"Eff it": Beckett and linguistic skepticism

Dirk Van Hulle (University of Antwerp, Belgium)

Ever since the scholastics (and actually even since Plato and Aristotle), philophy – according to Schopenhauer – has been a sustained abuse of general concepts and abstractions, by means of which one separated what was inseperable and united what was incompatible. Building on Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche similarly concluded that every concept is created by treating different phenomena as if they were the same. And Fritz Mauthner developed this linguistic skepticism into a full-blown critique of language, which Beckett carefully read. The article attempts to inventory the studies that have already been devoted to Beckett's attitude towards Mauthner, and to gauge the importance of the Austro-German tradition of linguistic skepticism (not just Mauthner but also Hofmannsthal, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein) for Beckett's poetics.

Samuel Beckett's complex attitude toward language is often linked to his reading of Fritz Mauthner's *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* [*Contributions to a Critique of Language*] and its possible impact on his writings. David Hesla's note at the end of *The Shape of Chaos* – "One of the howlers in this study may well be the omission of Fritz Mauthner"[1] – indicates an awareness in the early 1970s of the potential importance of Mauthner's *Beiträge* for Beckett's work. In the meantime, several attempts have been made to assess and reassess Beckett's relation to Mauthner's work on the basis of his typed notes preserved at Trinity College Dublin (TCD MS 10971/5), the excerpts in his so-called "Whoroscope" Notebook at the University of Reading (UoR MS 3000), and James Joyce's notes on Mauthner (in *Finnegans Wake* notebooks VI.B.41 and VI.B.46), made in

[1] David H. Hesla, *The Shape of Chaos: An Interpretation of the Art of Samuel Beckett* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 234 n. 18.

1938 when Beckett was helping Joyce.[2] In the last two decades of Samuel Beckett's life, critics such as John Pilling and Linda Ben-Zvi emphasized the considerable (though by no means exclusive or overriding) impact of Mauthner's writings, which was noticeable throughout Beckett's *oeuvre*: "For over fifty years – from the composition of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* in 1932 to the 1979 completion of *Company* – two Mauthner themes appear and reappear in Beckett's works: the impossibility of verification and the impossibility of proving this impossibility" (Ben-Zvi, "Mauthner for *Company*," 70). In 1976, John Pilling argued that "Mauthner in fact provided Beckett with the necessary ammunition to destroy all systems of thought whatever, even 'irrationalism'" (*Samuel Beckett*, 128). Thirty years

[2] Linda Ben-Zvi, "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language," *PMLA* 95 (1980): 183-200; and "Fritz Mauthner for *Company*," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 9 (1984): 65-88. Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983). Matthew Feldman, *Beckett's Books: A Cultural History of Samuel Beckett's 'Interwar Notes'* (New York and London: Continuum, 2006); and "Beckett and Popper, or, 'What Stink of Artifice': Some Notes on Methodology, Falsifiability, and Criticism in Beckett Studies," *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* 16 (2006b): 373-91. Julian Garforth, "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the *Whoroscope* Notebook: Beckett's Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache," in Dirk Van Hulle, ed., *Beckett the European* (Tallahassee, FL: Journal of Beckett Studies Books, 2005), 49-68. Edith Kern, *Existential Thought and Fictional Technique: Kierkegaard, Sartre, Beckett* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970). Geert Lernout, "James Joyce and Fritz Mauthner and Samuel Beckett," in Friedhelm Rathjen, ed., *In Principle, Beckett Is Joyce* (Edinburgh: Split Pea Press, 1994), 21-27. John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976); "From a (W)horoscope to *Murphy*," in John Pilling and Mary Bryden, eds., *The Ideal Core of the Onion* (Reading: Beckett International Foundation, 1992), 1-20; "Dates and Difficulties in Beckett's *Whoroscope* Notebook," in Dirk Van Hulle, ed., *Beckett the European*, op. cit., 39-48; Beckett and Mauthner Revisited," in S.E. Gontarski and Anthony Uhlmann, eds., *Beckett After Beckett* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 158-66; and *A Samuel Beckett Chronology* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). Jenny Skerl, "Fritz Mauthner's 'Critique of Language' in Samuel Beckett's *Watt*," *Contemporary Literature* 15/4 (1974): 474-87; and "Beckett and Mauthner's Influence: To the Editor," *PMLA* 95.5 (Oct. 1980): 877-78. Dirk Van Hulle, "Beckett – Mauthner – Zimmer – Joyce," *Joyce Studies Annual* 10 (1999): 143-83; and "'Out of Metaphor': Mauthner, Richards, and the Development of Wakese," in Dirk Van Hulle, ed., *James Joyce: The Study of Languages* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2002).

later, in his impressive analysis of the chronology of Beckett's notes on Mauthner, Pilling toned down his initial enthusiasm by suggesting that "perhaps […] it may not matter very much that Beckett encountered Mauthner at all" (*Chronology*, 165).

