"Speak of Time, without Flinching… Treat of Space with... the Same Easy Grace":[1] Beckett, Bergson and the Philosophy of Space

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It has long been accepted that Henri Bergson was a significant figure in the formation of Beckett's thought. However, the nature and extent of the latter's debt to Bergson has never been established on a secure footing. This contribution to Beckett/Philosophy *attempts to do just that, arguing that the commonly assumed influence of Bergson in* Proust *is hard to uphold. The temporocentrism that characterises that essay has its source not in Bergson but in Schopenhauer. Instead, there seems to be a brief but intense flirtation with Bergson's philosophy in 1930-31, but thereafter, Beckett's work differs from Bergson's in one crucial aspect: his recognition that there can be a spatial entity (here called place) other than geometrical space – the only form of spatiality that Bergson can conceive. Beckett comes to view place as something "lived," in a similar manner to Bergson's "lived time" or durée, and this brings him – belatedly – closer to Proust than to Bergson.*

Bergson was rare among Beckett's philosophers in that he was one of the few that the author appears to have read first hand, rather than read *about* in synopses; he was also rare in being the only twentieth-century philosopher that Beckett read until his brush with Sartre's and Mauthner's work in the spring of 1938.[2] There are a number of explicit references to Bergson in Beckett's writings – particularly in the so-called "grey canon" – which, in

[1] Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, edited by Steven Connor (London: Faber, 2010), 108.

[2] See Matthew Feldman, "Beckett, Sartre and Phenomenology", *Limit(e) Beckett*, zero issue (2010), http://www.limitebeckett.paris-sorbonne.fr/zero/feldman.html; accessed 06/12/2011.

consequence of a renewed interest in this corpus in recent years, have been referred to more often.[3] However, although the latter's work has been compared to the philosophy of Henri Bergson since the earliest Anglophone studies,[4] there has never been an attempt to move beyond mere comparison, to establish the relationship on a firm empirical footing. In recent years a number of studies take Beckett's reading of Bergson to date from before his 1930 monograph *Proust*, something which would be highly significant, since it would mean that Bergson was Beckett's first philosopher, perhaps read even before Descartes and Schopenhauer. However, the available evidence indicates that Beckett's reading of Bergson came later than is normally assumed. The aim here, then, is to examine the extent of Bergson's influence, how Bergsonian imagery appears – but also, crucially, how it does not appear – in Beckett's early works and beyond. This contribution to *Beckett/Philosophy* will argue that Beckett's postwar work is fundamentally opposed to Bergson's: Beckett conceives of identity as bound up with space in a way that would have been simply inconceivable to Bergson. However, it will be argued that Bergson – philosopher of time, enemy of all things spatial – is a major contributory factor in the development of the keen understanding of space that arises in the twentieth century, one that is particularly noticeable in Beckett's postwar work.

No Time for Space

One of the problems for scholars considering the influence of Bergson on Beckett's work is that it is not known when Beckett first read Bergson. Yet a critical commonplace holds that he did so before he wrote *Proust*, and

[3] However, Bergson is a surprising omission from many works; Richard Lane's *Beckett and Philosophy*, for example, makes no reference: Richard Lane, ed., *Beckett and Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

[4] The oldest study is Ruby Cohn, *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962); a more recent work in the comparative vein is Shane Weller, *Beckett, Literature and the Ethics of Alterity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); see in particular Chapter 3, *passim*.

that the latter's influence can be discerned in that monograph.[5] The source of this claim appears to be John Pilling's *Beckett Before Godot*,[6] which argues that Beckett "had certainly read [Bergson's] *Creative Evolution*" before writing *Proust* (39). However, Pilling provides no evidence for this. It is true that both during his time as an undergraduate at Trinity College, Dublin (1923-27), and his time as an exchange lecturer at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris (1928-30), Beckett may have been exposed to Bergson's thought. To be sure, Brigitte Le Juez claims that Beckett read Proust in his third year at Trinity.[7] Given the dominance of Bergsonian readings in the early days of Proust scholarship – a trend that Proust himself lamented[8] – it might be fair to assume that any tuition at Trinity adopted this perspective. Certainly, Suzanne Guerlac argues that French literary criticism was generally Bergsonian in outlook,[9] and this critical perspective may have reached Trinity through Beckett's tutor and mentor, Thomas Rudmose-Brown, described in a preface to one of his works as having "anticipated the direction of much contemporary French and English criticism."[10] However, Rud-

[5] Anthony Uhlmann says that "Beckett was well aware of the links that had been made between Bergson and Proust as well as the different understandings of time each developed": Anthony Uhlmann, "Beckett and Philosophy," in Linda Ben-Zvi and Angela Moorjani, eds. *Beckett at 100: Revolving it All* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 85-6. Gontarski writes that "The Bergson connection in *Proust* is not often acknowledged by Beckett": S. E. Gontarski, "Recovering Beckett's Bergsonism," in Ben-Zvi and Moorjani, 96. Ulrika Maude claims that "Beckett's early interest in Bergson's ideas is evidenced … in *Proust*": Ulrika Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 175.

[6] Shane Weller at least cites Pilling as his source. See Shane Weller, *A Taste for the Negative: Beckett and Nihilism* (Leeds: Legenda, 2005), 35.

[7] Brigitte Le Juez, *Beckett Before Beckett*, translated by Ros Schwartz (London: Souvenir Press, 2009), 12.

