



---

Thomas, Martin. "Schopenhauer, Beckett, and the Impoverishment of Knowledge."  
*Evental Aesthetics* 2, no. 4 (2014): 66-91.

#### ABSTRACT

In this paper I will explore Samuel Beckett's significant, yet overlooked, contribution to the study of asceticism and ascetic thought. I will present a reading of Beckett's seminal play, *Waiting for Godot*, so as to illustrate the way in which Beckett utilizes and develops numerous aspects of Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophical system. As I understand it, the Beckettian asceticism manifested in the tragedies of Beckett's middle period not only utilizes aspects of Schopenhauerian asceticism, it also incorporates broader, non-ascetic aspects of Schopenhauerian thought – namely that of *boredom*, and the aesthetic theory of the *dynamically sublime*. In contrast to Schopenhauerian asceticism, which focuses on bodily deprivation, Beckettian asceticism impoverishes not only the body but also the mind. Through the medium of tragedy, Beckett presents a unique ascetic method that centres on impoverishing the mind by preventing the formation of useful, or actionable, representations.

#### KEYWORDS

Arthur Schopenhauer, Samuel Beckett, asceticism, tragedy, the dynamically sublime

# Schopenhauer, Beckett, and the Impoverishment of Knowledge

Martin Thomas

In the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation* the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer lists the thinkers and historical figures with whom he believes one should become acquainted so as to better understand the practice of “quietism” or “the giving up of all willing.”<sup>1</sup> This list of ascetics includes St Francis of Assisi, Blaise Pascal, the Buddha Sakya Muni, Meister Eckhart, and Madame de Guyon. A revised list of quietist thinkers, one that incorporates the quietists who lived and worked after the death of Schopenhauer, would be incomplete if it did not include the name of the Irish playwright, Samuel Beckett. In this paper I argue that the tragic works of Samuel Beckett should be listed alongside the works of Schopenhauer as some of the most significant contributions to the study of asceticism as ethical practice.

This, however, is not the way that Beckett's work is presently understood in the philosophical realm. Unlike other disciplines that engage with the work of Samuel Beckett, philosophy has yet to consider the implications of Beckett's now well documented sustained engagement with Schopenhauerian thought, particularly the life-denying aspects of that thought.<sup>2</sup> Instead, Beckett's work is presented as a manifestation of Nietzschean and post-Nietzschean aesthetics.<sup>3</sup>

There are essentially three premises that fundamentally shape the present understanding of Beckettian tragedy in the field of philosophy. The first premise appertains to the role of art. To date, Beckettian prose and tragedy has been positioned as an ultimately life-affirming endeavour. For thinkers such as Alain Badiou, "All of Beckett's genius tends towards affirmation."<sup>4</sup> The second premise, which builds upon the first, is that the import of Beckettian art is its refusal to give in to "nihilism," here understood as the attribution of "meaning" to existence:

Solitude, emptiness, nothingness, meaninglessness, silence – these are not the givens of Beckett's characters, but their goal, their new heroic undertaking .... These states are, rather, "infinite tasks."<sup>5</sup>

In the post-Nietzschean reading of Beckettian aesthetics, Beckett refuses to ascribe meaning to life. This refusal promotes an acceptance of life, including its negative aspects. The third premise is that Beckettian art promotes a saving alterity. To quote Nussbaum, "Beckett's antinarrative is too many-sided, too ironic, to leave us with any simple comfort."<sup>6</sup> Beckettian tragedy, then, affirms life through its refusal to present the audience with material that allows it to say for certain that something either is or is not the case.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to this line of thinking, in the present work I will explore Beckett's significant, yet overlooked, contribution to the study of asceticism and ascetic thought. In particular, I will present a reading of Beckett's seminal play, *Waiting for Godot*, as a means of illustrating the ways in which Beckett utilizes and develops numerous aspects of Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophical system. As I understand it, the asceticism which is manifested in the tragedies of Beckett's middle period not only utilizes aspects of Schopenhauerian asceticism but also incorporates non-ascetic aspects of Schopenhauerian thought – namely the latter's thinking

on *boredom* and his aesthetics of the *dynamically sublime* – in the generation of an ascetic method that focuses on the deprivation of habitual, painless knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

The characters on Beckett's stage enact a unique form of asceticism, one which deprives them not only of physical comfort, but also of the comfort of habitual knowledge and certainty. Whilst both Schopenhauerian and Beckettian asceticism promotes the impoverishment of the body in the form of self-mortification, celibacy, etc., the Beckettian ascetic also promotes poverty of thought by refusing to generate actionable representations either in space and time or in the form of concepts.

As well as this, Schopenhauer and Beckett envisage different roles for ascetic practice insofar as it may initiate as well as sustain a state of quietism. Whereas Schopenhauer understands asceticism as a process of deprivation that one consciously undertakes once one appreciates the nature of existence – and for Schopenhauer, existence is suffering born of striving – Beckett employs ascetic practice as a means to provide the will, the part of oneself that strives, with knowledge of ubiquitous suffering. That is, the Beckettian intellect understands the ceaselessly striving will or will-to-life as the cause of suffering, and uses ascetic practice to convey this knowledge to the will. In short, whereas Schopenhauer argues that knowledge leads to asceticism, Beckett argues that asceticism leads to knowledge.

