimonianza dell'organizzazione del mondo' (p. 5).

le gore senza foce del Campo Morto [...] (*QP* p. 180).

The chain of words: 'uno strano essere: un pazzo, un topazzo [...] che cos'è, infine, un topazio? [...] cangiando sua figura in topaccio e ridarellava topo-topo-topo-topo [...] il topo-topazio' (*QP* p. 180) appears a departure from Gadda's otherwise allusive and associative semantic fields, swerving instead into dreamed-up nonsense. Roscioni, however, notes that these words in Pestalozzi's consciousness join up asemantically in conglomerations which 'si uniscono ad altri gruppi e frammenti di parole, e dànno origine a bizzarre neoformazioni.'[48] To the Freudian reading this dream has elicited,[49] I add that it sets in motion a process of 'verbal condensation', where this term of Freud's refers to the 'linguistic tricks performed by children, who sometimes actually treat words as though they were objects and moreover invent new languages and artificial syntactic forms', as 'the common source of these things in dreams and psychoneuroses'.[50] Interaction between meanings, like the physical tussling of the jewels, produces new words, a process relying on the breaking down into particulars of a given discourse among an infinity of discourses. Interdependence of objects (or words) is critical, for the reason Roscioni gives in his analysis of the jewels' stories: 'Nessuna vale per sé, nessuna è cosí compiuta e autonoma da non postularne delle altre'.[51] This interplay of meanings determines that *Quer pasticciaccio*'s jewels acquire additional significations which 'se provoquent' in the restricted passage to the page. As with 'nipote', the word which finally surges out, whether 'rubino',

[48] Roscioni, *La disarmonia prestabilita*, p. 86.
[49] See, for example, Sbragia, in which, followed by the Roma-Napoli train before it derails and dissolves into 'tenebra circèa', the topaz is, like other jewels in *Quer pasticciaccio*, a 'sexual metaphor': 'the "topaccio," the "wild rat" caroms like "black lightning" through a shameless pack of naked and cavorting Nereids until it spots its final destination, the plastered privates of the vulgar and inebriated Countess Circea' (pp. 154-55).
[50] Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey and others, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953-74), IV (1953), p. 303.
[51] Roscioni, *La disarmonia prestabilita*, p. 7.

'anello', or 'topazio', retains potential to liberate those other meanings, further unravelling the supposed finitude of form. While neither the process of exhaustion nor that of accumulation becomes complete in Gadda's novel, the struggling of meanings toward the page is the operative factor which brings forth and facilitates the emergence of meaning in the novel. Like Beckett's Trilogy enfolding the *hors-texte* within itself, Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio* rolls up into itself an 'attesa di ciò che seguirà' and a 'richiamo di quanto li ha preceduti e determinati'.

Restoring a 'confusione di voci'[52]

In a meandering intrigue superimposed with the words of its many characters, *Quer pasticciaccio* unleashes a torrent of speech which itself divides and multiplies. When, outside via Merulana, 'la fascia delle ruote delle biciclette, come un derma sui generis, pareva rendere impenetrabile quella polpa collettiva' (*QP* p. 16), Gadda penetrates the crowd, who all seemingly share the one skin, by lending voice to the Romans who compose it.[53] The desire to make someone talk, 'dire quello che pensava, cantare: cantarellare' (*QP* p. 37), dominates decisive moments throughout the text, becoming integral to the gathering of witness statements and of confessions from those accused, as per Pedullà's claim that *Quer pasticciaccio* is '[u]n romanzo molto parlato. Dove non parlano i personaggi, parla il Narratore. Un monumento alla oralità del raccontare. E cosa non esce di tremendo da quelle bocche! Fateli parlare e

[52] See 'Il patema testimoniale, appiccato il foco alle anime, deflagrava ad epos. Parlavano tutte in una volta. Era una confusione di voci e di aspetti: serve, padrone, broccoli: enormi foglie di un broccolo uscivano da una sporta rigonfia, tumefatta. Vocine acri o infantili aggiungevano dinieghi o conferme. Torno torno, un barboncino bianco scodinzolava eccitato e de tanto in tanto abbaiava puro lui: il più autorevolmente possibile' (*QP* p. 22).
[53] These are citizens of a 'clima linguistico', as Roscioni notes, 'certamente il piú composito d'Italia' (p. 80).

prima o poi verrà fuori la verità.'[54] The 'truth' of the matter, Gadda repeatedly implies, is to be found in the words of others collated by don Ingravallo, while we might envisage a parallel, ethico-epistemological quest undertaken by Gadda.

The novelistic form in general, according to Cascardi, is a genre 'whose component forms remain strikingly visible and in contention', one composed of competing discourses: the novel 'recognizes that there are many forms of speech that can lay claim to the truth'.[55] Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio* dramatises this quality by exposing its own 'incommensurable particulars' and 'sometimes divergent constellations of language and experience', features of all novels, according to Cascardi's analysis.[56] This novel, written by a self-proclaimed 'scrittore arzigogolato e barocco' (*CD* p. 16), has the encyclopaedic aspirations of the Baroque novel as described by Bakhtin,[57] but also foregrounds the stresses of its internal diversity.[58] For Bakhtin,

> Baroque pathos is determined by modes of *apologia,* and polemic. It is a prosaic pathos, one that continually senses the resistance offered by alien discourses, alien points of view; it is the kind of pathos associated with justification (self-justification) and accusation.[59]

In my introduction to epistemology in the novel, I cited Roland Barthes's claim that literature, through its power of mathesis, 'fait du savoir une fête'.[60] The 'mathetic' aspect of this novel that I find essential in understanding its relation to finitude is one which revolves around spokenness and unspokenness in the development of its

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[54] Walter Pedullà, *Carlo Emilio Gadda: Il narratore come delinquente* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1977), p. 244.
[55] Cascardi, 'The Novel', p. 164.
[56] Ibid.
[57] See Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (pp. 259-422): 'The Baroque novel unites in itself a great diversity of inserted genres. It also strives to become an encyclopedia of all the types of literary language of the epoch, even an encyclopedia of all possible types of knowledge and information (philosophical, historical, political, geographical, etc.)' (p. 396).
[58] See Guglielmi, 'Gadda and the Form of the Novel', in Bertone and Dombroski, on André Gide's model which 'discloses its own strategies' (pp. 25-26).
[59] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 394.
[60] Barthes, *Leçon inaugurale*, p. 20.

'delitti': the novel's commingling of discourses. The voices of the 'polpa collettiva', the Roman, Molisan, and Milanese dialects melded into Ingravallo's voice, teachings of the Catholic church (conflated with pagan rites,[61] and conflicting with legal doctrines), marketplace bartering by porchetta-sellers, strategies used by the businessmen of Standard Oil, sexual connotations evoked by Zamira's crew, the authoritative word of fascism, and words spoken against Mussolini's regime, combine in a heteroglossia which demonstrates Gadda's responsibility to each discourse: that of greeting the other *as* other, in the infinite language of others. Aware of the 'alien discourses' at odds within its pages, and the tension which alters meaning as these discourses struggle toward the page, the Baroque novel functions (via what Bakhtin describes as 'pathos') 'to restore some *other* genre, genres that, in their own unmediated and pure form, have lost their own base in reality.'[62] This goal of restoring other 'lost' or 'unavailable' genres can be read as an ethical gesture: a preservationist one. But in the pass of *angustia*, not all 'alien discourses' can be restored: the Baroque pathos of Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio* also lies in the impossibility of attending to all dying discourses at once.

Gadda acknowledges that 'chi parla e vive, parla e vive necessariamente legato da un complesso di relazioni ambientali e sceniche che lo avviluppano nelle totalità delle loro determinazioni'.[63] In the world of *Quer pasticciaccio*, grasping each 'complesso' means engaging with the social, political, and cultural forces which keep an individual bound up in their own relational 'groviglio': even those forces Gadda found repugnant. Set in 1927, *Quer pasticciaccio* is necessarily porous to the

[61] See Terzoli, *Commento*, p. 59.
[62] Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', p. 394.
[63] Gadda, 'Arte del Belli', in *SGF*, I, pp. 548-60 (p. 560). See also Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), where 'idioculture' denotes the 'embodiment in a singular individual' of 'interlocking, overlapping, and often contradictory cultural systems' (p. 21).

discourse of fascist ideology.[64] Yet the fascist word is never allowed to stand alone, unchallenged, in the novel. The novel, drawn as it is from 'cronaca nera', begins Chapter III with a reflection on 'i giornali':

> 'Orribile delitto a via Merulana,' gridavano li strilloni [...] Nella cronaca, dentro, un titolo in neretto su due colonne: ma, poi, sobrio e alquanto distaccato il referto: una colonnina asciutta asciutta, dieci righe ne la svolta, 'le indagini proseguono attivissime': e quarc'artra parola pe contentino: di pretta marca neo-italica (*QP* p. 60).

The Fascist regime decrees that crimes occupy only a marginal space in the newspaper, ostensibly to prove the success of its own regime in maintaining order.[65] The clash of discourses here becomes literal in a battle for column space: the voice of the newspaper hawker yells about the crime in via Merulana, yet the product he is selling glosses over the incident. Gadda, however, undercuts the dominance of fascist discourse: he does not merely cast out fascist speech by undermining it with his ironic reflection in Chapter III, but releases another discourse into the fray. Like any 'authoritative discourse' (as Bakhtin defines that term), the word of fascism possesses a 'semantic structure' which is at once 'static and dead, for it is fully complete, it has but a single meaning, the letter is fully sufficient to the sense and calcifies it',[66] so the governmental decree has no potential for creative use in *Quer pasticciaccio* beyond its reproduction. Instead, Gadda supplants it with an ironic, popular discourse, activated by the author's use of dialect, one Bakhtin might call an 'internally persuasive discourse', which directly challenges Mussolini:[67]

> Ereno passati li tempi belli... che pe un pizzico ar mandolino d'una serva a piazza Vittorio, c'era un brodo longo de mezza paggina. [...] Pensare che ce

[64] See Terzoli, *Commento*, to the effect that the 'allusione al calendario fascista à posticipata fino al capitolo quinto' (p. 13). See also Gadda, *Eros e Priapo*, in Gadda, *SGF*, II (1992), pp. 217-374, in which Gadda's critique of Fascism reaches its apex.
[65] See Terzoli, *Commento*, p. 191.
[66] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 343.
[67] See Deborah Amberson, *Giraffes in the Garden of Modernist Literature: Modernist Embodiment in Italo Svevo, Federigo Tozzi and Carlo Emlio Gadda* (London: Legenda, 2012), where she claims that 'Gadda's macaronic or baroque tendencies [...] do more than echo the diversity of the social heteroglossia', but rather 'expos[e] the abuses of the hegemonic linguistic systems' (p. 145).

> fossero dei ladri, a Roma, ora? Co quer gallinaccio co la faccia fanatica a Palazzo Chiggi? (*QP* pp. 60-61).

Bakhtin's elaboration of how 'internally persuasive discourse' is semantically '*open*' and 'able to reveal ever newer *ways to mean*'[68] can illuminate Gadda's offering up of this resistant discourse, tapping into dialect to undercut the official word, as a potential passage through the narrow stretch of *angustia*.

When Sbragia claims that Gadda's 'use of a plurilingual free indirect discourse created a "serpentine line" which intersected all three horizontal lines – low, middle, high – of the Italian triglossia',[69] we might envisage this plurilinguality in Gadda as the basis for a Bakhtinian 'internally persuasive discourse', which allows new words to emerge by compressing meanings through its intersection. At the juncture of this 'triglossia', novel words emerge which are both 'incastona[te] nelle necessità del momento', thus remaining authentic, and which are infinite in their heteroglossian reach. Bakhtin continues:

> The apologetic and polemical pathos of the Baroque novel is organically combined with the specific Baroque idea of testing the hero [...] In all important aspects there is no distance between hero and author; the verbal mass of the novel is all on a single plane, thus in all its aspects it is involved in heteroglossia to an equal degree and fails to incorporate this contradiction into its composition, leaving it, as it were, *outside* itself.[70]

In *Quer pasticciaccio*, we witness Gadda's process of testing Ingravallo via the impenetrable 'verbal mass' ('Ingravallo si sentiva soffocare, stritolato dalle relatrici e dalla relazione' (*QP* p. 22)), and the 'throat-choking anxiety' of *angustia* which affronts Gadda and Ingravallo would seem to level both on the same 'plane'. By abandoning the 'contradiction' (of author and character encountering 'heteroglossia'

[68] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 346.
[69] See Sbragia, p. 8.
[70] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 395-96.

to the same 'degree') '*outside* itself', a text enables some words spoken by 'alien discourses' to persist beyond the constraint of *angustia*. That is, the 'heteroglossia' of words at the intersection of *Quer pasticciaccio*'s plural discourses outlasts the structural finitude of the novel as a whole. The Baroque pathos in which author and character find themselves is a productive one: words are infused with meanings beyond their meanings, the latter spiralling out through the force of heteroglossia to absorb the multiple alterities of language outside the borders of the text, while the words themselves remain inside.

Speech irrupts in death

We move closer than ever to the limit of *Quer pasticciaccio* with its ending, in which Ingravallo travels to a deathbed in order to interrogate Assunta, who is caring for her dying father.[71] With this impending death, and the irruption of speech[72] followed by the silence which characterises the end of Gadda's novel, we are encouraged to 'riflettere':[73] look back on the earlier death of Liliana, and ask: what breaks up the 'groppo' held in tension by language in *Quer pasticciaccio*, or begins the unravelling of 'fili' in the 'groviglio'? If we believe Ingravallo's maxims, it is the alterity innate in death which abruptly disentangles the knot: 'la morte gli apparve, a don Ciccio, una decombinazione estrema dei possibili, uno sfasarsi di idee interdipendenti, armonizzate già nella persona' (*QP* p. 58). Otherness as force ('l'autre du langage')[74]

[71] Assunta's home is in Tor di Gheppio, and as Marchesini, 'Literature as the Experience of Boundary Crossing', reminds us, 'far gheppio' proverbially means to die (p. 126).
[72] 'Irruption of the other' is a phrase used by Attridge, *Singularity of Literature*, p. 26, but which may be sourced from Derrida, 'La Parole soufflée', in *L'Écriture et la différence*, pp. 253-92 (p. 263).
[73] Maurizio De Benedictis, *La piega nera: groviglio stilistico ed enigma della femminilità in C.E. Gadda* (Anzio: De Rubeis, 1991), suggests this is 'da prendere nel suo senso di tornare indietro d'un corpo [...] urtato in un altro' (pp. 143-44).
[74] Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, p. 45.

can irrupt to dissolve tension between nodes: '[c]ome il risolversi d'una unità che non ce la fa più ad essere e ad operare come tale, nella caduta improvvisa dei rapporti, d'ogni rapporto con la realtà sistematrice' (*QP* p. 58). But the dissolution of prior bonds between nodes also means relations will be reformulated: new relations will replace those dissolved. To understand the irruption of alterity as *word* in *Quer pasticciaccio*, I turn now to Derrida's definition of

> [...] l'irruption positive d'une parole dont je ne sais pas d'où elle vient, dont je sais [...] que je ne sais pas d'où elle vient et qui la parle, cette fécondité de l'*autre* souffle est l'impouvoir: non pas l'absence mais l'irresponsabilité radicale de la parole, l'irresponsabilité comme puissance et origine de la parole.[75]

Death, as other, and as 'oltraggio' (*QP* p. 57),[76] somehow provokes speech, or an excess of speech: we recall that the vision of Liliana's corpse marks the first recognisably Baroque, overflowing description in the novel. But from where does speech issue in death? In *Quer pasticciaccio*, it irrupts from the two openings chiselled into the narrative by differential force, in a link identified by De Benedictis:[77] the 'solcatura del sesso' (*QP* p. 48) barely evident in Liliana's dead body, and the 'piega nera verticale tra i due sopraccigli dell'ira' (*QP* p. 264) in Assunta's forehead when Ingravallo accuses her of murder at the end of *Quer pasticciaccio*.