In order to interpret these changing views in Beckett studies, this essay will examine Beckett's works in the context of linguistic skepticism in general, comprising (a) Austrian and German "Sprachskepsis," with a focus on Hugo von Hofmannsthal's letter, "Ein Brief," written by the fictitious Lord Chandos to Francis Bacon; (b) Bacon's "idols" and empiricism as applied by Mauthner; (c) the cognitive functions of writing, as explored in *Pochade radiophonique / Rough for Radio II*, which contains the only explicit reference to Mauthner in Beckett's published works. This is undertaken in order (d) to revisit the debates on Mauthner in Beckett studies and (e) to reconsider the notions of epistemology and empiricism in criticism on Beckett's works.

A. Austrian and German "Sprachskepsis"

When, in a letter of 21 September 1937, Samuel Beckett told Thomas McGreevy that Schopenhauer "was one of the ones that mattered most" to him, he added that "his generalisation shows fewer cracks than most generalisations."[3] Most probably Beckett was referring to what the editor Julius Frauenstädt called Schopenhauer's generalization of the Will, which according to Beckett was more valuable than the generalizations Schopenhauer himself fulminated against. These generalizations were universals. Schopenhauer had claimed that, ever since the time of the scholastics (and actually even since Plato and Aristotle), philosophy had been a sustained abuse of general concepts and abstractions, by means of which one separated what was inseparable and united what was incompatible.[4]

[3] Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck, eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Vol. 1: 1929-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 550.

[4] "Aber freilich, das ist eben sein Kunststück, daß er durch solche Begriffe, in denen, vermöge der Abstraktion, als getrennt gedacht wird, was unzertrennlich, und als vereint, was unvereinbar ist, weit über die Anschauung, die ihnen den Ursprung gab, und damit über die Grenzen ihrer Anwendbarkeit hinausgeht zu einer ganz anderen Welt, als die ist, welche den Baustoff hergab, aber eben deshalb zu einer Welt von

Building on Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche came to several – often divergent – philosophical conclusions, but with regard to language he similarly stated in his essay "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinn" ["On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense"] that every concept is created by treating different phenomena as if they were the same.

> What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions – they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins.[5]

In this essay (written in 1873, but not published until 1896 in *Nietzsches Werke*, vol. X "Schriften und Entwürfe 1872 bis 1876," ed. Fritz Koegel, 161-179), Nietzsche defines a word as nothing but an auditory copy of a nerve stimulus (312). This nerve stimulus is transferred into an image; the image, in turn, is imitated in a sound (312). Nietzsche first presents this process as a succession of metaphors and subsequently gives this insight a

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Hirngespinsten"; Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (Zürcher Ausgabe: Werke in zehn Bänden, Band III. Zürich: Diogenes, 1977), II, 101. ("But, of course, this is just his trick. Through such concepts, in which, by virtue of abstraction, what is inseparable is thought as separated, and what cannot be united as united, he goes far beyond the perception that was their origin, and thus beyond the limits of their applicability, to an entirely different world from the one that supplied the building material, and on this very account to a world of chimeras and phantasms"; Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, trans. E. F. J. Payne [New York: Dover, 1969], 84.)

[5] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im Aussermoralischen Sinn," in Karl Schlechta, ed., *Werke in drei Bänden* III. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997), 314.
English translation available online: http://faculty.uml.edu/enelson/truth&lies.htm

crucial epistemological turn:

> It is this way with all of us concerning language; we believe that we know something about the things themselves when we speak of trees, colors, snow, and flowers; and yet we possess nothing but metaphors for things – metaphors which correspond in no way to the original entities. (312-13)

The role of the nerve stimuli, to which Nietzsche had drawn attention, was to become a crucial element in Fritz Mauthner's critique of language. Arguably the most important and innovative concept he coined in his *Beiträge* is that of "Zufallssinne," i.e. the contingency of our senses. Mauthner has recourse to Charles Darwin's theories to argue that the evolution of our senses is just the work of chance, which implies that the "laws" of nature have the status of a law only because human beings' senses have developed in more or less the same way.