## • Schopenhauerian Asceticism •

For Schopenhauer asceticism “is denial of the will-to-life,” the “intentional mortification of one's own will.”<sup>9</sup> In an introduction to Schopenhauer, Janaway writes:

In “denial of the will to life,” one turns against the particular manifestation of the will to life found in oneself, which means turning against the body, and against one's own individuality. Thus one ceases, as much as possible, to strive for one's own egoistic ends, ceases to avoid suffering or to seek pleasure, ceases to desire propagation of the species, or any sexual gratification – in short, one looks down on that

willing part of nature which one is, and withdraws from one's identification with it.<sup>10</sup>

The will-to-life is central to Schopenhauerian ontology. In simple terms, the will is the inner nature of human beings and the "inner nature of all things in the world," "the kernel of reality itself."<sup>11</sup> The fundamental nature of the will, the way it manifests itself, is as *blind, ceaseless striving*.<sup>12</sup> However, in addition to being will, human beings also possess "intellect." In the Schopenhauerian conception of the self, the intellect is the "servant," "a mere slave and bondman of the will," the role of which is to generate representations of the world which permit the willing subject to act in a manner that ensures the survival of the species.<sup>13</sup>

By generating the intellect that in turn generates the world as representation, Schopenhauer argues that the will, which would otherwise exist in darkness, has "kindled a light for itself."<sup>14</sup> The intellect also has the ability to present the will with a different kind of knowledge, that is, knowledge of its true, suffering, nature.<sup>15</sup> In Schopenhauerian thought, human beings have the unique capacity to counteract the part of the self that blindly strives, and can thus bring suffering to a halt.

For Schopenhauer, the purpose of strict ascetic practice is not to break or quiet the will – for as I will discuss shortly, the will can only be broken by the *knowledge* that all that exists is essentially one, undifferentiated entity – but rather to ensure that the will, which has already been quieted by such knowledge, does not spark back to life and assert itself once more.<sup>16</sup> Asceticism, then, can be understood as an attempt to *maintain* the will's quieted state by depriving oneself of the means to strive; thus ascetic practice takes such forms as chastity, poverty, fasting, self-castigation, and self-mortification, which are all methods designed to inhibit the will's ability to spark back to life by depriving it of the motivation to do so.<sup>17</sup> To better understand the role that asceticism plays in quieting the will, one must first understand how the will is broken.

## • The Role of Knowledge •

For Schopenhauer only *knowledge* can lead to resignation and the desire to practice asceticism: “The will itself cannot be abolished by anything except knowledge.”<sup>18</sup> Specifically, the intellect must provide the willing aspect of the self with a particular kind of knowledge: namely “the most perfect knowledge of its own nature”;<sup>19</sup> that is, one becomes conscious “of the identity of one’s own inner being with that of all things, or with the kernel of the world.”<sup>20</sup> Schopenhauer describes the awareness that all is one as the state of “mysticism.”

Typically, knowledge serves to motivate the will.<sup>21</sup> When the intellect represents the world in terms of the principle of sufficient reason – that is, in terms of space, time, and causality – the will understands itself as an individual in a world which is populated by innumerable individuals who are in constant competition with one another for limited resources. When the intellect represents the world in terms of the principle of sufficient reason it presents all objects as potential motives for action.<sup>22</sup> In short, the intellect affirms the will, and by doing so encourages suffering in the form of personal anxiety and the infliction of harm upon others. In contrast, “knowledge of the whole becomes the quieter of all and every willing.”<sup>23</sup> By representing the world as “one,” the intellect provides a disincentive for action. As Singh states:

A person who is not totally immersed in egoism and is able to see through the *principium individuationis* [principle of individuation] realizes his kinship with everything that exists around him. The whole world seems as close to him as his own person seems to the egoist. Endowed with a holistic knowledge, and overwhelmed with empathy with all living things, such a person finds the nature of this world and its sufferings unacceptable, and no longer wishes to chase the motives of his selfish projects through endless willing.<sup>24</sup>

Schopenhauer argues that there are two “paths” which lead the individual to such an understanding of life.

## • Two Paths to Asceticism •

Schopenhauer contends that the knowledge that phenomenal life is essentially one, undifferentiated entity dawns on a person in one of two ways: through an awareness of the suffering of others or through personally felt suffering.<sup>25</sup>

The first path to breaking the will, the path taken by the “magnanimous person” or “saint,” is described as a “rare exception.”<sup>26</sup> Such a person appropriates the sufferings of the whole world,<sup>27</sup> and thus leads a life of virtue: understanding *intuitively* that all is one, the virtuous or compassionate person attempts at all times to alleviate the suffering of others, for he or she understands this suffering as his or her own:

If that veil of Maya, the *principium individuationis*, is lifted from the eyes of a man to such an extent that he no longer makes the egoistical distinction between himself and the person of others, but takes as much interest in the suffering of other individuals as in his own ... then it follows automatically that such a man, recognizing in all beings his own true and innermost self, must also regard the endless sufferings of all that lives as his own, and thus take upon himself the pain of the whole world.<sup>28</sup>

For Schopenhauer, however, virtue is only the penultimate step on the path to “salvation.”<sup>29</sup> The highest good consists in “denial of the will.”<sup>30</sup> The move from virtue to asceticism begins when the virtuous person understands the ubiquitous nature of suffering, and that the “ceaseless efforts to banish suffering achieve nothing more than a change in its form.”<sup>31</sup> Recognizing that the world is “full of misery” because the essence of the world – the will – generates such misery by its very nature of ceaseless striving, the compassionate person ultimately understands that the only truly compassionate stance is one of complete indifference.<sup>32</sup> In metaphorical terms, to borrow from Beckett, the only true “painkiller” is the refusal of painkillers.<sup>33</sup> As Julian Young argues in a discussion of Schopenhauer:

with this insight comes a transformation of the way in which one's identification with the transcendental self expresses itself. Previously it expressed itself in the triumph over egoism ... now, however, one "shudders at," "renounces" life, realising it to be irredeemably worthless ... one ceases to identify with *anything*...<sup>34</sup>

Schopenhauer describes this lack of identification with anything as "the greatest indifference to all things."<sup>35</sup> Merely *knowing* about the suffering of others is enough to cause one to resign from the life of striving, and to practice will-suppressing asceticism.