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[75] See ibid, p. 263.

[76] The most recent translation of *La cognizione del dolore*, trans. by Richard Dixon as *The Experience of Pain* (London: Penguin, 2017) has translated 'Ogni oltraggio è morte' (*CD* p. 36) (the concluding sentence to the episode of Gonzalo testing out the 'teorema dell'impulso' on a cat to see if it will land on its feet after being thrown from the second floor of the villa) as 'every insult is death' (p. 36). Yet in novels which are self-conscious of their overreaching, 'oltraggio' should convey its Dantean echo, of excess bordering on transgression: see James Miller, *Dante and the Unorthodox: The Aesthetics of Transgression* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005): 'Dante's *oltraggio* pushes us into an unchartable domain of ever-expanding theological possibilities where knowledge runs out, and memory trails off, and language (at least temporarily) breaks down, but immediate experience of the newness of life goes on and on' (p. 5).

[77] See De Benedictis, *La piega nera*, p. 144. See also Terzoli, *Commento*, on the 'rinvio alla figura di Giuditta nella tela di Caravaggio [...] rappresentata nel momento in cui taglia la gola a Oloferne con una marcata ruga verticale tra le sopracciglia del volto adirato e lunghi pendenti di perle, ben visibili al lobo dell'orecchio sinistro [...] che possono richiamare le "dondolanti scioccaje" [...] di Assunta. Il rapporto con la *Giuditta* introduce nel finale, luogo solitamente delegato alla soluzione del giallo, un segnale extratestuale, criptico ma fortissimo, che collega Assunta all'assassinio di Liliana, uccisa con un taglio alla gola' (p. 932).

Conforming to the Baroque pathos discussed in relation to Bakhtin, Ingravallo must retreat from both gashes in the female, fertile spaces of the novel: they are chasms from which the 'fécondité de l'autre souffle', the words of others are to flow forth, but not his own voice.

Liliana, mythologised by Ingravallo on the novel's first encounter with her as a being who tends toward 'uno spazio o un tempo irreali, da lei sola presagiti' (*QP* p. 9), is re-materialised in her death. Attridge insists that alterity can emerge as 'neither a mystical ideality nor an inviolable materiality, neither a Platonic Form nor a Kantian *Ding an sich*. The other can emerge only as a version of the familiar, strangely lit, refracted, self-distanced'.[78] His reading is useful in understanding why she cannot be elevated to the realm of noumenal angels, but is rooted in the corporeal, in the earthly, through death. To satisfy the '[b]uon gusto, impegno o necessità narrativa' which Gadda requires in his process of 'exhaustion' by parodying meaning after meaning, the detective must pay attention to each crevice of Liliana's dead body as she lies supine in the post-mortem examination. As Ingravallo stutters: 'quella riga [...] quella che Michelangelo [...] aveva creduto opportuno di dover omettere' (*QP* p. 47) in relation to the furrow of Liliana's genitals,[79] the novel engages with the 'irresponsabilité' which Derrida posits as 'puissance et origine de la parole'. This irresponsibility is, we might say, a responsibility to acknowledge the alterity of the process of *angustia* in which language originates. '[O]ltrepassato la morte' (*QP* p. 56), Gadda, as Baroque author, must find new ways to engage with the word of the

[78] Attridge, *Singularity of Literature*, p. 76.
[79] See Gerhard van der Linde, 'The Body in the Labyrinth: Detection, Rationality and the Feminine in Gadda's *Pasticciaccio*', *American Journal of Italian Studies*, 21 (1998), 26-40, for an extensive analysis of this crime scene.

dead; that is, to re-enliven discourse which is metaphorically 'no longer available',[80] just as Bakhtin indicates that this restoration is the task of the Baroque novelist.

In an inversion of the Baroque pathos defined by Bakhtin, and analysed in the last section, the roles of accuser and self-justifier are exchanged at the end of *Quer pasticciaccio*. In accusing Assunta Crocchiapani, by this point the most likely suspect, Ingravallo himself sounds like an assassin: 'Sputa 'o nome, chillo ca tieni cà: o t' 'o farà sputare 'o brigadiere, in caserma, a Marino' (*QP* p. 264). But when Ingravallo confronts that 'piega nera verticale [...] nel volto bianchissimo della ragazza', it has a quietening effect on his speech: 'lo paralizzò, lo indusse a riflettere: a ripentirsi, quasi' (*QP* p. 264). For Bonifacino, the word 'quasi', 'nel suo spessore semantico, testimonia un movimento di approssimazione mai finita alla verità del reale',[81] rather like Nabokov's concept of the 'infinite succession' of steps or layers (*SO* p. 9) heading toward the unknowable. The novel must end here, 'il frutto della verità rientra[ndo] sfuggentemente dietro la piega-ruga-solcatura',[82] since moving any further requires a digression toward a gap into which Ingravallo's narration cannot stray if Gadda is to obey his earlier edict: 'incastonar le parole nelle necessità del momento, sì con un certo senso del limite loro, e del pudor nostro'.[83] Ingravallo finds himself 'in procinto' ('[e]gli non intese, là pe llà, ciò che la sua anima era in procinto d'intendere') (*QP* p. 264), having reached a threshold, or limen through which multiple 'grovigli' of meanings have passed,[84] and which now extend beyond

[80] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 394.
[81] Giuseppe Bonifacino, *Il groviglio delle parvenze: Studio su Carlo Emilio Gadda* (Bari: Palomar, 2002), p. 434.
[82] De Benedictis, *La piega nera*, p. 162.
[83] Bertone, *Il romanzo come sistema*, writes that the 'voce dell'altro' is '[z]ittita' at the end of *Quer pasticciaccio* (p. 171), while Ferdinando Amigoni, *La più semplice macchina: lettura freudiana del 'Pasticciaccio'* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1995), takes the opposing view, that 'il discorso dell'Altro si fa sentire per la bocca di Assunta' (p. 127).
[84] See Christopher Johnson, *System and Writing in the Philosophy of Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge:

his epistemological reach *ad infinitum*. With Assunta's denial ('No, sor dottó, no, no, nun so' stata io!' (*QP* p. 264)), Gadda reflects that '[i]l nodo si scioglie a un tratto, chiude bruscamente il racconto',[85] that is, the story ends before the detective crosses the threshold. We are left, in the author's words, with 'quel silenzio, che farà la migliore delle opere', but which indicates the existence of other words we cannot perceive.[86] Words like 'nipote', 'gioielli', and 'groppo' remain within the text, resisting its closure internally, while others, including those unveiling Liliana's assassin, escape beyond it, but the 'apocope drammatica'[87] at the end of *Quer pasticciaccio* has a different effect. It represents a final method of respecting speech without absorbing it completely into 'complessa epistemologia': the final sentence of the novel allows unspoken words to divide and multiply off the page, and keeps narrative 'fili' rolling out in an extratextual dimension, off-limits to us.

Conclusion

The complexity of Gadda's epistemology imposes a dilemma for the author: it requires exercising responsibility toward the infinite meanings of others, or inscribing a totality against the flow of *angustia*, which constricts the passage of meanings to the page. Gadda does not reconcile himself fully to the loss inherent in expressing the force of others' language in form: detective Ingravallo falls silent

Cambridge University Press, 1993): 'the passage is a passion [...] a whole area of Derrida's work turns, with a certain fascination, around the question of the limen, the threshold, the passage, and its inherent difficulties or violence' (p. 23).

[85] Gadda, 'Incantagione e paura', in *SGF*, I, pp. 1213-15 (p. 1215).

[86] This 'silence', though valorised by Beckett, means something else entirely for the finitude of his Trilogy, to which I will turn in the final chapter. Rushing, 'La sua tragica incompiutezza', proposes that '[Gadda's] novel's ending might [...] represent the projection of an imaginary moment of total and totalizing comprehension, a moment of cognitive plenitude which is one of the promises of a detective novel, beyond the actual boundary of the novel itself, an ever-belated ending' (pp. 135-36).

[87] Gadda, *Interviste 1950-72*, p. 149.

before the limit-point at which ultimate meaning might be revealed, opening up a forum for the words of others beyond the last printed word of the text. Through his use of 'grovigli' in which meanings are coiled up in particular words, Gadda ensures that the word which emerges from the process of *angustia* retains something of the 'groppo' in which force previously held it.[88]

Yet the dissolution of the knot does not mean that tension has suddenly ebbed away: the 'nodo' is connecting up with others in our imagination, allowed to run wild after Ingravallo's 'quasi', without a given to curb *angustia*. We cannot help but remain aware of the *other* nodes of the 'groppo', since even when these are not explicitly named, Gadda's underlying philosophy of multiplicity assures us that they are there, wielding force within the system of the novel. Reflecting on the role of *angustia* in limiting an otherwise infinite process of meaning-selection allows us to understand that Gadda's writing of *Quer pasticciaccio* might be read as an attempt to unite 'pudore' and 'complessa epistemologia': or at least, as a determination not to sacrifice one for the other as *angustia* takes its toll on an infinity of meaning.

The self-reflexivity of Gadda's Baroque entails an awareness and exposure of all that precludes finitude: whether the tendency of narrative to double itself, inclusion of words which overflow their initial semantic meaning, or proliferation of discourses. Once voiced, these words and discourses pry open the text even further; yet Gadda struggles to express alterity where 'pudore' and an infinity of discourses coalesce. Their convergence marks the point at which the text can both admit what Bakhtin

[88] See Bonifacino, *Il groviglio delle parvenze*: 'L'autentico, l'infinità delle relazioni compresenti simultaneamente nel fenomeno, è rappresentabile solo in una parola che lasci apparire dentro di sé quel nesso conflittuale, come un nodo mai sciolto' (p. 434).

dubs the 'resistance offered by alien discourses'[89] as a capitulation to finitude (as an acknowledgement of the text's inability to absorb all) while integrating these discourses in associative ways that do not always require the words themselves to be spoken, or even written. Reformulated, neither saved nor lost,[90] words emerge anew, or irrupt as other, in 'quel silenzio': the silence waiting to signify an infinity of discourses outside Gadda's complex knowledge-system.

[89] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 394.
[90] Consider again Derrida on *angustia* in *L'Écriture et la différence*, as 'le moment où il faut *décider* si nous graverons ce que nous entendons. Et si graver sauve ou perd la parole' (p. 19).

Chapter Five

The Unthinkable and the Dia-chronic: Beckett's Trilogy (2)

> [...] avant d'être lâché, seul, dans l'impensable indicible, où je n'ai cessé d'être, où ils ne me laissent pas être [...]
>
> Beckett, *L'Innommable* (p. 80)

> [...] *il est impensable que l'impensable soit impossible.*
>
> Meillassoux on correlationism, *Après la finitude* (p. 68)

In the first epigraph's double-edged assertion, the 'je' of Beckett's *L'Innommable*, the final instalment of the Trilogy, claims to have always subsisted in a space of unthinkability[1] and unsayability, in which rest is impossible, and the imperative is to go on. As with the myriad self-cancelling statements across *Molloy*, *Malone meurt*, and *L'Innommable*, the narrator's words enfold within them a contradiction: the second half of the statement un-says, or marks a retreat from the one preceding it.[2] Critics have focused extensively on Beckett's un-saying tendency, formally known as epanorthosis,[3] and more recently, Shane Weller's *Language and Negativity in*

[1] Unthinkability is a key concern of Beckett's, with variations of this 'impensable indicible' formulation recurring in a draft of his late work *Stirrings Still*, which refers to the 'unthinkable improbable': see Samuel Beckett, *Stirrings Still / Soubresauts and Comment dire / what is the word*: a digital genetic edition (Series 'The Beckett Digital Manuscript Project', module 1), ed. by Dirk Van Hulle and Vincent Neyt (Brussels: University Press Antwerp (ASP/UPA), 2011), <http://www.beckettarchive.org> 30 July 2018 (MS-UoR-2934, 10r).

[2] On the concept of retreat, see Jacques Derrida, 'Le Retrait de la métaphore', in *Psyché: Inventions de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), pp. 63-93. Jill Robbins, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 139, writes specifically on negation as retreat, and Peter Fifield, *Late Modernist Style in Samuel Beckett and Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), p. 80, discusses her approach.

[3] See, for example, Weller, *Language and Negativity*, p. 4; Audrey Wasser, *The Work of Difference: Modernism, Romanticism, and the Production of Literary Form* (New York: Fordham University

European Modernism has located Beckett within, and even near the forefront of a tradition of 'linguistic negativism'.[4] Weller, placing emphasis on the *indicible* rather than the *impensable*, equates *L'Innommable*'s 'unimaginable unthinkable' with the 'beyond of language (or what [Beckett] terms "real silence") [...] precisely because any imagining or thinking of it would render it one more metaphor, one more instance of word fetishism – a mistaking of the word for the extralinguistic reality to which it is supposed to refer.'[5] I propose instead to focus on unthinkability, examining Beckett's 'impensable indicible' in temporal terms,[6] taking it to be that which impossibly precedes, or ensues from, the stretch of narratorial consciousness.

In this chapter I analyse a particular species of epanorthosis, or affirmation-negation in Beckett: that which involves analeptic and proleptic references to events, people, and things which logically should be out of reach of the narrator's consciousness. Whether Molloy's foreshadowing of Moran, or Moran's disintegration resembling Molloy's, the resurfacing of the knife-rest from one novel to another,[7] the reappearance in *L'Innommable* of Molloy's quest to find his mother (now degenerated into 'je cherche ma mère, pour la tuer' (*I* p. 175)), or the 'je' of *L'Innommable* recognising characters from outside the temporal bounds of that text,

Press, 2016), p. 9; Fifield, *Late Modernist Style*, p. 80; and Bruno Clément, *L'Œuvre sans qualités: Rhétorique de Samuel Beckett* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), pp. 180-87.

[4] See Weller, *Language and Negativity*, p. 5; 100.

[5] Ibid, p. 109. See also Richard Begam, *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996): 'the postmodern tends to express itself in a language of equivocation and contradiction, a language that consistently describes itself in terms of what is "unthinkable" or "unspeakable"' (p. 14).

[6] To paraphrase myself here, Weller's term 'extralinguistic reality' focuses on 'the unsayable which is unthinkable by virtue of our not being able to put it in words', while I will focus on the other half of the question: 'the unthinkable which is unsayable by virtue of our not being able to think it'.

[7] We can ask, for example, whether the 'porte-couteau' with which Moran fidgets in *Molloy* (*M* p. 192) is the same which is withdrawn from Macmann by Moll in the asylum in *Malone meurt* (she tells him 'que pour ce qui était des objets qui en avaient été retirés, ils avaient été jugés sans valeur aucune et bons tout au plus à jeter, à l'exception d'un petit porte-couteau en argent que l'on tenait à disposition' (*MM* p. 140)).