[8] In an interview with Élie-Joseph Bois which appeared in *Les Temps* on 13 November 1913. See Jacques Bersani, *Les Critiques de notre temps et Proust* (Paris: Garnier, 1974), 66.

[9] Suzanne Guerlac, *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press), 183.

[10] Cited in Samuel Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume 1: 1929-1940*, edited by Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 46 n. 7.

mose-Brown taught poetry, and according to John Pilling, the Trinity College Yearbook does not show a course offered on Proust while Beckett was a student there. Nevertheless, under the tutelage of Rudmose-Brown, Beckett did at one stage plan to write a thesis on a school of French poetry called Unanimism, which Anthony Uhlmann claims derived its ideas from Bergson (84). Beckett got as far as writing a research essay on the movement in the Summer of 1928, and according to Beckett's biographer, James Knowlson, "looked … closely into the theories and ideals" of the school.[11] However, the connection with Bergson is extremely distant and it is unlikely that Beckett would have got much Bergson from his preparatory reading.

This leaves the École Normale. According to Guerlac, the all-pervasiveness of Bergsonian thought was only just beginning to be shaken off at the time of Beckett's stay in Paris. Regarding the ubiquity of the philosopher's ideas, Guerlac cites François Mauriac, for whom Bergson was "the philosopher we listened to," and the Binet report of 1908 on the teaching of philosophy in schools, which concluded that "Bergson's ideas prevailed over all others among both faculty and students."[12] Even as late as 1930-31 at the École Normale, Merleau-Ponty felt that Bergsonism offered an alternative to the Neo-Kantian academic philosophy of his tutor, Léon Brunschvicg.[13] As part of this French intellectual culture, Beckett's friends Jean Beaufret and Alfred Péron would undoubtedly have been well-versed in Bergsonism. Péron shared a study with Sartre and his classmate Paul Nizan,[14] and Guerlac describes the former (one year above Merleau-Ponty at the École Normale) as

[11] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 76.

[12] Guerlac, 11-12. For accounts of Bergson's place in early twentieth-century French thought see: Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-garde* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); A. E. Pilkington, *Bergson and His Influence: A Reassessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); and Romeo Arbour, *Bergson et les lettres françaises* (Paris: José Corti, 1955).

[13] See James Schmidt, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Between Phenomenology and Structuralism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 17.

[14] C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski, eds., *The Faber Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to His Works, Life and Thought* (London: Faber, 2006), 431.

"steeped in Bergson."[15] This presumably also applies to Beaufret, who like Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, was a *normalien*. This intellectual culture may explain why Beaufret and "Alfy" (Péron) laugh when Beckett tells them that he is reading Schopenhauer in July 1930 (*Letters*, 33).

Péron was at Trinity as exchange *lecteur* from the École Normale from 1926-28, and according to Knowlson, Beckett shared many talks with him (Knowlson, 154). The content of these talks may be reflected in the character Chas's discourse on Bergson in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (written 1931-32). Chas was partly based on Péron, and if an autobiographical element to *Dream* can be assumed, as Knowlson suggests, conversations with Péron availed Beckett of many key Bergsonian concepts. As the protagonist, Belacqua, apparently stands back and listens, Chas holds forth on Bergson to a group of attending students:

> "The difference, then I say, between Bergson and Einstein, the essential difference, is the difference between a philosopher and a sociologist […] And if it is the smart thing nowadays to speak of Bergson as a bit of a cod … it is that the trend of our modern vulgarity is from the object … and the idea to sense … and REASON."[16]

This not only shows an awareness of the Einstein-Bergson controversy of the early 1920s, but also knowledge of the move away from Bergson in French thought.[17] However, as evidence that Beckett encountered Bergson's work before *Proust*, the passage is inconclusive: on the one hand, the novel appears to relate events from the late 1920s, but on the other hand, it was written after *Proust*, making it difficult to say whether the ideas reflect Beckett's

[15] Guerlac, 5 n.15. Dermot Moran notes that the first philosophical writer that Sartre read was Bergson during 1923-24, his year of *khâgne* (the final year of preparation for École Normale): Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2004), 364.

[16] Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, edited by Eoin O'Brien and Edith Fournier (Dublin: Black Cat, 1992), 212.

[17] Bergson had a public disagreement with Einstein over the notion of time in the latter's theory of relativity. See Guerlac, 13.

knowledge of Bergson at the earlier period or, as is more likely, the later.

So far, then, it has been impossible to demonstrate conclusively that Beckett read Bergson before he wrote *Proust*. Nevertheless, S. E. Gontarski and Shane Weller, amongst others, have quoted passages from that work which they consider exhibit a Bergsonian influence (see Gontarski, "Recovering," 96, and Weller, *Negative*, 35). The difficulty with this argument, though, lies in separating Proust's thought from Bergson's – in identifying whether an idea comes to Beckett from Proust or from Bergson. Despite his protestations, Proust had considerable contact with Bergson's thought, and there are clear parallels between the two *oeuvres*. After graduating in law in March 1893, and after acting as best man at Bergson's wedding,[18] Proust attended his lectures in Paris.[19] As Guerlac points out, both writers describe two forms of memory, and these bear more than a passing resemblance. For Bergson, one of these forms of memory is identified with habit and "remains dependent upon our will [*volonté*]," while the other is more "capricious."[20] This corresponds to Proust's differentiation between "voluntary" and "involuntary" memory, on which Beckett writes in *Proust*.[21]

In order, then, to demonstrate that what we see is the influence of Bergson on *Proust* rather than of Bergson on Proust, it would need to be demonstrated that Beckett read *À la recherche du temps perdu* in a way that was more Bergsonian than Proustian – to show, in other words, that a dependence on Bergson led Beckett to a distorted or erroneous reading. John Pilling has pointed out some key points at which Beckett over-reads his own interests into Proust's work, and indeed Beckett later admitted as much,[22] but it is also possible to discern an interest that Pilling or other commentators have not identified: Beckett's reading of the novel is temporocentrist in the extreme, almost to the total exclusion of space, something which seems

[18] Guerlac, 9.