The second path that leads to the understanding that all is one, which then inspires ascetic practice, is that of personally experienced suffering. Schopenhauer defines suffering in terms of one's continuing to lack something which one continues to want: "We call its [the will's] hindrance through an obstacle placed between it and its temporary goal, *suffering* ... For all suffering is simply nothing but unfulfilled and thwarted willing."<sup>36</sup>

Schopenhauer believes that this sense of frustration tends to encourage those who find themselves drawn to asceticism. "In fact, suffering is the process of purification by which alone man is in most cases sanctified, in other words, led back from the path of error of the will-to-life."<sup>37</sup> Such a person experiences so much loss and distress, anxiety and disappointment, that they are ultimately "crushed by fate."<sup>38</sup> The individual ceases to strive, and conducts himself or herself in a manner that precludes further striving.

It is my contention that Beckett guides his characters and audiences along Schopenhauer's "second path," on which personally felt suffering leads to the fundamental knowledge that humans are essentially striving beings, and that striving is the cause of suffering. However, unlike Schopenhauer's individual, who inadvertently suffers to such an extent that he or she turns his or her back on life, Beckett's individual suffers deliberately. Having appreciated that its own will is the cause of suffering, the Beckettian intellect then deliberately inflicts suffering upon the will in an attempt to break it. I will discuss Beckett's utilization of this understanding shortly.

I will now expand upon my earlier claim that Schopenhauer primarily sees asceticism in relation to bodily deprivation.

## • Ascetic Methods •

Schopenhauer describes the ascetic as “a sick man who applies a painful cure.”<sup>39</sup> In this section I will discuss the ascetic *methods* that according to Schopenhauer one must apply or endure in order to preserve the state of resignation brought about by the knowledge that all is “one.” Maintenance of the resigned condition requires vigilance on behalf of the embodied individual, for the body is the last vestige of the will-to-life. As long as the body remains it is possible for the will to resurface in the form of instincts and desires.<sup>40</sup>

Though Schopenhauer discusses a number of ascetic methods, there are essentially five core tactics, which may be simultaneously employed to maintain the denial of the will. These are celibacy, poverty, fasting, self-castigation, and self-torture.<sup>41</sup>

Schopenhauer sees celibacy as the “first step in asceticism.”<sup>42</sup> Celibacy is asceticism’s “central point,” as “voluntary and complete chastity ... goes beyond the individual life, and thus announces that the will, whose phenomenon is the body, ceases with the life of this body.”<sup>43</sup> In essence, celibacy ultimately denies the will-to-life the very fuel with which to strive, and thus to cause suffering.

The purpose of “voluntary and intentional poverty” is to prevent the will from “backsliding.”<sup>44</sup> Unlike the compassionate person who gives away property with the intention of alleviating the suffering of others, the ascetic renounces property with the intention of causing his or her own suffering, and in the hope of denying the will the means to strive, “so that the satisfaction of desires, the sweets of life, may not again stir the will, of which self-knowledge has conceived a horror.”<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, fasting, self-castigation, and self-torture are posited as ways for the ascetic to ensure that his will cannot “reignite.” The ascetic nourishes the body “sparingly lest its vigorous flourishing and thriving should animate afresh and excite more strongly the will of which it is the mere expression and mirror.”<sup>46</sup> At the same time that the ascetic barely maintains his or her physical life, he or she also continues to make the will suffer through the means of psychic harm (self-castigation) and physical suffering (self-torture).

It should be noted that Schopenhauer tones down his views on ascetic practice in the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*. In Chapter XLVIII, "On the Doctrine of the Denial of the Will-to-Live," Schopenhauer claims that self-mortification is most likely unnecessary for the sedation of the will. He also replaces self-castigation with humility.<sup>47</sup>

In the next section I will show that Beckett systematically incorporates many of the abovementioned methods of ascetic practice into his dramatic work. In *Waiting for Godot* we witness the practice of poverty, celibacy, self-mortification, and self-castigation amongst other ascetic procedures. In *Endgame* Beckett's ascetic intellects practice self-castigation, fasting, and celibacy amid an array of ascetic methods. Similarly in *Happy Days* the audience observes celibacy, self-mortification, and a vow of silence as part of a sustained attempt to break the will. It is important to note, however, that whilst Schopenhauer sees asceticism as a technique of holding the will in check *after* the knowledge of "oneness" and ubiquitous suffering has dawned upon it, in Beckettian tragedy ascetic practice is employed to break the will. In Beckettian tragedy, asceticism *leads to* knowledge of ubiquitous suffering. It is for this reason that the practice of asceticism one finds in Beckettian tragedy is, if anything, more vehement than that found in Schopenhauerian thought. Schopenhauer's reappraisal of the need to self-mortify is challenged in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* by the character of Lucky who forever burdens himself with a heavy load, and does nothing to salve the open wound on his neck.<sup>48</sup> And whereas Schopenhauer ultimately suggests that humility and not self-castigation is the key, in Beckettian tragedy self-castigation plays a pivotal role in breaking the will by making the will understand the part it plays in the generation of suffering.

## • Beckettian Asceticism •

In this section I will elaborate upon Beckett's utilization of the ascetic method of deliberately inflicted bodily suffering. I will also discuss the *uniquely* Beckettian response to the suffering that accompanies striving: namely, the intentional exacerbation of the experience of *boredom*, which

is brought about by the deliberate generation of *uncertainty*. Beckettian tragedy not only evinces the more “traditional” methods of ascetic practice discussed in the previous section, such as fasting and self-mortification, but also evinces a unique form of psychic self-harm.

