‘Disappointed Bridges’:
Language, Identity and Historiography in the Works of
James Joyce and Samuel Beckett

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Introduction

This thesis investigates the ambivalent and sceptical relationship towards language and linguistic representation shared by James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. The motivations behind the subversive approaches to language enacted by the two writers are both literary and political: both question the ability of language to represent external reality, and seek to expose and subvert the ways in which linguistic representations, and language in general, are mediated by ideological and social values which often reflect the political goals of those who create or use them. The discussion of Joyce focuses on *Ulysses* (1922), but I also discuss to a lesser extent *Dubliners* (1914), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939). The main focus of the discussion of Beckett is his so-called ‘Trilogy’ of novels, *Molloy* (1955), *Malone Dies* (1956) and *The Unnamable* (1958),¹ and his plays *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958) and *Happy Days* (1960). Wherever appropriate, the relevant works of one author are referred to during discussions of the other.

While famous for their radical reappraisal of the written word, Joyce and Beckett also question the ability of language to adequately represent experience or supposedly objective ‘reality,’ portraying language as imposing limiting structure on the scope and fluidity of non-linguistic experience. This suppressive quality of language is the result largely of the perspective and therefore bias inherent in linguistic representation: all linguistic representation operates by a process of selection, both of content and of how

¹These three novels were originally published in French in 1951 (*Molloy, Malone meurt*) and 1953 (*L’Innommable*) and subsequently translated into English by the author (*Molloy* in collaboration with Patrick Bowles). *Molloy, Malone Dies,* and *The Unnamable* are published in English in the single volume *Three Novels*. All citations of these novels refer to this volume.
that content is portrayed, and thus all representations represent a perspective of some sort, along with its attendant goals and motivations. Joyce and Beckett expose the myth of objective representation by exploiting the vastly different emphases inherent in different modes of representation, and by making explicit, and subverting, the editorial processes which implicitly underlie the creation of any representation in language.

As natives of colonial Ireland, Joyce and Beckett are at the same time intimately familiar with and estranged from the English language, the language of their political oppressors. This political marginalisation contributes to the sense of alienation from language in general which informs their works, and accounts for their concern with the social and ideological values embedded in it. The politicisation of language in the works of Joyce and Beckett also has various ramifications for their representations of identity: portraying personal identity as a fundamentally linguistic construct, both authors explore the problematic relationship between identity and language, which is both inadequate in its ability to represent the past of an individual or a culture and saturated with externally-imposed values. Constructed out of the words of others, their narrators’ identities are mediated by social and ideological values which are articulated through the language structures they are immersed in, often reproducing internally the perspectives and values which underpin hierarchical social arrangements such as patriarchy, class-based capitalism and colonialism.

As well as exploring the ideological saturation of various systems of language, Joyce and Beckett address the way in which groups with specific political or ideological agendas create language structures which articulate their perspectives and goals, particularly with regard to representations of the past. Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Beckett’s
 Trilogy, in particular, are concerned with ostensibly authoritative and teleological conceptions of history, which serve to maintain the status quo and legitimate oppressive social systems such as colonialism. In response to such ideologically-motivated representations of history, Joyce and Beckett expose their ideological underpinnings and question the capability of both human memory and the historical record to provide authentic access to the past. Without necessarily providing an adequate alternative to the ideologically-tainted representations of the past which they scrutinise, each actively undermines the authority of any historiographical conception and thus the ability of such conceptions to serve political and ideological ends – a course of action most appropriate to two writers in self-imposed exile from a centre of political, social and cultural oppression. Although employing often radically different techniques – Joyce’s work is characterised by an exhaustively excessive use of language, Beckett’s by stark minimalism and an impulse towards silence – both authors question the efficacy of language to represent experience and, in response to the nightmarish political events of the twentieth century, enact a rejection of ultimate authority, whether in literature or otherwise.

Chronologically, I refer first to the works of Joyce and subsequently to those of Beckett. This ordering reflects the fact that Beckett was writing at a later time than Joyce, lending the discussion a historical cohesiveness. More importantly, it reflects the latter’s dual relationship of influence from and resistance to the literary legacy of the former. Beckett acknowledged his indebtedness to Joyce, whose works he admired greatly and with whom he also had a personal relationship. The thematic influence of Joyce on Beckett is strong, and many of the concerns regarding language, identity and
politics which Joyce explores in his works are taken for granted by Beckett, both explicitly in the discourse of his narrators and implicitly in the structure of his works. Conversely, Beckett diverges significantly from the aesthetic techniques employed by Joyce. Issues which are raised in a broad manner by Joyce, such as the inadequacy of language as a representational vehicle or the constructed, fictional nature of personal identity, tend to be addressed by Beckett on a more fundamental level. While Joyce is concerned with the parcelling of the world into particular systems of language, for example, Beckett challenges the very basis of semiotics. While Joyce offers a broad exploration of the idea of the self as a linguistic construct or a text, Beckett takes such ideas for granted, and his narrators are often explicitly engaged in a process of textual self-creation – although as I discuss such ostensible ‘creation’ ultimately represents not an act of self-determination but assimilation into linguistically-articulated systems of ideology. In a similar vein, discourses which are dealt with by Joyce on a grand scale are often addressed by Beckett at the level of the quotidian, re-enacting issues of history, identity and politics which Joyce explores in *Ulysses* in the life of the individual or family. Comparisons between the works of the two authors thus often simultaneously yield thematic similarities and structural or methodological divergences.

Throughout this thesis more space is devoted to Joyce than to Beckett. This does not imply a judgement on the relative merits of the two writers, but rather reflects the fact that, while they share many of the same concerns, Joyce’s work is much more easily identified with specific political contexts than is Beckett’s. While Joyce’s deconstructive subversion of linguistic representations of the past and present can be readily placed within the politics of colonialism and Irish cultural nationalism, Beckett’s resists
identification with any single political issue or cause; indeed, Beckett seems to deliberately evade the specific allusions and subversive parodies by which Joyce enacts his political resistance. That is not to say that Beckett’s work has no political significance; on the contrary, his works are deeply concerned with dismantling authority, be it in language and literature or in the ideological or political perspectives which underlie linguistic representations – a concern which I will attempt to place within the historical and political context of the Second World War and twentieth century authoritarianism. While certainly applicable to a variety of political situations, and to the very ideas of ‘politics’ or ‘ideology’ themselves, for these reasons Beckett’s work is not as conducive as Joyce’s to extensive contextual discussion. The subsequent disparity in length thus reflects Joyce’s constant and relatively explicit engagement with political issues of his time – an engagement that has been increasingly recognised in recent times by commentators such as Declan Kiberd, Andrew Gibson and Robert Spoo – and conversely Beckett’s deliberate evasiveness with regard to specific political and historical contexts.
Chapter I:
The Limitations of Linguistic Representation

And if I failed to mention this detail in its proper place, it is because you cannot mention everything in its proper place, you must choose, between the things not worth mentioning and those even less so. For if you set out to mention everything you would never be done, and that’s what counts, to be done, to have done. (Three Novels 41)

James Joyce and Samuel Beckett are readily identified with one another in criticism, due to both their personal relationship and, in literary terms, the latter’s self-confessed indebtedness to, and deliberate departure from, his predecessor. Both are widely credited with transforming the face of literary representation – Joyce in a characteristically encyclopaedic fashion, famously incorporating a myriad of different styles and extending the representation of the internal life of the individual, Beckett by contrast as a stark minimalist noted for his deconstruction of constructs such as character and plot. Both, however, are also characterised by a problematic relationship with language, displaying scepticism about its capacity to represent external ‘reality’ or individuals’ experience, and concern with the ideological and social values inscribed in it. While their works share a pervasive scepticism about the efficacy of language to comprehensively and objectively represent experience, they approach the representational inadequacies of language in very different – even opposite – ways. As is often the case in comparisons between the two authors, concerns which are approached by Joyce on the level of style and structure are taken for granted both in the structure of Beckett’s texts and in the discourse of his narrators. Where Joyce demonstrates the impotence of language by pushing the
representational imperative to an extreme degree which ultimately reveals its own futility, Beckett’s narrators reject from the outset any comfortable relationship between signifier and signified, bemoaning the failure of words and narratives to satisfactorily convey or contain their experience. Both writers are also concerned with the social and ideological aspects of language – with language not as a neutral system of communication but, as the theorist M. M. Bakhtin suggests, as a ‘world view’ (271), replete with social and ideological values. Such a subjectivised and politicised approach to language stems, in part at least, from the two writers’ positions as voluntary exiles from colonial Ireland: the experience of being natives of a country dominated by another politically, economically and linguistically seems to have fostered the sense of marginalisation and alienation from the English language, and from language in general, which informs their work. While Joyce’s subversion of the representational capacity of language is readily placed within the politics of colonialism, however, Beckett’s texts resist any straightforward identification with any specific political context. Nevertheless, both challenge the idea that language can be objective or comprehensive, or that linguistic representation can authoritatively represent the world from which it derives.

The Limits of Realism: ‘Ithaca’ and ‘Wandering Rocks.’

Joyce famously told Frank Budgen that in *Ulysses* he wanted ‘to give a picture of Dublin so complete that if the city one day suddenly disappeared from the earth it could be reconstructed out of my book’ (Budgen 69). In this characteristically bold statement, he apparently indicates a commitment to verisimilitude. Such a grand affirmation of mimesis might seem to place Joyce, in intention at least, within the tradition of realist
fiction, were it not that his works display a complex, if not antagonistic, relationship
towards the principles of literary realism. Ian P. Watt argues that, in contrast to previous
modes of writing, modern realist fiction was less concerned with the aesthetic qualities of
language, attempting rather to undertake a more ‘dispassionate and scientific scrutiny of
life than had ever been attempted before’ (11). Consequently, ‘[i]t would appear ... that
the function of language is much more largely referential in the novel than in other
literary forms; that the genre itself works by exhaustive representation rather than by
elegant concentration’ (30). While known for his radical and often lyrical manipulation
of the written word, in *Ulysses* Joyce also explores at length the referential properties of
language, both with apparent sincerity in the ‘naturalism’ of the earlier episodes and
mischievously in the exhaustive encyclopaedism of the later ones.

In addition to its imputed fixation with unembellished verisimilitude, realist
fiction is also apparently concerned with the details of real, specific situations rather than
depicting universals or Platonic forms. Paul D. Morris writes that ‘[c]entral to the realist
endeavor is the desire to attain truth – qualified as verifiable and observable – in
opposition to the perceived goal of romanticism and classicism of attempting to depict an
ideal’ (27). In this too, Joyce in some respects fits the bill; while overlaid onto the
famous Homeric structure and informed by countless examples of myth and literature,
*Ulysses* is certainly concerned, perhaps more so than any other novel of its time, with the
experience of an individual within a specific, historical setting. As I will discuss,
however, despite its apparent alignment with the representational ambitions of literary
realism, *Ulysses* ultimately displays an ambivalent and sceptical attitude towards the idea
that life can be adequately represented in language.
In the ‘Ithaca’ episode of *Ulysses*, Joyce meticulously chronicles the behaviour and environment of Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom from a sterile, scientific point of view; ‘narrative’ is reduced to the explication of phenomena, expressed in the form of a scientific or empirical catechism. The episode opens, for example, with a geographical-mathematical description of Stephen and Bloom’s journey from a cabman’s shelter to Bloom’s home:

What parallel courses did Bloom and Stephen follow returning?

Starting united both at normal walking pace from Beresford Place they followed in order named Lower and Middle Gardiner streets and Mountjoy square, west: then, at reduced pace, each bearing left, Gardiner’s place by an inadvertence as far as the farther corner of Temple street, north: then, at reduced pace with interruptions of halt, bearing right, Temple street, north, as far as Hardwicke place. Approaching, disparate, at relaxed walking pace they crossed both the circus before George’s church diametrically, the chord in any circle being less than the arc which it subtends. (619)

As the episode progresses we are presented, in a similarly didactic manner, with often lengthy descriptions of numerous objective and subjective phenomena, including the admirable qualities which Bloom appreciates in the substance of water (624-25), the respective trajectories of the two men’s urine as they relieve themselves in Bloom’s garden (655), the books displayed on Bloom’s bookshelf (660-62), and the orientation and geographical coordinates of Bloom and Molly as they lie in bed (688). With its precise, detached question-and-answer style, ‘Ithaca’ apparently shares the ‘ideal of scientific objectivity’ which Watt describes as a tenet of modern literary realism (11). The language of the episode effects the transaction of scientific information and describes
the events of the plot in the most ‘objective’ and – from a scientific point of view – verisimilar way possible. In this respect, in ‘Ithaca’ Joyce can be seen to take the representational imperative behind realism to an extreme. William M. Chace, for example, contends that ‘[t]o turn to “Ithaca” is to encounter the episode that, in some ways, is the fullest possible realization of traditional realism’ (895). To adapt Watt’s phrase, the language of ‘Ithaca’ indeed seems exhaustively representational; intent on maximally describing the world in which the text is situated, including in its scope disciplines ranging from astrophysics to molecular chemistry, the episode enacts an absurdly over-the-top take on the realist penchant for detail.

If ‘Ithaca’ realises the theoretical principles which underlie realism, however, it does so in a way which is unrecognisable as realist fiction: the catechistical form of the episode marks a stark departure from the traditional narrative structure of the novel, while its vast array of detailed scientific information transgresses norms of novelistic content. Thus while Chace expounds the realist qualities of ‘Ithaca,’ he also adds the qualification that ‘the quality of data disgorged by the episode gives us the spectacle of realism unmonitored, realism liberated to pursue data unchecked by any traditional regulation’ (896). ‘Ithaca’ goes above and beyond the call of duty, as it were, in its representational meticulousness and its often tangential accumulation of information. As Karen Lawrence describes it, the ‘narrative mind’ of the episode ‘amasses facts with no regard for normal conventions of significance and relevance’ (181). This subversion of narrative relevance is also found in the works of Beckett: see the painfully protracted ‘sucking stones’ episode in Molloy, for example (Three Novels 69-74), or the exponentially proliferating pseudo-logical propositions of Watt. For both Joyce and Beckett, this intentional hair-
splitting and embracement of irrelevance serves to draw attention to the conventions which govern the inclusion and exclusion of information in literary representation. Stephen Heath, in a discussion of Roland Barthes’ *S/Z*, describes the two writers’ fondness for superfluity as a deliberate interference with the reading process. Heath talks of ‘[t]he threshold of functional relevance’ or ‘that which divides the narratable from the non-narratable, sequences below which are taken-for-granted and in-significant,’ noting that ‘[i]f this is “gone below” there is … a trouble in reading: witness the reactions to *Ulysses* or to the novels of Samuel Beckett’ (75). By including apparently insignificant and irrelevant information, Joyce and Beckett remind us that there is always a ‘taken-for-granted’ in literary representations, drawing attention to the fact that, by unwritten convention, even the most avidly representational literature only includes detail up to a certain threshold.

‘Ithaca’ is encyclopaedic in its representation of ‘reality,’ then, to the extent that it may be seen as transgressing novelistic conventions of ‘functional relevance,’ and including information which would normally be ‘taken-for-granted’ (or perhaps ‘deemed-irrelevant’). But while ‘Ithaca’ is seemingly exhaustive in its depiction of the events of the early morning of June 17, 1904, it also points towards the information which it implicitly leaves out: for each minute detail Joyce includes there is infinite potential for more detail, right down to the molecular structure of Bloom’s bookshelf or the chemical makeup of his urine. The immensity of the episode’s documentation shows that ‘reality,’ in an experiential-subjective sense or a hypothetical external-objective sense, can never be comprehensively documented or completely contained in a literary representation. In ‘Ithaca’ Joyce thus drives home the point that the stuff of existence is ‘too numerous to

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2 Lawrence also discusses Heath in relation to Joyce (188).
be enumerated' (*Ulysses* 282), and therefore that any linguistic representation must make selections of content simply as a matter of pragmatics. As Beckett’s Molloy says in the passage which serves as epigraph to this chapter, ‘if you set out to mention everything you would never be done’; the sheer scope of ‘reality’ precludes the possibility of comprehensively representing it in language, and therefore ‘you must choose’ (41) – that is, make editorial selections of content. As Lawrence argues:

> what the seemingly limitless number of details and styles suggests is the awareness that no matter how comprehensive the text, it can never exhaust reality. Any sentence, any linguistic form (and this of course includes the form of the novel) excludes the wealth of possibilities in life ... In eschewing the traditional economy of the novel, Joyce reveals that any fiction, any beginning, middle, and ending, is an arbitrary interruption of life. (78)

The over-determined but nevertheless *incompletely*-determined narrative of ‘Ithaca’ implies that, rather than being truly exhaustive, any narrative or linguistic representation is in a sense arbitrary in relation to the reality from which it is derived. By allowing into his text content normally considered extraneous to literary narrative – Heath’s ‘taken-for-granted’ and ‘in-significant’ (75) – Joyce shows that even the most comprehensive narrative is never truly comprehensive, always being governed by conventions of relevance and significance. In Lawrence’s words, he ‘purposely includes excesses and irrelevancies to demonstrate the arbitrariness of closure’ (79). Thus, rather than further approaching the representation of ‘objective’ reality or subjective experience, the encyclopaedic content of ‘Ithaca’ challenges the idea that life can be adequately or therefore objectively represented in language. John Hannay argues that
the question-and-answer style of the ‘Ithaca’ episode ... exaggerates a paradox inherent in the realistic novel, pretending to be not fiction at all but an objective inquiry into fact. ‘Ithaca’ plunges the reader into an extreme empiricism, in which every event is reduced by pseudo-scientific language and analysis to its component elements, creating what Joyce described as a ‘mathematico-astrinomico-physico-mechanico-geometrico-chemico sublimation of Bloom and Stephen’ [Letters, Vol. 1 164]. The word ‘sublimation’ here mocks the view, common in the late nineteenth century, that the rarified terms of the empirical sciences were adequate for describing all of reality. (441)

In attempting, and ultimately failing, to reduce the content of the novel to the ‘objective’ terms of science, ‘Ithaca’ questions some of the most fundamental principles of realism. As Watt suggests, ‘[m]odern realism ... begins from the proposition that truth can be discovered by the individual through [his or her] senses’ (12). Moreover, though, it is reliant on the idea that such veracious perceptions of the external world can be accurately translated into language – or as Morris puts it, ‘the belief that propositions of truth [can] be isolated, observed and depicted’ (33). What the frustrated ‘sublimation’ of the external-objective and internal-subjective world in ‘Ithaca’ suggests is that, regardless of the merit of individuals’ perceptions, the true extent of reality can never be adequately translated into or contained by language. In Ulysses the solid rock of objective fact thus remains elusive; when approached, Joyce’s empirical Ithaca is, and remains, as foggy and unrecognisable as the mystifying terrain encountered by the returning Odysseus. Despite the proclamation of the headline in ‘Aeolus’ that ‘ITHACANS VOW PEN IS CHAMP’ (142), ‘Ithaca’ demonstrates the impotence of writing and, by extension, of language as a vehicle of representation. As the pseudo-exhaustive expositions of the episode suggest,
linguistic representation is always subject to a process of selection, and therefore never comprehensive or objective.

The inevitability of selection, and hence of bias, in literary representation is illustrated in a slightly different way in the ‘Wandering Rocks’ episode of *Ulysses*. ‘Wandering Rocks’ consists of a series of nineteen vignettes which depict various characters going about their daily business in Dublin, often unbeknownst to one another and seemingly unconnected by any underlying thematic concern. As in ‘Ithaca,’ on one level the narrational techniques of ‘Wandering Rocks’ can be seen as advancing the representational objectives of realism. Certainly, the episode is intimately concerned with the minutiae of everyday life. We witness in detail the thoughts and experiences of both major and minor characters including, for example, Father John Conmee as he travels across town from his church by foot and tram (210-15); the impoverished siblings of Stephen Dedalus arguing over food and money in the family kitchen (217-18); Bloom perusing mildly pornographic novels at a book stand (226-27); and the son of the recently deceased Patrick Dignam deferring his inevitable return to his mourning family (240-42). ‘Wandering Rocks’ is also fastidious in its treatment of time; seemingly omniscient ‘interpolations’ give the reader cues as to the simultaneity of various events, giving the episode a sense of clockwork precision that allows us, if not to see how the vignettes relate to each other thematically, at least to see how they relate to one another chronologically. Not unjustifiably, the precision of both physical detail and the passage of time in ‘Wandering Rocks’ has been seen as asserting and extending the representational capabilities of literary realism. Richard Brown, citing Budgen, sees the episode’s complex handling of the temporal-spatial movement of its characters as a
‘measure of its representation of reality’ (65; see Budgen 126). Similarly, David Pierce notes the episode’s abundance of ‘[r]ealistic detail,’ observing Joyce’s ‘attention to an accurate recording of reality, [his consciousness of] how ignorance of tram or train timetables would be held against a writer’ (103).

Similarly to ‘Ithaca,’ however, the episode’s wealth of incidental detail ultimately has the effect of drawing attention to the inevitable disparity between the physical and subjective worlds and their representation in literature. Brown argues that Joyce ‘[d]isables] the divorce between the multifariousness of the city and the containment of the text by providing us with a text that is as multifarious as the city’ (72). The text, however, is of course not truly as ‘multifarious’ as the city it depicts, and as with the catalogue of explanation which makes up ‘Ithaca’ the text’s apparent claims of representational comprehensiveness ultimately prove to be bankrupt. Lawrence claims that in ‘Wandering Rocks’ (which precedes ‘Ithaca’ chronologically) a ‘Pandora’s box opens up in the narration’: the text begins to detail a myriad of simultaneous and often unrelated events from various points of view, and ‘[t]he narrative could then presumably continue to catalogue and recatalogue these experiences ad infinitum’ (87). Note the conditionality of Lawrence’s statement: while hypothetically the text could expand and recast its subject matter infinitely, it does not and, practically, because it is a work of literature which must exist both as a printed object and an intellectually consumable artefact, it cannot. Once again, the apparent informational excesses of Joyce’s text actually suggest the ‘arbitrariness of closure’ (Lawrence 79). While ‘Ithaca’ makes the point that the breadth of information available invariably exceeds language’s capacity to represent, ‘Wandering Rocks’ illustrates the divisibility of reality as experienced by
multiple observers simultaneously in time, and thereby demonstrates the need for
temporal selections in linguistic representation.

Joyce thus demonstrates that internal and external ‘reality’ is rendered inenarrable
not just by breadth of content but by the simultaneity of an infinite number of events
experienced by an infinite number of people, and therefore that any line of narrative must
be somewhat arbitrarily drawn out of the unbounded matter which makes up existence.
In the vignettes of ‘Wandering Rocks’ he provides fragmented glimpses of textual
‘realities’ which potentially co-exist with main narratives of his novel: that is, stories
which run parallel to those of Bloom and Stephen but which will not, or cannot, be
thoroughly explored in *Ulysses*. While we are offered Pisgah sights of the experiences of
John Conmee, Katey Dedalus, Patrick Aloysius Dignam and others, these narratives are
not pursued for more than a few pages, and the novel soon returns to its two primary
concerns: Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus. The quasi-narratives of ‘Wandering
Rocks’ represent the alternative possibilities and perspectives which must be rejected in
the writing of a linear narrative; by including such glimpses, Joyce hints at the narrative
potentialities that even as heteroglot a text as *Ulysses* implicitly suppresses. By allowing
such alternate perspectives into the text, however short-lived they may be, and by
catering for multiple simultaneous events, the narrative of ‘Wandering Rocks’ stands in
contrast to the linear, personal sense of time which tends to inform the realist novel.
Declan Kiberd argues that by illustrating the arbitrariness of his chosen ‘plot,’ Joyce
opens up the representation of time in literature from the nearly parcelled chronology of
linear narrative:
Separate chapters of *Ulysses* overlap in chronology, and even separate sections of the ‘Wandering Rocks’ chapter narrate the same events in time as seen from different perspectives, rendering by this means a most varied set of voices and experiences. The linear time of the realist novel denied all this and sought to dispose of time in neat parcels, but Joyce, in restoring a sense of the Eternal Now, also restored time’s mystery. (*Inventing* 340)

Like the historical actualities which Stephen ponders in the ‘Nestor’ episode, linear narratives are ‘lodged in the room of the infinite possibilities they have ousted’ (*Ulysses* 25), always coming at the expense of some other aspect or perspective. As Lawrence argues, in the subject matter of ‘“Wandering Rocks,”’ and “Ithaca,” Joyce investigates the possibilities that are ousted by the conventional novelistic plot’ (88). This is also something which the episode reproduces as a whole, in relation to its Homeric predecessor. Fritz Senn reminds us that by including in *Ulysses* a chapter based on the Wandering Rocks, Joyce was reinstating a narrative which, in *The Odyssey*, ‘remained a mere possibility’ – Odysseus having chosen instead to navigate between Scylla and Charybdis (‘Charting’ 156). As the content of linguistic representations is always somewhat arbitrary because it is subject to a process of selection and therefore exclusion, Joyce suggests, so linear narratives must always be selected out of infinite possibilities and thereby be the product of a particular perspective.

