

ON BABEL \ BABEL ON:
LITERATURE OF THE INSANE

BY

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DEDICATION

To Barbara who never understood a word of it while living, who grasped Nietzsche, far better than I, while dying and taught me the final point of madness a little later. To my Mother (1923-1987).

ABSTRACT

ON BABEL \ BABEL ON: LITERATURE OF THE INSANE

Since the publication of Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation* the subject of madness has come under much academic review. The object of my study is to explore the possibilities offered by Foucault's work, to examine and extend some of his ideas into the field of literature. By way of introduction I concentrate on two paintings of Babel by Pieter Bruegel the elder. These paintings offer two opposed ways in which madness can be read: the Rotterdam version depicts madness as threat, as something alien, whereas the Vienna canvas perceives madness in more accessible terms, as something intrinsic to the human condition. These two versions of madness provide a metaphor both for the experience and the reading of madness. The edifice of Babel designates the site where madness breaks from the horizontal plane (the plane of sanity) to assert its particular verticality. I describe the verticality achieved by the madman according to three inter-related aspects: a changing perception of time, of space and finally the creation of a unique language guided by a unique reasoning. These notions also allow my study to move from considering the mad writer to the mad protagonist and finally to the perception of a world imbalanced. By way of concretising these ideas I examine Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and focus on the way in which Zarathustra's search for madness was finally

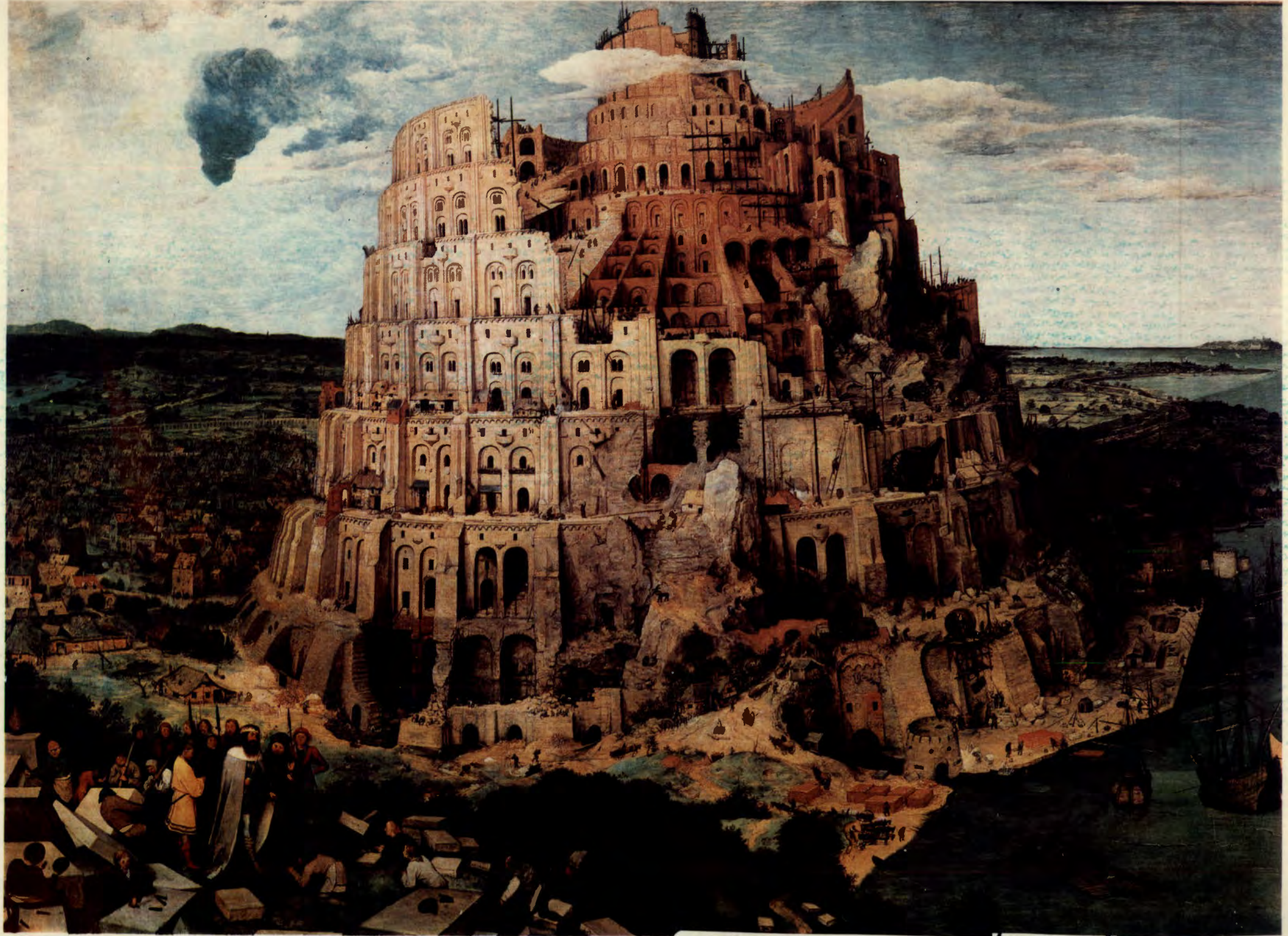
consummated in Nietzsche's insanity. In Chapter Two the same co-ordinates are applied to William Cowper where I argue that, in madness, Cowper is locked outside our time and space and trapped in a poetry that manifests and exacerbates his madness. His contemporary, Christopher Smart is the subject of Chapter Three and presents an opposing experiencing of insanity. Confined to an asylum, Smart uses *Jubilate Agno* as a way of escaping the asylum and entering into a timeless and spaceless zone. He generates a language of praise, of such abandon that he creates for himself a space, a poem big enough to accommodate the poet. Following Foucault's scheme I move from the classical period to the modern and, in so doing, focus my investigation on the contemporary writer Samuel Beckett. Chapters Four and Five are thus concerned with two of his early novels, *Murphy* and *Watt*. For each of these protagonists a change occurs, a change that ruptures, and renders distant, the old familiar world. For Beckett, however, madness does not end here, it continues insinuating itself through the mechanisms of reason and language. This contamination (which includes space and time) infects the narrative to such an extent that it questions the sanity of reason, the sanity of language itself. In the conclusion I suggest that it is the marginalised status of madness that allows it an insidious power, an ability to subvert language. The verticality of madness refuses language the certainty and the reasoned clarity it most desires. Madness is the doubt that makes language unsure of itself, that forces it to continue.

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The Tower of Babel (Rotterdam.)



16 *The Tower of Babel* (Vienna.)

CHAPTER ONE

I *Clovio's Ivory Tower*

There exist a few tales, a few moments in the history of story telling that are not domesticated by the passing of time. These stories are not merely part of a cultural legacy, they are narratives which continually break, unresolved, onto the surface. They recur simply because they have not yet been solved, explained away. The tower of Babel is one of these - a tale that sets out to explain the diversity of languages and yet contains, upon its surface, a disproportion that engenders further confusion. In its telling it produces, as if by mistake, a series of breaks that disarm any implied moral. In part its impact can be ascribed to its brevity: its nine short verses (*Genesis* 11: 1-9) belie the magnitude of the demands made on the reader. But by far the greater part of the enigma lies in the implied absence of the tower, "this tower with its top reaching heaven" (4). Although it is obviously in the process of being built, it is never described and is seen only through the angry eyes of Yahweh. God's concern is initially, and primarily, linguistic. His response is somewhat like the jealous magician's whose wizardry has been mastered by expelled apprentices:

'So they are all a single people with a single language!' said Yahweh. 'This is but the start of their undertakings! There will be nothing too hard for them to do. Come let us go down and confuse their language on the spot so that they can no longer understand one another.' (6-7)

This tower, squeezed between two exhaustive genealogies,

recedes from attempts to imagine it because it is not there in itself but as an alibi for Yahweh's wrath and as a symbol of the people's desire. The first stirrings of confusion are given a certain credence by the etymology of Babel which is, at once, derived from the Hebrew verb 'to confuse' and, in a complicitous fashion, designates the 'gates of the gods'.

Because of the lack of substance to the tower, various constellations of signification settle on the place where it should be. These are readings which attempt to flesh out the skeleton of this unsayable architecture. The obvious version (and one achieved precisely by not reading between the lines) is that 'God's confusion' was visited upon Noah's sons because they did not heed the covenant (9: 11). Theirs was an attempt to equal Yahweh, to build a tower of presumption into the heights. Their downfalling was their vanity. The second reading has Noah's children motivated by paranoia (and if God's reasoning in this section is anything to go by, an extremely sound paranoia) and the tower a progressive thrust towards knowledge based on past experience. The tower built on knowledge is an iconic representation of the organic counterpart in Eden - in itself a movement towards wisdom and the 'gate of the gods'. There are thus two Falls.

Both involve a transgression of limits established by the ambiguity of God's providence. Both involve a distancing from the *Logos*, the divine and creative word. And finally, both imply a need on the part of human ingenuity to bridge the gap imposed. This *Logos* stands as a Utopian promise, a language so pure, so quintessential that to discover it again

will ensure a semantics not *about* life but *of* life. The promise of this primal language is that we will no longer have to harness words, batter and barter with them in order to create a small clearing where words can, once more, mean without inverted commas. For all the apparent malevolence of Yahweh the belief remains, and in a sense has outlived its creator, that this original can be retrieved from the debris of merely functional speech. Babel, with its emphasis on language, is a tale that fictionally portrays the space upon which art must build. The process of artistic and linguistic representation does not begin with the Fall from Eden but with the Fall from Babel. The confusion of language, its breaking up into splintered tongues, details a widening breach within signification. This hiatus exists between the moment where Adam named and, in so doing, completed the creation of the animals -

I named them, as they passed, and understood
Their nature, with such knowledge God endued
My sudden apprehension... (*Paradise Lost* Book VIII,
352-54)

- and the moment of Babel where humanity lost the remaining vestiges of a pre-lapsarian consciousness. From this moment on language became a system of signs operating within a social construct. These signs are little more than gestures at the impossibility of the Real, but they are all that remain. Babel then is a sign of the courage and folly of a people trying to reach, with flawed materials, the 'gates of the gods'. The fall that began with Eden finds its conclusion in Babel.

In its incomplete presence, Babel exists as a space of promise and damnation, of knowledge and confusion. And as a compounded paradox it can communicate only by being constantly translated out, made to appear finished. Not only is it a parable for the act of translation but it involves itself in this act before its parable can be encoded. This is at the heart of the matter. Babel's emptiness is an incentive to create, albeit it on a lower level than God's summoning into being. Here however God destroys this creation by an act of translation: one that entails a crossing over from the order of construction to the chaos of an impasse in speech, from a busy populace crawling through its infrastructure (directed by a common speech towards a common goal) to empty ramparts and individuals, lost in the idiosyncrasy of Wittgenstein's private language. But even in these alienated towers there is, once more, the need to create, if only on a lesser scale. Construction and destruction feed into each other, follow from each other. Absence is eroded by presence, Babel is always given dimension, its ruins are forever being unearthed and in this process more and more translations gather to support this archetypal artifice.

If Babel sets a biblical precedent with the fall from a universal language it also establishes another limit. It names the first site of madness. Not that madness had not yet appeared, for it had been used to describe Noah's mad project. Noah's madness however, belongs to a higher cause (the legislation of Yahweh) and his sanity is proved in retrospect. The flood washes away this impeachment. Babel

designates a break with history, a break made more severe by the comprehensive genealogical parentheses that are its frame. Babel, or as Steiner puts it, "a lunatic tower . . . launched at the stars" (57) is the place where madness finds its biblical roots: firstly, because it depicts an attempt to contravene God's reasoning - an attempt to escape God and to reach him - and hence alienates itself from the 'sanity' of God's being; secondly it ushers in a complete breakdown in communication and with it the confusion of madness. Nowhere in this history had there appeared the blank look that questions all that the self (as a social and linguistic construct) appears to be.

Incomprehension disintegrates all that hitherto had meant unity and familiarity and leaves, in its wake, all the symptoms of an alienated mind. Alienation, in turn, scatters these people, drives them away in search of another horizon, a place where reconstruction can begin again.

This tower of paradox endures as a disturbing motif simply because it flaunts, on all these tiers, the polysemy of its design. Babel's inexplicability, its very silence taunts, challenges us to give it a name and thereby to make it present. Arguably the most popular of these attempts is an approximation that, suitably, is found in the visual rather than the written canvas. Pieter Bruegel the elder depicted Babel on three occasions. It became for him, as it did for Kafka (see Steiner 67), an image that troubled his imagination. Babel, it seems, denied his attempts to concretise it within one enduring form.

The 'first' version was painted on ivory and is "recorded in the estate of Clovio" (Martin 16). This version, in miniature, is perhaps the true Babel, the one that cannot be possessed, the lost one.

The Rotterdam version works by the immense size it conveys, the uniformity of the tiers ascending far into the heavens while, below, clouds hover in vague threat. It leans precariously and the unfinished infrastructure appears as a skeleton bearing its heady message. Human life is reduced to insect-like forms labouring in the distance, indistinct and overpowered by the magnitude of their creation. In overall effect its statement is devastating: Babel has achieved its status as the tower reaching into the heavens but in so doing it has created something that approximates the awesome dimensions of Yahweh. The tower represents God in magnitude and in threat, reducing humanity to insignificance on the threshold of obliteration. Most disturbing is the rigour of its construction for it depicts an alien order and provides a perspective open only to painter and viewer. There is no-one near to corroborate this sight, no mediating vision to humanise this awful construction. It juts from the linear plane, disturbing the space of an unspoiled countryside: a monolithic phallus, unyielding, remote and cruel. While this represents the God to whom it inevitably refers, it also describes a humanity dwarfed and engulfed by its own megalomania - a removed people challenging an equally removed creator, a faceless people defying and deifying the God they deserve.

To shift our terms slightly, this tower speaks as eloquently of a dominant conception of madness.

Here madness itself is cruel. It too sits stark upon the horizon, an unnatural structure that disrupts the languid contours of natural geometry and appears to be devised according to an ungainly linearity. Again its message is one of threat: an irrevocable break with the natural. The perspective in this painting is such that the building bulges out, almost rupturing the canvas in which it is enclosed. This wide-angle prospect ensures that the threat is exacerbated for the viewer. Uniformity of colouration and the low hanging clouds darken and render visually silent both the right side of Babel and the countryside that lies in its shadow. The disproportionate angles of the building (which create its leaning effect) predict the imminence of the fall but also displace nature's axis, making nature appear as if *it is imbalanced* in terms of the tower which dwarfs its milieu.

The madness of this enterprise is thus represented by the tower - physically it stands (in) for madness. As viewer, one is forced into seeing the many aspects of madness as danger, as a threat that looms over the (sanity of the) viewer: silent, huge and inhuman.

For Bruegel's audience it was perhaps enough to turn away enlightened, aware of the madness present in all attempts to contravene God's word. But if this kind of didacticism was all that concerned the Flemish painter, one version would have sufficed.

Appearing as an earlier version of the tower the painting in Vienna bears a resemblance to the former in perspective, the direction of the light source and the presence of a sea-port. However, this repetition of Babel works by difference rather than similarity. This 1563 version depicts Babel within the confines of a town and gains a certain proportion by being placed between the angular houses to its left and the ramparts of the castle apparent in the shadows on its right. It is 'accommodated' between the peasant s' houses and the royal apartments. That it spans class is lent further support by the foregrounded presence of Nimrod and his subjects. Nimrod's viewing of the work in progress also allows the viewer a point of reference, an aspect that humanises this tower. Babel is the focal point of the painting: it encompasses and unifies those who live beneath it.

The estranging twilight sky of the former is replaced by placid blue skies, the sunlight is gentle and even the clouds lend a harmony to the uppermost turret. These lyrical qualities are testimony to an indulgence on Bruegel's part. Here Babel is not only conveyed as an essentially human construct but also as something that belongs to the natural. Although nature has been disrupted by the consequences of the mercantile spirit (the wall that extends from the left and barricades the town from the countryside, the road that leads to the horizon) nature re-appropriates this world, enclosing the town with its sea and 'greening' (colouring green) the houses in the distance.

But perhaps most surprising is that the tower appears to be built out of rock, out of the unformed granite in its centre and above to the right. What is thus presented is an ingenious, although foolish, attempt to mould out of nature a solution to the threat of another cataclysm. Perched upon Babel's periphery is a collection of small dwellings - cottages upon the precipice - that complete this picture of tenacity and folly in the face of experience. For all its intricate structure and the frenzy of activity of those upon its walls it does not appear as if it will assume the same estranging dimensions as the Rotterdam canvas.

Again, to translate this into the terms of madness produces an extremely different view of Babel. Madness is no longer a proclamation of the alien but follows the contours of the natural and the social landscape. Its potential danger is diffused by it being a participant within a hermetic world. Possessing a somewhat clumsy symmetry it nevertheless incorporates all dimensions of social standing. The result is a mawkish lyricism of line broken by a fundamental folly built in from its inception. Here the madness of the tower is neither alien nor particularly threatening, it fits in along the axes from right to left and from foreground to background and like the green hue that spreads over the houses, madness is infused into the whole picture. As a perception of madness it becomes integral to both the natural and the social world. It is normalised and while it never loses its fundamental violence it is suitably accommodated in the range of behaviour. Madness is built out of natural materials, it is

an idiosyncratic response fashioned out of the unformed material of living.

These two versions of the tower produce a concatenation of meanings that spiral like the path around the circumference of the tower: a creation that embraces sanity and madness, that sees madness as alien and, also, as a fundamental part of all human endeavour and finally, as a place at once uninhabited yet eroded constantly by presences.

II Translating Babel

As with so many paradoxes, the history of the tower, and the history of madness, is a history of translations out of its silence into a reading that makes sense upon the *terra cognita* of the prevalent discourse. The tower must be brought back to earth.

These two versions of the tower provide a dual response: a response firstly to the incomplete presence of the tower and secondly to the proportions of the 'other' tower. To speak of madness is also a response to the lack of completion in madness; like the tower it exists in a space that does not give itself up easily to description, to words. Madness registers itself as silence either because it has become entirely autistic (Schizophrenic catatonia) or because it yields none of the sustained patterns that constitute everyday speech. The latter (Hebephrenic, Paranoid)

constitutes a silence perhaps more disturbing than the catatonic 'type'. It is normal speech hopelessly distracted by the obsession of the speaker: "I am dead", "I am damned by the wrath of an all-loving God". The initial premise which commences contact with another person operates according to rules which are lost on the madman¹. Mad discourse forever veers from the plane of 'normalcy', making obvious (and hence drawing attention to the artificiality of language) the rules that enable social intercourse. This inappropriateness denies response and forces the sane into a silence from which he or she may answer with another kind of silence (that of treatment and exclusion).

Both silences serve to place the madman *within* the mirror: as a fragmentary, ethereal being lost in the delusion of the mirror world, the unreal world. It is precisely the surface of the mirror - the '\ ' of this paper's title - which sanity relies on for its reflection and verification. The madman is a prisoner beyond that reflection and thus the entrapment within the mirror does not, as Lewis Carroll knew, merely involve an inverted mimesis. Existence within the mirror operates according to rules of mutation not simply inversion, of contraries not mere refutation. The experience is such that the madman looks in the mirror and finds not himself but someone more real than the self that looks. Madness is, thus, also a response to the otherness of sanity, it takes and corrupts the language of normality and creates languages (each uniquely distracted) that comment on and challenge the discourses by which we live. To an extent, then, to speak of madness is an impossible task which, at

best, can only speak of the limits of madness: a point at which discourse can be aimed only to fall short. The study of madness is a study of a double failure: the individual's failure to remain within the established limits and a failure for those who desire to read that madness. Shoshana Felman acknowledges both the obligation and the failure:

[O]ur historic task would be to give madness a voice, to restore its language: a language *of* madness and not *about* it. Now, our present cultural predicament... derives precisely from our incapacity to articulate this language: while intending to 'say madness,' one is necessarily constrained to speak *about* it. (14)

This breakdown is not limited to madness but is intrinsic to all acts of translation. Whether as paraphrase, phonetic transcription, poetic rendering or imitation, translation produces a text *about* rather than *of* the source language. And this in turn can be taken further. All languages are in themselves translations. As Octavio Paz puts it:

No text is entirely original because language itself, in its essence, is already a translation: firstly, of the non-verbal world and secondly, since every sign and every phrase is the translation of another sign and another phrase. (qtd. in Bassnett-McGuire 38)

Babel becomes the elaborate site where sanity, madness, language and translation cross over each other in a continual act of definition and redefinition. If the translation of madness is open to the same problems as translation itself then its failure, its incompleteness, is symptomatic of all attempts at signification. In this sense madness plays out in exaggerated form the problems of crossing over from signified to signifier, from the source to the target language¹, from

the world out there to the language in here. The drama of madness is made all the more 'realistic' by its proximity to the structure of the sane discourse. Madness, as I will attempt to show, may consist of an extremely specific and deluded language but is, nevertheless, one that operates according to the same conditions as ours: it makes use of a 'reason' and language in a way that emulates the way in which sanity makes sense. Furthermore, all of the writers I intend to examine are intimately involved in the problematic of translation, either in the usual sense of the term or in Paz's more figurative reading: Cowper spent many of his later years involved in the translation of Homer, Smart produced an important translation of Horace and Beckett is arguably one of the most astute translators of our century not only in his translations of Rimbaud, Paul Eluard and Sébastien Chamfort but in his meticulous translation of himself into words and into different languages. Finally there is Nietzsche (discussed in translation) whose 'philosophising with a hammer' was an attempt to break through, to translate, the crust of the present. This was to be a translation from the lowliness of 'the herd' to the height of the Overman.

A question remains however. How does one translate madness without it becoming, as Walter Benjamin acerbically puts it, "the inaccurate transmission of an inessential content" (70)? This kind of translation is best exemplified by Egas Moniz whose inventiveness in 1935 'solved' much of the puzzle of madness's silence. David Cooper describes this

solution as follows:

you just sat in the dentist's chair and had a chisel hammered home just above your eye-ball to sever the fronto-thalamic tracts to separate your thought from your feeling. You paid not too much more than a dentist's price to go home with one... black eye - and a new personality. No personality.
(102)

Moniz is perhaps an extreme example but he is not alone in the history of madness-translation. Moniz represents one way in which madness has been (and is) decoded into the language of health. As there are two towers there are two translations of madness.

Michel Foucault, in *Madness and Civilisation*, begins his history of madness with Bruegel's near contemporaries (Bosch and Byrant) and the way in which the high Middle Ages designated the beginning of a change in the attitude towards madness. This entailed a movement away from a perception of madness whereby it was tolerated - an irritation upon a skin that had until recently festered with leprosy - towards a reading of madness as threat, as something that must be locked away, expelled from the social body. Foucault's reading will inform much of this essay partly because it serves to expose so much that is pertinent to my study of Cowper and Smart (both victims of this Classical exclusion) and partly because it provides an explication of Bruegel's Babels. The Rotterdam canvas presages the Classical attitude towards madness: as something alien and foreboding, a gesture incomprehensible and, hence, dangerous. The Vienna Babel also depicts madness as folly but does so with understanding and sympathy: it reads madness as it was (a thing intrinsic to

living) and not as it was to become (a proof of one's animality, of an inhuman state).

These translations are not simply an event that happened with the changing sensibility of the Renaissance. Madness continues to be read in either one of these ways. From Plato's *Phaedrus* to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* authors have been taking sides, reading into its silence threat or the lost fragments of the human.

The arch-translator Freud forged a language of dreams and repression in an attempt to create a mediating discourse between sanity and madness. This vocabulary is strange to both states and yet in its very strangeness creates a linguistics of translation that seeks to break through the boundary separating them. However, in continuing to see madness as something alien, and thus maintaining the conviction of the Classical episteme, Freud pushed the madman even further into exclusion. The madman was now a victim entirely subject to the otherness of the therapist:

The doctor, as an alienating figure, remains the key to psychoanalysis. It is perhaps because it did not suppress this ultimate structure, and because it referred all the others to it, that psychoanalysis has not been able, will not be able, to hear the voices of unreason, nor to decipher in themselves the signs of the madman. Psychoanalysis can unravel some of the forms of madness; it remains a stranger to the sovereign enterprise of unreason. (Foucault 278)

However, for all of Foucault's animosity toward the praxis of psychoanalysis it still does not detract from Freud's genius as translator. It is as translator (and the audacity of that translation), as one groping towards the essence of insanity's silence in his libidinal theory, in his Eros and

Thanatos that Freud set a precedent for all those who would follow. He created a space that not only enabled Klein and Lacan but his detractors - notably Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, R.D. Laing, and Cooper - to speak.

If Freud designates one of the faces of the approach to madness, it is 'balanced' by the other face:

Although the mad often seemed so alien, so alien of mind as (it was believed) to require exclusion from society, their testaments plainly echo, albeit often in an unconventional or distorted idiom, the ideas, values, aspirations, hopes and fears of their contemporaries When we read the writings of the mad, we gain an enhanced insight into the sheer range of what could be thought and felt, at the margins. (2)

Coming at the beginning of Roy Porter's *A Social History of Madness*, this statement not only sets the tone of his study but offers an increasingly popular approach to the study of madness. This study has reviewed madness in historical terms in an attempt to disinvest psychology's hold over the subject. Since the 1960's - this period that Umberto Eco (61-85) sees as the new Middle Ages - mainstream psychology has come increasingly under attack from those who question the validity of its classificatory system and its diagnostic treatment of madness. Psychology's abstruse vocabulary in its articulations about madness has largely succeeded in continuing the mystification of insanity. What Porter and, to a greater extent, Foucault have done is, by careful historical analysis, to re-appropriate madness - to demystify it and to show that it is not as marginal as it was believed to be.

Madness, when historically decoded, comes to mimic the proportions of normality. Not that, for Porter, madness vanishes under the microscope of historical retrospection but that it is incorporated into the spectrum of idiosyncrasy that constitutes, at any given moment, normalcy. The sensation of the mad looking increasingly like the merely odd is encouraged by the distance between past and present. Our legacy of lunacy is decoded according to the present 'reasonableness' and is translated into terms that are familiar, if not filial. The madman comes home.

Porter re-examines, for example, the case of Daniel Schreber and criticises Freud's approach (and the many neo-Freudian readings which have followed) arguing that in Freud's pursuit of the unconscious he ignores the bulk of Schreber's *Memoirs* (156). For Porter, Schreber's claims of persecution are not necessarily fanciful and arise not from childhood experiences but from deprivation and solitary confinement:

the soul-deadening, soul-murdering tedium of one without company, deprived of books, pen and paper, of anything to occupy his mind.... Under those circumstances what else could Schreber do but go mad? 'Only he who knows the full measure of my sufferings in past years can understand that such thoughts were bound to arise in me.' (165-66)

From here, the second response is inevitable. Yesterday's lunatic becomes a hero, or at worst, a pathetic guru preaching a lost wisdom. And madness, newly understood, assumes the dimensions of a romantic ideal; in escaping from the inner sanctum of psychology it finds itself enclosed in another kind of mystery, a different religion. So we find

Foucault stripping away the mask that holds madness captive but replacing it with, admittedly, a more esoteric one. Foucault mourns the loss of madness to psychology (by this he means psychoanalysis) and recalls, with a certain nostalgia, a time when madness still had access to truth: "Madness deals not so much with truth and the world, as with man and whatever truth about himself he is able to perceive" (27). Less restrained is the glorification of madness offered by David Cooper's 'anti-psychiatry'. It is not that the mad should merely be included in our definition of the normal, but that sanity should look to madness for its wisdom and its hope:

Non-psychiatry means that profoundly disturbing, incomprehensible, 'mad' behaviour is to be contained, incorporated in and diffused through the whole society as a subversive source of creativity, spontaneity, not 'disease'. (117)

This is obviously tempting to the student of literature. Madness becomes an artistry unconscious of itself but providing literature with a 'new' source of inspiration, imagination freed from the shackles of what can, at any one time, be *thought*. But in the same way that Freud allows Cooper to speak, the latter is still governed by the need to allocate blame. Freud's blaming of the Oedipal scenario is, ironically, no different to Cooper's Marxist blaming of The Family. In this analysis of blame he merely replays the kind of thinking he finds so objectionable in the psychoanalytic paradigm. His anti-psychiatry would fit in neatly with the likes of Freud, Ernest Jones, Jacqueline Rose and Lacan in their efforts to find the site of blame within *Hamlet*. As

inescapable as blame is to the critical process it also hides behind its accusatory causality an idealism, a belief that the world would be better if some aspect of the pathology of the normal was brought to trial. Central as this unsaid tenet is to criticism it has to be foregrounded because of its particularly invidious relation to madness. The dialectic of blame establishes a causality that although focused on madness begins and plays itself out elsewhere: it pursues madness by running parallel to it. This imposition of what Foucault calls a taxonomic grid is perhaps essential for those who would cure madness by changing and reforming the structures that have been built around madness. My task in this essay is more modest. It is, in a sense, pre-critical in so far as I am not interested in diagnosing and curing Cowper, Smart, Nietzsche or Beckett but rather in discovering their madness, in hearing the violence that has been lost through commentary and time. Translation seeks, above all, to hear the original, to hear as fully as possible the rhythms of its internal voice, to penetrate the silence that lies at the centre of its art. Within the diversity of translations there is the possibility of assuming more and more the contours of the original.

Madness, as I have argued, feeds off sanity; it is located upon the horizontal plane of common perception. Again like Babel, madness exists unnoticed until it breaks with the horizontal and forges for itself an edifice of difference, a place where its vision is other. Madness 'begins' by asserting its verticality, as the many clichés on madness

testify: "off his head" or "out of her tree" are expressions that denote people whose behaviour not only signals a displacement of the axes of stability but suggest a height, a severing of the links that hold humanity to the plane of the rational. It is the verticality of madness that must be reappropriated, not as a way of domesticating it within an order (be it Marxist, psycho-analytic or Laingian), but as a way of throwing it into crisis, of criticising so as to reveal, if only obscurely, the lines of an older architecture.

In the practice of psychology, for example, the diagnostic manual currently in use employs five different axes in order to narrow down the extent and the nature of the dis-order. Open to constant revision it attempts to refine its categories so as to facilitate precise treatment. Now this is commendable for those involved in an understaffed and difficult profession, but it does encourage the practitioner to believe that these mental categories (beginning with neurosis and psychosis) are fact rather than approximations, are, finally, precisely ways of not hearing. The attempt to document the madman must eventually be recognized as an endless record of the exception and one that must inevitably inculcate the documentor. A supposedly clear case of lunacy, for example, refers to another whose madness is perhaps less obvious, which, in turn, evokes another. Soon one has pursued madness's variegated forms into the heart of normality and the documentor is forced to disband the project or impose limitations which exist only in abstraction. Thus we have the

DSM III with its diagnostic categories that substitute the complexity of the individual case with a clarity that is finally no more than a series of generalizations so vaguely applicable as to be nothing more than a sophisticated fiction. Given the slight modification in vocabulary, we have in the *DSM III* a document that strives for scientific clarity only to find, even if not to itself, a kind of horoscope of mental categories, a work of fiction.

What is needed is not the creation of increasingly refined categories of mental illness but rather the postponement of diagnosis; not permanently as Cooper suggests out of hand but long enough for madness to be heard critically, as a state in crisis. My translation seeks this in three interrelated ways.

Firstly it is necessary to trace madness back to its literary genesis. The models of madness derive not from empirical observation but from metaphor, from a poetic impetus. Although concentrating on the culpability of madness Jennifer Radden makes the point:

Mental disorders are often spoken of as diseases even in the case of functional conditions which want for any widely accepted explanation in organic terms and are as yet identified only as a set of psychological and behavioural manifestations. What was once a metaphorical extension has come to acquire a literal meaning. (17-18)

If this is true of the disease model of madness it is equally true of the moral model prevalent in the reading of madness from the early Greek myths to the Middle Ages and discernible in the work of the anti-psychiatrists. Whether as disease or as divine possession, for sanity to speak about madness

requires that it borrow from other discourses. Madness rendered explicable by means of linguistic convention sets a precedent for a consideration of madness solely as the subject of language. An attempt must be made to find a space before madness becomes *like* something else.

But where is this space, this point where the silence of madness is converted into speech? This question can best be answered by concentrating on the place and the moment where madness first asserts its verticality. Here lies the second site of my translation. There is a moment when the co-ordinates of the familiar no longer function in their old ways and they collapse in confusion - a transitionary state before the formation of a new and estranged pattern becomes apparent. Although there are obviously other manifestations indicative of the onset of madness I have limited myself to the changing perceptions towards spatio-temporal continuity. Space and time continue to provide us with a sense of enduring normality. To misuse Nietzsche's dictum: 'I fear we are not getting rid of space and time because we still believe in grammar'. These images provide a sense of order, a fixed point around which we revolve. And yet as we know, our conception of space and time changes in our experience of ecstasy, tragedy, hunger and boredom. If this change is coincidental with all moments of excess then for the mad (dwelling within the paradigm of excess) it is to be expected that their spatio-temporal conceptions must change in order to 'normalise' that excess.

In very different ways these writers are engaged in an act of self voyeurism; they see themselves gazing from afar, watching themselves as strangers. These authors enact Pascal's crisis of vision - to see themselves transported from the knowing centre to the edge of ignorance. From here, high upon the walls of Babel they create desperately, create implausibly but create and give form to the platform upon which they stand. It is this desperate creation that constitutes the third aspect of my investigation. Creation becomes a way of re-solving the disorientations of space and time, a way of finding a unique resolution to their state. Unique it may be but this does not mean that their resolution is chaotic or disordered. What is remarkable in each of these writers is that the expression of madness follows a logic - whether it is motivated by terror, praise or boredom it is that logic that both alienates and seduces the reader. If *logos* comprises the etymological base for both 'word/ speech' and 'reason', the insane discourse parodies the established effectiveness of any given discourse. It is a discourse that usurps the 'reason' of the *logos* while making use of the supremacy of the 'word'. Insanity drives a wedge into the *logos* creating a lacuna between reason and its expression. Madness continually modifies 'reason', reshaping the use of the 'word' until it reflects and explains the world once more. But this moulding necessarily asserts a world *sui generis*: a way of perceiving that approaches the limen of Wittgenstein's private language. Radden also recalls Wittgenstein but she holds that discourse cannot exist under

these circumstances:

A 'private language' like the schizophrenic's speech is hardly a language, and certainly 'thought' undertaken in it could not rightly be described as rational or reasonable. The minimum requirement of having reason... would seem to be communicable thought... which presupposes the ability to test reality [and] is the basis upon which the application of logic proceeds. (82)

While this is crowded with questionable assumptions it does raise the difficulty encountered in the mad poet. Surely "communicable thought" is a possibility even given a faulty testing of reality? The idea of communicable thought requires both a communicator and one who can interpret or translate the message. For the madman pre-occupied (again the spatial reference) with delirium, madness is a matter of language - a *logos* distorted and deranged but one that requires exactly the same process of translation as is encountered in all attempts to read. To translate madness is then an enquiry into the nature and limits of reading. It is an enquiry into the potential of language's ability to represent, for madness does not know of (or can no longer believe in) the prevalent forms of representation. Madness constantly postulates demented worlds which are contiguous with ours and yet are not governed by what Erich Fromm calls the "pathology of normalcy" (12). The challenge involuntarily undertaken by the madman's *logos* is that which Steiner sees as central to the demands of contemporary literature:

So that 'words may again be the word' and the living truth said, a new language must be created. For meaning to find original untarnished expression, sensibility must shake off the dead hand of precedent as it is, ineradicably, entrenched in existing words and grammatical moulds. (185)

What Steiner is essentially describing here is the Vienna Babel, a centre of creation that incorporates the diversity of social standing into the project of generating a new language, a language of verticality. This is not the alien language of the other Babel but a rough hewn and dynamic discourse struggling to assert itself above the plane of the vulgate, the place of dead, dry words. It is this language that we find in Smart in his assertion that the Hebrew *lamed* is physically inscribed within all aspects of creation (*Jubilate Agno* Fragment B 477-491).

If this constitutes the potentiality of madness it is tempered by the limitations of madness as discourse. Here is the other Babel. Seemingly void of human presence it represents the place where madness approaches the threshold of Wittgenstein's private language and the unspeakable language of catatonia. This is the pole to which Cowper is drawn in his final years. He could be describing this Babel when in the year prior to his death he translates his own "Montes Glaciales":

 Their lofty summits, crested high, they show,
 With mingled sleet and long-incumbent snow.
 The rest is ice....
 Thus stood - and, unremovable by skill
 Or force of man, had stood the structure still;
 (430-31)

The rest, as Beckett notes, is silence. These Babels thus provide a correlative for the reading *and* the experience of madness. Bruegel's existing versions assume, with this kind of consideration, an uncanny mobility. They slip and slide about the surface of signification, attaching themselves to

the plethoric perspectives of madness: at once depicting the ways in which it can be read by the sane and the ways it is suffered by the mad.