This Beckettian method of generating and perpetuating mental torment, or *anguish*, is Beckett’s considerable contribution to ethical thought. The deliberate generation of anguish is an *ethical* approach to life because such suffering is inflicted with the ultimate intention of bringing suffering to an end. Beckettian tragedy is ethical, then, not because it ennoble the human condition after the death of God,<sup>49</sup> nor because it is an affirmative response to difference.<sup>50</sup> Neither is Beckett’s work an affirmation of existence in general, an awakening to the reality of the “other” and the possibility of “love,”<sup>51</sup> or a revelation of the repeated attempt and subsequent failure to entirely negate life itself.<sup>52</sup> Rather, Beckett’s work is ethical because it proposes a *cure* for the life of suffering: a method for the destruction of the part of oneself that strives and by striving causes suffering.

- Beckett’s Deployment of Schopenhauerian *Boredom* as an Ascetic Method •

Whereas Schopenhauer is the first Western philosopher to systematically establish asceticism as *the* legitimate response to ceaseless internal drives, Beckett is the first explicitly post-Schopenhauerian thinker to not only incorporate Schopenhauerian ascetic thought into his own work but also to build upon it.<sup>53</sup> Beckettian tragedy is not merely the reiteration of Schopenhauerian asceticism in theatrical form but a systematic response to another system of thought, a response that ultimately devises its own method for denying and breaking the will.

At the heart of this method is the state of unrelieved boredom, which is generated by the intellect’s refusal to present a clear motive for action. In Beckettian terms, boredom is pain, and a motive for action is a “painkiller”:

HAMM: Is it not time for my pain-killer?  
CLOV: No.

HAMM: This is slow work. (Pause.) Is it not time for my pain-killer?  
CLOV: No.

HAMM: Give me my pain-killer.  
CLOV: It's too soon.

HAMM: Is it not time for my pain-killer?  
CLOV: (violently.) No!

HAMM: Is it not time for my pain-killer?  
CLOV: No!<sup>54</sup>

In this passage, Beckett utilizes the mechanistic boredom first elucidated in Schopenhauerian thought as the mind minus a motive, experiencing the full force of willing.<sup>55</sup>

For Schopenhauer the experience of boredom is an important mechanism for ensuring that the individual continues to strive. Boredom is a key aspect in the *cycle of striving*, wherein the individual constantly transitions from one desire to the next. For Schopenhauer, boredom is the state experienced in the moments between the attainment of one desire, and the inevitable pursuit of another. In boredom one experiences the "pressure of the will," but since it has no "motive" on which to fix, an "inner torment" results. The individual experiences the pain of longing *per se*, that is, longing without any definite object towards which one's energies and attention can be directed.<sup>56</sup> Thus it is that Schopenhauer describes boredom as a "fearful emptiness."<sup>57</sup>

It is important to note that Schopenhauer limits his discussion of boredom to an understanding of its effects and its purpose: boredom ensures that human beings are never satisfied, and thus continue to strive. But whereas Schopenhauer leaves his discussion of boredom at the level of description, Beckett goes further by utilizing the effects of boredom in ascetic practice. In Beckettian tragedy, boredom is a “perilous zone” of “fearful emptiness” which the Beckettian ascetic enters and refuses to leave:<sup>58</sup>

LUCKY: On the other hand... but not so fast... but not so fast...<sup>59</sup>

By incorporating boredom into ascetic practice, Beckett is the first thinker to depict boredom as an aspect of human experience that possesses ascetic potential. Beckett utilizes the human capacity to experience the feeling of the most frightful desolation and emptiness.<sup>60</sup>

We see this understanding of boredom mirrored in the austerity of the Beckettian tragic setting. In this context, the barrenness of Beckett’s landscapes and interior spaces may be understood as the experience of *boredom*:

POZZO: What’s it like?

VLADIMIR: (*looking around*). It’s indescribable. It’s like nothing. There’s nothing.<sup>61</sup>

We may compare Vladimir’s description of his experience in *Waiting for Godot* with the later settings for Beckett’s ascetic tragedies. First in *Endgame*:

*Bare Interior.*

*Grey light.*<sup>62</sup>

And later in *Happy Days* :

*Expanse of scorched earth rising centre to a low mound .... Very pompier tromp-l'oeil backcloth to represent unbroken plain and sky receding to meet in far distance.*<sup>63</sup>

In addition to Schopenhauer's conception of boredom, Beckett draws on an important aspect of Schopenhauerian aesthetics in his ascetic method, namely Schopenhauer's two-part conception of the *dynamically sublime*, wherein the intellect holds the will at bay so that it may come to appreciate a scene which it would ordinarily flee for fear of harm.<sup>64</sup> The dynamically sublime is vital to an understanding of the two-stage process through which, in his dramas, Beckett inflicts suffering upon the willing aspect of the self. His ascetic reinterpretation of Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory unfolds in the following manner.

First the intellect holds the will at bay by refusing to provide a *clear* motive for action, that is, a representation situated in space and time.<sup>65</sup> This denies the individual will the painless experience of habitual consciousness. Habitual consciousness is knowledge of one's existence that is delimited by the *a priori* filtering mechanism of the mind, which situates information about the world in space and time for the benefit of the striving will. Habitual consciousness is painless, then, because the will is, as it were, anaesthetized by the information it receives. When held in what Beckett calls the "perilous zone" between moments of habitual perception, where, because of the intellect's refusal to perform its anaesthetizing function, the individual will experiences the "suffering of being," the individual will suffers in two distinct ways.<sup>66</sup> First, the will suffers the pain of lacking an object towards which it may direct its energy – or, in Schopenhauer's words, the will experiences unalleviated "boredom".<sup>67</sup> And, second, it suffers from the knowledge it receives instead of habitual consciousness, namely knowledge about the ubiquitous nature of suffering.<sup>68</sup> Denied painless habitual consciousness, where a limited, filtered, version of the world is perceived, the individual will is instead revealed to itself, via an "involuntary" or "unwanted" memory, either as a being that has suffered, or as a being that has caused others to suffer.<sup>69</sup> This sudden awareness of past suffering is itself a cause of suffering. Ultimately, in ascetic practice, such suffering is deliberately generated for the purpose of having the individual will resign from life.<sup>70</sup>

It is this complex method of ethical self-destruction that I will now discuss in detail through a reading of *Waiting for Godot*.