The contingent development of the sense organs implies an equally contingent history of the world, or "Zufallsgeschichte."[6] This history does not lead to an ultimate goal. Instead, Mauthner's critique is explicitly dysteleological: the evolutionary history of human reason will not eventually lead to knowledge of the world (I, 690). Mauthner often refers to Darwin's notion of contingency, but he takes pains to point out that so-called "Darwinians" or "Social Darwinists" such as Herbert Spencer and Ernst Haeckel have abused the term "evolution" to reinstate the type of teleological explanation Darwin himself had rejected.[7] The word "evolution" therefore can only be salvaged if it is completely freed from these self-proclaimed Darwinians' notion of "Zweck" [purpose] and the connotations of "development" and "progress" (III, 586).

Mauthner's admiration for Darwin shows even in his writing style. The summary of Chapter IV ("Natural Selection") of *On the Origin of Species* is famously presented as a form of conditional reasoning:

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[6] Mauthner, Fritz. *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 3 vols, 3rd revised edition (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1923), I, 689.

[7] See Elizabeth Bredeck, *Metaphors of Knowledge: Language and Thought in Mauthner's Critique* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 42.

> *Summary of Chapter*.–**If** during the long course of ages and under varying conditions of life, organic beings vary at all in the several parts of their organisation, and I think this cannot be disputed; **if** there be, owing to the high geometrical powers of increase of each species, at some age, season, or year, a severe struggle for life, and this certainly cannot be disputed; **then** […] I think it would be a most extraordinary fact if no variation ever had occurred useful to each being's own welfare, in the same way as so many variations have occurred useful to man.[8]

In a passage in the second volume of the *Beiträge* Mauthner employs a similar rhetorical structure to summarize his accounting of the origin and history of human reasoning – with one difference, namely that the German word "wenn" can mean both "if" and "when," and this makes the construction less conditional:

> **When** we thus through one of the simplest sensations, namely perception of the colour blue, realised that human reason could come to take note of this perception by chance, **when** we feel with terrible resignation, that reason is therefore not a superhuman gift bestowed on humanity, that it is not an unchanging and eternal deity, that reason evolved in humanity and evolved into what it is, but that it also, however, could have evolved differently; **when** we recognise with a twitch as that of a wriggling worm that we are, not only in every step in our miserable existence, but also in what we hold to be the eternal and unalterably fixed fundamental laws of our intellectual being, merely a game played by the coincidence that is the world; **when** we recognise that our reason (which, after all, is language) can only be a coincidental reason, because it rests on coincidental senses, **then** we will only smile when we consider the argumentative passion with which anthropologists have laboured over questions of custom,

[8] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (London: John Murray, 1859), 126-27. Online version: http://darwin-online.org.uk

belief and other collective psychological 'facts'.[9]

Beckett excerpted this passage in the "Whoroscope" Notebook (UoR MS 3000, 55r-56v) in which he also made several notes on Darwin. The physical proximity of the notes on these two thinkers in the "Whoroscope" Notebook may be a coincidence, but there is also an intrinsic proximity in their respective views. Darwin's notion of contingency had made him more aware of (the dangers posed by) anthropocentrism. Once one accepts that a species can transmute into another one, the entire anthropocentric worldview collapses, as he noted in his notebooks.[10] Moreover, Darwin notes: "It is absurd to talk of one animal being higher than another. – We consider those, when the intellectual faculties [/] cerebral structure most developed, as highest. – A bee doubtless would when the instincts were" (189; notebook B.74). To a large extent, Mauthner's critique starts from an equally alert awareness of anthropomorphic tendencies, which Nietzsche had pointed out in his essay quoted above, and which the narrator in Beckett's *Watt* rejects as "an anthropomorphic insolence"[11] – a comment following the epistemological question posed with regard to Mr Knott: "Does he seek to know again, what is cold, what is heat?" (175).[12] The link with epistemology is equally direct in Mauthner's *Beiträge*: because of our "Zufallssinne" our power of reason is also contingent, a "Zufallsvernunft" (II, 689)

The first edition of the *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* was published in 1901 (volumes I, "Sprache und Psychologie," and II, "Zur Sprachwissenschaft") and 1902 (volume III, "Zur Grammatik und Logik"). In 1902, another landmark in terms of linguistic skepticism was published in the 18-19

[9] II, 689-90; translation in Matthew Feldman, *Beckett's Books*, 130; emphasis added.

[10] P. H. Barrett, P. J. Gautrey, S. Herbert, D. Kohn, S. Smith, eds., *Charles Darwin's Notebooks, 1836-1844: Geology, transmutation of species, metaphysical enquiries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 263; notebook C.76-77. Online version: http://darwin-online.org.uk

[11] Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, edited by C. J. Ackerley (London: Faber, 2009), 175.