[19] See Sheila Stern, *Landmarks of World Literature: Marcel Proust: Swann's Way* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), "Chronology," unnumbered pages.

[20] Cited in Guerlac, 125.

[21] *Proust*, 29 ff. See also18: "The laws of memory are subject to the more general laws of habit."

[22] Beckett admitted to Pilling, "[p]erhaps I overstated Proust's pessimism a little." John Pilling, "Beckett's 'Proust,'" *Journal of Beckett Studies* 1 (Winter 1976), 24 ff.

consistent with the influence of Bergson, but which is inconsistent with certain key passages in Proust's novel. In order to elaborate this difference it is necessary to summarize Bergson's thought briefly.

This was characterized by its concern with a concrete rather than a theorized conception of time. As Guerlac summarizes,

> Bergson [argues] that science gives us the world mediated through symbols, which deform our sense of reality to the extent that they immobilize what we experience as occurring in temporal flow. He [argues] that ordinary language only reinforces the worldview established by the formal languages of mathematics, and all of these modes of symbolic representation interfere with our ability to grasp the temporal nature of reality. They crush our sense of duration. (Guerlac, 19)

Bergson suggests that the habit (and error) of Western metaphysics is to consider time statically, measured out as by a clock instead of as "pure duration," which is the form that, he argues, consciousness assumes when it is not seen as a succession, with past states separated from present, and set alongside them. Laying conscious states out to analysis in this way is to commit the fallacy of "spatializing" them, which destroys the pure experience of consciousness. By contrast, Bergson's emphasis is on inner experience or intuition, things that cannot be measured, and can only be experience ever anew; they cannot be made identical to other things by wrapping them in language, or in an unchanging framework. Reality must be thought of as "mutual penetration," not as isolated states of succession. Duration should be seen as "ever the same and ever changing" as if we had "no idea of space."[23]

Bergson's emphasis on temporality and his exclusion of space helps to identify a rupture between his thought and Proust's. Though it may seem strange to suggest that a reading of a novel called *In Search of Lost Time* could ever be too concerned with the temporal dimension, there is a long tradition of space-focused studies of the novel. One of the earliest of these is

[23] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, translated by F. L. Pogson (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2001), 100-1, 125; see also Chapter II, *passim*.

José Ortega y Gasset's "Le Temps, la distance et la forme chez Marcel Proust," written in 1923 as a contribution to the obituary tribute to Proust in the *Nouvelle revue française*. There, Ortega y Gasset states at the outset: "What is involved [in the novel] is a new way of dealing with time and establishing a spatial dimension."[24] Some pages later, having discussed this temporal aspect, he writes, "[s]o much for what he [Proust] does with time. But more fundamental still, and more astounding, is his inventiveness where spatial relationships are concerned."[25] Presumably, what Ortega y Gasset finds astounding is for an author who comes out of a French tradition dominated by Bergsonian ideas to write about space. Other studies continuing to mine the rich vein of spatiality in the *Recherche* are Georges Poulet's *L'Espace Proustien* (1963) and, more recently, Jeff Malpas' *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (1999).[26]

By contrast, Beckett's temporocentrism is everywhere apparent in his account of Proust's novel. An initial indication can be got from his copy of the novel, held at the University of Reading. John Pilling has pointed out that Beckett made few if any marginal annotations to the sections most concerned with space: "Place Names: The Name" and "Place Names: The Place" ("Beckett's 'Proust,'" 16 n.21). In the monograph itself, the concern with time to the exclusion of space manifests itself in the opening paragraph: Beckett sets out to "examine in the first place that double-headed monster of damnation and salvation – Time" (*Proust*, 11). To be sure, Proust himself often elevates time over space. The ending of the novel, which Beckett quotes, is a fitting example:

> I would describe men, even at the risk of giving them the appearance of monstrous beings, as occupying in Time a much greater place than that so sparingly conceded to them in Space, a place indeed extended beyond measure, because, like giants plunged in the

[24] José Ortega y Gasset, "Le Temps, la distance et la forme chez Marcel Proust," in Leighton Hodson, ed., *Marcel Proust: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1989), 222.

[25] Ibid., 224.

[26] Georges Poulet, *L'Espace Proustien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963); Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

> years, they touch at once those periods of their lives separated by so many days – so far apart in Time. (cited in *Proust*, 12)

That time is subservient to space is also suggested in a letter written by Proust in 1912: "There is a plane geometry and a geometry of space. And so for me the novel is not only plane psychology but psychology in space and time"; though both space and time are evoked here, in the next sentence the former is eclipsed by the latter: "That invisible substance, time, I try to isolate."[27]

However, there are times in the novel when space is at least as important as time, if not more so, but Proust appears to overlook these passages in the ending to the novel, perhaps as a result of the prolonged and piecemeal composition of *À la recherche du temps perdu*.[28] In another passage (and one which Beckett quotes), the recovery of both time and space is crucial in the recovery of a loved one:

> We imagine that the object of our desire is a being that can be laid down before us, enclosed within a body. Alas! it is *the extension of that being to all the points of space and time* that it has occupied and will occupy. If we do not possess contact with such a place and with such an hour we do not possess that being. But we cannot touch all these points. (cited in *Proust*, 58; emphasis added)

The object of desire must be pursued in time and space, not time alone. However, Beckett refers to the passage – and to three others over pages 57 and 58 of his *Proust* – as an illustration of "the Goddess of Time." In his reading, the spatial element is absent: "No object prolonged *in this temporal dimension* tolerates possession, meaning by possession total possession, only to be achieved by the complete identification of object and subject" (57; emphasis

[27] Cited in Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 50.