For Joyce, then, as well as being a creative act, the construction of a linear narrative is also in a sense destructive or suppressive. R. A. Copland and G. W. Turner make a connection between the suppressive power of documented history in ‘Nestor’ and the similarly stifling power of language in ‘Ithaca’: ‘[In “Nestor”] Stephen is obsessed with the inadequacy of the written record to *realise* the actual event. Perhaps then we are
tacitly invited during the second use of the schoolroom catechistic method in “Ithaca” to supply our own reflections upon the ruin that language leaves when, like time, it has passed across the reality” (762).\(^3\) This argument is also pertinent to ‘Wandering Rocks,’ which, in conjunction with ‘Ithaca,’ invites us to consider the ‘ruin’ left by language: these episodes point towards the limiting power of language – the result of the inevitable subjectivity and selectiveness of vision inherent in all narrative – and thereby expose the myth of omniscient or objective narration. For Shari and Bernard Benstock, ‘any method of narration holds the possibility for unreliability because all narration is unreliable. We never get the whole story, from every possible angle, and we are never allowed to see (or hear) the choices that were discarded in order that this particular storytelling could advance itself’ (15). By forcing us to consider these discarded possibilities, in ‘Wandering Rocks’ and ‘Ithaca’ Joyce underlines the fact that linguistic representation always comes at a cost of alternative ways of viewing and representing the world.

As I have suggested, if narrative can never be exhaustive or all-encompassing, then neither can it be neutral. Morris writes that ‘[t]he realist goal of authorial objectivity signalled to many critics a rejection of style’ (28); in contrast to this claim, in _Ulysses_ Joyce sets out to debunk the very idea that literary ‘style’ can be discarded in favour of some neutral, objective mode of presentation. Hugh Kenner argues that Joyce’s deliberately thwarted attempts at narrative inclusiveness and impartiality serve to dispel the myth of the objective narrator: ‘No “objective” style, Joyce is … hinting, can in truth be discovered to exist, no registration of so-many-things-almost-in-an-equal-number-of-words; an attempt to simulate one will itself be a style, a narrator’s role’ (Joyce’s 71).

\(^3\) According to the schema Joyce provided to Stuart Gilbert, ‘Catechism (personal)’ is the ‘technic’ of ‘Nestor,’ while ‘Catechism (impersonal)’ is that of ‘Ithaca’ (see _Ulysses_ 734-35).
The stark empiricism of ‘Ithaca’ and the temporal fragmentation of ‘Wandering Rocks,’ rather than moving away from stylised representation, illustrate the inevitability of a narratorial presence. J. P. Riquelme makes this point, saying ‘[t]he teller disappears only when the page becomes blank, once the book is complete’ (22). For Riquelme, following Kenner, any attempt at objective narration can only result in another kind of narrator, no matter how subtle that narrator’s presence may be: ‘In the case of Joyce’s fiction, the narrator’s supposed disappearance is also his presence everywhere’ (23). While Joyce doesn’t necessarily undermine the veracity of individual perception or the general referential properties of the word, he does make it clear that linguistic representation is always reducible to a perspective, and thus no single line of narrative can claim to be omniscient or to objectively describe reality. Thus while in some ways Joyce’s text aims to expand and improve the representation of the experience of the individual, it also points towards the representational limitations of language in relation to internal and external reality.

**Language as a Destructive Force: Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable.**

For Beckett, too, representation in language is both limited in capacity and limiting in the way it reflects back on that which it purports to represent. While in *Ulysses* linear narratives are shown implicitly to suppress alternative narratives, in Beckett’s Trilogy it is the very naming of the world itself which limits and suppresses the ways in which the world can be experienced. If Joyce subjectivises language and destabilises its referential qualities, for Beckett there is a fundamental and unbridgeable divide between signifier and signified; as Molloy declares in the novel of the same name, there can be ‘no things
but nameless things, no names but thingless names’ (31). Molloy finds that his internal and external perceptions are frequently resistant to the descriptive power of language, saying: ‘even my sense of identity was wrapped in a namelessness often hard to penetrate … [a]nd so on for all the other things which made merry with my senses’ (31).

Moreover, language not only fails to capture the essence of Molloy’s experience, but actually hinders or limits that experience as it forces it into linguistic structures of meaning: ‘the icy words hail down upon me, the icy meanings, and the world dies too, fouly named’ (31). Representation in language imposes a limited meaning on the chaos of non-linguistic experience because the perceived world is supplanting by the words used to represent it; the infinite, fluid meanings of lived experience become fixed to the finite meaning of words, and thus for Molloy, ‘the world dies … fouly named’ (31). Trapped in a world of icy linguistic meanings, Molloy is left to examine what Copland and Turner describe as ‘the ruin that language leaves when … it has passed across the reality’ (762).

As Richard N. Coe notes, for Beckett’s characters ‘there is the malevolent power of language which builds an impenetrable barrier between reality as it can be known, and the ultimate reality as it is’ (109); unable to translate their experience of ‘reality’ through the filter of language, they find themselves able to perceive only the limits of language itself. Thus the world can only be understood through language, even if, to appropriate a phrase of Stephen Dedalus, it is a ‘disappointed bridge’ to non-linguistic reality.

If for Joyce the construction of a linear narrative is also a destructive or suppressive act, then writing for Beckett is, even more so, an act of both creation and destruction; as Malone complains, ‘my notes have a tendency … to annihilate all they purport to record’ (259). Malone’s words annihilate because they implicitly suppress any
alternative possibilities of representation or experience, much as a linear narrative suppresses all other possibilities — thus the double meaning of the Unnamable’s utterance: ‘The moment the silence is broken in this way it can only mean one thing’ (337, emphasis added). Moran, narrator of the second part of Molloy, describes recording his recollections ‘with a firm hand weaving inexorably back and forth and devouring my page with the indifference of a shuttle’ (132) — a Penelopean making and unmaking of his world as he weaves it into language. James Olney writes that ‘drawing the analogy to Penelope’s weaving a shroud is not altogether idle, for Beckett conceives of this weaving as an act both of life and of death: his narrative destroys as it creates, it devours the life it records as it devours the remaining sheets in the exercise book and the pencil with which he writes’ (874-75). Essentially, the sense of the destructive power of language felt by Beckett’s characters stems from the contrast between the free, fluid nature of experience and the structured formality of writing. In an interview with Tom F. Driver, Beckett discussed ‘the tension in art between mess and form’ (23). Driver paraphrases Beckett as declaring that, ‘[u]ntil recently, art has withstood the pressure of chaotic things. It has held them at bay. It realized that to admit them was to jeopardize form.’ In opposition to this supposed preference of ‘form’ over ‘mess,’ Beckett goes on to assert that the mess ‘is there and it must be allowed in’ (23). Under this view, language can be seen as an attempt to bring ‘form’ to the ‘mess’ of personal experience — a form which can be as constrictive and corruptive as it is fruitful. James Knowlson, Beckett’s biographer and long-time friend, writes of his apparent ‘acceptance of incoherence and chaos in human affairs and a distrust of all rational attempts to impose shape on this chaos’ (228). This distrust extends to the structured formality of writing and language; as Christian Prigent
argues, ‘[i]f the world is (only) this “long confused emotion” of which Molloy speaks [Three Novels 25], writing is an attempt to elude all that would cloak, in the stability and sweet clarity of lexical mastery, the violence and obscure aridity of this emotion’ (68). Furthermore, in contrast to the realist belief that truthful propositions about the world can be ‘isolated, observed and depicted’ (Morris 33), Molloy cynically suggests that ‘all that is false may more readily be reduced to notions clear and distinct, distinct from all other notions’ (82, emphasis added) – the ‘true’ nature of reality presumably being too multifarious and chaotic to be contained within the limited, binary structures of language. For Beckett, as Prigent argues, language thus short-changes and makes a travesty of experience by pressing stifling form onto ‘the desire and free in-significance that make the present’ (68-69).

**Editorial Selection and Point-of-View: ‘Aeolus’ and the Trilogy.**

For both Joyce and Beckett, then, the major problem with linguistic representation is that it imposes a singular or limiting meaning on an endlessly heterogeneous, multifaceted world, corruptively formalising the fluid nature of experience. Linguistic representations are always inadequate to the reality they represent because they are necessarily subject to processes of selection and exclusion. This necessity for selection in the construction of linguistic representations takes on a political significance with the realisation that there must always be someone making such selections, and that therefore behind any representation is a particular perspective, along with its attendant goals and motivations. This is an issue which Joyce indirectly addresses in the ‘Aeolus’ episode of *Ulysses.* ‘Aeolus’ is clearly and explicitly mediated by an external, editorial figure, which David
Hayman calls the ‘arranger.’ This figure divides the text into subsections and attaches headlines to them: the otherwise naturalistic narrative is constantly interrupted by the imposition of ‘descriptive’ tags, such as ‘HOW A GREAT DAILY ORGAN IS TURNED OUT’ (114) or ‘LOST CAUSES | NOBLE MARQUESS MENTIONED’ (128). For Lawrence, the relationship between the headlines and content of ‘Aeolus’ re-enacts in microcosm the problematic relationship between language and reality: ‘The headings act as a kind of signifier, the plot as the signified, and the relationship between them reveals the wealth of the signified with respect to the signifier’ (74). Thus once again Joyce illustrates the disparity between world and word: ‘The story always exceeds the attempts of the headings to encompass its meaning – the wealth of life exceeds its representation in writing’ (Lawrence 74). But the editorial interference which characterises ‘Aeolus’ also brings out into the open the editorial processes which underlie all examples of the written word, whether novel or newspaper. Through the obvious mediation of the text by an outside ‘arranger,’ Joyce draws attention to the external forces which normally operate on a text from outside the awareness of the reader; he makes explicit the author(ity) figure behind any linguistic representation, the figure who orders events and places their own interpretation on them much as the ‘editor’ arranges the text and tags it with headlines in ‘Aeolus.’ It is no accident that, when J. J. O’Molloy asks a colleague in the offices of the Freeman’s Journal ‘[i]s the editor to be seen?’, the other man replies: ‘Very much so’ (120).

Furthermore, not only the presence but the nature of this particular ‘editor’ is overly apparent, as what has hitherto appeared to be a novel is invaded by the language of journalism. As James Fairhall notes, ‘the Arranger manifests itself in “Aeolus” as the
suprapersonal consciousness of modern journalism, which orders the world and particularly time ("Sufficient for the day is the newspaper thereof" [Ulysses 133]) in its own specialized way’ (208). Lawrence argues that the editorial interference of ‘Aeolus’ serves to subvert the apparent naturalism of the earlier episodes of Ulysses: while it is a ‘nonparodic style that establishes the decorum of the novel,’ when this disappears with the advent of ‘Aeolus,’ ‘we realize that it too was a choice among many possibilities, a mode of presentation’ (43). The narrator of ‘Aeolus’ is clearly not ‘objective’ – it apparently has a vested interest in a journalistic mode of presentation – underscoring the same point made by ‘Ithaca’ and ‘Wandering Rocks’: that there cannot be a truly objective narrator, and that there can be no escape from style. As Kenner writes, ‘[a]ny “style” is a system of limits,’ each with ‘its recirculating habits and its exclusions’ (Joyce’s 81); all representation is attended by its own goals and motivations – such as those of journalism in ‘Aeolus’ – and consequently its own limitations. If style is a ‘choice among many possibilities,’ then each style makes its own assumptions about which aspects of the world to attend to and in what way, and consequently all representation is embedded with the implicit authority of authorial control. Trevor L. Williams discusses the authority inherent in editorial decisions:

The reader has the illusion of freedom, but it is a freedom sanctioned and controlled by the authority of the author. Seen in this light, the act of reading fiction imitates the working of ideology at large: daily one reads, watches, or listens to the ‘free’ media without attending to the editorial decisions taken on one’s behalf, the closing, as Herbert Marcuse put it, of the universe of discourse. (157)
In ‘Aeolus,’ Joyce addresses the issue of such concealed authority by making it explicit, exposing the authoritative and ideological organisation of the text for what it is. In contrast to the presumed representational authoritativeness of the realist novel, he opens up the textual ordering of the world to question, enacting what Lawrence calls his ‘scepticism about the ordering of experience in language’ (119). Indeed, Morris notes that, in critical perception, realism has gone ‘from being a progressive literary order to becoming an authoritative, repressive one’ (30). This fall from grace, he argues, stems from the assumptions mimetic art makes about its ability to ‘objectively’ represent the world:

In contemporary examinations of the question … mimesis is castigated for necessarily imposing a repressive order, a doctrine, upon the freedoms of both reality and art. In terms of reality, the mimetic impulse in art is viewed as ideologically motivated, resulting in the forced artistic capitulation to a repressive, pre-articulated and authorized version of the ‘natural’ order of things. (40-41)

Where ‘Wandering Rocks’ and ‘Ithaca’ question language’s ability to represent reality, ‘Aeolus’ un_masks the ideological motivations which influence its ordering in language. For Joyce, as for Roland Barthes, in some respects ‘mimesis serves as a repressive ideological and aesthetic order, reinforcing a prejudged view of the world and a prescription for its depiction. Like the Platonic banishment of mimetic art, this treatment of mimesis mistrusts the authority presumed in mimetic art’ (Morris 41).

While Joyce hints that the construction of a linear narrative is in a sense arbitrary and draws attention to the process of selection, Beckett goes a step further and
undermines the basis on which such selections are made. While narrating his stories, Malone expresses an uncertainty about whether the material he is choosing to mention is necessarily the most valid: ‘Did I say I only say a small proportion of the things that come into my head? I must have. I choose those that seem somehow akin. It is not always easy. I hope they are the most important’ (253). As a narrator, Molloy is even more doubtful about his ability to distinguish the essential from the extraneous: ‘And when it comes to neglecting fundamentals, I think I have nothing to learn, and indeed I confuse them with accidentals’ (80). Beckett levels the hierarchy of meaning, denying any basis by which ‘the most important’ information can be selected in a representation: while Joyce draws attention to and satirises the editorial role implicit in any representation, Beckett undermines the possibility that such a role could ever legitimately exist. Furthermore, Beckett humorously degrades the value of representing anything; after all, the choice for Molloy is not between things worth mentioning and those that are not, but between ‘things not worth mentioning and those even less so’ (41). Not only can the relative worth of various pieces of information not be conclusively determined, he mischievously suggests, but the very act of representing at all is of questionable viability and merit. Beckett’s Trilogy is anti-authoritarian in that it undermines the idea that an authorial figure can have the authority or capability to legitimately determine ‘the most important’ material to be represented and how it should be represented. While Joyce makes the authorial process as evident as possible, bringing the ‘arranger’ of his text on stage so its workings can be exposed, Beckett undermines the writer’s very ability to narrate and represent; both do so in the interests of challenging the authority assumed in linguistic representations. As Alan S. Loxterman argues:
Through their fictional technique both James Joyce and Samuel Beckett articulate theological uncertainty, the uneasiness of twentieth-century readers about whether reality can be grounded in ultimate authority. In fiction such authority is represented by the godlike narrator who oversees characters and plot and who provides the controlling intelligence from which a normative set of values can be derived, no matter how eccentrically a work’s characters might behave or how experimentally they might be presented in terms of narrative technique. The status of this traditionally godlike narrative authority is reinterpreted by Joyce then challenged by Beckett. (61)

In Beckett’s case, this dismantling of the authority behind literary representation can perhaps be seen as an indirect response to the disastrous consequences of twentieth century fascism, which he witnessed first-hand (see Knowlson 273-308). Knowlson notes that Beckett ‘followed with fascinated horror the workings of a bureaucracy that could spare or condemn a human being because he or she could or could not produce a certificate of baptism,’ and suggests that it may have been the experience of such ‘rationalistic barbarism’ which drove him to join the French Resistance (306). It may also have been such experiences of hegemonic authority that led him to the mistrust of Cartesian foundationalism and realist faith in mimesis which informs his post-war novels.

Language and Ideology.

In addition to questioning the efficacy of language as a representational vehicle, both Joyce and Beckett display an uneasiness about language stemming from its apparent external origins and its resultant social dimensions. While language does not necessarily originate outside the self, if it is to effect the transaction of information and ideas it must have interpersonal validity, and therefore must exist as something which is external and
shared rather than internal and private. Communicational language in this sense is a contract, a communal system of meaning in which its users agree to participate, the system itself not having originated in any of its individual participants. As Morris explains:

Individual communities engaging in a language game ... establish rules by which meaning is created and received. The practical social goals of co-existence and understanding necessitate an at least tentatively bounded world of meaning. For if humans within their communities wish to communicate, they must agree on a defined set of 'rules' for the establishment of meaning, on a referential use of words in their particular language game. Language, then, is not a series of essentialist correspondences between words and objects, nor is it an entirely autonomous linguistic system of random semiosis, but rather a community's socially constituted means of communication ... (63)

Thus 'national' languages, such as English, appear external to any one of the individuals who utilise them: while the language does not of course exist entirely outside of human influence, the individual has not created the words or the linguistic system that they use. It is this perception of the imperative externality of linguistic systems which, in addition to the representational limitations of language, results in the sense of alienation from language which pervades the works of both Joyce and Beckett.

Because of its origins as a socially-constructed system of meaning, language is inscribed with social values. If, as Joyce and Beckett suggest, there can be no 'objective' language, then any language is subject to particular biases and idiosyncrasies in the way it represents the external world, as well as being replete with layers of tradition and complex cultural meaning which have accumulated over time. Joyce's biographer
Richard Ellmann recounts how the writer once remarked to a friend, ‘I cannot express myself in English without enclosing myself in a tradition’ (397). In his sense of the social values inherent in language, Joyce prefigures the ideas of theorist M. M. Bakhtin, who writes of ‘language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived of as ideologically saturated, language as a world view’ (271). Language here is not simply a system of communication, but an entire way of experiencing the world; as Kenner argues, ‘[a]ny “style” is a system of limits’ (Joyce’s 81), and similarly any language as a whole is a system of limits with its own ‘habits’ and ‘exclusions.’ For Joyce, language is not only limited in its capacity to represent external reality but, because of the social values inherent in it, it also linguistically renders the world it represents in ways dictated by ideology and tradition. Thus, as Ellmann remarks, ‘[a]t a time when others were questioning the liberties he took with English, Joyce was conscious only of its restraints upon him’ (397).

For Joyce, anxiety over the external origins of his native tongue, and systems of language in general, largely stems from issues of identity politics: as a native of colonial Ireland, he experienced an acute sense of linguistic oppression and displacement, the native tongue(s) of Ireland having been supplanted by English. The young Stephen, conversing with his English Dean of Studies in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, expresses a sense of alienation and entrapment in the knowledge that the language he is most fluent in is that of the coloniser: ‘The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine … I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words’ (159). Stephen’s words, as Fairhall suggests in a broader
context, recall Tacitus’s assertion that ‘[t]he language of the conqueror in the mouths of the conquered is the language of slaves’ (248); the predominant language in countries dominated by foreign powers, such as English-controlled Ireland, is politically significant because it is symbolic of the power held by the colonising culture. Stephen’s, and by extension Joyce’s, discomfort with the English language reflects their unwilled immersion in a system of communication and discourse ‘owned’ by a culture which also dominated the political and economic life of their native country.

Under this conception of language, the act of naming the world takes on a directly political or ideological function, particularly within a relationship of disparity such as that between colonial Ireland and England. As Seamus Deane notes in his introduction to the collection of essays *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*, ‘[t]he naming or renaming of a race, a region, a person, is, like all acts of primordial nomination, an act of possession’ (18). In this light, episodes of *Ulysses* such as ‘Wandering Rocks,’ which I have argued address the failure of language to adequately capture experience or physical reality, can also be seen as addressing the political elements of language. Len Platt, for example, argues that ‘Wandering Rocks’ doubles as a catalogue of colonial historiography, a ‘historical naming’ or ‘a kind of roll-call’ expressed in the Anglo-Irish placenames (144). For Platt, the episode’s

personages and street names commemorate something quite other than a vibrant national culture. They are the markers of an imperial history which has had its presence stamped very firmly over the stones of a modern urban landscape. These markers reflect a historical dynamic – the dynamic of colonization. The frequency of monarch’s names and the names of both English and Anglo-Irish landed families constitute a topographic delineation of the ‘plantation.’ They also
authenticate, registering ownership of streets and buildings. Even more importantly, this naming indicates ownership, not just of material things, but of the historical process itself. (146)

‘Wandering Rocks’ reveals strata of historical subtexts which are intimately tied to the language in which the city is cast. If the episode, as I have suggested, emphasises that life can never be truly contained in language, then when we encounter names such as ‘the Empire music hall’ (223) or ‘Windsor avenue’ (235), we are reminded not only of the inadequacy of the name to denote the thing but also the political and ideological forces which have influenced the forcing of the world into particular linguistic structures. In a sense, Dublin is ‘foully named’ by the colonisers, who name the city in their own language and thus assert their ownership both of its material and social features. The politically-charged placenames of ‘Wandering Rocks’ are specific examples of an issue that for Joyce extends to the whole of the English language: that in its deficient representation of the world, it also tends to reproduce the ideological prejudices of dominant cultures such as that of colonial England.

Beckett too senses the ways in which socially-inscribed values are instilled in individuals through the language they use; his characters frequently note with a sense of unease that the language of communication and thought originates outside the self. As Iain Wright notes, ‘Beckett’s narrators, like certain poststructuralist critics, are preoccupied, obsessed, with the perception that writers are not the origins of the language which they use … and that in many ways it is the texts, the pre-given languages, which write the author and not the other way round’ (16). The Unnamable notes with distress that he can only think and speak with the ‘words of others,’ and as a result cannot escape his alignment to a socio-linguistic framework: ‘It’s a poor trick that consists in ramming a
set of words down your gullet on the principle that you can’t bring them up without being branded as belonging to their breed’ (314; 324). While it is much harder to place Beckett in a specific political context than it is for Joyce, his scepticism towards language still serves a political function. While Joyce is primarily concerned with the political implications of using the English language, Beckett’s denouncement of the social aspects of language apparently extends to all established systems of language; his narrators are not concerned about the social values inherent in any specific language so much as the fact that any language they should choose to use originates outside themselves and is ideologically saturated, consequently precluding them from representing (and thus experiencing) themselves or the world around them in their own terms. Even more conspicuously than for Joyce, for Beckett language is always pervaded by ideology, binding its users to a social framework. Language limits the fluid nature of experience to the strictures of words, but it also subjugates that experience to the ideological biases inscribed within the language. As I discuss in a later chapter, Beckett attempts to circumvent the ‘death’ wrought by words by directing them toward the ‘life’ which exists outside of language; it is only by paradoxically using language to indicate the existence of that which exists outside of language – the unnamable – that Beckett can suggest the possibility of freedom from a limiting, socially-bound network of meaning. As Prigent states, ‘[i]t is only in the fact that there exists the unnamable that there resides the chance to escape subjugation’ (68).

Significantly, for someone so concerned about the limitations of language and the social values inscribed in it, Beckett chose to abandon his native tongue and compose in another language. Beginning in the mid 1940s, he began to write primarily in French and
subsequently translate his works into English – a process by which he wrote many of his most well-known works, including Molloy, Malone meurt (Malone Dies), L’Innommable (The Unnamable) and En attendant Godot (Waiting For Godot). By intentionally moving out of his linguistic comfort zone, Beckett was placing himself in a position where his approach to language would have to be more deliberate, forcing him to write with a heightened consciousness of the workings of language which was lost in the over-familiarity of English. Certainly the English language was inescapably laden with the baggage of cultural and literary precedents; Knowlson paraphrases Beckett as suggesting that ‘English was overloaded with associations and allusions’ (323). Kiberd suggests that ‘[t]he attraction of French for Beckett may not have been its intrinsic character as a language, so much as the fact that he would have to use it with the literal-minded caution of a learner confronted with a second language: it reminded him that a writer is always estranged from the language’ (Inventing 535). By moving to an estranged language, Beckett may have been better able to see the limits of his own; as Bakhtin states, ‘one language can, after all, see itself only in the light of another language’ (12). This idea is hinted at by Molloy as he muses on his inability to accurately judge his familiar surroundings: ‘This phenomenon, if I remember rightly, was characteristic of my region. Things are perhaps different today. Though I fail to see, never having left my region, what right I have to speak of its characteristics’ (65). By abandoning his native linguistic region Beckett sought, if not to escape the confines of language altogether, at least to

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4 For a discussion of some of the issues arising from the fact that these texts exist in two different languages, see Leslie Hill’s chapter ‘The Trilogy Translated’ in his book Beckett’s Fiction: In Different Words. In the context of language as ideologically saturated and inscribed with tradition, Hill discusses the duality of these texts – how the French and English versions are not, and cannot be, fundamentally equivalent.
better understand the confines of his own language, and to approach anew the
problematic and differential relationship each language has with the world it represents.