My wish is then to retain, as far as possible, this sense of continuity (given the irreducible silence of the ivory Babel), constantly to bridge. The most obvious way of bridging these worlds, of searching for ways across the divide of translation would be, as Porter and Foucault do, to follow a historical course, to trace through time the historical productions and manifestations of madness. Although there is some kind of chronological movement between Cowper and Smart (18th century), Nietzsche (19th) and Beckett, my concern is with madness as a supra-historical condition - as that which exists in tandem with history, and yet as that which exists in a vertical relation to the plane of history. Irrespective of the existing model of madness, the terms according to which it is addressed guarantees it a marginalised status. It towers above the vocabularies of social discourse and while its foundation is rooted in history, its onset and culmination subvert the time and space - the historical locale - of its origin. Thus, on the one hand, it is not fortuitous that Cowper and Smart form an early part of my analysis. They depict the Classical crisis, in the history of perceiving madness (described by Foucault) and deserve consideration as such. On the other hand however, the multivalence of Babel suggests that in madness there is a silence that is disguised by the very history that sets out to expose it. Between the genealogies of historical

continuity the madness of Babel continues (as a void) to avoid transcription.

Foucault stands out as one who, in *Madness and Civilisation*, attempts to encroach upon that which is forbidden by the decency of accepted speech. In part the evocatory beauty of Foucault's treatise can be ascribed to his ability to penetrate beyond his essentially historical scheme into a poetics of the timeless: a poetry of those caught up in the "lyric glow of illness" (qtd. in Felman 52). Although Derrida finds this poeticising objectionable (61-63) he acknowledges the challenge undertaken by Foucault: the desire not to talk about madness, but of madness, to pursue the accepted terms of academic discourse into a place where it begins to glow with its own disturbing lyricism. It is this same fund beyond control that lies at the heart of the creative process and it is this that Foucault (and Derrida for all his protesting) implicitly realises. This signifies the point of contact between the madmen of writing and the writing of madmen, the desire behind all translation.

Rather than focusing solely on those who suffered under the curse and blessing of madness I will attempt to follow a continuity that begins with one who dwelt in the lands of both madness and sanity (Nietzsche) before moving into those whose personal relation to madness was lifelong (Cowper and Smart) and finally to Beckett whose mental condition has never been in doubt. The procedure is to follow the writer imbalanced to the world displaced.

Because of the difficulty encountered in too rigorous an historical approach my analysis will commence in the middle of Foucault's history. The middle state is also personally important to any examination of madness. Not only does it depict the initial manifestation of turbulence, the collapse of an ability to act within the constraints of the normal, but it also furnishes a time that contains the beginning of madness and the end of sanity. The subject poised between incompatible languages thrashes about in the face of a sane language that no longer makes sense and one that does not yet make sense.

Nietzsche's writing conveys exactly this struggle within languages, between a language that he sees as corrupted and empty and the language of his philosophy with all the dangers of a new semantics. Above all Nietzsche realises that madness is conceived of within the folds of sanity, it breaks clear and in the resultant clarity yearns (even in its silence) to return. But in its returning it offers nothing more than violence to an existence concerned with encouraging the dream of the normal. Violence in madness is a violence motivated by language against language. In 1596, 'violence' related both to physical injury committed against another as well as designating the disruption and perversion of the authority of the word, a sin against language. The violence of the madman is the tension of one pulling against the pillars that uphold the edifice, straining against the folly of sanity and the terror of its complement. But it is also a violence that creates the tower of its own obsession and in this

simultaneous destruction and creation plays out the drama of unreason to which we cannot afford to contribute and yet which we cannot afford to ignore, a gift from the periphery of ourselves.

III Nietzsche's bridge across

Take one for example entirely free from pain all over, both his body and the other yoke. Where can he turn for relief? Nothing simpler. To the thought of annihilation. Thus, whatever the conjecture, nature bids us smile, if not laugh. (*Mercier and Camier* 58)

The laughter that intervenes at the last for Beckett, is the laughter that Zarathustra battles for and finally finds. Zarathustra has to journey from the thought and threat of annihilation to the smile and laugh therein. He is one who traverses the longest distance: from the centre of the known to the periphery and back again without losing his footing. But changing the foundation. Nietzsche led the way for his protagonist but found something else in the place where nihilism and laughter meet.

Nietzsche belongs to those thinkers who lurk in the shadows of mainstream philosophy like a dog harassing the footsteps of the master. What Diogenes the cynic (the dog) is to Plato, Nietzsche is to the presence of Kant. And once this peripheral position had been assumed, his investigation was necessarily into the elsewhere. From the beginning his writing went against the dominant 'style' of philosophising - as witnessed by the poor reception of his *Birth of Tragedy* - and, in the process, became a threat to the rules of

philosophical writing. Nietzsche, and to a lesser extent Schopenhauer, were not philosophers, or rather, were not only philosophers but were thinkers who adopted philosophy as an available genre. As R.J. Hollingdale points out in his introduction to Schopenhauer's *Essays and Aphorisms*, Goethe had cornered the literary market. The novel, the play, autobiography, collected letters, the travel book and poetry had all been mastered under Goethe's genius:

One effect of all this was to drive original intellects out of the conventional literary categories into other fields, especially the field of philosophy, which Goethe had not harvested; and so it is that the world figures of German literature in the age after Goethe are not to be found amongst novelists or poets or dramatists, but among philosophers: Hegel, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche... (10)

However, Nietzsche's difference from these thinkers is, above all, a matter of style. By using this awkward word I am not constructing a Form and Content debate. What the *logos* is to the madman, style is to the 'normal' writer. Nietzsche's style encompasses both his form and content, his subject matter and his choice of language. This produces a text, to use Barthes' formulation, where

style is always a secret.... The allusive virtue of style is ... a matter of density, for what stands firmly and deeply beneath style, brought together harshly or tenderly in its figures of speech, are fragments of a reality entirely alien to language.
(198, 33)

The attempt, through style, to say that which was the fulfilment of style, to say that which was alien to language became his obsession. The need was to translate an invisible source language into the words of the target language. Thus the purple prose that overleaps

its subject matter at the end of *The Birth of Tragedy* was to be honed until it became, in itself, a perpetuation of that subject matter. This stylistic exaggeration produces a language that seeks to lacerate, to cut open the stitching, to open again the old wound where the desire for homogeneity smothers contradiction, absorbs the impact of paradox and annihilates those traces that betray the otherness of the self. In the same way Nietzsche is obsessed with the lineaments of the vertical; in every plane he searches for that which is hidden by hegemony, that which upon its surface contains the premonition of height, the brick and bitumen of Babel. The presence of unreason is implicit, for Nietzsche, in the very fabric of sanity.

His style is then an attempt to make the 'natural' (the naturalised) appear as an instance of perversion, to throw into doubt the ancient absolutes - from God, through the external world, down to the constitution of the subject. He is arguably the great philosopher of Babel, one who sets out to disorientate and confuse the tongues of normal discourse in order to produce the vertigo of transition. Nietzsche's impossible philosophy was nothing less than an attempt to drive the reader into a state like unto that of the madman where, in the collapse of the familiar there is the possibility of the transvaluation of all values. Thus on one level, Nietzsche is an image of one who spans much of the 19th century (1844-1900) and as such is a chronological nexus - a kind of temporal analogue of transition - between Cowper and Beckett. More importantly, he is a philosopher of the

transitional, one who seeks to force the reader into a state of transition, a place where reading can begin to read the reader.

He is transitional in so far as he belongs to history and is part of the transition that is time. Any fixed moment in time contains all past moments which are being modified by the present into that ideal object called 'the future'. This is so even if the future is no more than a re-discovery of the past. The present is always transitional to those who are resident in it.

It is with this awareness that his work is driven to reformulate, in a radical way, much of the past in an attempt to find some correlation between a present that he found intractably alien and a past ill-equipped: a past that had become dated. His sight was firmly set on the future. In a wry parody of Christ he notes: "My time is not yet come, some are born posthumously" (*Ecce Homo* "Why I write such excellent books" I)³. Writing for the future, his 'method' is an excavation of the past. By constructing a genealogy he expresses the hegemonic limitations of past thought, philosophical presuppositions that were, according to Nietzsche,

only a scholarly form of *faith* in the prevailing morality, a new way of *expressing* it... and in any event the opposite of a testing, analysis, doubting and vivisection of this faith. (*Beyond Good and Evil* 186)

These surgical metaphors, once more introduce the knife, the necessity of laceration and the duty of the 'new philosopher', one who wages war "by laying the knife

vivisectionally to the bosom of the very virtues of the age" (212). Morality, and the humanity that it implies, is seen here almost as a corpus (if not catatonic, then in pain) upon which he - as pathologist and midwife - must operate. In so far as he is a pathologist, his duty is to operate upon the body without recourse to an anaesthetising discourse: hence his ruthless and wantonly polemical statements. His work is, in this sense, an exploratory biopsy that takes place during the transitional phase between the first suspicion of disease and prognosis as (or and) cure. As a midwife however, he is carefully attempting to bring to birth a more healthy offspring: one that will grow into the future as something above 'the herd'. Here he is a philological midwife bringing the future - one that more closely resembles his conception of the human - to birth. His relation to Babel is plotted according to these two axes. The first is the vertical axis where the pathologist's scalpel makes an incision that exposes the seam by which contradiction (the small signs of the irrational) is brought back to the folds of the linear. This assault works at liberating unreason, parading the fragility of the construct that is sanity. Secondly, and in conjunction with the first, Nietzsche (the midwife) is concerned with bridging, with crossing over from the Classical prescriptive perception of madness to a more accepting attitude - from Rotterdam to Vienna. This is not to posit Nietzsche as a Pinel or Tuke, not as a liberator of madmen but as a liberator of the language of unreason.

The knife, however, cuts both ways. In subjecting humanity to the sutures of his kind of philosophising he becomes consciously (and later unconsciously) the subject of his own investigation. Nietzsche depicts a movement away from the kind of 'objective' philosophizing typical of, say, Kant who in his concern with categorical imperatives seeks a universal set of laws. His crusade is against this supposed objectivity, against a philosophy that is a science of the impersonal; a philosophy that asserts itself as something imposed from without the human sphere. Thus in *Beyond Good and Evil* he advocates a philosophising intricately bound up with the subjective:

It has gradually become clear to me what every great philosophy has hitherto been: a confession on the part of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir.... there is nothing whatever impersonal; and, above all, his morality bears decided and decisive testimony to *who he is*.
(6)

Nietzschean philosophy is less an empirical quest for universals than a matter of subjectivity, less a science and more an artistic vision.

Nietzsche (like Swift and Blake before him) is then one who is precariously balanced between the personal affects of madness and the detailing of an apatheia that he saw as engulfing the human spirit: a banal euthanasia visited upon society by collective wisdom.

Again as with Swift's later melancholia it is extremely difficult, if not impossible at the end, to delineate a sane from an insane discourse, pessimism from paranoia, justified arrogance from megalomania. In the prolific output of his

last articulate year (1888) he equates, more and more, the task of philosophy with the achievements of madness; a philosophy that repeatedly asserts the primacy of its own inverted vision. Nietzsche's style is simultaneously one that seduces and alienates: seduces because, as he repeatedly asserts, he was one of Germany's greatest writers of prose; alienates, partly because of the zealousness of his criticism against humanity and partly because his writing echoes the way in which he wished to live, in suffering and exclusion:

Philosophy, as I have hitherto understood and lived it, is a voluntary living in ice and high mountains - a seeking after everything strange and questionable in existence, all that has hitherto been excommunicated by morality. (*Ecce Homo* 3)

Nietzsche's pursuit of "everything strange and questionable" is in fact a reaching after madness, or more precisely, the boundaries in which it resides. The excess present in all his writing, from *The Birth of Tragedy* onwards, is not simply a prolonged insult directed by an obstreperous prodigy against the body of philosophy. That he sought to be realised in the future is not a rationalisation, a palliative for the lack of recognition in the present. It is a discourse that battles against the stability of the present and the way in which Babel is hidden even in the architecture of sanity.

Nietzschean excess harasses the present - both as temporal entity and as a symbol of the prevailing state of things - as a way of extending himself into the future and as a means of creating a future of possibility: a time when the world is expanded. The driving back of these limits necessarily means that he encroaches on all the established "virtues of the

age". Madness, that which negatively defines the adherence to 'virtue' is one of those limits.

For one who desired the transvaluation of values, it was required that he create a new kind of hero. Rather than compromise his message he created an ambassador of a new world - a fictional figure of such proportions that he encompassed and symbolized, far more accurately than any system, Transvaluation. The creation was, of course, Zarathustra. Zarathustra could go where Nietzsche could not, he could trespass upon areas that even Nietzsche's epigrammatic style found inaccessible. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* the limits of polite philosophising were ruptured. Replacement came in the form of a parody (because illogical) of the Socratic dialogue, the antithesis of Bacon's induction and the scornful fulfillment of Descartes' supposed dictum of operation: *de omnibus dubitandum* (*Beyond Good and Evil* 2). And perhaps most damaging to the ethos of philosophy, he replaced philosophy's drive towards truth with fiction: that which is, by definition, beyond the rationalist notions of truth. Here philosophy becomes its contradiction; the former's reliance on consistency of logic and coherence is transformed (exposed for what it is) into anecdote, dream, poetry and mixed metaphor.

Nothing is sacred here - least of all the respectability of the generic, of the exclusivity of forms. The only consistency within this new genre is (and this will be discussed below) the conspicuous moment that is repeatedly reached when, as his philosophy affirms a 'certainty',

discovers a 'truth' it is undercut by the drama of the narrative. Without warning, philosophy is refuted by the circumstance of the plot. In short, it is a text that asserts the certainty of a continual usurpation of discourses. Throughout *Zarathustra* there is a threat of a dual madness: a dislocation within the text and the protagonist. But it is precisely this dislocation that has generated so many bad readings of Nietzsche. From here it is a small step into the interpretative insanity that associated Nietzsche with Hitler and Mussolini and gave rise to a poetry of irony as German soldiers marched into World War I armed with *St. John's Gospel* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "A book for every one and no one". It becomes necessary to find a reader and a reading between these mutually exclusive terms, within the impossibility of this initial warning. To discover *Zarathustra* (and its madness) one must look to a place before *Zarathustra*, before this philosophy of the irrational.

In a chapter entitled "Thus spoke Zarathustra" Nietzsche recalls that the composition of *Zarathustra* was unconsciously heralded in *Joyful Wisdom*. The quality he finds essential to the new hero is "great healthiness":

dangerously healthy, healthy again and again - it seems to us as if we have, as a reward, a yet undiscovered country before us whose boundaries none has ever seen, a land beyond all known lands and corners of the ideal, a world so overful of the beautiful, strange, questionable, terrible and divine ... (2)

During the period (1881-1883) between the completion of *Joyful Wisdom* and the beginning of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche was anything but healthy: either physically or

emotionally. His proposal to Lou Salome had been rejected and he was involved in a circle of recrimination and petty jealousy propagated by his sister Elizabeth. It was Elizabeth, he remarks in a letter to Peter Gast, who

has deprived me of the fruits of the best victories I have won over myself, so that I have, in the end, become the victim of a ruthlessly revengeful sentiment, although my innermost mind has foresworn revenge and punishment. This inner conflict is bringing me step by step nearer madness.... (qtd. in Lea 178)

Obviously the author and his philosophy were not equal to each other but this is neither new nor interesting. What is of interest is the way in which he uses personal failure and illness as a way of giving birth to a new form. This is not only an indication of the therapeutic balm of artistic creation but is another instance of a trend that recurs throughout Nietzsche. Zarathustra is the offspring born out of a perceived movement towards madness and from a desire to overcome the spitefulness in himself and those around him. The result is partly the desire for escape from the temptation to despair of humanity and partly an incisive critique of that humanity: its illness and its bland worship of a geography of the known.

In *Zarathustra*, then, we find the presence of the multiplicity of faces that we have detailed: Nietzsche as midwife, bringing himself and the future to birth, as surgeon operating on the sickness of the past and the present, as explorer searching for new lands, as a bridge-builder for a 'new' kind of thought and finally in the persona of the child, Zarathustra. In each visage Nietzsche is identified as

a mediator, a go-between. He resides in the 'time' before and after birth, during the operation, uncovering a new world and representing an unknown country. But what of Zarathustra - surely he is not transitional, surely of all Nietzsche's work, he has arrived?

Martin Heidegger uses precisely such an image to introduce his comments: Zarathustra is the bridge that leads from humanity to the Overman (*The New Nietzsche* 68). This is explicitly supported by Zarathustra in his assessment of the 'higher men':

you are only bridges: may higher men than you step across upon you! You are steps: so do not be angry with him who climbs over you into *his* height. ("The Greeting")

Zarathustra yearns for the alien, for the Overman and the joyous refrain of the alien-ated: "*I teach you the Superman. Man is something that should be overcome*" ("Zarathustra's Prologue" 3). Zarathustra is that bridge; excommunicated from 'the herd' on one side and like Moses (although Nietzsche would not have approved of the comparison) unable to reach the promised land of the Overman. Zarathustra is also caught within the dedication, belonging neither to the "everyone" of sanity nor the "no one" of the Overman - a sanity beyond sanity. Zarathustra having written the new tablets or, as he calls them, the "new law-tables" may only yearn for the time when they will find fulfilment in the Overman. As Heidegger, with customary style, phrases it: "Longing is the agony of the nearness of the distant" (68). In Zarathustra we have neither a sufficient God nor a sufficient madness. He strains towards a wisdom that lies in the nebulous reaches where

sanity becomes madness - a point at which the boundary falls away and Transvaluation may really occur - for perhaps wisdom is this point of mingling.

That wisdom carries with it the strains of the irrational, is one of Zarathustra's favourite conclusions ("with all things one thing is impossible - rationality" ["Before Sunrise"]) and one that suggests the fabric of paradox that goes to make up the bridge. If we take our impetus from Nietzsche's vehement refusal of a system, then the metaphor of the bridge (this metaphor of transition) is as viable a 'method' as any and one that may allow us to follow the contours of Zarathustra's journey.

As has been suggested, the bridge that is Zarathustra and over which he must cross is one that requires to be built *en route* to the Overman. It does not possess the certainty of a madman's *logos* and has none of its 'stability'. Each step may be the one that causes him to topple and everything that has been gained by experience, by the process of construction, will be lost. The epigraph to *The Wanderer and his Shadow* explains how precarious this kind of existence must be:

You'll ne'er go on nor yet go back?
Is e'en for chamois here no track?

So here I wait and firmly clasp
What eye and hand will let me grasp!

Five-foot-broad ledge, red morning's breath,
And under me - world, man and death!
(*Human, All Too Human* III)

Zarathustra is the wanderer pursued by his exhausted shadow (the incident actually occurs in Book IV), is the congruence

of the interrogative and the exclamatory. Faced with questions that render him motionless in fear and doubt, he perceives from the height of his excess "red morning's breath" - a vision equally excessive in its violent beauty. He is suspended above an indifferent world, the mediocrity of humankind and the inevitability of an ungracious demise. This gives way, with a continuity that appears dreamt rather than contrived by any conscious attempt. Like the overlapping of episodes in a dream, the epigraph to *The Wanderer* flows, with its own strange logic, into the opening section of *Zarathustra*.

Zarathustra has left his mountain in order to preach the Overman to the world. His message is phrased, as can be expected, in terms of the bridge:

Man is a rope, fastened between animal and Superman - a rope over an abyss.
A dangerous going-across, a dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and staying still.
What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal... ("Zarathustra's prologue" 4)

No wonder that under these circumstances the wayfarer is required to be "dangerously healthy". But what of this word, this "danger"? First: the usual injunction that follows 'danger' is somewhat removed. Danger, as that which advocates the establishing of a distance, appears unavoidable. Second: danger is related to excess. As a word, its meaning begins at the point at which it escapes the secure, the specified boundaries. Thus we have the presence of two inter-related aspects. One registers danger in the continual presence of the inexplicable (from dreams to madness) and the other sees

danger in the way humanity distances itself from this danger; from recognising the implications of this "going-across".

The audience rejects his message partly because they do not wish to be reminded of the insecurity of their footing and partly because their attention is directed elsewhere. It is here that we first meet the real dialogue of the text: the dialogue between philosophy and literary narrative. The audience is enraptured by a tight-rope walker who has begun his walk across a rope that spans the market square. He provides for them a distancing from danger. His walk is both the epitome and the fulfilment of a danger they realise dimly enough to reject when annunciated by Zarathustra. The appearance of the clown - this balance between the fool and the madman - is just sufficient to topple the equilibrium between balance and gravity. The tight-rope walker finds certainty, or arrives at a state of rest, in his death.

The clown advances over the rope "with rapid steps" and his cry of "Forward lame-foot!... forward sluggard, intruder, pallid-face!" ("Zarathustra's Prologue" 6) indicates that the walker is out of his 'depth' and he realises how tenuous is his footing. But it is the buffoon's precipitous action that is the most telling: "he emitted a cry like a devil and sprang over the man standing in his path" (6). For Zarathustra-the-godless there are many demons, devils and portentous visions that plague the action of the narrative. This is partly explained in the next section where he summarises himself in terms of the event:

I am still distant from them, and my meaning
does not speak to their minds. To men I am still a

cross between a fool and a corpse. (7)

The bridge slowly begins to assume more concrete proportions. Not only is it an open-ended artifice but while its origin is within the physical and verifiable world, its inclination is to the boundary and beyond. Following directly from this comes an awareness of a severe limitation in the lexicon of available signifiers. In a dual sense, Zarathustra inhabits the realm where these signifieds exist (fools, madmen and corpses) while also being required to use these inexact, if not irrational, terms so as to grasp the nature of the milieu in which he finds himself.

The crowd "that flew apart in disorder" (6) responds exactly as a crowd is wont to do. While they are able to face the death of the tightrope walker - Elias Canetti points out in *Crowds and Power* that the presence of danger is the "discharge" that provides the crowd with a reason for being (18) - they are terrified by the strangeness of the buffoon, as one who personifies death in all its 'inhumanity'. Above all they take flight from Death as it perversely illuminates their lives and stains, with physical mutilation, the market square. If this is applicable even to "the herd" it is, for Zarathustra, a question that constantly bedevils his journey, his process of creation. As a reminder then, he carries the dead rope-walker with him on his departure from the town.

The corpse, and its attendant message, are omnipresent and have given rise to a conception of Zarathustra (and, for that matter, Nietzsche) as a morbid variation on the theme of Arthur Schopenhauer⁴. The best phrasing of the 'corpse'

occurs when the despondent prophet speaks of the corpse we carry; the death of, and in, life: "Everything is empty, everything is one, everything is past". He continues in a language that will become familiar:

The earth wants to break open, but the depths will not devour us!

Alas, where is there still a sea in which one could drown: thus our lament resounds - across shallow swamps.

Truly we have grown too weary even to die; now we are still awake and we live on - in sepulchers. ("The Prophet")

The impossibility (because desired) of the end, the geographical claustrophobia and infinite weariness echo exactly Cowper's "Lines written during a period of insanity" and "The Castaway". This designates the point where Cowper ends, the point he cannot traverse. For Zarathustra it is the original premise, that which must be overcome. Zarathustra's response is not registered in philosophical terms, but in physical: he is "transformed", refuses food and finally sinks into a long sleep. The certainty of the previous chapter has vanished and, upon awaking, his 'answer' to the charge is in terms of a dream. The climax is worth examining:

Then a raging wind tore the door asunder: whistling, shrilling and piercing it threw to me a black coffin... [which] burst asunder and vomited forth a thousand peals of laughter.

And from a thousand masks of children, angels, owls, fools, and child-sized butterflies it laughed and mocked and roared at me. ("The Prophet")

That his favourite disciple fails to interpret the dream correctly should be warning enough. The dream does not symbolise anything but itself. Dreams reside in that cloud of unknowing where everything is paradox and approximation. What can be read in this case is only that the dream encapsulates

a cul-de-sac where the slow constitution of the self meets its simultaneous disintegration; the child meets the coffin, truth meets the mask, sincerity and seriousness meet the laughter of mockery, assertion meets refutation. This is the dream of nihilism. In "The Child with the Mirror" exactly the same thing happens. He dreams that a child presents him with a mirror in which he sees "the sneer and grimace of a devil". From this he concludes, rather arbitrarily, that his doctrine is in danger of being misunderstood. Like death, these dreams cannot be overcome but neither can the 'message' be avoided. The dream is hermetically sealed - it cannot be entered from the outside and only dimly grasped in the silence of the interior: "he gazed long into the face of the disciple who had interpreted the dream, and shook his head" ("The Prophet").

Either in the form of dreams, visions or action, Zarathustra's journey carries with it this temptation to despair and stasis: the building of the bridge always has before it an abyss, a dead-end. Michael Haar's definition aptly describes the terrain of the bridge and the effect of standing there:

Nihilism... installs itself insidiously as a sentiment that is first of all one of gloom, and then one of terror, at the debacle of all meaning.... It is the moment when we feel ourselves - as in the onrush of a nightmare or as in a complete disorientation in space and time - flowing or drifting toward ill-defined borderlands where every previous meaning, every previous sense, still subsists, but has been converted into non-sense. (p 13)

In this way, nihilism becomes the point of contact between

madness and sanity. To go forward is absurd -not only dangerous but impossible for how can Nothingness be confronted without oneself becoming no-thing? Maurice Blanchot, who revels in thinking the impossible, unearths the final contradiction that rests at the bottom of nihilistic thought:

Nihilism is tied to being. Nihilism is the impossibility of coming to an end and finding an outcome in this end... it tells us that when we think nothingness we are still thinking being.... Nihilism here tells us its final and rather grim truth: it tells of the impossibility of Nihilism (p 126).

If we translate Blanchot's expression into mathematical terms we arrive at Frege's Nothingness:

the set with zero as its only member, which mathematicians write as $\{0\}$. Just by looking at this symbol we can see what Frege saw: nothingness is not nothing, but is actually something. (Guillen 96)

But to be confronted with that which is beyond thought does not excuse the thinker from the involuntary procedure of thinking it. Because the demon is always at the point of opening the door of the present, it does not mean that the coffin of masks will never "vomit forth [their] thousand peals of laughter".

The only other alternative, it appears, is to return to the thoroughfare, to join with the herd in the celebration of the mediocre. Book IV of *Zarathustra* deals with the "higher men", those who have forsaken the going-over and have retreated in despondence. Nietzsche addresses them in his "Fragments of Dionysus-Dithyrambs":

Already he mimics himself,
Already weary he grows,

Already he seeks the paths he has trod -
Who of late still loved all tracks untrodden. (87)

For Zarathustra this is not an alternative. Behind him lies the the graveyard of his youth, fragments of his self that have been destroyed by his ubiquitous "enemies". Only one thing remains: "a sweet odour comes to me from you, my dearest dead ones, a heart-easing odour that banishes tears" ("The Funeral Song").

It seems we have reached an impasse. Zarathustra's visions of the unthinkable constantly return the prophet, like the tightrope walker, to immobility. What is worse in his confrontation with the dwarf is that the great sophist is rendered silent. But who is the dwarf, what was the silent message understood only by Zarathustra? The incident occurs in a chapter called "Of the Vision and the Riddle".

A partial answer has been essayed. The dwarf is another of the creatures that inhabit the boundary and, of course, like the corpse he carries earlier, this apparition sits on his shoulder:

half dwarf, half mole; crippled, crippling; pouring
lead drops into my ear, leaden thoughts into my
brain...

Thereupon the dwarf fell silent; and he long
continued so. But his silence oppressed me; and to
be thus in company is truly more lonely than to be
alone! (1)

Although expressed as external, the dwarf weighs upon his introspection - a dead-end fashioned for one. Extending Blanchot's dictum, nihilism sounds at our most solipsistic depths. Indeed it is tied to being but not a communal being. It is insurmountable because in its nightmarish quality it refuses to become public. We all have a different dwarf, we

see a different expression upon the face of nothingness.

If the dwarf is the ultimate threat to Zarathustra it is because he embodies the "Spirit of Gravity": that which threatens to dislodge him from the bridge's edge. At the point of confrontation between himself and the dwarf the dream-like narrative alters the bridge into a path where he confronts *his* version of nihilism. Two paths, one running into the past and the other into the future are joined under the gateway of the "Moment". At this point of junction the question is phrased:

must we not return and run down that other lane out before us, down that long, terrible lane - must we not return eternally? ("Of the Vision and the Riddle" 2)

Repeatedly Zarathustra is trapped by the same demon (note also the presence of the demon in *Gay Science* 341): time as the eternal present versus time as the eternal recurrence of the same. For Nietzsche, this is his temptation to despair. And truly it is with this thought (this "what if" as he phrases it in *Gay Science*) that Zarathustra reaches far into madness. For in articulating, however partially, the Unthinkable, by translating it into words it creates an epicentre of futility that ripples through time, engulfing memory and hope alike, razing all the artifices, bringing all to degree-zero. What is left are the remains of

existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness: *the eternal recurrence*. (*Will To Power* 55)

But what happens, on these occasions, when Zarathustra thinks madness? The first response designates the disappearance of

Zarathustra. He retreats from the endless discourse that generally sustains him and retires into silence and stasis. The narrative falters and we, as readers, find ourselves alone; no longer privy to the endless stream of philosophic confession. In "Zarathustra's Prologue" we find him "on the ground beside the dead man lost in thought", shaking his head at the disciple in "The Prophet" and in "Of the Vision and the Riddle": "Thus I spoke, and I spoke more and more softly: for I was afraid of my own thoughts and reservations" (2).

At first glance, then, it appears that he is defeated, forced to retrace his steps. In "Of the Child and the Mirror" the meeting of 'self' and demon is brief and obscured as is his resolution. But to retrace our steps we discover not avoidance but re-solution. To return to our mathematical analogy, this statement of the minimal, of the end of numbers is also a statement of potential:

The set $\{0\}$ is the blank realization of the null set $\{\}$, just as the musical pause is the blank realization of the a musician's potential to create sound. (Guillen 96)

It is not too extreme to argue that this set is the prerequisite to other numbers, as silence is to speaking, as nothingness is to meaning and as folly and madness are to sanity.

In following the image of the corpse let us not forget the presence of the clown. As Zarathustra has met the horror of madness, he has also become acquainted with its mirth. As a fool he is freed from the constraints that bind others, as a philosopher of foolishness he is the ultimate graffiti

artist scrawling, with his life, the paradox of wisdom:

My hand - is the fool's hand: woe to all tables
and walls and whatever has room left for fool's
scribbling, fool's doodling! ("Of the Spirit of
Gravity" 1)

Haar's statement to the effect that in the face of nihilism there is a conversion from sense to non-sense assumes a new dimension. Everything is rendered foolish and falls under the domain of foolishness but that conveys only the negative aspect of the paradox. To accept non-sense is the positive aspect and to a certain extent Nietzsche had already prepared the way for this kind of conclusion. It was not merely, as F.A. Lea would have us believe, that his proclaiming chaos contains an intellectual confusion that asserts the existence of order (p 331-32). Nietzsche takes Schopenhauer further: chaos is given, what is required is a way of living in it, a way of living with the most abysmal thought. A hint is contained in the potential of foolishness. For Zarathustra the word becomes the instrument of creation:

Are things not given names and musical sounds so
that a man may refresh himself with things? Speech
is a beautiful foolery: with it man dances over all
things. ("The Convalescent" 2)

Language is the means by which Zarathustra refreshes himself; even more it is the means by which he resuscitates himself. Again to flesh out Blanchot - nihilism is inextricably bound to silence. It is the silence that intrudes upon speech (like the corpse upon life), upon music, upon action. Continuance therefore is essentially a matter of language where the first word wards off the silence. If only for a while.

Of course language is, in this sense, a lie and for two

reasons: firstly, it avoids the absolute of nihilism;
secondly, any discourse has within it a grammar that seeks to
order:

'Reason' in language: oh what a deceitful old
woman! I fear we are not getting rid of God because
we still believe in grammar. (*Twilight of the Idols*
5)

Enter the fool. The fool and the madman are able to penetrate
language, making of its certainties a matter of doubt,
emulating its order while parodying with non-sense its
semantics. The foolish Zarathustra uses language to retain
his status in madness, as a way of mimicking the language we
take for granted. Even Nietzsche realised that the parody of
the history of thought was not sufficient. The fool also has
to answer.

The 'answer' is found in "Of the Vision and the Riddle".
After his confrontation with the dwarf he has a vision of a
shepherd and the snake whereupon he orders the shepherd to
invert the order of things: "Bite!/ Its head off! Bite!" (2).
The snake in this case is a continuation of the corpse, the
dwarf, the Spirit of Gravity. If it can be overcome it allows
transfiguration:

No longer a shepherd, no longer a man - a
transformed being, surrounded with light, *laughing!*
Never yet on earth had any man laughed as he
laughed.... and now a thirst consumes me, a longing
that is never stilled (2).

Its visionary quality makes it both known and inaccessible.
The Overman has crossed over the bridge and is visible from
Zarathustra's purview. For the fool, laughter is the most
obvious solution: both a laughter 'at' and 'with'. And both

aspects are entailed in The Will to Power.

The Will To Power: the great metaphor of misunderstanding. Of all Nietzsche's ideas this one best served the more perverse faces of ideology. How seriously this idea was appropriated is understandable if we consider how seriously (he who is usually so ironic in his treatment of extremism) Georges Bataille sought to repudiate its claim in "Nietzsche and the Fascists". Bataille's concern is to point out the logical contradictions between Nietzsche's concept and the way it was twisted in order to preach a doctrine of patriotism. Bataille emphasises the homeless nature, the desire for another, as yet uncharted, country. But there is also a contradiction between *Il Duce's* desire to make public (accessible to all) The Will To Power and the essentially solipsistic nature of that Will. Like the singular face of "the abysmal thought" the Will To Power cannot be disseminated, it refuses publicity. Its relation to nihilism is immediate: The Will To Power exists in the silence of the confrontation with the Spirit of Gravity. If one cannot evoke that Will, one is condemned to the weary treading of existent paths.

In the silence where the self is threatened with disintegration The Will To Power implies two distinctive movements. One is negative: a distancing from the temptation to succumb to

the prophet of the great weariness who taught: 'It is all one, nothing is worth while, the world is without meaning, knowledge chokes'. ("The Cry of Distress")

Here the laughter is addressed at those who have failed and,

in the process, at the possibility of failing oneself. Zarathustra takes his example from life: "and life itself told me this secret: 'Behold,' it said, 'I am that *which must overcome itself again and again*' ("Of Self-Overcoming"). This implies the positive: a continual re-creation of oneself out of oneself. The laughter that resounds is a laughter with oneself; a laughter of forgiveness and acceptance. Finally it is a laughter that is self-perpetuating:

Perhaps it is precisely here that we are discovering the realm of our *invention*, that realm where we too can still be original, perhaps as parodists of world history and God's buffoons - perhaps, even if nothing else of today has a future, precisely our *laughter* may still have a future! (*Beyond Good and Evil* 223)

The paradox in the fool's answer is simply that nothing changes except the fool's perception. Invention exists in the parody "of world history" and in the continual creation of the self out of the ruins of the encounter with nihilism. This is the laughter of the gods, the laughter that overcomes the boundaries of fear, sanity and self. It is exactly this Nietzschean laughter that Harry discovers at the end of Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf*. But the laughter does not end here, it flows back into the body and becomes the dance.

It is in the dance that the Spirit of Gravity is finally conquered. The dance is the physical counterpart to the laugh: in both, the self is lost in the act of creation. At bottom, Zarathustra's message is simply this: laughter, rejoicing in itself, in its ability to ridicule the threat of failure becomes the dance, the positive movement out of

stasis. The fool, laughing and dancing, continues the construction of the bridge by converting the abyss into something solid (through his mad perception). He achieves the impossible - he learns to dance upon the chaos. And in dancing the abyss is made solid by that which hitherto most threatened his destruction. It becomes

A dance-song and a mocking-song on the Spirit of Gravity, my supreme, most powerful devil, who they say is 'the lord of the earth'. ("The Dance Song")

The bridge to the Overman is paved with dwarves:

For must there not exist that which is danced upon, danced across? Must there not be moles and heavy dwarves - for the sake of the the nimble, the nimblist? ("Of Old and New Law-Tables" 2)

The threat posed by the Eternal Return of the same is met by a change in perception that no longer desires to avoid but to embrace eternity. Throughout "The Seven Seals" Zarathustra chants this acceptance - "how should I not lust for eternity and for the wedding ring of rings - the Ring of Recurrence" (1). To accept the possibility of the Eternal Return, even if the logic of acceptance is impossible, generates a change within the metaphor of the bridge. The resolution of Time inspires a resolution in Space.