- Beckett's Couples: How the Intellect Places the Will in an Impoverished State of Boredom •

In *Waiting for Godot* we are presented with two sets of Beckettian couples, pairs of characters that in this reading represent aspects of the individual self. The first couple, the down and out Vladimir and Estragon, loiter by the side of a country road where they wait for a message from the mysterious Godot. The other couple, Pozzo and Lucky, a wealthy landowner and his slave, are perpetual travellers along the same road. In Schopenhauerian terms, Vladimir and Pozzo perform the role of the tireless will, whereas Estragon and Lucky perform the role of intellect. Each intellect is defined by his understanding of, and his approach to, the subject of boredom: the ascetic, Lucky, takes every opportunity to exacerbate the experience of boredom. I will shortly discuss Lucky's use of boredom and other ascetic methods. Estragon, on the other hand, attempts to alleviate boredom by responding to Vladimir's demands for relief from the pain of endless waiting by providing a motive for action, and by so doing performs the role of the typical intellect that assists the will to escape its self-generated pain.<sup>71</sup>

Similarly, towards the end of the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer distinguishes the behaviour of the person who attempts to avoid suffering from that of the person who generates suffering, that is, Schopenhauer distinguishes the vast majority of humanity from the ascetic practitioner. Most people, in their attempts to ensure a "secure and pleasant existence" "chain" their will "ever more firmly to life, thus ensuring their suffering continues." In contrast, ascetics "deliberately make their life as poor, hard and cheerless as possible, because they have their true and ultimate welfare in view."<sup>72</sup> The *behaviour* of the ascetic announces to the world that suffering can only end if one refuses to alleviate it, or in Beckettian terms, the intellect fails to provide a "painkiller."

I believe that this understanding regarding a person's approach to suffering – that one is either an ascetic or a non-ascetic – is a productive

way of understanding both intellects in *Waiting for Godot*. Whilst Estragon seeks a “secure and pleasant existence” for himself by begging for food and money, and by seeking to leave for a more salubrious location, Lucky “deliberately” makes life as “poor, hard and cheerless as possible” by refusing to provide relief.<sup>73</sup> In short, the two intellects, Estragon and Lucky, provide very different *knowledge* to their respective wills regarding the essential nature of the world and of suffering. The former informs its will that suffering can be avoided. The latter intellect communicates to its will the knowledge that suffering is essential to its very nature. I will therefore focus my attention on the ascetic character of Lucky, “a sick man applying a painful cure.”<sup>74</sup>

### • Lucky’s Traditional Asceticism: Poverty of the Body •

Before I proceed to Beckett’s unique approach to asceticism – generating suffering through the creation or non-cessation of uncertainty – I will first set out what one might refer to as Lucky’s utilization of “standard” or “traditional” means of breaking the will, as described by Schopenhauer.<sup>75</sup> In his persistent attempts to make his willing aspect, Pozzo, suffer, Lucky carries out a wide array of ascetic acts, including acts of self-mortification, fasting, and self-castigation. As a form of self-mortification, Lucky burdens himself with a heavy bag, which at the end of Act II we discover is filled with nothing but sand.<sup>76</sup> In addition, Lucky does nothing to alleviate the running sore that has formed on his neck where the rope with which Pozzo controls him has rubbed him raw.<sup>77</sup> In Act I, Lucky also refuses sustenance by refusing the chicken bones to which he is entitled.<sup>78</sup> These ascetic acts are undertaken with one purpose in mind: “that by constant privation and suffering, he may more and more break down and kill the will that he recognises and abhors as the source of his own suffering existence and of the world’s.”<sup>79</sup>

That Lucky’s objective is to break his will is announced by the will itself. In response to Lucky’s behaviour – his refusal of sustenance, his refusal to provide physical relief, and the way he now “thinks” in such a way as to deny certainty about the world – Pozzo declares that Lucky is “killing” him.<sup>80</sup>

- Lucky's Unconventional Asceticism: Inflicting Boredom (Poverty of the Mind) •

Lucky's "traditional" ascetic gestures may help us understand other self-destructive aspects of his behaviour, for instance that which Pozzo describes as Lucky's "thinking." Whereas Lucky had once thought "very prettily," providing Pozzo with a great deal of abstract knowledge about the world, his objectless thoughts are now said to make Pozzo "shudder":<sup>81</sup>

POZZO:                    (*groaning, clutching his head*). I can't bear it... any longer... the way he goes on... you've no idea... it's terrible...he must go... (*he waves his arms*) ... I'm going mad... (*he collapses, his head in his hands*)... I can't bear it... any longer...<sup>82</sup>

Lucky's way of "thinking" is a form of psychic self-harm. While "traditional" ascetic gestures deprive the body of the energy it needs to strive, Lucky's thinking deprives the will of the *information* it needs to strive; it deprives the will of certainty about the world. Deprived of "certainty" and of a clear motive for action, the will is left in a frustrated state. Lucky's way of thinking causes the will to suffer by depriving it of painless, knowledge, "painless" because it permits the will to act. I will shortly provide textual examples from *Waiting for Godot* to support this claim.