[12] In 1980, Jennie Skerl already pointed out the many affinities between Mauthner's *Beiträge* and Beckett's *Watt*, which he started writing only a few years after reading Mauthner in 1938.

October issue of the Berlin newspaper *Der Tag*: Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "Ein Brief" – a fictitious letter allegedly written in 1603 by Philip, Lord Chandos, younger son of the Earl of Bath. The letter is preceded by a short, one-sentence introduction, explaining that Lord Chandos addressed this letter to Francis Bacon to apologize for his complete abandonment of creative activity, which Bacon had interpreted as a sign of mental stagnation. What happens in his mind, however, is anything but stagnant. Chandos struggles but hardly manages to explain the hubbub in his head. He sums up his condition by indicating that he has lost the ability to think or speak of anything coherently. This lost ability manifests itself particularly in abstract terms, which crumble in his mouth like moldy fungi ["modrige Pilze"].

The philosophical concerns voiced by Mauthner in 1901-02 were given literary shape in this letter, which became the precursor of other expressions of linguistic skepticism in Austrian literature, from Robert Musil's *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless* (1906) to the later experimental writings of Friederike Mayröcker and Elfriede Jelinek.[13] The linguistic concerns voiced in Hofmannsthal's letter also reverberate in his own works, with which Samuel Beckett was not unfamiliar. On 21 November 1936, Claudia Asher presented him with Hofmannsthal's *Der Tor und der Tod* (1894; first book publication 1900) and Beckett's personal library in his apartment in Paris contains a copy (one of only twenty copies in a manual impression) of "Das dichterische Element in unserer Zeit" – an excerpt from a lecture Hofmannsthal gave in Vienna in 1907, composed in Claudius-Fraktur by Axel Kaun at the printing office Haag-Drugulin (Leipzig) in the autumn of 1937.[14] The lecture contains a few remarks on the direct link be-

[13] Walter Eschenbacher, *Fritz Mauthner und die deutsche Literatur um 1900: Eine Untersuchung zur Sprachkrise der Jahrhundertwende* (Bern and Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1977).

[14] The opening sentence of the 1907 lecture "Der Dichter und diese Zeit" mentions both the notions of the "poetical element" and "our time" explicitly: "Man hat Ihnen angekündigt, daß ich zu Ihnen über den Dichter und diese Zeit sprechen will, über das Dasein des Dichters oder des dichterischen Elementes in dieser unserer Zeit, und manche Ankündigungen, höre ich, formulieren das Thema noch ernsthafter, indem sie von dem Problem des dichterischen Daseins in der Gegenwart sprechen" (Hugo von Hofmanns-

tween thought and language[15] that are fully in line with Mauthner's *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* and with "Ein Brief" – Hofmannsthal's own fictitious letter, which also relates to Anglophone cultural history, as it is addressed to Francis Bacon.

B. Bacon's Idols and Empiricism

Francis Bacon is known as the father of empiricism, which was Fritz Mauthner's methodological starting point. The guiding principle of empiricism – *nihil in intellectu nisi prius in sensu* – occurs frequently in the *Beiträge*, especially in the first volume (I,273, 324-25, 332-33). Toward the end of the last volume, Mauthner mentions the famous phrase again: "Nothing is knowledge in human thought that was not first in the senses. And nothing enters into the senses that is unable to assume – contingently – the form of these senses" (III, 639). Beckett was quite familiar with this phrase. He had already employed it in his 1929 essay on Joyce and jotted it down again in his "Whoroscope" Notebook among his notes on Sartre's *L'Imagination* (UoR MS 3000, 62r).

As Elizabeth Bredeck notes, Mauthner's interpretation of this empiricist dictum differs from previous interpretations in that (1) he rejects the notion of a clear boundary between physical and mental aspects of knowledge, suggesting instead a continuum; and (2) he undermines the notion of an epistemological foundation by asserting that our existing sense organs have not remained the same over time but continue to evolve, meaning that other sense organs are conceivable (Bredeck, 37-9). The parrot in *Malone meurt* ironically concludes in Latin: "[n]ihil in intellectu,"[16] thus commenting not only on the empirical principle, but also on the issue of multilingualism,

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thal, *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden. Reden und Aufsätze* 1–3. Vol. 1, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1979, 54-81; 54.)

[15] "Alles, was in einer Sprache geschrieben wird, und, wagen wir das Wort, alles, was in ihr gedacht wird, deszendiert von den Produkten der wenigen, die jemals mit dieser Sprache schöpferisch geschaltet haben," (63).