From the first the bridge departed from the market square in search of more etheral reaches. Zarathustra's narrative traces the laborious construction of the bridge at the point where opposites meet without contradiction. The repetitive process that marks the journey from stasis to dance, from sanity to insanity, from eloquence to dumb silence, merely exacerbates Zarathustra's longing. He may

call it the Overman or the time of his children ("The Sign") but its most immediate manifestation is a desire for a beyond, a desire for a "wild wisdom" that is able to break loose of physical, moral and cultural boundaries:

And often [this wisdom] tore me forth and up and away in the midst of laughter: and then indeed I flew, an arrow, quivering with sun-intoxicated rapture:

out into the distant future, which no dream has yet seen... where gods, dancing, are ashamed of all clothes ("Of Old and New Law-Tables" 2)

What he yearns for (and his visions attest to) is the certainty of a *logos*: of a beyond that ridicules the world of distinction. In the certainty that has hitherto been the property of the madman, Zarathustra's narrative renders insignificant the boundary between sanity and insanity, between truth and lie, between good and evil. From this height he no longer wishes to understand or to be understood. This is the space he wishes to escape from. The bridge, and its philosophical counterpart *The Transvaluation of all Values*, is a crossing over understanding itself:

I no longer feel as you do: this cloud which I see *under* me, this blackness and heaviness at which I laugh - precisely this is your thunder-cloud. You look up when you desire to be exalted. And I look down, because I am exalted. ("Of Reading and Writing")

Zarathustra becomes the one who 'overstands': who stands over the respectability of past thought, its fabricated distinctions and its trivial concerns. From here he sees a typically Blakean vision ("The Sign") - the gathering of birds, the arrival of the placid lion, the turning away from the "higher men" towards the "great noontide" and the final step towards the Overman, the one who stands over.

Although by the end of the text Zarathustra has not arrived, the journey seems almost completed. According to its dialectic, he has managed the impossible task of reaching into and beyond madness. In sanity to insanity and back to a heightened vision where one informs the other, becomes the other. But Zarathustra could not reach the other side because he was a fictional entity and could only be made real in Nietzsche. Within the infinite ironies of madness it was Nietzsche who finally gained the certainty that has eluded Zarathustra. The lion that had come as a sign to Zarathustra is translated (six years later) into a beaten horse that Nietzsche embraces before collapsing into madness. It was at this time he declared the achievement of his *logos*; he had finally found "the mask that hides a knowledge which is fatal and *too sure*" (qtd in Haar 35).

For many years Nietzsche had carefully explored the notion of value, an exploration which focused on the established criteria and necessarily involved an exploration of what it was to be healthy and sane. And inversely, what it was to be mad. But if he examined madness, madness examined him. We know very little of his madness except that it was plagued by ironies. After a life-time's struggle against the petty mindedness of his mother and sister, he ended up as their captive only able to watch as Elizabeth converted his 'homeless' teachings into a pro-Nazi ideology, to see (without the power to comment) his works become recognised after years spent labouring in alienation; to live in a silence beyond words following his prolific output of 1888.

In Nietzsche's silence, a silence of the same order as Aquinas in his later years, there is the fulfilment of Zarathustra's flight from, and entrance to, the truth of nihilism. For Zarathustra, nihilism meant a peeling off of action and words to expose a vacuum which, in turn, became an incentive to create again. And indeed the nature of fiction encouraged and made possible this continuation, each word overcoming the silence of the page. Creation begins out of silence, it acts upon it, but, and this is where Nietzsche and Zarathustra meet, it is the place where creation also ends.

Within the narrative of being, the beaten horse is, for Nietzsche, the moment of verticality. It breaks through the succession of events and inserts a silence where the sounds of sanity should be. In exactly the same way as Dostoyevsky uses the horse's slow death in *Crime and Punishment*, Nietzsche's encounter rises above the familiar and he sees the coming together of power and beauty with defeat, of Dionysus and the Crucified. That he signed his final letters in this fashion is indicative of a sensitivity of these opposites achieving reconciliation. And these opposites, with their echoes of Vienna (the frenzy and folly of a building Dionysian in spirit) and Rotterdam (austere and broken as the crucified Christ) are resolved in the last Nietzschean paradox. His whole creative act had been the translation of the hidden (Babel's unfinished battlements) into a philosophy, a *logos*; but this *logos* was not accessible until he himself reached madness. His infantile regression and his

catatonia completed the *logos* that Zarathustra had so desperately sought, but completed it within silence. Nietzsche spent his life discerning and deciphering the patterns of Rotterdam and Vienna eventually to find the silence that was the climax of his enterprise and the fruition of his creativity - the silence that was Clovio's lost ivory tower.

CHAPTER TWO

Cowper: The Art of Nearly Drowning

One is supposed to be cast into belief without reason, by a miracle, and from then on to swim in it as in the brightest and least ambiguous of elements: even a glance towards land... even the slightest impulse of our amphibious nature - is sin!... What is wanted are blindness and intoxication and an eternal song over the waves in which reason has drowned. (Nietzsche *Daybreak* 89)

For Cowper the sea contained a dual and diametric valency. It was the place where God was most evident, where he placed his footprints in "Light shining out of darkness" and where he appears as a beacon in the storm of "Temptation". As Nietzsche suggests it was the place where Cowper could lose himself within belief. But it is no coincidence that his last poem "The Castaway" details a sailor caught between the imminence of death and a consciousness that continues to record unabated. This poem was based upon an entry in Anson's sea travels and while it was a popular document for a society fascinated by discovery, Cowper's use is somewhat idiosyncratic. So is his use of Alexander Selkirk (Defoe's source for *Crusoe*) in "Verses" where water is, again, an image of immensity and alienation:

From the centre all round to the sea,
I am lord of the fowl and the brute.
Oh, solitude! where are the charms
That sages have seen in thy face?
Better dwell in the midst of alarms,
Than reign in this horrible place. (311)

It becomes apparent that it is not the sea itself that concerns Cowper but rather its magnitude that designates simultaneously providence and danger. The size of the waves,

the infinite prison of water and, in his penultimate poem "Montes Glaciales", the dimensions of the approaching glaciers dwarf and threaten to obliterate the speaker. Cowper interpolates himself, somewhat hysterically, between the forces of nature and his various protagonists; it is always Cowper who is at the mercy of the wrath of nature.

And here, Nietzsche's metaphor becomes germane. After Cowper's first outburst of madness he did indeed plunge into evangelical waters, he found a place where reason could submit to the rigour of a theology. That was the miracle of his conversion - the surrendering to a religious *logos* - but it existed in a state of tension with another conversion, another *logos*. It was madness that kept on averting his eyes, dragging him back to the land, to Selkirk's isolated island: transforming that which should have been his salvation into the threat that heralded his damnation. The eternal song that played over the waves was, for Cowper, the song of an unobtainable succour and an impending doom.

A sense of enormity is always present within Cowper's madness and goes some way toward explaining the extent of his ability to represent madness. Insanity conjures up the Rotterdam Babel for Cowper - all around him he perceives the huge shadow of his blasphemy and with it a revenge in proportion to his 'sin'. The tower with its sickening inclination, the way it swells to engulf the canvas and its severe disposition mimicks the image of God Cowper came to realise. Cowper belongs to those who have, through history, dwelt on Babel and lived in suffering in its tortured

heights. Under the sign of this Babel the "deer who left the herd" is particularly well placed. In the same way as this tower conveys the macabre and preternatural construction arising from a refusal to heed the Covenant - something unnatural born from an unnatural contravention - it ironically assumes the visage of the creator (the vengeful God of the Old Testament). Such is Cowper's madness: it consists of a logic of damnation that is built out of a dogma of salvation.* Cowper is one who, in his desire to reach into the heavens, to attain the gates of the gods, fashions the very gates that deny him entry.

If Cowper plays out, in an excessive manner, a scenario of futility common to those who could remember the strange justice of Yahweh, then where does society place him and where does madness locate him? The pressure of this paradox was, for Cowper, not merely a fascinating, if essentially intellectual concept, but was a word made flesh and occupied an obsessive vitality within him. It isolated him from a secular landscape as well as from evangelical submersion. As I have suggested, the initial outcome was to take up residence upon the island that although belonging to neither, offered some kind of footing; a condition, after all, expressive of most of humanity - at least as far as Pope is concerned:

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of Mankind is Man.
Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state,
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the Sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest,

In doubt to deem himself a God, or Beast;
In doubt his Mind or Body to prefer,
Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err;
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
Whether he thinks too little, or too much:
Chaos of Thought and Passion, all confus'd;
Still by himself abus'd, or disabus'd;
Created half to rise, and half to fall;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of Truth, in endless Error hurl'd:
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world! (516)

Consider the dualities Pope mentions: action or stasis, body or mind, god or beast, even life or death. The tendency, encouraged by the Aristotelian presence, is one of *either* life or death whereas for the Judeo-Christian death is the affirmation of (eternal) life; for the nihilist, death constantly intrudes upon life - the conundrums are endless. One is almost tempted to join with Wittgenstein in asserting that there are no philosophical problems, only problems of definition. But this is an avoidance of the issue. Pope draws attention to paradox not because he wishes to amuse himself with the titillation of the double-think that it produces. Rather, Pope sees in paradox a concept that reflects humanity itself; a concept that repeatedly threatens to disintegrate in its simultaneous statement and negation of itself. What becomes central is the *locus* of the individual. Pope repeatedly emphasises humankind's context: "placed on this isthmus of a middle state", "in doubt" within this "chaos of thought" " he hangs between". However, in the clarity and austerity of these lines a certain distance is established, the poem recedes from the topic it attempts to confront. Pope makes his incision with one hand and stitches with the other.

Paradox is thus both an entrance and an exit. Paradox

designates one of the places where language chokes on itself, at once mocking language as a neutral vehicle of representation and damning the subject who dares to utter. But by the very term, this rift is sealed. As Barthes points out in relation to myth, paradox (its internal contradiction) is naturalised (119), it simply becomes 'the way things are'. The implications of paradox are diffused by the very word: in uttering 'paradox', paradox is tamed. The moment of crisis - the moment when languages proliferated on Babel - is resolved 'naturally' by the majority, but not by the madman. It was precisely these small words, these trivial things that loosed Cowper from his stayed moorings into the immensity, the awful size of madness.

Anyone who has read Cowper's *Adelphi* will be struck first by the almost vaudeville quality in his repeated attempts to commit suicide. What begins as an entirely normal fear of having to exhibit his knowledge before his prospective employers is transformed, through a process of innovative reasoning, into a compulsive urge to suicide, or at least the charade of suicide. We follow Cowper to the Tower wharf where he intends to jump to his death, but cannot because "a porter or two seated upon some goods" (I 21) impedes his way, back to his chambers and his twenty attempts to take an overdose of laudanum; his attempt to stab himself with a broken penknife and finally, in a suitably ironic finale, his attempt to hang himself with his garter. Even given his obvious 'distraction' what must strike the contemporary reader, although not the protagonist, is the

absurdist humour of it all. Cowper appears as a precursor to Buster Keaton. Apart from a certain similarity between them physically, both suffer under an increasingly cruel fate but, and this is the second point, do so impassively. Like Keaton's face, Cowper's tone throughout is dead-pan. Perhaps this can partly be explained by the fact that he writes *Adelphi* after the fact (indeed after re-birth) but this does not diminish the discomfoting sense of having irrationality described in such rational terms. Consequently Cowper's critics are bound to be polarised over the importance (even the presence) of insanity in his work.

In Cowper's case, for instance, there are those who prefer to avoid any mention of his insanity because it is seen as extraneous to the merit of the work. Then there are those of the psycho-analytic and anti-religious persuasion who see equivocation in his most 'innocent' pastorals¹. But what of his mad productions, what of this subject that is either absent or made into an alibi for religious self-destruction or fear of castration? By and large criticism has distilled off all traces of Cowper's madness, leaving in its place specific critical preoccupations - madness is cleared away, translated into modes of discourse that bear little relation to that madness. Hence Nick Rhodes' anti-biographical stance in his edition of Cowper's *Selected Poems* (selected by whom, with what in mind?):

Of dementia and hopelessness there is astonishingly little evidence. We must assume either that they were not 'suitable subjects', or that biography can never tell the whole story. (15)

He continues by singling out "Lines Written during a Period

of Insanity" noting that

it registers itself... as a piece of literature. It is not, in any useful sense, 'insane'. Nor does it pretend to be the naked language of the soul - though that may well be its impact. (15)

It is precisely the contrast between Cowper's main body of poetry and that written during periods of imbalance that should draw attention to poems so uniquely different from his didactic satires and his prayers to rusticity. For Rhodes, madness belongs elsewhere and although it may qualify as "the naked language of the soul" it can never be translated, let alone into "literature". As loaded as this statement is with all the clichés about madness, it allows a distinction to be made between 'madness as failure' (Rhodes' reading) and the 'failure of madness'. The latter is exemplified in "The Shrubbery".

"The Shrubbery" (292-3) was composed in 1773 after his second breakdown and attempted suicide. The psychodramatic events that had marked his first attack returned: extreme depression, nightmares, infantile regression and a pervasive paranoia. As he remarks at a later date: "I believed that everyone hated me... [I] was convinced that all my food was poisoned, together with a thousand megrims of the same stamp" (qtd. in Quinlan 89). It was at this time that his ecstatic religious conversion came under demented scrutiny, culminating in a dream in which God rejected the evangelical Cowper in papist Latin: "*actum est de te, periisti*" (qtd. in Quinlan 91). This perceived rejection is registered in the title of the poem where he notes that it was "Written in a

time of affliction".

From the opening line nature is afflicted by the speaker's perception which is, in turn, disturbed. The shade does not inherently possess happiness for it is an attribute placed on the shade by the speaker, nor is it a projection of self (as would normally be the case) for the "happy shades" exist in spite of - "to me unblest" - his presence. Cowper has surreptitiously introduced a 'normal' non-afflicted personage who could not but perceive the shade as "friendly to peace". By introducing sanity into the poem, at this early stage, he isolates himself from the subject matter in his attempts to translate between the voices of sanity and madness and, while he dismisses this in his later work, here madness constantly needs apologies. Madness is made accessible to the reader by being simply an inversion of sanity. The landscape viewed as subjectively peaceful by a hypothetical viewer contrasts to the speaker's melancholic status which constantly inverts nature's "fruitful scenes" into wasted prospects that "tell of enjoyments passed,/ And those of sorrows yet to come". This sense of nature contaminated by loss is not only a typically elegiac technique, but one that recurs in Cowper to signal the severity of the rape (in its original sense 'to forcibly take away') of his treasured nature. That which should give him joy reiterates his mental anguish. So, in "Lines on the Death of Sir William Russel" we find, almost verbatim, this inverted vision: "Why all that soothes a heart from anguish free,/ All that delights the happy - palls with me" (285).

The Cowper of the fables, the descriptive pastorals, the pedagogic satires is shadowed by Cowper insane and by a different vision: a vision distorted by its subjectivity and yet in its distortion creating a pattern that strives to give that subjectivity form.

As is usually the case in his nature poetry, the poem unfolds by accumulating visual components into a total scene thereby allowing the poet, as reference point, a part in the whole. Here, however, the description begins by asserting the speaker's non-participation:

This glassy stream, that spreading pine,
Those alders quiv'ring to the breeze,
Might sooth a soul less hurt than mine,
And please, if anything could please. (292)

Each of the nouns - stream, pine, alders - requires a different adjective before it gains its precise vitality; rather than the fluid movement of a camera pan, these are snapshots without overlap. The "glassy stream" in its transparency (or its fragility as glass) is isolated not only from "that spreading pine" and "those alders quiv'ring" but also separate from the luxuriant viscosity of "the stream/ That as, with molten glass, inlays the vale". Nature has become as fragile and friable as the one who describes. It has been appropriated by his own basilisk thoughts, a melancholic erosion that wears both the speaker and his description down to a hopeless silence. This is achieved, in stanzas two and three, with a certain grace in a kind of alliterative lisp: "glassy steam", "soothe a soul", "shows the same sadness", "slights the season and the scene".

Here the poem should end, at the point where sound slopes towards a silence beyond language. But Cowper, the apologetic, feels obliged to continue, to wrest the remainder of the poem back to the social world. In part, the problem with the poem is that it is already too sociable, too crowded. Consider what appears and colours the landscape: the shrubbery itself, a kind of featureless presence that shadows the poet's world; a hypothetical and stable presence for whom the "fruitful scenes" are accessible; the feminine "care" who has withdrawn "her animating smile" from nature; the "saint or moralist" searching for "the secret shade" and, finally, the 'victimized' poet who acts as a disorganizing principle failing to control the tincture of his mind or the poem.

The vague presences that over-populate the poem can perhaps be equated with the paranoid suspicion as to the intentions of God and humanity alike. He is caught in the exact place where paradox can either be an entry or an exit. He is sane enough to suspect that his perceptive organs may be at fault, and yet unable to explain away these real (to him) anxieties. If Cowper is rendered impotent before the failure of his own mind, so too is the poem helpless and the remaining three stanzas are stranded in a middle state neither able to return or to leave (entirely) the social, sane world.

The final stanzas portray (and betray) an exhaustion of technique and emotion through repetition. By forsaking the singularity of his vision of nature for a dull overview he deprives the poem of the nuances he has been at such pains to

create: the honed image of "alders quiv'ring", falls into the blandness of "wood and lawn", then no more than "fruitful scenes" before being dissipated entirely by the abstract generalisation of wasted prospects. By the poem's close Cowper has lost control precisely in his attempts to assert a control foreign to the experience itself; in his peopling of the poem he finds madness crowded out, driven from the stage that should have brought it to light. In all this there is no *time* for madness: "These tell me of enjoyments past/
And those of sorrows yet to come".

Cowper is caught in an unchanging present that is suspended between an idealised past and a foreboding future: the former taunts, the latter threatens. In "The Shrubbery" this terrain is artificially tamed by a blurring of focus, a looking elsewhere. Nothing is confronted here - the suffering speaker retreats into the luxury of pain and what is left is the sour flavour of tombstone platitudes and obituary lists. Viewed from the perspective of one who suffers, this is the poetic exposition of Foucault's melancholia:

In melancholia, the spirits are swept by an agitation, but a feeble agitation, without power or violence: a sort of impotent jostling which does not follow marked paths, nor open roads (*aperta opercula*), but traverses the cerebral matter by endlessly creating new pores; yet the spirits do not wander far upon the paths they trace; very soon their agitation languishes, their strength fails...; melancholia never reaches violence; it is madness at the limits of its powerlessness (121-22)

This not only succinctly points out the weakness - "I am a stricken deer" - that exerts its force over Cowper's very character, but also comments on the poetic range of his expression. "The Shrubbery" is an exemplum in miniature of

the man and the poetry. The catatonia to which he was reduced in his later years, conveys this awareness of defeat. As a man, the chronic agitation that governed his life, albeit intermittently, from 1763 to his death in 1800 eventually wore down his strength, leaving him powerless. Furthermore, this defines more explicitly the erosion present in "The Shrubbery": the introspective agitation that motivates the poem is worn away precisely because "the spirits do not wander far upon the paths they trace". Cowper faltered, and eventually surrendered, before the jostling of the world; he failed where Blake, in Bataille's view, succeeded:

If a poet's life conformed generally to reason it would go against the authenticity of his poetry. It would remove an irreducible element, a sovereign violence from poetry, without which it is mutilated.... Blake, who was not mad, haunted the frontiers of madness. (62)

Cowper, who was, loitered on the same frontier in "The Shrubbery" but with his gaze turned in the opposite direction. And in an unobtrusive annotation to Spurzheim, Blake conducts a conversation with the ghost of Cowper about fulfillment in madness:

Cowper came to me and said: 'O that I were insane always. I will never rest. Can you not make me truly insane? I will never rest till I am so. O that in the bosom of God I was hid. You retain health and yet are as mad as any of us all - over us all - mad as a refuge from unbelief - from Bacon, Newton and Locke". (772)

In Smart I will investigate the latter part of this admonition, but Blake is correct in so far as Cowper still had to discover and use the "sovereign violence" of his madness. Madness, here, is failure: not only in the usual

sense of its failure to comply with normalcy, but as a failure to recognise itself. Thus it is important to consider what Cowper's speaker could not, to speculate on the vision he was unable to express. The reconstruction of this vision requires that words are put into his mouth, to find the poetic of madness hidden behind "The Shrubbery".

Blake obliquely touches on this. The posthumous presence of Cowper cannot rest, cannot find a place of rest and calls to Blake out of his agitation. The distracted movement from the external to the introspective, between the past and the future, and from a world "peace possessed" to one of "fix'd unalterable care" locates him at a time and in a space that his agitation seeks to escape: he is located where he is not. This is contingent with the perception of Cowper persecuted by rebuke and threat, his hand shaking uncontrollably, attempting to raise the laudanum to his lips. If he is present it is only because he desires to escape the present. The second threat of the present is immobility and he who has been "admonish[ed] not to roam" is reduced to a voice responding with melancholic passivity and wallowing in his own pain. Here, like the paralytic in *The Task* Cowper "sits, / Spectatress both and spectacle, a sad / And silent cipher" (Book I 139). Cowper escapes "The Shrubbery" through a frenetic agitation that yearns for release from an overwhelming gravity that draws him to stasis and silence. In both forms his is a fear of the present, of gazing at and facing its gaze in turn.

The Task, for example, relies entirely upon the poet's

perceived presence as he conducts the reader on a rambling tour of nature and home-spun philosophy. Its effect is achieved through a sense of immediacy: of the speaker being present and describing a scene temporally unfolding within the moment. Patrica Spacks speaks of this as a form of aesthetic ordering in which Cowper delights (180-81). This poetry works by means of the 'sanity' (and here read the ideal of the 'average perceiver') of the description. As the author of *The Task* he assumes an easily verifiable part in the 'tradition'. On one side he has been associated with Milton's *Paradise Lost*, with Gay, Thomson and Gray, and on the other as the precursor to Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats.² Above all Cowper was an Augustan; he was willingly subservient to the existing conventions and possessed, as Rhodes would have it, "no desire to flout tradition" (16). As Leigh Hunt dismissively comments: "[Cowper] was not alone because he led the way, but because he was left on the roadside" (qtd. in Hartley 4). Both these statements are redolent with the assumptions of period; nevertheless it is tempting to see his mad productions as a defiance of classical constraint.

Accordingly, madness is a prophetic voice that heralds the future and contains, in its excess, the birth of a new consciousness. Because it is dislocated from the prevalent ideology it can see, albeit it in fragmentary form, the fractures of that culture. A reading of madness as the original subculture, and Cowper as the unwitting hero, is encouraged by the restive period between 1750 and 1800. Not

only was it marked by growing industrialisation, the French Revolution, the Jacobin uprising in England and a proliferation of religious dissent, it also signified the beginning of an aesthetic revolution in response to these changes. Moreover, this "Age of Sensibility" (and its more appropriate title: "The Transitional Age") was becoming an age of 'Insensibility', where the visage of classicalism experienced within its mask of decorum, the nightmare of unreason. Madness began, as never before, to make its presence felt. While Foucault and Andrew Skull examine the incarceration of madness - undoubtedly the main consequence of the newly perceived danger of madness - other aspects deserve mention. It is of some metaphorical significance that during this period England was ruled by King George III who was mad, "north north-west", according to Porter's sources until he lapsed into senile dementia in 1810 (42). Madness was not only on the rise but ruling the country. However, to conceive of madness not only as a freedom from rationality but as free to proclaim itself is to be mistaken. Dr. Francis Willis, the king's mad-doctor, clearly states the terms of agreement under which madness is acknowledged:

As death makes no distinction in his visits between a poor man's hut and the prince's palace, so insanity is equally impartial in her dealings with her subjects... When therefore my gracious sovereign became violent, I felt it my duty to subject him to the same system of restraint as I should have adopted with one of his own gardeners at Kew. In plain words, I put a strait waistcoat on him. (Porter 47)

The restraint in his expression is matched by the restraint in his action: stripping madness of its power as the king is

stripped of his and quite literally confining it to the realm of the respectable. While we must agree that madness was poised between threat and domestication, its presence can be found throughout Europe - and nowhere more evident than in the artist. One immediately thinks of Cowper, Smart and Clare who spent time in asylums; of Chatterton's suicide, of Collins' insanity in his later years; in Germany the 'modernity' of Hölderlin's poetic ravings and the confinement of Schiller in the early 19th century; the madman de Sade shouting from the Bastille and the suicide of Gérard de Nerval. Although this can be explained away in part by pleading extreme sensitivity on the part of the poet it is indeed tempting to construct a causal relationship between madness and periods of social change. Madness then, is the resultant eruption that momentarily occurs before being restrained by a topography that alienates its Babel. But this is of limited help in the case of Cowper who, having spent a brief period in Dr Cotton's private asylum, retired to the country where he lived out the remainder of his days as an ascetic recluse. If Cowper's biography emphasises the domestication of madness, surely its presence as threat must be evident in some form? In madness does Cowper not produce the first signs of the mania that was to mark romanticism? F.L. Lucas would seem to think so:

From the more primitive energies within us comes the artist's creative powers; from the twilight of preconsciousness rise his visions and his dreams... but it was unfortunate, though inevitable, that the new movement early developed signs of mania - as in Blake. (103)

Romanticism as madness harnessed by words is also the thrust of Von Schlegel's summation. This "new movement" is "the expression of a secret attraction to a chaos which lies concealed" but which "approaches more to the secret of the universe" (343). What Lucas fails to realise is the difference between the "signs of mania" (one recalls Bataille's Blake) and mania itself. "Imagination", says Foucault "is not madness":

Even if in the arbitrariness of hallucination, alienation finds the first access to its vain liberty, madness begins only beyond this point, where the mind binds itself to this arbitrariness and becomes a prisoner of this apparent liberty.
(93)

Cowper's madness finds no voice in these versions of classicalism or romanticism. Madness is located "only beyond this point". Madness belongs to (our) history only in an adjacent sense, it generates its own history that bears an idiosyncratic affinity with our readings of space, time and the events they hold. Proposing, for the moment, that history is linear, the history of insanity (from Dionysus to Sexton) is a history of vertical movements - a multitude of Babels - that break with history into an alienated height where the resources of history (that which makes existence familiar) can offer no succour. In madness one is constantly forced to re-discover the world - to reinvent the wheel of one's own turning - according to the particular shade of that madness. The madman wakes to a lonely world where nothing is familiar. The collapse of the familiar begins with the breakdown of the coordinates that make it so; time is one of these fundamental signifiers of stability.

Saint Augustine is at his Aristotelean best on the subject of Time and it allows him to become hopelessly enmeshed in a tantalising quandary. Time, he holds, "is coming out of what does not yet exist, passing through what has no duration, and moving into what no longer exists" (269). "Lines Written..." (289-90) begins with this premise only to take it further, deeper into the paradox. Present time is that which is always happening (an eternal moment) as well as that immeasurable instant teetering on the edge of the Past and the Future: that which never happens. This kind of metaphysical callisthenics is necessary preparation for the seeming confusion of the opening stanza:

Hatred and vengeance, my eternal portion,
Scarce can endure delay of execution,
Wait, with impatient readiness, to seize my
Soul in a moment.

The merciless emotions of "hatred and vengeance" are not tempered by the passing of time; neither is there a rationality available to diffuse or tame their consequence. Faced with this, Cowper succumbs before a twofold victimisation. Firstly they are the speaker's "eternal portion" in so far as the present is an eternal moment; thus Cowper evokes a tortuous futility that is similar in tone, if not in predicament, to Dante's unbaptised souls in *Hell*

We heard no loud complaint, no crying there,
No sound of grief except the sound of sighing
Quivering for ever through the eternal air.
(Canto IV 25-27)

But Time's other quality is also activated - that which "scarce can endure delay" - whereby Time is perceived as "impatient readiness". Painful eternity and catastrophic

instant are fused and suspended around "wait" which is as applicable to the endured suffering of Vladimir and Estragon as it is to the closing 'hours' of Marlowe's *Faustus*. Like the two tramps he is entirely uncertain of the temperament of his saviour; like *Faustus*, Cowper does not fear to lose his life but his soul.

Something of Cowper's unique obsessions - his paranoia, his prophetic nightmares - have already been mentioned. Whatever their psychopathological import they served to deprive him of his former evangelical surety of salvation, that which had secured his return to sanity after his attempted suicide. Excluded from the hope given by religious salvation he found nowhere to turn even at a time when religion held its greatest currency. As Sir Leslie Stephen points out, the 18th century could be roughly described as a continuum ranging from a perception of God open to individual comprehension (Deism) to the emotional loss of self in God (Evangelicalism). The former attempted to make God resemble, as far as possible, humankind and the approach to God available through the intellect. Stephen summarises Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity*:

The excellence of [Christianity] appeared not from its transcending the limits of human knowledge, but from its entire coincidence with the teaching of the unassisted intellect. (100)

But if Deism was attacked by the 'recognised' churches as being a blasphemous attempt to demystify God, the Wesleyans were reproached for the opposite. Donald Davie quotes the following:

[The Wesleyan's] devotion was unreasonable, irregular and injudicious.... Their spirits appear to me [an Anglican minister at the time] to be turbulent, unruly and censorious... like other [forms of] enthusiasm [it] will promote infidelity and turn out to be the damage of religion and the souls of men. (43)

During one of his more tempered moments, Hugh I'Anson Fausset describes Cowper's madness according to the Deist/Evangelical spectrum:

The rational self-assurance of the Deists could not re-assure such a nature as his, because it offered nothing to his emotional sensibility; but the emotional self-assurance of the Evangelicals not only failed to satisfy, but distorted his reason. (97)

Between the extremes of individualism and submission, between logical exegesis and emotional blind faith in a literalist scripture, we find Cowper agitated but immobile: without the ability to humanise God (to make God in the human image), to submerge himself in God or to reject God.

As evinced in his *Adelphi* Cowper converts his past into a series of sins which he then exhibits on the stage of evangelical re-birth. Reinterpretation on this scale requires that one's sinful past assume a chimerical quality - it should become less than real in the face of the 'reality' of re-birth. But for Cowper this reality was constantly infiltrated by his past - as sinful - not merely as a reminder of his fallibility but as something finally more real to him than any birth, any salvation. Thus, according to the perverse logic of madness (and again we witness the deviation from the alternatives of rationality) the only remaining choice was to reject himself or, in the terms of religious discourse, to see his soul as rejected by God:

Nature revives again, but a soul once slain lives no more... Next month will complete a period of 11 years in which I have spoken no other language. For causes which to [my friends] it appears madness to allege, but which rest upon my mind with a weight of immoveable conviction... there is a mystery in my destruction. (II 200)

As he asserts, the "language" in which he speaks is not one of apostasy but one of a belief that is unreasonable. Like insanity's flight from the plane of history, the language of madness commences its articulation in logic only to arrive at a place seemingly contrary to what is understood by logic. The language in which Cowper speaks is arrived at through the raiments of syllogism:

- God has repeatedly spoken to humankind through dreams and visions.
- My soul has been rejected in a dream.
- God has condemned me: "I [am] fed with judgement".

If this be madness, Foucault assures us that it works according to the familiar and within the realm of a stringent mathesis:

The marvelous logic of the mad which seems to mock that of the logicians because it resembles it so exactly, or rather because it is exactly the same, and because at the secret heart of madness, at the core of so many errors, so many absurdities, so many words and gestures without consequence, we discover, finally, the hidden perfection of a language. (95)

Here we find the final paradox of the numerous in which Cowper was involved. The language of which, and in which, Cowper speaks threatens discourse itself. Whereas language sets out to present a homogeneous and transparent picture of things, madness inadvertently ridicules this. It is as if a sane discourse (one that 'invites' us to share a perspective and in so doing to normalise it) is a stained-glass window

through which we are all taught to see a similar world, albeit coloured by the materiality of that discourse. In madness, however, all hope of homogeneity is disappointed for what is confronted here is more akin to a kaleidoscope. The stained-glass window is shattered and the view is of the fragmentary: incomprehensible patterns gathered from the shards of normality. The Babel of insanity not only departs from the plane of history and from logic but also makes itself visible above the plane of a shared language. It not only validates the Saussurean precepts but concretises them as it ruptures the illusionary fabric between signifier and signified. The connection between the two is revealed as entirely arbitrary (lacking even the 'meaning' offered by convention) and it is this arbitrariness that is celebrated in madness. Neither does it stop here; arbitrariness is recharged by madness and a new (and ancient) signification takes form. This language exposes the semantic conventions and initiates a new language that arises from the very distortions of the madman's logic. Faulty as this syllogism is, it provides an entry into an animated language. This is the *logos* that Cowper refused to recognise in "The Shrubbery" and which finds him, for all his aversion, in "Lines Written". In the latter the distortion of language and reason engenders the strange sense of vague familiarity together with the presence of the alien: the smell that all madness gives off.

What is familiar in "Lines Written" is religion, what is alien is the way a religious perception is turned back on

itself until it becomes a grotesque parody of extant religious belief. The unique flavour of Cowper's madness is tangential to the Deist/ Evangelical continuum. Thus, although his vocabulary is typical of the period in general, his fashioning of it has nothing to do with the alternatives of the time - his madness is, in this sense, out of time and space and vertical to that continuum.

This is evident if we acknowledge that Cowper almost certainly used Isaac Watts' "The Day of Judgement" as his model. Both are written in sapphics, both are similar in their apocalyptic tone and imagery: Watts' lines "to receive them headlong/ Down to the centre" are re-cast by Cowper as "to the centre headlong". Watts has produced a poem that faithfully proclaims the tenets of dissent - specifically the belief in divine selection - and, as such, gives us an instance of 'sanity' against which we can measure Cowper's private *logos*. Watts and Cowper were from the same mould. Both made use of poetry as a way of conveying, in lyrical form, the tenets of evangelicalism. In Cowper's madness there is, however, a parting of the ways. Although he continues to use the vocabulary of dissent it does not indicate an expression of belief but a distance from it. It is precisely this distance (and the vigour of the logic that underlies it) that initiates a commentary on Watts' poem and brings to the surface a turbulence within Watts' reasoning. Cowper's madness uncovers in Watts the very same inconsistencies that disrupted Cowper's belief in the first place. In madness Cowper finds the logic that Watts strives to disguise.

Certainty of expectation provides Watts with a didactic vehicle for this meditation in spiritual terror. Without exactly prophesying the time of the apocalypse, the description's vivacity suggests an imminence that is near enough to be described, on the verge of realisation:

When the fierce north wind with his airy forces
Rages up the Baltic to a foaming fury,
And the red lightning with a storm of hail comes
Rushing amain down,.
(*Norton Anthology* 399)

Prophecy is the hymnist's natural temptation and is fully exploited by Watts as he disguises the underlying fictional basis of his cataclysm by using "when" (similar to Cowper's use of "wait"): a word that has to be accepted on 'good faith' before the poem can assume meaning. It designates a conjectural time that is belied by the assertive tone and the precise violent description that follows. Imagination ("my fancy") parades as fact in Watts' claim that he knows the cataclysm's origin ("the Baltic") and the focus of the senseless destruction that will firstly annihilate "the poor sailors" before moving onto "the guilty wretches". Without a Miltonic constraint to temper his doomsday ruminations, Watts sacrifices theological consistency for the purposes of emotional impact, for emotional blackmail. Although the macabre imagery has its source in the propagandist technique of 'salvation through irrational fear', Watts unwittingly draws the same distinction as does Cowper between the merciless and benign persons of the trinity; inadvertently, Yaweh is set in opposition to Christ:

Stop here my fancy: (away all ye horrid

Doleful ideas); come arise to Jesus;
How he sits God-like!

Watts' yearning for salvation is finally a desire for salvation not in Yahweh, but from Yahweh - from a God who has come to embody "ye horrid/ Doleful ideas" - favouring Jesus who is merely "God-like". By evoking the cataclysm, Watts exposes an uncertainty that nearly escapes the text and reconciles the dual faces of God only through the contrivance of platitude. This is not possible for Cowper whose focus is directed exactly upon the dual 'personality' of the Judeo-Christian God. On the one hand there is the old testament Yahweh who can say to Moses "leave me now, my wrath shall blaze out against [the Israelites] and devour them" (*Exodus* 32 10) and on the other hand, Christ as the sacrificial victim. The perverse resolution that he reaches is to become both victim and executioner: his madness fuses the faces of his God. The doubt is highlighted in Cowper, hidden in Watts. But this dubious doxology causes Watts' poem to falter for it can only conceive of salvation as an abstract alternative to damnation. Damnation (like Milton's Satan) has a vitality that is conspicuously absent in those ascending

to glory
While [their] hosannas all along the passage
Shout the Redeemer.