For both Joyce and Beckett, language is inadequate to the vastness and fluidity of
experience. Joyce mocks the ‘scientific’ objectives of literary realism; in episodes such
as ‘Ithaca’ and ‘Wandering Rocks’ he takes the principles behind realism to an extreme,
ultimately revealing the doomed nature of attempts at comprehensive representation, and
exposing the myth of objectivity. Joyce shows that all literature, and by extension all
linguistic representation, is, as Lawrence puts it, ‘an arbitrary interruption of life’ (78): by
allowing into his text glimpsed alternatives to linear narrative he demonstrates that all
narrative operates by a basis of selection and exclusion, and thus always constitutes some
perspective which is not omniscient and objective but a choice among infinite
possibilities. For Beckett, the impotence of representational language is taken for
granted; his characters bemoan not just the contraction of life into arbitrary linear
narratives, but the very forcing of experience into language which is not able to
adequately contain it. Joyce and Beckett both address the authority concealed in the
selection process which informs the construction of linguistic representations – the
‘editorial decisions taken on one’s behalf’ as Williams puts it (157) – Joyce making
explicit the authorial decisions affecting the text, Beckett overtly challenging the
authority on which such decisions are made. Primarily, by destabilising language and
drawing attention to the invariably subjective nature of linguistic representations, both
writers enact an illumination and challenging of authority – authority which exists not
just in the way language is used to represent the world, but more fundamentally in the
ideological and cultural values inherent in language itself. Thus if Joyce restores ‘time’s
mystery’ by rejecting the parcelling of time into linear narratives (Kiberd, *Inventing* 340), Beckett attempts to restore the mystery of the world before it was neatly parcelled into language; both attempt to escape the ideological subjugation which such ‘parcelling’ entails.
Chapter II:
The Self and Language

Enough of acting the infant who has been told so often how he was found under a cabbage that in the end he remembers the exact spot in the garden and the kind of life he led there before joining the family circle. (*Three Novels* 324)

As well as displaying a fascination with the ability (or inability) of language to represent external reality and individual experience, Joyce and Beckett explore language as it is constitutive of the self, portraying personal identity as being fundamentally reliant on linguistic constructs and processes. The role of language in constituting the self is not, of course, straightforward: both writers’ approaches to language itself are marked by ambivalence and scepticism, and consequently both explore the problematic relationship between language and identity. As I discuss in the previous chapter, Joyce and Beckett were concerned with language’s external origin and the social values inherent in it, Joyce remarking on the ‘tradition’ intrinsic in the English language, Beckett similarly bemoaning its satiation with ‘associations and allusions’ (*Ellmann* 397; *Knowlson* 323). This sense of alienation from socially- and ideologically-replete language was exacerbated by the two writers’ positions as colonial subjects, and with regard to the self they are both particularly concerned with the problems and politics entailed in a personal identity constructed out of the ‘words of others’ (*Three Novels* 314) – especially when the ‘others’ in question represent a dominant social, cultural or political group. The problematic social aspects of personal identity extend beyond the broader language from which personal identity is constructed (e.g. ‘national’ languages such as English), with
Joyce and Beckett more specifically portraying the self as being constructed out of social narratives or linguistic structures which exist within these broader languages. For both writers, individuals can be seen to construct their identities by writing themselves into socio-linguistic narratives, adopting notions of identity which pre-exist in the language structures which surround them. Rather than implying a particular degree of agency in the construction of identity, however, Joyce and Beckett portray this process as an unavoidable assimilation into ideology; precluded from experiencing themselves on their own terms, their characters find themselves coopted into linguistically-articulated, pre-existing identities which ultimately serve to reproduce and maintain hierarchical social and economic arrangements. Furthermore, this process of linguistic ‘interpellation,’ as the philosopher Louis Althusser terms it, represents not just the adoption of or cooption into linguistically-mediated notions of identity, but assimilation into ideological systems which are actively advanced through systems of language: Joyce in particular addresses the way in which groups with political or ideological agendas seek to centralise their worldviews through the creation of unified language structures. Characterised by their alienation from and scepticism towards language in general, Joyce and Beckett explore in their works the complex role of language both in constituting individuals’ senses of personal identity and in facilitating the often problematic social and ideological elements of such identity.

The Self As Text: ‘Circe’ and *Krapp’s Last Tape*.

The limitations of language as a representational medium take on a constitutive significance for personal identity if the self is viewed as a fundamentally linguistic
construct. The critic and theorist Fredric Jameson provides an eloquent summary of the relationship between identity and language, proposing ‘first, that personal identity is itself the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future with one’s present; and, second, that such active temporal unification is itself a function of language’ (Postmodernism 26-27). For Jameson, the ability to unify the disparate moments which make up a life is reliant on the ability to connect one’s past, present and future in language – in short, the coupling of various temporal events by way of a first personal pronoun, utilising sentences such as ‘I was there,’ ‘I did this’ or ‘I will do this.’\(^5\) A failure to achieve such linguistically-based temporal unification, according to Jameson, would break down the sense of continuity of identity, resulting in an atemporal, ‘schizophrenic’-like state:

If we are unable to unify the past, present, and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present, and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life. With the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time.

(Postmodernism 27)

Jameson’s account of trans-temporal identity, as well as indicating the extent to which the experience of continuity between past and present relies on the connective properties of language, implies that personal identity is something that is experienced in the terms of a linguistic construct; even the term ‘biographical experience’ suggests something literary or fabricated, as if the individual experiences the substance of their life through the prism

\(^5\) This is, of course, a major simplification, but illustrates the core principles of Jameson’s ideas.
provided by paradigms of biographical representation. As James Olney points out in a
discussion of Beckett’s *Company*, ‘[a]utobiographers and other life-narrators’ frequently
begin the process of narrating their personal histories with statements such as ‘‘I was
born on such and such a date and in such and such a place,’’ even though the experience
of birth is invariably ‘unremembered’ (862). But of course the use of language to
transcend unbridgeable gaps in memory and time is not confined to the writers of
autobiographies; everyone is a ‘life-narrator’ to some extent, representing the content of
his or her life in autobiographical narratives, and everyone utilises language to unify
aspects of these ‘histories’ which conscious experience cannot – who, after all, would
omit the details of their birth or early childhood from a description of their life simply
because it is ‘unremembered’? This tendency to connect unremembered past events to
the present by linguistic means also calls into question the veracity of other ‘biographical
experience’ as represented in language; as Olney goes on to suggest, the act of beginning
with the ‘absolutely unverifiable event’ of birth not only ‘cast[s] great doubt on
everything else’ a narrator may assert about their life, but also ‘render[s] impossible the
assertion of “I” in the recalling of these unrecallable events’ (862). If, as Olney suggests,
the ‘I,’ or the conscious conception of self, exists by virtue not of objective memory but
of language, this raises the idea that personal identity is not merely reliant on language
but is, in a sense, a primarily linguistic construct – the self as a *text* – an idea which is
explored by both Joyce and Beckett. Stephen Connor sees an analogy between dramatic
or literary representations of time and the conscious experience of past, present, and
future in Beckett’s play *That Time*:
The words ['in no time' (Beckett, *That* 424)] may ... suggest that the audience has participated in a stretch of 'no-time,' that is, the 'non-time' of dramatic representation, in which there is no real before or after, or even present tense, but only the representations of them. If we feel ourselves about to be restored to the real time of habitual experience, we may also feel for a moment the anxiety that this theatrical 'no-time' is more like our own lived time and our representations of it than we care to, or can afford to, believe. ('Voice' 132)

Rather than literature imitating experience, here experience imitates literature; for Connor, the sense of time and continuity between past and present as constructed in the human mind is analogous to the representation of time in drama or literature. Paul D. Morris, discussing *Ulysses*, notes that 'humans occupy moments or fragments of time only in relation to other humans. From the perspective of the conscious individual, however, life and time are a single stream without beginning or end' (122). Connor's remarks about *That Time* suggest the extent to which such a sense of continuity and unity of identity is fabricated in consciousness by way of Jamesonian unifications of 'biographical experience' in language, which parallel the fabrication of temporal flow and continuity in art or literature. Much as linear narratives, or the chronological narratives of drama, provide an artificial representation of time as a 'single stream,' the human consciousness uses frameworks of language to effect a sense of personal unity and continuity in the face of disjunctions of memory and experience: the seamless text, perhaps, is no less 'real' than the seamless consciousness. In this conception, the self is a linguistic construct or a text which unifies the individual's past and future with their present but which also constitutes a somewhat artificial sense of continuity and
wholeness, and the works of Joyce and Beckett offer insights into the ways in which continuous and unified personal identity is fabricated in language.

An idea of the self-as-text is presented in the ‘Circe’ episode of *Ulysses*, an example I will use to provide a broad introduction to linguistic notions of personal identity in Joyce and Beckett. ‘Circe’ has the structure of a drama, with stage directions and cues for its *dramatis personae*, although if it is a drama it could never be performed on stage. Alongside relatively ‘realistic’ dialogue a raft of hallucinatory happenings and anthropomorphic transmogrifications take place, such as the apparition of an ascending ‘cake of new clean lemon soap … diffusing light and perfume’ (419), Bloom’s assailment by ‘twittering, warbling’ kisses (449), and characters’ constant changes in costume – and gender. The episode’s subject matter takes the form of a nightmarish pantomime, of which Stephen and Bloom are a disturbed audience, and in which they are also actors. If history, as Stephen proclaims in ‘Nestor,’ is a nightmare from which he is trying to awake, then ‘Circe’ represents the nightmare of personal history. Wracked with guilt over his mother’s death, Stephen is confronted by her visage, which urges him to repent his sins (540-42). Similarly, Bloom encounters the mutating spectre of his self-poisoned father (416-17, 482-85, 488-91) and the silent ghost of his deceased infant son (565), as well as standing trial over allegations of impropriety against various women he has known (436-49). ‘Circe’ re-presents and re-shapes the multifarious and often traumatic content of its characters’ pasts, giving phantasmagoric form to the detritus of personal experience and the ‘sins of the past’ (503); the episode dramatises the distorted memorial processes by which personal identity is constituted.
‘Circe’ reflects on the nature of the self not only in its content but also, more tellingly, in its structure: the fabricated nature of personal identity is suggested in the episode’s self-conscious ‘constructedness,’ or, as Karen Lawrence puts it in her discussion of ‘Ithaca,’ its advertisement of ‘its own artifice’ (58). As in ‘Aeolus,’ the editorial arrangement behind the text in ‘Circe’ is strikingly apparent. Hugh Kenner argues that the opening scene description of the episode ‘is surely “selected” and “arranged” to the point of Gothic parody; a stage setting, precisely, where all is flimsy, where light is expression, where careful casting has seen to it that the shadowy men and women shall all be “stunted”’ (‘Circe’ 346; Ulysses 408). Here, the conspicuous ‘arrangedness’ and artificiality of the text has implications not just for the arrangement of linguistic or literary representations but also for the ‘arrangement’ of personal identity, so to speak. The organisation of the text into dramatic form reflects the organisation of the characters’ memories into linguistic or theatrical arrangements which attempt to give form to the mess of personal experience. In the previous chapter I discuss what Beckett, in an interview with Tom F. Driver, described as a ‘tension in art between the mess and form’ (23). Olney remarks that ‘[t]he belief that the chaos of experience must not be reduced simply to the form of the art work, but rather that the two should necessarily “remain separate” … has various consequences for Beckett’s repeated and renewed attempts at narrating a life’ (867), and both Beckett and Joyce represent personal identity as a construct which corruptively formalises the fluid and chaotic nature of lived experience. Memory in ‘Circe’ is a drama, consisting of characters – essentially constructs created by Stephen and Bloom – reciting seemingly rehearsed lines. If personal identity is reliant on language, ‘Circe’ suggests, it is a dramatised fabrication of
experience and fantasy which is experienced and relived through mental performance. Kenner argues that

the ideal reader is meant at this point to reflect how thoroughly congenial is the theatre of roles and surfaces to this author's vision of things. On the first page of the book the first thing we were shown was Buck Mulligan playacting, and if Stephen Dedalus seemed to be holding himself aloof from that particular play, it was because of his immersion in a different play of his own. ('Circe' 341)

The structure of 'Circe' thus suggests the 'fictional' nature of the narratives of personal history, as well as their reinforcement through reiteration. The characters of the episode are immersed in the plays of their own identities; personal experience and fantasy is consolidated and (re)arranged in language, re-performed in a textualised procession of words and images, and ultimately made real through its re-performance and reiteration. As Malone says in Beckett's Malone Dies: 'If I go on long enough calling that my life I'll end up by believing it. It's the principle of advertising' (53). 'Circe' presents the inner life of the self as comprising linguistically-represented experience, transfigured through the lens of metaphor and fantasy, and made formal, stable and reviewable like a literary or dramatic text.

While 'Circe' offers a preliminary exploration of a notion of the self as a linguistic construct or text, Beckett much more extensively and explicitly explores these ideas in his play Krapp's Last Tape. In contrast to the self-conscious surrealism of 'Circe,' Krapp's Last Tape more literally explores the notion of the self-as-text as Krapp listens to autobiographical audio recordings he has made at previous stages in his life.
Recording a survey of his life each year on his birthday, Krapp has transferred the intangible 'text' of his life – the linguistically-mediated recollections which constitute his sense of identity – to physical texts: the reels of tape stored in the drawers of his desk, which can be replayed on demand. Furthermore, Krapp's mechanisation of the memory process ostensibly represents a move towards a greater objectivity of recollection, aided by technology. As Paul Lawley notes, Krapp's futuristic setting reflects the fact that, at the time Beckett was writing, the tape recorder was a relatively new invention: Beckett had to set the play 'in the future' in order to allow the 69-year-old Krapp time to have recorded tapes some 40 years in his past (89; Krapp's 221). More importantly, the tape recorder was a form of technology that had the potential to revolutionise individuals' relationships to their pasts, offering the ability to capture and replay utterances mechanically rather than relying on human memory. Preserved verbatim in the medium of tape, Krapp's 'self-texts' are technically accurate transcriptions of his perceived condition at previous stages of his life, rather than the phantasmagorical processions of 'confused emotion' (Three Novels 25) which Bloom and Stephen experience in 'Circe.' If the tape recorder allows Krapp to accurately record his feelings and experiences for later reference, then this objectivity could also be seen to apply to his identity insofar as it is a construct based on memory as contained in language. Removed from the phantasmagoric fusion of fact, figuration and fantasy which comprise the drama of personal identity in 'Circe,' Krapp's Last Tape apparently presents a paradigm which promises a veracious notion of personal identity as a temporal unification of the present with a linguistically-mediated past – a past which is made present by technology.
Despite the apparent recollective objectivity offered by the tape recorder, however, Krapp finds himself alienated from the recordings of his past—his audio self-texts—in multiple ways. He fails to ascertain several references made by his former self: encountering allusions to a ‘black ball,’ a ‘dark nurse,’ and a ‘memorable equinox’ in the ledger which indexes the contents of his tapes, Krapp finds himself mystified as to the details of these supposedly ‘memorable’ events (223). On occasion, he fails even to understand the vocabulary of the voice on the tape: when the 39-year-old Krapp speaks of his mother’s prolonged ‘viduity,’ the older Krapp has to look the word up in a dictionary (225)—‘as if it had come from a source entirely outside himself,’ as Ryan Bishop and Walter Spitz note (71). At times Krapp is in cohorts with his younger self at the expense of the even younger Krapp; the 69-year-old shares a laugh with the 39-year-old on tape about the pompous voice and highflying aspirations of Krapp in his twenties (224). The 39- and 69-year-old Krapps share a sense of distasteful alienation from their younger self: ‘Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp,’ mutters Krapp at 39, as the older man assents (224). Immediately after this brief communion with the younger voice on tape, however, the present-day Krapp laughs alone at the 39-year-old’s solemn recounting of a resolution to drink less alcohol (224). The chasm between the 39- and 69-year-old Krapps only continues to grow: the latter finds the former’s ecstatic description of an epiphanic ‘vision at last’ so distasteful and infuriating that he winds the tape forward, cursing, so as to bypass the section entirely (226-27). Ultimately, Krapp comes to view his 39-year-old self with the same repulsed detachment with which the 39-year-old viewed himself in his late twenties: ‘Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago,’ he exclaims into the tape recorder, ‘hard to believe I was
ever as bad as that. Thank God that’s all done with anyway’ (228). Rather than enabling an objective sense of continuity with his past, the tape recordings emphasise the disjointed nature of Krapp’s identity; alienated from the language, the memories, and the outlooks of the voices on tape, the Krapp on stage stands alone, cut off from all former versions of himself. As Connor remarks, ‘Krapp’s Last Tape demonstrates how little is kept in such a “faithful” recording. For Krapp to listen to the tape of himself as a man of thirty-nine is to reveal clearly his ironic non-coincidence with himself’ (‘Voice’ 122).

The ‘non-coincidence’ of Krapp at various stages in his life confounds the idea that identity is continuous and lifelong, implying the impossibility of any stable manifestation of the person known as ‘Krapp.’ As Lawley argues, ‘[t]he situation is both comic and strange, the result of the confrontation not simply of an arid present with a rich past, but of conflicting formations of the self emerging from a series of such formations’ (90). The series of ‘conflicting formations’ of Krapp’s identity, furthermore, is a series without a telos, the continuous supplantment of each formation with a distinct and contradictory formation precluding any ultimate manifestation of ‘Krapp’: behind the solitary, cynical laughter of the man on stage there lies the spectre of a hypothetical future Krapp, laughing derisively at the beliefs and proclamations of himself at 69. The successive stages of Krapp’s ego are like the list of Molly Bloom’s supposed lovers provided in ‘Ithaca’: each one imagines himself to be ‘first, last, only and alone,’ while in fact he is ‘always the last term of a preceding series even if the first term of a succeeding one ... neither first nor last nor only nor alone in a series originating in and repeated to infinity’ (Ulysses 683). Krapp’s identity is ultimately discontinuous, devoid of a cohesive ‘I’ linking his experiences across time. Unable to unify the linguistic utterances
of his past and present, Krapp becomes like the schizophrenic Jameson describes, his life ‘an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time’ (Postmodernism 27). His words, spoken across various times and preserved on tape, represent separate, discrete utterances uprooted from their original contexts; furthermore, the words of his former selves, losing their meaning for the later Krapp, essentially become free-floating signifiers rather than constituent parts of a continuous, linguistically-constructed personal identity. While Joyce begins to explore the textual nature of personal identity and the transformative power of human memory in ‘Circe,’ in Krapp’s Last Tape Beckett employs an explicitly textual paradigm of identity in order to emphasise the fragmented and non-veracious nature of an individual’s memory, and therefore connection to the past.

Despite the reiterative accuracy provided by the tape recorder, then, Krapp is ultimately detached from his past, his identity anything but stable and continuous. Similarly, the Trilogy is replete with narrators who are often totally detached from the reality of their pasts. Molloy, characteristically uncertain about his ability to know the past, describes himself as being ‘ill-qualified’ to speak of his childhood (54). Malone, similarly doubtful about his capacity to remember, or in fact to make any truthful statement, wonders whether he is capable of ‘lying’ about any subject other than himself (189); when contemplating events he may have experienced in the past, the most assertive phrase he can muster is ‘I would not put it past me’ (228). The Unnamable, also, can no more verify past events than he can determine what he actually is: ‘I’m a big talking ball, talking about things that do not exist, or that exist perhaps, impossible to
know, beside the point’ (305). Beckett thus questions the relationship between personal identity or personal history as it is conceived by the individual and an objective history of events, primarily by questioning the accuracy and authenticity of conscious memory. As Olney argues, ‘Beckett, like other writers of our time, has altered the terms and raised the stakes of the wager by calling into doubt, in the most radical way, memory’s capacity to establish a relationship to our past and hence a relationship to ourselves grown out of the past’ (863). Beckett’s characters are estranged from themselves because their recollections, if they exist at all, do not have a clear relationship to real events: their memories are ‘disappointed bridges’ to their pasts. For Krapp, as for Molloy, Malone, and the Unnamable, the continuity of identity is problematic if not an outright fallacy. Krapp’s memory certainly does not play back with the precision of the machine, and as Mary Catanzaro states the presence of the tape recorder ‘only strengthens the huge gulf between the past and the present’ (37). If identity, as Jameson suggests, is the result of a temporal unification effected in language, then Beckett calls into question the efficacy and veracity of linguistic constructions which purport to connect present and past. The corruptive formalising and fictionalising properties of linguistically-mediated memory suggested by Joyce in ‘Circe’ are re-imagined by Beckett as an unbridgeable gulf between individuals and their personal histories as represented in language.

While the estranged voices on tape emphasise Krapp’s detachment from his past, it is clear nonetheless that the utilisation of autobiographical recordings does contribute in some way to his sense of identity. Krapp sees his autobiographical project as enacting the distillation of the essential from the extraneous elements of his experience: he

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6 I address recollective and epistemological uncertainty in the Trilogy more thoroughly in the next chapter, discussing the political function that such uncertainty serves. At this point, it suffices to say that Krapp is one in a long line of Beckettian characters who are cut off from their pasts by defective memory.
describes the act of recording and listening to his tapes as a process of ‘separating the
grain from the husks’ (223). Defining the ‘grain’ as ‘those things worth having … when
all my dust has settled,’ Krapp attempts to identify – with the help of the tapes – elements
of his past which are fundamental to his sense of self, which he then ‘[tries] to imagine’
(223-24, emphasis removed). As Lawley remarks, however, ‘this process can hardly
constitute a neutral record’ (90); Krapp’s relationship to the events narrated on tape, and
the original recordings themselves, represent not objective recollections but subjective
accounts of his identity as he perceives or imagines it to be. In a manner reminiscent of
the inseparability of fact and fiction in ‘Circe,’ Krapp’s memories, and their contribution
to his sense of self, are indistinguishable from his subjective self-imaginings and
retrospective fantasies. As Lawley goes on to argue, ‘[m]emory and imagination blur in
the tapes, which thus annually record not a life, not even the ‘grain’ of a life, but the
imagining of that grain’ (90). While Krapp’s memory is detached from the events
narrated on tape, he is further detached from any supposedly ‘objective’ past by the
fictionalising processes by which he makes sense of disparate information from his past
and incorporates it into his present sense of self. Connor notes how he alters the tapes,
and his relationship to them, by exerting editorial influence: ‘By ignoring the main part of
the tape, the account of the moment of inspiration which the younger Krapp feels is the
most significant part of his yearly report, and concentrating on the “farewell to love,”
Krapp seems in an almost literal way to be rewriting the record’ (‘Voice’ 124). Thus, as
Connor suggests, in the selective focuses of his revisitation of the tapes Krapp makes it
‘plain that the ‘farewell to love’ is [the event] that will be infinitely repeated’ (‘Voice’
124-25). By selectively repeating and bypassing particular sections of his recordings,
Krapp rearranges and rewrites the already subjective record provided by the tapes. As Lawley puts it, ‘[t]o get what he wants, he plays, skips, plays again, winds back and repeats: in short, he edits’ (90).

Moreover, in many respects Krapp’s approach to the tapes and their revisitation is not so much editorial as authorial. Lawley goes on to argue that

Krapp is not only an editor. We infer from several details that he is by vocation a writer – he refers ironically to an ‘opus ... magnum’ [Krapp’s 224] – and we may be puzzled that this is not emphasized by Beckett. Yet in a sense everything we see and hear Krapp doing is authorial: on his tape he (re)imagines his past, and on stage he edits it into his present. (91)

Disconnected from the reality of his personal history and at odds with his own former worldviews, Krapp reconstitutes his past in a way which not only revises his previous memories and senses of self but actively fabricates moments of significance out of his long and ambivalent experience. Thus for Lawley, rather than representing genuine watersheds in Krapp’s life, ‘[t]he mother’s death and the “Farewell to love” were consciously shaped as turning-points by the younger Krapp and are accepted as such by old Krapp’ (93). Wilma Siccama describes how Krapp’s ostensible desire to genuinely re-experience his past leads him into ever-increasing circles of fabricated representation:

The longing for the original experience drives Krapp to repetition, as he rewinds the tape to listen to the idyll once more. However, he does not experience the original event; he just repeats the recorded, recounted version. Krapp’s attempt to make the past present results not just in a repetition, but in a repetition of a representation, which leads him further and further away from the authentic experience. (177)
Krapp's desire for a genuine connection with his past 'cannot be satisfied, since what is being repeated is not the original experience but a representation' (Siccama 179). His initial experience is inevitably supplanted by a representation of that experience both on the tapes and in his conscious memory. Subsequently, his re-appraisal of these representations can only supplant them with further representation, and thus as Siccama argues '[e]very repetition differs from the authentic experience, doubles it, and ultimately leads to more attempts to make the past present, and hence to more representations' (179).