[16] Samuel Beckett, *Malone Dies*, edited by Peter Boxall (London: Faber, 2010), 44.

mentioned toward the end of Lord Chandos's letter: for unlike Belacqua, who announces in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* that he was going to write a book, Lord Chandos tells Bacon that he will *not* write a book, neither in English nor in Latin, because the language in which he might be able to write and think is neither Latin nor English.

Another reason why Bacon is an appropriate addressee of the Chandos letter is the former's theory of idols, developed in *Novum Organum* [*The New Organon* (1620)]. Bacon discerns four types: "Idols of the Tribe" (*idola tribus*), which are common to the human species; "Idols of the Den" (*idola specus*), which are peculiar to an individual; "Idols of the Marketplace" (*idola fori*), originating in the misuse of language; and "Idols of the Theater" (*idola theatri*), which result from an abuse of authority. In aphorism 43 of Book One, Bacon explains how the idols "formed by the intercourse and association of men with each other" can become an obstacle for reasoning, since "the ill and unfit choice of words wonderfully obstructs the understanding." As a result, "words plainly force and overrule the understanding, and throw all into confusion, and lead men away into numberless empty controversies and idle fancies."[17] In aphorisms 59 and 60, Bacon stresses that the Idols of the Marketplace are the most troublesome of all:

> For men believe that their reason governs words; but it is also true that words react on the understanding; and this it is that has rendered philosophy and the sciences sophistical and inactive. Now words, being commonly framed and applied according to the capacity of the vulgar, follow those lines of division which are most obvious to the vulgar understanding. And whenever an understanding of greater acuteness or a more diligent observation would alter those lines to suit the true divisions of nature, words stand in the way and resist the change. (I, 59)

[17] Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* [1620], trans. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath, in *The Works*, Vol. VIII (Boston: Taggard and Thompson, 1863), I, 4. Avalaible online at http://www.constitution.org/bacon/nov_org.htm

Bacon's idea that language can actually be an "obstacle"[18] to understanding still reverberated in the nineteenth century. As Mauthner observed, the point of most nineteenth-century linguistic skeptics was that we can only think what language allows us to think.[19] If there is any truth to the thesis that language governs cognition by determining the distinctions and categories we make, an important part in this process is played by metaphors. Mauthner interpreted this phenomenon as a confirmation of his epistemological skepticism, based on the limits imposed upon our cognition by language. But this is also a matter of perspective. If language really has such a significant impact on our thought processes, it might also be possible to use language (for instance by means of multilingualism, or by introducing neologisms and portmanteau words as in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*) in order to broaden our cognitive faculties.

C. Cognitive Functions of Writing

Samuel Beckett was intrigued by these cognitive faculties and seems to have been particularly interested in the mental processes involved in the act of creative writing. His works, especially his radio plays, often thematize these metacognitive reflections, and it is probably not a coincidence that the only explicit reference to Mauthner in his published works occurs in one of these very radio plays. Unlike his empiricist predecessors, Mauthner suggested a gradual continuum between physical and mental aspects of knowl-

[18] Mauthner articulates the idea of language as an obstacle to human communication and employs the image of an ocean to express this double aspect of language – suggesting a thin line between poetry and seasickness: "Wie der Ozean zwischen den Kontinenten, so bewegt sich die Sprache zwischen den einzelnen Menschen. Der Ozean verbindet die Länder, so sagt man, weil ab und zu ein Schiff herüber- und hinüberfährt und landet, wenn es nicht vorher versunken ist. Das Wasser trennt, und nur die Flutwelle, die von fremden Gewalten emporgehoben wird, schlägt bald da, bald dort an das fremde Gestade und wirft Tang und Kies heraus. Nur das Gemeine trägt so die Sprache von einem zum anderen. Mitten inne, wenn es rauscht und stürmt und hohler Gischt zum Himmel spritzt, wohnen fern von allen Menschenländern Poesie und Seekrankheit dicht beisammen" (I, 40).