Beckett subverts what we expect to be knowable within a certain character's narration. I employ the work of Genette, as well as concepts from Derrida and Meillassoux, to understand what semblance of finitude remains after Beckett's analepses and prolepses: projections into imagined pasts and futures, momentarily affirmed as possible before anachrony's contents are relegated to the realm of the unthinkable.[8]

I initially turn to narratology for my methodological approach to this chapter, benefiting from the body of techniques which narratology offers to analyse the effects of anachrony.[9] First, I adopt Genette's terms for 'le signifié ou contenu narratif' (*histoire*), 'le signifiant, énoncé, discours ou texte narrative lui-même' (*récit*), and 'l'acte narrative producteur' (*narration*).[10] In light of Beckett's endlessly iterative narratives (his pervasive repetition of characters' attributes and situations, often in embedded narratives), I seek to examine the effect of 'redondance' via analepsis and prolepsis, as Genette describes it.[11] To take into account Beckett's well-documented epanorthosis, I also consider the effect of 'collision' within the narratives,[12] whereby affirmative and negative statements clash with each other, and project possible elements of the story into temporal impossibility.[13] However, a narratological approach to Beckett's Trilogy ultimately cannot suffice. This is firstly for the reasons Andrew Gibson gives in *Towards a Theory of Postmodern Narrative* where he

[8] Something akin to Critchley's 'impossible temporality': see Critchley, *Very Little…Almost Nothing*: 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, which I am choosing to see as the time of dying, […] the impossible temporality of *le mourir* in distinction from *la mort*, the time of the possible' (p. 189).
[9] See Genette, *Figures III*.
[10] Ibid, p. 72.
[11] Ibid: 'le récit y revient ouvertement, parfois explicitement, sur ses propres traces' (p. 95).
[12] Ibid, p. 91.
[13] Ibid. See also Mieke Bal, *Narratology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017). It is difficult to determine whether analepsis and prolepsis in the Trilogy is internal, external, homodiegetic or heterodiegetic (inside or outside the diegesis).

exposes narratology's limitations, arguing that it presupposes a 'geometrics',[14] and secondly because the analeptic and proleptic movements in *L'Innommable* and the other Trilogy texts are neither mere repetitions nor predictions: they are bound up in *impossibility* (as repetitions of impossible pasts, and predictions of impossible futures).[15] Theirs is the 'impensable indicible' space outside the narrator's consciousness, be it linguistic (as in Weller's premise) or temporal (as in mine). Moreover, the structures analysed by narratology such as 'focalisation' and 'frequency' tend to break down when reading Beckett: the complex focalisation of the narrative does not simply involve embedded narratives, but consciousnesses collapsing into each other, and frequency becomes indeterminate where the singularity of events is in doubt.

Where narratology falls short in the investigation of Beckettian anachrony, I borrow a strategy, rather than a philosophy, from Meillassoux. As the type of anachrony which I investigate in Beckett is connected to unthinkability, I propose that a more apt descriptor for this anachrony may be '*dia-chrony*', to draw on the spatio-temporal meaning with which Meillassoux's *Après la finitude* imbues this word. Meillassoux uses the word 'dia-chronic' to refer to

> tout discours dont le sens inclut un *décalage temporel* de la pensée et de l'être: non seulement, donc, les énoncés portant sur les événements antérieurs à l'émergence de l'homme, mais aussi ceux portant sur de possibles événements *ultérieurs* à la disparition de l'espèce humaine.[16]

[14] Gibson, *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp. 3-5.
[15] Impossible futurity closes in on the inaccessible past in *L'Innommable*: 'votre temps à vous, celui des autres, celui des vieux morts et des morts à naître, pourquoi il vient vous enterrer à compte-gouttes ni mort ni vivant, sans mémoires de rien, sans espoir de rien, sans connaissance de rien, sans histoire ni avenir' (*I* p. 171).
[16] Meillassoux, *Après la finitude*, p. 167.

Since we are not dealing with the portrayal of events prior to the emergence of human consciousness in the Trilogy, but rather with the analogy of narrators fictively positing events as prior to or post their own consciousness, Meillassoux's own philosophical project (of going beyond or 'après' finitude) will recede in importance for the most part of this chapter: it is his mechanism for examining the 'dia-chronic' which matters here.

To understand the 'dia-chronic', Meillassoux suggests that we trace backwards (or forwards) from what he calls the 'matière-fossile' available in the present[17] (where this 'matière-fossile' is some thought in the 'now' which should be unthinkable, since it derives from a time of impossible being). Dia-chrony, for Meillassoux, signifies an 'écart temporel entre le monde et le rapport-au-monde'.[18] In following the Meillassouxian path ('aller du présent au passé, selon un ordre logique, et non du passé au présent, selon un ordre chronologique'),[19] this chapter asks whether and how analeptic and proleptic movements (which I read as remnants of pasts and futures posited as possible before being undercut) interrupt the Trilogy's formal finitude. My analysis is structured in three parts: firstly, a focus on the 'je' of the Trilogy and the disconnect between thinking and being, secondly, on the various past and future selves the 'je' proposes to take on, in dia-chronic movements dispersed

[17] See ibid: these are 'matériaux indiquant l'existence d'une réalité ou d'un événement ancestral, antérieur à la vie terrestre' (p. 26). That which remains for us in the present, '*l'archifossile*' (p. 26) leads us toward a trace: 'C'est bien à *pister* la pensée que l'archifossile nous convie, en nous invitant à découvrir le "passage dérobé" que celle-ci a emprunté pour réussir ce que la philosophie moderne nous enseigne depuis deux siècles comme l'impossible même: *sortir de soi-même*, s'emparer de l'en-soi, connaître ce qui est que nous soyons ou pas' (p. 49).
[18] Ibid, p. 168. Where a character might legimitately relate to their own world, in the Trilogy we witness them attempting to relate to other worlds, but paradoxically creating those worlds in the process. We can perceive in this relation-to-other-worlds a postmodernist aesthetic, as that aesthetic is described by Waugh, *Practising Postmodernism/Reading Modernism*: 'a fundamental sense of the aesthetic (derived from Kantian thought) as a form of knowing and presenting which is sensuously embodied, an alternative to conceptual knowledge because, ontogenetically, it realises worlds and experiences for which we had no concepts until they came into existence' (p. 15).
[19] Meillassoux, *Après la finitude*, p. 34.

throughout the narrator's stream of consciousness (the possible selves of 'Malone' and 'l'autre', 'Basile' and 'consorts', Mahood and Worm), before striking each of these down, and thirdly, on the unnameable 'voix' which comes to dominate the final passages of *L'Innommable*, persisting after the negation of extratemporal selves.

Finally, I ask what negations of a just-posited 'impensable indicible', evident from *Molloy* onwards but intensifying in *L'Innommable*, mean for the Trilogy's finitude, considering, chiefly, how narrators' impossible thinking of the unthinkable, and saying of the unsayable, coexists with Beckett's well-documented tendency to *un-say* the sayable, *unthink* the thinkable, or in other words, to un-grasp the finite.[20] If past, present, and future are impossible, what becomes of narration? In the conclusion to this chapter, I turn, as Derrida does in 'Force et signification', to the Flaubertian dream of the 'livre sur rien'. I focus on how Beckett's three novels self-consciously fail to articulate the 'impossible' temporality of thought separated from being: a failure which culminates in *L'Innommable* and its 'tympanum'. Through this metaphor signalling the in-between of world and being, I cycle back to concepts introduced earlier in this thesis, to interrogate what all three authors' obsession with finitude says about our relation to the outside of thought.

'Dire je. Sans le penser': the 'cogito' and dia-chrony in the Trilogy

The momentum of narration in *L'Innommable* begins with uncertain infinitives ('[a]ller de l'avant, appeler ça aller, appeler ça de l'avant' (*I* p. 7)), yet the narratorial

[20] See Connor, 'Beckett's Radical Finitude': 'if finitude means never being able quite to coincide with one's being here and now, it also means the inability to live anywhere else "but" in the here and now. Finitude means embeddedness, the impossibility of ever being otherwise than at a specific place and time, *en situation*, in a specific set of circumstances that cannot be discounted or set aside as merely incidental' (p. 38).

'je' soon grapples with an antithetical need: 'supposer un commencement à mon séjour ici, ne serait-ce pour la commodité du récit' (*I* p. 14). To suppose a starting point, we must have recourse to figures issuing from outside the temporality of *L'Innommable*. Paradoxically, Beckett's assumption of 'cette putain de première personne' (*I* p. 93), that is, his use of the first person from *Premier amour* to *Nouvelles et textes pour rien*,[21] also involves a breakdown or what Trezise calls a 'dispossession' of the *cogito*:[22] analepses and prolepses, the means by which the 'je' of *L'Innommable* tries to establish origins and endings, in practice disconnect thinking from being, voicing instead the stories of others. In a passage which evokes the language of Meillassoux in *Après la finitude*, Gontarski directly links the disembodied voice in Beckett to the disconnect between thought and being:[23]

> The untethered, thereless voice, in all its conflicting mysteries, is the means, almost a method, of getting at thought's flow, thought's thinking itself into an existence, beyond a thinker, that is, beyond anything but a trace of the Cartesian *cogito*, of consciousness as being and becoming, through, to borrow Derrida's neologism, *différance*, a process of movement, deferral and change, of differentiation, say, with neither genesis nor terminus.[24]

In thinking toward thought 'beyond a thinker', the 'je' morphs through analepses and prolepses into the present tenses of others (before each of these are negated), and finally into voice, that mechanism of 'différance' through which the 'je' cannot but encounter alterity. Beyond thought, voice has little to enunciate but that 'trace of the Cartesian *cogito*' of which Gontarski writes, carrying on to mark its persistence after ontology and epistemology are 'finished'.

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[21] See Trezise, *Into the Breach*, p. 4, referring to *Premier amour* (Paris: Minuit, 1970), and *Nouvelles et textes pour rien* (Paris: Minuit, 1958).
[22] Trezise, *Into the Breach*, p. 32. See also 'This dispossession [of subjectivity itself], this involvement with an outside already within is what Deleuze, after Bataille, has called a *felûre* or breach. And it is into the breach that Samuel Beckett writes' (p. 33).
[23] Meillassoux, *Après la finitude*: 'nous devons saisir comment la pensée peut accéder à […] un être si bien *délié* […] si bien séparé de la pensée, qu'il s'offre à nous comme non-relatif à nous – capable d'exister que nous existions ou non' (p. 51).
[24] S. E. Gontarski, *Beckett Matters: Essays on Beckett's Late Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), p. 13.

Begam stresses that the novel is 'preeminently an epistemological genre' for Beckett.[25] To advance his argument, he references Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* to the effect that '[m]odern realism [...] begins from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses: it has its origins in Descartes and Locke [...]',[26] while Begam himself adds that 'the basic situation in the *Discourse* – a man alone in a room, thinking – is the basic situation in much of the pentalogy.'[27] *L'Innommable* indeed features a consciousness, but to make the rest of Begam's assertion work in relation to Beckett, we would have to add quotation marks around 'man', 'alone', 'in a room', and 'thinking', since none of these terms is clearly established in the final Trilogy text.[28] The position of the 'je' in *L'Innommable* is as fixed as that of Rodin's *Le Penseur*: 'j'ai toujours été assis à cette même place, les mains sur les genoux, regardant devant moi [...] Les larmes ruissellent le long de mes joues sans que j'éprouve le besoin de cligner les yeux' (*I* p. 11). Immobile, the narrator's capacity to gather knowledge via the senses, Cartesian- or Kantian-style, is limited: 'Des organes, un dehors, c'est facile à imaginer, d'autres, un Dieu [...]' (*I* p. 31). The statuesque 'je', surrounded by an indeterminate space which can be deemed neither void nor plenum,[29] seems even more remote from the time of possible action

[25] Begam, *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity*, p. 28. See where Begam suggests that the 'pentalogy' of novels including *Murphy* and *Watt* conceives of a '"lapsarian epistemology," a retelling of the story of the fall as a loss of subject-object unity' (p. 10).
[26] Ibid, p. 28, directly quoting Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 12.
[27] Begam, *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity*, pp. 28-29. He cites Hugh Kenner, *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), to the effect that 'Beckett would seem to be the first to have read the *Discours de la Méthode* as what it is, a work of fiction' (p. 28).
[28] See Hill, *In Different Words*, p. 56, and *L'Innommable* itself: 'pas d'êtres humains ici, ou, s'il y en a, ils ont fini de crier' (*I* p. 15).
[29] 'Pour tirer cette question au clair j'aurais besoin d'un bâton ainsi que des moyens de m'en servir, celui-là étant peu de chose en l'absence de ceux-ci, et inversement. J'aurais besoin aussi, je le note en passant, de participes futurs et conditionnels. Alors je le lancerais, tel un javelot, droit devant moi, et ce qui me cerne de si près et m'empêche de voir, je saurais si c'est du vide toujours, ou si c'est du plein, selon le bruit que j'entendais' (*I* p. 23).

than Malone of *Malone meurt*, who at least wielded a pencil. Yet the 'je' possesses a strange agency: 'C'est moi qui écris, moi qui ne puis lever la main de mon genou. C'est moi qui pense, juste assez pour écrire, moi dont la tête est loin' (*I* p. 24). To make sense of these statements, we have to differentiate between the 'moi'(s) somehow. If both correspond to the narrator's present self, the statement is meaningless: one 'moi' is writing, one is immobile, one is thinking in order to write, while another's head is far away. I here propose a solution to the conundrum of the narrator's displaced consciousness: we can resolve (temporarily, at least) the epistemological challenge of how to grasp contradictory spatio-temporal statements through reading them as dia-chronic.

For Merleau-Ponty, in Wyschogrod's words, 'the body possesses a kind of natural diachronicity, carrying its past along with it and projecting itself into the future'.[30] Yet in the Trilogy, and in *L'Innommable* in particular, the body does not cohere sufficiently to carry the narrative of its past into its future. Due to the process of 'émiettement' detailed in Chapter Two, the body reaches a point of decomposition in *Malone meurt* from which there can be no recovery in the present tense. Since the fixed-in-place narrator insists 'je n'ai jamais été ailleurs' (*I* p. 18), the past must instead belong to another, who presumably possessed a body and the capacity to act: '[j]e suis, depuis que je suis, ici, mes apparitions ailleurs ayant été assurés par des tiers' (*I* p. 11). The 'je' must be content with using a 'minimum of mind'[31] not their own to effect recourse into the past, borrowing the bodies of others who stand in as 'placeholders'.[32] 'Beckett's poem 'neither' contains a couplet which illuminates how

[30] Wyschogrod, 'Towards a Postmodern Ethics', in Hoffman and Hornung, p. 57.
[31] Beckett, *The Unnamable* in *Samuel Beckett: The Grove Centenary Edition*, II: Novels, pp. 283-408 (p. 305). This unique expression in the English version is not translated literally in the French.
[32] I borrow this term from Critchley, *Very Little…Almost Nothing*, where he writes of 'the question of the "I" in Beckett and the continuous negotiation that it maintains with the "not I" in terms of the way

the 'cogito' could define itself through these 'placeholders': 'from impenetrable self to impenetrable unself/by way of neither'.[33] The lines might well describe how *L'Innommable* devises one 'unself' after another in a spiral of alterities which imperil the status of its initial 'je'.[34] From the outset, the narrator professes indifference to remaining oneself:[35] '[o]ui, c'est à souhaiter, finir est à souhaiter, finir serait merveilleux, qui que je sois, où que je sois' (*I* p. 26), the 'qui que' and 'où que' recalling the interrogatives which begin *L'Innommable*. Yet other characters or 'placeholders', including Malone, 'l'autre', Basile, Mahood, Worm, and other anachronistic figures from across Beckett's œuvre[36] might allow the narrator to

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the category of the subject is reduced from an ontological substance to a logical place-holder in Kant' (p. 169).