[28] This aspect is something Beckett discussed four years later in "Proust in Pieces:" Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and Dramatic Fragment*, edited by Ruby Cohn (London: Calder, 1983), 64-65.

added).[29] This "complete identification," Beckett has already told us, is frustrated by time, and time alone: "The aspirations of yesterday were valid for yesterday's ego, not for to-day's" (*Proust*, 13). He goes on to say that in a (hypothetical) moment in which the object of desire is gained, "the time-state of attainment eliminates so accurately the time-state of aspiration" (14). By contrast, for Proust, space is key in the pursuit and attainment (if such a thing is even possible) of the object of desire, and this is all the more true of the most important object of desire in the *Recherche*: the self.[30] As early as the fifth page of the novel, awaking disorientated in the middle of the night, the narrator says, "not knowing where I was, I could not even be sure at first who I was."[31] This is as clear a statement as we could want: identity is predicated on knowledge of one's position.[32]

This points, then, to something of a misreading on Beckett's part – and a misreading that appears to be in keeping with a Bergsonian perspective. So are we to conclude that Beckett's study of the *Recherche* is more Bergsonian than Proustian, by virtue of its being concerned more with time than with space, and that Bergson therefore influenced the composition of *Proust*? Plausible as this reading may seem, the evidence is overwhelmingly against it. Let us examine the facts as they are known.

First of all, the evidence that is usually given that Beckett used Bergson as the philosophical scaffold for *Proust* is Rachel Burrows' notes, taken when she was one of Beckett's students at Trinity in 1930-31. Uhlmann and Gontarski both argue along these lines.[33] However, Pilling's *A Beckett Chronology* states that *Proust* was submitted to Chatto and Windus on 17

[29] A few lines after the passage on page 57, and before the three passages from *À la recherche du temps perdu*, "time" becomes "time and space:" Beckett speaks of "[a]ll that is active, all that is enveloped in time and space:" in his account, at best there is no difference between time and space; at worst space is subordinate.

[30] This is something that Pilling notes, arguing that in Proust's work Beckett found an interest in a "radically new" subject, "what constitutes man's essential being" (Pilling "Beckett's 'Proust'," 14).

[31] Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, *Volume 1*, translated by C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), 5.

[32] Oddly, none of the readings cited above which have explored the spatial element in Proust's work mention this passage.

[33] See Uhlmann (85-6) and Gontarski (96).

September 1930, but that Beckett did not begin lecturing until 15 October.[34] This does not exclude the possibility of Bergson's influence on *Proust*, but it does discount the main evidence given. Much more convincing is the evidence *against* such an influence. If Beckett were influenced by Bergsonian ideas, it might be expected that his marginal notes in his copy of the *Recherche* would reflect this. As Pilling shows, these offer an insight into Beckett's developing interpretation of the novel, quoting even Kant at one point, but they make no mention of Bergson ("Beckett's 'Proust'," 14). Furthermore, while Beckett's letters to Thomas MacGreevy over the Summer of 1930 offer a running commentary on his (lack of) progress on *Proust*, and make reference to his first reading of Schopenhauer, and to the fact that he is studying the German specifically in order to write the monograph (*Letters*, 26-46, *passim*), there is no mention of a similar recourse to Bergson. More revealing, though, is the letter that Beckett wrote on 14 October 1930 to Charles Prentice, senior partner at Chatto and Windus, the publishing house that had commissioned Beckett's *Proust*, confessing to having written the conclusion to Proust in a hurry, and asking:

> Would you let me add 5 or 6 pages to the last 9? Or would that make it too long? I would like to develop the parallel with Dostoievski and separate Proust's intuitivism from Bergson's. (*Letters*, 52)

The key word here is "develop": it is the parallel with Dostoyevsky, and not that with Bergson, which is to be elaborated *further* – i.e., more than it already is. By contrast, Bergson will seemingly become an awkward appendage, though this awkwardness is itself significant, testifying as will be seen below to a change in Beckett's perspectives.

Added to these considerations is the fact that Arnaud Dandieu, in his *Marcel Proust: sa révélation psychologique* – which, in his 1977 thesis, "Beckett as a Critic of Joyce and Proust," Terence McQueeny shows was

[34] John Pilling, *A Beckett Chronology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 27. See *Letters*, 48 n.1.

Beckett's "chief secondary source"[35] for *Proust* – called a Bergsonian reading of Proust one of the key errors of previous analyses of the *Recherche.* In his avant-propos, from which Beckett "borrows" heavily, as McQueeny demonstrates (94 ff), Dandieu mocks "les esprits 'serieux'" [the serious minds] who see Proust as "nourri de Bergson" [fed on Bergson].[36] A few pages later Dandieu argues that the first eighty pages of the second volume of *Le Temps retrouvé* present a clear exposition of Proust's theoretical grounding, which should "couper court à tous les malentendus" [eliminate all misunderstanding]; specifically, those who see Proust as working under the influence of Bergson are committing a "méprise intellectualiste" [an intellectualist error], and will have to "rectifier leur erreur" [correct their mistake] (Dandieu, 14).