The inability of Krapp's representations of the past to objectively capture his experience, and his subsequent revision and reformulation of these representations, suggest that the construction of personal identity may be not only a linguistically-based process but, to a large extent, the creation of a work of fiction. The formation of personal identity becomes a process of inventing material to fill the void left in the absence of genuine access to the past; Beckett's characters don't so much build their identities out of their experiences as invent stories about their experience in order to explain their existences in 'plausible terms' (Three Novels 106). As Jean Yamasaki Toyama notes, in the Trilogy as well '[r]emembrance and invention go hand in hand,' and the constant uncertainty and self-conscious embellishment which accompanies the narrators' attempts to recount the past ultimately throws doubt upon the reliability of their stories in their entirety (21). J. D. O'Hara notes how the narrator of Malone Dies seems to fabricate the autobiographical elements of his narration in the same way as he constructs the obviously fictional stories he tells:
Every reader notices the signs telling us that Malone is inventing Sapo’s story as he goes along, e.g., ‘Sapo had no friends – no, that won’t do’ (189); but few notice that the same signs are present when he speaks of himself. ‘When my chamber-pot is full I put it on the table, beside the dish,’ he tell us. ‘Then I go twenty-four hours without a pot. No, I have two pots’ (185). In the same place he tells us how he communicated with the woman tending him, but then concludes, ‘All that must be half imagination’ (185). (65)

The narrators of the Trilogy and, less explicitly, Krapp, are engaged in a continuous process of self-construction; their lived experiences are supplanted by linguistic representations whose relationship to the real events is uncertain, comprising a fusion of erroneous recollection and whimsy. Their focus on narratological modes of representation encourages a sense of identity which takes the form of a linear story and which, more often than not, they are aware are perversions and fabrications of real experience. Nels Pearson notes a similar construction of identity in the story ‘A Painful Case’ from Joyce’s *Dubliners*:

From the moment James Duffy begins his first conversation with Mrs. Sinico and ‘tries to fix her permanently in his memory’ [*Dubliners* 105], Joyce exactly depicts the manner in which a restricted, self-preoccupied mind can literally erase the history it is attempting to construct with every word that it writes. At the beginning of the story, we learn that the intellectually detached Duffy ‘had an odd autobiographical habit which led him to compose in his mind from time to time a short sentence about himself containing a subject in the third person and a predicate in the past tense. He never gave alms to beggars and walked firmly, carrying a stout hazel’ [*Dubliners* 104]. The sentence beginning ‘He never gave alms to beggars’ is a formal manifestation of the limited,
narratologically constructed consciousness of Duffy, as are most of the sentences in the story.

(154)

For both Beckett and Joyce, just as the creation of a linguistic representation is also in a sense a destructive or suppressive act, the language in which personal identity is codified formalises and supplants that which it purports to represent in a suppressive or limiting way; because the conscious self exists by virtue of linguistic representations it is inadequate to both the fluidity and the scope of lived experience. Like Moran’s writing hand, which weaves ‘inexorably back and forth’ and devours his page ‘with the indifference of a shuttle’ (Three Novels 133), for both authors the construction the self is a dual process of weaving and devouring, of linguistic creation and non-linguistic destruction. As language for Beckett supplants that which it names, the fictions of personal origin, like any other ‘tale ... too often heard’ (Ulysses 25), eventually become the only reality for the individual. Malone becomes the stories he tells about himself, and nothing more: ‘This exercise-book is my life, this child’s exercise-book, it has taken me a long time to resign myself to that’ (274). Joyce’s ‘Circe’ suggests a conception of the self as comprising artificial constructions of experience and fantasy which exist by virtue of language – an idea which, as Pearson explains above, he also addresses in a different way in Dubliners. To an even greater extent than Joyce’s, Beckett’s works portray personal identity as a linguistic fabrication essentially ungrounded in objective fact; cut off from the reality of their pasts, Krapp and the narrators of the Trilogy attempt to fill the

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7 In fact, such a fluid and complete extra-linguistic reality only exists in a theoretical sense since, as I mention in the previous chapter, access to ‘reality’ can only be achieved via the structures of language. This is the Catch-22 of language for Joyce and Beckett: language is necessary in order to comprehend external reality (and, since we are discussing the self, internal reality), yet the comprehension it allows is limited and, in many cases, limiting or suppressive towards that which it represents.
void with narratives which both supplant and continually revise those pasts, creating in
language fictional selves which attempt to compensate for the failures of memory.

The Textual Self, Society and Ideology: ‘Nausicaa’ and Happy Days.
If the self is a legal fiction constructed out of language, however, then like any linguistic
construct it is subject to a process of selection: in other words, if personal identity is
constructed through the adoption of certain terms, then the question remains how those
terms are selected and from where. As the Unnamable suggests in the epigraph to this
chapter, personal identity may be constructed not just from personal fantasies which
compensate for the absence of genuine connections to the past, but from ideas and
suggestions received from others – an idea which experimental psychology, particularly
the work of Elizabeth Loftus, has subsequently confirmed in research on the induction of
false memories.\(^8\) Rather than suggesting a great deal of personal agency in the
construction of identity – as might first appear the case in a situation where the past is
seemingly ‘created’ rather than remembered as such – Joyce and Beckett portray the
process of representing and fictionalising the past as constrained and directed by
externally-imposed ideas and values. For both authors, the externally-originating
elements of personal identity include not just the infantile adoption of inherited myths of
origin – the case of the ‘infant who has been told so often how he was found under a
cabbage that in the end he remembers the exact spot in the garden and the kind of life he
led there’ (Three Novels 324) – but potentially every aspect of an individual’s sense of

\(^8\) Loftus conducted pioneering research on the inaccuracy and malleability of human memory, particularly
regarding the manipulative effects of interviewing style in cases of eyewitness testimony. See, for
example, her book Memories: Surprising New Insights Into How We Remember and Why We Forget, and
her extensive account of false memory induction within the judicial system in Loftus and Ketcham, The
Myth of Repressed Memory: False Memories and Allegations of Sexual Abuse.
self. Virtually all self-awareness and self-conception is portrayed as being generated through linguistically-mediated processes which essentially originate outside the self: personal identity is formed by the adoption of, or assimilation into, pre-existing systems of language which articulate socially-constructed notions of identity. In this sense, the formation of the self can be seen as a primarily social phenomenon, and both authors portray personal identity as being inevitably constructed out of the ‘words of others,’ as the Unnamable puts it (314). Consequently, while for both authors personal identity is in some sense fabricated rather than based on objective memory, such a process of fabrication constitutes not so much liberating self-creation as assimilation into linguistically-articulated ideological systems. In their literary and dramatic works, Joyce and Beckett address the construction of personal identity from, and individuals’ entrapment within, what Rodney Sharkey calls ‘the binds of received identity structures’ (2).

In the ‘Nausicaa’ episode of Ulysses, Joyce addresses the way in which individuals construct their personal identities out of social narratives, or pre-existing socio-linguistic structures. ‘Nausicaa’ consists of two distinct sections, the first half consisting of free indirect discourse focussing on a young woman named Gerty MacDowell, the second largely of Bloom’s interior monologue. From the outset, Gerty’s narrative is insufferably sentimental, opening with a quaint description of its setting on Sandymount Strand:

The summer evening had begun to fold the world in its mysterious embrace. Far away in the west the sun was setting and the last glow of all too fleeting day lingered lovingly on sea and strand, on the proud promontory of dear old Howth guarding as ever the waters of the bay, on the
weedgrown rocks along Sandymount shore and, last but not least, on the quiet church whence there streamed forth at times upon the stillness the voice of prayer to her who is in her pure radiance a beacon ever to the stormtossed heart of man, Mary, star of the sea. (331)

The language of the first part of the episode is derived from, among other sources, sentimental novels and fashion magazines of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. ‘Nausicaa’ does not simply cast its subject matter in a manner which parodies sentimental literature, however; the narrative technique of the episode is complicated by what Hugh Kenner, in his book Joyce’s Voices, calls the ‘Uncle Charles Principle.’ The Uncle Charles Principle describes the way in which Joyce’s seemingly third-person narration actually tends to adopt the language of the character it is describing. Kenner observes that Joyce’s ‘fictions tend not to have a detached narrator, though they seem to have. His words are in such delicate equilibrium, like the components of a sensitive piece of apparatus, that they detect the gravitational field of the nearest person’ (Joyce’s 16). In other words, even when using apparently detached third-person narration rather than interior monologue, Joyce often narrates the experience of his characters in their own terms, hence ‘the narrative idiom need not be the narrator’s’ (Kenner, Joyce’s 18). Thus when Uncle Charles’s pipe-smoking excursion to the garden shed is described in a ‘genteelly euphemistic’ manner as ‘[repairing] to his outhouse’ in A Portrait, the phrase is not Joyce’s but Uncle Charles’s himself (Joyce’s 16-17; Portrait 50). Similarly, the sugary, quaint and euphemistic phraseology of ‘Nausicaa’ represents not just the parodic language of a third-person narrator, but the language of its subject: Gerty MacDowell.9

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9 This principle also applies in Pearson’s discussion of James Duffy in Dubliners above: as Pearson notes, the third-person sentences which describe Duffy actually represent his own narratologically-orientated consciousness.
As I have suggested, Gerty is described in language typical of the sentimental novels, such as ‘The Lamplighter’ by Miss Cummins,’ which she reads (347):

Gerty MacDowell who was seated near her companions, lost in thought, gazing far away into the distance was in very truth as fair a specimen of winsome Irish girlhood as one could wish to see. She was pronounced beautiful by all who knew her though, as folks often said, she was more a Giltrap than a MacDowell. Her figure was slight and graceful, inclining even to fragility … The waxen pallor of her face was almost spiritual in its ivorylike purity though her rosebud mouth was a genuine Cupid’s bow, Greekly perfect. (333)

In accordance with Kenner’s Uncle Charles Principle, such language represents not just how Gerty is characterised, but the way she characterises herself: she perceives – or idealises – herself to be ‘as fair a specimen of winsome Irish girlhood as one could wish to see,’ fragile yet ‘Greekly perfect’ in appearance, a colonial counterpart to the domesticated and demure young women she encounters in her favoured literature. With regard to the boy she has a crush on, Gerty employs a novelistic paradigm of romance, imagining a symbiotic combination of her domestic femininity and his chivalric masculinity which ultimately leads to the telos of marriage:10

She was a womanly woman not like other flighty girls, unfeminine, he had known, those cyclists showing off what they hadn’t got and she just yearned to know all, to forgive all if she could make him fall in love with her, make him forget the memory of the past. Then mayhap he would embrace her gently, like a real man, crushing her soft body to him, and love her, his ownest girly, for herself alone. (342)

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Gerty’s conception of herself, and her expectations for the future, are therefore grounded in paradigms of femininity as represented in popular novels. Similarly, her considerations of her appearance are derived from the language and discourses of ladies’ fashion magazines: she is described as being ‘dressed simply but with the instinctive taste of a votary of Dame Fashion,’ attired in a ‘neat blouse of electric blue … because it was expected in the Lady’s Pictorial that electric blue would be worn’ (335). Gerty is ‘written out of’ socially-constructed narratives; the borrowed terms of her narrative suggests that she experiences the world through the language of fashion magazines and romance novels. Her identity is constructed entirely out of such language; Gerty’s sense of self is blueprinted from an ideology of domestic femininity which is manifested in the literature she reads. As Andrew Gibson remarks, ‘Gerty’s conception of the world is … deeply and densely embedded in the world of the magazines,’ a world which ‘could articulate a markedly ideological account of contemporary Irish society and culture’ (139; 128). Gibson comments on the extent to which such literature could be pervaded by ‘domestic ideology’ and evolutionary-oriented concern with ‘national fitness’ (131), noting that ‘[t]he advertisements and advice columns in the magazines told women how to improve their health and fitness. At the same time, the stories, advertisements, and features all insisted that a girl’s destiny was romance, marriage, and a “nice smug and cosy little homely house” [Ulysses 337]’ (132). Although she fantasises about acting ‘in spite of the conventions of Society with a big ess’ (348, emphasis added), Gerty’s identity has incorporated a social ideology which is embedded in the language structures she is immersed in: she has adopted as her own a worldview where electric blue clothing is
‘expected’ and matrimonial love is ‘a woman’s birthright’ (335; 336). In the ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ episode of *Ulysses*, Stephen discusses Shakespeare’s selective appropriation of dramatic and literary material which predated him: ‘You will say those [character] names were already in the chronicles from which he took the stuff of his plays. Why did he take them rather than others?’ (203). Like the composition of Shakespeare’s plays for Stephen, in ‘Nausicaa’ the creation of personal identity is a process of selection amongst pre-existing terms: Gerty has adopted a pre-made notion of what it means to be an individual – or, more specifically, a woman – handed down to her by the media and popular culture. If Gerty’s identity, like those of Krapp and the narrators of the Trilogy, is a constructed work of fiction rather than being based on ‘objective’ memory, she does not attain some romantic degree of self-determination or agency; if she appears to create her identity out of the discourses which surround her, such ‘creation’ presents a false choice since the self-reflexive terms available to her merely situate her within an externally-imposed ideology – a dilemma which, if Gerty is not aware of it, causes constant concern amongst the self-alienated narrators of the Trilogy.\(^\text{11}\) If ‘Circe’explores the theatrical or literary nature of individuals’ conceptions of self, ‘Nausicaa’ suggests how individuals are written into socially-constructed narratives which predate them. Kenner writes that Joyce ‘early grew convinced that people shape their environment with the help of stories they know, and trap themselves into playing parts in those stories’ (‘Circe’ 342). Gerty is trapped in a part which demands a menial domestic existence and obedience to social trends and etiquette, offset by the promise of fulfilment and redemption through marriage; her sense of individuality reproduces ideological values inherent in the language structures she adopts.

\(^{11}\text{See Chapter I, 26-27.}\)
The social constitution of personal identity in ‘Nausicaa’ can be usefully examined using the theories of the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser. Althusser theorises about how the individual subject is constituted as an effect of the wider ideology in which they are immersed. For him, the constitution of the individual as an ideological subject primarily serves to ensure the ‘reproduction of labour power,’ such a reproduction requiring ‘not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order’ (6). Individuals are ‘steeped’ in ideology by way of ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’ such as educational or religious institutions, or by extension the media, and given the ‘know-how’ to ‘conscientiously’ exploit or be exploited. Such ‘steeping’ in ideology thus ensures the continuing relation between the various components of the capitalist system – exploited and exploiters alike (7). The social aspects in particular of Althusser’s ideas shed useful light on the ways in which personal identity is constructed from social networks of meaning. Althusser uses the term ‘interpellation’ to describe the process by which individuals are ‘constituted’ as an effect of ideology, using the analogy of a suspect being hailed by police:

> [A]ll ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of subject … ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’ (47-48, emphasis Althusser’s)
The individual is constituted as an effect of ideology with his or her self-recognition as a subject: ‘Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn around. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was “really” addressed to him, and that “it was really him who was hailed” (and not someone else)’ (48). Interpellation thus involves both a hailing and a response; in relation to the linguistically-based construction of identity which I have been discussing, ideology ‘hails’ individuals through the ideologically-saturated language structures in which they are immersed. Individuals’ self-construction in the face of failures of conscious memory, while it might superficially appear to allow for a large degree of self-determination, in fact represents an often unconscious but unavoidable ‘response’ to the call of ideology; the adoption of inevitably externally-originating terms of self-reference represents an individual’s self-recognition as a subject, and thus immersion into an ideological system.

Joyce’s works display a sensitivity to the socio-ideological concerns later theorised by Althusser. Like Althusser, Joyce is concerned with individuals’ assimilation into ideologically-driven narratives of history and identity. As James Fairhall argues:

The crucial conflict for Joyce had to do with being a subject, in both senses of the word. He fled Ireland to avoid being the subject of an oppressive history, yet he needed to be the subject, or hero, of his own story. The crux was the interconnection between history and story. Children grow into history by assuming parts in ready-made stories of which they are the subjects; they are interpellated into these stories which, collectively, reflect the ideology of a given culture. (118)
Joyce’s concern with domestic and colonial narratives in *Dubliners*, his representation of the dual demands of church and state in *A Portrait*, and his exploration of historical discourse in *Ulysses* all provide rich parallels with Althusserian ideas. Similarly, these theories can be fruitfully applied to ‘Nausicaa.’ Using Althusser’s theoretical framework, Gerty has been interpellated as an subject, assuming a feminine identity which pre-exists in the language structures in which she is immersed. While she is apparently unaware of the fact, her ‘self-construction’ out of familiar literary and journalistic paradigms of identity represents her self-recognition as an ideological subject. Furthermore, the pre-existing identity into which Gerty is interpellated indeed effects the ‘reproduction of labour power.’ The ‘domestic ideology’ and ‘drive for “national fitness”’ that Gibson describes in the literature Gerty reads (131) ultimately serve to reproduce the social and economic conditions which underpin a patriarchal, colonial society, encouraging an ideal of womanhood which is physically healthy, submissive to the standing social order, and supportive of directly productive male figures. As Gibson argues, “‘Nausicaa’ is ... much concerned with the relationship between Gerty and a set of discourses that produce a serviceable model of English and colonial womanhood’ (133). As per Althusser, in Gerty MacDowell Joyce represents a young woman unwittingly trapped within a received notion of identity which is driven by the ideological requirements of a patriarchal and colonial society and handed down to her via the social, literary and journalistic language structures which exist around her; Gerty is ‘constituted’ by her implicit self-recognition as a subject of these ideological discourses.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{12}\) It is also interesting to note how Gerty ‘interpellates’ herself as the subject of Bloom’s desire: ‘Yes, it was her he was looking at and there was meaning in his look’ (342). Having been ‘hailed’ by Bloom’s gaze, she immediately ‘recognises’ herself as object of his address: ‘If ever there was undisguised
Beckett also explores the embeddedness of individuals within linguistically-mediated socio-ideological systems in his play Happy Days. Happy Days has two major characters: Winnie, a ‘well-preserved’ and ‘plump’ woman of around fifty who is increasingly buried in a mound of sand, and her husband Willie, who spends much of the play in a hole, out of sight (275). Winnie, like Joyce’s Gerty, seems to be totally immersed in a socially-constructed network of meaning which disguises the situation she is in. Woken each morning by the sounding of an alarm, Winnie talks in an incessant monologue which focuses on trivial matters and routine domestic tasks such as brushing her teeth and hair. Winnie’s mundanely domestic language obscures the fact that she is buried in a mound of sand, becoming increasingly immobile and isolated – a condition which is perhaps an absurdist metaphorisation of the bleak and limiting social landscape inhabited by the likes of Gerty. Her language allows her to remain high-spirited and optimistic; hers is a language of cheerful drudgery, which also emphasises a passive acceptance of the status quo: she ‘mustn’t complain,’ having ‘so much to be thankful for,’ in the form of the material goods which populate her black shopping bag (277). Like Gerty, Winnie is fixated on the words of others, although she displays a more conscious awareness of her indebtedness to socially-saturated language. She consistently refers to nondescript cultural capital, asking herself ‘what are those wonderful lines’ (277) and ‘[w]hat is that unforgettable line?’ (299). Engaging in continual citation, Winnie is immersed in a worldview articulated by art and literature which buffers the monotony and solicitude of her life: ‘That is what I find so wonderful, a part remains, of one’s classics, to help one through the day’ (304).

admiration in a man’s passionate gaze it was there plain to be seen on that man’s face. It is for you, Gertrude Mac Dowell [sic], and you know it’ (346).
In the face of the bleak realities of her existence, Winnie’s immersion in a worldview articulated by art and literature can be seen as the adoption of a false consciousness which buffers against the traumas and mundanities of life. *Happy Days*, like ‘Nausicaa,’ in some respects addresses the use of language to avoid, suppress, or manipulate reality rather than to ‘confront experience,’ as Declan Kiberd suggests in a comparison of Gerty MacDowell’s language to that of Molly Bloom (‘Vulgarity’ 166). Both Winnie and Gerty adopt ‘fictional’ notions of identity (i.e. self-concepts which are based on social values and expectations rather than ‘objective’ memory) articulated through social language structures, which direct how they perceive themselves and their relationship to the world around them, often in romantic or fantastical ways. As I discuss above, however, such appropriation of externally-originating notions of identity represents individuals’ integration into ideological systems articulated through the self-reflexive language they adopt, and similarly Winnie’s inherited worldview, while it may be consoling, also represents her unwitting integration into a constraining system of ideology. Theatre critic Irving Wardle described Madeleine Renaud’s 1963 portrayal of Winnie as ‘an emblem of middle-class decorum, holding the sense of chaos and despair at bay by reliance upon a fixed code of good manners and regular habits’ (in Knowlson 454). Winnie deflects the true nature of her isolated and constricted condition by focussing on the limited ideas and actions available to her in the domestic language she uses; as Catanzaro argues, ‘[u]sing language as the principal means to suppress herself, Winnie seems to adhere to a strict code of feminine behavior according to turn-of-the-century conventions’ (41). A revolver, which Winnie frequently acknowledges but never directly names, seems to represent the violence masked by the language of mundane
domesticity – the unspoken threat of chaos or sense of self-perversion which is
euphemised or disguised within established codes of language. As Catanzaro suggests,
‘[t]he deadly repetitiousness of a subject’s phrases say only one thing: that loss is violent,
especially as it surfaces in language’ (34). For Stephen Watt, the gun represents a
tantalising object which exists just beyond the fringes of her socially-constructed sense of
self:

Winnie’s revolver, displayed prominently but never fired, is never fired in part because it exists
outside the code of being-a-woman in which Winnie is ensnared … Ostensibly more mature than,
say, Gerty MacDowell in James Joyce’s Ulysses, Winnie is imprisoned within a code of beauty
and caught in a web of romantic fantasy similar to those which enslave her younger Dublin
predecessor. (60-61)

Watt’s discussion of the revolver’s uncomfortable relationship to the social code in which
Winnie is embedded suggests the extent to which her socially-mediated consciousness is
both liberating and confining. While Winnie’s ‘code of beauty’ or ‘web of romantic
fantasy’ clearly ‘helps her through the day,’ as she puts it, it also represents her
‘imprisonment’ within a limiting social paradigm of domesticity and materialism. Like
Gerty, Winnie’s ability to act, and her ability to experience reality – Jameson’s
hypothetical extra-linguistic and extra-ideological ‘Real’ (Political 35) – are reliant on
socially-articulated notions of the individual’s relationship to the external world which
are embodied in the systems of language she uses. Having forged her relationship to the
world out of the ideas available to her from art and literature – those ‘wonderful lines’ –
she is unwittingly coopted into a constraining ideological system. Ideology is enforced
through the ostensibly ‘chosen’ notions of identity made available through social language structures: Winnie recognises the assuaging power of the social constructs of personal identity she adopts, but remains oblivious to the power of these constructs to limit her intellectual autonomy and maintain her static, isolated condition. Her immersion in sand reflects also her immersion in a fabricated identity which reproduces an ideology of confined domesticity and unquestioning submission to a limiting status quo.

In its depiction of the ideological subjugation entailed in the social construction of identity, Happy Days, like ‘Nausicaa,’ can be usefully examined with reference to the idea of interpellation. On first glance, analysing Happy Days from an Althusserian framework is not without its problems. For Althusser, the primary impetus behind individuals’ immersion in ideology is economic, ensuring the continuing relation between the various elements which constitute a successful economic system. The aging couple of Happy Days is clearly past the stage of actively contributing to an economy, and the couple’s isolated condition – the play’s absurdist setting in the middle of a desert – seems to separate them entirely from social modes of production. Winnie, if she is no longer a contributing member of a productive system, however, remains immersed in a false consciousness of consumerist materialism. The material items in her shopping bag constitute one half of her seemingly dualistic raison d’être – the other half being her menial and socially-saturated language. As Lawley notes, ‘Winnie’s resources for survival are twofold: words and her bag’ (94). Winnie’s language, however, cannot be separated from the material items in her bag: her language prescribes her relation to material goods, emphasising their primary importance and touting them as an adequate
compensation for the limitations and drudgeries of life: through her immersion in a materialistically-oriented system of language she is interpellated as the subject of a capitalist ideology. Her incessantly consumerist discourse sets up her dependence on tangible items and the minimal actions they allow, a dependence so well-established that it apparently serves as a safeguard even when the assuaging power of language itself is diminished: ‘Is not that so, Willie, that even words fail, at times? ... What is one to do then, until they come again? Brush and comb the hair, if it has not been done, or if there is some doubt, trim the nails if they are in need of trimming, these things tide one over’ (284). Willie, quoting from the classified section of a newspaper – ‘Opening for smart youth’ (279, 297); ‘Wanted bright boy’ (280, 297) – can only utter titbits of a social code of production of which he is no longer a part. As I have implied earlier, if the false consciousness of domestic materialism which Winnie adopts acts a buffer against the harsh realities of her life, it also limits her ability to act autonomously and reinforces her reliance on material goods; as with Gerty, Winnie’s adoption of an identity articulated primarily through art and literature represents her assimilation into an ideological system which ultimately reproduces the conditions of production and consumption and the social status quo which maintains it. In Althusser’s terms, Winnie’s search for comfort and meaning in the face of a bleak and isolated personal existence, and her discovery of that meaning in the materialist language of the ‘classics,’ represents a ‘response’ to the hailing of ideological forces which pre-exist her. Winnie and Willie, if they have passed the productive stages of their lives, continue to demonstrate their embeddedness within an ideological system, largely articulated through the borrowed language that they use, which focuses on production and consumption. Both utilise socially-constructed
relationships to other people and the external world as a buffer against the harsh realities of life, much as Gerty does via her obsession with physical appearance and the codified relationship of marriage in ‘Nausicaa.’ As Lawley suggests, ‘we can now recognize a significant continuity between Krapp and Happy Days: both plays are concerned with the continuous construction of individual identity in the face of an encroaching threat’ (94). Similarly, Catanzaro writes that ‘Winnie’ s conduct is based on a voiced narrative, a means at once of denying intolerable contradictions that lie hidden beneath the surface of her marriage, and of constructing substitute truths on the very ground cleared by such a denial’ (40). Such ‘substitute truths,’ however, represent ideologically-charged worldviews which as Althusser suggests serve to maintain adequate economic and social conditions: rather than freeing their subjects from the drudgeries of life, such ‘truths’ merely reinforce their immersion in an ideologically-driven economic and social system. Happy Days, along with ‘Nausicaa,’ deals with the fabrication of personal identity out of social systems of language, which fictionalise the relationship between the individual and the world in which they live. Such self-fabrication again represents an internal response to the hailing of ideology – the internalisation of socially-circulated ideological values, or individuals’ appropriation of ideologically-constructed models of the self. The ‘substitute truths’ which Gerty, Winnie and Willie adopt are socially-mediated, ideologically-driven notions of identity which ultimately promote production and consumption and the maintenance of the social status quo.