[33] See Beckett, 'neither', in *GCE*, IV:

'To and fro in shadow from inner to outershadow

from impenetrable self to impenetrable unself by way of neither

as between two lit refuges whose doors once neared gently close, once
turned away from gently part again

beckoned back and forth and turned away

heedless of the way, intent on the one gleam or the other

unheard footfalls only sound

till at last halt for good, absent for good from self and other

then no sound

then gently light unfading on that unheeded neither

unspeakable home' (p. 425).

[34] See Weller, *Language and Negativity*: 'The narrator begins by rejecting past metaphors for himself – Murpy, Watt, Mercier-Camier, Molloy, Moran, and Malone – before positing a series of new metaphors, each of which will be rejected [...] These metaphors include the figures of Basil, Mahood, Worm, a tympanum, an entirely linguistic entity, and an entirely alinguistic one – an abstract "wordless thing"' (pp. 108-9). See also Begam, *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity*: the premise of my chapter resonates with Begam's understanding of *différance* in Beckett, in that I envisage the self being deferred (like the narrator of *L'Innommable* delaying the hour of self-reflexive speech (*I* p. 29)) and differed through 'unselves'.

[35] See Lars Bernaerts and Dirk Van Hulle, 'Narrative Across Versions: Narratology Meets Genetic Criticism', *Poetics Today,* 34 (2013), 316-17, on the critical debate which reads *The Unnammable* either as a quest to 'express' the self, or to 'repudiate' it.

[36] See '[j]e ne suis, est-ce besoin de le dire, ni Murphy, ni Watt, ni Mercier, non, je ne veux plus les nommer, ni aucun des autres dont j'oublie jusqu'aux noms, qui m'ont dit que j'étais eux, que j'ai dû essayer d'être, par force, par frayeur, pour ne pas me reconnaître, aucun rapport' (*I* p. 65).

conform to the Kantian '[d]e nobis ipsis silemus, décidément ça aurait dû être ma devise' (*I* p. 71).[37]

By way of unselves: 'Me voilà loin, me voilà l'absent'

For Szafraniec, who reads Beckett from a Derridean point of view, Beckett is 'arguably the most "eventless" writer ever'.[38] *Histoire* indeed breaks down in the Trilogy as *récit* pursues what Beckett's famous letter to Axel Kaun calls a 'Literatur des Unworts'.[39] 'Unwording', a feature of 'linguistic negativism' as Weller identifies it, depends on a fluctuating dynamic in which the 'je' raises possible 'unselves' before dispelling those possibilities. The 'je', for instance, regards alterity as an essential precursor to narrative: '[j]e ne serai pas seul, les premiers temps [...] Je vais avoir de la compagnie. Pour commencer. Quelques pantins', but anticipates, '[j]e les supprimerai par la suite. Si je peux' (*I* p. 8). These pre- and post-ontological 'pantins', who eventually become the narrator's 'placeholders' (or 'vice-existers', as Beckett calls them in his own translation of *L'Innommable*),[40] are named to supplant the 'je' in *histoire* and thereby to explore narrative possibilities off-limits to the narrator. The evocation of one figure after another, all of which the narrator planned to negate ('supprimer') from the outset, recalls Blanchot's *La Part du feu* where the

[37] Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) have collated the following references by Beckett to 'de nobis ipsis silemus' among archival material, including two uses of the phrase among his personal letters, his pencil marking of this phrase in volume XI of Kant's work, the note in Beckett's own 'Whoroscope' Notebook: 'Bacon's "De nobis ipsis silemus" taken by Kant as epigraph to KRITIK der R.V' (referring to 'Whoroscope' Notebook, Beckett International Foundation, The University of Reading, UoR-MS3000, p. 441), and the phrase's reappearance in *L'Innommable*, cited in-text here (p. 138).
[38] Asja Szafraniec, *Beckett, Derrida, and the Event of Literature* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 22.
[39] See Beckett, 'Letter to Axel Kaun', in *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, I, p. 520. Translation: 'Literature of the unword'.
[40] See Beckett, *The Unnamable* in *GCE*, II: 'my next vice-exister will be a billy in the bowl' (p. 309). See also his French original, in which vice-exister becomes: 'mon prochain représentant en existence' (*I* p. 47).

author-philosopher writes that literature liberates by naming a fictive world, but therefore requires the negation of the whole (actual) world.[41] *L'Innommable*'s 'possibilité d'un débarras par voie de rencontre' entails naming alterities expressly in order to negate them: '[d]'abord salir, ensuite nettoyer' (*I* p. 22). To use Beckett's own metaphors, the narrator sullies the narrative with alterities, without whom there can be no start to narrative, but excavating the enclosure, skull ('l'intérieur de mon crâne lointain' (*I* p. 26)), or world of the text from these encumbering figures is always the objective, for they must be cleared out for the first-person narrative to end as first-person narrative.

By the point at which the 'je' of *L'Innommable* declares 'je n'ai besoin de rien savoir sur moi' and disclaims all past actions ('[j]e n'ai jamais désiré, ni cherché, ni subi, jamais rien connu de tout ça, jamais eu d'objets, jamais d'adversaires, jamais de sens, jamais de tête' (*I* p. 65)), we have already turned to other characters to fill in the gaps in the *histoire* of *L'Innommable*,[42] following Basile, Mahood, and Worm into the extratemporal tunnels leading away from the 'je'. Combined with the pledge 'je ne dirai plus moi' (*I* p. 113) and the constant retrojections by the 'je' into the past(s) of others from within a space of impossibility, the lack of narratable action on the part of the 'je' (except when borrowing another's body, consciousness, or voice), indicates

[41] See Blanchot, *La Part du feu*, on literature's negation of the whole world: the imaginary realm 'est le monde, saisi et réalisé dans son ensemble par la négation globale de toutes les réalités particulières qui s'y trouvent, par leur mise hors de jeu, leur absence, par la réalisation de cette absence elle-même, avec laquelle commence la création littéraire, qui se donne l'illusion, lorsqu'elle revient sur chaque chose et sur chaque être, de les créer, parce que maintenant elle les voit et les nomme à partir *du* tout, à partir de l'absence *de* tout, c'est-à-dire de rien' (p. 307).

[42] See Ian Maclachlan, *Marking Time: Derrida Blanchot Beckett des Forêts Klossowski Laporte* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), on Genette's narratological terms: 'The absence of a distinction established by narrative tense between the time of *histoire* and that of *narration* leads, in Genette's view, either, in the case of apparently objective narrative, to the eclipsing of *récit* in favour of *histoire* [...] or conversely, in the case of interior monologue, to the disappearance of *histoire* in favour of pure *récit*': 'effet déjà sensible chez Dujardin, et qui ne cesse de s'accentuer chez un Beckett, un Claude Simon, un Roger Laporte' (p. 61; citing Genette, *Figures III*, p. 231).

to us that the recurrence and invention of one figure after another is a deliberate strategy. Through these figures, the 'je' can declare 'me voilà loin, me voilà l'absent' (*I* p. 210) while continuing to narrate. From within the unsustainable temporality the 'je' occupies, there is only one possibility for narrative continuation and its eventual completion: seek out other pasts and futures ('essayer dans un autre présent, même si ce n'est pas encore le mien' (*I* p. 33)), each to be decided impossible in turn, before the narrator returns to self by way of multiple 'unselves' ('moi aussi j'ai le droit d'être reconnu impossible' (*I* p. 147)), in an embedded spiral of failed analeptic and proleptic selves.

'Cet intervalle vacillant': Malone et l'autre

H. Porter Abbott, in his study of what he calls the 'egregious gap' in Beckett, delves into the gap in *Malone meurt* in which Malone loses his pencil for two days. This gap is itself tucked within another gap, at the completion of which Malone's own 'vice-exister', his invented character Sapo, transforms into yet another, Macmann. Abbott asks: 'could this two-day gap be a wormhole from one universe to another, a kind of black hole, small but powerful enough to suck up sixty years from that other universe? Was Sapo lost in this two-day hole in the scene of narration?'[43] The sucking of characters or objects into a 'black hole' leading 'from one universe to another',[44] if not unique to intra-textual narrative in *Malone meurt*, might equally explain the analeptic reappearance of Malone and other anachronistic figures in *L'Innommable*. The jarring revelation which comes at the start of the final Trilogy

[43] H. Porter Abbott, 'Narrative', in *Palgrave Advances in Samuel Beckett Studies*, ed. by Lois Oppenheim (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 7-29 (p. 17).
[44] See 'au lieu de faire le joint […] et de me reprendre à l'endroit où ils m'avaient déposé, ils me cueillent loin de là, et sous un tout autre aspect, dans l'espoir peut-être de me faire accroire que je m'étais chargé de l'intervalle tout seul' (*I* p. 72).

text, that 'Malone est là [...] n'allant nulle part, ne venant de nulle part, Malone passe' (*I* p. 9; 11), marks the exit point of a secret passage through the Trilogy which we did not know was gaping open. If we consider the title of the work in which Malone is the eponymous character, his reappearance in *L'Innommable* may be read as a direct contradiction of the second Trilogy novel's presumed trajectory: Malone was not meant to survive beyond the end of his narrative.[45] The narrator of *L'Innommable* declares of Beckett's reappeared character '[d]e sa vivacité mortelle il ne reste que peu de traces' (*I* p. 9).[46] The proleptic 'il sera peu question de Malone, de qui il n'y a plus rien à attendre' (*I* p. 9) reinforces to us that this resurrected Malone is (at least in terms of his future fictive potential) not quite the same Malone as he was on the other side of the wormhole. What could the resurgence of the now voiceless Malone, ever more firmly barred from the world of action and its time of possibility in *L'Innommable* than he was in *Malone meurt*, mean for the ability of the final text's narrator to end the Trilogy?

To come to grips with the (apparently inexplicable) familiarity and contemporaneity between the final Trilogy text's narrator and the narrator of *Malone meurt*, we have to ask a version of Meillassoux's question: what is the meaning of dia-chronic statements in the Trilogy which involve Malone? Why does the narrator of *L'Innommable* know (of) Malone? Might the narrator be contemporaneous with Malone? Did the narrator invent Malone? Is Malone the author who has written the 'je' of *L'Innommable* into being? For Gibson, whose *Postmodernity, Ethics, and the Novel* centres on the 'distinctions between what is apparently known and what is

[45] But as the previous chapter on Beckett concluded, bodily endings do not always coincide with textual endings in the Trilogy.
[46] Malone carries little of himself into *L'Innommable* apart from his hat, by which the narrator recognises him, although the 'je' does reference the tenuous possibility that it might be Molloy wearing Malone's hat: 'Ne serait-ce pas plutôt Molloy?' (*I* p. 10).

presented as beyond the frame of narratorial knowledge', these questions about the mode of narration are 'the crucial ethical distinctions'.[47] Yet Beckett continually undercuts overthinking of this kind: spurning the inevitable generation of hypothetical responses by readers, he conspicuously fails to satiate the train of thought which tracks backward or forward from anachronistic appearances.

As one of these readers, I look to Blanchot's 'Le Mythe de Mallarmé' for guidance on the re-emergence of analeptic characters in literature:

> A quoi tend l'écriture? A nous libérer de ce qui est. Et ce qui est, c'est tout, mais c'est d'abord la présence des 'choses solides et prépondérantes' [...] Cette libération s'accomplit grâce à l'étrange possibilité que nous avons de créer du vide autour de nous, de mettre une distance entre nous et les choses.[48]

In the 'nominalistic irony' which for Beckett marks a stage along the way to a 'Literatur des Unworts',[49] we must first name what we wish to negate. 'Malone', along with the figure of 'l'autre', who intrudes shortly after Malone makes his appearance, headlines the series of 'placeholders' or 'vice-existers' in *L'Innommable*, named or written into being through the impulse to 'créer un vide autour de nous'. On my view, the respective passages of Malone and the other, as the first alterities to enter the world of *L'Innommable*'s narration, embody the trajectory of narratives via their vacillating orbits, signalling narrative interplay and repetition in the Trilogy.

Referencing the lines 'Malone, lui, paraît et disparaît avec une exactitude de mécanique, toujours à la même distance de moi, à la même vitesse, dans le même sens, dans la même attitude' (*I* p. 12) and 'il tourne [...] autour de moi, comme la

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[47] Gibson, *Postmodernity, Ethics and the Novel* includes 'differentiations between more or less "omniscient" narrators; between an "omniscient" third person narrator and one who professes only a limited or partial knowledge of the world narrated; between a third person narrator-character who is absent from the world narrated and one who is a character in the story he or she tells' (p. 26).
[48] Blanchot, *La Part du feu*, p. 46.
[49] Beckett, 'Letter to Axel Kaun', in *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, I, p. 520.

planète autour de son soleil' (*I* p. 13), Hill writes of 'planetary motion, with intersecting orbits and flat ellipses, and extremities converging at either end, rather like a purgatorial spiral [...] evoked quite explicitly at the beginning of *L'Innommable*.'[50] The spiral which Malone describes around the narrator suggests that the two will never come into contact, and that the narrator will never be able to self-liberate from Malone in the 'possibilité d'un débarras par voie de rencontre' (*I* p. 22). 'L'autre', by contrast to Malone, is more of an intersecter than an orbiter:

> L'autre vient droit sur moi. Il fait son entrée comme au travers de lourdes tentures, avance de quelque pas encore, me regarde, puis se retire à reculons. Ployé, il semble porter à bout de bras des objets pesants, je ne sais lesquels [...] Son regard, levé assez longuement vers moi, je le sens implorant, comme si je pouvais faire quelque chose pour lui. Autre impression, non moins fausse probablement: il m'apporte des présents et n'ose les donner. Il les remporte, ou bien il les lâche et ils disparaissent (*I* pp. 19-20).

Tellingly, the narrator is incapable of reading this other (as the 'non moins fausse probablement' indicates), or even differentiating them from their own self: '[d]ire que j'ai vu en lui, sinon moi, un pas vers moi' (*I* p. 99). When read with '[l]'autre vient droit sur moi', the repetition of 'pas' in 'un pas vers moi' enables us to infer an implicit negation within the other's movement toward the 'je', a phenomenon which Clark usefully clarifies: 'To say the word 'not' (*pas*) of anything is still to speak and to leave in language that trace or footprint (*pas*) of one's approach (through negation) to the other.'[51] While the revolving Malone may persist as an encumbering presence, 'l'autre', once invoked and called to approach, becomes synonymous in the 'pas vers moi' with a future disappearance into the 'vide'.

The 'je' tracks the movements of both 'Malone' and 'l'autre', wondering whether the

[50] Hill, *In Different Words*: 'The trilogy might be thought of more accurately as occupying a space which, to invert the scholastic definition of God, has its centre nowhere, and its circumference everywhere' (p. 58).
[51] Clark, p. 137.