More convincing still is the idea that the temporocentrism of *Proust* is derived not from Bergson but from other sources. This is apparent on page 63 of Proust, where, as McQueeny shows, Beckett paraphrases Dandieu closely (see McQueeny, 94) – with a subtle but significant difference: Dandieu, in some brief remarks on Proust's treatment of time, uses (despite his caution against Bergsonian readings of Proust) the phrase "durée concrète" [real duration] (Dandieu, 20-1), which cannot but evoke Bergson. However, in Beckett's gloss on this passage, the Bergsonian element is absent; more, what sounds most Bergsonian is related to Dostoevsky:

> Proust's chronology is extremely difficult to follow, the succession of events spasmodic, and his characters and themes, although they seem to obey an almost insane inward necessity, are presented and developed with a fine Dostoievskian contempt for the vulgarity of a plausible concatenation. (*Proust*, 62)

But the most damning evidence against the Bergsonian reading of Proust is that temporocentrism is a thoroughly Schopenhauerian attitude. In the present volume, Erik Tonning argues that "Beckett's analysis of 'the

[35] Terence McQueeny, "Beckett as a Critic of Joyce and Proust," Ph.D Thesis, University of North Carolina, 1977, 93.

[36] Arnaud Dandieu, *Marcel Proust: sa révélation psychologique* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1930), 9.

Time cancer' … draws heavily on Schopenhauer."[37] This is supported by McQueeny's thesis, which shows the extent of the references to Schopenhauer (100 ff), tracing the derivation of certain key passages in *Proust* from Schopenhauer's work. In particular, he shows that Beckett summarizes Schopenhauer's views on music (100), and relies heavily on these in the concluding pages of *Proust*, taking from Schopenhauer the key pessimistic element that separates his (Beckett's) reading from Dandieu's. Crucially, Schopenhauer's theory of music is temporocentrist: McQueeny points out that "Schopenhauer holds that musical impressions are perceived through the form of time alone to the exclusion of space" (105-6); moreover, it is by spatializing the musical experience that the purity of that experience is lost: "Swann … fails to appreciate the Sonata in itself, spatializes it by allowing the musical phrase to become the *entremetteuse* which links him with Odette, and by this reduction fails to achieve the will-less state of contemplation which provides a momentary escape from the sufferings of the world as will" (106). In the closing lines of the monograph, in his reading of this same passage, Beckett writes that Swann "identifies the 'little phrase' of the Sonata with Odette, spatializes what is extraspatial" (*Proust*, 72). It is clear how close the imagery here is to Bergson – who also writes on music – but McQueeny convincingly shows that the source is nonetheless Schopenhauer. We must therefore be skeptical when Gontarski claims that "[t]he passage does indeed summarize Schopenhauer, but it is a gloss on Bergsonian *durée* as well" ("Recovering," 98).

When we try to discern the longer-term influence of Bergson on Beckett's thought, a similar problem to the one we have encountered in *Proust* presents itself: that of demonstrating that the images and concepts in Beckett's work that seem Bergsonian are in fact just that, and not derived from another source. Gontarski sees the influence of Bergson extending into Beckett's drama of the 1950s, affecting particularly the treatment of movement in the postwar works. However, it seems more likely that the images he identifies come from Beckett's and Bergson's shared interest in the Pre-Socratics. For Beckett's part, references in the novel *Molloy* (written in French in 1947) and the play *Endgame* (written in French between 1954 and

[37] Erik Tonning, "'I am not reading philosophy': Beckett and Schopenhauer," 25.

1957) amongst others, attest to an enduring fascinating with these philosophers.[38] But this is no less the case for Bergson, who was profoundly influenced from the outset by early Greek thought. He lectured on the Pre-Socratics at Clermont-Ferrand in the mid-1880s, and later wrote a Latin thesis entitled "Quid Aristoteles de loco senserit," which rejected the Eleatic view of space in favor of the Aristotelian.[39] Connor J. Chambers argues that Bergson's philosophy began in reflections upon the paradoxes of Zeno, and indeed Bergson refers to the Eleatics constantly, seeing a parallel between nineteenth-century positivism's distortion of reality through scientific representation, and the similar distortion in Zeno's paradoxes, whose paradoxical element arises precisely out of a confusion of representation with reality.[40]

Again, though, we need to provide specific evidence that any of the apparent overlapping between Beckett's thought and Bergson's is just that, and not ideas derived from Beckett's reading about the Pre-Socratics. Gontarski cites a passage which he argues stands as an example of the former. Discussing the famous passage in *Endgame* (written 1954-57, published 1957), in which the protagonist, Hamm, insists that his companion and servant, Clov, wheel him into the exact center of the stage, then loses his temper when he is not convinced that these instructions have been carried out to the letter, Gontarski insists on a Bergsonian reading, even in the face of Beckett's pronouncements to the contrary: "Beckett may have focussed on geometry and called Hamm's preoccupation [i.e., to be in the exact center of the stage] Pythagorean in his 1967 staging of the play, but it suggests a

[38] See Matthew Feldman, "Returning to Beckett Returning to the Presocratics, or, 'All their balls about being and existing,'" *Genetic Joyce Studies* 6 (Spring 2006); accessed online on 06/12/2011 at http://www.antwerpjamesjoycecenter.com/GJS6/GJS6Feldman.htm

[39] Translated into French as "*L'Idée de lieu chez Aristote*." At the time of writing the thesis has not been translated into English. Incidentally, none other than John Burnet, one of Beckett's sources on Greek philosophy, reviewed the book of the thesis in 1892: J. Burnet, Review of H. Bergson "Quid Aristoteles de loco senserit," *The Classical Review*, 6 (1892), 322.