If ‘Circe’ and Krapp’s Last Tape address the extent to which personal identity is a linguistic construct which, in the face of disjunctures of memory, entails the fabrication or fictionalisation of personal history, then ‘Nausicaa’ and Happy Days explore the ways
in which individuals unwittingly construct their identities out of social or ideological structures which are articulated through the systems of language which surround them. Joyce's Gerty and Beckett's Winnie, in particular, can be seen to experience both themselves and the world around them via the perspectives inherent in the language systems they have adopted; language for Joyce and Beckett forms the foundation of consciousness, and the socially-saturated language utilised by their characters suggests the extent to which even the most private aspects of individuals' senses of self are mediated by social and ideological values. The 'fabrication' of identity, rather than providing individuals with a romantic degree of self-determination, is shown to constitute a largely unconscious and inevitable assimilation into pre-existing ideological structures: Gerty and Winnie, in adopting linguistically-mediated notions of identity which pre-date them, are unwittingly coopted into ideological systems which reproduce and maintain hierarchical social and economic arrangements such as patriarchy, colonialism, or class-based capitalism. From an Althusserian perspective, Gerty and Winnie are interpellated as ideological subjects upon their self-recognition as the subjects of discourses which surround them: constructing their identities by assuming roles provided to them by the media, art, and literature, their self-fabrication out of the words of others represents an internal 'response' to the linguistically-articulated 'hail' of ideology. In 'Nausicaa' and Happy Days the ideological forces behind the socially-circulated systems of language which their characters use are seen to be largely without agency; while they certainly serve ideological ends, these discourse merely 'exist' around individuals, without necessarily being promoted by anyone in particular. As Althusser notes, the underlying ideology of a culture 'never says, "I am ideological"' (49). However, Beckett and
particularly Joyce address not only how individuals inherit systems of ideological thought through the language they use to conceptualise themselves and the world around them, but also the way in which linguistic structures are created or coopted by groups for specific political or ideological purposes.

Nationalism, Interpellation and ‘Unitary Languages’: ‘Cyclops’ and the Trilogy.

Extending on the ideological saturation of language in general and individuals’ assimilation into linguistically-mediated ideological systems, Joyce and Beckett are concerned in their works with how groups with political or ideological agendas create or adopt unified language structures which articulate their perspectives, goals and motivations. This aspect of the relationship between ideology and language explored by the two authors can be elucidated by the theories of M. M. Bakhtin: Bakhtin talks of ‘unitary languages,’ ideologically-replete ‘systems of linguistic norms’ which ‘[give] expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization’ and which ‘develop in vital connection with the processes of socio-political and cultural centralization’ (270-71). Bakhtin’s formulation sheds light on the linguistic and political strategies employed by Joyce and Beckett, and provides a useful extension to the Althusserian model of interpellation which I have discussed in relation to their works. In a sense, Bakhtin’s ‘unitary languages’ represent the linguistic means by which groups with political or ideological agendas actively seek to ‘interpellate’ subjects into identities or worldviews which advance their goals and motivations; if ideology (in a general, non-active sense) ‘hails’ its subjects through the social language systems which surround individuals, as I have suggested, Joyce and Beckett also portray how language
systems are created and used by political and ideological factions for the express purpose of ‘hailing’ or ‘recruiting’ others. While Althusser might not necessarily agree that linguistic ‘unification and centralization’ by politically- or ideologically-motivated groups constitutes ‘interpellation’ as such, the term is useful because it encapsulates the extent to which such language structures make ideological claims on their subjects; certainly both Joyce and Beckett felt that the formation or adoption of unified and ideologically-saturated systems of language could represent a hegemonic imposition of ideological values, and felt threatened by the power of such linguistic systems to subjugate or subject-ify those exposed to them and impinge on individual intellectual autonomy. In response to the ideological content of social forms of language, and more specifically the active advancement of political or ideological viewpoints through the creation or adoption of particular linguistic structures, the two authors employ contrasting literary strategies. Joyce emulates various politically- or ideologically-motivated language systems to the point of excess, parodically showing up their limitations and ideological underpinnings through a dynamic of rampant heteroglossia. Beckett, conversely, seeks to evade the political and ideological cooptation of systems of language by ridding his work of specific allusions or parodies – he seeks to do away altogether with the recognisably social forms of language which Joyce subverts parodically. Through their contrasting techniques of gigantism and minimalism, Joyce and Beckett seek to expose and subvert the linguistic means by which hegemonic ideologies, such as insular nationalism, authoritarianism or colonialism, cast what the young Stephen Dedalus describes as their ‘nets’ *(Portrait 171).*
While ideas about the ideological function of particular types of language are prevalent throughout much of Joyce’s work, he addresses these issues perhaps most specifically in the ‘Cyclops’ episode of *Ulysses*. Before addressing Joyce’s subversion of the political or ideological cooptation of particular language structures, I will explain in some detail the structural and technical means by which he sets up the episode’s relationship to systems of language in general, extending from my discussion of the limitations of representational language in the previous chapter. ‘Cyclops’ is characterised by marked shifts in narrative frame. The seemingly naturalistic, first-person narration of an unnamed Dublin barfly (commonly referred to as the ‘I-narrator’) is frequently interrupted by outlandish passages which parody various styles of representation, each with its own vocabulary and particular focus. In their exaggerated representational specificity, these parodic passages recall Kenner’s discussion of the limitations of individual styles: ‘Pastiche and parody, these are modes which test the limits of someone else’s system of perception. Any “style” is a system of limits; pastiche ascribes the system to another person, and invites us to attend to its recirculating habits and its exclusions’ (*Joyce’s* 81). As Mark Nunes argues in an analysis of ‘Cyclops,’ ‘[e]ach shift in narration provides a new perspective with its own terms, characterizations, and interests, as well as its own narrative limits’ (175, emphasis added). Early on in the episode, in the middle of a mildly racist conversation between the I-narrator and Joe Hynes regarding a legal misdemeanour, the text suddenly assumes the linguistic framework of a legal document:

For nonperishable goods bought of Moses Herzog, of 13 Saint Kevin’s parade, Wood quay ward, merchant, hereinafter called the vendor, and sold and delivered to Michael E. Geraghty, Esquire,
of 29 Arbour Hill in the city of Dublin, Arran quay ward, gentleman, hereinafter called the purchaser, videlicet, five pounds avoidupois of first choice tea at three shillings per pound avoidupois and three stone avoidupois of sugar, crushed crystal, at three pence per pound avoidupois ... (281)

This fictional contract between 'Geraghty, the daylight robber' and 'the little Jewy' Herzog, as they are delicately identified by the I-narrator (281), constitutes a formal realisation of events discussed colloquially by the characters. In this genre or style, the terms are formal and explicit; the focus of interest is material goods, measured in pounds and stone avoidupois, and their monetary values, measured in pounds, shillings and pence sterling (281). Characterisation, insofar as it occurs, is merely a function of the legal relationships between the parties: Herzog becomes 'vendor,' Geraghty 'purchaser' and 'debtor'; the men's families and associates are rendered 'heirs, successors, trustees and assigns' (281), identified only by their legal responsibilities to and through the parties of the contract. Beyond this, the 'legal' style is incapable of speculation: it is indeed 'monocular,' lacking depth perception, with no capacity to convey emotional experience, non-monetary value, or the intricacy of interpersonal relationships beyond the roles assigned by legal frameworks. This narrative frame is clearly delineated by its specific terms and one-dimensional focus, and as such is patently limited as a central or authoritative view of the world.

Likewise, the parodic interpolation which occurs on the following pages provides a similarly constraining representational framework. After the I-narrator describes walking 'around by the Linenhall barracks and the back of the court-house talking of one
thing or another’ (281), the narrative is thrust into a high-epic depiction of Ireland, clad in romantic, hieratic language and obsessed with national resources:

In Inisfail the fair there lies a land, the land of holy Michan. There rises a watchtower beheld of men afar. There sleep the mighty dead as in life they slept, warriors and princes of high renown. A pleasant land it is in sooth of murmuring waters, fishful streams where sport the gunnard, the plaice, the roach, the halibut, the gibbed haddock, the grilse, the dab, the brill, the flounder …

(282)

The stylistic features of this passage are as clearly delineated as those of the contract on the preceding page; here, windy expressions and a chivalric view of human nature take precedence. It is also, like the contract, a style obsessed with wealth and possession. Unlike the contract, however, this narrative frame is plagued by an excessive emotionality – an intense, proud attachment to the land and its resources, which it compulsively names: ‘the gunnard, the plaice, the roach …’; ‘the wafty sycamore, the Lebanese cedar, the exalted planetree …’; ‘flaskets of cauliflowers, floats of spinach, pineapple chunks …’; ‘bellwethers and flushed ewes and shearing rams …’; ‘butts of butter and rennets of cheese and farmer’s firkins …,’ and so on, ad nauseam (282-83). The limitations of this epic recitation stand opposite to those of the legal contract: it suffers an inability to see beyond the romantic notion of geography and natural resources it espouses. Flora, fauna and manmade produce are detached from their physical and social realities to become symbols of abundance and, collectively, the image of a secular land of milk and honey. Though mesmerised by the idea of ownership, this narrative frame has no consciousness of the pragmatic, the political, or indeed the legal aspects of the land it
describes; it is, again, a one-dimensional view, a linguistic framework limited by its chosen vocabulary, its selected subject matter, and the way in which it portrays those aspects of the world it deems appropriate to include. As Nunes argues, these parodic passages, along with the 30-odd others which grace ‘Cyclops,’ serve to expose ‘the limitations of any given narrative framework’ by illustrating the inadequacy of any particular collection of ‘terms, characterizations, and interests’ to authoritatively or comprehensively represent the world (174; 175). In the parodies of ‘Cyclops,’ Joyce works within the frames of reference of several successive systems of language – he inhabits them – in order to demonstrate the representational limitations of each particular system. Each narrative framework, or style of representation, is shown to be limited by the capacity of its chosen terms, the specificity of its interests, and the biased perspective with which it characterises its subject matter; in illustrating this, Joyce undermines the claim of any narrative frame to be central or authoritative.

Interestingly, on occasion Joyce does not adhere to the terms of the representational styles he parodies as strictly as might be expected, given that what I have called his ‘inhabitation’ of them is the basis of his subversion of their authority. At times during the epic parody discussed above it is as though the impassive, legalistic voice of the contract is trying to insert itself into the narrative, perhaps interrupting the romantic voice for fear that its cataloguing will continue indefinitely without pragmatic intervention: ‘… the brill, the flounder, the mixed coarse fish generally and other denizens of the aqueous kingdom too numerous to be enumerated’; ‘… the exalted planetree, the eugenic eucalyptus and other ornaments of the arboreal world with which that region is thoroughly well supplied’ (282, emphasis added). Similarly, during the
parodic account of an execution-wedding later in the episode, the language of journalism
attacks itself as public-event cliché is conflated with journalistic hyperbole: ‘it is safe to
say that there was not a dry eye in that record assemblage’ (297, emphasis added).
Gibson sees these ‘awkward little shifts in level’ as echoes of ‘similar incongruities’ in
the mythological-historical works of Standish O’Grady, which Joyce paid close attention
to – and parodied extensively – in his composition of ‘Cyclops’ (116). However, these
‘shifts in level’ also constitute, through the invasion of one phraseology by another,
striking illuminations of the profoundly different emphases inherent in linguistic
frameworks and thus their impotence as central or authoritative perspectives. In other
words, these ‘shifts in level’ remind us that we are working within specific systems of
language: they are exceptions which draw attention to the rules. With regards to political
and ideological cooptation of language, Joyce’s demonstration of the representational
limitations of the various systems of language he uses points towards the perspectivity of
any representation and ultimately, as I discuss below, serves to expose and subvert the
utilisation of particular forms of representation for specific socio-ideological purposes..

The parodic interpolations, illustrative as they are of the limitations of any
particular linguistic framework, also compel consideration of the supremacy or authority
of the first-person narrative – the ‘I-narration’ – that they interrupt. The relation of
events by the I-narrator is certainly more naturalistic, more stable, less inflated and less
absurd than the parodic interpolations: it is an account of realistic events in a pub, rich
with Dublin colloquialisms, lacking any hallmarks of parody. In this, however, it does
not stand apart from the parodic passages as a central or authoritative narrative position;
on the contrary, in light of the parodies we must recognise the I-narrator’s own narrative
frame as a ‘perspective with its own terms, characterizations, and interest’ (Nunes 175) and thus equally limited. Bloom, for example, is reduced to ‘a prudent member’ (291), one of ‘those Jewies’ (292), ‘rogue and vagabond’ (300), ‘Mister Knowall’ (302), ‘[o]ld lardyface’ (319), and ‘[m]ean bloody scut’ (326). These characterisations are so simplistic, ignorant, or downright false that they can scarcely be said to be more accurate depictions of Bloom than his various metamorphoses under the shifting lenses of the parodies: ‘bedight in sable armour … O’Bloom, the son of Rory’ (285), ‘[t]he distinguished scientist Herr Professor Luitpold Blumendaft’ (292), ‘Nagyaságos ural Lipóti Virag’ (328), and ultimately ‘ben Bloom Elijah’ (330). Similarly, Bloom’s words and actions are presented dismissively and one-dimensionally: we are told sardonically of ‘his jawbreakers about phenomenon and science and this phenomenon and the other phenomenon’ (292) and ‘his but don’t you see? and but on the other hand’ (293, emphasis Joyce’s). His arguments are taken out of context and reduced to ‘mucking it up about the mortgager under the act’ (300) or ‘trying to back him up moderation and botheration and their colonies and their civilisation’ (311), and we are informed by the I-narrator that ‘[a]s true as I’m drinking this porter if he was at his last gasp he’d try to downface you that dying was living’ (316). It is clear that we are experiencing Bloom through the lens of another’s eye; in contrast to the extensive and intimate characterisation provided by the *monologues intérieur* of the earlier episodes, in ‘Cyclops’ it is a shallow and prejudiced construction of Bloom with which we are presented. As Nunes points out, ‘[a]lthough the reader feels compelled to discredit [the] parodic narratives because of their “inaccuracy,” Joyce makes it clear throughout the chapter that the I-narrator, with his open biases, prejudices, and opinions, is equally
limited’ (175-76). Furthermore, if the parodies force consideration of the subjectivity, bias, and limitation of the I-narrator’s perspective, the I-narrative reinforces the fact that any narrative or linguistic framework is as perspectival as any overtly first-person narration; if the ‘I’ is removed from the frame in the parodies, it always lurks ominously in the background, singular and myopic.

Joyce’s use of parody in many ways recalls the ideas of Bakhtin, ideas which, as I have suggested earlier, shed light on the political and ideological aspects of his literary techniques. As I discuss previously, for Bakhtin language is not a ‘a system of abstract grammatical categories’ but rather a ‘world view,’ replete with ideological values (271). Joyce’s technique in ‘Cyclops’ is a process of shifting, monocular vision in which each narrative frame proffers a particular perspective – a ‘world view’ of sorts – which represents the world according to its own goals and motivations, and therefore limitations. Moreover, the interaction between the parodies and the ‘I-narration’ – their mutual destabilisation and subversion of one another – points towards the bias and limitation resulting from what Bakhtin calls the ‘centripetal’ forces at work in language (271): Joyce exposes the representational inadequacies which result from the unifying and homogenising forces which operate in the construction of a linguistic framework. Bakhtin explains how the creation of what he terms ‘unitary languages’ serves to suppress linguistic diversity or ‘heteroglossia’:

A common unitary language is a system of linguistic norms. But these norms do not constitute an abstract imperative; they are rather the generative forces of linguistic life, forces that struggle to overcome the heteroglossia of language, forces that unite and centralize verbal-ideological thought, creating within a heteroglot national language the firm, stable linguistic nucleus of an
The linguistic assumption of a stable discursive position – the adoption of a ‘unitary language’ or a ‘system of linguistic norms’ such as those Joyce parodies in ‘Cyclops’ – necessitates the selection of ‘terms, characterisations, and interests,’ and in doing so makes necessary the exclusion of infinite alternatives, just as the writing of a linear narrative implicitly suppresses all possibilities and perspectives other than that which it chooses to adopt as its own. As I discuss in the previous chapter, for Kiverd Joyce’s rejection of linear narrative serves to open up the representation of time from the ‘neat parcels’ provided by the chronological realist novel (*Inventing* 340). Similarly, the heteroglossia of ‘Cyclops’ serves to open up literary representation from the frames of reference provided by individual styles or systems of language. In contrast to the ‘Eternal Now’ described by Kiverd, the more parodic passages such as those I have been discussing, as well as the I-narration, are limited precisely because they seek to dispose of time and their subject matter in ‘neat parcels,’ or selective focuses packaged in their chosen vocabularies.

Joyce thus undermines various attempts at linguistic stabilisation and unification: he denies these ‘unitary languages’ stability, by forcing them to co-exist with other, similarly limited systems of language, and thus points towards the representational boundaries of each particular ‘language.’ The limited and distortive properties of representational language in ‘Cyclops’ take on a greater political significance once the parodic passages are contextualised as parodies of specific politically- and ideologically-motivated uses of language. While the parodies certainly serve to call into question the
representational capabilities of any particular system of language, such systems of
language are – for Joyce and for Bakhtin – almost invariably linked to the specific
ideological or political goals of various groups. In Bakhtin’s analysis, verbal-literary
structure and socio-ideological structure are one: language is invariably ‘ideologically
saturated,’ embedded with implicit value judgements. Furthermore, Bakhtin recognises
not only that language is inevitably saturated with ideological values, but also that
systems of language are utilised for specific socio-political purposes; he goes on to argue
that ‘a unitary language gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and
ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the
processes of socio-political and cultural centralization’ (271). In this view, the creation
or adoption of a linguistic framework becomes a function of active ideological
centralisation, and this is precisely what Joyce critiques through his demonstration of
stylistic limitations in ‘Cyclops.’ The utopian list of natural resources discussed above
takes on a greater significance when the obsessive cataloguing of national wealth returns
through the mouth of ‘the citizen,’ a hard-line nationalist based on Gaelic Athletic
Association founder Michael Cusack:

[O]ur potteries and textiles, the finest in the whole world! And our wool that was sold in Rome in
the time of Juvenal and our flax and our damask from the looms of Antrim and our Limerick lace,
our tanneries and our white flint glass ... and our Huguenot poplin ... and our woven silk and our
Foxford tweeds and ivory raised point from the Carmelite convent in New Ross, nothing like it in
the whole world ... (312)
The earlier parodic passage, it becomes apparent, does not simply serve to demonstrate the limitations of a given narrative framework but is the linguistic embodiment of specific tendencies within the nationalist movement, namely the tendency to overemphasise Ireland’s natural bounty. As Lawrence asserts, the parodies are ‘directed against specific aspects of Irish society’ (103), in this case against nationalists who employ romantically hyperbolic representations of Ireland and its resources. This is a tendency with a two-pronged political purpose: to rouse national feeling through pride of possession, and to inspire animosity toward the English by instilling a sense of dispossession pertaining to the ‘ruined trade’ of Ireland (Ulysses 313), the result largely of imperial exploitation. On one hand, it may seem surprising that Joyce should expose such an anti-imperial strategy to deconstruction and ridicule. Certainly, he was no apologist for colonial rule; on the contrary, as I discuss in detail in the next chapter, Ulysses enacts a sustained attack on colonial representations of Ireland and its history. However, he was also concerned about the ideas and tactics employed by Irish nationalists, particularly the hegemonic nature of their political and ideological claims and the distortive, one-dimensional systems of language or representation through which such claims are articulated.

Joyce took issue not with nationalism per se, but with its cruder forms. In the words of Neil R. Davison, ‘it was because Joyce harboured nationalist pride that he had become so disturbed with politics in Ireland during the 1890s and after the start of the century’; he recognised that certain nationalistic tendencies were ‘destructive to acceptable forms of nationalism, as well as to human intercourse in general’ (247). On the demand for uncritical support of everything Irish, the young Joyce commented
succinctly when, his Irish-made match failing to ignite, he quipped: ‘Damn these Irish matches!’ – a pointed acknowledgement of practical reality ‘at a time when nationalists urged Irishmen to buy Irish only’ (Ellmann 93). Such single-minded adherence to a national ‘cause’ represented, for Joyce, a hegemonic imposition of values akin to the colonial ideology the nationalist movement ostensibly stood in opposition to, and it is the ideologically-motivated systems of language by which the movement sought to ‘recruit’ supporters – or rather subjects – that he parodically subverts in ‘Cyclops.’ The parody of epic and romantic depictions of Ireland, and the compulsive resource-listing entailed with them, illustrates the monocularity of the nationalist movement by deprecating its language structures; just as the ‘unitary languages’ which Joyce parodies are limited in their representational capacity, the ideological drives behind such language are limited in scope and limiting in the way they seek to represent reality. Joyce protests the forcing of the perceivable world – or ‘what you damn well have to see’ (Ulysses 178) – into verbal-ideological structures which gloss over vulgarity and heterogeneity in order to create a convenient, unitary world view, as well as critiquing the ways in which such worldviews are adopted and used for political purposes. As Lawrence explains:

The parodies in ‘Cyclops’ are double-tiered: they parody society by parodying its forms of discourse. If Joyce exposes ‘myths’ of culture, he does it by showing the rhetoric that perpetuates the deception ... The passages parody the various forms of Irish propaganda – language that romanticizes and simplifies the Irish past and present ... they parody a language that is a ready-made deception, a kind of sloganeering. Instead of a picture of Ireland, this kind of language offers a glossy print. (103-04)
Joyce’s deprecation of the ‘glossy’ language of nationalism thus represents not a rejection of the nationalist project itself, but a rejection of the one-dimensional and indeed hegemonic aspects of such a project, and the distortive social and linguistic mechanisms which maintain it. Like the glossy magazines which interpellate Gerty’s subjectivity in ‘Nausicaa,’ the representational styles which Joyce parodies in ‘Cyclops’ are ideologically-saturated linguistic systems which articulate pre-judgements about the world and individuals’ relationship to it and reinforce oppressive social conditions – in this case the demands of insular nationalism. Stephen’s words in A Portrait resonate loudly: ‘When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets’ (171). Naïve and self-important as Stephen may sound, these sentiments are felt throughout Ulysses, and nowhere so much as in ‘Cyclops,’ where Joyce attacks the linguistic mechanisms by which such hegemonic ideologies cast their ‘nets.’