[19] "Wir können nur denken, was die Sprache uns gestattet, was die Sprache und ihr individueller Gebrauch uns denken lässt" (II, 533).

edge instead of a clear boundary. This also implies a gradual transition from what is supposed to be "unconscious" to what is called "consciousness." The adaptation of the sense organs to the outside world – and according to Mauthner, to some extent, the adaptation of the outside world to our sense organs as well – bears a strong resemblance to the instinctive activity of breathing (I, 189), an activity that continues even while we sleep. This analogy between sleeping/waking and unconscious/conscious mental activity had a long tradition, which Beckett may have first encountered in Windelband as ascribed to Leibniz. In the transition from sleeping (unconscious) thoughts to wide-awake (conscious) ratiocination, the act of writing has been presented as an effective catalyst. For instance, the German experimental physicist and writer Georg Christoph Lichtenberg noted in his so-called "Sudelbücher" that the act of writing often wakes up or stirs something inside us which, until then, we had not clearly recognized.[20]

With his metaphor of a sleeping system inside every human being – which can be woken by means of writing – Lichtenberg expressed a view that was predominant over the last few centuries. Until recently, neuroscientists assumed that neural activity when at rest could be compared to a somnolent state. However, recent developments in cognitive neuroscience and neuro-imaging have revealed that even when a human being is doing nothing at all, a huge amount of meaningful activity is going "on" in the brain. These "stirrings still," in Beckettian terms, are called the brain's default mode; they take place in a network of brain regions that are at work even when a person is not focused upon the outside world. [21]

[20] "Zu Aufweckung des in jedem Menschen schlafenden Systems ist das schreiben vortrefflich, und jeder der je geschrieben hat, wird gefunden haben, dass schreiben immer etwas erweckt, was man vorher nicht deutlich erkannte, ob es gleich in uns lag" ["Writing is excellent for waking up the sleeping system in every person, and anyone who has ever written will have found that writing always awakens something that one did not clearly recognize before, even though it lay within us just the same"] (cited in Hanspeter Ortner, *Schreibe und Denken* [Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000], 74).

[21] "The concept of a default mode of brain function arose out of a focused need to explain the appearance of activity decreases in functional neuroimaging data when the control state was passive visual fixation or eyes closed resting. The problem was particularly compelling because these activity decreases were remarkably consistent across a wide variety of task conditions. Using PET, we determined that these activity

For a long time, notably since Descartes' idea of the pineal gland as the physical place where the mind interacts with the body, the *communis opinio* was that consciousness took place in a privileged spot in the brain. In contrast to this Cartesian dichotomy between what is pre-conscious and what is conscious, Daniel C. Dennett suggested that there is no such place that suggests a sharp boundary; there are only various sensory inputs and various interpretations of these inputs. The succession of interpretations is comparable to the multiple drafts of a narrative. According to this "multiple drafts model," conscious experience is a process; it occurs over time, and there is no clear boundary or exact moment when a conscious experience is precisely separated from all other mental processing. Moreover, "no central experiencer confers a durable stamp of approval on any particular draft."[22]

In Beckett's radio play featuring Mauthner's name, this process becomes thematic and each of the four characters (Dick, Fox, Stenographer, Animator) can be interpreted as a cognitive function or "rôle"[23] in the creative process. The fictionalized creative process employed in *Rough for Radio II* is preceded by a "report on yesterday's results" (which includes the oft-cited reference to Mauthner) and by a rereading of "yesterday's close" (61). Whether Dick is seen as the Schopenhauerian "Will" or the young Beckett's "itch to make,"[24] he is only one part of the mental "stirrings" that constitute the act(s) of composition. Fox is not necessarily asleep; he is said to have "gone off" (66); and while he is "off" the words he has uttered are amended by Stenographer at the Animator's instigation (68-9). As Beckett

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decreases did not arise from activations in the resting state. Hence, their presence implied the existence of a default mode. While the unique constellation of brain areas provoking this analysis has come to be known as the default system, all areas of the brain have a high level of organized default functional activity"; see Marcus E. Raichle, Abraham Z. Snyder, "A default mode of brain function: a brief history of an evolving idea," *Neuroimage* 37.4 (2007): 1083–90.

[22] Daniel C. Dennett and Marcel Kinsbourne, "Response to Glicksohn and Salter," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 18.4 (1995): 810-11.

[23] Samuel Beckett, *All That Fall and Other Plays for Radio and Screen*, preface and notes by Everett Frost (London: Faber, 2009), 67.

[24] Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 90.

indicates, the agency of textual change is much more complicated than what used to be referred to as a singular "authorial intention." Animator may be extremely authoritarian, but he does not know exactly what he is after: "Of course we do not know, any more than you, what exactly it is we are after, what sign or set of words. But since you have failed so far to let it escape you, it is not by harking on the same old themes that you are likely to succeed, that would astonish me" (66). Mauthner is referred to in the radio play as the author who had shown that the least word dropped in solitude "*may be it*."[25] By underlining these three words, Stenographer creates the false impression of accuracy and precision, whereas the stressed suggestion of finding "*it*" only emphasizes the extreme vagueness of the "exhortations" (60). Yet despite Mauthner being presented in *Rough for Theatre II* as a connoisseur in the matter, he did not know exactly what he was after either. He *did* know, however, that it was not the word "silence," and suggested the "not-word" ("Nichtwort") instead, because "silence is still a word" (I, 83).