Deprived of a *clear* or usable representation the individual will cannot discharge its energy towards a target or goal. This accumulation of energy causes the will to suffer, as an inability to strive causes pain.<sup>83</sup> I refer the reader back to an earlier discussion of the two "paths" by which Schopenhauer believes the will is led to resign from life. In particular, I refer to the second path to resignation: that of personally felt suffering. I believe that Beckett is employing Schopenhauer's understanding of suffering, which "is simply nothing but unfulfilled and thwarted willing," to break the will.<sup>84</sup> That is, I believe that Lucky, by deliberately refusing Pozzo the knowledge he needs to be able to act, is *deliberately* inflicting the kind of suffering that comes with ongoing irresolution.<sup>85</sup> Here

Beckettian meaninglessness is not a goal as it is argued in the work of Cavell and Critchley, it is a tactic used by the intellect in its attempts to break the will.

This reading of Beckettian tragedy, one that is alive to Beckett's exploration of quietism, understands Beckettian indeterminacy not as an end in itself but as a *means to an end*.<sup>86</sup> The existing literature on Beckettian uncertainty appears to exclude the possibility that Beckett *does something* with uncertainty, namely that he seeks to achieve a particular outcome. It is my contention that the deliberate generation of uncertainty is merely a penultimate step in Beckettian ascetic practice. In Beckettian tragedy, the *tactic* of uncertainty is a key method of asceticism used by the intellect in its attempts to achieve the goal of will-lessness.

This is the first part of the two-part Beckettian ascetic method of psychic self-harm: *the non-provision of a motive for action*. I will now elaborate upon this particular understanding of Lucky's behaviour.

What, then, does Lucky "think" when Pozzo orders him to think for everyone's entertainment?<sup>87</sup> Lucky thinks nothing; that is, Lucky provides the appearance of reasoned thought, with the standard features of argument, counter-argument, qualifications, and so on. However, in essence Lucky's speech provides only the *form* of such an argument, minus the *content*. Lucky provides merely the appearance of "thinking." Lucky's "tirade"<sup>88</sup> in Act I of *Waiting for Godot* is a complex process of refusing to provide Pozzo with what Schopenhauer would call a "judgement," which is formed by logically applying one concept to another.<sup>89</sup> Instead of knowledge about the world, Lucky ultimately provides Pozzo with a series of endless qualifications and professions of uncertainty. In the following excerpt from the play, I shall emphasise this tactic by isolating Lucky's professions of uncertainty :

On the other hand with regard to... with some exceptions for reasons unknown... for reasons unknown... but not so fast... labours left unfinished ... beyond all doubt all other doubt than that which clings to the labours of men... but not so fast for reasons unknown... left unfinished for reasons unknown... left unfinished... for reasons unknown... for reasons unknown... for reasons unknown... approximately by and large more or less... for reasons unknown... in light of the labours lost ... the light of the labours lost... in the year of their Lord six hundred and something... for reasons unknown... but not so fast... for reasons unknown... the labours abandoned left unfinished... abandoned unfinished... unfinished...<sup>90</sup>

Here we witness the first aspect of Beckettian asceticism in action: the generation of uncertainty through the refusal to provide a judgement. It is however, not a refusal to provide a motive *per se*. Beckettian asceticism appears to be an exaggeration of the human capacity for reason, and the indecision that necessarily stems from this capacity to behave in a non-reflexive, or non-instinctive manner.<sup>91</sup> In Beckettian epistemological terms, Lucky refuses to represent the world "habitually," that is, Lucky refuses to present Pozzo with information that permits him to "know" and to "act" upon this knowledge. In effect, Lucky's way of thinking prevents the will from reaching a decision.<sup>92</sup> The effect that this has upon Pozzo is clearly stated in the stage directions that accompany Lucky's "thinking" :

Pozzo dejected and disgusted ... Pozzo's sufferings increase ... Pozzo more and more agitated and groaning.<sup>93</sup>

By refusing to provide a motive – a definite object, on which Pozzo can "fix," and towards which his energies can be directed – Lucky is intentionally generating a key feature of Schopenhauerian boredom: "a feeling of – eventually acute – frustration."<sup>94</sup>

### • Lucky's Unconventional Asceticism: The Beckettian Dynamically Sublime •

It is at this point in the process, as Pozzo endures the frustration of uncertainty and irresolution, that Lucky then proceeds to the second part of the Beckettian ascetic method of psychic self-harm. Having opened up a "perilous zone," a "period of transition that separates consecutive adaptations" from one habitual state to the next where Pozzo is allowed to experience the "suffering of being," Lucky then proceeds to the ascetic method of self-castigation.<sup>95</sup>

As a form of ascetic practice, self-castigation is intended to mortify the will. The individual verbally accuses himself or herself as a form of

penance. Self-castigation is essentially a pronouncement of one's own misdeeds, an attempt to disabuse oneself of self-misperception. As an example of self-misperception, Pozzo declares his nature to be "liberal."<sup>96</sup> Thus although Pozzo is a landowner with many slaves, he perceives himself as one who is broad-minded, generous, tolerant, and so on. By preventing Pozzo from lapsing into habitual thought – where he may once again understand himself as one who is benevolent – Lucky is able to present Pozzo with an understanding of his true nature, an understanding that would otherwise go unheard. This non-habitual knowledge is presented during Lucky's tirade in Act I.