To be fair, these limitations are allayed by the use of the sapphic form. The final line of each stanza signals an abruptness that is singularly pertinent to an apocalyptic content. It is as if leisurely completion of the stanza is hindered by an awareness of urgency and ideally the concluding line acts as an epigrammatic summation of the

stanza. But if the form serves to heighten this sense of the apocalypse, it also contaminates the final joyous stanzas, imbuing the supposed "shout" of victory with a residual fear that spills over from the bulk of the poem. Watts' "shout" gains an added, but contrapuntal, resonance - beneath the "hosannas" the "shrill outcries" continue to sound.

In all senses of the word Watts sets himself up as visionary: one who makes use of worldly objects to extend reality towards the eternal. In the case of Cowper however, the excuse of Time Future cannot be used in order to create a prospective reality. In his insanity, the time is now - the reality in all its hideous distortion already present. He too is a visionary, not of a world expanded, but distorted. That from which he retreated in "The Shrubbery" is that which finds him in "Lines Written...". Watts' densely populated world of worms, vultures, sailors and skeletons gives way to a stark landscape inhabited only by the poet's mind and biblical nightmares. Indeed the sense of the timeless, so carefully constructed in the opening stanza, is matched by the virtual lack of spatial reference. For two poems so alike in form and tone, there is a 'world of difference' between them.

The theological inconsistency that subverts "The Day of Judgement" stands in contrast to the brilliant piece of logical 'reasoning' in Cowper's poem. Although Cowper's initial assumption - God's rejection - may be questionable, what follows is a finely wrought argument, far superior to the clumsiness of Watts' cogitation. The unholy

identification between the poet and Judas not only reiterates the charge against Judas but measures Cowper's more extreme betrayal: "Damn'd below Judas: more abhorr'd than he was, / Who for a few pence sold his holy Master". Judas sets a horizon beyond which betrayal cannot go, but in so doing allows Cowper to project a language beyond that point and yet one still harnessed by Judas' example. The logic of madness allows language to breathe another air, the air of its own delirious height (and depth):

Man disavows, and Deity disowns me;
Hell might afford my miseries a shelter;
Therefore hell keeps her ever hungry mouths all
Bolted against me.

According to Cowper's inverted world, the succour of eternal damnation is denied him not because it is too extreme but because it is not extreme enough. This pristine logic of madness was also noted by Polonius - "though this be madness yet there is method in't" (*Hamlet* II, II 205-06) - who could be describing Cowper's coding of experience:

- I am "damn'd below Judas".
- Judas, who suffers in perdition, is history's precedent.
- Hell cannot admit anyone "below" Judas.

In hell's rejection, Cowper irrefutably proves his continued existence but, at the same time, colours that existence with all the horrors of hell and more. Hell's righteous rejection defines further the experience of one "who hangs between", one whom "man disavows and Deity disowns". The human/ divine continuum finally places him precisely on the isthmus of Pope's contradictions: a point where presence becomes absence and where he is alienated from salvation, damnation, humanity

and God. Although he is excluded from the possibilities of hope and futility, he remains a captive. He exists solely in terms of that from which he is excluded: "hell['s] hungry mouths all bolted against me". This, in turn, explains the esculent imagery that underscores the poem. The act of eating (and we remember his conviction that his food was poisoned) does not indicate sustenance but the vitriol of God's wrath:

Hatred and vengeance, my eternal portion...
Hell keeps her ever hungry mouths all/ bolted...
I, fed with judgement, in a fleshy tomb...

Diet and confinement gain new semantic dimensions while their guiding logic (however deranged its assumptions) seeks to convince that these dimensions are plausible. Watts' preteristic salvation fails to convince simply because it attempts to describe an apocalypse that is, as St. John discovered, *literally* indescribable. Cowper's poem works by its refusal to image. Even its weakest lines - "Hard lot! encompass'd with a thousand dangers;/ Weary, faint, trembling with a thousand terrors" - intimate a horror larger than the mechanisms of representation. So the visionary aggrandisement in Watts is converted into torpor: both a numbing in the face of excess and a depiction of an abstract cerebral world. Cowper remains inert but for the self-referential "weary, faint, trembling". And when he is finally acted upon, it is not physical but perceptual; he does not change (no movement is involved), his perception of self changes: "I, fed with judgement, in a fleshy tomb, am/ Buried above ground." Inverted confinement and poisoned sustenance establish an intraversable distance between the subject "I" and the verb

"am". This suggests the final consequence of Cowper's autonomy from the material world. Cowper's language is startling because it seeks to locate subjectivity outside language: he exists in a negative relation to words. Whereas Watts moves towards meaning, towards the moral of his conclusion, Cowper retreats from the implications of words. The subject recedes from language and from the positioning that language implies.

His madness insists that if he bothers to write, he can write^{only} of one thing: the desire for dissolution, an end to it all. But how - and this is a typically 20th century problem - can one write of the presence of nothingness? "Lines Written..." shows one way: to subtract constantly, with the utmost dedication, from the already deprived, to detract from the minimal. Of course, here too he must fail. The poem *is* written. With all his other imprisonments, he must add language.

At last the impotence of "The Shrubbery" is poetically conveyed in a fitting manner. Impotence, that previously demarcated failure, is now charged with a violence that accurately portrays the battle between a subjective desire and the impossibility of its fulfilment in action. Dissolution is that which Cowper desires - not merely death for that would only "delay [the real] execution". Ironically, the emotional submission to the whole that evangelicalism purported to render accessible lingers in Cowper. Although it is not an alternative it is a shape that, in the insane discourse, presents itself as a desire to submit to any whole

beyond life, even if it is to be "sent quick and howling to the centre headlong". But Cowper's damnation is like Nosferatu's - a damnation that uncovers our fear that consciousness does not cease with death and that within a grave, and rotting body, we will continue in a state of eternal privation.

Exactly that which he desires is that which he cannot obtain: in yearning for dissolution into any whole he is answered by his own estranged reflexivity. It is this sense of weakness, this resultant impotence, that is not only at the culpable heart of "Lines Written..." but in the marrow of his insane poetry. Time, space, belief and language have all been subjected to the Möbius strip of paradox. Each of these devices of location has been twisted into another plane where, although they remain, they are worthless: no longer signifiers of meaning but signifiers of the distance from meaning.

The movement that has been detailed is from artistic impotence in "The Shrubbery" to the art of impotence in "Lines Written..." and "The Castaway" (431-2). Of the latter much has been said. "The Castaway" lends itself more easily than the nebulous milieu of "Lines Written..." to critical discourse.³ For our purposes it is sufficient to note that Cowper uses the same techniques to create the perpetual imminence of personal catastrophe. Forsaking the allusion to Abiram and Judas, he turns to a factual incident recorded by George Anson in his travels. "The Castaway" uses the drowning of a sailor, firstly as an external correlative by which he

can construct a sympathy between himself and the sailor for "misery still delights to trace/ Its semblance in another's case" (76-8). Once again, he proceeds from here to plot his more extreme distance:

snatch'd from all effectual aid,
We perish'd, each alone:
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelm'd in deeper gulphs than he.

This extended metaphor raises and transforms his theme. It retains the excess of an indifferent storm, thus evoking a cruel parody of his earlier "Light shining out of darkness": Cowper is trapped under the God who "plants his footsteps in the sea,/ And rides upon the storm". Here the mysterious ways of God are poetically linked to the "mystery in [Cowper's] destruction" in a manner that again disrupts - through the logic of its narrative - the seeming transparency of language. Expressing his imminent destruction and the mystery of its ways, Cowper, again, portrays himself as dead and alive: dead, as he paradoxically remarks "We perish'd, each alone" and later "I beneath a rougher sea"; yet alive, for the poem is completed while the poet is still "whelm'd in deeper gulphs". He continues to exist in the long hour before drowning, perceptive only of the futility of a "destiny [temporarily] repell'd". Cowper would have found Anson's words perfect diet for his obsession:

[I] conceived from the manner in which he swam,
that he might continue sensible for a considerable
time longer, of the horror attending his
irretrievable situation. (Qtd in Rhodes 118)

Some of the most stable expressions of humanity's sanity - temporal and spatial consistency, certainty in fact,

'shared' experience - are placed in doubt by Cowper's madness. "The Castaway", as in "Lines Written...", dislocates a moment in time (the sailor's death) from its moorings in the past and the future in order to examine the poet's sense of perpetual torment. Within the historical event he finds a correlative for his insanity with all its illusionary assumptions.

By focusing on actuality he attempts to find succour for his own condition. Irrespective of the sailor's painful demise his death is appropriated into a historical world: a realm which is ordered if only by the passing of time and its ability to be documented. That Cowper sought to use poetry as a therapeutic escape from madness is emphasised in a letter to Samuel Teedon:

Time and the pen have been my only remedies for the deepest wounds that ever soul received, these many years. (IV 302)

Poetry then (the passing of time was hardly a remedy) provides him with a means of avoiding madness - thus explaining his averted gaze in "The Shrubbery" - or at least a way to normalise and diffuse it, a way of patching up the fissures that appear. Unlike "Lines Written", "The Castaway" seeks to achieve exactly this mending. The sailor's death offers him a parable by which he can begin to express the insular theme of his madness with the intention of returning from that madness to order and security. He returns by way of the poetic immortalisation of the sailor: "And tears by bards or heroes shed/ Alike immortalize the dead". This is Cowper sane - safe and secure within the bosom of a typically

Augustan moral. However, (and here "The Castaway" provides an incisive parable of his life's battle) the pen refuses to cease. In the two concluding stanzas the poem is "snatch'd from all effectual aid" and madness, once more, ruptures the surface that he has laboured to sanitise.

We depart from this, his final poem, with him again caught in motionless agitation: "I beneath a rougher sea, / And whelm'd in deeper gulphs than he". Here the picture freezes: the waves are about to engulf him and the dissolution he fears and desires is about to be made flesh. So imminent is this that it is tempting to conclude for him, to bring down the waves, to add in the inevitable period. Cowper's madness, however, refuses this closure. Insanity locates him in an eternal state of suspended animation. He closes his life as he had lived it: at the dimensionless point where assertion and refutation meet, at the heart of the paradox.

Cowper's Babel (so close to Bruegel's Rotterdam canvas) remains, to the end, unfinished. Fashioned out of paradox its tiers spiral out of its surroundings, alienating him from the familiar and yet plummeting down into the strangeness of what was familiar. And in the midst of this architecture was Cowper, nowhere at home, a barely visible figure upon the broken fortifications of unreason. But even in his impotence, his size and his insignificance, his madness is sufficient to bespeak the resonances of an eternal signification - a language ascending out of representation and offering a small glimpse of the beyond.

CHAPTER THREE

Smart: The Fool's Asylum

Though vine, nor fig-tree neither,
Their wonted fruit should bear,
Tho' all the fields should wither,
Nor flocks, nor herds, be there:
Yet GOD the same abiding,
His praise shall tune my voice;
For while in him confiding,
I cannot but rejoice. (Cowper "Joy and Peace in
Believing" 464-65)

Although Cowper experienced joy after his conversion, it was an ecstasy all too brief and finally against the grain of his madness. The *logos* that he fashioned in madness was, like the image of his God, entirely lacking in humour and overcame all serenity with the 'terrible thought' that dogged Zarathustra's travels. If Cowper was transfixed by Bruegel's Rotterdam painting then Smart represents the Vienna version. Confined, by his family, to a madhouse, isolated from the nature he adored, he tunes his voice in a celebration of folly. Madness smiles in Smart's *logos*, he is caught up in building a tower that wishes to reach God so as to bless him better. Thus to journey from Cowper's universe of damnation to Smart's world is to travel through psychiatry's looking-glass (the '\ ' that separates worlds), to traverse in another way the representations of Babel.

These two poets depict the extremes of a malady that is usually seen to exist within the manic-depressive personality. Although contemporaries, Cowper's insane 'message' is one of pessimism, damnation and confinement; whereas Smart's mad poetry is of unbridled ecstasy, a

delirious joy that seeks to unify self with the world. The only similarity in their imbalance would be registered in their excess. There are, however, points of contact. The discovery of *Jubilate Agno* is indirectly due to Cowper's madness, for William Hayley attempted to examine it as a measurement against which Cowper's illness could be gauged (Bond 16). As contemporaries, their sane work adhered to the tenor of the Classical period, both in their use of genre and their sober propriety in matters of poetic representation. Both exhibited in their nature poetry a love of pristine creation that pre-figured - if not influenced - the romantics. Cowper was briefly confined in a private asylum in 1763 - the same year that Smart was released from his seven year period of incarceration. Finally, however different their respective manifestations of madness, God lay at the centre of their obsessive convictions.

Cowper's 'art of impotence' follows a line of entropy beginning with joyous rebirth into God's salvation only to decay into silence and death. Never does his faith in God diminish; it is merely reinterpreted (from God the loving father, to God the distant, to God the vengeful) until it again makes sense of the fragmentary process. Excess, faith and the presence of an order of madness unite these poets in all their difference.

As with Cowper, Smart's madness began (inevitably in a paradoxical manner) with a restoration to sanity. Cowper's *Adelphi* is a commemoration of his return to sanity from sin and madness. However, as mentioned earlier, the extremes were

not brought into balance merely by evoking God. If Cowper saw God as having given him life it was not long before he believed God had retracted his gift. Sanity was accompanied by evangelical hysteria that eventually faded, leaving only the grimace of a displeased creator haunting him for the remainder of his days. Supposedly Smart also underwent a birth out of madness which he described in "Hymn to the Supreme Being on Recovery from a Dangerous Fit of Illness":

When reason left me in the time of need
And sense was lost in terror or in trance
My sinking soul was with my blood inflamed,
And the celestial image sunk, defaced or maim'd.
(20-24)

These words may be Smart's but the vocabulary on which he draws is entirely conventional, smacking of Augustan sentimentality as when he describes his children as "My little prattlers, [who] lifting up their hands,/ Beckon me back to them, to life, to light" (51-52). Uncertain as to what he should ascribe his madness to, he flounders between a causality of humours and a more religious doctrine - an equivocation that may give us insight into the available readings of 18th century madness but not something that aids his poetic task. The bulk of this poem warbles through contrived hypostatisations of charity, hope and devotion, sentimental references to his family and vague references to ailing biblical monarchs. This qualifies as Smart's 'shrubbery', overpopulated with pointless allusions that destroy any possibility of a sustained effect. Confronted with poetry of this calibre one recalls Browning's commentary on Smart's early poetry: "All showed the Golden Mean without

a hint/ Of brave extravagance that breaks the rule" (22-23). It is exactly this awareness of, and dependence on, "the Golden Mean" that prohibits him from making a powerful statement either about his illness or his path to 'recovery'. As Cowper discovered, his age possessed no formulated discourse of madness (in spite of Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* [1621]) and it remains up to the madman (as poet) to forge a language capable of conveying that madness.

Preaching from the heights of salvation - both physically and spiritually - Smart dimly perceives the precariousness of his footing; an instability that is, fittingly, registered in temporal terms. Supposedly the poem progresses from a despairing loss of reason, through health and into an acceptance of God's revitalizing intervention: its movement, in this sense, is chronological. Yet after his cure, within the progression of the poem and his celebration of a God "whose power's uncircumscrib'd, whose love's intense" (57) he returns, without reason, to dwell on his illness:

My feeble feet refused my body's weight,
Nor would my eyes admit the glorious light;
My nerves, convuls'd, shook fearful of their fate;
My mind lay open to the powers of the night.
(67-70)

The power of these lines when compared to the rest of the poem need not suggest morbid self-pity (as did Cowper's in "The Shrubbery") but rather a certain force that finds its strength by attending to the uniqueness of his experience; it is here that Browning's "brave extravagance" is briefly uncovered. This brief temporal reversal in the midst of

Augustan platitudes of stability give rise to fissures in the poem's architecture. Even with a liturgical addendum - "And justify those sweetest words from Heaven, / 'That he shall love Thee most, to whom Thou'st most forgiven" (107-108) - the poem seems about to collapse. As a poem on the verge of collapse it is contingent with Smart's instability at this time, and his collapse into madness led to his confinement in the same year as the poem's completion. From the ruins of this pastiche of convention can be found not only the poetry that was to assert itself in *Jubilate Agno*¹ and *A Song to David* but the very *logos* that inspired his new perception of the world and his duty therein.

The problem he experienced with a causality based on a "blood inflamed" is indicated by the hesitant way he tries to describe his own perception of madness: was sense "lost in terror or in trance", was his soul "defaced or maim'd"? This descriptive confusion vanishes however in his journey out of madness. For Smart there is no doubt that God was the physician that "pitying, did a second birth bestow:/ A birth of joy - not like the first of tears and woe." (71-72) Situated somewhere between evangelical ecstasy and Blake's "Infant Sorrow" these lines foreshadow the poetry that was to come. Smart's birth into madness will allow him to achieve a synthesis - a unique declaration of faith. Smart's madness is something that avoids both the proscriptive generation of guilt that typified evangelicalism, and the kind of liberal apostasy advocated by Blake.

One would seemingly have no difficulty in reading Smart as joyous evangelical who perceives himself as "the Lord's News-Writer - the scribe evangelist" (B 237) while becoming vitriolic in his condemnation of past pleasures as evil: "For all STAGE-playing is Hypocrisy and the Devil is the master of their revels" (B 345).

Neither would it be extreme to place Smart with Blake for they are undoubtedly the great English visionaries of the latter half of the century. In addition Blake's imagery and thought seem to bear a certain family resemblance. In "The Little Girl Lost" Blake begins with a vision:

In futurity
I prophetic see,
That the earth from sleep
(Grave that sentence deep)

Shall arise and seek
For her maker meek:
And the desart wild
Become a garden mild. (119-120)

The earth as alive, in a very real sense, and its natural inclination to God are decidedly Smart's major themes.

Jubilate's Fragment C is preoccupied with a prophetic vision of mankind having returned to God and, in so doing, establishing a "garden mild".

The validity of these associations and the further possibility of producing two, almost opposite, readings must render any one reading of Smart's work (especially that composed between 1756-1763) extremely tenuous. To offer an evangelical reading would risk missing the playfulness (even to the point of irreverence) of Smart as journalist for the Lord. Furthermore, this reading would find it difficult to

accommodate Smart's platonic Idealism in his objection to drama's "Hypocrisy". Similarly, a Blakean reading would struggle to reconcile Blake's prophetic work with one whose New Jerusalem would be heralded in the following manner:

*For I prophecy that men will live to a much greater
age. This ripens apace God be praised.
For I prophecy that they will grow taller and
stronger...
For men in David's time were ten feet high in
general. (C 88-91)*

No doubt there are connections to charismatic forms of belief, to Blake and, for that matter, to a myriad of philosophies and poets in between. However, in fairness to the poem's spirit we are bound to return to its vision and the *logos* of its creator.

His madness, for example, is not as self evident as Cowper's. Although there is much uncertainty about the particulars of his confinement, it seems that his crime was simply one of religious enthusiasm. Even Johnson, the great spokesman of the 'Age of Sensibility' finds this strange:

I did not think he ought to be shut up. His infirmities were not noxious to society. He insisted on people praying with him; and I'd as lief pray with Kit Smart as any one else. Another charge was, that he did not love clean linen; and I have no passion for it. (qtd. in Price 517)

That he was effluent, both in physical and spiritual areas, hardly seems reason enough to restrict his movements to an asylum. This can be partly explained by recourse to the hygienic temper of the day and a pervading understanding of madness that is wryly expressed by Swift in *A Tale of a Tub*. Perhaps no-one could understand the whims of any period better than Swift; certainly there are few who could describe

madness in terms both reasonable and absurd. With his inimitable mixture of irony and utter seriousness, Swift presents the following understanding of madness in "A Digression Concerning Madness":

there is a particular string in the harmony of human understanding, which in several individuals is exactly of the same tuning. This if you can dexterously screw up to its right key, and then strike gently upon it, whenever you have the good fortune to light among those of the same pitch, they will, by a secret necessary sympathy, strike exactly at the same time. And in this one circumstance lies all the skill or luck of the matter; for if you chance to jar the string among those who are either above or below your own height, instead of subscribing to your doctrine, they will tie you fast, call you mad, and feed you with bread and water. (330)

Whatever else has changed in the history of madness, this pre-occupation with the normative has endured. The rather flippant tuning analogy hardly hides the dark implication that sanity is finally a matter of "chance" or "skill".

Foucault is at pains to point out a shift that occurred during the classical age: a shift in a consciousness that could no longer tolerate the unsightly visage of madness dwelling at liberty in the midst of a society preoccupied with order. Madness no longer provided an exemplum of instruction - the acknowledged wisdom of the fool - but became a grotesque and regressive aspect of human refinement and deserving only of isolation. The madman's former power to instruct was replaced by an avowal of his impotence:

Until the Renaissance, the sensibility to madness was linked to the presence of imaginary transcendences. In the classical age, for the first time, madness was perceived through a condemnation of idleness.... If there is, in classical madness, something which refers elsewhere, and to *other things*, it is ... because [the madman] crosses the

frontiers of bourgeois order of his own accord, and alienates himself outside the sacred limits of its ethic. (58)

The implication here is that the madman's message had been entirely demystified by translating the insane into economic terms. The prophet had, in losing his voice, become a vagrant. And vagrants in a society that showed a growing interest in industrialization and the utilization of labour must either work or be excluded from that community. The former solution, while working in the case of the poor, was doomed to failure when applied to the mad:

The order and discipline of the whole work-house were threatened by the presence of a madman who, even by threats and punishment, could neither be persuaded nor induced to conform to the regulations" (Scull 41)².

As in classical aesthetics, the concern was primarily one of order. John Aiken's "Thoughts on Hospitals" (1777) emphasises this in his call for the removal of the madmen "from the public eye to which they are multiplied objects of alarm" (qtd. in Scull 42). It is here that these various strands converge (in time) on Smart who had become an "object of alarm": his unbridled song was seen as dissonant according to "the harmony of human understanding", his impropriety had alienated "himself outside the sacred limits" of a society obsessed with restraint, decorum and the proclamation of a self-evident order. In this context, the fact "that he did not love clean linen" issues forth a hygienic irreverence of almost symbolic proportions. Metaphorically, Smart was doing the dirt on the dress of his age.

We are now more in a position to understand the specific "skill" that sanity required and which Smart did not possess. In perhaps the most famous of his lines from *Jubilate*, Smart innocently describes his contravention of that order:

*For I blessed God in St James's Park till I routed
all the company.
For the officers of the peace are at variance with
me, and the watchman smites me with his staff.*
(B89-90)

Viewed from without, Smart appears an object of embarrassment who was, in his outburst, able to provoke severe restraint being placed on him. Those who would refuse to acknowledge his imbalance as anything more than religious enthusiasm should re-consider the dimension of a prayer that "routed all the company". Malesherbes, writing at the same time, provides a summation of the kind of 'crime' committed by Smart and its implied solution:

It seems that the honor of a family requires the disappearance from society of the individual who by vile and abject habits shames his relatives (qtd. in Foucault 67).

With a desire for mental cleanliness of this proportion, the solution adopted by Smart's friends and relations was simply to evict him from the space of that community - an exclusion that lasted, with brief reprieves, for seven years. His spatio-temporal isolation carried with it all the indignities of confinement in the 18th century. He had personally become a spectacle, more fascinating than the famous dwarf, Thomas Hall, and the rarest of birds: "For I have seen the White Raven and Thomas Hall of Willingham and am my self a greater curiosity than both" (B 25). And publicly, he had (with his mad brethren) become a grotesque

side show in an asylum that had turned itself into an amusement arcade of Failure: "*For they pass by me in their tour, and the good Samaritan is not yet come*" (B 63). To exist beyond the social ethic was not really to exist at all. The madman had reached the end of his journey: from prophet, to vagrant and finally to an empty cipher on the threshold between the human and subhuman. It is not extreme to suggest that during the period in which Smart was confined, madness had reached its darkest age. The madman had been 'objectified' and was treated accordingly:

Let Andrew rejoice with the Whale, who is array'd
in beauteous blue and is a combination of bulk and
activity.
*For they work me with their harping-irons, which is
a barberous instrument, because I am more unguarded
than others.* (B 124)

This brings us to a point where we must acknowledge his madness, but a madness operating in a sensibility that is remarkably conscious of itself and its surroundings. Smart's madness is decidedly not something that is easily classified or dismissed. Criticism has, in general, sought to achieve exactly this in its response to Smart. Williamson retrieves Smart and places him in a prevalent framework by holding that "Smart's insanity may account for the obsessional nature of his beliefs, but does not 'explain' those beliefs themselves or their origins" (1979 414). This amounts to severing madness from the creating consciousness that contains, or is contained by, that madness. Alternatively, to classify Smart as cyclothymic using, as evidence, *Jubilate*, also seems singularly unhelpful (See Dearnley, 4). Sensing the

inadequacy of this diagnosis, there are those critics who categorise Smart by a special pleading to the Unknown. Thus Geoffrey Grigson would like to see madness as a quality that "enabled Smart to concentrate his mind for a while in trance-like states of pure consciousness" (5). What, exactly, is meant by "pure consciousness" we are never told. In insanity, criticism can so easily find a hermeneutic escape clause that 'explains' by classifying madness in terms of chaos: the random nature of the poem comes to reflect the randomness of a disturbed mind. Dearnley is not at all sure whether this is a good or a bad thing. Her ambivalence causes her to see the poem as some form of poetic catharsis in which "all the affectations and emotions of the soul, its sudden impulses, its hasty sallies and irregularities, are conspicuously displayed" (145). It may be confessional but it cannot receive her approbation - one is tempted to say, absolution - while she suspects the confession is nonsense:

We realise that it is sometimes difficult, even impossible, to distinguish between sane metaphor and insane vision in *Jubilate Agno*. Yet the imaginative fantasies and strange grammatical forms suggest that the poem is the reckless product of a deranged imagination. (155)

Dearnley's hesitation is shared by most critics on Smart. This poem - incomplete, swaying between lyricism and obituary lists, part visionary, part obscurity - seems to contribute more to the rich tapestry of literary anecdote than to any coherent poetic intention. Rightly, the suspicion is that the critic always runs the risk of seriously explicating that which is nothing more "than the reckless product of a deranged imagination". As the critic goes in search of

progressively more esoteric influences on Smart, the fear is that finally meaning is found where none was intended and the critic duped into the seriousness of scholarship and the critical process³.

So it appears that for the scholar of Smart's *Jubilate* there are two related approaches. The first is the most obviously alluring: to view the poem as a work in progress, as something that requires to be finished by the reader. Thus those who are concerned with sources are interested in validating the text as already complete, as containing a pattern beneath its surface. This would also include (as we shall see) Hartman and Lui who 'ghost write' the poem using the extant text as raw material and their endeavour is creative rather than critical. The second path is to 'surrender' to the poem's vicissitudes: to see it as one would a living organism. Here *Jubilate* is left as fragmentary, mad as the poet was mad, boring, repetitive and, at times, poetic as life is sometimes oddly so. While never escaping the temptations of the first approach, it is in the second that the 'reader of madness' may best find insanity's strange spirit.

Immediately we assume this position, we find a series of echoes between *Jubilate* and other voices on the periphery of sanity.

Consider, for example, Mac-dá-Cherda, an Irish *geilt* (wildman) of the 7th century. While apparently drawing the obvious distinction between the folly of earthly wisdom and the wisdom of his folly, he laments his outcast state:

It is unjust to call me a fool,
God endowed me with the best of sense.
When I am foolish, I strike heaven;
when I am wise, I am repentant...

Other periods come to me of foolishness
and of madness; when they (the men of the world)
come to me after that,
I do not follow the true path. (qtd. in Seward, 40)

As suggested in these lines, the distinction between wisdom and madness disintegrates and his concluding question - "is wisdom any better than foolishness" (40) - is impossible to answer without perjuring oneself. The poem not only celebrates his foolishness but implicitly lures one into the fool's domain; the reader, finally, is the fool, rejoicing in his or her own foolishness. This playfulness of the fool is so much a part of Smart's campaign in *Jubilate*.

In society's exclusion of Smart, he had been located in a limbo where fools, madmen and other forms of social ineptitude resided. The full import of Smart's innocence and joy find a context in this limbo on the periphery of society's consciousness; peripheral perhaps, but excessive, recalling the latin *excere* - to go beyond. Already we have discovered a version of Smart who, in his incessant prayer, implicitly outrages the polite domestication of conventional religious worship by taking prayer from the church into the 'playground' of St James Park - and there routing the company. Subsequently we find Smart as one accused, attacked by watchmen, perhaps physically tortured (at least psychologically maltreated) in the asylum. In his unwitting assault on the society he has been made a victim and it is in *Jubilate* that he sets out to re-dress himself within a malign

world. The poem then is a document of his reconstitution: the building of a world made coherent according to his gospel of madness.

In redressing his predicament, Smart refuses to hanker after a re-admittance to the social order but rather strips away his remaining attachments to that order. The first tangible bonds that he dissolves are financial and, by extension, maternal. Thrice he bequeaths his inheritance to his "mother in consideration of her infirmities... her age...[and] her poverty" (B46-48). Amidst the variegated brilliance of imagery, this unanimated repetition signals the death, in incantatory fashion, of the mother-son affiliation. The finality of this severing is ironically conveyed, as is so often the case, in the context of "Let":

Let Sared rejoice with the Wittal - a silly bird is
wise unto his own preservation.
*For I this day made over my inheritance to my
mother in consideration of her poverty.*
Let Shuni rejoice with the Gull, who is happy in
not being good for food.
*For I bless the thirteenth of August, in which I
was willing to be called a fool for the sake of
Christ. (B49, 51)*

Williamson is content to point out Smart's bitterness at the loss of his inheritance by noting the references to cuckoldry (20). That is as may be, but one cannot ignore the complexity of the dialogue in which Smart is involved. The wittal and gull survive because of the former's insignificance and (its wise) foolishness; the latter, only because it is unfit for human consumption. The contextual implication is that Smart's survival is partly due to the economic inefficacy of cannibalism - one is reminded of Swift's *A Modest Proposal* -

and partly due to his supposed foolishness. Smart uses Paul's words when the latter rebuked, also through irony, the Corinthians: "we are fools for Christ's sake, while you are such sensible Christians. We are weak; you are so powerful. We are in disgrace; you are honoured" (1 Cor., 4). To associate Smart's madness with that of the fool is not so extreme if we consider William Willeford's basic definition:

The fool is, in short, a silly or idiotic or mad person, or one who is made by circumstances (or the action of others) to appear a fool in that sense.... (10)

Willeford has, in turn made extensive use of Desiderius Erasmus. *The Praise of Folly* draws a distinction between a self-destructive madness that destroys the victim (Cowper, for example) and a madness that "brings no small share of delight both to those who experience it and to those who observe it without being mad to the same degree themselves" (59-60).

Only from the vantage point of folly is Smart able to consign his reputation, together with his family, to Providence:

*For silly fellow! silly fellow! is against me and
belongeth neither to me nor my family. (B 60)*
*For the Fatherless Children and widows are never
deserted of the Lord. (B 70)*
*For I pray God to give [my children] the food which
I cannot earn for them any otherwise than by
prayer. (B 76)*

Where once his prattlers bade him to return from madness, now he gives them away to God from within that madness. While the earlier madness was filled with hesitancy and doubt, trapped within the *locus* of transition, the madness in which he has taken up residence displays a surety. That he has irrevocably

traversed the social limits is certain. Beyond his mother, beyond his wife and children (with whom he is never reconciled), beyond his life, he stands and sees, as the poem suggests, perhaps for the first time:

Let Micah rejoice with the spotted Spider, who
counterfeits death to effect his purposes.
*For they lay wagers touching my life. - God be
gracious to the winners.* (B 92)

This is the humorous triumph of the absent. In the camouflage of folly he joins with Christ to watch impartially his material remains being wagered, but nonetheless to bless the ignorance and folly of humankind. Compassion proceeds from an absence. Removed from the immediacy of participation - "I meditate the peace of Europe amongst family bickerings and domestic jars" (B 7) - Smart sees more clearly, or more precisely, sees a different world. This is the rebirth that occurred - not in any narrow religious sense but in a metaphorically pro-creative sense. Without idealising madness or glossing over the pain and humiliation of his classification as "silly fellow", Smart finds in his folly the vision of a child. He stands, as it were, on the other side of Blake's "doors of perception" and while not claiming to see into the Infinite, he sees infinite potential, "as numerous and musical as the grasshoppers of Paradise" (B 100). Smart's *logos* was not, as Grigson would have us believe, merely involved in keeping "a species of journal" (35) but rather in creating a poem necessarily incomplete; one that implies an ellipsis reaching into an infinity where the poet would continue "to bless the Lord JESUS in the innumerables, and for ever and ever" (B 133).

We may accept, with Professor Sherbo, that Fragment D was composed at a fixed rate and that Smart was some kind of Robinson Crusoe marking off days (see Williamson xxiii); what we cannot accept is the further implication that the poet was a helpless captive of time or, more damning, that Fragment D is useful only to prove that Smart was an avid reader of obituary lists.⁴ The extent of his vision could not allow him to see time, anymore than space, as something to which he must submit:

*For innumerable ciphers will amount to something.
For the mind of man cannot bear a tedious
accumulation of nothings without effect.
For infinite upon infinite they make a chain. (C
35-37)*

As with numbers, time - in Smart's limbo - must "amount to something"; the poem, in fact, is an impossible taking stock of that amount. What could be "a tedious accumulation of nothings" is constantly manipulated *in excere* so that it transcends its limitation; as Stead pointed out the sign for infinity (∞) appears as "a chain of noughts" (qtd. in Williamson 94). Similarly, specific days are mentioned not as a dreary accumulation of time but as a means to transform it in prayer. His last mention of calendar time may serve as an example: "Let Poor, house of Poor rejoice with Jasionne a kind of Withwind - Lord have mercy on the poor this hard weather. Jan: 10th 1763" (D 216). The individual (dead or not) joins with his or her family and Jasionne to praise God who is, in turn, asked to grant mercy to the poor on this specific day. This complex process of reciprocity and association, while not making for stirring poetry, elevates 10th January so that

it comes to rest beyond its temporality. Time loses its factual respectability and instead gains - as in his maternal denial - an incantatory and evocative quality.

The strange relation that exists between madness and the fundamental instability of space and time is one that, consciously or unconsciously, is confronted and resolved in the most unique ways. To return to St. Augustine. Smart does not see either an endless, or furiously expectant, torment as did Cowper; Smart's incantation gathers up the past, brings to birth the future in prophecy and collates this in a timeless present that is endlessly evoked. Evocation: a calling up that, in this poem, seeks to blur the distinction between past and future, between here and elsewhere. 'To call up' implies that the elsewhere, the other time is always present - surrounding us but invisible because dormant. In calling it up we resurrect (make active) language and gain entry into all moments and places. Sequence and distance collapse into a timeless and spaceless event which contains, and is contained by, all. Thus the Word in the beginning was simply "Let": the word that, according to Western doxology, began the lighting of candles in the dark. And for Smart, within his madness, within the darkness of his cell, "Let" achieves exactly this purpose: it breaks down the walls of his incarceration and allows history and universe to become visible. His madness literally allows him to call it to mind. So, to call this present timeless is a misnomer that should not imply a languid eternity between one moment and an unknown next but an immediacy that results from the meeting

of supposedly mutually exclusive entities: transplanting people, animals and plants from their historical moorings and placing them in a world that exists only for the 'duration' that the imagination requires to bring this world into being. The closest parallel is the world described by John in *Revelation*. Indeed, the opening of *Jubilate* is extremely close to John's vision (7: 9-10):

Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues; give the glory to the Lord, and the Lamb.
Nations, and languages, and every Creature, in which is the breath of Life.
Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together. (A 1-3)

The roll-call that follows makes it clear that in appearing before God, "man and beast" are freed from space and from time into an abyss made solid by God's, and to a lesser extent Smart's, creation. But there is a more interesting corollary to this. From within the limbo of his social exclusion (which is again both temporo-spatial) he reclaims and reconstitutes the world supposedly denied him. At this point, Smart differs absolutely from Cowper who found here refusal and fragmentation. Smart discovers what the Kabbalists are fond of calling 'atOnement'; an *einfihlung* of mystical proportions.⁵ Willeford, intent on stressing the amorality of the fool, and his affiliation with "nothingness", raises an apposite point:

The fool in his connection with nothingness [in Smart's case, 'everythingness']... may seem both a threat to reality and to our ways of seeing it complexly. But the fool in his link with 'nothing' [or everything] may also transform both reality and these ways of seeing it. (62)

Absolute pattern (the patterns of the Absolute) and absolute negation of pattern are very similar. Smart, as fool, imposes mad order on all that he sees in the same way as Zarathustra decodes the artificiality of social arrangement. To see either order or chaos challenges a society which has defined sanity in terms of seeing just enough of one or the other. Smart's foolishness is guaranteed by excess and does not arise out of his confrontation with chaos and a need to flee from its blank truth. His madness turns the possibility of chaos into a perception of the eternal and his poetic response is an expression of this eternal (and hence incomplete) presence of a Creator's hand.