D. Dupe of Expression

"Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent," was Ludwig Wittgenstein's final word in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, after having indicated in paragraph 6.45: "The feeling that the world is a limited whole is the mystical feeling."[26] In many ways Mauthner's *Beiträge* has more affinities with the later Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* than with this earlier Wittgenstein.[27] The Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* claimed: "The name means the object. The object is its meaning" ["Der Name bedeutet den Gegenstand. Der Gegenstand ist seine Bedeutung" (3.203)]; whereas the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* de-

[25] "The least word let fall in solitude and thereby in danger, as Mauthner has shown, of being no longer needed, *may be it*' – three words underlined" (60; emphasis in original)

[26] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus; Tagebücher 1914-1916; Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Werkausgabe Band 1.(Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006), 6.25. Trans. C. K. Ogden, 1922. Hypertext edition by Jonathan Laventhol at http://www.kfs.org/~jonathan/witt/tlph.html

[27] Matthew Feldman, *Beckett's Books*, 123; Joachim Kühn, *Gescheiterte Sprachkritik: Fritz Mauthners Leben und Werk* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975); Gershon Weiler, *Mauthner's 'Critique of Language'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

fined the notion of "meaning" quite differently: "For a *large* class of cases – though not for all – in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language" ["Die Bedeutung eines Wortes ist sein Gebrauch in der Sprache" (*Philosophische Untersuchungen* §43)]. The latter definition is close to Mauthner's idea that language is among or between people ["zwischen den Menschen" (I, 19)]. Language is not an object or a tool; it merely is its use: "Die Sprache ist aber kein Gegenstand des Gebrauchs (...), sie ist gar nichts anderes als ihr Gebrauch. Sprache ist Sprachgebrauch" (Language is not a utensil (…), it is nothing but its use. Language is language usage; I, 24). Wittgenstein's language games may also be seen to be prefigured in Mauthner's *Beiträge*, when he compares language to a party game ("Gesellschaftsspiel der Sprache"): "Die Sprache ist nur ein Scheinwert wie eine Spielregel, die auch umso zwingender wird, je mehr Mitspieler sich ihr unterwerfen" (Language is only a pseudovalue, like the rule of a game, which also becomes more compelling as more people subject themselves to it; I, 25). As Beckett told John Fletcher in 1961, he only started reading Wittgenstein "within the last two years."[28] The books by and about Wittgenstein in Beckett's personal library indicate that he must have been aware of Wittgenstein's notion of language games, but also of the earlier notion of the mystical, as expressed in entry 6.44 of the *Tractatus*: '"Nicht *wie* die Welt ist, ist das Mystische, sondern *dass* sie ist" ("Not *how* the world is, is the mystical, but *that* it is").

Mauthner had tried to "suppress" any tendency toward the mystical, no matter how much he liked some of the leading European mystics and their stammering eloquence (III, 617). He was well aware of the fundamental paradox underpinning his magnum opus – that he needed to make such an extensive appeal to language (more than two thousand pages) in order to critique it (I, 1). But, in and of itself, this sheer quantitative aspect of his work is already an indication of his philosophical stance: whereas a mystic is ultimately reduced to silence, Mauthner's critique comes closer to a pragmatist's approach, suggesting that the conversation needs to go on and disapproving of the way mystics posit some single correct view, which they feel can never be attained. Elizabeth Bredeck refers to Nelson Goodman's

[28] John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1964), 87-8.

alternative, which is not "a shush, but a chatter" (Bredeck, 50).[29]

"I chatter too much" (67), says the Animator in *Rough for Radio II*, to which Stenographer replies: "Come, come, sir, don't say that, it is part of your rôle, as animator" (67). In the same capacity, the Unnamable describes his "rôle" as follows: "I have to speak, whatever that means. Having nothing to say, no words but the words of others, I have to speak. No one compels me to."[30] In other words, the Unnamable is his own Animator. Unlike the young Beckett (the Beckett who wrote the German letter to Axel Kaun in July 1937), the Unnamable does not expect to find anything behind the veil: "there is nothing, nothing to discover, nothing to recover" (25). And yet he has to speak, because otherwise he will be the dupe of his expression: "Not to have been a dupe, that will have been my best possession, my best deed, to have been a dupe, wishing I wasn't, thinking I wasn't, knowing I was, not being a dupe of not being a dupe" (25).