[40] See Connor J. Chambers, "Zeno of Elea and Bergson's Neglected Thesis," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Volume 12, Number 1 (January 1974), 63-76.

Bergsonian epistemology as well."[41] But Beckett had insisted that the imagery was derived from Pre-Socratic thought – albeit that of a different philosopher – on an earlier occasion. In response to a letter from Alan Schneider of 21 November 1957, inquiring as to whether Beckett had remembered the identity of the "old Greek" evoked by Hamm, Beckett makes it clear that the philosophical framework of the play comes from the Pre-Socratics:

> I can't find my notes on the pre-Socratics. The arguments of the Heap and the Bald Head (which hair falling produces baldness) were used by all the Sophists and I think have been variously attributed to one or the other. They disprove the reality of mass in the same way and by means of the same fallacy as the arguments of the Arrow and Achilles and the Tortoise, invented a century earlier by Zeno the Eleatic, disprove the reality of movement. The leading Sophist, against whom Plato wrote his Dialogue, was Protagoras and he is probably the "old Greek" whose name Hamm can't remember. One purpose of the image throughout the play is to suggest the impossibility logically, i.e. eristically, of the "thing" ever coming to an end.[42]

Hamm's efforts to place himself in the exact center of the stage thus suffer from the fate mentioned in the last sentence of Beckett's letter: the task can never be ended. It is thus the Pre-Socratics, not Bergson, that provide the imagery here.

It seems, then, that Beckett is unlikely to have used Bergson as the scaffolding of *Proust* – or indeed *Endgame*. It remains to be established precisely when Beckett actually encountered the philosopher's work, and the

[41] S. E. Gontarski, "There is No Outside the Image: Bergson on Movement," paper given at the Samuel Beckett: Debts and Legacies seminar series, Oxford, 11 June 2010; accessed online on 06/12/2011 at: http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2010/07/stan-gontarski-there-is-no-outside-the-image-bergson-on-movement/

[42] Samuel Beckett to Alan Schneider, in Maurice Harmon, ed., *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 23. See also Feldman, "Returning to Beckett."

influence that this had on his own work. All that is known is that, as Rachel Burrows' notes show, Beckett mentioned Bergson often in his lectures at Trinity in 1930-31, comparing writers such as Proust, Gide, Rimbaud and Dostoevsky to the philosopher.[43] This seems to suggest that the earliest known mention of Bergson – in the aforementioned letter to Prentice – came about as a direct result of Beckett's first encounter with the philosopher's work in the original, as he began to do his preparatory reading for his lectures after the completion of *Proust*. It seems plausible that, as a result of this encounter, Beckett then – and only then – became interested in the differences between Proust and Bergson, and wished to add – rather than develop – this point in proofs of his monograph on Proust. Once he started to read Bergson in preparation for his teaching, he may well have realized that there are other parallels that he had overlooked – possibly something along the line of the notes that Rachel Burrows took from Beckett's lectures:

> Detached from Bergson's conception of time but interested in this opposition – instinct & conscious intelligence. Bergson insists on absolute time; Proust denies it. For Proust it's [i.e., time is] a function of too many things -- local but not absolute reality. (MIC 60)

If Burrows' notes cannot be deployed, as they usually are, as evidence of Beckett's use of Bergsonian ideas in *Proust*, they are nevertheless significant in that they indicate that Beckett saw Bergson as a useful tool in the analysis of literature. For a brief period over the 1930-31 academic year, it seems that he found the relevance of Bergson everywhere. It may be that a Bergsonian approach in his lectures was recommended to him by the Department at Trinity, and he had little control over the syllabus he taught. But this would not explain Beckett's wholesale and seemingly wholehearted adoption of Bergsonian ideas. In addition to the new approach to Proust that Bergson gave him, and the frequent references in the lectures – all to explain key points of a writer's thought – Beckett inserted a small but significant element of Bergson into the Trinity College Dublin Modern Language Society's play *Le*

[43] See Rachel Burrows' notes: Library of Trinity College Dublin, MIC 60.

Kid, a spoof of Corneille's *Le Cid*, performed early in January 1931.

Knowlson reports that "the importance given to time" in *Le Kid* was Beckett's main contribution; it was his idea to take an alarm clock on stage, which he carried with him, and which interrupted (by design) one of his main speeches. The play also included the character of Old Father Time (Knowlson, 124). These temporal elements would not on their own be particularly interesting, were it not for the fact that, while the program described the *Le Kid* as "a Cornelian nightmare," Beckett described it to his friend as "Corneille & Bergson" (*Letters*, 68). Despite the charade that by all accounts the performance turned into, Beckett appears to have had a serious purpose. As Knowlson points out,

> The classical unity of time, according to which all of the play's action occurs … within a time span of twenty-four hours, was shown being observed literally by a "silent figure seated on a ladder and smoking a pipe [playing] Einsteinian tricks with time" […] *Le Kid* was, as Pelorson himself recognised … an intellectual *canular*, a product of the École Normale kind of mind: clever, avant-garde and rather Surrealistic, but with a mixture of the effete, the pretentious, and the puerile. (124-25)

The production suggests classical drama cannot reflect a post-Einsteinian world, but Beckett's contribution perhaps hints at a belief that Bergsonian ideas can revive drama for the twentieth century.