The fool's awareness of an underlying chaos is, in fact, very close to Smart's vision of an Order patiently awaiting exposure. This can be partly explained by the subjectivity of the perceiver, but it is a subjectivity refined by the fool's peripheral *locus*. As Anton Zijderveld observes in *Reality in a Looking-Glass* (1982):

The fool's nature... lies on the borderline between man and animal where it is subjected to strange impulses which are not controlled by the mind and the traditional values and norms... He represents the chimeric no-man's-land between nature and culture, between meaninglessness and meaning. (17)

Willeford's point is much the same (see 132). Both the fool and Smart react in the same way, both find themselves instinctively drawn to nature for it is here that man and animal meet; it is here that order and chaos exist in such close proximity that they become indistinguishable, synonymous. Furthermore, there is the renowned sympathy that

exists between the fool and nature; the fool sees therein a reflection of his own vulnerability before a world enamored with control. Smart sees the same process as that which isolated him: a socially imposed ordering has occurred that rids itself of all that is not useful to humanity's conceptions of the world and itself. From the "no-man's-land" of the asylum, his gaze falls equally on nature and culture. The former elicits a joyous celebration while in the latter he detects a 'false' mathesis and here his criticism is unyielding.

In fragment A Smart not only unearths Old Testament personages to appear before God, but he seeks those animals that supposedly offer little testament to the glory of the animal kingdom. From his alienated purview he identifies with those from nature who, for some reason (or unreason), have become the 'under-dogs', the peripheral:

Let Tola bless with the Toad, which is the good creature of God, tho' his virtue is in the secret, and his mention is not made. (A 29)

Let Ethan praise with the Flea, his coat of mail, his piercer, and his vigour, which wisdom and providence have contrived to attract observation and escape it.

(A 36)

Repugnance is swiftly altered into a delicate and mysterious beauty in this making mention. The truth of these lines is not scientific, does not depend on Bacon's agitation of nature in order to control it. Smart's poetry displays a shift in emphasis from control to celebration. Poetry is determined by the creature's action. Order exists in participation: not only in the poetry's participation in action, but also in the strong gender identification that

binds nature to the poet. This identification exhibits astounding prowess. While acknowledging the difference in intention, Donne's flea is lifeless even before the final verse. Smart's flea is magnified, decked in its military regalia and growing in size and animation with each comma. But at the moment when it could regain its repugnance, Smart incorporates it into "the secret" of God's "wisdom and providence" until it is magnified and reduced in the same glance. Enlarged by the poet to "attract observation" it is reduced by nature to "escape it". Hartman rightly emphasises the theme of magnification in Smart's Magnificat, but at the price of the limiting supposition that Smart's Magnificat works on "the pun (magnifi-cat) alluding to the 'magnification' of the cat Geoffrey and the animal kingdom generally" (431). The flea is enlarged so that it can be reviewed, seen beyond its connotation, seen newly awoken from its dormancy. Alan Liu is closer to the mark in his examination of Hartman's examination of Smart's line: "For I pray the Lord Jesus to translate my MAGNIFICAT into verse and represent it" (B 43). For Liu, Christ (and by extension Christ-opher) is the translator:

Jesus is the 'voice' of God's writing speaking
itself in the garden of mortality, in the cool of
the day. Precisely by the death he both pronounces
and suffers, he allows all the fallen 'voices' of
generation to be 'translated' upwards into heavenly
being. (123)

Browning puts it well when he exclaims that Smart

pierced the screen
'Twixt thing and word, lit language straight from
the soul, -

Left no fine film-flake on the naked coal
Live from the censer ... (86)

So precisely does Smart capture, and is captured by, a certain creature - both real and mythical - that he freezes it, imaginatively, in the purity of its uniqueness: we find "the Coney, who scoopeth the rock, and archeth in the sand" (A 20), the mythical "Salamander, which feedeth upon ashes as bread and whose joy is at the mouth of the furnace" (A 65) and "the Cameleon, which feedeth on the Flowers and washeth himself in the dew" (A 75). The formal diction acts as a gentle counterpart to the reverence he seeks to convey, one that states and diffuses his isolation through this subtle projection. But it is more than merely projection; Smart conquers his isolation through a poetry that communicates immediately with the reader. He uses a printer's analogy to convey his intention and the force behind that intention:

*For my talent is to give an impression upon words
by punching, that when the reader casts his eye
upon 'em, he takes up the image from the mould
which I have made. (B 404)*

In the neglected creatures of nature, Smart discerns God's creating hand and by extension - as lesser creator - himself. The link established in Fragment A between biblical protagonists and the animal kingdom, and the recondite association between aspects of himself and the described gathering of the clans, reiterates his isolation at the same time as it overcomes its implication. Within this final paradox Smart asserts the 'verticality' of his mad poetry. It is poetry located in an imaginative dimension that, although not alleviating his confinement, his feelings of betrayal,

allows him company in a timeless zone where the past and future generations join in the *inspirare*, the breath of God. This is not Hartman's blasphemous usurping of God's omnipotence (431-32) or Dearnley's megalomania (see 42) but an insane transcendence, achieved poetically, through a continuous and elaborate diffusion of self into the timeless wealth of human, animal and fictitious precedent.

If this is so, it is necessary to understand something of the nature of this 'insane transcendence'. The 18th century had taken care to locate the asylum elsewhere - geographically and psychologically. It had also taken the further precaution of degenerating its inmates so that they lost the raiments of humanity and became, as Foucault points out, something closer to animals. The madman had slid, so to speak, irrevocably down the Great Chain of Being:

The animality that rages in madness dispossesses man of what is specifically human in him; not in order to deliver him over to other powers, but simply to establish him at the zero degree of his own nature. For classicalism, madness in its ultimate form is man in immediate relation to his animality, without other reference, without any recourse. (74)

For Foucault the interest lies in the delineation of madness within classicalism, whereas, for our purposes, it is the madman's reaction to the prevalent *modus* that is of more interest. Smart has already made it clear that he supposedly belongs to the animal kingdom in his comparison between the "White Raven" and himself, "a greater curiosity" (B 25). For the 18th century society this distinction was necessary for a psychic cleanliness that made secure its own sanity and

absolved it from recognizing itself in the other. Rather than submitting before this logic, Smart extends it to create a bridge, upon which he stands, across these mutually exclusive realms. His *locus* allows him a divine retribution as he becomes, in his excess, a hallucination in the mind of 18th century thought. His perception refuses to see the world in terms of some fashionable hierarchy of human worth. Smart sees an order, true only to the mystery of itself, and one that draws no fundamental distinction between the offspring of the world. The order is neither Aristotelian nor Newtonian, but foolish and in some senses, mystical. His celebration of creation discards the techniques and logic of a science already absorbed with the myth of the totally known and rather speaks of a knowledge of what Meister Eckhardt calls *istigkeit*. Smart as fool joins with the simplicity and complexity of the mystic to announce the most obvious and, for that reason, the most hidden of truths. Mechtild of Magdeburg could be speaking of Smart when she says:

The truly wise person
kneels at the feet of all creatures
and is not afraid to endure
the mockery of others. (qtd. in Fox; 1983, 69)

Smart's foolishness has another reason. By poetically diffusing himself into nature he partakes in the fool's act where each animal becomes, for him, a mask which he tries on in participation before returning to the mute asylum. Each line, each creature frees him from his confinement into animality and what can be called un-existence. *Jubilate* is, in this way, the ultimate poem of participation and absence.

The paradoxical union of being and non-being, of foolishness and wisdom serve to inform any reading of Smart as visionary. As far as he has been rendered absent from society he has created for himself a purview from which he glimpses a different reality. As far as he is a fool - what is a fool but an inarticulate visionary, one who, in Willeford's terms

bears the name of a transcendent perfection and is the living reminder among us of its inaccessibility. The value remains undecipherable in the chaotic and insubstantial mirror of the fool's show. (138)

Jubilate's success and failure can be gauged in terms of Smart's ability to articulate his glimpse of "transcendent perfection". Even in his most obviously prophetic section (C 57-161), however, he makes it clear - "it is the business of a man gifted in the word to prophecy good" (C 57) - that his vision is ecstatic and addressed to the timeless potential of humankind rather than to any specific future time. The central metaphor of the horn which infuses the lines that follow is on one level a rather pathetic phallic gesture that will render women subordinate:

For I prophecy that [women] will be cooped up and kept under due controul. (C 67)
For I prophecy that men will be much stronger in the body. (C 74)

Beyond his fears of castration, however, the horn is a gateway that leads, like Virgil's, to a more opulent world (see Liu's remarks, 119) that is realized through a vision of hermetic connectedness and Ekhardtian 'Is-ness':

For it is good to let the rain come upon the naked body unto purity and refreshment. (C 113)
For the horn is of plenty.

*For this has been the sense of all ages.
For Man and Earth suffer together.
For when Man was amerced of his horn, earth lost
part of her fertility. (C 153-56)*

This potentiality is kept from fruition because humanity (and here we can form a partial compromise from the above) has lost its spiritual phallus. As sexist as this aspect of his vision is, it does reiterate a *principae anima* that he believes has been lost in humanity's preoccupation with self-glorification. At this point his celebration of a world 'gathered by obsession' gives way to a critical thrust accusing society for the way it makes sense empirically rather than spiritually. Historically it is not surprising that scientific consciousness would face the brunt of Smart's peculiar wrath.

From his illusory state of mind, his un-existence, Smart attacks the great progressive mechanism of science. In Bacon's terms, Smart has achieved an "inductive leap"; not into the clear pathways of empiricism, but into 'the cloud of unknowing'. *Jubilate's* now notorious anti-Newtonian stance has generated much discussion (probably because here, as in other areas, he adumbrates Blake); all of which proves that for all his diversity of interest he was no scientist. Williamson presents the best summation of this position in "Smart's *Principae*":

Smart's indiscriminate embrace of 'facts' of any kind, from any source... was fundamentally unscientific. In so far as scientific evidence supported his metaphysical preconceptions he was happy to accept it; where the evidence conflicted with his preconceptions he dismissed it with cavalier disdain. (1979 411)

While she is certainly correct in attributing his selective usage of facts to an overriding desire to allocate to God the original and final cause (419), there is another possibility as worthy of consideration.

Part of the fool's ethos is implicitly critical of the human tendency towards self-importance for it entails a consequent depreciation of the other until the other becomes merely useful or non-existent. The history of madness is a history of exactly this process of distinguishing between the useful and the otiose. Furthermore, as many prominent thinkers have noted, this process was initiated in the 17th and 18th centuries and has become our most pervasive legacy. Newton, together with Bacon and Descartes, initiated a radical reevaluation of nature and our location therein; a forsaking of the hermetic world-view for one explainable in mechanical terms. Now obviously this is a complex, and contentious, issue and one largely beyond this essay's field of interest.⁶ Suffice it to say that Smart detects in science's treatment of nature the same process as that which resulted in his confinement. Nature, like the madman, matters only in so far as it can be explained and manipulated. With unconscious irony Bacon's *New Organon* posits its fundamental premise in terms of madness and panic:

For even as in the business of life a man's disposition and the secret workings of his mind and affections are better discovered when he is in trouble than at other times; so likewise the secrets of nature reveal themselves more readily under the vexations of art than when they go their own way. (qtd. in Berman 17)

Bacon's "art" is nothing more than the mechanisms of science. As Morris Berman argues in *The Reenchantment of the World*, Bacon was not only the founder of scientific method but the one who initiated a gradual change in consciousness. Perhaps somewhat idealistically (although his thesis is provocatively argued), Berman sees the movement from alchemy to the mechanical sciences as one that brought with it a change from participating consciousness to one that, in Bacon's terms, stood outside - vexing nature. Thus

quantifiability, and the deliberate act of viewing nature as an abstraction from which one can distance oneself - all open the possibility that Bacon proclaimed as the true goal of science: control. (34)

And if the natural world was fast losing its sense of hermetic connectedness it was surely becoming, as Foucault reminds us, a menagerie closed in by much the same bars - those of mechanical and classical reasoning - as those which confined the madman. It is unreason that initiates Smart's attack on Newton more than any influence of Hutchinson or the Cambridge philosophers; "cavalier disdain" arises from his rebellion against this reasoning rather than any carelessness in philosophical methodology.

From any reasonable perspective his attack, and resolution, is ludicrous:

For the phenomenon of the horizontal moon is the truth - she appears bigger in the horizon because she actually is so. (B 426)
For she has done her day's-work and the blessing of God upon her, and she communicates with the earth. (B 429)
For when she rises she has been strength'ned by the Sun, who cherishes her by night. (B 430)

The naivety of these lines obviously reiterates what Smart, elsewhere, calls "the Argument A POSTERIORI [which] is God before every man's eyes" (B 360). The argument is conducted visually rather than discursively and it is indicative of his mad poetry. *Jubilate* is not Smart 'doing' poetry, but Smart as poetry: "For a man speaks HIMSELF from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet" (B 228). The process of doing, of actively ordering material into a publicly accessible form is anathema to Smart because it requires the translation into merely rational terms. Smart's translation involves a reasoning not only of the mind, but of the body *in totum*: a translation of himself into the natural, the social, and finally the spiritual world - "I shall be translated myself at the last" (B 11). And perhaps this explains the poetic clarity of so much of *Jubilate*. The dialogue between poet and the world is conducted from the crown to the sole; and thinking, contrary to Descartes assertion, is but a part of the body's reasoning. The moon appears bigger because "she actually is so": the eye may yet triumph over the mind's incessant, congested recall of fashionable facts. Day and night and the sun and moon are described as platonic lovers - an affiliation of macrocosmic dimension that destroys, if only for a moment, the inanimation of a more probable explanation.

To detect only a causality of homage fails to note the working of a more complex *logos* present at the heart of the matter. For Smart, God is ontology and teleology. It is God whose presence embodies truth, but a truth necessarily remote

from rationality and empiricism - any attempt to pursue and discover this truth is pointless and impossible. Smart's God and the fool's chaos once more appear nearly identical. Believing that he is visibly immersed in spiritual truth it frees him from the tiring search for truth and meaning. It frees him into an atemporal amphitheater that requires only ecstatic description, not ordering. Here, order does not have to be humanly created, but is creation - is itself. Within this medium Smart proclaims a world ordered not by equations but by poetry. His literal reading is partly the simple-mindedness of the fool and partly an expression of a truth poetic, rather than logical. Even his early verse displays, however infrequently, a poetry of child-like innocence. Knowledge comes from a purity of action, of being entirely involved in the delight of natural action. For humanity this action is praise as it is for the migratory bird. The bird praises by following its divine instinct:

Who points her passage thro' the pathless void
To realms from us remote, to us unknown?
Her science is the science of her God.
Not the magnetic index to the North
E'er ascertains her course, nor buoy, nor beacon,
She Heav'n-taught voyager, that sails in air,
Courts nor coy West nor East, but instant knows
What Newton, or not sought, or sought in vain.
("On the Omniscience of the Supreme Being"; qtd. in
Dearnley, 97)

It is incorrect to assume that Smart was against Newton or, for that matter, Bacon and Descartes merely because of their ideas. Smart - and time has proved him correct - saw the mechanical universe as one de-vitalized. Instead he proposes a spiritual and poetic form of physics which

understands many of Newton's laws according to the *veritas* of poetry and celebratory spirituality. This is not to hold that he saw scientific inquiry as a waste (for it has the potential to celebrate the world rather than mankind) but as a failure in its desire to value control over participation and measurement over blessing.

In his attempt to reconstitute the world, Newton's mechanical explanation situates humankind as the one who explains and therefore creates; Newton's error is that he denigrates the poetry of the obvious:

For Newton nevertheless is more of error than of the truth, but I am of the WORD of GOD. (B 195)
Let Silas rejoice with the Cabot - the philosophy of the times ev'n now is vain deceit. (B 219)
Let Barsabas rejoice with Cammarus - Newton is ignorant for if a man consult not the WORD how should he understand the WORK? (B 220)

"Newton is ignorant", is a fool, not simply because he fails to perceive an obvious extant order but because he fails to understand the depth of meaning in "the WORD of GOD". Matthew Fox traces this phrase back to the Hebrew for 'word' which is *dabhar*, meaning creative energy (40). For Smart the Word and the Work are indistinguishable whereas he feels that Newton has dissected them and in so doing has, perhaps unwittingly, sought to render the Work understandable with the consequence that the Word becomes a useful, but lifeless, appendage - a tool of convenience. When Hartman observes, from a structuralist framework, that for Smart "the fault lies with language, which has lost yet may regain its representational power" (438) he is nearly correct. Smart does not blame language but sees it as a victim of a social de-meaning that

involves both humanity and its language. But a language victimised works, in turn, its own silent revenge and becomes a prison for those who would speak. If language has been de-meant, it ensures that those who use it are de-humanised, are controlled by its proscriptive functionality. The danger is that a language without a spiritual dimension, without its *dabhar*, may become, like a humanity without belief, "lost in the midst". Adrift, without any location the individual is rendered truly foolish: "For the MAN in VACUO is a flat conceit of preposterous folly" (B 264). Like Erasmus' Folly, Smart turns his foolishness on its head to point to a folly disguised, but one that is "flat" and vacuously hollow. He recalls, if only for an instant, Johnson's *Rasselas* and the warnings made against the vacuity of life and the importance of a vision directed towards God. With this threat of lifeless vacuity, the solution proposed by Smart is to bring the 'language of humanity' back to life, to uncover that creative energy:

*For by the grace of God I am the Reviver [re-viver]
of ADORATION amongst ENGLISH-MEN.
For being desert-ed is to have desert in the sight
of God and intitles one to the Lord's merit.
For things that are not in the sight of men are
thro' God of infinite concern. (B 332-34)*

Approaching the question of language and representation from an entirely different perspective, Smart reaches a conclusion remarkably close to contemporary thought. Discourse, for Smart, is never a transparent instrument through which an impartial world is observed. The moral didacticism prevalent in so much 18th century verse (including much of his earlier work) gives way to a 'poetics'

unfashionably alive to its medium. Smart's madness produces a poetry - in *Jubilate* and *Song to David* - that exhibits both language's potential and the possibility of it bearing fruit through the insanity of the poet's *logos*. Discourse and logic unite to form (as they did in Cowper) a unique *logos*. If, at least in this regard, Smart appears strangely modern it is because he anticipates much of the work of contemporary criticism. And while these affiliations must be left to others to explore (see Lisi and Hartman's work) it is noteworthy that Smart's 'aesthetic' provides a refreshing palliative to the *ennui* that marks those critics who see only failure and silence haunting every utterance. Smart's answer is, of course, the fool's. Whether it is the *joie de vivre* in his transformation of isolation ("deserted") into a feast of religious reverie or the absurd claim that each language contains the spirit of an animal - "For the Mouse (Mus) prevails in the Latin./For Edi-mus, bibi-mus, vivi-mus -- ore-mus" (B 636-7) - we are forced to acknowledge the way in which language and nature, supposedly as objects to be controlled, are liberated in order to illuminate or destroy our careful schemes of ordering. If this insight is trivial, it is not often so in a poem that rivals Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in aphoristic profundity:

For where Accusation takes the place of
encouragement a man of Genius is driven to act the
vices of a fool. (B 365)
For the phenomenon of dreaming is not of one
solution, but many. (B 371)

Whereas Cowper's discourse is bound for catatonic silence, Smart's seeks to overflow the world by means of a constant

evocation of language: as poetry, as joyous plaything and as living subject. If "to act" merely implies action then the reference could be to the likes of Newton and Bacon for in their attempts to manipulate nature they implicitly accuse rather than encourage through praise. But if "to act" is taken as the fool's show then the line is self-reflexive - Smart is the "man of Genius" who has been accused and expelled by his society. His sensitivity to the paradoxes initiated by this ambivalence foreshadows (in B 371) the basic premise in the dream analyses of Jung and, to an extent, Freud. Smart forsakes any simple causality between a dream and its meaning by emphasizing the multiplicity of meaning that is so precisely the dream experience.

Again he is like Blake in his desire to see beyond the obvious (as superficial) into the obvious (as thing in itself). Their poetry has, in common, this simultaneity of the simple and complex. Both these poets manage to animate the Word's 'character' in a way that succeeds in narrowing the hiatus between signifier and signified. The Word is disturbed, it manages to shake off its extant shroud of meaning and is momentarily transfigured as it reaches into the ineffable. Daniel Stempel speaks of something similar in "Blake, Foucault and the Classical Episteme":

The source of Foucault's 'verticality' is not necessarily obscure. If the axis of identity is lifted from the surface of the taxonomic grid and rotated until it is perpendicular to that surface, passing through the grid at the origin, being and logic are no longer in the same plane.... Discourse, as Foucault points out, becomes detached from representation, moving either towards the ideal of language as mathesis or towards a rhetoric

in which being recedes from representation,
infinitely regressing into the transcendence of the
ineffable or the abyss of the unspeakable. (404-
405)

Stempel's implication is that at this vertical position (a verticality close to the vertical poetry of insanity) being and representation become, so to speak, poles apart. However difficult it is to conceive of one's being "infinitely regressing into the transcendence of the ineffable" it is possible to detect a contingent movement in the dialectic of madness.

In Smart's exclusion from society he had lost his identity; as far as society was concerned madness deprived him of the rights of existence, of existence itself. This absence is totally in accord with Stempel's "being [that] recedes from representation". But that is not the entire point. As poet of foolishness he forges, and we recall his printer's analogy, a world out of that absence; a world literally of "things which are not in the sight of man" - a world open, once more, to his unique representation and participation. This is the reason that Bishop Lowth's antiphonal response becomes, for Smart, seminal to *Jubilate*. Even the most esoteric connections display this dialogue between the poet who participates and the one who represents:

LET PETER rejoice with the MOON FISH who keeps up
the life in the waters by night.
*FOR I pray the Lord JESUS that cured the LUNATICK
to be merciful to all my bretheren and sisters in
these houses. (B 123)*

While there is no logical connection between the "Let" and the "For" the two grids of context and meaning coalesce imaginatively allowing the "MOON FISH" to represent the hope

of health in the dark despair of the asylum, allowing Smart to become that same fish, acting as a sentinel for a society who struggles to see the vitality of Smart's spiritual world immersed, as they are, "in the waters by night". The many possible readings must acknowledge the central place occupied by Smart both as one who re-presents the world and actively participates in its representation. In madness the individual bound only by the superficial trappings of logic can reconcile being and representation within an insane, and unique, *logos*. But if insanity can achieve this impossibly paradoxical union of being and representation it can as easily alienate being from any kind of representational expression: a condition to which Cowper's silence testifies. And in Cowper we see the absolute difference from Smart; the difference in the way they resolved, in madness, their position on Pope's isthmus.

Cowper became an empty shadow after "The Castaway", became in fact an image of the process by which the madman was incorporated - through negation - into society. In Smart, the madman as empty cipher finds a champion. *Jubilate* traces a non-discursive progression that is an exact parodic reversal of the madman's disinvestment. In fully accepting his foolishness, his smallness, he has been able to grow in stature - "For tall and stately are against me, but humiliation on humiliation is on my side" (B 112) - on the other side of the looking-glass until he locates himself in the asylum of un-existence where he re-possesses not only the medieval wisdom of the fool, but the transcendent vision of

the prophet. Thus his madness allows for the reconstitution of the world, of language, of self.

Williamson ends her article on Smart's anti-scientific stance in a way that is generally representative of the critical attitude towards *Jubilate*. She draws a comparison to *Song To David* which she describes as

the greatest monument to the speculations which occupied him in his years in the asylum; *Jubilate Agno* became the quarry out of which it was to be built. (422)

These are harsh words for one who was to finish editing this quarry only a year later. Ironically, for all the insight her edition displays, here she misses the point.

What we have in *Jubilate* is a battle that takes place on the surface between sanity and insanity, between the social ethic and its boundary. The triumph of the poem exists firstly in its disappointing of poetic expectations: it is incomplete, bemusing in its allusions and 'ends' with a dreary list (Fragment D) of unknown people coupled randomly with obscure herbs. And yet if we have listened to the dialogue between self and the universe what else should we expect? It is incomplete because it extends into the past and future ⁶ - it presumes continuance. It is only esoteric to those who wish for the certainty of sources, for those who miss the evocative quality that can result when disparate fields meet, momentarily forming new worlds. The 'endless' Fragment D is, if anything, exhibitionist; carried off by one who has already won the battle in breaking down the boundary that sought to divide him from the social ethic. Imaginatively he reinstates himself (as "Smart") into the

middest of respectability with that gentle, deprecatory
humour of allusion, the humour of a very wise fool:

Let Fig, house of Fig rejoice with Fleawort. The
Lord magnify the idea of Smart singing hymns on
this day in the eyes of the whole University of
Cambridge... (D 148)

This brings us to the second point. *Jubilate* is "the idea
(aptly described earlier as the "mental image of the object"
[B 7]) of Smart singing hymns": it is the constant merging of
the poet and the experiencing self in the act of creation.

The poem is, of course, a failure. In Williamson's terms
it is a quarry that needs to be exploded, arranged and
brought to a state of completion. But that is to view it from
the outside, through the eyes of the excavator, the one who
edits. It fails because it continually escapes, through its
madness, all attempts to order, to isolate consistent themes,
to confine it, finally, to the dimensions of the page. This
kind of excavation can, at best, be only half successful: in
the search for the artist as creator, the artist as creature
is ignored. And indeed it is tempting to ignore Smart as a
body - from crown to sole - that writes itself in *Jubilate*: a
body, and thus a poem, composed of contradiction and
fragmentation, but pervaded by joyous obsession. It is to
Nietzsche that we must turn if we would understand what Smart
achieved, nothing less than the body as the word, life as
poetry:

In man, *creature* and *creator* are united: in man
there is matter, fragment, excess, clay, mud,
madness, chaos; but in man there is also creator,
sculptor, the hardness of the hammer, the divine
spectator and the seventh day. (*Beyond Good and
Evil* 225)

CHAPTER FOUR

I Murphy: That Harmless Lunacy

Let Jude bless with the Bream, who is of melancholy
from his depth and serenity.
*For I have a greater compass both of mirth and
melancholy than another. (Jubilate B 131)*

For Foucault, ever since the classical exclusion of madness, humanity has dwelt under its premises, under its influence. Modernity (which, for Foucault begins in the 19th century) has sustained this exclusion and in much the same way as Cowper and Smart were in the middle of an aesthetic reorientation, Nietzsche is a transitional figure between the classical and modern 'periods'. It is Nietzsche who stands between, and who also signifies a repetition and a difference in the focus of madness. Zarathustra stands in the middle of a madness that links Nietzsche to Cowper and Smart and to the mad protagonists that roam Beckett's world. The terror and the elation alternately experienced by Zarathustra relates to both Cowper and Smart on one side and becomes synthesised in Beckett's work on the other side. In Beckett, opposites do not follow as much as they become each other. Bruegel's Vienna Babel is transformed into the Rotterdam one and back again within the space of a sentence, within the space of a word. Here melancholy becomes mirth and sanity, madness. In Beckett's world the horizontal plane is forever being sundered by these (old and new) monoliths asserting their presence. It is little wonder that Beckett's heroes are

rarely nonplussed.

How then does one speak of madness within a world consistent only with its author's conception and one in which all expectations - if expectations there be - are destroyed and fulfilled with the same indifference? It seems ludicrous to speak of insanity in the carefully organized chaos generated by Beckett. His landscape, in its varying hues of bleakness, may present madness as a cranky norm but not in terms that we have come to expect in the course of our discussion. In general, criticism has blithely accepted Beckett's characters as odd, as absurd, and proceeded from there. Absurdity however, as it was popularised by Martin Esslin, is not a suitable place to begin, but perhaps a place to end. Madness, which is always in danger of being domesticated itself, must continually interrogate the terms to which it contributes: we cleave to the surd rather than the absurd. The surd is both an exact number that occupies a place in mathematical space and time while also being an irrational number - that which defies that which defines. It also describes a deafness, an inability on the part of the sufferer to hear, to participate fully in the conventions of intercourse. Like the "aural circumcision" (3) of which Kermode speaks, the surd entails a hearing that is a mishearing. Within the various resonances of the word there is, perhaps, the glimmer of a single content; that which Murphy realises when his labour is refused by a chandler:

Sometimes it was expressed more urbanely,
sometimes less. Its forms were as various as the
grades of the chandler mentality, its content was

one: 'Thou surd!'. (47)

And if our search is for the quintessence of the surd within Beckett then it is with Beckett the man we may begin.

Deirdre Bair's biography on Beckett attempts, in vain, to make contiguity of the man and the artist. Her failure, the failure of all biography, to traverse the intraversable distance between creature and creator is exacerbated by man and text: both forever receding from availability in a procession of contradictory positions. Even when one comments on the other there remains a sense of fellow actors passing judgment on a production in which neither particularly wished to participate.

Two examples, two words, will suffice to plot (at least for the present) the correlation between creator and created. Both are found in Bair's tome. In his early twenties Beckett presented a paper to the Modern Languages Society

about a literary movement called 'Le Concentrisme', led by one Jean du Chas, which was supposedly revolutionizing Parisian intellectual circles with its Rabelaisian humour and bawdy writing.... The body of the membership, all serious scholars, spent the remainder of the meeting diligently discussing the possible literary merit of... 'Le Concentrisme', which existed only in Beckett's imagination [and] was never heard of again after that evening... (51-2)

The first is, thus, irreverence: an almost blasphemous exposition of the academic project and its insatiable appetite for the fashionable. Beckett's 'new school' is forwarded with a straight face, indistinguishable from the multiple faces of the extant *avant garde* (as a performance, Tzara would have been delighted, the politicised Breton, outraged). Beckett's irreverence goes deeper for it collapses

a series of distinctions: between importance and trivia, thesis and hypothesis.

The second co-ordinate is one that has assured him a place as the great composer in, and out of, decomposition. To Roger Blin he writes that "[I am] doomed to spend the rest of my days digging up the detritus of my life and vomiting it out over and over again" (299). This is reiterated (in aesthetic terms) in "Three Dialogues" where he blames Tal Coat and Matisse for doing nothing more than disturbing

- a certain order on the plane of the feasible.
- D - What other plane can there be for the maker?
- B - Logically none. Yet I speak of an art turning from it in disgust, weary of its puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road. (*Disjecta* 139)

This prefaces his famous, and typically impossible, dictum where in spite of expression's bankruptcy, one writes out of the futile "obligation to express" (139). Expression as weariness, as exhaustion; living as the awful desire finally to exhaust exhaustion, to weary of weariness. Within irreverence and exhaustion the private man and the author return each other's weary glance.

If Beckett is unavailable for comment and if the only impression he has left on his work is formulated in such negative terms - terms that demarcate absence rather than presence - we need to look further. The body gone, or almost gone (as an icon Jane Bown's portrait expresses this decay of almost skeletal proportions mingled with enigmatic mockery) we turn to the labyrinth of his texts.

That Beckett's personal liaison with literature takes place within modernism is a point on which we can speculate more profitably later, but for the present let us consider his relation to another tradition: an isolated legacy without precursors and with no insights to bequeath to those who follow. In *Sade/ Fourier/ Loyola* Roland Barthes touches on many aspects of this tradition. He calls these writers "Logothetes, founders of language" (3) and detects in all of them a withdrawal from society in order to create a language capable of articulating and ordering their worlds according to the particular hierarchy they establish. And as founders of language they are necessarily found in language:

Sade is no longer an erotic, Fourier no longer a utopian, Loyola no longer a saint: all that is left in each of them is a scenographer: he who disperses himself across a framework he sets up and arranges *ad infinitum*. (6)

What is implicit and yet never articulated by Barthes is the enormity of the task and its implicit failure. Yet in spite of this they pursue this infinite arrangement with a vehemence that mocks the finitude and mortality of the self. In writing the impossible text each of them withdrew from the world into the text that was to become their life. That this arrangement cannot reach completion, cannot really begin, requires on the part of the author, a sense of irreverence, an iconoclasm that makes ridiculous both the self and the conventional aims of writing: to represent, to order, to end. Like Beckett, these writers are always confronted with the inexhaustibility of their assignment - and thus their own exhaustion - and yet they write, mocking the exhaustion that

haunts them in life and in the text. In Sade's case, confinement made writing a reasonable way to pass 26 years - he was obliged to write by the legal restraints that denied him action. But for Fourier, Loyola and (perhaps the greatest of them all) Thomas Aquinas the same obligation, of which Beckett speaks, hurries them onward along their untenable course: in exhaustion, irreverence and obligation we can append the Thomistic world of *Summa Theologiae*. Closer to our concern, we recall *Jubilate* written in the isolation of an asylum (isolation is one of Barthes' prerequisites: "the new language must arise from a material vacuum" 4), it, too, manages to order, to mock the foolishness of the self and the world, and 'ends' continuing into infinity. And we have Beckett, whose writings (his poems, plays, novels and his one film) constitute a world of language that can correctly be called Beckettian.

There are two points at which Beckett differs from Barthes' pioneers of language. The first difference is a desperation in Beckett's work: there is no hierarchy of order (no Loyolian God or Sadean libertine overseer) that blesses his work and exonerates him from the failure of not finishing. Secondly, Sade, Fourier and Loyola begin this infinite tract in a state of knowledge (if not grace):

for them the reconstitution of the whole can be no more than a summation of intelligibles: nothing indecipherable, no irreducible quality of ejaculation, happiness, communication: nothing is that is not spoken... (4)

In the case of Sade there is no evidence of development as an author, no chance that he will finish and begin a different task. Once created, the Sadean language is always present -

requiring only the careful arrangement and rearrangement of the syntax of bodies and crimes. Beckett, however, has both to learn his language and to unlearn a certain Joycean strain: the latter was achieved in *More Pricks Than Kicks* and in his early poetry; the former (and formative) took place in *Murphy* and *Watt*. These novels display an experimentation, a honing and destruction of the possibilities of language to arrive at a discourse that has never been discarded; only endlessly arranged and repeated. *Murphy* and *Watt*, then, are transitional works that seek to resolve the position of one learning to write and one learning to find habitat in that writing.

What this has to do with madness is simply this: in *Murphy* and *Watt* Beckett not only conducts his most direct exploration of madness but also, as will be argued, inculcates madness into the fabric of the texts that follow. It is not with these transitional works that we begin however. Let us rather begin when his discourse is in full bloom and decay, and, in keeping with our preoccupation with the in-between, let us start in the middle.

In 1946 Beckett wrote a novel in French called *Mercier et Camier*. Feeling it to be, in some way, inferior, he suppressed its publication for 24 years. Most Beckett critics have taken their cue from the author's disavowal and while Hugh Kenner and John Fletcher refer to it in some depth, they do so with reservation. They prefer to view it as a transitional work and are content to limit their comments to the way the novel continues concerns begun in *Murphy* and

adumbrates the repartee that *Waiting for Godot* was to make famous together with the quest motif that was to plague his later works.

What happens in the novel is simple in the extreme. Mercier and Camier are two old tramps (men of leisure) accompanied by a relatively absent narrator through a series of aborted attempts to forsake their town of habitation. Repeatedly they are waylaid by a series of circumstances foreseen (pubs, *ennui* and the weather) and unforeseen (*ennui*, the weather and pubs) that bring them back to their point of departure, somewhat older than before. By Chapter seven the narrator calls a halt to the "stink of artifice" (9) and while allowing for a touching separation begins to conclude the work. Although the two meet again, the unstated link that bound each hand and foot to the other has been broken and they part once more, presumably not to meet again. With the narrator they seem to have grown weary of the companionship through chapter and verse. With sublime perseverance the narrator not only manages to conclude but, with great precision, inserts a summary of the action after every two chapters - perhaps this is a kind gesture for those immersed in (as Beckett calls it in "Gnome") "the loutishness of learning" (*Collected Poems* 7). This summation of course misses the point. What it does show is the inordinate difficulty that we must face if we are to come to Beckett with our stock of preconceptions gathered from what we now call 'the expressive realist text'. Something, it appears, has taken place behind our backs, something that affects not only the tone but the architecture of the novel. It is this

'something' that requires definition.