In addition to ‘glossy’ and manipulative representations of the Irish present, Joyce critiques in ‘Cyclops’ similarly ideological representations of the historical past. Bringing into focus an important theme in Ulysses, the episode is much concerned with fallacious and corrupt conceptions of history and the ways in which historiography is employed as a tool of socio-ideological advancement. Representations of the past evoked by members of the Celtic Revival movement, in particular, attracted Joyce’s antipathy. The Revivalists valorised the folklore and literature of pre-colonial Ireland, seeking to adopt such premodern cultural material as the basis for a modern Irish identity – a strategy which Gibson describes as ‘an appropriation of a past by those to whom it did not truly belong’ (108). Moreover, as Gibson discusses, figures such as Standish
O’Grady produced purportedly ‘historical’ texts which made little or no distinction between such fictional or mythic material and established fact, de-emphasising historical veracity in favour of creating a sense of a distinct, collective past for Ireland (107-13). Such constructions of history granted Irish nationalists a sense of continuity with a ‘pre-Christian, heroic age’ (Gibson 108), suiting the purposes of figures such as W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory who wished to forge, through literature, a unique and independent Irish identity in opposition to the influence of colonial England. As Seamus Deane suggests, ‘[n]ationalist Ireland invented an Ireland that never existed so as to create in fact an Ireland which does now exist’ (‘History’ 135). For Joyce, however, such an assumption of authority over Ireland’s cultural legacy, along with the rejection of historiographical empiricism, was again tantamount to the strategies of the colonists themselves. As Gibson remarks, the Revivalists had ‘effectively colonized a set of narratives’ (117), assuming ownership of both a cultural legacy and a historical past and shamelessly manipulating it for their own political purposes. In Althusserian terms, just as the grandiose depiction of Ireland’s resources espoused by the citizen represents a linguistically-embodied appeal for an idealistic, pro-nationalist worldview, Revivalist historiography was for Joyce a manipulative form of representation employed for the specific purpose of ‘recruiting’ subjects to political and ideological ends.

The Revivalist tendency to blur ‘the borderlines between history and mythology, legend, folklore,’ as Gibson puts it (109), is taken to task in ‘Cyclops’ in an inventory of ‘many Irish heroes and heroines of antiquity’ (Ulysses 284). This extravagant catalogue opens with established mythical and historical Irish persons, but proceeds to include
figures of increasingly dubious relation to Ireland, linguistic jokes, and entirely fictional characters:

Cuchulín, Conn of hundred battles, Niall of nine hostages, Brian of Kincora, the Ardri Malachi, Art Mac Murragh, Shane O’Neill, Father John Murphy, Owen Roe, Patrick Sarsfield, Red Hugh O’Donnell, Red Jim MacDermott, Soggarth Eoghan O’Growney, Michael Dwyer, Francy Higgins, Henry Joy M’Cracken, Goliath, Horace Wheatley, Thomas Conneff, Peg Woffington, the Village Blacksmith, Captain Moonlight, Captain Boycott, Dante Alighieri, Christopher Columbus …
Benjamin Franklin, Napoleon Bonaparte, John L. Sullivan, Cleopatra, Savourneen Deelish, Julius Caesar, Paracelsus, sir Thomas Lipton, William Tell, Michelangelo, Hayes, Muhammad …
Patrick W. Shakespeare, Brian Confucius … (284-85)

The ludicrousness of this list, the futility of trying to connect all its components together in a coherent, meaningful way, illustrates the absurdity and ultimate meaninglessness of a historiography which de-emphasises historical fact and assimilates disparate, often fictional, material in the service of a nationalistic agenda. Joyce satirically destroys any pretence of validity in such a historical conception by taking the argument to its logical conclusion, presenting a concept of history where ‘anything goes’ and empiricism and established fact are merely incidental. As Lawrence suggests, Joyce subverts the political or ideological aims of the Revivalist section of his society by parodying its forms of discourse (103); by recasting in parodic form the dubious historiographical methodology employed by Revivalist nationalists, he reappropriates from the Revivalists their usurped and ideologically-motivated claims of authority over the past.

Through his exposition of the limitations and biases of Revivalist historiography, Joyce critiques the criteria of selection operating in ideological constructions of the Irish
past and present, and in concepts of Irish nationhood more generally. As I discuss in the previous chapter, Joyce is concerned with how linguistic representation and particularly linear narrative operate by a process of selection and exclusion: the selection of the terms and perspectives which constitute a style of representation necessitates the exclusion of alternatives terms and perspectives. As he demonstrates in ‘Cyclops,’ written history, and indeed representations of nationhood, are no different. Through his parodic recirculation of representations of the Irish past and present employed by the Celtic Revivalists he exposes the ideologically-motivated way in which their selections and exclusions are made, and by extension he critiques the selection and therefore bias inherent in all ostensibly final or authoritative representations or worldviews. As Fairhall claims, ‘Joyce sought liberation from the nationalist tradition itself. In his art he set about doing this through a procedure of exposure and subversion, not just of Irish nationalist history but potentially of all histories, revealing to us the shaky foundations of any representation of the past that claims to be authoritative’ (38). Any one conception of the past cannot claim to be absolutely authoritative or objective, just as any one style of linguistic representation cannot adequately or authoritatively represent the reality from which it derives. In ‘Cyclops’ history, like the creation of a unitary language, and like the formation of personal identity as I discuss earlier in the chapter, is a process of selection – of terms, of content, and of perspective – which comes, as Gibson states, ‘only at the cost of evasion and massive omission’ (117): the rejection or suppression of the alternatives. Similarly, the creation of a national concept – a linguistically-embodied ideological construction of nationhood – necessitates a selection of terms (or membership criteria), and consequently the exclusion of others. Joyce was concerned with the

13 I discuss Joyce’s approach to historiography more extensively in the next chapter.
exclusivity of the concepts of nationhood put forward by Irish nationalists, addressing in particular the tendency of nationalist movements to align themselves with xenophobic discourses such as anti-Semitism. While he professed initial admiration for Arthur Griffith’s Sinn Féin, Joyce became disillusioned with the movement’s adoption of ‘vitiolic racial slur’ as a method of rousing national solidarity (Davison 246). The urge for national unity and its cruder counterpart, hatred and fear of the Other, has a menacing presence in ‘Cyclops,’ manifested chiefly in the citizen’s tirades of chauvinistic, anti-Semitic rhetoric. The citizen epitomises the vulgar side of nationalism which Joyce scorned as ‘the old pap of racial hatred’ (Ellmann 237), illustrating the thin line between nationalistic fervour and chauvinistic faith in what Davison calls ‘essentialized racial difference’ (248). His attacks on Bloom conflate national or cultural difference with ideas about divinely-ordained racial inferiority: ‘A wolf in sheep’s clothing … That’s what he is. Virag from Hungary! Ahasuerus I call him. Cursed by God’ (324). While the citizen invokes religious principles to underscore his conception of national identity, such discriminatory outbursts hint at the very fragility of the idea of nationhood. Bloom’s religious heritage renders him an outsider to the citizen’s ‘Ireland,’ an abstract concept which is a far cry from Bloom’s simplistic but adept definition, ‘the same people living in the same place’ (317). The citizen’s idea of ‘nation’ is in a way akin to the parodic list of ‘Irish heroes,’ a frenzied set of inclusions and omissions which no meaningful formula could tie together. This lack of solid definition, like Bloom’s paradoxical qualification on nationhood – ‘Or also [people] living in different places’ (317) – points towards the idea that, as Davison states, ‘a nation is, ultimately, an ideology’ (255).
Although he doesn’t explicitly acknowledge it, Davison’s comments on the ideological nature of nationhood in ‘Cyclops’ recall the work of Benedict Anderson. Anderson defines a nation as an ‘imagined political community’ (6), an essentially hypothetical construct which purports to unite its disparate and physically separate members but whose membership is also inherently limited:

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion … The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human begins, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind … Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings. (6-7)

Anderson’s ideas elucidate the controversy over nationhood in ‘Cyclops’: the Irish ‘nation’ which the citizen appeals to is imagined – both implicitly as a community of people who have never met, and more overtly in the Revivalists’ extravagant self-imaginings – and, as becomes clear, limited in its inclusiveness. As Fairhall argues, ‘Anderson’s formulation brings into sharp focus the issues of Bloom’s verbal skirmish in the pub. Any nation differentiates its citizens from those of other nations in terms of certain shared traits, while it ignores inconvenient facts that tend to subvert the illusion of unity’ (173). Furthermore, for Anderson nationalism is analogous not to particular political beliefs but to deeper, ontologically-concerned systems such as religion: like
religious thought, he argues, nationalism ‘responds to the obscure intimations of
immortality, generally by transforming fatality into continuity (karma, original sin, etc.)
In this way, it concerns itself with the links between the dead and the yet unborn, the
mystery of re-generation’ (11). This idea too informs the nationalistic discourse of
‘Cyclops.’ Fairhall adeptly explains the citizen’s appeals to Andersonian ideas of
nationhood:

The Citizen’s mind shuffles between Ireland’s past, at once great and tragic, and its shining if
indefinite future. He recalls ‘the invincibles and the old guard and the men of sixtyseven’ and the
peasants who ‘were driven out of house and home in the black ‘47’ [Ulysses 316]. At the same
time he invokes ‘the future men of Ireland’ and the day ‘when the first Irish battleship is seen
breasting the waves with our own flag to the fore’ [Ulysses 314]. He evokes a vast imagined
community, including ‘our greater Ireland beyond the sea’ [Ulysses 316], that comprises the dead,
the living, and the yet unborn. (176-77)

The citizen invokes an imagined collective past and future in order to consolidate an Irish
national identity in opposition to English rule, re-enacting on a grand scale Jameson’s
notion of personal identity as a temporal unification in language; at the same time, his
appeal to unity enacts a suppression or denial of difference. In refusing to concede any
stable definition of Irish nationhood, Bloom rejects the spurious and exclusive imagined
community offered by narrow-minded nationalists – an act which Joyce repeats in
macrocosm through his parodic subversion of the linguistic systems in which such
hegemonic ideas are couched. Joyce attacks the claims of dogmatic, racialised
nationalism, along with the validity of any worldview which would assert a claim of
totality or objectivity, recognising that the forging of national unity through myopic
language structures comes at the cost of allowing difference within a national identity. As Kiberd notes, the unity necessary to achieve independence from England had the potential to become ‘a denial of difference after liberation’ (Inventing 337). While Joyce clearly opposed the cultural, political, and economic domination of Ireland by imperial England, he was equally opposed to any alternative cultural order which would similarly dominate verbal-ideological expression and deny heterogeneity. Nationalists who insisted on the Irish language, who advocated dubious Revivalist historiography, and who prescribed the creation of an independent identity through cultural nationalism, sought to subvert the cultural dominance of the English through predominantly linguistic means; they sought to create, through language, a unique and independent cultural system which would differentiate and ultimately liberate them from their oppressors. Joyce, in turn, subverts these linguistic mechanisms of subversion, recognising that they potentially constitute an alternative cultural tyranny; as Kiberd suggest, through the assertion of a new cultural hegemony, Irish nationalists of Joyce’s generation were susceptible to the accusation of employing ‘all the old imperialist mechanisms in the name of a national revival’ (Inventing 333).

In a relatively straight-forward reading of ‘Cyclops,’ Bloom-Odysseus defies the Cyclops-Citizen intellectually, by calmly and intelligently refuting his bigoted claims and rejecting his incitements to violence, much as he conquers the ‘suitors’ (in the form of Boylan and other rivals for Molly’s affection) by mentally transcending his jealousy in ‘Ithaca.’ The citizen, however, while he certainly embodies many of the hegemonic, monocular ideologies which Joyce attacks in ‘Cyclops,’ is simply a focal point for a wider critique of socio-ideological centralisation through language. The true Cyclops,
and the ultimate target of Joyce’s subversion of verbal-ideological supremacy in the episode, is any ideological framework which claims supremacy, which centralises its unitary world view at the expense of heterogeneity, or which asserts the stable ‘nucleus’ of a unitary language against the realities of heteroglossia (Bakhtin 271). If ‘Circe’ provides a model of the self as a textual construct and ‘Nausicaa’ suggests the extent to which such a textual self is mediated by the ideological values inherent in the social language structures which surround individuals, ‘Cyclops’ addresses the way in which political or ideological agendas such as nationalism are actively advanced through the creation of language structures. The grandiose depictions of Ireland and its resources, the fantastical representations of Ireland’s history, and the exclusive conceptions of Irish nationhood itself which Joyce parodies represent the linguistic embodiments of politically- and ideologically-driven attempts at cultural ‘unification and centralization’. Through the creation of what Bakhtin calls ‘unitary languages’ which articulate their goals and motivations, the proponents of Irish nationalism seek to interpellate subjects into identities which affirm the validity of an independent Irish identity, but which also deny difference within the social identity they create. Joyce’s heteroglossic recirculation of nationally-oriented styles of representation undermines the ostensible authority of these language structures and the limited and oppressive values which underlie them – a subversive ‘response,’ perhaps, to the actively-advanced and linguistically-articulated calls of nationalist ideology.

Beckett, too, displayed an ambivalence about nationalism and the propagandistic techniques utilised by its proponents, although his approach to specific instances of these issues in his work is much harder to elucidate. Certainly he shared Joyce’s
disillusionment with dogmatic nationalism, and rejected insular ideals of national unity such as those promoted by the Celtic Revivalists. Sharkey writes that ‘[a]s a symbol, Beckett felt Cuchulainn aimlessly slumping in the G. P. O. had palpably failed to inspire people because its revivist symbolism was self-defeating, claiming Celtic antecedence for a country whose history was far more complex and culturally heterogeneous’ (3). Unlike Joyce, whose antagonism towards monological political and ideological causes preoccupies *Ulysses* and the rest of his oeuvre, however, Beckett’s private distaste for the cultural politics of Irish nationalism and separatism is corresponded by an apparent political vacuum in his works. While Joyce (as Lawrence puts it) attacks political and ideological agendas by parodying their forms of discourse (103), in Beckett’s Trilogy it is difficult to identify passages of direct parody, or even specific literary or historical allusions. Indeed, the marked lack of cultural references or socially-evocative language seems to indicate that Beckett deliberately avoids using socially-replete forms of language – a project which, as I discuss in the previous chapter, he explicitly cited as a motivation in forsaking English in favour of French. If Joyce seeks to subvert the authority of ideologically-motivated systems of language by employing a dynamic of rampant heteroglossia, Beckett rebuffs the ideological functions of language by deliberately purging his texts of recognisably social forms of language.

If Beckett does not parody the specific forms in which dogmatic nationalism is couched, however, he does mock its underlying ideas and values. Again, his approach is much less overtly political and much less grandiose than Joyce’s. While Joyce attacks the abuse of linguistic representation and historiography by Irish nationalists on a grand scale, Beckett addresses nationalistic discourse at the level of the quotidian, and in a
manner which is characteristically nonchalant and therefore belittling to such ostensibly weighty issues. Tadeusz Pioro argues that Malone’s dual obsession with narrating stories and cataloguing his possessions parodies the nationalist tendencies which Joyce derides in ‘Cyclops’:

In isolation, Malone tries to continue to create himself through the narrative he writes or, alternately, by preparing an inventory of his possessions. These activities correspond to the relation between *bildung* and national culture, too often understood as nothing but a catalogue of a nation’s possessions. Historical accounts of national culture put the greatest emphasis on the ownership of cultural property, neglecting to contextualize the origins and social existence of cultural entities. (Joyce parodies this in the ‘Cyclops’ episode of *Ulysses*, where ‘Patrick W. Shakespeare’ is included in the list of famous Irishmen.) (130-31)

Malone’s feeble inventorying of his meagre resources and his fascination with stories of the shaggy dog type reduces the nationalists’ obsession with wealth and cultural capital to an absurd and pathetic game. Beckett also ridicules the nationalist demand for narratives of national unity and origin. Malone suggests that the need for myths of origin and existential narratives is a purely human tendency: ‘to tell the truth God does not seem to need reasons for doing what he does, and for omitting to do what he omits to do, to the same degree as his creatures, does he?’ (245). His dissection of the story-telling impulse implies the extent to which such narratives, rather than being legitimate explanations of existence, are convenient fictions which serve to give the illusion of unity and meaning. Similarly, Molloy is doubtful about whether what he calls his ‘ruins’ ever constituted a cohesive whole (39). As Toyama notes, he ‘even questions whether the ruins ever formed a whole, for it may be that all was always confusion: unity being a myth created
to explain the ruins’ (27). In ‘Cyclops,’ of course, the importance of myths of origin and culturally-binding narratives primarily derives from the political need for unity felt by Irish nationalists in the face of colonial domination. By trivially re-enacting the grand projects of dogmatic nationalism in the actions of a series of decrepit old men Beckett strips such agendas of their self-importance, as well as suggesting the contrived and fabricated nature of overarching cultural or social narratives.

Joyce and Beckett both explore the complex and often problematic role of language in constituting the self. The ‘Circe’ episode of *Ulysses* and Beckett’s play *Krapp’s Last Tape* present personal identity as a linguistic construct; in ways which parallel the ideas of Fredric Jameson, personal identity is portrayed as a linguistic unification of past, present and future, individuals’ conscious senses of self-unity and self-continuity being reliant on the connective properties of language. This idea is confounded, however, by the limitations of conscious memory and the tendency of the human mind to embellish or transform lived experience in retrospect; ‘Circe’ presents the conscious self as consisting of a phantasmagoric procession of images and characters which blurs fact, fantasy, and experience transfigured through metaphor, while in *Krapp’s Last Tape* the disjunctures of memory give rise to a notion of identity as entailing the constant revision and re-writing of a disconnected past. Joyce and Beckett are both concerned with the externally-originating, social elements of language, and both explore the problematic aspects of a personal identity constructed out of the ‘words of others’ (*Three Novels* 314). In ‘Nausicaa,’ Joyce portrays an individual whose sense of self and relationship with the external world has been constructed from social notions of identity which are articulated through the language structures she is immersed in; Gerty
experiences her life through the language and discourses of romance novels and fashion magazines. Similarly, Beckett’s *Happy Days* addresses the use of language to disguise or manipulate reality: Winnie, increasingly immersed in a mound of sand, is also immersed in a linguistically-mediated ideology of consumerism and domesticality, which allows her to accept her isolation and immobility and to take solace in material possessions. For both Gerty and Winnie, however, the fabrication of identity out of linguistically-articulated social notions of identity represents not a romantic act of self-determination but unwitting immersion in ideological systems which reinforces the social hierarchies and arrangements which underpin a patriarchal, colonial or capitalist society. For both authors, furthermore, the socio-ideological aspects of personal identity extend not just to the passive assimilation of individuals into pre-existing socio-linguistic structures, but also to the active advancement of political or ideological aims through the creation of unified language structures. In ‘Cyclops’ Joyce enacts, through parody, the employment of various systems of language, each with its own particular emphases and vocabulary, and in doing so presents a deeper critique of the use of language as an ideological vehicle. The systems of language he parodies correspond to specific politically- or ideologically-motivated styles of representing Ireland’s past and present employed by Irish nationalists: they are the linguistic means through which such groups seek to interpellate individuals into identities and worldviews which are conducive to their goals. Employing an exorbitant dynamic of parody, Joyce subverts the political or ideological cooptation of language structures by making each language coexist with various other, similarly limited systems of language, thereby denying each language and the political or ideological motivations it represents the claim of being central or authoritative.
Conversely, Beckett’s work is marked by the absence of socially-evocative language; rather than undermining socially- and ideologically-replete systems of language through excessive exploitation of their ‘recirculating habits and … exclusions’ (Kenner, *Joyce’s 81*), the Trilogy attempts to avoid such language altogether, as well as parodying in microcosmic form the obsession with wealth, cultural capital and narratives of origin associated with dogmatic nationalism. Both writers’ ambivalence about the ability of language to represent reality, and their concern with its social and ideological dimensions, contribute to their explorations of the linguistic elements of the self; language is portrayed as a primary component of personal and cultural identities – a primacy compounded by the failures of objective memory – but simultaneously alienating in its saturation with ideological values, and susceptible to manipulation by groups with political and ideological agendas.
Chapter III:
The Politics of Historiography

Fabled by the daughters of memory. And yet it was in some way if not as memory fabled it.

(*Ulysses* 24)

And agreement only comes a little later, with the forgetting. (*Three Novels* 217)

Joyce’s deconstruction of the historical representations employed by the Celtic Revivalists in ‘Cyclops’ illustrates a key concern in the works of both Joyce and Beckett: the use of historiography to uphold ideology. For both writers, history is ultimately an ideological construction, made and remade, as Derek Attridge argues, ‘under the shifting pressures of ideological and material needs’ (78). Following from their scepticism about language in general, which I detail in Chapter I, Joyce and Beckett seek to destabilise all representations of history by emphasising their mediation by ideologically-inscribed language, and questioning the ability of written history to authoritatively represent the past. Joyce seeks to expose and subvert the ideological foundations of history through his representation of the self-serving historical conceptions expressed by various parties within the context of colonialism – conceptions which are primarily rebuffed through Stephen Dedalus’s willingness to embrace a certain degree of historical relativism, and his eagerness to identify the ideological underpinnings of selective, subjective accounts of the past. Stephen’s own abuse of historical representation in ‘Scylla and Charybdis,’ however, while partly satirical, underscores Joyce’s point that all representations of history tend to be biased constructions, reflecting the goals and motivations of those who
employ them. Beckett shares Joyce’s concern with the ideologically-saturated nature of history, and his literary strategy of questioning the veracity of the historical record. Beckett’s deconstruction of the historiographical and epistemological processes underlying accepted conceptions of history, however, is much more radical and pervasive than is Joyce’s: as with the issues of language and identity I have discussed over the last two chapters, many of his narrators take for granted the inability of memory to provide genuine access the past, and impotence of language to represent it. In his representation of the epistemological degeneration of the self-assured Jacques Moran, Beckett re-enacts in microcosm many of the social and ideological issues surrounding history that inform *Ulysses*; in response to the ideological and political cooptation of the historicising process by various groups, both writers challenge the adequacy of historical memory, and the capacity of linguistic representations to portray the past.

**Histories With Points: ‘Nestor’ and ‘Telemachus.’**

It is not, of course, only the Celtic Revivalists whose ideologically-motivated representations of the past and present undergo Joyce’s scrutiny, and the first two episodes of *Ulysses* enact a thorough critique of the historiographical methods and attitudes towards history which underpin colonial rule. The four main characters who appear in the ‘Telemachus’ and ‘Nestor’ episodes roughly correspond to four major socio-political groups in colonial Ireland: there is an Irishman who is antagonistic towards colonial rule (Stephen Dedalus), an Irishman who is complicit with colonial rule (Buck Mulligan), an Anglo-Irishman (Mr. Deasy), and an Englishman (Haines). Indeed, these episodes seem deliberately staged to deal with colonial issues; as Andrew Gibson
states, ‘[i]t is no accident that Ulysses should begin with an edgy, bickering tension between two young Irishmen which focuses to such an extent on the problem of the Englishman in their midst’ (24). The socio-political categories to which these characters belong are often complicated, however: Stephen’s role as the ‘rebellious Irishman,’ for instance, is confounded by his refusal to align himself with any nationalist movement, while Haines’s role as a representative of colonialism is made enigmatic by his apparently sincere interest in Irish language and culture. Nevertheless, Joyce uses the interactions between these characters to examine various ways in which Ireland’s history is viewed and constructed by different parties within the colonial paradigm. ‘History’ in Ulysses is always secondary to historiography; as in ‘Cyclops,’ where the excesses of Celtic Revivalist propaganda overwhelm historical epistemology, in ‘Telemachus’ and ‘Nestor’ the realities of the historical past are constantly overshadowed by the ‘nightmare’ wrought by the appropriation and misrepresentation of the past by those in positions of social authority.

Joyce presents various historiographic models in Ulysses in order to illustrate their limitations and ideological underpinnings. History, as it is presented to the students of the Dalkey boys’ school where Stephen teaches, for example, is a sequence of factual information to be memorised. ‘Nestor’ begins with Stephen asking his students to catechetically produce facts concerning the Roman hero Pyrrhus:

- You, Cochrane, what city sent for him?
- Tarentum, sir.
- Very good. Well?
- There was a battle, sir.
— Very good. Where?

[...]

— I forget the place, sir. 279 B.C. (24)

Reduced to a series of names, places and dates, stripped of context, learning ‘history’ becomes for the schoolboys a task in rote memorisation, akin to the mathematical sums which they are instructed to ‘copy ... off the board’ (28). Like the sums, which the slow-witted Cyril Sargent reproduces but does not understand, such a ‘copybook’ history is ultimately meaningless to those who have learned to recite its facts without appreciating the implications of what they have learned. Stephen reflects that, rather than imbuing the boys with a sense of the past, history has become for them merely ‘a tale like any other too often heard’ (25), a collection of stale narratives which have become impotent through repetition. For the Anglo-Irish headmaster Mr. Deasy, as well, history consists of a series of static facts which are to be collected and stored, like the Stuart coins and antique spoons which he displays in his study. As Trevor L. Williams argues, Deasy’s coins represent history as a static, orderly and tangible presence: ‘In Mr. Deasy’s possession the coins, symbolising the “facts” of history, remain inert, accumulated without regard for the life they embody, circulation frozen’ (149).