What seems to be the case, then, is that for a brief period Beckett turns constantly to Bergson as a support for his ideas.[44] He seems to have taken a lot more from Bergson than the "straws, flotsam, etc., names, dates, births

[44] However, what cannot be established is which Bergson texts Beckett read. Pilling suggests *Creative Evolution*. In any case, it is a characteristic of Bergson's work that its key themes remain relatively constant, meaning that the temporocentrism of *Time and Free Will* is still present in *Creative Evolution* (see Guerlac, 6). The latter work's idea of "continual elaboration of the absolutely new," for example, pervades Chapter III of *Time and Free Will*.

and deaths" that he took from other philosophers.[45] Moreover, this connection with Bergson may have been lasting. Pilling argues that at the time of composing *Murphy* in 1935 and 1936, Beckett had not forgotten what he had told his students at Trinity about Bergson.[46] Certainly, in 1938 he wrote to MacGreevy saying that the latter's essay on Yeats would help people who "in the phrase of Bergson can't be happy until they have 'solidified the flowing'" (*Letters*, 599). Later still, John Calder reports having conversations with Beckett sometime between the mid-1950s and his death in 1989, on, amongst other things, Bergson, which "went on all night."[47] However, Beckett's brief but intense flirtation with Bergsonism seems to be over by the time of the composition of Beckett's first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. Begun in 1931, but written mostly over the summer of 1932, this novel contains the aforementioned passage in which the character Chas describes Bergson as a "bit of a cod." To be sure, the joke could be on those for whom speaking of the philosopher in this way is "the smart thing," but Beckett's growing interest in spatial matters – notably the representation of landscape in painting[48] – from this point in his career on is indicative of a turn away from the thought of Bergson.

Time for Space

Bergson's treatment of space is extremely troubled. He insists that *durée* be considered pure consciousness, without any contact with the outside world: "the fact is there is no point of contact between the unextended [*durée*] and the extended [space]" (Bergson, 70). But he struggles to explain the flow of conscious impressions without a space that would allow things

[45] Samuel Beckett, "German Diary," Notebook 4, 15 January 1937; cited in Knowlson, 244. See also, Samuel Beckett, "Philosophy Notes," Library of Trinity College Dublin, MIC 10967.

[46] John Pilling, "A Critique of Aesthetic Judgment: Beckett's 'Dissonance of Ends and Means,'" in S. E. Gontarski, ed., *A Companion to Samuel Beckett* (Chichester and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 63.

[47] John Calder, *The Philosophy of Samuel Beckett* (London: Calder, 2001), 109.

[48] See Beckett's famous comments on landscape painting in the so-called "Cézanne letters" of September 1934 (*Letters*, 222-23, 227).

to happen: events must *take place* somewhere. Bergson's constant use of spatial imagery, though, suggests that *durée* cannot do without space; Bergson simply finds it impossible to keep space out of his discussion. In a passage which cannot but recall Beckett's 1938 phrase "solidify the flowing," Bergson says that "[w]e instinctively tend to solidify our impressions in order to express them in language" (130); a page earlier he has explicitly equated solidification with homogeneous space.[49] Bergson cannot conceive any other spatialization but the geometric. He cannot see that, just as "clock time" differs from "lived time," there may also be something we might call "map space" which differs from what Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls "*l'espace vécu*" or "*l'espace anthropologique*" [lived space].[50] Part of the problem is that Bergson has no word for this second type of space. Although again and again he needs to refer to a space other than geometrical, spatialized space, he uses the same term "space" for both: within a few pages he speaks of "an objective cause situated in space," and of things existing "[o]utside of me, in space"; he says, "[t]here is a real space," then cryptically asserts that "[s]pace contains only parts of space" (106, 108, 110, 111).

By contrast, Beckett's work is profoundly concerned with space – or rather, with what he more often calls "place," perhaps in order to avoid the problem of terminology that dogs Bergson's work. While there are a number of instances in the letters and journalism of the 1930s of Beckett speaking of place alongside Bergsonian terminology,[51] the concern with place is most

[49] Fluid inner states are first isolated then "solidified in homogeneous space" (Bergson, 129).

[50] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 340. It is called "l'espace agissant" [lively space] by André Masson, in an article which Beckett and Duthuit discussed in the second of the *Three Dialogues* (*Proust*, 112): André Masson, "Divagations sur l'espace" [Divagations on space], *Les Temps modernes* 44 (1949), 962. Contemporary phenomenologists call this alternative space "lived place" or simply "place:" see Malpas, *Place and Experience*, and Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Alternatively, the British anthropologist, Tim Ingold calls this dimension the environment: Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000). In the last analysis, though, Casey says "the exact choice of term does not matter" (212).