It soon becomes apparent that the all important journey is of little importance; it is a quest without a chapel perilous and apart from the policeman they kill, without even a green knight. Apparently fate and amnesia collaborate to thwart any prospect of success. If the quest is undefined and impossible then surely some form of friendship will define the heart of protagonists and novel alike. This possibility is also denied when, by the completion of Chapter seven after a stirring bout of farewell salutations they part, bound for "the tedium of flight and dreams of deliverance" (89). That which binds them together will also be that which separates them; the cohesive causality at work is habit, the tortuous logic it follows, no more than boredom.

The final refuge would then seem to encourage the importance of the individual character; but here too we are bound to be disappointed. Dissimilarity does not exist as an index of meaning - "no symbols where none intended" (255) is the warning that terminates *Watt*. Camier is no more intellectual than Mercier (a hypothesis as applicable to the false Cartesian dualities that criticism has used to pursue Vladimir and Estragon). Their difference begins only to mean within their union. As Laurel requires Hardy and as Arsene requires Watt - and we recall the morphic similarity between these couples - Mercier needs Camier both as the 'straight man' and as a way of assuming that role in turn.

To enter the novel at all, it must be through the dialogue:

I too fail to see why, said Camier, exactly why. All I know is that yesterday we did see why, exactly why.

When the cause eludes me, said Mercier, I begin to feel uneasy.

Here Camier was alone in wetting his trousers.

Mercier does not join in Camier's laugh? said Camier.

Not just this once, said Mercier. (60)

Without memory, without explanation, Mercier and Camier pursue yearnings for objects long since vanished with a result that is deadly funny. It is quite possible that Camier's laughter has a literal meaning (knowing the incontinence of Beckett's heroes) and it is this thought that imbalances the narrative. The flow of discourse is disrupted by polyreferential signifiers (too much meaning) which continually bankrupt the narrative, making it meaningless. This, in turn, makes the narrator's task impossible. The absence of quotation marks, for example, refuses a distinction between the one who utters and what is uttered. Who says and what is said is reduced to the same level as if it has become a matter entirely unimportant or impossible to ascertain. The merger however encourages another in which the narrating 'I' - "The journey of Mercier and Camier is one I can tell, if I will, for I was with them all the time" (7) - joins with the narration, joins Mercier and Camier to form a vague 'Cloud of Knowing and Unknowing' covering our heroes:

Strange impression, said Mercier, strange impression sometimes that we are not alone. You not?

I am not sure I understand, said Camier.

Now quick, now slow, that is Camier all over.

Like the presence of a third party, said Mercier.

Enveloping us. I have felt it from the start. And I am anything but psychic. (100)

The narrator's lack of actual congress at once elevates him or her to a position as authorial persona while demeaning

that supposed control as the narrator is exhausted by the weariness, if not futility, of both Mercier and Camier's actions and the act of narration. There is no possibility of non-participant observation in Beckett's world-weary world. It comes as no surprise that by the end of chapter seven this persona is in the dark (with Mercier and Camier) and disinterested in ascertaining the laborious chain of events that occur in the ruins of "this hospitable chaos": "In any case nothing is known for sure, henceforth. Here would be the place to make an end. After all it is the end" (103). Sickened both by the protagonists and the artifice of the novel, the narrator calls a halt to both: "That's it. It takes a little time to grasp more or less what happened" (108). As is so often the case in Beckett's work (often even his point for departure) it is all over bar the shouting. Fortunately, or unfortunately, it is the shouting that is never over. It continues

ingesting, excreting, undressing up, dossing down, and all the other things too tedious to enumerate, in the long run too tedious, requiring to be done and suffered. No danger of losing interest, under these conditions.(108)

The reversal is simple yet horrific in its mundaneness. Boredom raised to the power of devastation, the trivial becoming an all consuming sign of waste. What *Mercier and Camier* achieves is the meticulous inversion of terms whereby life is not deprived (in an existential sense) of meaning, but meaning is deprived of its importance. And if boredom becomes the inescapable catastrophe we must acknowledge then we are treading on very familiar rounds. Beckett has borrowed

from madness. The endless mingling of exhaustion and irreverence that motivates his work is not only obsessive but resembles (if it is not indistinguishable from) the madman's *logos*. His terms may be perverted but they proceed from these premises in a coherent and orderly fashion. The logic of this argument as formulated in *Murphy* and *Watt* - and based largely upon an irreverent reading of Descartes - is unimpeachable. The world in which Mercier and Camier wend their way is a world (irrespective of the peculiarity of its ontological base) that constantly normalises the principles of its creation.

We are back in Cowper's world of rabbits, endless summer walks and chatty letters. And yet in the midst of this paradise, his nightmares, his sense of condemnation makes of Eden something unobtainable: "Ah happy shades, to me unblest". Nothing is abnormal in Cowper's world, but normality itself, which mocks unwittingly. And it is through (and on) that normality that he inscribes his madness:

 how could I escape
Infinite wrath and infinite despair!
Whom Death, Earth, Heaven, and Hell consigned to
 to ruin,
Whose friend was God, but God swore not to aid
 me! (428)

It is fitting that these lines should be written on a window-shutter, on that which grants visual entry into the world - the point upon which Cowper's madness is written. Nature (here read normality) is transformed by madness into the wrath of "Death, Earth, Heaven and Hell".

This is what is described in the fast decaying universe

of *Endgame*. Hamm speaks of an equally obsessive vision where he describes a mad friend of his: one who, like Blake

was a painter - and engraver. I had a great fondness for him. I used to go and see him, in the asylum. I'd take him by the hand and drag him to the window. Look! There! All that rising corn! And there! Look! The sails of the herring fleet! All that loveliness! (*Pause.*) He'd snatch away his hand and go back into his corner. Appalled. All he had seen was ashes. (*Pause.*) He alone had been spared. (*Pause.*) Forgotten. (*Pause.*) (32)

Ironically, this madman's vision has become that which, in reality, lies outside the windows of the play. But if this is different from Blake's vision, it has a comprehensiveness reminiscent of another painter - Pieter Bruegel. For both Beckett and Bruegel the ashes and the corn co-exist.

Foreground merges with background (in Bruegel's work both are always in focus) to produce an endless canvas where Icarus falls, a farmer toils, the innocents are slaughtered, village fairs are celebrated and skeletons disrupt an idle feast. This makes more specific Beckett's inexhaustible text and explains Watt's appearance in an attempt to reconcile Mercier with Camier, their memories of Murphy's demise and more typically Malone's disgruntled assertion:

Then it will be all over with the Murphys, Merciers, Molloys, Morans and Malones, unless it goes on beyond the grave... How many have I killed, hitting them on the head or setting fire to them?... There was an old butler too, in London I think, there's London again, I cut his throat with his razor. (217)

Malone as the arch-mover in *Murphy*, solving the mysterious 'suicide' of the butler 20 years earlier? If there is a freedom in Beckett's world it is simply the freedom to range freely among the ruins of that world while being held captive

by it. Like the Beckettian body (which will be treated in my discussion of *Watt*) these characters not only overflow the dimensions of their physicality but transgress the boundaries of the text, flowing from one to the other but prisoner still to the unenviable logic of Beckett's world. And it is that *logos* that first becomes apparent in *Murphy* and establishes the range of pigments available for the 'endless' Beckettian canvas.

II *Murphy: Insanity In Sanity*

What is the nature of existence within the Beckettian canvas, what is it to exist here? The Latin root of 'to exist' is *ex - sistere*, 'to stand out' and as such is a word whose genesis is spatial. This has useful ramifications both for the comparison to the collapsed perspective of Bruegel and Beckett as well as partially explaining the distortion of space in madness. And so it is with the question of space that we begin.

We begin to notice the ubiquitous sameness of geography in *Mercier and Camier* when we look back at his earlier work. His short stories in *More Pricks Than Kicks* are firmly set in Dublin and the surrounding countryside; in *Murphy* the action is rigorously set in Dublin and London, between the months of June and October. In fact the narrative is extremely finicky about these specifics of time and place. Murphy first appears "in a mew in West Brompton" (5); his meeting with Celia occurs when she

had turned out of Edith Grove into Cremorne Road, intending to refresh herself with a smell of the Reach and then return by Lot's Road, when chancing to glance to her right she saw, motionless in the mouth of Stadium Street, considering alternately the sky and a sheet of paper, a man. (11-12)

Even his proposal to her "the following Sunday" takes place "in the Battersea Park sub-tropical garden, immediately following the ringing of the bell" (13). It is extremely tempting, after this little foray into exactitude, to join with Mr Kelly as he pleads for a break from "all these demented particulars" (12). And indeed, there is something demented in these particulars - especially in terms of the gray landscapes ("Lessness") and primal ooze (*How It Is*) of his later work. But the dementia goes further. This meeting, courting and proposal, as recounted by Celia, is as factual as the narrative ever becomes. This is where the conventional novel ends: from here on (with the exception of the asylum sequence) the novel flounders in a more abstract realm. This is not to say - as one can say of his work from *Watt* onwards - that the plot recedes, but that the focus is elsewhere. That Celia brings Mr Kelly (and the reader) up to date is nevertheless something that is incontrovertibly in the past. This "striking case of love requited" (13) has reached full cadence, as has the conventional world to which each, uncomfortably, belongs. Apparently in *Murphy* the stability of the real is always in the past, before the novel began and somewhere else. Once started, the world of particulars is rendered unstable by the very people that should objectify it. With the sole exception of Celia (and we shall have recourse to clarification later), the book is full of people

in various stages of physical and mental decline: Mr Kelly on his death bed, Neary's attempted suicide at the 'hands' of a statue, Miss Counihan's anthropoidal form (69), Miss Carridge's stink, Miss Dew's Ducks disease, Mr Endon's apnoea, Cooper's acathisia (perfectly described as "deep seated and of long standing" [69]) and Murphy. Murphy's dress (45) betrays him as a mixture between a clown and a beggar with all the resultant odour of his pilgrimage locked in. And as for the rest of him

his troubles had begun early.... With what sorrow [the obstetrician] recorded that of all the millions of little larynges cursing in unison at that particular moment, the infant Murphy's alone was off the note. To go back no farther than the vagitus. (44)

Finally, even when the particulars are scientific there is something demented about the way they are presented, the way their status is ridiculed. We recall how in *Mercier and Camier* the thwarted and unknown quest is enclosed by constant summaries which succeed in stripping bare the little that happens by focusing attention on the process of inactivity. Although these summations locate the action in time, they also dislocate the action by commenting on its passing. These 'factual' summaries merely become ghosts that haunt the characters, mock the author's failure to get to the point and tease the reader. Similarly the physiological description of Celia, in its measured precision (10), detaches her from the lifelessness of the data that constitutes her body.

Murphy fares no better. Even placed in his mew in West Brompton, his posture - bound, naked in a rocking chair - if not

quite impossible (the lost seventh scarf) presents one desperately trying to escape, through confinement, the space his body occupies:

it gave his body pleasure, it appeased his body. Then it set him free in his mind. For it was not until his body was appeased that he could come alive in his mind, as described in section six. (6)

Apart from its obvious Cartesian resonances, the oddity of this ritual of release demarcates Murphy's search for a space that is other than that of West Brompton. By stilling his body - in nakedness and a primal rhythm - he can escape (if only for a while) its exhausting demands. And the consequence of coming alive in his mind is not to give it precedence over the body, but to obliterate the voice of the body as a step towards a greater obliteration that entails both: to silence, finally, the dialogue of woe between antinomies. The desire to still the body is thus not an attempt to take sides with either of these warring factions, but merely to declare a momentary truce. Bound to a rhythm that is both coital and pre-natal, he simulates a time of undifferentiation, a moment when he is either lost in the act of coitus, or hidden in the womb and unaware of the acting to come. Within this rocking, there is the dim possibility of negating the chatter of Pope's opposites: life and death, subject and object, self and world, mind and body.

As promised by the considerate narrator "section six" does indeed clarify Murphy's relation to the mind, body and rocking chair. Murphy's body is in a position common to all Beckett's protagonists from Belacqua to the persona in *Company*. The body is more or less perennially in a state of

exhaustion - exhausted not only by the decrepitude of a body forever waning, but by its traffic with the mind. For motion to be at all possible it must occur while one is at rest: for the rat to move, the man must be asleep (64-5).

The movement of the mind through "the three zones, light, half light, dark" arises from the rest of the body. The first zone, an imaginative mockery of the prevalent terms of existence, allows Murphy, the victim of the world, to become its persecutor. But in the same way as even God must tire of avenging himself on the world, this zone gives way to the second where "the pleasure was contemplation":

In both these zones of his private world Murphy felt sovereign and free, in the one to requite himself, in the other to move as he pleased from one unparalleled beatitude to another. (65)

But each requires effort, a kind of weak participation and for one exhausted in body, mental strain, however slight, takes its toll. The third degree is infinitely more alluring:

Here there was nothing but commotion and the pure forms of commotion. Here he was not free, but a mote in the dark of absolute freedom. He did not move, he was a point in the ceaseless unconditioned generation and passing away of line.

Ma trix of surds. (66)

Here the escape is seemingly final; not only from the body, but from the mind as well - the final retreat from the Cartesian world. If this retreat is important to *Murphy*, it is also pertinent to the study of madness. Morris Berman's *Reenchantment of the World* and Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation* are odd bed-fellows indeed, and yet both locate a significant change in social consciousness with the writings of Descartes. Descartes is, for them, a metaphor of a change

under which we still toil. For Foucault, Descartes excludes the madman (108) - both as body and as one who thinks - from the terrain of what can be thought. The madman becomes unthinkable and - madness having lost the validity of thought - only good enough to be locked away. Felman summarises the position:

A man can still be mad; but thought cannot. Thought is, by definition, the accomplishment of reason, an exercise of sovereignty of a subject capable of truth. I think, therefore I am not mad; I am not mad, therefore I am. (39)

Implicit in this, is a division that is indicative of the Cartesian thesis, a division that Berman sees as central to thinking since the 17th century. In proposing a body and mind, Descartes holds

the assumption that mind and body, subject and object, were radically disparate entities. Thinking, it would seem, separates me from the world I confront. I perceive my body and its functions, but 'I' am not my body. (21)

Thus for Berman, Descartes' method (together with the work of Bacon and Newton) created a perception of ourselves as divided entities: divided from the world, from others and from ourselves. But as divided subjects we retain the desire to merge with our otherness. Hence Cartesian sanity is, according to Berman, a systematic fragmentation that is finally "nothing more than a collective madness" (124).

Although Berman does not glorify the experience (see Cooper's *Language of Madness* 41-42), madness is conversely a reconstitution of the unified self:

Madness is, in the end, a statement about logical categories, and its reversion to the structure of premodern thought represents a revolt against the

reality principle that it sees as crushing the human spirit. (125)

Phrased by the Cartesian voice, Murphy is, on one hand, a picture of sanity: he is one unable to think madness. He is excluded, by definition, from anything beyond sanity's realm. But on the other hand, Murphy is an example of one on the limits of sanity, where the consequence of being sane begins to breathe the air of madness. And his inability to reconcile the opposites of body and mind, together with his desire to do so, draw him towards madness and make of his sanity a kind of madness. Madness exists in Murphy as an index of his sanity. His scorn of the latter, however, does not guarantee him finding succour in the former. Madness does not accept volunteers. He is finally caught, for all his attempts at immolation of the double headed self, in the frustration of dualism.

Our study of madness has, once more, shifted its ground. From the osmotic flow between madness and sanity that we detected in connection with Nietzsche, we arrive at the supposed heart of sanity (or the impossibility of madness) only to find that we have been followed. The mathematical basis upon which Descartes built his system, and which has become an unquestioned legacy to contemporary thought is, for Foucault, the sign of a withdrawal from madness. For Berman it signifies the presence of madness. The consequence for Murphy at least, is the perpetual confinement in the "matrix of surds": as an irrational number existing within a mathesis that typifies its opposite. He is nothing less than an irrational number on either side of the mirror which divides sanity from insanity. His quest is perfectly reasonable under

these impossible conditions: to reach negation, "a mote in the dark of absolute freedom". The brief reprieve of coitus, being held in the arms of his rocking chair, moments in which he is rendered insensible to the world and finally madness are, for him, tolerable steps towards "Christ's parthian shaft: *It is finished*" (44). As Beckett, with great lyricism, claims in his translation of Chamfort's maxim:

Better on your arse than on your feet,
Flat on your back than either, dead than the lot.
(*Collected Poems* 159)

Like the darkening hues of refutation that make up the spectrum of Murphy's mind, there are degrees of bodily rest; brief reprieves from the exhaustion of movement. We have examined Murphy on his arse, let us now consider him on his back. If the rocking chair grants him a physical exit from the Cartesian paradigm, then equally the park is, for Murphy, an exit from the labours of the city. The park, within the topography of a city that is geared toward a mathesis of productivity, functions as a pocket of worthlessness. It is no coincidence that *Mercier and Camier* and *Watt* begin in a park, not by chance that Murphy proposes to Celia in one and definitely not serendipity that speeds him to Lincoln's Inn Fields with the knowledge that "to sit down was no longer enough, he must insist now on lying down" (48). And this position achieved, like the meditative tramp he is,

he slipped away, from the pensums and prizes, from Celia, chandlers, public highways, etc, from Celia, buses, public gardens, etc, to where there were no pensums and no prizes, but only Murphy himself, improved out of all knowledge. (62)

His slipping away is under the guise of indolence. The

unemployable scandal that was the madman of the Classical period continues to exist in Murphy. In the domestication of madness, in the rationalisation of irrationality, madness remains a pathetic cipher on the periphery (in the city's parks) but nevertheless has not been entirely expunged. Madness exists, barely visible, out of the corner of the social eye. Murphy, perched precariously between sanity and its otherness, retains a freedom of movement (however painful) within the matrix of worth. While he maintains that freedom - which is little more than the freedom to starve - he can carry out his petty blasphemies against the social order. Here too he finds refreshment on his lonely journey, for although there is no possibility of his being "improved out of all knowledge", if he can cheat the waitress out of .83 of a cup of tea (51) or Miss Dew out of threepence (60) he achieves, in reality, a sovereignty over the order that is akin to the light zone of his imagination. To win but a round between those "endowed with the ruthless cunning of the sane" and himself "a seedy solipsist" (50) is victory indeed. A victory, in no other sense, than that of a child pulling faces as the enemy parades its supremacy through the conquered streets. It does however introduce Murphy's trivial attempts to subvert the order of things: it is a refusal, like Beckett's "Le Concentrisme", to belong.

Seedy solipsist or not, there exists a world, social in nature, either to or from which Murphy cannot escape. What of the bevy of lesser characters that commute feverishly around Dublin and between Dublin and London? Their role as lesser entities is a given, for as the narrator tells in one of the

numerous asides, "all the puppets in this book whinge sooner or later, except Murphy, who is not a puppet" (71). What makes them puppets is partly a narrative ploy whereby they assume an almost farcical status at the hands of the puppeteer (author, God). As with much farce, they are motivated by the stringency of love: physical, romantic, ideal. It is over love that Neary - Murphy's prospective mentor - and Murphy part:

'The love that lifts up its eyes,' said Neary, 'being in torment; that craves for the tip of her little finger, dipped in lacquer, to cool its tongue - is foreign to you, Murphy, I take it.'
'Greek,' said Murphy. (7)

They are puppets not because they are unaware of the Cartesian mess, but because they refuse to learn its object lessons - Neary's desire for Miss Dwyer, Miss Counihan and Celia; Wylie's yearning for Miss Counihan and Celia; Miss Counihan's affection for Murphy, Wylie and Neary. And beyond this cacophony of voices loving and loved there is another strident choir involving Neary, Flight Lieutenant Elliman, Miss Farrell, Father Fitt... (7). Beyond that, no doubt, there lies another mathematical constellation of love's hopelessness. However far it extends, at its epicentre is Murphy.

Literally, they are bound to him, for it is Murphy whom they seek: he is the rational answer to their problems, the one who can give credence to their collective waiting, travelling, kissing, double-crossing, pursuing and drinking. He is the logic that, once gained, will organize their lives into syllogistic bliss:

- Murphy loves not Miss Counihan
- Neary/Wylie loves Miss Counihan
 - Miss Counihan loves Neary
 - Miss Counihan loves Wylie.

If Murphy is the *ergo sum* of their immediate existences, he is also Descartes' "evil demon" (100) who instills doubt rather than certainty. This is obvious for one who, in his amorous dealings, is still trapped within the old antitheses: "[t]he part of him he hated craved for Celia, the part that he loved shriveled up at the thought of her" (8). Love for Murphy is yet another version of the same dis-ease. This is most perceptively realised by Celia and, to a lesser extent, by Neary.

Neary for all his need for an object to love grows weary, in the course of the novel, of the game in which he participates. He is like Murphy, but for one major difference: "he seems doomed to hope unending" (113). Thus betrayed by Miss Counihan and Wylie he begins "yearning for Murphy as though he had never yearned for anything or anyone before" (113). "As though": the original premise of the game; the premise that forces continuance. Murphy is no longer a means to an end but an end in himself: the game continues, the sides are changed. This is exactly what Murphy desires to escape, this infernal closed system where causes become effects, means become ends, subjects become objects. As even Wylie has the perspicuity to note:

For every symptom that is eased, another is made worse. The horse leech's daughter is a closed system. The quantum of her wantum cannot vary. (36)

Both David Hesla (*The Shape of Chaos* 43-45) and Hugh Kenner (*Samuel Beckett* 79-115) perceive the immense difficulty of

one embroiled in this rational/irrational universe. So Neary, although contaminated by Murphy, fails to learn Murphy's lesson: if desire is to be found anywhere, it must lie in the desire to make of oneself an end and an end to desire.

The contamination of Neary may be partial, but Murphy's need for the cessation of need entirely rubs off on Celia. When left to her own devices (while Murphy is out searching for unemployment) she assumes his former position in the rocking chair. Moreover, she does not merely content herself with sitting:

She could not sit long in the chair without the impulse stirring, tremulously, as for an exquisite depravity, to be naked and bound... always the moment came when no effort of thought could prevail against the sensation of being imbedded in a jelly of light, or calm the trembling of her body to be made fast. (42)

This sado-masochism within the self has sexual overtones simply because the relief gained is of the same ilk. Celia has found a place where victim and persecutor meet within the oldest of rhythms, or as Yeats would have it, "O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,/ How can you know the dancer from the dance?" ("Among School Children" 130). As a consequence, she also shares with Murphy a growing weariness in the face of "life and death and other tuppenny aches" (*Collected Poems* 157). With the death of the butler, she reaches a realisation not only of the imminence of her death, but the deaths of Murphy and Mr Kelly as well. From this point on she turns "away from so much dark flesh and word to the sky, under which she had nothing to lose" (129). She is on her own way to Murphy's end, she who was Murphy's "last

exile" (131).

Having left his last exile Murphy takes shelter in the house of madness, a house whose metaphor is played out geographically, "on the boundary of two counties" (90). The hints as to the solution offered by madness have come not only by way of his intimate proximity to oddity, but also through the prognostication offered by the dubious shaman Suk (22) and by the narrator: "To those in fear of losing it, reason stuck like a bur. And to those in hope...?" (56). And so Murphy's approach to the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat is somewhat like Zarathustra's, a sense of coming home:

Murphy, whose experience as a physical and rational being obliged him to call sanctuary what the psychiatrists called exile and to think of the patients not as banished from a system of benefits but as escaped from a colossal fiasco. (101)

Those words again: "physical and rational being", madness as escape and the world as "colossal fiasco". For Murphy there is only one solution. The sane world has, at its core, unreasonable assumptions, whereas madness, for all its stink of "peraldehyde and truant sphincters" (96) should have, at its quiet centre, all that Murphy has hitherto been denied: companionship (albeit it of a catatonic variety), a role-model in the hairy guise of Mr Endon (105), a padded cell (103) especially built for Murphy's merger with non-Murphy and the possibility, in the end, of madness itself. That he can 'communicate' with those under his care is extremely alluring:

It meant that they felt in him what they had been and he in them what he would be. It meant that nothing less than a slap-up psychosis could consummate his life's strike. (104)

As the park is to the city, the asylum to the sane world, his chair to the room, Murphy has finally found "the little world" (101) to which he can permanently belong. He has made of the periphery a centre and after only a short residency has the "aspect, even to Ticklepenny's inexperienced eye, of a real alienation" (109).

Thus prepared, he begins his night rounds and enters, in a manner similar to that of St. John of the Cross, the dark night of the soul.² Delivered from the prying eyes of the clinically sane, Murphy is alone in the night with his madmen. The apotheosis comes when Mr Endon, sensing Murphy's eye behind the judas (a sequence ripe for Lacanian analysis: the deception of Murphy's eye by Mr Endon's gaze [see 135]) sets up the chess game - a game of initiation that is typical of all rites of passage. In keeping with the supposedly neat inversion of terms, Mr Endon's chess board bears the same relation to insanity as Murphy's chair bears to sanity. Chess is governed by rigorous rules, implies an outcome and is played upon a surface that is the personification of the matrix in which the self engages the otherness of the world. It is a game that represents - in its very order - logic and rationality: in short, all the limbs of the sane construct.

Within the game of sanity, Murphy is still too good a player. He attempts desperately to engage Mr Endon on one hand, and to emulate Mr Endon's refusal to be engaged on the other. For all his attempts to reach into insanity, he makes the mistake of postulating the old antinomy: Mr Endon refuses to become his other, either as friend or foe. As Bair points

out, Murphy could have achieved a re-cognition of Murphy by Mr Endon in one more move (195) but Murphy retreats before insanity's gaze: "there was nothing but he, the unintelligible gulf and they. That was all, All, ALL" (134). Why is Murphy bound to the "ALL" of sanity (its worthlessness and its plenitude) and why can he not cross over into the "ALL" of madness - its wealth of Nothingness, of Smart's unreality? The answer is obvious.

Murphy is the curator of madmen and, whether he likes it or not, upholds the order he despises. To believe that insanity can be reached merely by inverting the terms is to repeat Neary's mistake. But as we have noted, Murphy is cut off from Neary because of the latter's unending hopefulness. He is also excluded from Mr Endon's vision as absolute negation:

'the last at last seen of him
himself unseen by him
and of himself'

A rest.

'The last Mr Murphy saw of Mr Endon was Mr Murphy unseen by Mr Endon. This was also the last Murphy saw of Murphy.'

A rest.

'The relation between Mr Murphy and Mr Endon could not have been better summed up by the former's sorrow at seeing himself in the latter's immunity from seeing anything but himself.'

A long rest.

'Mr Murphy is a speck in Mr Endon's unseen'. (140)

This convoluted epiphany sees madness as the Otherness which is oblivious of its being other. Murphy cannot cross over into madness, but neither can he retreat to sanity. He has reached a point where he is excluded from both: to use the language of geometry, he becomes a vertex extending out of a

linear plane. And this vertical ascendance or descendance places him in "the unintelligible gulf".

As one unintelligible to himself and to others, as one lost in the gulf where the madness in sanity meets the sanity of madness, Murphy designates the end of one kind of Beckett protagonist (including Belacqua, Celia and Neary) and the birth of a new melodious breed: Watt, Molloy, Malone, Unnamable... Although the potentiality of Murphy has not been exhausted, Murphy is. His laboured walk back to his quarters, his slow shedding of clothes, his blank collapse on his back, the fragmentation of his past in

Scraps of bodies, of landscapes, hands, eyes,
lines, and colours evoking nothing, rose and
climbed out of sight before him (141)

his dim intentions, his final pushing off and his being pushed off into the "superfine chaos" (142): like Christ's weary toil to Golgotha (after his own glimpse of madness in Gethsemene), Murphy must die so that his spirit may rise in Watt. In *Murphy* we have the simultaneous birth and death of madness. We glimpse it in Murphy's game with Mr Endon and watch as it dies away or, more properly, is suffused into the texts that follow. On the level of character, those that follow Murphy bear the stigmata of Murphy's epiphany - damned to suffer, perennially, from Murphy's wounds. Madness is now an unforgettable part of them and an unobtainable dead end. They are cursed to move on, in search of other forms of congress with "the accidentless One-and-Only, conveniently called Nothing" (138). Whereas Beckett will invariably deny it to those who follow, he grants Murphy the great Beckettian

wish and allows him the final reconciliation with the other,
the merger of self quite literally with the world:

By closing time the body, mind and soul of Murphy
were freely distributed over the floor of the
saloon; and before another dayspring greyned the
earth had been swept away with the sand, the beer,
the butts, the glass, the matches, the spits, the
vomit. (154)

Beckett writes Murphy off.

CHAPTER FIVE

Watt: If This Be Reason There's Madness In't

I Fatal Vision (In)sensible

I know a poor man named Murphy, said Mercier, who had the look of you, only less battered of course. But he died ten years ago, in rather mysterious circumstances. They never found the body, can you imagine.

My dream, said Watt. (*Mercier and Camier* 111)

Lest we forget ourselves in Murphy's remains, consider what remains in *Murphy*, what spirit has not been burnt off or distilled out. Beckett may no longer need Murphy's body *in toto* but there are distinguishing marks which remain to be passed on (in his passing on) to his scions. The Cartesian mathesis as played out in Murphy's mind is one. Physical decrepitude and vulgar apparel are others. And finally there is Murphy's birthmark on his buttock.

The motif of the buttocks as the seat of unreason is introduced as early as Neary's first appearance. Neary, banging his head - as *locus* of sense - against the marble buttocks of Cuchulain is rescued by Wylie only because the latter convinces the Civic Guard "as one sane man to another" (28) that Neary is an innocuous lunatic. The preference that madness has for this part of the anatomy is reiterated when Celia (as one who has learnt Murphy's lessons so well) is the only one who can recognise Murphy among the charred remains that constitutes his body, mind and soul. The "birthmark deathmark" (150) on his buttocks, although hidden from those not intimately involved with his quest (note Miss Counihan's

disappointment), is visible to those who have intuited Murphy's vision. The birthmark then, is Murphy's great bequest to those who follow. It is, most obviously, imprinted on Watt's anatomy where it festers - between *Murphy* (1938) and *Watt* (1944) - before finally blooming into the narrative:

he still carried, after five or six years, and though he dressed it in the mirror night and morning, on his right ischium a running sore of traumatic origin. (30)

If it establishes itself as a physical mark on the characters, it also has its impact on the text: a blemish that is registered in the footnotes, the addenda and that finally discolours the text itself.

Similarly, it prevails as a deep seated metaphor that signals the nature and the extent of the transformation that has irrevocably ruptured Murphy's hold not only on life, but on his dealings with sanity. Like the game of chess with Mr Endon, the apocalypse (as completion of one world and as revelation) is registered in trifling terms: nothing *really* happens in the game, the birthmark is not patently obvious, both are beneath the surface. But then as *Murphy* has so effectively evinced, so is madness.

To see the blemish beneath the skin requires a transforming vision, it requires in Blake's terms an ability

To see the World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour... ("Auguries of Innocence"
506)

With one difference: Beckett's vision is decidedly negative, far more inclined to see the world as a grain of sand and infinity and eternity as the unbearable weighing on the need

to end. The merging of Cowper's pessimism with Smart's co-opting vision is complete in Beckett.

Even given the invisible revelation with Mr Endon Murphy has, at best, only a dim and rather romanticised apperception of living on the verge of the blackout. His sanity repeatedly drags him back to "the pensums and prizes, [to] Celia, chandlers, public highways, etc, [to] Celia, buses, public gardens, etc." (62) Exactly how gradual this movement is - from the petty fugues of living as drunk to living dementia - is indicated by Arsene in his encapsulation of the *change*:

There I was, warm and bright, smoking my tobacco-pipe, watching the warm bright wall, when suddenly somewhere some little thing slipped, some little tiny thing. Gliss-iss-iss-STOP! I trust I make myself clear.... It was a slip like that I felt, that Tuesday afternoon, millions of little things moving all together out of their old place, into a new one near by, and furtively, as though it were forbidden. (41)

Arsene's revelation is noteworthy because it repeats the trivial dimensions of which Beckettian revelation is composed. It is not so much that nothing happens ('twice') but that comprehension flounders before the vision's inconsequence: "Gliss-iss-iss-STOP! I trust I make myself clear."

Consider the wealth of material Arsene gives in order to place his change: it occurs on a Tuesday afternoon, he is watching (and note the assuring repetition) the warm, bright wall and smoking his pipe. Time, place, occupation - the three all powerful locating devices on which we unceasingly fall back in order to assure ourselves that we are awake, sober and sane. Pitched against this is the vision

articulated according to the suspicious rhetoric of metaphor and one which is riddled with qualifiers that reiterate both its inconsequential status and the impossibility of precise description - "somewhere some little thing slipped, some little tiny thing."¹ Like the birthmark it is both there and not there, visible while being hidden beneath the surface. The slip places Arsene beyond the pale of the given. He has been initiated into a world irrevocably altered and has returned, a portly shaman, to convey his experience to Watt. But in the crossing over, the materiality of the old world (if it is at all possible to speak of old and new when the two have existed contemporaneously) does not neatly, or necessarily, translate into the terms of the new. The sun on the wall has become

so changed that I felt I had been transported, without my having remarked it, to some quite different yard, and to some quite different season, in an unfamiliar country. At the same time my tobacco-pipe [became so alien] that I took it out of my mouth to make sure it was not a thermometer, or an epileptic's dental wedge. (42)

A different yard, a different season, an unfamiliar country and smoking a thermometer: thus is the slip registered.

Because the change is furtive, "as though it were forbidden" and because the vocabulary differs depending on which side of the fence one resides, clarity cannot be achieved according to the prevalent gospel of making sense. Arsene is thrown back to a pre-Aristotelean era, to a moment when there is only experience without the ability to arrange. He cannot begin his tale without feeling the need to begin at a position prior to the beginning (see Edward Said's comments

on this difficulty in *Beginnings*, especially "A Meditation on Beginnings" 27-78). He cannot pursue even a linear organisation of experience towards an end because nothing is connected either by time or space. Neither can he pursue a thread in his argument because that is all he possesses: threads without recourse to pattern. If the point is ever to be made it is, as always, only thanks to exhaustion. What Nietzsche has to say of philosophy is equally true of any attempt to make sense:

Every philosophy is a foreground philosophy - that is the hermit's judgment: 'there is something arbitrary in the fact that *he* stopped, looked back, looked around here, that he stopped digging and laid his spade aside *here* - there is also something suspicious about it'. (*Beyond Good and Evil* 289)

Arsene, and for that matter the main characters in *Watt* and *The Trilogy*, desire nothing more than to lay the spade down, to exhaust for the last time the business of being.

Exhaustion however, is one of those curious words that designates the end of a tether and the hopeless distance from the end. Exhaustion: the waste product of the machine that enables the mechanism, in the most considerate way, to continue and thereby refuses it the opportunity to finish. So Lucky ends his speech on "unfinished" (*Waiting for Godot* 45), the Unnamable with the infamous "I can't go on, I'll go on" (*The Trilogy* 382). And as with all Beckett texts after *Murphy* exhaustion - as completion - is imposed by the narrating figure but always with the awareness that this is but a pause, the story is not over. This 'waste product' literature rests briefly and then begins again to breathe, out: to

exhale, to exhaust.

Arsene's is not alone in his vision. It has been painfully contracted from Murphy who has in turn been infected by the squirming lobster that bothered Belacqua so in *More Pricks Than Kicks* (19). And now it is Arsene's duty to pass on the disease.

Either as conversion to a new vision of things or as infection, Beckett's earlier works are concerned with conveying this change from a prior state to that under which his later creatures suffer. For Belacqua, Murphy, Arsene and Watt a moment occurs when everything comes under review. As Arsene has shown this is an epiphany of uncertain dimensions and not only because it refuses to be ordered. Take Watt's for example:

The piano is doomed, in my opinion, said the younger [Gall].
The piano-tuner also, said the elder.
The pianist also, said the younger.
This was perhaps the principal incident of Watt's early days in Mr. Knott's house. (69)

This summation is not entirely facetious and neither can its impact be attributed solely to the admittedly pessimistic purport of the dialogue between father and son. What Watt registers is a similarity between his genealogy (his diseased ancestors) and the spread of decay that begins, innocently, with the piano and goes on to contaminate all connected with it. Once the 'machine' (that which allows the free flow between things and creates, in the process, the familiar) fails, all else follows: Belacqua's lobster, Celia's butler, Murphy's game of chess, and for Arsene and Watt, Mr Knott's house. The object that acts as the catalyst is insignificant

in terms of the consequence; the world, it seems, is full of ornaments that can become furniture for the insane.