This notion of being a "dupe" has a prehistory: in 1926 Francis Ponge had published his *Douze petits écrits*, which opens with a short apology and ends with the explanation that "la parole me garde mieux que le silence. Ma tête de mort paraîtra dupe de son expression. Cela n'arrivait pas à Yorick quand il parlait"[31] ("speech guards me better than silence. My skull will turn out to be the dupe of its expression. This did not happen to Yorick when he was talking). Yorick's skull was the dupe of his own expression – the skull's unintentional grin. This was not the case as long as the fellow of infinite jest could talk. His skull's "expression" is merely a fossilized silence. To speak is the only way not to become the dupe of this unwitting expression.

E. Epistemology and Empiricism Revisited

In the meantime, Beckett scholars have been studying the relationship between Beckett and Mauthner for several decades. Mauthner's "influence" was the topic of critical exchanges in the "Forum" of the *PMLA* in the 1980s. In October 1980, Jennie Skerl (author of "Fritz Mauthner's 'Critique of Language' in Samuel Beckett's *Watt*") wrote a letter to the editor of

[29] Nelson Goodman, *Problems and Projects* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), 31.
[30] Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, edited by Steven Connor (London: Faber, 2010), 25.
[31] Francis Ponge, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Gallimard Pléiade, 1999), I, 3.

PMLA, reacting to Linda Ben-Zvi's article "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language," in which Ben-Zvi – according to Skerl – "fails to point out that Beckett first becomes a 'Mauthnerian' artist in *Watt*" ("To the Editor," 877). In her reply, Linda Ben-Zvi objected to the term "Mauthnerian," "implying as it does a derivative position to Beckett and a definite oversimplification of Mauthner." According to Ben-Zvi, Beckett himself warned against this kind of "pigeonholing" and "Skerl falls into just such a critical trap" ("Ben-Zvi Replies," 879).

A quarter of a century later, research on Mauthner stood at the center of another methodological debate in Beckett studies. Having recourse to Karl Popper, Matthew Feldman argued for a form of "empirical scholarship" based on the criteria of "falsifiability" and "empirical corroboration" ("Beckett and Popper," 376ff.). A polemic with Garin Dowd ensued,[32] in which the latter expressed concern regarding the potentially narrowing effect of a rigidly applied empirical methodology. The debate has been invigorating and thought-provoking. In particular, it has increased critical awareness of both the advantages and disadvantages of empiricism in literary studies. Material documents can be very useful for literary interpretation, but the empirical data they contain often require interpretation in their own right. For instance, a recent examination of the books in Beckett's personal library from his apartment in Paris has revealed that it not only contains a copy of the three-volume *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, but that hundreds of pages feature pencil lines in the margins: 340 marked pages in volume I; 217 pages in volume II; 164 pages in volume III. These data are certain to be of interest to Beckett studies, but questions remain. The mere fact that these volumes are among the books in Beckett's personal library does not necessarily imply that the remarkably straight pencil marks they contain indicate Beckett's interest in these passages. There is no explicit indication or conclusive evidence to corroborate the conjecture that the markings were made by Beckett. Unless more evidence is found, one cannot exclude the possibility that the marks were made by someone else. A comparison of the marked passages with the typed Mauthner notes in Trinity College, Dublin and the excerpts in the "Whoroscope Notebook" (UoR MS 3000) reveals that half of the excerpts correspond to twelve marked pages; the other half corresponds to eleven unmarked pages.

[32] See *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 20 (2008), 375-99.

If the twelve marked pages reinforce the likelihood that Beckett was the author of the marginal lines, the eleven unmarked pages diminish this plausibility with almost equal (quantitative) force. Even though the data are quite abundant, the archival record still shows lacunae.

Obviously these lacunae are not a reason to shun an empirical approach, for any trace of the writing may be of potential use to corroborate interpretations of Beckett's works. But (especially in the context of the contingency of our sense organs; Mauthner's "Zufallssinne"; and his philosophical approach to empiricism as one of several divergent views on epistemology) the uncertainties and gaps in the archival record call for a careful approach to the interpretation of writing traces and for the discreet use of critical rhetoric, mindful of Francis Bacon's idols and Fritz Mauthner's critique of language. Within Beckett studies, the author's interest in Mauthner's theory of language and epistemology continues to be a benchmark test case in a constant effort to assess our knowledge/ignorance of Beckett's writings, and to keep the methodological conversation open. The last word about Mauthner and Beckett will possibly never be spoken, but the research is as gripping as Beckett's sustained search for what he called the "ineffable departure," concluding that there was "Nothing left but try –"

F. "eff it."[33]

[33] Cited in Knowlson, 697.