Pozzo is unable to understand why his countrymen and -women are starving and miserable, given that society has made such "strides" in the study of "alimentation and defecation." Despite all that has been achieved, they continue to "waste and pine waste and pine," and to "shrink and dwindle."<sup>97</sup> To the best of Pozzo's knowledge they should be fit and well, given the "strides of physical culture the practice of sports such as tennis football running cycling swimming..."<sup>98</sup> In short, Pozzo appears to have no real awareness of the suffering of others. He assumes that all, like he, have access to food, sanitation, and time for recreation. Essentially this is the version of the world that habitual, will-centred, consciousness has presented to Pozzo: his version of the world – where, as a wealthy man, he has all he wants and needs – is the only version. Given this, the terrible side of life is inexplicable. People die *despite* all the improvements that had been made to living standards. This, then, is how Pozzo understands past events.

However in his tirade, Lucky finally breaks through. We know that Lucky is trying to "kill" Pozzo by "the way he goes on."<sup>99</sup> Whilst holding the will at bay by refusing to provide a clear motive for action, Lucky accuses Pozzo of culpability, of causing suffering:

LUCKY: ... in a word the dead loss per caput since the death of Bishop Berkeley being to the tune of one inch four ounce per caput approximately by and large more or less to the nearest decimal good measure round figures stark naked in the stockings feet in Connemara in a word for reasons unknown ... the skull ... the tears ... the skull the skull the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis ... the skull the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the skull ...<sup>100</sup>

Whereas people were once seen to “waste and pine” despite improvements in “alimentation and defecation,” that is, death itself was sanitized, the version that Lucky now presents to Pozzo of the same events focuses on the sheer horror of starvation and the sheer indifference of those who, as landowners, did nothing to alter the situation, indeed allowed it to happen. Thus whilst Lucky refuses Pozzo a motive for action, he rather presents him with knowledge of ubiquitous suffering, and with it an incentive for inaction. Whereas thinkers such as Badiou view Beckett’s recognition of the “Other” as a life-affirming event, it is my contention that the recognition of the other in Beckettian tragedy results in the will’s resignation from life.<sup>101</sup> The recognition of the “Other” in Beckettian thought is recognition of the other whose suffering one has caused by striving, and whose suffering one can end by ceasing to strive.

Beckett signifies Pozzo’s resignation, which occurs in response to the knowledge presented by Lucky in his tirade, through the motif of sightlessness. Pozzo, who once had “wonderful” sight, is now, after understanding the suffering of others, as “blind as Fortune.”<sup>102</sup> In resignation, the “light,” which the will has “kindled” for itself in the form of the intellect,<sup>103</sup> which in turn generates the world as representation, goes out. It is extinguished because once the will resigns, the intellect, which is merely part of the striving will, is simultaneously cancelled out: “No will: no representation, no world.”<sup>104</sup>

## • Conclusion •

In this paper I have shown that once one removes the key premise that underpins Beckettian interpretation, namely that art affirms existence, one may also challenge the other premises that presently shape the philosophical understanding of Beckettian tragedy. Whereas interpreters such as Adorno, Cavell and Critchley posit “meaninglessness” as an anti-nihilistic feature of Beckettian tragedy, I have alternatively argued that Beckettian meaninglessness – when examined in the light of Schopenhauerian ideas – is a life-denying tactic, one where the intellect refuses to furnish the individual will with actionable information. And with regard to the premise that Beckettian art is life affirming because its indeterminacy encourages an appreciation of alterity, I have argued that in

Beckettian tragedy an awareness of the suffering “other” provides the willing subject with the requisite motivation to resign from life.

In my reading of *Waiting for Godot*, I have argued that the Beckettian intellect employs asceticism – deliberately inflicted self-harm – to break its own will. Lucky employs “traditional” methods of ascetic practice – namely, fasting and self-mortification and self-castigation – but also employs the unique ascetic method of irresolution and uncertainty, which leads to a painful state of boredom and an inability to strive. This unique Beckettian method of ascetic practice incorporates and reformulates several aspects of Schopenhauerian thought.

## Notes •

---

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E.F.J Payne. (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), Vol. 2, 613-615.

<sup>2</sup> Ulrich Pothast, *The Metaphysical Vision*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 12-16.

<sup>3</sup> See Theodor Adorno, “Trying to Understand *Endgame*,” in *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 1. ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 241-275; Simon Critchley, “Lecture 3: Know happiness – on Beckett,” in *Very Little ... Almost Nothing* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 142.

<sup>4</sup> Alain Badiou. *On Beckett*, ed. and trans. by Alberto Toscano and Nina Power. (London: Clinamen Press, 2003), 44.

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Cavell. *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 156. See Adorno and Critchley, cited above.

<sup>6</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 305.

<sup>7</sup> See for example Shane Weller, *A Taste for the Negative: Beckett and Nihilism*, (London: Legenda, 2005); Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (London: Faber, 1956); *Endgame* (London: Faber, 1958); *Happy Days* (Grove Press, London, 1961).

<sup>9</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 2, 615, 613.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Janaway, *Schopenhauer: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2002), 111.

<sup>11</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, 349, 351.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 148-9.

<sup>13</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, 176, Vol. 2, 212.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 150

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 180.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 391.

- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 380-2.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 400.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 233, 307-8
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, 613.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 334, 379, 397.
- <sup>22</sup> John E. Atwell, *Schopenhauer on the Character of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 154.
- <sup>23</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, 379.
- <sup>24</sup> R. Raj Singh, *Schopenhauer: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2010), 133-4.
- <sup>25</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, 379, 394, 397.
- <sup>26</sup> Atwell, *Schopenhauer: The Human Character* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 191.
- <sup>27</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 2, 638.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 378-9.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, 608, 634.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 362.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 380, 315.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 380.
- <sup>33</sup> Beckett, *Endgame*, 14, 16, 23, 34, 46.
- <sup>34</sup> Julian Young, *Willing and Unwilling: A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), 124. The internal quotations are from Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, 379.
- <sup>35</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* Vol. 1, 380.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 309, 363.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, 636.
- <sup>38</sup> John E. Atwell, *Character of the World*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 159.
- <sup>39</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, 397.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 391-2.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 380-2, 388.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 380.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, 625, Vol. 1, 380.
- <sup>44</sup> Young, *Willing and Unwilling*, 1987, 125.
- <sup>45</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, 381- 382.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 382.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, 607.
- <sup>48</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 1956: 25.
- <sup>49</sup> Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1961).
- <sup>50</sup> Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988).
- <sup>51</sup> Badiou, *On Beckett*, 44, 4
- <sup>52</sup> Shane Weller, *Beckett, Literature, and the Ethics of Alterity* (Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke, 2006), 193
- <sup>53</sup> Julian Young, *Schopenhauer* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005), 246.
- <sup>54</sup> Beckett, *Endgame*, 1958: 14, 16-17, 23, 28, 34.
- <sup>55</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, 364.
- <sup>56</sup> Young, *Schopenhauer*, 212 citing Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, 364.
- <sup>57</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1: 312.

- <sup>58</sup> Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with George Duthuit* (London: John Calder Publishers, 1999), 18.
- <sup>59</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 42-3.
- <sup>60</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 164, 312, 364.
- <sup>61</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 86-7.
- <sup>62</sup> Beckett, *Endgame*, 11.
- <sup>63</sup> Beckett, *Happy Days*, 1.
- <sup>64</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, 204.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 202, 364.
- <sup>66</sup> Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with George Duthuit*, 18-19.
- <sup>67</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, 164, 312, 364.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 315, 397.
- <sup>69</sup> Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with George Duthuit*, 72-3.
- <sup>70</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, 285.
- <sup>71</sup> See for example Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 17, 63, 65, 75, 76.
- <sup>72</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 2, 638.
- <sup>73</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 1956, 27, 39, 81.
- <sup>74</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, 397.
- <sup>75</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, 380-2, 388.
- <sup>76</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 21, 88.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.
- <sup>79</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation.*, 382.
- <sup>80</sup> Beckett *Waiting for Godot*, 34.
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.
- <sup>83</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* Vol. 1, 364.
- <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.
- <sup>86</sup> See Chris Ackerley, "Perfection is not of this World: Samuel Beckett and Mysticism," *Mystics Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 1/2 (March/June 2004), pp. 28-55; and Ackerley, "Samuel Beckett and Thomas à Kempis: The Roots of Quietism." *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 9 (2000): 81-92
- <sup>87</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 42.
- <sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>89</sup> Schopenhauer, "On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason," trans. by E.F.J. Payne (Chicago: Open Court, 1974), 154-156.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-45.
- <sup>91</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, 205-6.
- <sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, 207.
- <sup>93</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 42.
- <sup>94</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, 364 and Young, Schopenhauer, 2005, 212; see also Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 42.
- <sup>95</sup> Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with George Duthuit*, 18-19.
- <sup>96</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 39.
- <sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.
- <sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-5.
- <sup>101</sup> Badiou, *On Beckett*, 4.

<sup>102</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 86.

<sup>103</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1: 150.

<sup>104</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, 411.

## Bibliography • ---

Ackerley, Chris. "Perfection is Not of this World: Samuel Beckett and Mysticism," *Mystics Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 1/2 (March/June 2004), 28–55.

———. "Samuel Beckett and Thomas à Kempis: The Roots of Quietism." *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 9 (2000): 81–92.

Adorno, Theodor. "Trying to Understand Endgame," in Vol. 1 of *Notes to Literature*, 241–275. Edited by Rolf Tiedemann, Translated by Shierry Weber Nicholsen. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

Atwell, John E. *Schopenhauer on the Character of the World*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1995.

———. *Schopenhauer: The Human Character*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990.

Badiou, Alain. *On Beckett*. Translated and edited by Alberto Toscano and Nina Power. London: Clinamen Press, 2003.

Beckett, Samuel. *Proust and Three Dialogues with George Duthuit*. London: John Calder Publishers, 1999.

———. *Happy Days*. London: Grove Press, 1961.

———. *Endgame*. London: Faber, 1958.

———. *Waiting for Godot*. London: Faber, 1956.

Cavell, Stanley. *Must We Mean What We Say?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Connor, Steven. *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988.

Critchley, Simon. *Very Little ... Almost Nothing: Death Philosophy and Literature*. London: Routledge, 1997.

- Derrida, Jacques. *Acts of Literature*. Edited by Derek Attridge. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Esslin, Martin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1961.
- Janaway, Christopher. *Schopenhauer: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University press, 2002.
- Knowlson, James. *Damned to Fame*, London: Bloomsbury, 1996.
- Nussbaum, Martha. "Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Dionysus" in Christopher Janaway (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 344–374.
- . "Narrative Emotions: Beckett's Genealogy of Love", in *Love's Knowledge*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp286–313.
- Pothast, Ulrich. *The Metaphysical Vision: Arthur Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Art and Life and Samuel Beckett's Way to Make Use of It*. New York: Peter Lang, 2008.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur. *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*. Translated by E.F.J. Payne. Le Salle, IL: Open Court, 1974.
- . *The World as Will and Representation* (Volumes 1 & 2), Translated by E.F.J. Payne. New York: Dover, 1966.
- Singh, R. Raj. *Schopenhauer: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Continuum, 2010.
- Weller, Shane. *Beckett, Literature, and the Ethics of Alterity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006.
- . *A Taste for the Negative: Beckett and Nihilism*, London: Legenda, 2005.
- Young, Julian. *Schopenhauer*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2005.
- . *Willing and Unwilling: A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer*. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987.