[51] See, for example, the "Cézanne letters," and the 1936 review of Jack B. Yeats' *The Amaranthers*: in the latter, Beckett defends the work as "art, not horology" (Samuel

obvious apparent in the postwar fiction. Written in 1964, *All Strange Away*, in its opening lines, retrospectively makes what seems like a clear statement of the ubiquity of place in Beckett's postwar fiction:

> A place, that again. Never another question. A place, then someone in it, that again. Crawl out of the frowsy deathbed and drag it to a place to die in. Out of the door and down the road in the old hat and coat *like after the war*, no, not that again.[52]

The phrase "like after the war" can be read as a reference to Beckett's postwar work: the image of crawling out of a frowsy deathbed and dragging it to a place to die in is the basic narrative trajectory of many of the works of this period, both the most famous ones – the "Trilogy" of *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* (written in French 1947-48) and *The Unnamable* (written in French 1949-50) – as well as lesser known texts such as *Four Novellas* and *Mercier and Camier* (written in French 1945-46) and *Texts for Nothing* (written in French 1951). This suggests that, in these works too, there was "never another question" than place. However, this concern with place does not take the form of a simple rejection of geometric space in the style of Bergson, or *Proust*, but sees space as bound up with the sense of self, as in Proust's work. Unable to gain a command of their environment, Beckett's characters are unable to gain a sense of self.

Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, edited by Ruby Cohn [London: Calder, 1983], 89). So far so Bergsonian, but as the review progresses the temporal imagery is often blended with the spatial: "The moments are not separate, but concur in a single process: analytical imagination. Not first the old slum coming down, then the new slum going up, but in a single act slum seen as it is and other" (89). The description of moments as "a single process," with the slum of the past as tangible as the slum of the present seems very close to passages throughout *Time and Free Will*: at one point in that work Bergson says that *durée* "refrains from separating its present state from its former state … but forms both … into an organic whole" (100), and something similar seems to be happening here, the old and new slum melted together. However, the subtle but key difference here is that Beckett is speaking of *places* melted together, as well as moments.

[52] Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing and Other Shorter Prose, 1950-1976*, edited by Mark Nixon (London: Faber, 2010), 73); emphasis added.

This is most apparent in *Texts for Nothing*, which announces a concern to establish a robust sense of self: "With perseverance I'd get at me in the end" (26). Crucially, this knowledge of self is to be "got at" by recourse to place: the narrator will list all the "tried and trusty places" – "those places *where there was a chance of my being*, where once I used to lurk" (29, emphasis added): the sea, mountains, the forest, the city, the plain, various rooms (5). But when the narrator is tempted to locate his self in those places – in the South Eastern Railway Terminus, or if not then in a two-stander urinal on the corner of Rue d'Assas – he berates himself, "tut there I am far again from that terminus and its pretty neo-Doric colonnade, and far from that heap of flesh, rind, bones and bristles waiting to depart it knows not where [...] that lump is no longer me and should be made elsewhere" (30, 46, 30-1). His attempt to locate self in place yields nothing, and he must resign himself to "reporting me missing and giving up" (29). The "high hopes of a habitable earth" (28) that he holds ultimately come to nothing.

It is striking just how close this project of seeking the self in the places it has occupied is to Proust's. At one point, the narrator of *Texts for Nothing* describes his very cells as dispersed across space: "What can have become […] of the tissues I was, I can see them no more, feel them no more, flaunting and fluttering all about and inside me, pah they must be still on their old prowl somewhere, passing themselves off as me" (26). As noted above, Proust writes, in a passage which Beckett quotes, that beings are extended in the time and space which they have occupied, meaning that "If we do not possess contact with such a place and with such an hour we do not possess that being. But we cannot touch all these points" (cited in *Proust*, 58). Echoing this, the narrator of *Texts for Nothing* asks, "[h]ow is it that nothing is ever here and now?", and, again: "What elsewhere can there be to this infinite here?" (25, 26). In a highly significant move, the passage from Proust's *Recherche* that Beckett earlier read from a temporocentrist perspective is transformed in *Texts for Nothing* into spatial terms.

There is still another key instance where Beckett's earlier temporocentrism leads him to overlook a conception of place in Proust's work, one close to that which will appear in his own postwar work. Mentioned above is the passage in which Proust says that knowledge of *where one is* is vital to a sense of *who one is*. If we look at the passage in its context, we see that

it supplies a key image for Beckett's later work.

> when I woke in the middle of the night, not knowing where I was, I could not even be sure at first who I was; I had only the most rudimentary sense of existence, such as may lurk and flicker in the depths of an animal's consciousness; I was more destitute than the cave-dweller; but then the memory – not yet of the place in which I was, but of various other places where I had lived and might now very possibly be – would come like a rope let down from heaven to draw me up out of the abyss of not-being. (*Remembrance*, 5-6)

The image of waking without knowing at first to what, and groping to find out where (and thereby who) one is appears in "Ceiling" (written in 1981). In a passage which has clear echoes of the above excerpt, the narrator has

> No knowledge of where gone from. Nor of how. Nor of whom. None of whence come to. Partly to. Nor of how. Nor of whom. None of anything. Save dimly of having come to. Partly to. With dread of being again.[53]

In both *Remembrance of Things Past* and "Ceiling," a lack of knowledge about one's location is bound up with a lack of knowledge about one's identity: command of place seems to go hand-in-hand with command of the environment. Significantly, this passage is not marked in Beckett's copy of the novel – indicating that Beckett's later work comes to a more nuanced understanding of Proust's thought than that presented in his 1930 monograph. Importantly this is an understanding that moves him far away from any sympathy with Bergson. Indeed, it moves him towards the Proustian pole of the dichotomy that Burrows noted: away from Bergson's insistence on absolute time, toward *local* – emplaced – reality. It seems that just as where geometry was concerned, Beckett was a Protagorean before he was Bergsonian, where place was concerned, he was more Proustian than Bergsonian.

[53] Samuel Beckett, *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho, Stirrings Still*, edited by Dirk Van Hulle (London: Faber, 2009), 129.