The object of transference (in a non-Freudian sense) is simply that 'thing' which allows or forces one to move through onto the other side - it is the hole in the fence through which Sam passes on his way to Watt (159). Rather, it is the *moment* of transference that is remarkable. The incident with the Galls, for example

was not ended, when it was past, but continued to unfold, in Watt's head, from beginning to end, over and over again, the complex connexions of its lights and shadows, the passing from silence to sound and from sound to silence, the stillness before the movement and the stillness after.... it developed a purely plastic content, and gradually lost, in the nice processes of its light, its sound, its impacts and its rhythm, all meaning, even the most literal. (69)

For Watt transference works by the incident's refusal to be transferred. As an incident of little import it refuses to take its place in the archives of memory but insists, like a stuck record, to play itself again and again and with a blithe disregard for the chronology of the event. Moving from profundity to silliness in the same breath, breaking up and rearranging the sound and the silence, the before and after, the event is fractured into disjointed fragments. Like Humpty Dumpty fallen the vision refuses to be put together again. Or to put it more 'exactly', the incident appears to Watt as something akin to a Cubist hallucination - the clues that should create order and perspective are exactly those which are distorted. However the vision is described, and eventually it remains hermetically sealed against

description, its effect is such that it decimates everything that surrounds the event: a deconstruction that ripples its way through the body and the mind of characters and text alike.

For Watt this collapse soon spreads to all attempts to signify and he finds himself trying uselessly to connect potness with the word 'pot'. His revelation has disentangled signifier from signified, has destroyed the faith that keeps language on its feet and so Watt in a last attempt to restore things hopes that perhaps this is nothing more than a (transitory) *illness*:

he was in poor health, owing to the efforts of his body to adjust itself to an unfamiliar milieu, and that these would be successful, in the end, and his health restored, and things appear, and himself appear, in their ancient guise, and consent to be named, with the time-honoured names, and forgotten.
(81)

The body is at fault and once it has adjusted to the demands of its new surroundings everything will return to normal. But the body, like its partner the mind, refuses to find its health, refuses to become adjusted.

II The Cartesian Corpse

There has always been a connection between the vision and the body that suffers the vision: it pours into the body making it different, transforming it. This is as true for the madman whose body becomes glass as it is for St. Theresa with her body pierced or for the stigmata that St. Francis receives as the apotheosis of his faith: the range of

response is as diverse as the manifestations of madness. However, whereas religion tolerates and venerates the physicality of transformation in its saints the same respect, is not reserved for the madman. For Arsene the alteration of the body does not indicate a 'perfection' (assuming the perfection of Christ's tortured body) of the human form, but rather like the analogy of insanity as mental illness it indicates a different kind of being. Like Smart, Arsene is not translated into the animal but into the realm of the curiosity, into another body, into a mouth so different that it no longer recognises the stem of a pipe between its lips.

The vision devastates the previous world, it makes final and irrevocable the step Murphy could not take in his life even if he took it with his life. But what has this to do with the body? Arsene's vision is not simply a cognitive event but is a mentally and physically transforming experience. The body also sees itself as if for the first time.

Beckett's body is engrossed with Cowper's body as something "buried above ground" and drawn more to the iconography of Zarathustra's dwarf. The vision of collapse is rendered in physical terms - the body recognises in the vision a correspondence for the vision is also a locus for decomposition; a Humpty Dumpty about to hit the ground but calling it 'growing up, growing old'. From this point on Beckett's body is always held in the palm of disorder, caught permanently in the flight from the realisation of the vision and the subsequent realisation that any flight will be

accompanied by the decaying body (and mind) it seeks to escape. It is in these terms that madness affects Beckett's bodies and makes them kin with Descartes' madmen:

how could I deny that these hands and this body belong to me, unless perhaps I were to assimilate myself to those insane persons whose minds are so troubled... they constantly assert that they are kings when they are very poor; that they are wearing gold and purple when they are quite naked... (96)

The body is moved into a realm of otherness that exists at a position diametrically opposed to the sane, healthy person. As is so often the case with those who would speak of madness, the difference is phrased in absolute and dualistic terms: kings or paupers, regally dressed or naked. But what is most surprising about this extract is the central position it occupies in his *Meditations* - it constitutes the first major objection to the common sense perception of existence and occurs immediately after he opens himself to doubt. Madness features at the inception of his tract on sanity - sanity, as that based on reason, founded on common-sense and supported by the twin pillars of the body and the mind. Thus, at this early stage, it is highly suspicious that he uses a non-argument to dismiss that doubt: he is sane because his hands and his body belong to himself. The fact that the body is possessed by the doubter apparently exonerates the doubter from doubt. The Cartesian body can only be examined in the surgery of the verifiable and under an extremely rational scalpel. It is considered

as having a face, hands, arms and the whole machine made up of flesh and bones, as it appears in a corpse by body, I understand all that can be

terminated by some figure; that can be contained in some place and fill a space in such a way that any other body is excluded from it. (104)

Descartes' body is the corpse that thinks, is the machine confined to the space where it is and defined by the impossibility of it being elsewhere. The body is the object supreme, an object only to be owned and operated on by the thinking subject. Although Descartes goes on to doubt the existence of the body (105), once the *cogito* is acknowledged as the *primum mobile* the body re-surfaces unscathed. In the same way that doubt passes over insanity, it passes over the body. The body is a machine, is a functional entity fixed securely in time and space. There is no space in the world of *Meditations* for either Arsene's vision or its effect on the body.

Beckett's bodies recall Descartes' and interrogate their utilitarianism; they seek to open up the machine to the doubt that Descartes could not muster. In the "Sixth Meditation" Descartes (innocently) considers the divisibility of the body in contrast to the indivisibility of the mind by arguing that

if a foot, or an arm, or any other part, is separated from my body, it is certain that, on that account, nothing has been taken away from my mind (164).

It remains for Beckett to take this divisible body to its logical extreme, to the weeping trunk in *The Unnamable*. Within this investigation the body does not come away unscathed. Descartes' body is healthy, working, as his favorite metaphor has it, like a machine. Not only does it designate a terminal point in space but is also the apogee (in a pre-Darwinian sense) of the various forms of life. In

this way it is the Renaissance body, a body defined by
Mikhail Bakhtin as

a strictly completed, finished product.... All signs of its unfinished character, of its growth and proliferation were eliminated; its protruberances and offshoots were removed, its convexities (signs of new sprouts and buds) smoothed out, its apertures closed. (29)

It is, in short, a body without doubt. In contrast, Beckett's bodies are in a state of disrepair and decline. The assortment of decrepitude that ranged through *Murphy* continues in *Watt* not only because it indicates an environment beyond the pale but because Beckett is obsessed with the ideal of the enclosed body and his protagonists' distance from that body. Both mind and body can succumb to madness.

When Foucault speaks of the madman who rises from the ashes of the leper, he is touching on an essential point about the connectedness of disease with madness. Although the perception of madness as disease was popularised in Pinel's re-evaluation of the lunatic, it is a metaphor that continues to exist and inform our present conception of insanity. As Jennifer Radden points out:

The plausibility of this [disease] model relies on the central analogy underlying it: that between the psychological states and behaviour comprising what can be observed of madness... and the symptoms of a physical ailment. (15)

In order to understand madness one resorts to an analogy outside of itself and in so doing creates, unwittingly, an orbit that extends from the healthy figure to the psychotic wretch. The ill body gravitates towards the latter pole and

because of the mystery that still disciplines the subject of madness, the seriously diseased, deformed and dying are moved to hospices in the same suburbs as the asylum. The sick body like the 'sick' mind still stinks of the extrinsic.

In essence perhaps, but not in morphology, Beckett's body is Deleuze and Guattari's "body without organs" (9). In *Watt* the body has most, if not all, its organs but with the stipulation that these organs are never closed, are always dripping with the fluid of "traumatic origin".

Follow first a simple line of bodily connections: Murphy touches on *Watt* by benefit of a birthmark, *Watt* reminds Goff of Hackett, Hackett recalls Murphy in their fascination with twilight and with the rocking motion (in the former's case because of a need to scratch his hump [22]) that both indulge in before the darkness overcomes them. Hackett is bound to the same sick family and exists both as another eddy rippling out from the centre of Beckettian ailment and as a point of origin for the bodies that swarm through *Watt*. His hunch is a direct result of his falling off the ladder - the same ladder that features in the futile pilgrimages undertaken by those in *The Lost Ones*, the same ladder of which Arsene speaks when he narrates the impact of his vision: "What was changed was existence off the ladder. Do not come down the ladder, I for, I haf taken it away" (42). If this is the ladder that Beckett's heroes climb and fall off it is the same object as that over which Descartes climbs to certainty; but whereas Descartes may fumble, Beckett's characters have long since fallen.

For Hackett the transformation was played out in a

physical locale and is essentially a matter of stature, the hunch giving him a decidedly different slant on that which is properly called life. From his purview and confronted by the sight of Watt, Hackett 'did not know when he had been so intrigued" (15). He recognises, in the fading light, one of his fallen brothers. Watt identifies himself as such by visual utterance:

Mr Hackett was not sure that it was not a parcel, a carpet for example, or a roll of tarpaulin, wrapped in a dark paper and tied about the middle with a cord. (14)

This indistinct perception of Watt is due, in part, to the fast fading light when he together with "the flowers will be engulfed" (20). But if this were entirely so then surely Hackett's interest would fade in proportion with the diminishing light. Twilight encourages one to see uniformity as the night sets about the gradual obliteration of difference. Even the hunchback Hackett when in the dark is no longer identifiable as a hunchback, or as Hackett. Watt is discernible because he is in his natural element (where both body and mind are most at 'home') and because he continues to be visible beyond the point where he should cease to be visible, he remains tangible "from the waist up faintly outlined against the last wisps of day" (16). Like the smile of the Cheshire cat Watt exists as a residue even after his departure (which is never mentioned), remains hanging in the air long after his body has left for other pastures. In his wake he leaves Goff, Tetty and Hackett in an aporia of unprovable reasons for his behaviour. As this attempt to rationalise Watt's getting off the bus continues the three

parties grow increasingly irritated by the incident's resilience against plausible ("perhaps he is off his head" [17]) interpretation. Nothing about his action, his history - of which Goff knows nothing - or his appearance allows him to be fixed or dismissed in the order of things. Neither can he be contained by words; indeed his demeanor "does not invite mention" (16) as Goff puts it. Nor can he be contained by his body. In the same way as Hackett's hunch depicts a body crippled by the flesh's need to escape the confines of the body, Watt's body loses its distinctive outline and in becoming like a roll of tarpaulin parodies the body which should give him shape. For both of them the body refuses to fit into the one that Descartes assumes is given. The Beckettian body is extended and distended into another territory and yet within its discomfort it acknowledges the obligation that has been placed on its shoulders (perhaps the reason for the incredible decrepitude of Beckett's characters) by Descartes' metaphor: to act as if it were a machine. As Kenner notes:

The body, if we consider it without prejudice in the light of the seventeenth-century connoisseurship of the simple machines, is distinguished from any machine, however complex, by being clumsy, sloppy, and unintelligible... (121)

Although Kenner goes on to say that "Cartesian man deprived of his bicycle is a mere intelligence fastened to a dying animal" (124) he is more concerned with the bicycle, as a Beckettian image, than with the "dying animal". But the bicycle only gives the illusion of a functioning Cartesian entity, an illusion that is routed even before Mercier and

Camier reach the plundered machine. Descartes is undone in the pseudo-mechanism of the Beckettian figure.

From the beginning of Beckett's work the collapse of the body was a prevalent concern. "Whoroscope" concentrates on Descartes' contrary eating habits where ingestion has a perversely stringent order (according to Beckett's notes he "liked his omelette made of eggs hatched from eight to ten days; shorter or longer under the hen and the result, he says, is disgusting" [5]) and a system of eating far from delectable:

Are you ripe at last,
my slim pale double-breasted turd?
How rich she smells,
this abortion of a fledgling!
I will eat it with a fish fork.
White and yolk and feathers. (4)

This gives rise to the two nearly distinct forms that are reproduced in the personages in *Watt*. The first is the decaying body that accepts its *sine qua non* and sets about trying its utmost to finish, to escape by perseverance. Thus, we have the presence of Mary whose appetite extends over four pages of nauseating iteration and where intake - eating as drawn out suicide - has consequences that are manifested, like Hackett's hump, on the exterior:

her long grey greasy hair framing in its cowl of scrofulous mats a face where pallor, langour, hunger, acne, recent dirt, immemorial chagrin and surplus hair seemed to dispute the mastery. (53)

The face, like the rest of her body, is in disarray. Not only is it falling to pieces but it is oozing all the while.

The second point is the way in which this self-abuse is ordered, the way in which it retains a pristine logic in

terms of its gluttony. An onion is followed only by a peppermint and it, in turn, by another onion (49-50). And as for her hands Arsene does not "hesitate to compare [them] with that of piston-rods" which, in a wonderful parody of scientific discourse, meet "at a point equidistant from their points of departure or arrival" (54).

Not far from this is Watt walking. Again it is as if the legs are desperately involved in a flight not from something behind Watt (note his indifference to Lady McCann's stone [30]) but from Watt himself, from the tarpaulin trunk. To give his legs their due, they embark upon their journey adhering to all the niceties of Euclidian geometry: east is a direction that results from the negation of the northern bust and the southern foot (28). Such, no doubt, is the paradox whereby deformity finds a certain grace by operating in compliance with strict criteria. Descartes' body is opened up to doubt and upon this investigation, collapses; but this collapse is played out according to rules that provide a burlesque version of Descartes' machine: arms as pistons, legs as levers for the bulk above them. If in *Murphy* we discerned the crippling of the Cartesian mathesis, then here we discover the mathesis of the Cartesian cripple.

Criticism is not merely an instrument of blame that takes its revenge against other times, other people. Descartes is not a tyrant who stands over history wielding his sceptre of thought. He exists both as a metaphor who appears as an independent voice and as a vocalisation of Renaissance thought. Like El Greco painting himself

unobtrusively into his work, Descartes emerges quietly (musing in his study) in the Renaissance canvas. Thus Beckett's work is not to be seen as a conscious indictment of Cartesian order but as a literature that naturally rubs itself up against the past corpses of thought and against Descartes, a ghost who unquestionably haunts the present.

This caveat is necessary because in closely following Beckett's parody of Descartes' bodies it is easy to overlook the end product: a deteriorating machine weakly asserting to the *deus ex machina* that it still works even though it has lost its legs. This terminally ill organism that mimes a healthy prototype is the result of Beckettian physiognomy.

What Descartes implicitly (and Bakhtin explicitly) portrays is a body obsessed, like the mind, with sanity. Part of this concern can be attributed, as Foucault argues, to a desire to clean up the public travesty of madness, to get it off the streets. "The great confinement" was not restricted to madmen being placed in asylums but extended to other members of the community of the peripheral. On the 'objectified' body a growth had appeared and had to be lanced: the madman, the physically deformed and, of course, the fool. With classicalism the fool (who has much in common with the madman) loses his former status and recedes from the public eye. Even the court jester is appropriated into an order that nullifies the fool's ability to challenge. Anton Zijderveld notes that by the 18th century "the bourgeoisification of the fool" (126) was complete, the fool is made redundant by a growing bureaucracy.

Beckett, however, resuscitates the fool from decline, he reconstitutes the reified visages of the fool from the circus, from vaudeville and from the tramps in the city parks in order to arrive at the caricature of the Cartesian machine - Frankenstein's monster in a top-hat attempting to master the chaos of an uncoordinated anatomy.

In *Watt* it is not that the clothes and boots no longer fit (this is reserved for the antics of *Waiting for Godot*) but that like Frankenstein the body can no longer be accommodated by its outline. The attempts on the part of the Lynch family to reach 1000 years is not a request for a temporal identity as much as it signifies a need to come together in one body, as if all the variegated illnesses that perplex the Lynch individuals can be annulled in the creation of one, albeit impossible, healthy personage. Out of a century of breath, the family argues, surely we can collate a sound pair of lungs, connected to a functional torso, connected to... Of course not says Beckett.

The Lynch family, then, is the metaphor of the physical Beckettian being and is reflected on a smaller scale by the abortive coupling between Sam and Watt in the latter's attempt to tell his story. While unity is allowed under the guise of the family name it is denied by the inability of the family to partake of the communion of one body (here those searching for Christian symbols should begin their investigation). And yet they gain a certain charm simply because they cannot achieve their unifying century. Like the fool's stumble and eventual fall (as Milton implies) there is

a certain grace. The death of Joe, Bill and Jim has its (tediously enumerated) consequences for the rest of the extended family even down to "Rose and Cerise and Pat and Larry [who are left] great-grandfatherless" (107). Although they will never reach the golden age they achieve a unity of sorts merely because of the fervour of their need to do so. The impact of death on the entire family - not merely a thing of remorse but of mathematics - generates an interconnectedness not unlike that of the sympathetic functioning of the nerves, muscles and organs of the body. In this sense, its bodiness is its decrepitude. For the Lynch family the body refuses to coalesce: it avoids formulating itself into one organism, and yet, in spite of itself, is an organism because it is connected by deformity and a singularity of desire. Thus the Lynch family is an arena where the body suffers a breakdown and yet pathetically fulfils the Cartesian machine.

For Mr Knott the one, singular form is achieved but it too has its problems - it has lost, according to Watt, its singularity. Rather than the machine refusing to work, it can no longer "fill a space in such a way that any other body is excluded from it". Mr Knott lies at the unstable centre of the constellation of earthly bodies and like God, of whom he is reminiscent, he cannot be located as a tempo-spatial entity. With the passing of each day "the figure, stature, skin and hair" (211) change and although the permutations follow the rules of combinatorics they entirely disrupt the notion of the body as fixed. Accepting that Sam was correct

and that "Watt had no hand in these transformations" (211) we are left with a morphology little different from the Lynch consortium. While the Lynch family were sifting through the debris of disease in order to resuscitate an enduring body, Mr Knott is one body constantly changing the terms that constitute it. The former try to create a self from the diversity of others; the latter is, as Rimbaud has it, a self that is always other. At any one point in time and space both are there and not there. For the Lynch family, death defines the living body, and for Mr Knott time kills the body that was present a moment ago:

For daily changed, as well as these, in carriage, expression, shape and size, the feet, the legs, the hands, the arms, the mouth, the nose, the eyes, the ears... (211)

Such is the fate of the body in *Watt*: in a state of turmoil and hence struggling to find a repose outside of the parameters of the body. Murphy's need to emulate more and more perfectly the oblivious joys of the horizontal is concretised by those characters in *Watt* who yearn to escape the plane of their physical being.

Because the body not only collapses in an anatomical sense (bound, always, for Chamfort's "better dead than the lot") it is restless within the bounds of its form. It overflows itself, spreading beyond these dimensions. It is a body driven mad by the palpable evidence of unceasing decay and unceasing sameness within decay. As such it is always driven by the need to find an area into which it can escape. This area into which the body desires to escape is not

specified, it is not Rousseau's noble savagery - for Beckett it is the fact of birth that places humanity everywhere in chains - nor Schopenhauer's asceticism. Aware of decay not as an abstract construct but as an omnipresent condition gnawing away from the inside and the outside, the body cannot hope for migration to greener pastures but only for completion, for cessation. This is a philosophical decision realised at a physiological level. Conceived in Cartesian terms we have a machine that is not so much running as running down. And in its running, its bleeding, its deformity, its gradual and expeditious decay it indefatigably remains as the lunatic body: like the vision, refusing to pass into the past, like the vision, continually fragmenting. In space and in time.

Thus Arsene not only leaves the space of Mr Knott's house but, upon his departure, leaves a residue image of his body: "the man standing sideways in the kitchen doorway looking at him became two men standing sideways in two kitchen doorways looking at him" (62). Either Arsene's vision or Arsene as vision remains and prepares Watt for his encounter with the Galls. This momentary doubling up of the material world is caused by a blurring of focus but in Watt's case it is an initiation carried out intuitively by one entering the out-of-focus world of Mr Knott's residence. The destabilising of the original and singular world is created by this repetition, a repetition that makes it impossible to distinguish between the real and the copy. Nothing from here on can be verified and this is possibly more disconcerting to the reader than to Watt for his sight is focused beyond this

apparition of duality towards the slow breaking of the new day. His vigilance is directed towards time and its passing.

As Arsene doubles in space Watt doubles in time. Upon leaving Mr Knott's residence and upon reaching the train that will take him to the farther (for the body doomed to continue there is no fartherest) end of line, he sees a human figure dressed in

the uninterrupted surfaces of a single garment, while on his head there sat, asexual, the likeness of a depressed inverted chamber-pot, yellow with age, to put it politely. (225)

Hackett's tarpaulin becomes the "single garment", Watt's mustard-pepper block hat (217) becomes an "inverted chamber-pot, yellow with age"; even the walk, although differing in inclination, is as useful in praxis. Watt having left Mr Knott's employ is followed in time by another Watt trying to reach the decaying body of the first.

The Beckettian body is complete. It stands, with some difficulty, as the mirror image of Descartes' physique. On the surface of the mirror there is an agreement of forms: both are machines, both are terminated in a specific space and time and both are possessed by the consciousness that inhabits the body. At least that is how it appears on the surface. But beneath the skin is the vision of the birthmark and once it is foregrounded it sets about the dismantling of the Cartesian machine, it destroys the presumption of tempero-spatial continuity, it vanquishes the mind of the 'owner'. And it struggles, despite the impediments of breath and motion, to achieve that which Descartes innocently assumed as given - to be "made up of flesh and bones as it

appears in a corpse".

The physical body - one of the two great pillars of dualism - is eaten away from within and although it continues to stand becomes an empty support, pure and white and meaningless. Precisely like the vision, which is its cause, nothing and everything changes. The mad, distended body mimics the sane, enclosed one which such tenacity and such a desire for verisimilitude that we can only applaud the effort. But the consequence of this applause is dire.

III The Mad (?) Mathematician

Irrespective of the support this reading finds in Beckett's work it is somewhat unfair, if not to the letter then to the spirit of Descartes' work. The body escapes doubt because it exists under the sovereignty of the mind. Even when in a letter to Hyperaspistes he speaks of "the prison of the body" (*Philosophical Letters* 111) it is with the awareness that the body is subservient to the control of the mind. The mind is that which orders, which posits distinctions (including that between itself and the body) and that which doubts and discovers certainty therein. Because the mind doubts it proves the certainty of its existence. Certainty is reached because the mind cannot doubt that it doubts (54). This rephrasing is necessary to point out the tautological beauty and ab-surdity of the reasoning. In the same way that Beckett's body is born out of Descartes'

healthy being, Beckett begins at the point where Descartes reaches his end. Augustine has prepared the way, when after floundering through the unfathomable depths of creation he wearily exclaims: "I do not know even what I do not know" (*Confessions* 273). What is possibly the only example of humour in Augustine's *oeuvre* gives philosophic precedent to Beckett's gloss of Descartes. 'If I cannot doubt that I doubt' becomes, in the looking glass where earlier we caught sight of the disfigured body, 'I cannot be certain that I am certain'.

The growth that appeared on the classical body has its mental continuation in doubt. Doubt is mental retardation that sets the mind back and impedes its progress towards divine perfection. If Descartes utters its name, he does so in order to dismiss it, to banish it from the realm of the thinkable. Certainty and doubt are mutually exclusive but co-extensive. To understand fully the beauty of this logical conundrum consider the notorious example of *Die Fliegenden Blätter* (the diagram that appears as a rabbit or a duck). Likewise, to use an image closer to our concern, it is possible to see the skin - burning with its third degree interrogation - or the birthmark under the surface. And to see one excludes, if only for a moment, the other. There is little difference between Descartes' seeing certainty and Beckett seeing doubt. The structure that demarcates the reasoned and the reasonable is repeated. It is traced, so to speak, both backwards and forwards in an audacious attempt to emulate the existing schemata.

This urge to re-iterate (in a novel that is a perpetual venture at iteration) finds a striking resonance in Steven Connor's *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, theory and text*. Making extensive and provocative use of Derrida and Deleuze his focus is linguistic rather than philosophic but with the same result. For both Derrida and Deleuze repetition fails in its attempt to re-affirm the primacy of the original, be it word or concept. Failure is implied in repetition's very ability to achieve its aim:

Repetition aspires to the condition of an invisible membrane that encloses its original, without impeding access to it in any way, or interfering with its nature. But even this close self-effacing servitude displaces the authority of the original.
(4)

Even if, as Deleuze argues, this difference "is invisible except in the fact of its pure differentiability" (7) the consequence of this is absolute.

Beckett has traced Descartes' theorising with all the love and dedication of Akaky Akakievich, the logophile in Gogol's "The Overcoat" (74-5)². For Akaky the result of his labour is a movement out of the troublesome plane of understanding and meaning and into a surface occupied by the pure cavorting of signifiers. For Beckett the same end attracts him: "more and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it" (*Disjecta* 171). But for Beckett this can only be reached through repetition - both as that which creates "differentiability" and, as in his treatment of Descartes, achieves inversion - and constant negation. Negation is, as Connor asserts, a version of

repetition in so far as it also "runs together effacement and proliferation" (35). Thus like the Beckettian body, the mind is a mirror image of Descartes'. It reflects the common sense orderings of the latter's ruminations, it adheres to the same logical process by which he arrives at certainty, the same mathematical character which he incorporated into his reasoning but, and this is essential, the former is unable to translate itself back into the original. The Beckettian mind finds itself a prisoner both of the body and of the mirror - reflecting, across an intraversable space a rational being while being trapped in the plane of the irrational. This is the final culmination of Foucault's logic in madness for this apparition is indeed founded on "irrefutable logic, perfectly organized discourse, faultless connection in the transparency of a virtual language" (97). Madness is achieved and sustained by the fervour of the desire to emulate sanity.

So Watt, the unknowing victim and unwitting desecrator, attempts in his small way to fulfill the rules of sanity and being "a university man" (21) tries to do so according to the extant methodology of making sense. On Watt's peregrination through the world he is accompanied by a host of useful syllogisms and minor sciences. Thus we find him surprised, on reaching Mr Knott's house "that his science of the locked door, so seldom at fault, had been so on this occasion" (35). The science of the locked door has, if Watt would only remember, been annulled earlier. When Mr Endon escapes his cell, leaving the sane Murphy inside, he enacts a sub-textual release of madness into the clinical exactitude of the world

and this contaminates not only the asylum but the grounds (where Sam and Watt walk and talk), Mr Knott's house and the very air that the subsequent creatures are forced to breathe. Like that smell of "peraldehyde and truant sphincters" (*Murphy* 96) in the MMM, the smell of madness is concentrated around these institutions. Watt's trouble with the Galls is nothing more than a symptom of an earlier conundrum at the entrance of Mr Knott's house. In the same way as the altering vision spreads from its nebulous epicentre backwards (into *Murphy*) and forwards (into *The Trilogy* and beyond) the faltering of the mind - in its attempt to fulfill the dream of a logical universe - is present from the outset. Once madness has begun its debilitating contamination, nothing and no-one escapes from breathing its air. For Watt the meeting with the Galls is only the most concrete statement of a science irrevocably flawed. The clues have been there all along: in Arsene's aside, at the entrance of Mr Knott's house, in the voices that babble/Babel in his ear, all the way back to his first appearance and its effect on those he leaves in the wake of his walk. This is due in part (as I have argued) to his indistinct morphology and partly because his presence does not *add up to anything* in the minds of Goff, Tetty and Mr Hackett. They flounder because their collective reasoning cannot accommodate Watt into the dialectic of 'Either... or'; he refuses to be analysed into sides. To this extent, at least, the formulation of the madman in *Anti-Oedipus* is apt:

Whereas the 'either/or' claims to mark decisive

choices between immutable terms (the alternative: either this or that), the schizophrenic 'either... or... or' refers to a system of possible permutations between differences that always amount to the same as they shift and slide about. (12)

Their attempt to postulate a specific place - bench, *park*, football field - within a specific time, in short to stipulate a route for Watt, falters with each 'or' (18, 22). What is left in this plotting of Watt is the refrain of "or" that begins each sentence and draws phonetic and semantic emphasis to the hollowness of these assignations with exactitude.

Or to consider another example. Mr Hackett reverts to simple arithmetic in an effort to balance the equation between the mind and the living that assails it:

all that you can tell me is that he has a huge big red nose and no fixed address. He paused. He added, And that he is an experienced traveller. He paused. He added, And that he is considerably younger than you, a common condition I must say. He paused. He added, And that he is truthful, gentle and sometimes a little strange. (20)

As Gestalt theory knows, nothing (or only nothing) adds up, and each repetition, each attempt to complete the circle, to add up the parts, fails. Knowledge is not bound for certainty but for something that we call certainty - a point when Nietzsche's spade is finally laid aside. Each repetition covers the same (never exactly the same) ground and if some kind of coherence is ever achieved it is by emphasising the 'And's and 'Or's calling out into exhaustion (and perhaps the capital letter is the most we are finally able to do with a Reality that forbids to be named). Neither is Sam above addition and repetition in the face of Watt's encounter with

the Galls (72). But whereas Mr Hackett used arithmetic (admittedly with little success) to clear up Watt's appearance, Sam uses it to subtract clarity from Watt's narrative. Each "add" moves away from sense, moves into a realm where the encounter is frayed and buckled into a disjunctive synthesis held together by the inexplicable fact of it having happened. In a sublime Cartesian joke the end point, the mathematical conclusion, is doubtful but rigorously so:

And some idea will perhaps be obtained of the difficulties experienced in formulating, not only such matters as those here in question, but the entire body of Watt's experience, from the moment of his entering Mr Knott's establishment to the moment of his leaving it. (72)

However, this rigour is itself made arbitrary by the scope of its enquiry. Watt's problems with the outside and inside world are not only confined to his stay in Mr Knott's house. The imposing of a time span is an inappropriate quantification that sets about undermining the veracity of this humble conclusion. The conclusion, tentative as it is ("some idea will perhaps be obtained"), is negated by the difficulty of formulation in the world *outside* Mr Knott's house. Logic and mathematics no longer provide points of arrival but of departure. Partly because of the nature of repetition and partly because of the dim desperation in Watt's application of the mechanisms of logic, Watt becomes "like that mad (?) mathematician who used a different principle of measurement at each step of his calculation" (*Disjecta* 173). Neither the principle of measurement nor the calculation is incorrect; they simply do not meet within the

same plane and this refusal to have intercourse inserts a doubt that separates procedure from solution.

There is a rancid spreading of uncertainty that eclipses Watt's world with the same alacrity that enabled Descartes to recreate his world once his *cogito* was found amidst the potential chaos of a world open to scepticism. Beckett's repetition of Descartes generates an unexpurgated version of *Meditations* and one that in its search for an end to doubt cannot finish until all permutations, whether reasonable or implausible, have been explored. Again here is the presence of exhaustion together with the repudiation of the spade laid down, once and for all. But (that favourite Beckettian word) apart from Murphy who was dismissed by his creator and managed to reach the once and for all, the end cannot be reached.

Irreverence and the defiance it heralds do not appear as morbid deities for nihilists but grow out of a last ditch attempt to discover a mental foundation that cannot be eroded away by doubt. The Cartesian meditation is played out once more but in this repetition, a state of non-scepticism is phrased in a minor and barely audible key. At the heart of doubt lies a doubting of doubt that will never equal Cartesian certainty but that, as Blanchot points out, makes it impossible to pursue doubt into itself (how different would be the history of thought if Descartes had realised that one can never be certain of certainty). It is the impossibility of reaching this inner temple and taking up residence within its secrets that turns Beckett's creatures

away from completion, with face averted. Irreverence and exhaustion are not the cries of a rebel, are not revolutionary calls to desecration but are the consequences of the fleeting glimpse visited upon Murphy, Celia, Arsene and Watt. They are the signs of cowardice and courage - a turning away from the vision with the realisation that it is everywhere. Such is the obsession of Beckett's characters, such is the view seen by the mad painter at his window.

The exhaustion that urges Watt and company to stop is balanced by the impossibility of this course of action. The outcome is that things continue to follow the now thoroughly discredited vestiges of sanity in an increasingly maddening fashion. Addition, subtraction, alternatives and permutations continue throughout the novel and with each new application elicit a growing sense of vertigo - a dizziness as that which is already minimally effective becomes less so. So Watt on Mr Knott's rearrangement of clothes and furniture, on Erskine and the bell, Arthur on the topic of Bando, Mr Louit and the committee are all instances that mimic the scientific laws upon which reasoning is based in such a way as to debunk their efficacy while applying these rules with a straight face. Each new application, brings new failure and signifies a retreat from the sanity guaranteed by these rules.

So the reading mind casts about for other points, places that have escaped Watt's punctilious eye. But neither space nor time has been left untroubled. The space that surrounded the body is either a reservoir for decay or is filled with the trace elements of bodies no longer there; Watt is

followed in time by a self that never arrives. If the physical Watt experiences difficulty the same can be said of the mental version.

When Watt manages to enter Erskine's room and discovers the painting with the broken circle and the point he, in essence, unearths a representation of the system under which he lives. Deep within the labyrinth of Mr Knott's house he finds access to a secret known only to the first floor initiate. He discovers a circle with a centre that has escaped, a centre that has broken free of the tyranny of the line that encloses and defines it. This point's flight from the circle - and according to geometry the point has no dimension - must destroy the circle which is defined as a succession of points equidistant from a central point. The artifice contains a 'central' flaw and is rendered 'pointless' yet it remains because it is an approximation of a mental construct, a physical point depicting a mental hypothesis. While this realisation is seminal (if this word has any meaning) to Beckett's relation to language, it also repeats the entire Cartesian mistake - the unreason at the centre of reason. Once started, this instability continues into a collapse of the mind's ability to perceive space. The permutations of the circle's relation to its centre (126-7) and to other centres and circles is complicated again by the crude means of expression whereby many dimensions (both in space and time) are conflated in any act of representation upon a two dimensional surface. Thus the painting represents a circle and a centre separated from each other "in boundless

space, in endless time (Watt knew nothing about physics)" (127) and yet all the while, searching - "search" is repeated 9 times - for each other. Only a mind as obsessed as Watt's could perpetuate such a crime upon this simple representation, this geometrical hiccup. The revelation experienced by Watt and friends is exactly of this depth: nothing has changed, the painting in all its innocence remains a simple depiction on a geometrical theme. But to consider even the most facile of objects and incidents can drag the perceiver into psychotic depths - hence Cowper's paranoia when he overhears a conversation, Smart's injunction to pray unceasingly, Watt's Galls, Watt's painting. Furthermore, to see beyond the surface into a depth, however inappropriate, is to see a proliferation of 'meanings' alien to the surface. But for Watt the loss of confidence in a theory, a theory for which no sane alternatives exist, each application is a matter of desire, a desperate searching for an exception that will once more prove the rule.

The unreason at the heart of Cartesian certainty discredits the theory but never threatens to destroy it. The case for a continuous and familiar world, as proposed by Descartes and for that matter, Bacon and Newton, has overwhelming support. Watt finds in the painting a representation of the system and of himself. He is also the centre that has escaped the circle, a centre, as I have suggested, that exists in the dimension of madness and that is irrevocably separated from the plane of the 'feasible'. But, as his predecessor Arsene notes, all that remains for

the madman is the possibility of searching for that which can never be reached:

The glutton cast away, the drunkard in the desert, the lecher in prison, they are the happy ones. To hunger, thirst, lust every day afresh and every day in vain, after the old prog, the old booze, the old whores, that's the nearest we'll ever get to felicity, the new porch and the very latest garden.
(43)

The garden of Eden, no doubt.

Where does this leave the Cartesian mind as re-thought by Beckett? Essentially in a position identical to the meagre remains of Beckett's bodies - routed by the decay inscribed into the architecture of health. The citadel of the mind stands above those lesser Aquinian animals (to which the body belongs) and yet for Watt it increasingly becomes a ruin barely hidden beneath the pristine surface of its columns. Attention is drawn to the emptiness under each arch until the building is nothing more than a silence in space. The mind, like the body, reflects its Cartesian counterpart but in the repetition (that is its reflection) slips away from the original unable to return, incapable of translating itself back into a given, assumed and sane cast. The Beckettian mind has been driven away by the force of the vision and it stands on the periphery of the Cartesian form, shadowing, but irrevocably remote from the certain, healthy construct that Descartes called the self. Beckett has added a dimension (one of decay and doubt) to Descartes' that undermines the latter and yet almost escapes detection from humanity's 'two dimensional' perspective: the dimensions that constitute the dialectic of foreground and background, self and other,

sanity and madness, being and non-being. The merger between self and other so attractive to Murphy is achieved in *Watt* simply by reiterating the terms of distinction (body and mind, self and other) and making of the self a place where the self cannot be.