In Deasy’s history of ‘arte-facts,’ as it might be termed, historical information is given the appearance of being static, obvious, and irrefutable. Much as he insists on keeping his coins stored in an orderly fashion on his sideboard and in his savingsbox, Deasy prides himself on reducing arguments to orderly, simplistic and, as he sees it, irrefutable declarations – or putting matters into ‘nutshell[s]’ as he proudly claims (32). In contrast to Stephen’s Aristotelian definition of history as ‘an actuality of the possible
as possible’ (26) – the realisation of one possibility among infinite possibilities – Deasy’s conviction in the indisputable factuality of his own knowledge overrides any consideration of alternative potentialities. Deasy denies the possibility of multiple interpretations of the historical record; as he asserts to Stephen on the issue of foot and mouth disease, ‘[t]here can be no two opinions on the matter’ (32). His supreme conviction in his own notions of historical fact and causality overrides any ‘competing voices’ and essentially closes ‘the universe of discourse,’ as Williams notes in a broader context (145). For Deasy, the ‘whats’ are so self-evident that the ‘whys’ are irrelevant: thus his insistence that the students at his school learn by rote rather than for conceptual understanding. This guise of objectivity, however, conceals the interpretation and selection behind the ‘facts’ to which the headmaster refers; his historical conception reveals a subjectivity which goes unchallenged not because he is accurate in his views, but because, as head of the school and as a member of the dominant Anglo-Irish class, he is in a social position which allows him to determine the view of the past which is taken to be ‘correct.’ As Williams notes, ‘[t]he interpretation of the likes of the Ulsterman Deasy becomes, because he represents the dominating class, received opinion, or rather “the dictates of common sense” [Ulysses 32],’ under the guise of which ideologically-laden thought becomes difficult to counteract (146). Williams describes how social authority overrides objectivity in an episode from A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, where the young Stephen finds that he cannot respond appropriately to the bully Wells’s question on whether or not he kisses his mother: ‘The struggle for dominance, for the right to provide “the right answer,” is … engaged. What is the correct answer? The “grammatical” answer need never actually be enunciated, for those (like Wells) who are
securely positioned within their social group always already know the answer’ (106). The historical record thus becomes the site of a struggle not of interpretation but for interpretation: accuracy of interpretation is not so important as the right to interpret in the first place. Deasy belongs to the class that is able to define ‘common sense,’ and at the Dalkey boys’ school it is his ‘facts’ which are the currency of historical discourse. By refusing to accommodate any multiplicity of historical interpretation, he operates a monopoly on the past; dictated by the delusive authority of ‘common sense,’ Deasy’s notions of history represent, as Williams describes it, ‘the tyranny of fact’ (38).

Deasy’s facts are tyrannous because in masquerading as ‘common sense’ they reject the possibility of alternative perspectives, and in doing so they centralise the ideological standpoint concealed behind his selection and representation of historical information. Through his ‘factual’ didacticism, Deasy presumes to speak on behalf of the English and Irish alike, subjugating those he speaks for to his ideological preconceptions, and denying them the right of speaking for themselves. He sweepingly informs Stephen that the Anglo-Irish and English ‘are a generous people, but we must also be just,’ to which Stephen responds by saying: ‘I fear those big words … which make us so unhappy’ (31). Stephen fears the ‘big words’ of Mr. Deasy because they impose an inherent judgement on those they address and speak for; the ‘generosity’ and ‘justice’ of which Deasy speaks are ideologically-laden concepts which presuppose a need for custodial generosity towards the Irish, and legitimate the imposition of the moral values of the dominating class. Robert Spoo writes that at the ‘back of Deasy’s big words is a specific interpretation of Irish history, an implicit claim that the English and Protestant classes, out of a sense of noblesse oblige, have played the role of custodian to a feckless,
unreliable Catholic majority – a benign trustee who must temper a natural inclination toward generosity with the severities of justice’ (106). Deasy’s ‘big words’ also deny difference within the groups they denominate. He accuses Stephen of judging him unfairly on the basis of stereotypes and generalisations: ‘You think me an old fogey and an old tory, his thoughtful voice said’ (31). Having done so, however, Deasy categorises all young, Catholic Irishmen as a homogenous collective, erroneously labelling Stephen a ‘fenian’ (31).

As custodian to the official history of this ‘feckless majority,’ Deasy assumes an editorial role which is expressed in his inclusions and omissions of historical ‘fact.’ As Fritz Senn notes, ‘[o]ne problem that is integrated into “Nestor” is why certain facts or rumours have survived in the cultural memory and others have not’ (‘History’ 50). Deasy accuses Stephen, along with his so-called fellow ‘fenians,’ of having a defective historical memory: ‘I saw three generations since O’Connell’s time. I remember the famine. Do you know that the orange lodges agitated for repeal of the union twenty years before O’Connell did or before the prelates of your communion denounced him as a demagogue? You fenians forget some things’ (31). In response, however, Stephen’s mind fills with phrases recalling the historical persecution of Roman Catholics by Protestants (see Gibson 2; Spoo 69), aspects which Deasy’s ‘Protestant reading’ of Irish history (Spoo 106) glosses over: ‘Glorious, pious and immortal memory. That lodge of Diamond in Armagh the splendid behung with corpses of papises. Hoarse, masked and armed, the planters covenant. The black north and true blue bible. Croppies lie down’ (31). Stephen reinstates elements of history excluded from Deasy’s version; he demonstrates Deasy’s own tendency to ‘forget some things,’ illustrating how selective the
headmaster’s arsenal of ‘facts’ is. ‘History may be a world force,’ writes Ulrich Schneider, ‘but it is also what human beings remember, and the human memory is often extremely selective’ (46). Deasy’s accusation of Stephen – ‘You fenians forget some things’ – is thus doubly ironic: having rebuked Stephen for misjudging his character and for being historically forgetful, he reverts fully to stereotype, and his own proclivity for omission in historical discourse is exposed. At the same time, in recalling the pogroms carried out by Protestants against Catholics, Stephen offers a brutally draconian version of the ‘justice’ of which Deasy so confidently speaks. As Gibson states: ‘Stephen repudiates a narrative that turns the “Englishry’s” invasion of Ireland into a process bringing civilization to the barbarians. He insists, instead, on the barbarities for which the “Englishry” themselves were responsible’ (36). In Deasy’s selective history of facts and Stephen’s mental rebuttal of his narrow historical conception, Joyce dialogises what Senn calls the ‘criteria of selection’ which operates in the recording and recalling of history (49). Deasy adopts a selection of historical ‘facts’ that reinforces the stereotypes of Irish unruliness and English benevolence which legitimate colonial custodianship, while at the same time glossing over abuses perpetrated by his own social group. As Schneider states, ‘no matter how many facts Mr. Deasy can cite, his version of the history remains ideologically colored’ (46). Deasy’s ‘generosity’ and ‘justice’ represent the colonial ideology to which his employment of historical facts is subservient; they are indeed the ‘big words’ which his smaller words, narrowly detailing selective events from history, support.

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14 In using the term ‘Englishry,’ Gibson alludes to the work of Thomas Babington Macaulay, whose History of England from the Accession of James II (1848-61) espoused an Anglocentric, teleological conception of history similar to that of Deasy.
Beyond the disembodied and ideologically-tainted facts like those fed to the schoolboys, Deasy bestows a narrative on history. He views history as the mysterious but inevitable revelation of divine will: ‘The ways of the Creator are not our ways, Mr Deasy said. All history moves towards one great goal, the manifestation of God’ (34). As Spoo notes, for Deasy history is an algebraic formulation similar to the schoolboys’ sums, moving ‘in grave morrice’ across a page towards that ‘one great goal’ (69; Ulysses 34). Like his selection of convenient historical ‘facts,’ Deasy’s teleological master narrative of history serves to validate present conditions: as Schneider notes, if ‘history is understood to be a chain of necessary and predetermined events, a process which follows its own laws, then every rebellion against the status quo appears senseless, and the conditions which prevail at any particular time are inevitable’ (45). Under Deasy’s interpretation of history, the colonial rule of Ireland is not only inevitable but God’s will, and thus opposition to it is both futile and unjustified. To adopt Benedict Anderson’s phrase, Deasy turns ‘chance into destiny’ (12) in order to justify his position as a member of the dominant class; his conviction in the predestined nature of history serves to deflect responsibility for human actions and denies the right of the repressed to voice discontent.

Joyce’s portrayal of Deasy’s Anglocentric, predetermined and teleological conception history serves to point up the ideological underpinnings of representations of the past he saw as being thinly-veiled legitimations of colonialism. Such ideologically-motivated historical conceptions are most explicitly challenged in Ulysses by Stephen. In response to Deasy’s declaration that God is an active, purposeful force who shapes and reveals Himself through human history, Stephen, ‘shrugging his shoulders,’ replies that

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15 According to the notes to the Oxford World’s Classics 1922 Text of Ulysses, this line should in fact read: ‘All human history moves towards one great goal …’ (Ulysses 780).
God is ‘[a] shout in the street’ (34): random, ambiguous, and apparently non-interventionist. In allowing his ‘God’ to be running free, out in the street, Stephen undermines the orderly sequence of Deasy’s theology, and the static, encased history which is its bedfellow. In contrast to Deasy’s unadulterated confidence in historical ‘fact,’ Stephen questions the relationship between the record of history and the reality of historical events. He rejects absolute historical relativism, accepting that, behind the manipulation and distortion inevitably inherent in representations of history, there is usually some initial, underlying fact: ‘Fabled by the daughters of memory,’ he reflects while ruminating on the historical legacy of Pyrrhus, ‘[a]nd yet it was in some way if not as memory fabled it’ (24, emphasis added). Stephen thus retains, as Spoo states, some ‘minimal belief in the signifieds of historiographic discourse, in the “real” content of history’ (93). By the same token, however, he recognises that history is only accessible as memory has ‘fabled’ it, the flesh-and-blood of real events having ‘faded into impalpability through death,’ to appropriate his definition of a ghost (Ulysses 180).

While Stephen accepts the extra-linguistic reality of historical events, he is also aware that such events are only available to us as they are recorded in language; as David Sidorsky notes in a discussion of Finnegans Wake, in the recording of history Flesh becomes Word as events and persons are ‘disembodied’ from their lived contexts to become wholly linguistic representations (314). Sidorsky contends that ‘Stephen’s definition of history as “a nightmare from which I am trying to awake” [Ulysses 34] indicates the attempt to seek to locate and perceive all the terrifying events and agents of history only in and through their “wake”’; thus in Stephen’s history lesson, ‘the actions of Pyrrhus are found to be unknowable except as their aftermath is remembered or
constructed' (313). Stephen’s conception of history is thus comparable to that which
Fredric Jameson espouses in The Political Unconscious: Jameson maintains that ‘history
is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but … as an absent cause, it is
inaccessible to us except in textual form, and … our approach to it and to the Real itself
necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political
unconscious’ (35). 16 Stephen’s discomfort with ‘history’ stems from the fact that the
reconstruction of the past must necessarily be founded on the subjective data of written
records, and consequently from the nightmare of political ‘narrativization’ to which the
likes of Deasy submit the historical record.

One problem with knowing historical events through their linguistic
reconstructions is that historical memory is both selective, as Mr. Deasy’s impoverished
history demonstrates, and extremely reductive. As Schneider notes of Stephen’s lesson,
‘[a]ll that remains of a series of complex events and intertwined human lives is a list of
battles and a few phrases that famous men are supposed to have spoken, “that phrase the
world has remembered” [Ulysses 24], as Stephen says of Pyrrhus’ (50-51). Stephen
recognises that the representation of history is invariably inadequate to the complexity of
real events, unmasking Deasy’s unequivocal employment of ‘facts’ as a mere pretension
to historiographic authority. Furthermore, he recognises that Deasy’s selective
historiography is born not out of ignorance, but out of an ideological motivation to
misrepresent the past, using history as he does to justify his personal and political places
in society. The young Joyce, in a 1902 essay on the Irish poet James Clarence Mangan,
describes history as being synonymous with ‘the denial of reality,’ a phrase which

16 Numerous commentators have noted the affinity between the subject of history in Ulysses and Jameson’s
theories, including James Fairhall (1-10), Robert Spoo (62, 64), and Derek Attridge (78-85).
suggests not only the inadequacy of language to reconstruct the past, but the
supplantation of what Jameson calls ‘the Real’ by invariably flawed or falsified
representations, or ‘that which deceives the whole world’ (Joyce, ‘James’ 59). As
Attridge notes, such inevitably inadequate accounts of the past tend to be ‘ideological
constructions’ (80), made and remade by communities under ‘the shifting pressures of
ideological and material needs’ (78). It is these shifting, ideologically-motivated
constructions of history that are Stephen’s target when he questions the adequacy of the
historical record and notes the selectiveness of Deasy’s facts. As Gregory Castle argues:
‘Joyce’s struggle against history (which is, more precisely, a struggle against the master
narratives of history which determine social conventions of all kinds) is not a rejection of
history per se but rather an agonistic relation with history whenever it functions as a
monological, authoritarian legitimation of social power’ (307). Deasy’s history, when
confronted with the detritus it excludes in the thoughts of Stephen, is shown to be merely
a self-serving attempt to close the unbridgeable gap between present and past. To quote
Spoo, Deasy’s history is ‘brought face to face with its differential self, with the result that
what passed for ontological truth – the claims of empire, for example – can be recognized
as but one mask among many in the carnival of power and ideology’ (34-35). In this
view, recorded history is an inadequate and easily abused connection to historical reality,
a ‘disappointed bridge’ from which Deasy makes Daedalian leaps of faith, crafting
through language the historiographic apparatuses which keep his prejudices aloft. The
historiographical heteroglossia fostered by Stephen – and more broadly Ulysses –
transforms Deasy’s high-flying ideas of history into the struggling of a self-justifying
Icarus.
As well as challenging the veracity of recorded history, Stephen considers potential alternatives to historical events which eventuated: ‘Had Pyrrhus not fallen by a beldam’s hand in Argos or Julius Caesar not been knifed to death. They are not to be thought away. Time has branded them and fettered they are lodged in the room of the infinite possibilities they have ousted. But can those have been possible seeing that they never were? Or was that only possible that came to pass?’ (25). While Deasy insists on the ineluctability of that which ‘came to pass,’ Stephen is willing at least to contemplate other possibilities which the realisation of certain events have ‘ousted,’ considering whether the fact that something has happened merely proves that it was possible. In entertaining notions of what might have been, Stephen further undermines Deasy’s worship of the actual, opening up his affirmation of the status quo to question. Where Deasy sees only one, predestined possibility for human history, Stephen sees a constellation of realised and ousted possibilities; thus while for Deasy the colonisation of Ireland is inevitable and unquestionable, Stephen suggests the arbitrariness of such an outcome, and in doing so affirms the possibility of alternative political circumstances. In his rumination on possibility and actuality, Stephen draws on William Blake’s distinction between the ‘daughters of memory,’ the muses responsible for the recording of history, and the superior ‘daughters of inspiration,’ muses of the imagination, who are able to transcend the earthly mundaneness of history (Schneider 49). Stephen’s employment of Blake’s phrases serves to illustrate a conflict he sees between the closed tyranny of ‘actual’ history and the open, transcendental possibilities available to art. As Schneider states, ‘[h]istory must deal with the one event which occurred, while poetry is in the better position of being able to deal with the entire range of suppressed possibilities’ (55).
Thus Joyce, in his essay on Mangan, writes that ‘[p]oetry, even when apparently most fantastic, is always ... a revolt, in a sense, against actuality’ (‘James’ 59). For Stephen, the contemplation of non-actualised historical possibilities in thought or art is a further revolt against the ‘tyranny’ of Deasy’s factual, progressive history.

Stephen also rejects Deasy’s notions of teleology through his use of language, light-heartedly revelling in narratives whose open-ended structure reflect the counterteleological principals central to his political position. As Mary C. King notes, the link between history and language is inadvertently broached when the unattentive pupil Armstrong mistakes Stephen’s history question on Pyrrhus for a question about grammar (354); Armstrong’s response – ‘Pyrrhus, sir? Pyrrhus, a pier’ – results in Stephen’s quip that a pier is a ‘disappointed bridge’ (25). Stephen’s witticism, which Sidorsky calls a ‘denial of teleology for piers or bridges,’ is ‘puzzling’ for the schoolboys, who are unaccustomed to such ambiguity in the classroom (306). As Spoo notes in a comparison between the ‘pleasantries’ of Stephen and Deasy, ‘[s]tories with a point are as disagreeable to Stephen as histories with a goal’ (73). In ‘Nestor,’ in addition to his joke about bridges, Stephen tells his students an indecipherable riddle about a fox (27). In ‘Aeolus’ his ‘Parable of the Plums’ is without a clear point, with Myles Crawford struggling to ascertain whether or not it has ended (Spoo 73; Ulysses 139-142); the alternative title of the ‘parable’ – ‘A Pisgah Sight of Palestine’ – furthermore refers to Moses’s unrealised goal of reaching the Promised Land which he sighted from Mount Pisgah. Spoo points out that Deasy’s ‘joke,’ on the other hand, ‘has a cruel telos’ (73): ‘I just wanted to say, he said. Ireland, they say, has the honour of being the only country which never persecuted the jews. Do you know that? No. And do you know why? ...
Because she never let them in ... That's why' (*Ulysses* 36). The contrast between the witticisms of Stephen and Deasy illustrates a key reason why Stephen rejects teleological notions: he recognises how teleological concepts can be employed in the subjugation of others. Deasy wields his teleological witticism against Jews, just as he wields his teleological concept of history against the victims of colonial rule. His equations always culminate in the subjugation of a victim or the attribution of blame, whether he is invoking God to justify the oppression of the Irish (34), accusing Jews of being responsible for all of England's ills (33), or blaming women for bringing sin into the world, and a great deal subsequently (34). Gibson sees Stephen's Pisgah parable as a 'thematic protest' against the malicious historical narratives adopted by the likes of Deasy, arguing that 'since history becomes nightmarish when it is coopted for certain kinds of representation, when it is processed by texts that threaten or preclude individual freedom, it is only right that the individual respond with texts that embody openness and possibility' (135-36). Stephen refuses the closure which underpins the repressive master narratives of history to which he is subjected, preferring ambiguity and interpretative multiplicity to malicious teloi, and metaphysical disorder to dogmatic predetermination. Even nihilism is preferable to a doctrine which endorses subjugation and oppression: Spoo discusses how, in 'Proteus,' a bleak alternative to Deasy's progressive history becomes salient to Stephen when he sees a dog stumble upon the festering corpse of another of its kind (72). For the live canine, as Stephen observes, history indeed 'moves to one great goal' (*Ulysses* 46): the infestation of dog. If Stephen cannot offer an adequate alternative to the narrativised history of Deasy, he is eager at least to embrace notions of indeterminacy or chaos which undermine the strict order on which such
oppressive master narratives are based. As Garry Leonard notes, ‘[t]he “escape” afforded by chronicles of disorder is not an escape from history but rather an escape from the historicized to the not-yet-historicized where the colonial subject may have access to possibilities ousted by the sham “actualities” imposed by historical narrative’ (21-22).

The Anglo-Irishman Deasy’s manipulation of his representation of the past is also enacted by the Englishman Haines, who at the beginning of Ulysses is staying in the Martello tower with Stephen and Buck Mulligan. Haines shares Deasy’s confidence in his own interpretations and judgements, asserting his moral authority to make executive decisions as he pours tea for the two Irishmen: ‘– I’m giving you two lumps each, he said’ (12). He, too, presumes to speak unequivocally on behalf of the Irish, even as he affirms the legitimacy of anti-colonial sentiment: ‘An Irishman must think like that, I daresay’ he asserts, in response to Stephen’s declaration of his servility to the ‘imperial British State’ and the ‘holy Roman catholic and apostolic church’ (20, emphasis added). Like Deasy, Haines adopts a conception of history which exonerates the English of blame for colonisation and acquits him of complicity in colonial exploitation. He manipulates his representation of his own relationship to English national identity in order to deflect blame for historical injustices, saying: ‘We feel in England that we have treated you rather unfairly. It seems history is to blame’ (20). In these sentences, Haines initially connects himself with his English forbears and compatriots by speaking in the collective (‘We feel in England’), thus reinforcing through language his relation to a continuous, collective national identity – Anderson’s ‘imagined political community.’ He tentatively acknowledges the injustices of colonialism (‘we have treated you rather unfairly’) but then, having come perilously close to conceding collective responsibility for the historical
mistreatment of Ireland, he proceeds to absolve himself and his country of guilt or responsibility by employing a discontinuous concept of national identity where past actions are dislocated from the present: ‘It seems history is to blame.’ By citing ‘history’ rather than the actions of human beings as the active force behind colonial domination, Haines relegates historical injustice to a discrete, detached past which has no bearing on the present, thereby circumventing any consideration of culpability or remorse. As Schneider notes, ‘[s]ince Haines sees history as responsible for everything that happens in the world,’ as in Deasy’s history of manifest destiny, ‘the question of human guilt and responsibility does not even arise’ (45). In conceptualising history as an autonomous force, disconnected from the present, Haines overturns his sense of a continuous, collective English identity in order to disengage himself and his cohorts from responsibilities anchored in the past.

Both Deasy and Haines thus ‘coopt’ history (Spoo 135) in order to justify their positions as members of the dominant class. Their teleological and depersonalised historiographies affirm the status quo and negate any question of human responsibility. Castle discusses Deasy and Haines’s self-absolution in terms of the self-serving historiographies which they employ:

As representatives of an imperial culture, whose historical master narratives usurp the Irish experience it refuses to treat ‘fairly,’ Deasy and Haines perform the same maneuver: they apotheosize history, narrate the past according to the logic of a process (both deterministic and transcendental) outside of human experience which leaves them blameless partisans of what is, after all, both inevitable and necessary. (311)
While Deasy appeals to predestination in order to affirm the legitimacy of current social and political conditions, Haines prefers simply to bypass the question of accountability altogether; both make history subservient to ideology, using it as a back door by which, as members of society complicit with an oppressive administration, they are able to escape culpability.

Haines’s role as a colonial figure is complicated, however, by his apparently genuine interest in Irish culture. Ironically, of the three main characters in ‘Telemachus,’ the Englishman is the only one fluent in the Irish language – a language which the Irish peasant woman delivering the milk mistakes for French (14). Nevertheless, despite his apparent sympathy with those on the receiving end of colonial rule, Haines is shown not to be above profiting from colonisation. Mulligan suggests to Stephen that Haines’s family wealth was made as the result of colonial exploitation, announcing that ‘[h]is old fellow made his tin by selling jalap to Zulus or some bloody swindle or other’ (7).

Furthermore, as Gibson argues, ‘Joyce pointedly gives him South African connections, as though to stress that an apparent sympathy with the oppressed in one corner of the Empire does not preclude collusion in their oppression in another’ (26). Haines’s penchant for Irish culture, no matter how earnest it may be, also represents a project undertaken firmly within the social and economic framework of colonialism. He seeks to convert Irish culture into a form acceptable to the English, reducing local customs and idiosyncrasies to fragments in a quaint ‘chapbook,’ as Stephen calls it (25), which is perhaps supposed to substitute for the indigenous culture gradually lost under English rule. It is also, presumably, an enterprise from which Haines hopes to benefit
economically, when he sells copies of the book to worldly Britons; ‘chapbook,’ after all, implies a ‘chapman,’ an archaic term for a peddler or merchant (OED).