'décalage' between the two will remain constant:

> J'ignore donc si j'aurais jamais l'avantage de les voir tous les deux ensemble. Mais j'incline à croire que oui. Car si je ne devais jamais les voir ensemble, il faudrait que devant moi Malone succède à l'autre, ou le précède, toujours dans les mêmes délais exactement. Non, je me trompe. Car le décalage peut très bien varier (et il me semble que c'est le cas) sans qu'il soit jamais supprimé tout à fait. Cet intervalle vacillant m'engage néanmoins à penser que mes deux fidèles se rencontreront un jour, se heurteront et peut-être se renverseront. J'ai dit qu'ici *tout se répète tôt ou tard,* non j'allais le dire, puis je me suis ravisé (*I* pp. 20-21) (my italics).

Expired literary character and unnamed figure ('l'autre' here parodying and counterposing the unnamed narrator in their anonymity) oscillate in moving closer, then further away from each other in an imagined 'intervalle vacillant', threatening to trespass into each other's textual space before withdrawing: the 'visite' of 'l'autre', the 'je' tells us, 'n'a jamais coïncidé, jusqu'à présent, avec le passage de Malone' (*I* p. 20). Tension in this spatial representation of the past recurring in the narrator's present works off the prospect of encounter through repetition (if 'tout se répète tôt ou tard'), or through collision: '[e]t je serai peut-être débarrassé de Malone et de l'autre, non pas qu'ils me dérangent, le jour où je les verrai ensemble, c'est-à-dire en collision' (*I* p. 21). Rather than the narratological 'redondance' of repetition, such a 'collision' is essential if the 'je' is to create a void around the self, yet the spatio-temporal indeterminacy of the interval between the two holds us back from determining whether 'Malone et l'autre' will ever materialise within the same narrative moment.

In a naming-negating vacillation which relies on literature's power of liberation, the metanarrative invocations of this first 'pseudo-couple' (*I* p. 16), followed by the invocations of 'Basile et consorts', Mahood and Worm, strive toward an ultimate unwriting of the narrator's others. The 'intervalle vacillant' between the characters' orbits (where those orbits symbolise narrative trajectories) dramatises literature's

ability to 'créer du vide autour de nous'[52] without ever actualising this power of negation.[53] Though an anonymous alterity – perhaps meant to represent, covertly, the 'je' of *L'Innommable* – continually threatens to infringe on Malone's narrative terrain, and vice versa, the non-coincidence of their narratives means that we may not see the narrator's maxim '[d]'abord salir, ensuite nettoyer' fulfilled. Neither the collision of their two narratives, nor a redundant repeat of both is confirmed to occur. Never made present within the same moment, these initially proposed vice-existers exist only as a foretaste of deliverance, evoking that coveted 'possibilité d'un débarras par voie de rencontre' (*I* p. 22).

'Ailleurs alors': Basile, consorts, 'they'

Trezise, in his already-cited list of the twentieth century's attempts to posit an 'intersubjective alterity', lists Heidegger's *das Man*, ('the anonymous, public "they"'), along with the 'voice(s) haunting the subject(s) of Beckett's trilogy'.[54] In the Trilogy, these voice(s) coexist, even commingle with an unnamed, indeterminate 'they'.[55] 'They' recall simultaneously the unspecific totalitarian forces ('innombrables agents du malin' (*M* p. 13) hiding in the shadows of *Molloy*); the equally totalitarian forces imposing Enlightenment reason on the 'je';[56] and the generic 'they', the pronoun that, when plural, can be used to encompass all alterity in one neat gesture, deflecting responsibility and repercussions. In *L'Innommable*, the unnamed, myriad

[52] Blanchot, *La Part du feu*, p. 46.
[53] The narrator does eventually declare everyone gone at a certain point ('Je remarque une chose, les autres ont complètement disparu' (*I* p. 189)), but like any other negation in Beckett, the declaration carries with it an implicit threat of its reversal.
[54] Trezise, *Into the Breach*, p. 66.
[55] The anonymity of this 'ils' pairs with that of the 'je' and the 'autre' described above.
[56] See 'Ce sont eux aussi qui m'ont appris à compter, à raisonner' (*I* p. 19) and 'Qu'on me demande l'impossible, je veux bien, que pourrait-on me demander d'autre? Mais l'absurde. A moi qu'ils ont réduit à la raison' (*I* p. 85).

alterities implicit in 'they' take the form of a set of people who have allegedly imparted knowledge to the narrator via inconceivable means: '[c]e qui me laisse perplexe, c'est de devoir ces connaissances à des gens avec qui je n'ai jamais pu entrer en communication' (*I* p. 18). 'They' at once occupy a space of authority (requiring a 'pensum' from the narrator (*I* p. 39)), of instruction (inflicting the notion of time on the narrator (*I* p. 64)), and of obscure generality ('Ils m'en ont raconté sur les hommes' (*I* p. 17)). Equipped with knowledge of the narrator's extratemporal past self (for example, that the narrator's eyes used to close (*I* p. 23)), 'they' retain awareness of a narratorial identity which seems to precede the narrator's consciousness, one conflated with Molloy's, since the narrator suggests 'they' have knowledge of his mother: '[c]'était un de leurs sujets préférés' (*I* p. 18). Their knowledge is necessary if the 'je' is to establish any of the 'fictions of concord'[57] canvassed in Chapter Two. 'They', crucially, are also the means by which Beckett accomplishes a specific type of homodiegetic, external analepsis in *L'Innommable*:[58] flashbacks informing the narrator of a past life 'dans la lumière' (*I* p. 17), supposedly outside the temporality of the text. In other words, 'they' claim to know the true *histoire* of *L'Innommable*, but the problem is that the narrator cannot make their knowledge of this backstory coincide with the exigencies of ongoing *narration*.

Unlike '[c]es Murphy, Molloy et autres Malone' (*I* p. 28), 'they' are not intrinsically analeptic figures, but rather tap into the past through powers of memory which the 'je' does not share:

> Ils m'en ont raconté sur les hommes, sur la lumière. Je n'ai pas voulu les croire. N'empêche qu'il m'en est resté. Mais où, quand, par quelle voie, me suis-je entretenu avec ces messieurs? Sont-ils venus me déranger ici? Non, ici

[57] Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p. 59.
[58] See Genette, *Figures III*, where he describes internal and external analepses (pp. 90-91).

> personne ne m'a jamais dérangé. Ailleurs alors. Mais je n'ai jamais été ailleurs (*I* pp. 17-18).

Despite the attempts of these impersonal figures to inculcate the narrator with the *histoire* of a time 'ailleurs', the narrator has no ability to think this moment in the past, nor to *think themselves elsewhere*, and thus no ability to incorporate *histoire* into the present act of *narration*: 'Pourquoi me suis-je fait représenter parmi les hommes, dans la lumière? Il me semble que je n'y étais pour rien. Passons' (*I* p. 17). This severance of being from thought marks the reverse of the most common type of anachrony in the Trilogy, wherein the narrator thinks back to a moment, then realises the 'je' could never have *been* there, so should not be thinking it, thus abruptly self-corrects. 'They' offer direct contradiction of the narrator's repeated 'je n'ai jamais été ailleurs, quelque incertain que soit l'avenir' (*I* p. 25), prompting us to question the authority of narration over hearsay in *L'Innommable*. We derive second-hand knowledge in the Trilogy from homodiegetic external analepsis (that is, the words 'they' utter, focalised through and reported by the narrator): but whether this past existence of the 'je' outside the bounds of the text is forgotten, never known, or never actualised, 'they' nonetheless represent the summit of all epistemological achievement beyond the narrator's current consciousness. The problem, though, is that enlightenment as to an elsewhere remains encapsulated within 'them', and never within the narrator: 'ici c'est mon seul ailleurs' (*I* p. 193). As a result of this unbridgeable gap, the origins and ends 'they' offer cannot be made coterminous with the act of narration.

The concept of 'ailleurs' (where this elsewhere is the scene of the narrator's past self) is recessed chiefly within the figure of Basile. The first named, and purportedly only

new creation of *L'Innommable* by that point in the narrative, Basile comes to the forefront of the otherwise faceless group 'they' constitute, taking on authorial status:

> Ils étaient quatre ou cinq à me harceler, sous le prétexte de me faire leur rapport. L'un d'eux en particulier, de nom Basile je crois, m'inspirait d'une forte répugnance. Sans ouvrir la bouche, rien qu'en me fixant avec ses yeux éteints d'avoir tant vu, il me rendait chaque fois un peu plus tel qu'il me voulait. Tapi dans les ténèbres, me regarde-t-il encore? Usurpe-t-il encore mon nom, celui qu'ils m'ont collé, dans leur siècle, patient, de saison en saison? (*I* p. 19).

Connor surmises that Basile, less character than metaphor, has been invented 'to designate all those words, ideas, feelings and concepts which seem to come from outside the [narrator's] real, authentic self',[59] only to be undercut as fiction later on:

> Et Basile et consorts? Inexistants, inventés pour expliquer je ne sais plus quoi. Ah oui. Mensonges que tout ça. Dieu et les hommes, le jour et la nature, les élans du cœur et le moyen de comprendre, lâchement je les ai inventés, sans l'aide de personne, puisqu'il n'y a personne, pour retarder l'heure de parler de moi. Il n'en sera plus question (*I* p. 29).

Basile inspires 'répugnance' precisely because that of which he is emblematic is intolerable: the knowledge of the narrator's past life, in the light, preceding the narrator's consciousness, can only clash with the temporality of the text as the 'je' has established it up to the point of Basile's appearance. The premise of the act of narration can never coincide with this new ante-*histoire* 'they' present, which drifts too temptingly into the domain of realist fiction as a kind of Bildungsroman, becoming an all too plausible story of the narrator's impossible formative time.

In an apparent last-ditch attempt to unify the Trilogy narrative under a single Dantean punishment, the anonymous 'they' are accused of having set the 'je' a pensum to discharge:[60] 'On m'a donné un pensum, à ma naissance peut-être, pour

[59] Connor, *Repetition, Theory, and Text*, p. 74.
[60] Nadia Louar, 'Beckett's Bodies in the Trilogy, or Life as a Pensum', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 27 (2018), 69-82: They are 'responsible for the relentless "penance", "lesson", "indictment", "pensum" and "debts" inflicted on the recalcitrant narrators and their undisciplined bodies' (p. 76). See also

me punir d'être né peut-être, ou sans raison spéciale, parce qu'on ne m'aime pas, et j'ai oublié en quoi il consiste. Mais me l'a-t-on jamais spécifié?' (*I* p. 39). As the 'je' of *L'Innommable* is not the only protagonist of the three novels obliged to write, Nadia Louar reads the whole Trilogy as a pensum: '[t]he pensum, which subsumes all obligations in the Trilogy, is crucial to the fate of the Beckettian body. The concept of life as a pensum to be worked off echoes throughout the entire corpus.'[61] The idea of a pensum echoes the task of Molloy, who must write and have the papers collected, yet who remains indifferent to whether the gaps (and thus markings) on the page are obliterated (speculating 'qu'on ferait mieux, enfin aussi bien, d'effacer les textes que de noircir les marges, de les boucher jusqu'à ce que tout soit blanc et lisse et que la connerie prenne son vrai visage, un non-sens cul et sans issue' (*M* p. 18)). *L'Innommable* suddenly reintroduces the Trilogy's earlier concept of 'le maître':

> Quand tout se taira, quand tout s'arrêtera, c'est que les mots auront été dits, ceux qu'il importait de dire, on n'aura pas besoin de savoir lesquels, on ne pourra pas savoir lesquels, ils seront là quelque part, dans le tas, dans le flot, pas forcément les derniers, il faut qu'ils soient avalisés par qui de droit, ça prend du temps, il est loin, qui de droit, c'est le maître, on lui apporte le procès-verbal [...] (*I* p. 138).

It does not matter which words are used, nor which form the obligation to write takes. The report of Molloy becomes a story in Moran's hands, a 'leçon' initially in *L'Innommable*, then a pensum, and finally a 'procès-verbal', in a circle which rejoins its origin. The pensum cannot be discharged because the circle is ongoing, and also because the narrators are obliged to write what cannot be written. If the pensum

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Gontarski, 'A Sense of Unending: Samuel Beckett's Eschatological Turn', *Samuel Beckett Today: Aujourd'hui,* 21 (2010), 135-49, where he identifies Beckett's knowledge of Schopenhauer surfacing in the use of the word 'pensum': 'In between fictive, mythologized beginnings and inaccessible ends is unrelieved travail, borne through the fiction of punishment, life as pensum, Samuel Beckett's metaphor for the "task" that damns the life of the body' (p. 142), reminding us that Beckett's *Proust*, in *GCE*, IV*,* pp. 511-54 (p. 554) concludes with its final word ('defunctus') evoking Arthur Schopenhauer's 'Das Leben ist ein Pensum zum Abarbeiten: in diesem Sinne is defunctus ein schöner Ausdruck'. See Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, trans. by E.F.J. Payne, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1974; repr. 2000) II: 'Life is a task to be worked off; in this sense *defunctus* is a fine expression' (p. 300); 'defunctus' here means 'One who has finished with the business of life' (p. 300n4).

[61] Louar, 'Life as a Pensum', p. 76.

were successfully discharged, perhaps the outcome would be a reunification of *histoire* and *discours*, but instead the pensum is taken up at various points by different Trilogy individuals, truncated, and discontinued in an inevitable cycle of orbiting and intersecting characters. We do not succeed in moving from novel to novel, nor from level to level, by completion of one pensum after another, since we know from *Molloy* and *Malone meurt* that the edges of *histoire*, *discours*, and *narration* do not map onto each other: the non-coincidence of the 'rapport' which various 'they' figures demand across the Trilogy means that the 'je' cannot look to the pensum to provide definition of a past self.

The narrator's naming of a semi-religious, impersonal 'they' enables 'concord' fictions to be postulated within the text, such as the possibility of discharging a pensum and the narrator thus being released from obligation, able to 'dire je', and move toward the end of narration. Yet the concord fictions invoked by 'them' are short-lived, or soon negated. Both the past of the narrator and the possibility of absolution are withdrawn, as 'they' morph into an off-hand reference to an off-limits alterity going through its own process of 'différance' throughout the Trilogy. The potential for the analepses 'they' induce to explain Molloy's or Moran's pasts do little to explain the narrator's present. As 'unselves' through which the narrator attempts to move toward an 'impenetrable self', 'they' are futile: 'they' might know the *histoire* of the 'je', but none of them can definitively inflict the notion of time on the narrator, or make the 'pre-originary' interlude of the 'je' '*they*' know coincide with present reality. Being elsewhere based on hearsay cannot be reconciled with the imperative of thinking in the here and now: an imperative which only strengthens as 'they' fade away, and Mahood and Worm come to the fore.