Watt's body, for example, is the other of Descartes' body. In the same way Watt's mind is not a thing that organises and promotes a coherent identity but a thing disorganised. The doubting mind without the succour of certainty is nothing more than a plaything of numerous plausible (and hence implausible) alternatives - a perpetual fragmentation that occurs in tandem with an urge towards unified coherence. And if Watt is besieged by a plenitude of alternatives he is also harassed by other voices:

But Watt heard nothing of this, because of other voices, singing, crying, stating, murmuring, things unintelligible, in his ear. With these, if he was not familiar, he was not unfamiliar either. So he was not alarmed, unduly. (27)

For Watt (as for Molloy, Morone, Malone, Worm...) the self is the sum total of the other.

When I spoke, earlier, of Bruegel's kinship with Beckett as a conflation of perspective it was simply this. For both the canvas depicts a scene where every gesture of certainty and meaning is placed within a context that disrupts and negates that meaning. The fall of Icarus, and the sense of tragedy it evokes, is destroyed by the farmer's toiling. The act of ploughing, as an act of preparation for cultivation, is also a preparation for death - the furrows become the earthly grave that Icarus never attains. A two-fold movement

is enacted. One is the expression of meaning negated and the other, deriving from the first, is a meaning, a connectedness that surfaces on another level. Beckett's representation of Cartesian body and mind is a repetition that finds itself unable to repeat the model of assured identity. Descartes' certainty, like the 'fact' of Icarus' fall is negated by Beckett's attempt to phrase that certainty. And yet meaning, admittedly of a different order, is secreted from the folds of that negation.

IV The Logistics of the Word

Perhaps it is presumptuous to speak of meaning in a context so absolutely enfeebled by the emptying out of meaning - be it logical, scientific, mathematical or even the proclamation of identity. 'I', and all that this enormous word suggests, is perhaps the funniest joke known to those sedentary forms of life crawling, ambling, dying and thinking along Beckett's lanes and ditches. If the notion of a continuous and contained self is discredited according to the means by which things are made to mean, then language is surely the last bastion of sense?

But by now the fortifications that demarcate certainty (body and mind) have systematically been entangled by the contaminating vision and thus, language must be considered with the same wariness. A certain rhythm can be detected below the surface, a dance that like Zarathustra's gains

momentum from the confrontation with "the birthmark deathmark". The crippling of Descartes' body is subsumed, and to an extent cured, by the control of the mind over the disease of that body. But what can heal the mind after it meets with Watt's aphasia, this short-circuiting conveniently called thought? Language, surely?

In order to dismiss any doubt that there exists an intimate liaison between the mathematical and the linguistic cipher, Mr MacStern (a member of the incapacitated but objective committee) suffers a slip of the tongue, more metaphysical than Freudian. In an attempt to make sense of a conversation which has long since slipped into the nonsensical he asks that Mr Nackybal's answers be written as words rather than as figures. His reasoning is as follows:

Why then he would simply write down the words that he hears, instead of their ciphered equivalents, which requires long practice, especially in the case of numbers of five and six letters, I beg your pardon, I mean figures. (186)

Although this apology follows fast on the heels of his slip, the damage is done. His is a mistake that is made all the more grievous by its insignificance. The proposition forwarded by Beckett is simply that there is no essential difference between these modes of signification.

Again Beckett is following Descartes' scheme whereby the incorporation of mathematical principles into language was an attempt to impose upon language a new rigour. This is not to say that Descartes held a naive view of language, as his letter to Mersenne (20 November 1629) makes clear. For Descartes the notion of a new and universal language based on

the mathematical equivalence of terms - love = *aimer*, *amare*, *philein*... - "is too much to suggest outside fairyland" (*Philosophical Letters* 6). But for all the problems he has with Hardy's plan, his method is attempting something very similar. As far as Beckett is concerned this opens language to the same kind of internal incoherence as that which appeared in the seemingly clear surface of Descartes' scientific reasoning. This, more so than maths and science, is an accepted observation and one guaranteed ever since Platonic Idealism posited its distinction between forms. In fact, Watt's encounter with the unnamable pot and his frustrated search for potness is surely one of the finest fictional accounts of what took place in Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*. Like Watt's inability to reach a convincing solution using the paraphernalia of science and logic, language also retires from its obligation to settle, once and for all, on that which it names.

Even worse is that it comes so close, its arbitrariness is so exact, that it escapes the notice of those who happily and unhappily go about their business. For Watt, language is another example of the fall off the ladder:

For the pot remained a pot, Watt felt sure of that, for everyone but Watt. For Watt alone it was not a pot, any more. (79)

But he is not the first to have realised this. With Adam's fall - from life in fairyland - he also lost absolute proximity to that which he named. In order for Adam to call out the name of an animal involved a pre-lapsarian remembrance, a re-calling of a time when he, content in the

twilight, strolled with his creator. A 'cow' after the Fall is not the same as the pre-lapsarian cow, the quintessence of the former (the archetypal signified) has been milked off, leaving a drained facsimile. The difference between the cows is for most of us negligible, but for Beckett's characters it cannot be forgotten or resolved: "it was just this hairbreadth departure from the nature of a true pot that so excruciated Watt" (78).

Thus we arrive at the final fulfillment and refutation of Descartes by Beckett. There are moments, as Kenner points out, when the narrative "despite Descartes' proclaimed certainty, has Molloy's tone" (119). Indeed, there is a sense in which Beckett's *opus* can be seen as an attempt to re-write Descartes' *Discourse on Method and The Meditations*, this essay which Descartes self-effacingly calls "an historical account, or, if you prefer, a fable" (29). This fable, by the arrogance of its brevity and the certainty of its solution is an alluring prospect for any writer. But in Beckett's repetition something (called respectively the body, mind and language) goes terribly awry.

Like the clown who tries to emulate the audience's walk, smile (see Watt's 23) and its rational gestures, each new attempt is more catastrophic than the last. The Cartesian formula whereby thought translates itself into language to arrive at certainty is recast in the Beckettian recipe as a language unable to translate itself into lucid thought and producing a double confusion: confused thought confused, in turn, by language. Central to this confusion is the presence

of language which confounds and betrays the smooth passage of thought towards certainty. Language manages to ambush thought and threatens, always, to throw it and certainty into confusion. It is an awareness of this - but mediated by a genuine affection for Cartesian mathesis - that prompts Lacan to situate the Cartesian *I think* as something separate from *I am* (See *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* 35-7, 222-26). For Beckett, language constantly refuses the surrender of the period and continues, closing this famous dictum in its own arms so to speak - *I think therefore I am I think...* The result is what cybernetics calls an infinite loop, a kind of ping-pong game between assertion and denial and one which elicits a dizziness (on the part of the reader) powerful enough to eventually destroy the machine.

Whether the break is between signifier and signified or between language and thought it persists, diminutive but beyond the resources of translation. Returning to our clown, each attempt to traverse that 'hidden' distance not only makes it increasingly explicit but increases the distance, albeit within a non-spatial realm. The realm crossed over with every sane gesture entails a leap of faith that is beyond Watt's physical and mental mobility. It comes to designate the moment where meaning falls away, where it reaches its limit. On the one side there is a reality as remote as death and on the other side hollow signification, like the echo of footsteps in a mausoleum. In the middle ('\\') is Watt, alone, with the rest of his post-Murphy family, and this middle spreads until it is no longer merely

an object of obsession, a symptom of something else. The obsession engulfs the perceiving Watt and sucks him into a vortex from where he indistinctly mumbles sermons that refuse to be translated back into the rational or forward into death's wise silence.

His living denies him silence and yet, like Adam, his every word is infused with an impossible desire to return to the language of Eden where things would "consent to be named, with the time-honoured names" (81). For Watt, language is not only to be regretted once spoken - as Arsene says, "Personally of course I regret everything" (44) - but is, in itself, language as regret.

Regret is retroactive desire. It issues forth a language that seeks, as the centre seeks the circle, Descartes' wordy confidence. While this confidence is lost on Watt he has a translator of sorts in Sam. Sam is the one who can restore Watt's failing body, his frail mind and his flailing language. In so far as *Watt* is *The Meditations'* other - the broken text full of ruined protagonists and debilitated words - Sam is Watt's other: a Cartesian representative who will renovate the body of Watt and the text. They stand across from each other, reflecting each other: "I felt as though I were standing before a great mirror, in which my garden was reflected, and my fence, and I" (157). In fact with Sam's first full blown appearance he sets about physically restoring the ailing Watt much like Mary Magdalene repairing Christ on the road to Calvary:

with a cloth I had in my pocket [I] wiped his face, and his hands, and then taking a little box of

ointment I had in my pocket I anointed his face, and his hands, and then taking a little hand comb from my pocket I straightened his tufts, and his whiskers, and then taking a little clothes brush from my pocket I brushed his coat, and his trousers. (161)

This achieved, he encloses Watt in his arms and the two set about walking and talking: at last a unified, coherent entity. That this novel exists at all is (seemingly) thanks to Sam who transfers Watt's manic inversions back, through the looking glass, into sense. It appears as if Beckett, after detecting the rot that has set in, retreats behind the closure that Sam's narrative provides.

If this is granted the rest follows. The 'fault' lies with Watt. He is simply mad and Sam, in an act of Christian charity, is engaged in a faithful transcription of that madness. Thus *Watt* is a case study no different from Nijinsky's diary or Schreber's journals. The narrator Sam translates it into an accessible, fictional portrayal of oddity for the edification of others who like him are "desirous above all of information" (163). However, if it is information that sanity desires there are small lacunas that first need to be filled in.

In the process of cleaning Watt, Sam embarks upon a mode of expression that is as laborious and iterative as Watt's bovine attempts to make sense. It is evident, from this, that Sam has huge pockets (the bottomless pockets of the clown?), that his actions are carried out with the meticulous care of a mime and that his language is not as impartial as it pretends to be. It is as if he has to take a run-up, to go back to that infernal pocket before he can get to the end.

But by now the faintest smell of repetition should create suspicion. Sam is having the same difficulty as Watt in getting to the point, in finishing. Even the repetition of "Then" (six in all) which should move the story on, slips into "And then" alternating with "And so" and making of the narrative a clumsy, jangling thing. We are watching a recital, in language, of Watt walking. Nor is there any way to ascertain how much is Watt's story and how much is a fictional account offered by Sam. There are parts of the text - the opening and closing sections of the book in which Watt is not present - that are obviously beyond the scope of Watt's telling. Compounded with this are the difficulties experienced by Sam in the act of translation where, as he frequently admits

I missed I suppose much I suspect of great interest touching I presume the first or initial stage of the second or closing period of Watt's stay in Mr Knott's house. (163)

Such is the voice of our Cartesian candidate. Finally there is (by now) the small problem of Sam's own mental credentials. His friendship with Watt is confined to the pavilion (obviously within an asylum) which they once shared (149). Sam is but another of Beckett's madmen.

The discrediting of Sam as a reliable narrator succeeds, once more, in unwinding the stable centre - the given in the geometry of being - with the result that the reader is caught in something akin to Poe's maelstrom. Holes are forever opening up in what appears to be a solid surface and these whirlpools drag the protagonists and reader alike, down,

revolution by deliberate revolution. Connor also remarks on the 'impossibility' of reading *Watt*:

as she struggles down the page, she is likely to lose her place, lose the sense, and to become, like the disembodied voice of *The Unnamable*, adrift in the words that speak remorselessly through her.
(32)

Here, on the rapidly descending boat (the mechanisms by which sanity builds for itself a sea-worthy edifice) a *logos* begins, quietly, to make itself heard. At the point where all is imminent chaos a small, barely audible voice asserts itself. It is the voice that must doubt doubt, the body in pieces, the body still not still and the language creating in the face of effacement.

Watt and Sam have indeed tossed themselves off from the myopic security offered by the plunging ship and pursue, in plural, the narrator of "A Descent into the Maelstróm":

[I] fastened myself to the cask by means of the lashings which secured it to the counter, and precipitated myself with it to the sea, without another moment's hesitation. (217)

If this maelstrom can be compared to the organised chaos of Mr Knott and his residence the chaos and the cask can be found within the resonances of his name. As virtually every critic of *Watt* has pointed out, Mr Knott is a double play on 'knott' and 'not' and, as such, his house and his person are *loci* of complexity (as in a problem being knotty) and of negation. Furthermore, and this has an important connection to Beckett's preoccupation with symmetry, a knot is a way of holding things together, an example of human reasoning at its most ingenious.

A sub-text begins to open up in the analysis. For the

body the cask (that which permits endurance) was found in folly. Descartes' crumbling body, although operating according to a defunct *modus operandi* still creates, creates a poetry not of movement but a poetry as movement - a struggle for a symmetry not within health but within decay.

As for the mind there is the ludicrous attempt to repeat the gesticulations of sanity only to create its inverse. However, in the process, the mind assumes, if not the content, then the *shape* of rational thought. The more it parades the vestiges of rational thought from its distant purview the funnier it becomes. The point is reached when, according to the dialectic of inversion, the brief appearance of sense in this normalised unreason is as shocking as its opposite once was. Mr MacStern is another of those Beckettian characters (see Mercier and Camier) who find inordinate difficulty in sustaining the demands of the narrative in which they are trapped. His responses to the conversation repeatedly slip beyond the text and call out to the reader in an attempt at commiseration. Piecing together this fragmentary discourse, this laughable but lucid commentary, produces something like the following:

Ego Autem (181)
Bless me, what was that (183)
How long will this go on? (184)
It means nothing (186)
I know nothing of that (186)
Impossible (187)
There is something fishy here (187).

For Watt (as translated by Sam, as translated by the narrator ...) language repeats the meagre solutions of his earlier physical and mental encounter with life (so called).

The mere perpetuation of words, a perpetuation which has become increasingly strained for Beckett (in his novels, plays and radio productions), is nevertheless a declaration of independence from, and a flirtation with, the final silence. If only as a material entity it fills the blank pages of his texts, it covers the desolation of a silent stage and disrupts the stillness of a tuned radio. And indeed it suffers from exhaustion:

From where she lies she sees Venus rise. On. From where she lies when the skies are clear she sees Venus rise followed by the sun. On. (*Ill Seen Ill Said* 7)

Each "On" drags the story out of the silence forever closing in, a metronome keeping beat with the silence but composing a rhythm *ex nihilo*. As Beckett says in a letter to Alan Schneider: " My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else" (*Disjecta* 109). To make a sound as fully as possible is achieved by means of a language that repeats meaning (as signifier connected to signified) and in so doing shaves off sense in its pursuit of sense. In the above example the rhyme and repetition of "lies ... rise... lies ... skies... rise" - this break of Saussure's syntagmatic chain by the paradigmatic - both weakens the difference between these words and creates a rhythm. A place where, beneath the surface, words can dance. Here, by his own admission, is the true measure of Beckett's indebtedness to Joyce.

Transition, edited by Maria and Eugene Jolas, was the

review in which Beckett's vision was first expressed. The review was heavily influenced by Joyce's *Work in Progress* and the possibilities that it offered. Partly it was a mouthpiece for Joyce and a creation of an audience for the language of *Finnegan's Wake*. As part of this preparation a series of essays were commissioned by Joyce on various aspects of the forthcoming tome. Beckett's contribution - "Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce" - for all its usual irreverent commentary finally turns its attention to Joyce's language. Language - and thus the future of literature - was alive and well, or more precisely, drunk and disorderly:

Here form *is* content, content *is* form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read - or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*.... When the sense is dancing, the words dance.... The language is drunk. The very words are tilted and effervescent. (27)

This response to language presages a moment where Beckett meets with and departs from Joyce. For Beckett the problem with inebriating language is that inevitably it must waken to a sombre and hungover dawn. To keep language tilted requires a more drastic remedy, one which is already implicit in the terms of his argument. The debate is no longer solely concerned with the inherent difficulties of representation but, according to Beckett, Joyce manages to represent the process of representation. While this may be feasible in Joyce's case - with *Finnegan's Wake* generating an unceasing slew of neologisms - how is it possible for one who by his own admission has nothing to express? Where there is nothing

to express, using Beckett's phraseology, and where there is the obligation to express, the only and seemingly impossible alternative is to express expression: to write not in order to express 'X' but in order to create a discourse that in finding its own rhythm can dance itself, again, into meaning. The closest he came to this in *Murphy* was, of course, in Mr Endon's company:

'the last at last seen of him
himself unseen by him
and of himself' (140)

This language of perpetual motion appears at the nadir of *Murphy* and consists of four terms - last, (un)seen, him, himself - that threaten to perpetuate themselves into extinction, but at the same time constitute a small bastion of words, swaying to their beat and holding off the inevitability of "a rest" (140). Joyce's intoxication still repeats (albeit it with a slur and a hiccup) the old relations with the external world. What Beckett achieves is the step beyond, the taking of language beyond the new into the oldest of places where the silence is met and broken. His *logos* then drives words into the silence of madness, into its emptiness, but also out of madness where language weaves its silent dance, like Zarathustra, upon the abyss. This then is language as regret, a recalling of a time, before the fall, when the creative energy of *dabhar* still sounded across the world. But even regret, for Beckett, is not entirely negative. It allows Watt and Sam to make inroads into the silence, to generate in language a cadence that lingers long after the 'last' ('ha', as Arsene would say) word has been

sounded. Irrespective of the subject matter, this regret choreographs a dance of lyrical beauty that glides far into the unsayable silence:

To pause, towards the close of one's three-hour day, and consider: the darkening ease, the brightening trouble; the pleasure pleasure because it was, the pain pain because it shall be; the glad acts grown proud, the proud acts growing stubborn; the panting the trembling towards a being gone, a being to come; and the true true no longer, and the false true not yet. And to decide not to smile after all, sitting in the shade, hearing the cicadas, wishing it were night, wishing it were morning... (201)

The smile, coming as it does before the "after all", constitutes the second aspect of Beckett's *logos*: it allows for a foolish irreverence. While language no longer has the rights to the quiddity of the world (pots, cows and love) it cannot help but beget a meaningful resonance. This paradox creates a space for Watt and Sam's humour, a series of jokes both in language and on language.

The endless combinatorics which contribute to so much of the bulk of the novel do, as Connor notes, confuse and exasperate the reader. But perhaps more importantly they enact a virtuoso performance of logic gone mad, they posit the thought that this infinite loop may never stop, they produce delight when they do, if only for a moment. During these interludes of 'Problem - Solution - Objection' once the required terms are established, this lumbering mechanism of language can take over, allowing the writer a respite from the task at hand and leaving the reader battling down a page, growing emptier and emptier.

Emptiness provoked by combination is also provoked by

repetition. The consideration of Watt as a man's man and as a woman's man (137-8) sets up a frenzy of repetition that hollows out the meaning from these already brittle denotations. And yet, again, at the point at which they reach minimal presence (empty signification) they continue wryly to stand - their material existence a joke, their joke their existence. Even when words do vanish they proclaim their presence by their absence. Upon the first page, in the first paragraph, this conundrum asserts itself: "He knew they were not his, but he thought of them as his. He knew [] were not his, because they pleased him" (5). Repetition here simply ensures that the gap is noticed, the joke taken.

Absence, in this way, contributes to much of the novel. From the "?" (27, 30) which responds to the demands of becoming specific, to the Swiftian "(Hiatus in MS)" (238) and finally to the Addenda with its brilliant "change all the names" (254) the novel both allows an infinity to be inserted and repeats that expansion where Watt is no longer Watt but another with whom we must become acquainted. This presumes an endless novel, endlessly repeated and always different.

Humour allows Watt and Sam to gain an equilibrium as they revolve around the walls of the vortex. But this laugh is not unequivocally redemptive, it is always tempered by the mangled catastrophe below and the inaccessible but blue skies above. It is a laugh touched with lunacy, a laugh that arises out of the vision where annihilation and futility are written upon every surface. It is Zarathustra's laugh, and Arsene's:

But the mirthless laugh is the dianoetic laugh,
down the snout - haw! - so. It is the laugh of

laughs, the *risus purus*, the laugh laughing at the laugh, the beholding, the saluting of the highest joke, in a word the laugh the laugh that laughs - silence please - at that which is unhappy. (47)

This laughter breaks out at the moment when it is silenced and signifies another link in this carefully fashioned chain of inversion: the momentous in the mundane, depth in the surface, madness in sanity, silence in the word, laughter in the unhappy. And at the end of our discussion the magnitude of simply saying 'And Vice Versa'.

The effect of this is perhaps the funniest of all Beckett's jokes. A subtle shift takes place within the reading of the text. The protagonists only serve as the butt of a small joke, they suffer from the atrocities (at the level of plot) inflicted on them by God/god/fate "who loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown" (*Waiting For Godot* 43). The real direction of the humour is at the reader who suffers in parallel, but who is also forced in the act of reading to suffer the further indignity of having to repair, to fill in with 'meaning' the continual rupture of silence and absence that ascends to the surface of the text. The process of reading which, as Lennard Davis observes (3), is already a rather bizarre activity is made doubly so in a novel where the reader is forced to enact the same lunatic reasoning in order to make sense.

One can only read *Watt* up to a point - a point where reason reaches its limit - or until one is moved by that point onto another plane. The plane of the foreign, of the familiar.

CHAPTER SIX

The Ends Of Madness.

Madmen won't stand for imitation. To them the outside world is not a mirror or a soundbox. They believe themselves alone in the world, as though they were holding that world in the hollow of their hand and they are right. They live vertically. To drown, one drop of water is enough. (Wiesel 20)

The shadowy form of Babel remains undisturbed, it continues to stand between, and over, the tales of life, birth and death as if haunting the passing of generations. Babel, as Bruegel understood, cannot be fully realised, its outlines are vague, its content transparent and its shape incomplete. And, representing madness, it bestows upon it the same credentials, the same sense of the nebulous. Madness whispers.

Foucault, by the fact that he sets out to write a history of madness, describes these whisperings into sounds that history can hear, that is, into a silence that follows from the classical exclusion of madness. The madman *was* silenced, but this silence is of a different order, a different kind from the modulations I have sought to trace. Like Bruegel's paintings, madness is both exhibited (in Vienna and Rotterdam) and lost (the ivory miniature), present and absent. The consequence of this ambiguity is that madness has become marginalised both in Foucault's negative sense and in so far as it *appears* at the margins. Its presence has not been entirely expunged or reduced to impotence. Madness registers itself as a threshold discourse, both on the

threshold of becoming fully audible and fading into an irretrievable silence. Again as Bruegel points out, madness - its ethereal outline - needs to be filled out, fleshed out. His sensitivity to the subject refuses to conceive a definitive version and thus presents the madness of Babel as having different forms both to the sane and to the mad. But with the confinement initiated by classicalism, madness lost this multivalency for it was now linked to the idea of cure and, once connected, it became a spatio-temporal possession, firmly rooted in history. The madman rigorously subjected to the dialectic of cure had to comply with the demands of time and space, but even more, madness was cured only when it repeated the language of reason. However, cure and the multiplicity of (contradictory) meanings that it signifies, remains for each a translation, each a theory, a univocal fleshing of Babel's outline. And cure - whether psychoanalytic, Laingian or even Janovian - necessarily excludes that which is anathema to its premises, a cure *works* by exclusion.

I have attempted to work in reverse - to include, as far as I am able, madness. For this reason I have begun in reason and from here sought out a moment of disorientation, a place where the earth begins to shift, where time, space and language no longer provide the old continuities. Within this break a verticality is created, a *logos* rising out of language, feeding off it, but given its final transmuted shape by the reason of its madness.

In these terms Nietzsche was perhaps the great

philosopher of inclusion, of thinking all things at once. In Zarathustra he pursued madness through contradiction, through paradox and through a language that could, simultaneously and endlessly, assert and deny its ability to represent.

Zarathustra was a surface philosopher, one who dwelt on the precarious surface (of the mirror, of the '\')

between the vanity of reason and the disfigured madman on the other side. Zarathustra made of himself a bridge from Rotterdam to Vienna. He attempted to traverse the distance between madness as devoid of reason to madness as folly, as intrinsic to the human condition. If Zarathustra sought madness it was Nietzsche who found it. Such was the impact of the discovery that Nietzsche retired from words, from the surface of words into a place full of lost memorabilia and where, no doubt, Clovio's tower also lay, discarded.

The vertical *logos* that elevated Cowper placed him high on Babel, a stark figure terrified by the size of the building upon which he stood. Believing himself to be cut off from the heavens (where God lay) he could only stare down and recognise the awful distance from the ground, the familiar that he celebrated in *The Task*. The tower was his blasphemy, his sin against the Holy Spirit and it clung to him as much as he clung to it. But in crossing over the divide he manages, almost against his will, to produce poems that contort language, impossible poems that falter on the brink of signification and yet never quite fall (into moral platitude or non-sense). Cowper's madness creates a poetry by which he not only projects himself beyond the acceptable

strains of Augustan verse but beyond language itself. Between the opposites that he cannot reconcile, a tension exists, a tension that signals a language trying to say what it cannot say. By locating himself within the pull of paradox he approaches, that which Beckett so desires, "the literature of the Unword" (*Disjecta* 143).

But Cowper remains as a physical entity and as a mental disturbance upon the desolate walls of the Rotterdam Babel. Smart's *logos* achieves the opposite. In his folly he joins with the bustling multitude upon Vienna, not in the regal figure of Nimrod - although Nimrod finds mention (A 9) and is incorporated into the body of the poem, the body of the poet - but in the activity of creation. *Jubilate Agno* is a play upon the ambivalence of this version of Babel. It too is incomplete, it emanates from the very earth and most importantly the poem and the painting involve a vitality that repudiates those who would see only condemnation in this Babel. In the process of building this unifying tower, this tower that involves the whole of creation, Smart disappears into the fabric of the edifice. He reaches un-existence at the same 'time' that he rediscovers the cadences of a pre-Babel *logos*. In joining the natural to the human by means of the divine he unearths a *dabhar*, a language that seeks the centre of translation. For all the madness of these fragments, Smart strives for a language that will act like his fountain - "*ascend in a stream two thirds of the way and afterwards prank itself into ten thousand agreeable forms*" (B 210).

The sense that language is a prank played out on a

defenceless humanity is both the blessing and the curse visited upon Beckett's work. As a logothete, language is not, as Cowper hoped it would be, a place to hide from madness, it is the place where madness invidiously asserts itself. Beckett is not obsessed with madness, he merely sets out to describe a world and yet, after the climax of *Murphy*, finds his attempts to describe unhinged. In part Beckett's problem can be attributed to his desire to locate Clovio's tower of silence while constantly meeting with the ungainly convergence of Rotterdam and Vienna. In the foreignness of the former there is the familiar shape of the latter. The *logos* to which Watt and company are subject is the simultaneous appearance of opposites, of Rotterdam and Vienna, of tragedy and comedy and of self and other. And the language this gives birth to, is one that asserts and denies itself, is one that is trying to die. In Beckett language is no longer a surface along which the subject moves towards a completed communication, rather it is a unstable surface that carries within it the threat of rupture: any word, any pause can cause language to ascend into the verticality of its delusion.

Through time and space, from the madman to the mad prophet and to the world demented, each *logos* attests to its singularity - an individual reasoning fashioning a distinctively charged language. From sanity to madness, from us to those we describe as *On Babel* is, at once, a huge and an insignificant step. Insignificant because madness drags with it reason and language, and can only find expression within the very mechanisms by which sanity organises itself. Huge

because madness, in appropriating these mechanisms, defiles and contaminates these sacred orientations. To return to Foucault, it was for this reason that madness was excluded (and remains so), confined to asylums on the outskirts of society. Even in the force of its exclusion, the building remains, its bricks and mortar charged with the power of the unknown; a sense of the taboo that casts a shadow over the city and over its sense of the normal. In exactly the same way the various forms of the *logos* of madness insert themselves back into the prevailing discourse upsetting its free flow, its pure surface. If this subterfuge was solely restricted to the madman's writing (Cowper and Smart) it would remain little more than an oddity - something to be placed in anthologies of psychosis - but that it is sustained in Nietzsche and Beckett instigates a terrorism against the community (of language). For the latter especially, those places where language (as the embodiment of reason) seems most sure of itself are the places where unreason declares its presence.

At the margins of discourse, in every lacuna, every comma, every period, madness appears disfigured and disfiguring. The language that should reflect and corroborate our living becomes the mirror wherein we see the other side. It is the eternal fact of madness that denies our truths, laughs at tragedy, weeps at accomplishment and refuses to bestow upon the subject a sense of finitude, of having arrived.

In its presence madness is still located *On Babel*. If

sanity depicts the mad *logos* as that which will *Babble On*
then madness has its revenge. Madness forces the sanity of
language to *Babel On*, to continue and to continue
perpetuating the same mistakes. From the margins its absence
defies language's desire for order and forces it to continue
- sealing up the holes, repairing the leaks, adding letters,
impossibly trying to finish the sentence.

NOTES

Clovio's Ivory Tower

¹ I intend to use the term 'madman' in its generic sense rather than the awkward 'madperson' or madman/woman. However, as Foucault suggests, there are differences in the way in which madness is treated within gender (see 136-58). For a feminist reading of madness see Marilyn Yalom's *Maternity, Mortality and the Literature of Madness*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP., 1985.

² I have used the terms 'source and target' according to their conventional use in translation studies:

What is generally understood as translation involves the rendering of a source language (SL) text into the target language (TL) so as to ensure that (1) the surface meaning of the two will be approximately similar and (2) the structures of the SL will be preserved as closely as possible but not so closely that the TL structures will be seriously distorted. (Bassnett-McGuire 2)

³The various editions of Nietzsche's writings have necessitated the use of a different form of documentation. I have chosen the more popular method: all quotations are notated by a paragraph number. When referencing critics the difference will be indicated by the use 'p' denoting 'page'.

⁴R.J. Hollingdale associates the melancholy prophet with Schopenhauer (p 157) and while this is, no doubt, a valid assumption it must be remembered that it is he who most threatens Zarathustra's certainty. The prophet is far more than a mere representation of his predecessor.

Cowper: The Art of Nearly Drowning.

¹Cowper's interest in animals is reflected through his madness and becomes for Hoosag K. Gregory a matter of suspicion:

I am a hare myself, Cowper seems to be saying, who have always feared being left alone and betrayed by those on whom I had believed I could depend... and perhaps by making you [his pets] perfectly safe from further dangers, I can somehow ensure my own safety. (45)

These Freudian insights say nothing about Cowper's poetry (mad or otherwise) that is not equally applicable to the *modus vivendi* of the S.P.C.A. In contrast one of the most interesting attempts at integrating Cowper's mental anguish into an understanding of his poetry, is that of Vincent Newey in *Cowper's Poetry: a critical study and reassessment*.

² The similarity between Milton and Cowper is comprehensively covered by Dustin Griffin in "Cowper, Milton and the Recovery of Paradise". Concentrating on his position as a 'transitional' poet, Kenneth MacLean discusses Cowper's affiliation to the work of Wordsworth and Keats. See also Patricia Meyer Spacks' *The Poetry of Vision* (chapters two through seven). Newey's entire thesis draws attention to the relation between Cowper and the early romantics; especially Wordsworth and Coleridge.

³In the context of our discussion, the most noteworthy explication is offered by Newey in a chapter entitled "'The Castaway', Hymns and other Poems". Approaching the poem from his discussion of *The Olney Hymns* he notes that many similar techniques are used in "The Castaway", to explore his distance from the devotional paradigm. See also Quinlan's assessment of Cowper's poetry in terms of imagaic

consistency, where the sea becomes an increasingly loaded image, depicting the threat of dissolution.

Smart: The Fool's Asylum

¹ *Jubilate Agno*. ed. Karina Williamson. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). All subsequent references will be to this edition. The main difference between her edition and Bond's is found in her dispensing with the rather clumsy division of Fragment B into B¹ and B².

² Lilian Feder also points this out when she notes that

"the insane during these centuries [late 17th and 18th] were generally treated not as alternate selves of the sane, but as their 'Antipodes', whose cure could be effected, if at all, only through some form of prescribed punishment". (148)

³ While this is accepted as a matter of course by post-structuralist criticism, it is inimical to those critics who are concerned with verifiable influence and a certainty of intention. Thus much of the extensive scholarship that *Jubilate* has initiated, has delved deeply into the period and found influences that constitute a daunting collection of esoterica. While the influence of Bishop Lowth's *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* is accepted by most, other influences are less evident. Dearnley suggests precedents in John Ray, Isaac Watts and Samuel Boyse (82-95). John Block Friedman detects the influence of "Henry More, Nathaniel Culverwel, Benjamin Whichcote or John Norris" (1967: 255). Albert J. Kuhn finds influences as remote as Rev. John Brown, William Law and Swedenborg (1963: 123). Finally Williamson discovers a major influence in John Hutchinson's *Moses*

Principal (416). Perhaps the most astounding aspect of this collection is Smart's mad perspecuity in (consciously or unconsciously) touching on these ideas in his poem.

⁴ See A. Sherbo, "Christopher Smart, Reader of Obituaries." *Modern Language Notes*. 71, 1956. 177-82.

⁵ The Kabbalist spirit of atOnement has very little in common with Geoffrey Hartman's use of the word in his analysis of Smart. His otherwise brilliant reading is infused with a perception of Smart as guilty neurotic who senses that

he is *disturbing* the 'holy Sabbath' of creation by his recreation; that he is *trespassing* on sacred property or *stealing* an image of it or even exalting himself as maker... Smart therefore atones the exposed, self-conscious self by at-one-ing it with the creature. (own emphasis [432])

Ironically, Hartman is guilty of that "trespassing" which he suspects in Smart. See Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Christopher Smart's 'Magnificat': Toward a Theory of Representation." *Journal of English Literary History*. 41 (1974): 429-54..

⁶ The flexibility of *Jubilate's* form has allowed for many contemporary variations. As Bruce Hunsberger has argued, in "Kit Smart's *Howl*", there are various connections between *Jubilate* and its mutated offspring by Allen Ginsberg. Perhaps less obvious, but equally rewarding, are the connections that exist between Smart's poem and Anne Sexton's "Magnificat".

Murphy: that Harmless Lunacy

¹ The passage from which this comes deserves quoting in full:

a feeble idea may be obtained of what awaits him too smart not to know better, better than to leave his black cell and that harmless lunacy, faint

flicker every age or so, the consciousness of being, of having been. (82)

² Mysticism and the mystic quest is the theme of Hélène Baldwin's *Samuel Beckett's Real Silence*. In an already somewhat contrived reading of Beckett's *Trilogy*, she mysteriously ignores the 'plenitude of mystical reference' in *Murphy* by arguing that his early work cannot be "subsumed under the rubric of mysticism and metaphysical quest I am attempting to outline..." (10). This is odd, for surely *Murphy's* quest could be seen as assuming the process indicated by St. John of the Cross:

I remained, lost in oblivion;
My Face I reclined on my Beloved.
All ceased and I abandoned myself,
Leaving my cares
Forgotten among the lilies. (*The Collected works of St John of the Cross* 348)

Watt: If this be Reason there's Madness In't.

¹ Such, it seems, is the problem that has plagued those yearning to speak of the essential spirit of things, be they mystics or poets: the indefinite vocabulary in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the harassed tone in Yeats' *The Vision*, and the defeatist centre in Eliot's earlier work:

I am moved by *fancies* that are curled
Around these images, and cling:
The notion of *some* infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering *thing*. ("Preludes" 24-5, own emphasis).

² There exists an evocative connection between Beckett's work and the strange productions of, at least, two Russian writers of the preceding century. Both Ivan Goncharov (in *Oblomov*) and Gogol (in "Diary of a Madman" and "The Overcoat") muster a prose that is extremely reminiscent of

Beckett's. Gogol could well be describing Watt when he describes Akaky's attempt to express himself:

Akaky Akakievic spoke mainly in prepositions, adverbs, and resorted to parts of speech which had no meaning whatsoever. If the subject was particularly complicated he would even leave whole sentences unfinished, so that very often he would begin with: 'That is really exactly what...' and then forget to say anything more, convinced that he had said what he wanted to. (80-81)

Perhaps even more evocative is the biographical similarity that has both authors setting their tales in St. Petersburg (a kind of Russian Dublin that was for Gogol "a graveyard of dreams" [qtd. in *Introduction* 11]) and has Gogol destroying his work and starving himself to death and Goncharov as a paranoid recluse living out the last 22 years of his life in silence, in St. Petersburg.

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