‘Pas à mon sujet’: Mahood, Worm, and tentative heterodiegesis

> […] it is in fact the realm of the given, or the so-called self-evident, that is most intractable to human thought. We find it almost impossible to grasp or coincide with this realm of the given, the incontinently-renewable once-and-for-allness of every instant, the statute of limitations of every project. Our apprehension skeeters off the actual into whatever might prolong or retard it, making what shift we can, through fantasy, religion, literature, commerce, to remit its finitude.
>
> Connor, ‘Beckett’s Radical Finitude’ (p. 46)

When the narrative of ‘ailleurs’ takes root, the narrative of *now* slips away. The introduction of Mahood, who replaces Basile just as the latter ‘prend de l’importance’ (*I* p. 37), and Worm, who will act both as substitute and foil for Mahood, marks the segment of *L’Innommable* which repeats the digressive-ness of *Malone meurt*. The problem of infinitude in Beckett is not just Gadda’s dilemma of not being able to say all – ‘tout mentionner’, as Molloy phrases it – it is that ‘même en ne mentionnant que quelques-unes des circonstances en présence, on n’en finit pas davantage’ (*M* p. 66). This part of the Trilogy actualises the ‘intractab[ility]’ of the finite or given, as Connor phrases it.[62] As Mahood’s anecdotes infiltrate the narrative begun by the ‘je’, the stories of this new figure (and Worm after him) consume narrative duration, delaying ‘l’heure de parler de moi’ (*I* p. 29) and thus the possibility of ending the first-person narrative. Apart from consuming the narrator’s time, the ostensibly heterodiegetic stories of Mahood and Worm risk being read as homodiegetic analepses due to their framing (and continual infiltration) by the ‘je’, so that we struggle to determine whether these secondary narratives should be read as inside or outside the diegesis. The potential for digression to absorb the entire narrative, as well as for homodiegetic analepsis to irrupt within a purportedly heterodiegetic

[62] See also Critchley, *Very Little…Almost Nothing*, who writes repeatedly of the ‘ungraspability of finitude’ or of the ‘finite’: at p. 31, p. 33, and p. 162.

story, has ramifications for the feasibility of an 'impenetrable unself',[63] or at least a coherent self who might end all stories: instead, the self is composed (or to use the word from my previous Beckett chapter, *decomposed*) by stories which are penetrable, fugitive, and indeterminate.

The 'je' of *L'Innommable* succumbs to a paradox when it comes to falling silent:

> Ces Murphy, Molloy et autres Malone, je n'en suis pas dupe. Ils m'ont fait perdre mon temps, rater ma peine, en me permettant de parler d'eux, quand il fallait parler seulement de moi, afin de pouvoir me taire. Mais je viens de dire que j'ai parlé de moi, que je suis en train de parler de moi. Je m'en fous de ce que je viens de dire. C'est maintenant que je vais parler de moi, pour la première fois (*I* p. 28).

The narrator here accomplishes what seems to be an external, homodiegetic analepsis, imagining that they themselves wrote Murphy, Molloy, Malone, and others into being, and that this writing or speaking of other characters prevented the narrator from speaking about themselves, thus postponing the end of their own speech. Yet this is a vicious cycle, as Bernaerts and Van Hulle note: '[w]henever the nameless narrator tries to talk about himself, he is driven to create a new character instead.'[64] Through these acts of mini-authorial creation, the Trilogy's spiral of embedded narratives becomes endless, and we can envisage its perpetuation beyond the pages of *L'Innommable* into a post-textual zone. The stories associated with Mahood and Worm, two figures supposedly invented by the narrator but not always within the control of the 'je', epitomise this spiral, undermining the intial dramatic situation we encountered at the start of *L'Innommable*. To Begam's comment that Mahood represents the time 'before the end of man', and Worm denotes that 'beyond

[63] Beckett, 'neither', in *GCE*, IV.
[64] Bernaerts and Van Hulle, 'Narrative Across Versions': 'In other words, the nameless narrator is both narrator and narrated, and yet in neither of these capacities can he be regarded as "the subject" in answer to the question "But what then is the subject" […], because he merely substitutes for the narrator's self-reference' (p. 318).

the end of man',[65] I might add that the 'je', reprising the role of the 'tympanum',[66] represents the in-between time, the *process* of ending 'man'. We might, therefore, treat Mahood as a synecdochic figure for analepsis, and Worm as a proleptic figure. Associated with Kantian noumena and deprived of a phenomenal manifestation, Worm connotes the 'beyond' of thought: '[n]e sentant rien, ne sachant rien, il existe pourtant, mais pas pour lui, pour les hommes, ce sont les hommes qui le conçoivent et qui disent, Worm est là, puisque nous le concevons, comme s'il ne pouvait y avoir d'existence que conçue' (*I* p. 99). Sliding as they do inside and outside the diegesis, the before-during-and-after stories associated with Mahood, Worm, and the 'je' make it impossible to define that diegesis's boundaries.

Mahood, the character who replaces Basile, is not just a character invented by the narrator, as Rónán McDonald reminds us:

> [...] each time [the narrator] summons a character or a story his own identity quickly blurs into that of his creation, so that Mahood is at first a 'delegate' but then a part of himself. When he tells a story of Mahood's successor, stuck in a jar below a restaurant menu, he is both a character in a story and another description of the narrator's condition, told in the present-tense first person.[67]

This doubling of dramatic situation between character and narrator elicits temporal confusion if we consider the story in which the 'je' takes themselves for Mahood: 'A l'instant dont je parle, où je me suis pris pour Mahood, je devais être en train de boucler le tour du monde, je n'en avais peut-être plus que pour quelques siècles' (*I* p. 51). The narrator inserts themselves into Mahood's Odyssean return from a world

[65] Begam, *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity*, p. 164.
[66] See also Derrida, 'Tympan', in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), pp. i-xxv: 'On sait que la membrane du tympan, cloison mince et transparente, séparant le conduit auriculaire de l'oreille moyenne (la *caisse*), est tendue obliquement (*loxôs*). Obliquement de haut en bas, de dehors en dedans et d'avant en arrière' (pp. vi-vii).
[67] McDonald, *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 103, with whom Bernaerts and Van Hulle, 'Narrative Across Versions', engage (p. 312).

tour, following him to 'une sorte de cour ou de préau', in the centre of which there is a 'miniscule rotonde, sans fenêtres, mais bien pourvue de meurtrières' in which Mahood's 'chers absents', eleven or so family members, wait for him to draw near (*I* pp. 51-52). Mahood toils to move closer to them, but instead merely orbits ('moi je tournais à l'extérieur, eux ils tournaient à l'intérieur' (*I* p. 52)). Suddenly, the story inverts in that the 'je' (at this moment subject, rather than heterodiegetic narrator of the story) is informed by Mahood that the narrator's family members have died, carried off by sausage poisoning. After this revelation the narrator (now wholly identifying neither with Mahood nor with the 'je') ends up within the enclosure, trampling upon their decomposing remains: 'j'y parachève mes girations, en piétinant les restes méconnaissables des miens, à qui le visage, à qui le ventre, selon le hasard de leur distribution, et en y enfonçant les bouts de mes béquilles, à l'arrivée comme au départ' (*I* p. 61). Revitalising Molloy and Malone, users of crutches, in the process, four or more characters collapse into the one consciousness, and we do not know what to call the one who is experiencing this traumatic episode.

Though we are warned, '[c]eci a tout l'air d'une anecdote de Mahood. Et pourtant non, toutes les histoires de Mahood étaient sur moi' (*I* p. 43), the narrator later negates, or at least problematises, this insistence on interchangeability with Mahood. Throughout the ordeal of Mahood's return to the 'cour' we are never allowed to forget that Mahood is speaking, albeit in the voice of another who frames his assertions and who can never be lost from the page, not even when naming another: 'je cite Mahood' (*I* p. 55), 'C'est toujours Mahood qui parle…' (*I* p. 56), 'si Mahood disait vrai' (*I* p. 59). If not for these (doubtful) assurances, we might take the story at hand for a homodiegetic, external analepsis concerning the past of the 'je' before the narrator begins on the present story. Yet if the story actually concerns Mahood, we are instead

dealing with a heterodiegetic analepsis (whether internal or external). The mise-en-scène of the anecdote involving the deceased family somewhat resembles that of the narrator's already-canvassed situation in *L'Innommable*, but also recalls the first two Trilogy texts. The 'I' of the Odyssean narrative journeys like Molloy, with no rewarding homecoming, while the 'I' who ends up inside the jar is reminiscent of Molloy replacing his mother in his mother's room, as well as manifold other replacements across the Trilogy. Like Malone (and possibly other familial figures) who orbit the 'je', the 'I' is never able to come closer, so that the centrality of the narrator in this final 'Trilogy' text, orbited by a multitude of created figures, would seem to invert the rotunda situation whereby one figure orbits a number who are contained within.

The story in which Mahood begins to morph into Worm follows suit in echoing earlier Trilogy texts. The anecdote in which the narrator is plucked like a flower, stuffed in a jar with a menu attached, facing an abattoir, to supplicate passers-by: 'Piqué, à la manière d'une gerbe, dans une jarre profonde, dont les bords m'arrivent jusqu'à la bouche, au bord d'une rue peu passante aux abords des abattoirs, je suis au repos, enfin' (*I* p. 67) reminds us of the supplications, helplessness, and immobility of Molloy. This figure, incapable of moving beyond their enclosure, likewise recalls the monadic experiences of Malone, while Gontarski speculates that Beckett's '*Play* and *Not I* may emerge from the same jar':[68] a rather deep jar, from which we can envisage the spiral of replacement extending proleptically beyond this text. Beckett's recycling of dramatic situations ensures that differentiating possible focalisers is

[68] Gontarski, 'A Sense of Unending', p. 144.

impossible, while aligning past with Mahood, present with the unnamed narrator, and future with Worm becomes unthinkable too.

'Maintenant je m'entends dire que c'est la voix de Worm qui commence [...] Croient-ils que je crois que c'est moi qui parle ?' (*I* p. 98), muses the 'je', but if the narrator has invented Worm (and Mahood), as the 'je' claims to have done, how can the 'je' profess to be speaking? Only if the heterodiegesis is actually homodiegesis, or overlaps with it. The effect of repetition within diegeses in *L'Innommable* is neither 'redondance', nor straightforward 'collision': rather, in a collapsing of consciousnesses, the 'je' cannot figure out which stories have already been told, nor which words to use. The narrator cannot therefore use these stories to construct an 'impenetrable self' with which to continue on to death (where death is the end of speech, since, as we acknowledged with Weller in Chapter Two, 'one has to remain oneself in order to die').[69] The problem is that the narratives of Mahood and Worm delay time-ending narratives and prohibit the diegesis's possible coincidence with the narrator. We might say that the 'intractability of the given', as Connor describes it, is exacerbated in the Trilogy by unwieldy storytelling: narrators of uncertain identity telling stories of uncertain focalisation and frequency. And we might also pause to note that thinking the unthinkable also results in unthinking the thinkable. Thinking at all in *L'Innommable* means that the moment of 'now' and the cogito occupying it are lost in what we might (only tentatively) call heterodiegesis, carrying us away from the given.

[69] Weller, *A Taste for the Negative*, p. 102.

'Je suis le tympan': nowhere to think, nowhere to be

After Mahood and Worm have had their storytelling time, and *L'Innommable* begins to emit what might be its 'derniers mots, les vrais derniers, ou ce sont les murmures, ça va être les murmures' (*I* p. 212),[70] the voice initially introduced as 'pas la mienne, mais qui ne peut être que la mienne' (*I* p. 34) strips away the figures which the 'je' has invented, and seizes control of the narrative. Enacting the principle that even in the face of impossibility of narrative continuation,[71] 'il faut que le discours se fasse' (*I* p. 12), this voice remains after the 'unselves' of 'Malone et l'autre', 'Basile et consorts', Mahood and Worm are refused as possibility. The imperative here recalls Blanchot's famous interpretation of *L'Innommable*, which focuses on the fact that the 'je' is 'obligé de parler' (*I* p. 8), an obligation innate in 'expérience vécue sous la menace de l'impersonnel'.[72] What is this implicit threat? The impersonal – identifiable with no one, temporally ambiguous, and located in 'cette voix qui m'a dénaturé' (*I* p. 107) – perhaps menaces us because, independent of both being and thought, it disconnects our sense of ontological finitude from that of our epistemological finitude.

Self-revisions further confound us in this disconnect. In the epanorthosis characterising *L'Innommable*, the 'voix' itself is eventually deconstructed *as* voice: '[c]ette voix qui parle […] en est-elle une?' (*I* p. 34). Yet as the narrative rhythm of *L'Innommable* accelerates, we cannot linger long enough to ponder that question:

[70] We might conceive of these 'murmures' as a non-verbal expression of the movement of dying resembling the 'rantolo' (*CD* p. 191) in Gadda's *La cognizione*.
[71] Critchley, *Very Little…Almost Nothing*, sees the voice itself as emblematic of impossibility, or the 'impossible temporality of *le mourir* in distinction from *la mort*, the time of the possible' (p. 189).
[72] Blanchot, 'Où maintenant? Qui maintenant?', in *Le Livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), pp. 256-64 (p. 259).

thought cannot continue to exist in the midst of this speech to determine whether the voice is indeed a voice. Speech empties of the thinker, so that at least one project of the narrator, announced at the beginning of the text, is fulfilled: 'Non, je ne dois pas essayer de penser. Dire simplement ce qu'il en est, c'est préférable' (*I* p. 21). Begam's concept of each new figure in the Trilogy as a 'locutor' who mindlessly takes up speech, or passes it on, accords with the idea of speech separated from thought, also finding expression in Blanchot's identification of 'une parole neutre qui se parle seul', uninhibited by the 'je', and moving from mouth to mouth in the Trilogy.[73] Blanchot's and Begam's emphasis on the itinerancy of this voice meanwhile supports Connor's concept of a

> congenital transitionality which prevents the voice in *The Unnamable* from ever being satisfied with where it is in consciousness, language or story. It must always inhabit a 'space' which is a 'space between', always inside and outside its stories, signifier and signified, gaze and spectacle, original and copy, between the terms of all the other metaphorical polarities which are used to represent representation.[74]

It is to this possible 'space between', the 'tympanum' between world and thought, vibrating with voice, which I now turn, elaborating an argument developed across both my chapters on Beckett: that the texts bear witness to Beckett's decomposition or 'émiettement' of the space of possibility, uttering the unfinished movement of their retraction into nothing.

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[73] See ibid. Begam, *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity*, explains: '[t]he locutor should not, in other words, be thought of as a character so much as a depersonalized function, a locus or site from which discourse emanates [...] the locutor has no fixed residence [...] it carries on a kind of itinerant discourse, a locution without a location [...] unlike a narrator, a locutor may speak with Basil's voice in one breath and Mahood's in the next' (p. 159). In a footnote, Begam clarifies that Fritz Senn uses 'dislocution' 'as a catchall term to describe "all manner of metamorphoses, switches, transfers, displacements" [...] in Joyce's work' (p. 215): see Senn, *Joyce's Dislocutions: Essays on Reading as Translation*, ed. by John Paul Riquelme (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984); Begam specifying that his own 'use of the term is meant to have a narrower focus, one that relates the operations of *différance* to narrative' (p. 215). See also Gontarski, *Beckett Matters*: 'Beckett's voices with their own volition and detached from substance, from materiality, from presence, often function as characters, as others, nameless, ghostly, hostile. It is Beckett's rupture of the Cartesian foundation of subjectivity, "I am"' (pp. 20-21).

[74] Connor, *Repetition, Theory and Text*, p. 77.

Identifying with the in-betweenness of the 'tympan' means having thought on one side, and being on the other:

> […] c'est peut-être ça que je suis, la chose qui divise le monde en deux, d'une part le dehors, de l'autre le dedans, ça peut être mince comme une lame, je ne suis ni d'un côté ni de l'autre, je suis au milieu, je suis la cloison, j'ai deux faces et pas d'épaisseur, c'est peut-être ça que je sens, je me sens qui vibre, je suis le tympan, d'un côté c'est le crâne, de l'autre le monde […] (*I* p. 160).

The image of the 'tympanum' voices the story of having nowhere to be, and nowhere to think. Before *L'Innommable* ends, we are offered one final possibility of digression outside the diegesis. As the novel approaches its final, paradoxical words, the narrator tells the story of lovers (*I* pp. 199-200). The door which separates, like the tympan, 'd'une part le dehors, de l'autre le dedans', somehow lifts out of this story into the narrator's consciousness, so that the 'monde fabuleux' (*I* p. 201) morphs into a potential threshold and means of escape out of the overarching narrative. But then the narrator backtracks: there is no door there, or the door initially imagined does not exist ('que vient faire une porte ici?' (*I* p. 212)). The prospect of the space of possibility fully retracting as it does in this episode, leaving no exit and no place of rest, was portended from the outset of *L'Innommable*: '[o]n croit seulement se reposer, afin de mieux agir par la suite, ou sans arrière-pensée, et voilà qu'en très peu de temps on est dans l'impossibilité de plus jamais rien faire' (*I* p. 7). In this tympan-like zone of impossibility, what is left for the narrator to do? We must go back to the first narrative method raised by the 'je' of *L'Innommable*: 'Et si je parlais pour ne rien dire, mais vraiment rien?' (*I* p. 27). Recalling Flaubert's 'rêve en négatif, en gris, origine du Livre total qui hanta d'autres imaginations', in Derrida's words,[75] this

[75] See Gustave Flaubert to Louise Colet, 16 January 1852, in *Correspondance*, ed. by Jean Bruneau, 6 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1973-2007), II (1980), p. 29; and Derrida's characterization, in *L'Écriture et la différence*, of this dream as a '[r]êve en négatif, en gris, origine du Livre total qui hanta d'autres imaginations' (p. 17).

dream would seem to be the defining narratorial project of *L'Innommable* (the opposite, we might say, of Gadda's in *Quer pasticciaccio*), until the project is retracted: 'il semble impossible de parler pour ne rien dire, on croit y arriver, mais on oublie toujours quelque chose, un petit oui, un petit non, de quoi exterminer un régiment de dragons' (*I* p. 27). As the concordances of past selves and thresholds of future selves are withdrawn into impossibility, only one option remains: to speak, in the present, of nothing, and finally end narrative.[76]

Conclusion

H. Porter Abbott distinguishes 'between Beckett's thematics of nothing – void, absence, emptiness, naught – and the quite different experience of knowing nothing.'[77] Confusion between the two incites the narrator of *L'Innommable* to reach, futilely, for Malone's stick in order to check whether the background of the enclosure represents 'du vide' or 'du plein' (*I* p. 23). Nothing as 'void, absence, emptiness, naught' is that which cannot be *voiced* directly, but only ever spoken around, like Malone orbiting around the impossible narrator. Nothing is a 'vacance', '*autour de laquelle* on parle toujours', according to Derrida.[78] Yet the Flaubertian 'rêve négatif' is not possible in Beckett, for we are not left with the void after negation, but rather a plenum, a book totalised in a negative sense: filled with negated statements and retracted possibilities. In the narrator's unfulfilled movement toward rest, we close

[76] Angela Moorjani, '*Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable:* The Novel Reshaped', in *The New Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, ed. by Van Hulle, pp. 19-32, notes that critics drawing on post-structuralism have credited 'a non-Cartesian break between consciousness and being' to 'the lack of coincidence with the alien voice *dehors*' (p. 26).
[77] Abbott, 'narrative', in Oppenheim, p. 7.
[78] Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, p. 17. Derrida insists that nothing cannot be our object, but rather the object for study should be: 'la façon dont ce rien *lui-même* se détermine en se perdant'. The concept of this 'trace' might be akin to that impossible pathway which leads the 'je' from present consciousness to the negation of impossible pasts and futures.

in claustrophobically on a 'livre sur rien', but the persistence of impossible analepses and prolepses occludes the narration from becoming a speech-saying-nothing. The accumulation of these prolepses and analepses then enacts Abbott's *second* version of the nothing which emerges from epistemological failure: 'the quite different experience of knowing nothing'. This is a kind of positive knowledge of the negative, ensuring that there is a level on which we can always think the unthinkable because, as for the correlationist, '*il est impensable que l'impensable soit impossible*'.[79] In Beckett, however, the thought of the unthinkable lasts only until the next sentence's negation.

If we consider, for a moment, only the affirmations in *L'Innommable*, Beckett's text is *what could be* under other conditions which are themselves impossible. In the attempt to posit the unthinkable (think the unthinkable, say the unsayable), the Trilogy imagines analepses and prolepses outside the narrator's consciousness. These dia-chronic statements are then retracted, declared impossible, and relegated to an unfeasible temporality, so that imagined pasts and futures are withdrawn. 'Unselves' proposed via anachrony are discarded: the narrator cannot determine the all-important 'intervalle vacillant' between 'Malone et l'autre', cannot locate a being in the past which could correspond with the 'histoire' 'they' wish to impart to him, and cannot differentiate homodiegetic narration from heterodiegetic in the confluence of Mahood-Worm stories. The focus moves to the present moment, which is then infused with crisis: post-unselves, the present succumbs to the 'voix' which seeks the 'je' blindly as a mouth to enter into ('une voix pareille, qui peut la contrôler, elle essaie tout, elle est aveugle, elle me cherche, dans le noir, elle cherche une

[79] Meillassoux, *Après la finitude*, p. 68.

bouche, où se mettre' (*I* pp. 206-207)).[80] The negation of possible pasts and futures would be less problematic if the possibility of a present, too, were not then also withdrawn, but it is. The text unsays the sayable, unthinks the thinkable: the 'tympanum' is all that is left, vibrating with voice, but without a thinker to modulate that voice's pronouncements. With all temporalities withdrawn, there is nowhere to rest: we close in, by way of 'unselves', on a 'livre sur rien', a *récit* without *histoire*,[81] but a residue of negated analepses and prolepses remains, which precludes a final emptying out, or unwording. If '*il est impensable que l'impensable soit impossible*', Beckett's Trilogy can continue on only in this time of unthinkability, which is not merely a temporal void.

[80] The 'Mouth' in 'Not I', Beckett, *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works*, pp. 373-84, evokes this same mouth into which speech streams.

[81] See Maclachlan, *Marking Time*: 'We have already suggested that the elision of one or the other of the categories of *histoire* and *récit* would, in general terms, close any text to reading, and that, in the sort of cases of simultaneous narration identified by Genette, the distinction remains analytically operative if only to account for its transgression. Rather than the collapse of this distinction, such transgressive cases might instead be regarded as showing up an undecidability of *histoire* and *récit*' (p. 61).

Conclusion

When we pick up a novel and lift its cover, we also open ourselves up to another's creative possibilities, which at that moment (of beginning to read) seem infinite. Yet we can almost immediately perceive the novel's finitude: how it is, like us, bounded by time, physical borders, the constraints of reality, limitations of language, and restrictions on thought. More than in any other literary genre, boundedness emerges in the novel, which mimics us ontologically and epistemologically in its pretension to span the human life, and reveal the breadth of the human mind. The self-reflexive novels for comparison, here written by Nabokov, Gadda, and Beckett, cling to the novelistic form, struggling with their own formal finitude even while discoursing on it. Employing the language of mid-twentieth century finitude, and satirising the tenets of correlationism, these novels give philosophy that precious, because indirect, place which literature can allocate to knowledge, indicated by Barthes.[1] Yet the three novelists also strain against this language, ironising it as well as refusing to allow any conventional concept of 'finitude' to dictate the novel's capabilities. Nowhere is this more striking than in Beckett, who, intrigued by the post-Kantian tradition's relation to the unknowable, insinuates that attempts to think the unthinkable result in unthinking the thinkable, leaving us with nothing at all after our epistemological overreaching.

[1] See Barthes, *Leçon inaugurale*: 'la littérature fait tourner les savoirs, elle n'en fixe, elle n'en fétichise aucun; elle leur donne une place indirecte, et cet indirect est précieux [...] le savoir qu'elle mobilise n'est jamais ni entier ni dernier; la littérature ne dit pas qu'elle sait quelque chose, mais qu'elle sait *de* quelque chose; ou mieux: qu'elle en sait quelque chose' (pp. 18-19).

While not neglecting the ends of the seven novels under consideration, this study is not about closure, which has been the literary term most commonly associated with finitude to date. Closure asks what the end offers to us, but finitude interrogates the sheer concept of the limit, boundary, or end: it concerns the thought of limitedness, boundedness, or endingness itself. In each of the five chapters, we have juxtaposed one major feature of textual finitude against a corresponding figure of human finitude: in Chapter One, novelistic (ir)resolution against the finitude of death; in Chapter Two, the edges of the text (*corpus*) against the edges of the body (*corps*); in Chapter Three, textual unworking against the withdrawal of reality; in Chapter Four, proliferating discourses in the novel against language's constriction of meaning; and in Chapter Five, impossible analepses and prolepses against the severance of thought from being in mortal temporality. It is the novel's emulation of the human life and mind which enables us to make closer comparisons between philosophical and novelistic finitude than we can between philosophy and any other literary genre's finitude of form.

The most obvious connection between finitude of the novel and of the human life arises, to return to Chapter One, in the novel's movement toward a conclusion: a movement analogous to the progression of life toward death. This chapter, which dealt with Heidegger's concept of *Sein zum Tode*, recast it in literature as a writing toward a conclusion, or in the case of Gadda's incomplete novel *La cognizione del dolore*, writing toward irresolution. In seeking to understand how this novel's painful sense of time generates a dual 'ansia' stemming from time-boundedness as well as from our responsibility to other people, we considered how novelists might in general be faced with what

Heidegger calls a '*Grenzsituation*': a confrontation with finitude in which responses to the challenge fall into the categories either of resoluteness or irresoluteness. Redefining the latter term, we saw that an ethics of irresolution might finally require an author *not* to conclude, despite an impetus toward conclusion present at every step of Gonzalo de Pirobutirro's story, as in the case of *La cognizione*. As Gadda's own philosophical treatise, the *Meditazione milanese* clarifies, it is impossible to close a system if we are to give the alterity of the unexplained its due: whether the Kantian noumenon, Fichte's I, or the Leibnizian or Brunian monad, a 'qualcosa [...] di inspiegato' (*SVP* p. 741) inheres in every system to resist finitude. We later revisited the idea of an unaccounted-for 'residuo o errore di chiusura' (*SVP* p. 743) standing in the way of the novel's finitude in chapters on Beckett's and Nabokov's works, where Gadda's residue contrasted with remainders persisting after epanorthosis in Beckett, and with speculation projecting toward an inaccessible unknowable in Nabokov.

Residual alterity gets in the way of Gadda's endings, so that his act of 'tamponare le falle del sistema' merely expands the novel as system (*SVP* p. 741), but he cannot do without this 'residuo'. Those textual elements which keep resolution open are exactly those indispensable to Gadda's narrative ethics, as explored in Chapter Four through the lens of Calvino's claim that Gadda's philosophy of multiplicity informs the latter's narrative style. In Gadda's non-ending, and in the corresponding non-death of *La cognizione*'s narrative, to go back to Blanchot's term,[2] Gadda's work inverts more than one theory espoused

[2] Blanchot, *La Part du feu*: 'une mort qui ne met fin à rien' (p. 327).

by Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*: first, the theory that crisis in the novel emanates from a consciousness in every moment of the end, and second, the theory that each choice of the novelist limits the next. *La cognizione* demonstrates that a novel can suffer crisis not only in its awareness of an end, but rather in its self-conscious exposition of a lack of ending or 'inadempienza' (*CD* p. 63): its anxiety of unlimitedness, not unlike the Levinasian 'impossibilité de la possibilité'[3] which counters the Heideggerian concept of death as a virile moment. Though neither Beckett, nor Nabokov, nor Gadda shies away from the theme of death, these authors nonetheless evoke the impossibility of dying in their novels, with *L'Innommable*, *Sebastian Knight*, and *La cognizione* the clearest examples of novels hovering in the 'other night' of petrified possibility.[4] Gathering momentum toward its own irresolution, Gadda's writing opens up textual possibilities as though the work is an unrolling 'gomitolo' or 'groviglio' of threads, resembling Gadda's own preferred metaphor for textual infinitude. The threads of *La cognizione* which entangle the voices, desires, and demands of others within the knot of the self not only thwart Gadda's desire to negate the self in his novel and thus 'morire nell'opera', as Stellardi suggests,[5] but also ensure that when the same knot or problem (here, of the self in death, encountered in *La cognizione* as 'una tacita, ultima combinazione del pensiero' (*CD* p. 45)), re-emerges in Gadda's later novel *Quer pasticciaccio*, the voices of alterity multiply almost infinitely as death becomes instead the opposite of *La cognizione*'s 'combinazione': 'una decombinazione estrema dei possibili' (*QP* p. 58).

[3] Levinas, *Le Temps et l'autre*, pp. 57-58, citing M. Wahl (p. 92).
[4] See Blanchot, *L'Écriture du désastre*, p. 82, and Critchley, *Very Little…Almost Nothing*, p. 36.
[5] See Girard, *Mensonge romantique* ('mourir dans l'œuvre'), p. 345, quoted in Stellardi, *Gadda: miseria e grandezza*, p. 41.

As a counterpoint to Gadda's writing-toward-irresolution, in Chapter Two we turned to Beckett's decomposing as it relates to both the trope of physical decomposition as well as textual decomposition in his Trilogy, equating the latter to Beckett's self-identified 'rhythm and syntax of extreme weakness'.[6] By contrast with Gadda's (frustrated) impetus toward fulfilment, Beckett's tendency toward decomposition sharpens into focus when we liken the borders of his texts to those of the body, comparing the aporia of ending narrative to the existential aporia at the end of life. Aporia, in its paradoxical etymology which suggests both passage and non-passage, materialises in the Trilogy's endless drama of identity, one in which various 'je' figures strive to separate themselves from objects, from each other, and from life in the passage to death. Yet identity, and thus the finitude of each of Beckett's three novels (which must retain their own ontological identity if they are to end),[7] depend on distinctions holding. Instead of merely affirming the meaningfulness of a given distinction, for instance between Molloy and Moran, Beckett undoes the differences proposed by the narratives, crumbling the space between terms so that distinctions collapse into meaninglessness, and the passage proffered out of his Trilogy withdraws almost as soon as it is posited.

The narratives within Beckett's three novels interrogate the limits of their identity *as* narratives by swerving into the domains of first inventory, then memoir. Every Trilogy text conforms to the maxim which seems to underlie

[6] Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, III, p. 211.
[7] See Weller, *A Taste for the Negative*, p. 102.

Gadda's stylistic 'compulsione all'esaustione':[8] that we list things in order eventually to be rid of them, yet listing objects both stalls and prolongs narrative. Detour into 'fact', whether through characters' inventorying or memoir-writing tendencies, inhibits an end to storytelling. Memoir, the project which follows upon failed inventorying in the Trilogy, permits Beckett to expose the novel's inherent ability to voice the non-event, and to negate the whole world (altering 'le tout qu'est tout' into 'le tout qu'est rien' (*I* p. 169)). This negation is necessary to then establish a fictive world,[9] an understanding also evident in Nabokov where that author exposes the withdrawal-into-absence innate in writing,[10] his novels' apparent self-awareness of literature's inevitable unworking, as covered in Chapter Three. In Beckett, the self-conscious realisation of literature's inherent negative power manifests in his characters' recording of everything that '*fails* to happen',[11] their abrupt negations of preceding statements making it impossible to establish narrative order and temporality. This storytelling confusion is exacerbated when the Trilogy's narratives perform a metaphorical 'touch', folding over each other in a repetition of barely differentiated details. Conflating subjectivities across the three novels in a 'pseudo-coupling' of characters and stories like the iterative 'twins' in Nabokov's *Pnin*, and dichotomised doubles in Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio*, Beckett's 'touching' narratives institute a kind of Merleau-Pontean 'intercorporéité':[12] a sharing out of sensorial understanding among identities which propels narrative forward as readers seek out the links between characters. Escape from the Trilogy's global intercorporeal consciousness is

[8] Stellardi, *Gadda: miseria e grandezza*, p. 32.
[9] Blanchot, *La Part du feu*, p. 307.
[10] Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*, p. 623.
[11] Derrida, 'This Strange Institution', in Attridge, *Acts of Literature*, pp. 34-35.
[12] Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible*, p. 185.

only possible through something like the Nancean concept of 'excription', which explains how writing might inscribe a body at its outer limit. Yet the desired-for movement of exscription *hors-texte*, beyond the borders of the three novels and the bodies peopling them, becomes impossible as reversible narratives fold over, unbalance, and overwrite each other, leaving no exit.

Against Beckettian 'decomposition' and Gaddian 'irresolution', we encountered Nabokovian unworking in Chapter Three. In all three movements, the novelists postulate the end (or at least absence) of narrative as their ultimate objective, yet prolong narrative through exposing their texts' coming apart. Blanchot's concept of *désœuvrement* sounds antithetical to the polished nature of a Nabokov novel, yet in two novels which verge on biographic metafiction, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and *Pnin*, Nabokov foregrounds something like Blanchot's 'ruse par laquelle l'écriture va vers *l'absence de livre*'.[13] Just as Beckett's decomposing relies on 'émiettement' (*M* p. 247), Nabokov's unworking of his texts depends on what Blanchot calls 'creusement',[14] both processes which entail a crumbling away at reality without which alterity or 'communion' (*P* p. 20) would not be possible. Nabokov's extensive patterning, or collection of designs in both novels which affirm the texts' literariness, enables him to create textual worlds seemingly resistant to any 'creusement'. Yet his ruse also consists of unworking those patterns, dismantling the novels' realities.

From the first, the dual ontological-epistemological dilemma of both Nabokov

[13] Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*, p. 623.
[14] Ibid, p. 592.

novels emerges in 'divestment' (*P* p. 20). Nabokov asserts in *Pnin* that our mortal form permits only a discrete existence, with death our only possible contact with the epistemologically other: alterity eludes us while we remain sealed within the monadic bounds of life. Yet the art of biography cracks open this seal, precluding intactness, since we cannot relive another's reality without deforming it. Through the texts' self-conscious opening up, an external perspective infiltrates the works, setting in motion metaleptic tears in narration. Perceptions clash between authorial presences, impossible narrators, and resurfacing characters in the biographical works (some of these characters reappearing in later Nabokov novels like the anachronic resurgences of Molloy and Malone in Beckett's Trilogy), as unreality supplants the book we initially began. Like Beckett's Trilogy narratives and Gadda's *La cognizione*, these two Nabokov novels dramatise their own possible openings onto exteriority as an integral part of their plots, one without which biography would be out of the question. Turning the book as 'réceptacle du savoir'[15] inside out like the interior of a mind revealing itself, Nabokov aligns the ontologies of books and people in his works, proposing books as markers of ontology, which themselves also promise epistemological alterities within their pages.

Sebastian Knight's ontological conflation between half-brothers ultimately withdraws the text into absence, while the impracticality of *Pnin*'s narration, revealed in its final chapter, subsumes that novel in impossibility, as competing accounts of reality given by Pnin and the narrator detract from the novel's overall pretension to truth. In Heideggerian *Angst*, 'the withdrawal of what-is-

[15] Ibid, p. 621.

in-totality' 'crowds round us in dread',[16] as when Gonzalo attempts to isolate himself from others. In Nabokov's metabiographic fiction, however, the withdrawal of versions of reality is a definitive clearing-away, marking the first step in an 'infinite succession of steps' (*SO* p. 9) toward an unknowable, which might alternately be dubbed the real, the 'Grand Dehors', or noumenon. He leaves us only with the post-textual speculation constituting that step, and not with the unknowable itself.

Writing the Total Book, as I wrote in the introduction to this study, is incompatible with the novelist's project. Yet the concept of a novel-in-its-totality still helps to clarify why Gadda's novels seek to both exhaust and accumulate[17] infinite possibilities before death. It also helps to justify the Gaddian moment of 'apocope drammatica',[18] which contrasts with both the continuation of voices in Beckett's endings, and the cutting-out of consciousness in Nabokov's. Chapter Four investigated Gadda's Baroque in its pursuit of that which has been lost – the speech of the other – and its attempts to bring back that speech ('sauve[r] […] la parole', to quote Derrida),[19] in an accumulation of discourses intended to respect the alterity of the other's word(s). We considered how Gadda's style, adapted to his 'complessa epistemologia',[20] comes into tension with his 'pudore' and need to embed words in the finiteness of the present moment, all while Gadda retains the sense of the 'contrastanti possibilità' which make up complexity (*SGF*, I, p. 454). These seemingly unlimited possibilities compress together in the narrow pass of

[16] Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics?', trans. by Hull and Crick, p. 366.
[17] Stellardi, *Gadda: miseria e grandezza*, p. 32.
[18] Gadda, *Per favore, mi lasci nell'ombra*, p. 149.
[19] Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, p. 19.
[20] Calvino, *Lezioni americane*, p. 104.

angustia, that creative process theorised by Derrida, and characterised by anxiety, in which discourses are constrained both by human time-boundedness and by their necessarily finite movement toward the page.

In questioning the finitude of what the novel can hold, we considered *angustia* as passage from the potentiality of force to form, with form's attendant loss, or reduction of possibilities, in *Quer pasticciaccio*. The issue of the passage of others' words into the novel intensifies in Gadda's works, in which his maximalist instincts and underlying philosophy of multiplicity incite him to split narratives into two, to investigate a word's 'differenziale semantico' (*SGF*, I, p. 437), to formulate linguistic 'neoformazioni',[21] to wrap up hidden meanings within knots which then maintain an inherent unravelling potential, and to leave certain words conspicuously unspoken and unexhausted. It is in this way that the originary force of expression in Gadda retains an ethical significance, bound up in the 'relation with the other' which for Levinas is 'time' itself: unretrievable, and uncoincidable,[22] a lack of coincidence to which Chapter Five returns with regard to Beckett's 'unthinkable' temporal jumps.

Through the Baroque, relation-to-the-other comes to the fore in Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio*: this verbose novel reveals its encounter with alterity in the 'resistance of alien discourses' within the tangle of words uttered in this text. In its project to 'restore some *other* genre' which 'has lost [its] own base in reality',[23] Baroque pathos as defined by Bakhtin connects irrevocably to alterity, while Gadda's Baroque also exposes the work of the novel in general, which

[21] Roscioni, *La disarmonia prestabilita*, p. 86.
[22] Levinas, 'Ethics of the Infinite', in Kearney, p. 57.
[23] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 394.

does not seek to conceal its 'incommensurable particulars',[24] but is instead concerned with a diversity of discourses. In Gadda's novel, the need to make the other talk, as in *Quer pasticciaccio*'s police interrogations, is writ large. As in the metaphysical detective stories of Beckett (*Molloy*) and Nabokov (*Sebastian Knight*), epistemological challenges in Gadda's novel become ontological crises which redefine alterity. After the force of otherness irrupts in death, 'fili' lead away from knots of meaning to dissolve them and allow for the reformulation of their threads in other, new knots, so that the novel on a metaphorical level enacts Gadda's description of how he remains fascinated not just by a word, but by 'una aspettazione [...] un'attesa di ciò che seguirà, o [...] un richiamo di quanto li ha preceduti e determinati' (*SGF*, I, p. 629). The fact of the 1957 novel's ending in silence signifies the ungraspability of an infinity of discourses more completely than words aimed at capturing those discourses ever could. Silence respects their ungraspability without allowing 'pudore' to succumb to complexity of meaning.

The same constriction of meaning in *angustia*, which Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio* exhibits, may be circumvented by that specific epanorthosis in Beckett's Trilogy detailed in Chapter Five. In this type of negation, impossible analepses and prolepses map out our way to the 'unthinkable' before they are themselves negated. When Chapter Five circles back to Chapter One in its concern with temporality, the approach to time in the novel becomes dia-chronic in a Meillassouxian sense, signifying Beckett's engagement with the temporal discrepancy between thought and being: an inevitable discord, according to correlationism. By Chapter Five, our treatment of temporality

[24] Cascardi, 'The Novel', p. 164.

includes not just the thrust of imminence, an onward rush of time propelling Gonzalo and his mother to the grave, as we saw in Chapter One, but a three-fold potentiality. Firstly, the present tense of Beckett's 'je'-narrator recedes, supplanted by a desire to 'essayer dans un autre présent' (*I* p. 33). Secondly, the 'je' affirms a past or future self belonging to another which allows the 'je' to escape briefly from the finitude of their moment, gravitating toward an 'impensable indicible' (*I* p. 80) which correlates to the before or after of consciousness. Thirdly, however, this past or future is denied in a more abrupt negation than that of Nabokov's gradual withdrawal of *Sebastian Knight*'s and *Pnin*'s imagined worlds. Beckett's overturning of what we thought was unknowable, momentarily making the unthinkable accessible, seems to make a claim for the novel's transcendental potential, yet the narratorial lapse into unthinkability is never allowed to endure long enough to close a narrative in the Trilogy.

Following anachronies through the Trilogy, we see that the uncertain focalisation and indeterminate frequency of events narrated, complicated by that reversibility of narrative we canvassed back in Chapter Two, exposes the limits of narratology (which nonetheless provides a useful starting point) in analysing Beckett's novels. The various unselves which emerge to replace the 'cogito' of the narrator in *L'Innommable*, from 'Malone et l'autre', 'Basile et consorts', Mahood, and finally to Worm, voice the stories of others. Yet as each of these unselves breaks down into impossibility, their ventures into *histoire* disintegrate back into the *récit* initiated by the first 'je' of *L'Innommable*. The extratemporal tunnels bridged by anachrony close up, and we find ourselves once more up against Kant's *de nobis ipsis silemus* (*I* p. 71): back at the 'motif

désastreux de notre finitude'.[25] Through these unselves Beckett dramatises literature's potential to name in order to negate, and thus create space around the self (as in the case of 'Malone et l'autre'), to accomplish analepses and prolepses external to narrative (as in the case of 'Basile et consorts'), and finally to unthink the thinkable, as heterodiegesis explodes within homodiegesis (as in the case of Mahood and Worm). With nowhere to rest between these failed anachronic selves and the immobile, temporally restricted 'je' (who encapsulates, like the books on Gadda's bookshelves, the finitude of 'our capacity to act', as Guglielmi phrases it),[26] the 'tympanum' proposed toward the end of *L'Innommable* becomes a tempting join between thought and being, in which the novel's ontology collides with its epistemological potentialities. We do not arrive at the Flaubertian 'livre sur rien' because the 'tympanum', as a remnant of the various selves proffered and negated, can still vibrate with voice, occupying the space between 'dehors' and 'dedans', epistemology and ontology. In Chapter Two, Beckett's voices striving to transition from speech into silence already prefigured the Meillassouxian project of '*sortir de soi-même*'; in Chapter Five, they initially demonstrate the urge to 'connaître ce qui est que nous soyons ou pas',[27] though Beckett does not countenance this possibility long before negating it.

As I explained in the introduction, this study centres on Nabokov, Gadda, and Beckett because their struggle with the finite novelistic form *becomes* their novels. But in conclusion, what this means practically is that through testing the

[25] Badiou, *Logiques des mondes*, p. 561.
[26] Guglielmi, 'Gadda and the Form of the Novel', in Bertone and Dombroski, p. 38.
[27] Meillassoux, *Après la finitude*, p. 49.

finitude of form, these novelists border on writing something *other* to the novel. Gadda's digressions allow what Cascardi calls the novel's 'component forms' to take over,[28] Beckett's determination to make 'nothing happen' vocalises what is going on already under the surface of the text,[29] while Nabokov's game with the conventions of metafictional biography replaces the novel with his 'ruse-upon-a-ruse'. From Chapter One onwards, we have seen that conceiving of death as an end to the novel's possibilities conflicts with the ongoing movements of irresolution, crumbling, and unworking which define Gadda's, Beckett's, and Nabokov's novelistic styles. Each novelist's engagement with alterity institutes an ethics of non-fulfilment (perhaps clearest in Gadda) which respects our being bounded temporally, bodily, linguistically, cognitively, and by the limits of reality. It is tempting to sketch a spectrum between minimalism and maximalism, locating Beckett on the minimalist extreme and Gadda on the maximalist extreme, with Nabokov somewhere in the middle. Yet as the preceding five chapters attest, all three novelists are maximalists: their maximalism merely manifests itself differently. Gadda's is overt, expounded in his theoretical writings. Beckett's is hidden, concealed within his strategy of 'vaguening'.[30] Nabokov's maximalism emerges in that 'ruse-upon-a-ruse' which not only draws the novel toward its absence, but exposes this withdrawal (since any 'vaguening', negation, or withdrawal of elements grounding the novels in their respective realities cannot take place without first the creation of a fictive

[28] Cascardi, 'The Novel', p. 164.
[29] To quote Clark on the Blanchotian imaginary: 'this is a realm where nothing *is happening*' (p. 81).
[30] See Rosemary Pountney, *Theatre of Shadows: Samuel Beckett's Drama 1956-76 (From 'All that Fall' to 'Footfalls'* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1988), where she writes, with regard to a *Happy Days* manuscript: 'Stage VI, the first typescript of both acts, is remarkable for a manuscript note beside the opening stage directions that reads simply "vaguen". The note is twice underlined and is explicit testimony to Beckett's policy of "vaguening" the later drafts of his plays' (p. 149).

world in totality). The authors' maximalism is not solely epistemological, as in the inclusion of diverse and unexpected fields of knowledge in their novels, but ontological, in that all three novelists disclose their awareness of the novel's existential finitude, yet seek to maximise its existence before the inevitable end.

In each of the seven novels, speech postpones that end. In Chapter Two, when voice and touch met in 'excription', we noted that voices assume a body just in the moment that they voice their incorporeality; in Chapter Five, we saw that voice and the bodily merge in the in-between of the 'tympanum'. The final moment of any novel centres on the withdrawal of the writer's words, or the ceasing of words sounding in readers' minds. In each novelist in this study, this metaphor of sound dying out recurs: the 'singhiozzo' in Gadda, the 'tympan' in Beckett, and perhaps the 'violin in a void' in Nabokov (*IB* p. ix), so that being is reduced to the production of sound shortly before death: the 'doux fantôme de parole',[31] or a final murmur in which utterance falters. After the finitude of utterance, thought can stretch beyond the textual end, in a 'ruissellement du dehors éternel', to use Blanchot's metaphor:[32] even before that end, each novelist permits us to hear the sound of this rustling, without it becoming intelligible.

[31] Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini*, p. 485; See Critchley, *Very Little…Almost Nothing*, who describes this 'soft spectre of speech' as 'the unqualifiable murmur at the back of our words' (p. 205).
[32] Blanchot, *L'Espace littéraire*, p. 81.

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