By means of his representation of Haines’s attitudes towards Irish history and culture, and his Irish companions’ responses to these attitudes, Joyce subtly addresses Irish complicity with colonialism. In ‘Telemachus’ Buck Mulligan represents the complicitous Irishman, playing the role, as Gibson describes it, of ‘court jester to the English’ (30).\(^\text{17}\) While Mulligan privately professes disdain for the colonisers (‘God, these bloody English. Bursting with money and indigestion,’ he exclaims to Stephen [4]), publicly he is quite willing to play the moderate role desired of him by his English counterparts: Irish in his quirks but ultimately Anglicised, irreverent but not rebellious. Mulligan acquiesces to colonial expectations of the Irish, hoping to benefit by offering titbits of Irish culture to Haines for inclusion in his book. He encourages Stephen to relay his ‘symbol of Irish art’ to Haines, in exchange for a potential reward: ‘Cracked lookingglass of a servant. Tell that to the oxy chap downstairs and touch him for a guinea’ (7). For Mulligan, such deference to the dominant social group is merely harmless opportunism: ‘Why don’t you play them as I do?’ he asks Stephen (16). Stephen, on the other hand, never hesitates to point out Haines’s continued implication in the systems of economic, social and political power which make him so unhappy: throughout the course of _Ulysses_ he calls Haines ‘[t]he seas’ ruler’ (18), a ‘[p]enitent thief’ (179) and, in a biting aside perhaps also directed at Mulligan, a ‘[u]surper’ (23). Stephen embarrasses Haines by insisting on his own position as a member of an

\(^{17}\) Gibson takes this phrase from Joyce’s own writings on Oscar Wilde; see Joyce, ‘Oscar Wilde: The Poet of “Salomé”’ (149). Stephen also uses a version of the phrase in ‘Nestor’ – ‘A jester at the court of his master’ – in an apparent reference to Mulligan, occurring as it is does in the midst of a thought about ‘Haines’s chapbook’ (25).
oppressed people – a people oppressed by the English – thus provoking the Englishman’s sheepish indictment of ‘history.’ Rather than pursuing diplomacy, Stephen deliberately tries to ‘put [his] hoof in it,’ as Mulligan scolds him (16), rejecting the illusive leverage sought by his deferent companion. Thus as Gibson argues, while ‘Mulligan thinks that acquiescence means power … Stephen knows that it spells continuing disempowerment’ (30). Williams contends that ‘Mulligan demonstrates how ideology works through the total acceptance … of making money by representing to the Englishman his preconceived notion of Irish “folk” ways … By attempting to exploit the Englishman, one is merely reproducing the entire pattern of exploitation’ (139). In the relationship between Haines and Mulligan, coloniser and colonised meet each other half way; one concedes the more overt and severe aspects of his power, while the other forgoes bringing up the awkward issues of political and cultural independence in exchange for economic and social advancement. Gibson notes that this convenient refiguring of the colonial relationship reflects on several points the political movement known as ‘constructive Unionism,’ which was influential in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (24-25). Stephen, however, rejects any acquiescence to the expectations of the English: he recognises that by acceding to Haines’s request to ‘make a collection of [his] sayings’ (16) he would be granting the Englishman the authority of textualising his experience, allowing him to commodify it and transform it into the sanitised version of Irishness which allows Haines, amused but not disconcerted, to remain ‘smiling at wild Irish’ (23). As Kiberd notes, Stephen sees, as Mulligan does not, that such acquiescence leaves ‘the English with the power of description and the Irish succumbing to the pictures they had constructed’ (Inventing 32).
Joyce thus addresses politically-, ideologically- and economically-motivated conceptions of history by means of his representation of the attitudes displayed by Irish, English and Anglo-Irish characters in ‘Telemachus’ and ‘Nestor’ – conceptions which are primarily rebutted through Stephen’s unwillingness to acquiesce to colonial conceptions of Irish culture and history, and his willingness to question accepted representations of the past. In contrast to the blamelessness promoted by Haines’s notion of an autonomous history, and Deasy’s faith in divine providence, Joyce also lays out the specific mechanisms through which colonial domination has historically taken place. The most apparent of these in ‘Nestor’ is the issue of economic exploitation and dependence. Deasy explicitly recognises the importance of economics to political authority, informing Stephen that ‘[m]oney is power’ (30). Moments later, however, Deasy seems to forget this dictum as he dispenses advice to Stephen, speaking brashly of the ‘pride of the English’: ‘I paid my way ... I never borrowed a shilling in my life. Can you feel that? I owe nothing. Can you?’ (31). Deasy’s conviction in the virtue of self-sufficiency assumes a degree of economic equity absent in the wider relationship between coloniser and colonised. As the citizen loudly laments in ‘Cyclops,’ the prosperity of colonial England was a two-sided coin, the other face of which was the economic exploitation of colonies such as Ireland; as Stephen is no doubt aware, such proud independence as Deasy advocates is not so readily available to the economically exploited as it is to the exploiter. Indeed, Stephen’s thoughts turn immediately to colonisation and ownership: in response to Deasy’s probing on ‘the proudest word you will ever hear from an Englishman’s mouth,’ he identifies the Englishman as ‘[t]he sea’s ruler,’ and replies with a colonial cliché: ‘That on his empire ... the sun never sets’ (30). The ‘financial
settlement' which prompts Deasy and Stephen’s discussion highlights the economic disparity between the two: Stephen, as an employee, is obliged to serve others in exchange for necessary income while Deasy, the employer, has the power to dispense both wealth and advice. While this may be overly simplistic as a metaphor for the colonial roles which the pair assume, their financial interaction points towards the broader systems in which colonial relations take place. As Williams points out, Haines, the most prominent Englishperson in *Ulysses*, makes a point of *not* paying his way when he goads Mulligan to pay the milk woman in ‘Telemachus’ – an act which, along with Haines’s rent-free sojourn in the tower, he sees as emblematic of ‘the economic domination practised in the macrocosmic relationship of England and Ireland’ (165).

For Sidorsky, the monetary exchange between Deasy and Stephen is similarly representative of wider relationships of power and dominance. He notes the implicit allegiance to authority embedded in the symbolic system of coinage:

Coins are objects of little intrinsic worth whose value derives only from their relationship to a dominant sovereign. In contrast to a currency which would embody the values of its own author, bear his impress, and be minted by him, the historical coinage of sovereign powers represents an external imposition. In ‘Nestor,’ Stephen concedes that some concession to the historical coinage has been unavoidable. (317)

Stephen recognises his entrapment in colonial systems of power, seeing his recurring economic and social interactions with the Anglo-Irishman Deasy as symptomatic of his increasing reliance on and embedment within colonial spheres of influence: ‘The same room and hour, the same wisdom: and I the same. Three times now. Three nooses round
me here’ (30). The ‘nooses’ which his encounters with colonial authority place around him represent not only his economic predicament, but also issues of language and discourse. Stephen is burdened by Deasy’s ‘wisdom’ because the headmaster has the prerogative to define and dispense wisdom; more broadly, though, Stephen feels oppressed because the entire system of discourse within which he engages in the commerce of knowledge is owned in some respect by the class represented by Deasy. Sidorsky’s discussion of the systems or ‘external impositions’ by which authority is asserted lends itself naturally to the relationship between power and language, another symbolic system of exchange. He goes on to discuss language as an imposition of ideology and authority analogous to that of ‘coinage’ in the economic sense, taking as a reference point Stephen’s recalling of the biblical maxim ‘To Caesar what is Caesar’s, to God what is God’s’ (*Ulysses* 26):

By his reference to the gospel account of the coin tribute of Jesus to Caesar, Stephen recognizes that, no matter how autonomous the contents of the work, there is a formal service to the historical language. Thus, the author of *Ulysses* may have had as his motto *non serviam,* but in writing his book in the currency of the King’s English, he rendered great service to the English language. Yet, writing in Gaelic would have brought with it some allegiance to the Irish national cause, and Latin would have represented a bow to the Church of Rome. Adopting the name of Giacomo Joyce and writing in Italian may have reflected his position as exile and expatriate, but it did not realize a liberation from the use of a national, historical language. (317-18)

Financial currency and language, the currency of thought, thus represent two major systemic means through which the English domination of Ireland takes place: it is such foundational systems of dependency, rather than the invisible forces behind such ‘big
words’ as ‘history’ or ‘God,’ which Joyce shows to underlie the continued subjugation of Ireland to English economic interests and cultural ideals. Stephen Dedalus, in deconstructing the means whereby colonial subjects are coopted into economic, linguistic, and ideological systems of domination, confronts the British Empire which demands both the coin of tribute and immersion in its systems of language and discourse. As I discuss below, however, Stephen is not an unequivocally heroic figure with regards to the treatment of history in *Ulysses*, and his own approach to representing the past is not beyond Joyce’s criticism or satire.

The multifarious conceptions of ‘history’ scattered throughout ‘Telemachus’ and ‘Nestor’ illustrate both the instability of the term and the various roles it is made to play in the arena of colonial discourse. History is travestied, coopted, bought, sold, never objective but always employed in the service of some personal, political, or ideological agenda. In the struggle for possession of history Stephen employs a tactic of sabotage, always bustling to knock the ball out of the hands of anyone who endeavours to strike a goal against him or any other oppressed player in the wider game of ideology and politics. It is in his mind primarily that the progressive history of Deasy and the autonomous history of Haines are unmasked as self-justifying and self-absolving attempts at usurping authority over the unattainable past; it is he, too, who spurns Mulligan’s collusion with the historicising processes of colonial authority. Yet in ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ it is Stephen’s turn to abuse the representation of the past as he discusses Shakespeare with a group of Irish writers and intellectuals. In this episode the relationship between history and language is again brought to the forefront as the men discuss the historicity of Shakespeare’s life and autobiographical influences on his works;
as they attempt to reconstruct the history of Elizabethan England they are faced with the problem of how to restore, in language, that which has ‘faded into impalpability through death, through absence, through change of manners’ (130), to adopt Stephen’s phrase. Colonial issues, particularly those regarding language and literature, subtly but unmistakably permeate Stephen’s thoughts as the men discuss the national poet of England in the National Library of Ireland; Gibson notes that, as in ‘Telemachus’ and ‘Nestor,’ Stephen sees himself as pitted against dominant, Anglocentric readings of the past (74). As Stephen explains his biographical theory of Hamlet to his condescending colleagues, however, it is he who ends up employing the very historiographic techniques that he repudiates as arms of colonial propaganda in the first two episodes of Ulysses.

A Hermeneutics of Desire: ‘Scylla and Charybdis.’

Stephen repeatedly associates Shakespeare with colonialism, presumably as an epitomic example of dominant, English culture. The two occasions on which he refers to representatives of colonial rule as ‘[t]he seas’ ruler’ both immediately follow references to Shakespeare: he applies the phrase to Haines almost directly after the Englishman compares Dublin Bay to the setting of Hamlet (18), and to Mr. Deasy following the headmaster’s ill-informed quotation of Iago (30). In ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ literature is intimately linked with politics; the discussion of Shakespeare is frequently overshadowed by concern about the apparent inferiority of Irish literature compared to the English tradition of which Shakespeare is the paramount figure. The men discuss the need for an Irish literary figure to rival the Shakespearean hegemony: ‘– Our young Irish bards, John Eglinton censured, have yet to create a figure which the world will set beside Saxon
Shakespeare’s Hamlet though,’ he admits, ‘I admire him, as old Ben did, on this side idolatry’ (177). As Thomas Lyster, the librarian of the National Library, makes clear, the development of Irish cultural nationalism is an enterprise fraught with anxiety: ‘They say we are to have a literary surprise, the quaker librarian said, friendly and earnest. Mr Russell, rumour has it, is gathering together a sheaf of our younger poets’ verses. We are all looking forward anxiously’ (184). As a writer, Stephen feels the pressure placed on him to produce work which would further such a nationalistic project; as his frequent allusions to colonial rule suggest, this burden is intensified by the constant presence of the colossal, English figure of Shakespeare. Stephen’s hyperconsciousness of the cultural politics entailed in literature causes him to occupy a position of ambivalence towards Shakespeare which is not shared by his Anglo-Irish colleagues, and his exposition of Hamlet is driven in part by his awareness of the cultural Anglocentrism manifested in the bardolatry practiced by the likes of Eglinton.

While Stephen shares an admiration of Shakespeare’s works, in contrast to his counterparts he actively sets about demythologising Shakespeare and, by extension, the English national ideology which this iconic cultural figure represents. A resistance to bardolatry is inherent in his unconventional theory that Prince Hamlet corresponds to Shakespeare’s deceased son Hamnet, the Ghost representing Shakespeare himself and Gertrude representing an adulterous Anne Hathaway; on one level, Stephen’s theory is an attempt to undermine cultic adulation of Shakespeare the man by portraying him as a cuckold and an exile. Stephen’s deflation of Shakespeare represents a rejection of the playwright as a symbol of English pre-eminence. Gibson argues that Stephen resists the ‘conflation of Shakespeare with an auratic Englishness’ (67), specifically identifying
Stephen’s theory as being antagonistic towards Edward Dowden, an ‘indomitably English-orientated’ professor of literature of whom Eglinton was a disciple (62-63). For Dowden, Shakespeare represented the pinnacle of English culture, a culture which he saw as infinitely superior to that of the Irish (Gibson 62-63); Nathan Wallace writes that Dowden felt Ireland incapable of producing a literary figure of Shakespeare’s calibre (803). While Eglinton is clearly more hospitable towards Irish literature than Dowden, he nevertheless displays some of the views which antagonise Stephen in Dowden’s account of Shakespeare. For Eglinton, matters such as who Hamlet is modelled on are ‘purely academic’ (177), irrelevant in the face of the timeless brilliance of Shakespeare’s art: ‘we have the plays,’ he informs Stephen sternly. ‘We have King Lear: and it is immortal’ (181). Stephen’s autobiographical exposition of Hamlet, or ‘this prying into the family life of a great man,’ as Eglinton describes it (181), is thus also an effort to open up Shakespeare to debate which is foreclosed by unadulterated worship. Stephen seeks to reappropriate Shakespeare from the hands of Anglocentric, unionist and pro-colonial commentators; Gibson goes so far as to assert that ‘Stephen’s account of Shakespeare is very much that of the “fenian” Deasy takes him to be’ (65).

Stephen’s attempt to wrest the historical figure of Shakespeare from the domain of Anglocentric discourse represents a struggle for the interpretation of historical information, and as Eglinton remarks this information is neither abundant nor irrefutable, like ‘[c]lergymen’s discussions of the historicity of Jesus’ (177). As in ‘Telemachus’ and ‘Nestor,’ the poverty of historical information available is a constant source of contention. Eglinton muses on the lack of verifiable details about Shakespeare’s life: ‘We know nothing but that he lived and suffered. Not even so much. Others abide our
question. A shadow hangs over the rest’ (186). In the absence of certainty about the past, the issue of how to reconstruct history from written texts, anecdotal reports, and often speculative biographical information is never far from the surface of the men’s conversation. In the ‘shadow’ occupied by historical conjecture, both historiography and hermeneutics are shown to be processes directed as much by the nature of the interpreter as by the information at hand. Eglinton implies that there is a tendency for readers and scholars to project their own identities onto the texts with which they engage: ‘Has no-one made [Hamlet] out to be an Irishman?’ he asks; ‘Judge Barton, I believe, is searching for some clues’ (190). Eglinton seems to view this selective interpretation as a largely unconscious process, the intuitive reflection of personal context onto external content, or the interpretation of texts in light of one’s own experiences – thus there is an inclination for Hamlet to be perceived as Irish by the Irish. Stephen, too, notes the constant experience of self-recognition in literature: ‘We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love. But always meeting ourselves,’ he muses (204). Willi Erzgräber sees Stephen’s interactions with the historical legacy of Shakespeare texts as a two-way process of elucidation:

Stephen sees in Shakespeare, as it were, a spiritual father, and he attempts to illuminate his own life, which is set in completely different kinds of social and historical circumstances, through reflection on a reconstruction (from documents and secondary literature) of Shakespeare’s life. At the same time the opposite process occurs; Stephen projects his own experiences into the reconstructed life of Shakespeare and tries on the basis of this to interpret Shakespeare’s works.

(292-93)
Stephen sees in Shakespeare's life reflections of his own; his reflection on Shakespeare's deathbed, for instance, turns into a reflection on the death of his mother (182). He also projects himself onto his interpretation of Shakespeare. His proclamation of the centrality of 'banishment' to Shakespeare's plays (203), for example, seems to be as much a reflection of his own marginalisation from the assembly in the national library, and his self-imposed artistic exile, as it is an analysis of the Shakespearean oeuvre. In these instances, Stephen unconsciously perceives the life and texts of Shakespeare through the prism of his own experience, and vice versa. Throughout the scene in the library, however, he also intentionally manipulates his presentation of historical information so that it is in line with his theory of *Hamlet*.

In arguing his claims about the historicity of Shakespeare, Stephen consciously suppresses historical information which is not congruent with his argument. Stephen informs his audience that a fiery 'daystar' rose at Shakespeare's birth, portraying it as a fateful beacon shining throughout the course of bard's life (201). He then mentally warns himself not to 'tell them he was nine years old when it was quenched' (201), carefully omitting facts which are inconvenient to his romantic image. Stephen performs the same editorial or censorial manoeuvre that Deasy carries out in 'Nestor' when he omits the persecution of Catholics from his history of Ireland: he shapes history to order by purging it of inconvenient facts. As Patrick McGee argues, '[a]ny decision, including Stephen's, as to Shakespeare's true identity is shown to be just that – a decision, a cutting away of part of the text in order to enhance or accentuate another part' (64). If Stephen's is a somewhat 'fenian' interpretation of Shakespeare, as Gibson argues, then in 'Scylla and Charybdis' he bears out Deasy's accusation: 'You fenians forget some things' (31).
Ironically, Stephen’s image of the ‘daystar’ serves to apotheosise Shakespeare’s name; he has the star shine ‘in Cassiopeia, the recumbent constellation which is the signature of his initial among the stars’ (201), in order to emphasise the significance of the name William. By invoking such a providential account of Shakespeare’s life, Stephen steers surprisingly close to the bardolatry his theory stands in opposition to – and the theological predetermination embraced by Deasy. However, he uses his providential image as part of his attack on the conventional apotheosised version of Shakespeare; his emphasis on the importance of names serves to justify his assertion that Shakespeare’s characters represent real people from his life, whose dramatic counterparts ultimately reveal the private concerns of a cuckolded playwright. Stephen thus shows himself willing to utilise both the methods and the ideas of his ideological opponents when it suits him; in this he apparently takes after the Revivalists who, as Kiberd argues, Joyce sensed were intent on using ‘all the old imperialist mechanisms in the name of a national revival’ (Inventing 333). In having Stephen adopt the rhetorical methods of his opponents, Joyce underscores the inevitability of corruption in representations of the past; while Ulysses deconstructs the manipulative historiographic practices employed by groups such as colonial apologists and cultural nationalists, the events of ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ imply that even those apparently immune to such ideologically-driven historiographical distortion are susceptible to abusing the representation of the past when it is in their interests.

In addition to such explicit manipulation of fact, Stephen self-consciously tailors his representation of the historical past to enhance the plausibility of his theory. Utilising
the power of imagery, Stephen attempts to sway his listeners by overwhelming them with a lucid ‘[c]omposition of place’:

– It is this hour of a day in mid June, Stephen said, begging with a swift glance their hearing. The flag is up on the playhouse by the banks. The bear Sackerson growls in the pit near it, Paris garden. Canvasclimbers who sailed with Drake chew their sausages among the groundlings. Local colour. Work in all you know. Make them accomplices. (180)

Stephen seeks to make his audience ‘accomplices’ in his rhetorical endeavour by requesting them to enter, through imagery, a world which he constructs in language; his location of the Elizabethan scene at ‘this hour of a day’ and, like the scene in the library, ‘in mid June,’ serves to bolster its immediacy. This aspect of Stephen’s rhetorical method, which Spoo describes as the weaving of a ‘historical word-tapestry’ (53), constitutes a somewhat propagandistic historiography – propagandistic in the sense that he selects vivid, romantic images with which he attempts to seduce his audience as he moves deeper into his argument, using the power of language as a primary tool with which to advance his (albeit trivial) cause. Having set the scene, he then moves seamlessly from apparently innocuous scene-setting to a theoretically-charged representation of the players at the Globe:

[Shakespeare] speaks the words to Burbage, the young player who stands before him beyond the rack of cerecloth, calling him by a name:

*Hamlet, I am thy father’s spirit*
bidding him list. To a son he speaks, the son of his soul, the prince, young Hamlet and to the son of his body, Hamnet Shakespeare, who has died in Stratford that his namesake may live forever.

(181)

Much as Deasy conceals ideologically-laden thought under the ‘guise of “common sense”’ (Williams 38), Stephen introduces subjective information – an image of Shakespeare and Burbage which corroborates his theory – under a guise of objectivity, following on as it does from the detailed, naturalistic image of Elizabethan England with which he asks his audience to engage. Stephen hopes that if his listeners become ‘accomplices’ in the aesthetic act of scene-setting, they will also more readily accept the speculative and self-serving information he introduces to the scene; as the assistant librarian Mr. Best unwittingly admits later on, ‘[t]he sense of beauty leads us astray’ (196).

Spoo too notes the conscious manipulation of historical information in Stephen’s ‘elaborate resuscitation of Shakespeare,’ contending that ‘[w]hat had been for Stephen in _A Portrait_ a barely awakened sense of the past has become in _Ulysses_ a deliberate act, a conscious historiographic method’ (53). While in _A Portrait_ Stephen develops a sense that the past is available through rumination on language, such as the Latin phrase ‘*implere ollam denariorum*_’ (in Spoo’s words, he uses ‘verbal exhumations as prolegomena to historical knowledge’) in ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ he intentionally takes advantage of the linguistic mediation of history, playfully manipulating his representation of the historical past to serve his own purposes (_Portrait_ 150; Spoo 52, 53). Stephen’s engagement with Shakespeare represents a hermeneutics of desire; he projects himself and his ideas onto Shakespeare’s texts and the historical records of his life, and draws
from these sources only what is convenient to his rhetorical purposes – what he wants to see. For McGee, the ‘real problem’ in analysing Stephen’s interpretation of *Hamlet* ‘is to know where the desire of reading intersects with the text in question’ (48); Stephen blurs the lines between fact and conjecture, and his selective use of historical information obfuscates the barrier between the ‘objective’ past and the past as Stephen wants it to be perceived. Following his deconstruction of Deasy’s historiographical methods in ‘Nestor,’ Stephen’s adoption of similarly propagandistic methods in ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ is immensely ironic, and significant in terms of how history can be understood in *Ulysses*. Along with Stephen, it is desire which directs how Deasy, Haines, and the narrator of ‘Cyclops’ view the past; no matter who is doing the looking, Joyce implies, history has a tendency to reflect what people want to see.

It is not only Deasy’s self-serving historiography which Stephen coopts in ‘Scylla and Charybdis.’ Taking his cue from Haines, he also manipulates his representation of his identity, invoking varying conceptions of the continuity of personal identity in order to detach himself from the past at will. Stephen proposes two contrasting temporal conceptions of personal identity, represented by the phrases ‘I, I,’ in which the self is conceived of as existing continuously from past to present, and ‘I. I.,’ in which the past is discrete from the present (182). He muses on the paradoxical relationship between conscious continuity and physical discontinuity, concluding that his identity is continuous by virtue of consciousness: ‘But I, entelechy, form of forms, *am I by memory*’ (182, emphasis added). Later, he discusses the evolution of art in terms of this binary tension between the continuous and the discontinuous:
– As we, or mother Dana, weave and unweave our bodies, Stephen said, from day to day, their molecules shuttled to and fro, so does the artist weave and unweave his image. And as the mole on my right breast is where it was when I was born, though all my body has been woven of new stuff time after time, so through the ghost of the unquiet father the image of the unliving son looks forth. (186)

Here Stephen portrays historical experience as a series of disconnected moments, constantly dying and regenerating like the individual molecules which constitute the body, but united through the metamorphosing image of the artist. In the same way, the discontinuities of the body are reconciled in the phrase ‘I, I,’ past and present being linked by way of the first-person singular pronoun. Stephen thus espouses a conception of identity which is, as Jameson describes it, a ‘temporal unification of past and future with one’s present,’ this unification being ‘a function of language’ (Postmodernism 26-7).18 This linguistic unification of identity across time is what Haines manipulates in ‘Telemachus,’ when he negates the ‘we’ connecting him to English national identity in order to disengage himself from the historical accountability entailed in it. In ‘Scylla and Charybdis,’ Stephen performs an analogous manoeuvre, jestingly adopting a discontinuous view of personal identity in order to justify his failure to pay back a pound borrowed from George Russell. Stephen argues that the molecular change which has occurred in his body renders him discrete from his former self and therefore not liable for past debts: ‘Five months. Molecules all change. I am other I now. Other I got pound’ (182). For unpaid debts, Stephen facetiously implies, ‘it seems history is to blame.’

18 See Chapter II for a more thorough discussion of this idea.
To paraphrase Eglinton, Stephen, like Haines, wants to eat his cake and have it too (196); Haines desires the license to articulate what ‘[we] feel in England’ while at the same time asserting that ‘history is to blame’ for England’s political legacy, while Stephen seeks both to affirm the continuity of his own identity (‘I ... am I by memory’) and jocularly disown his past actions (‘Other I got pound’). This mischievously humorous duplicity of intention is also manifested in Stephen’s treatment of Shakespeare. In arguing his somewhat tenuous hypothesis on *Hamlet*, Stephen is to some extent playing the devil’s advocate: he readily admits that he does not believe his own theory (205). Spoo describes Stephen’s playful advancement and retraction of his theoretical position as the Penelopean weaving of ‘a historical text from which, when pressed by his listeners, he coolly extricates himself’ (46). Stephen disengages himself at will from the theoretical viewpoint he espouses, much as Haines disengages himself freely from the ideology which underpins colonialism; like Joyce himself, or even Irish modernism more generally, perhaps, Stephen is willing to adopt and discard the structures of others in the manner of the carnivalesque, although while humorous his intention is not so clearly satirical as is Joyce’s. Both Stephen and Haines utilise this flexibility to release themselves from responsibility for faults in the theoretical or ideological position they maintain – Stephen from the tenuousness of his theory, Haines from the historical injustices of colonialism – while maintaining the advantages of holding such positions. Eglinton presses Stephen over the paradoxical relationship he has to his theory: ‘– Well, in that case, he said, I don’t see why you should expect payment for it since you don’t believe it yourself’ (205). The irony which Eglinton perceives in Stephen’s supposed apathy towards his position is also apparent in Haines’s denunciation of history; as a
‘penitent’ beneficiary of colonialism, Haines profits from an ideology in which he ostensibly does not believe. Joyce’s treatment of Stephen as an artful rhetorician and a manipulative historiographer in ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ perhaps represents a negative or satirical portrayal of his younger self, emphasising his own distance from his literary hero in a novel so ambivalent about heroism. More importantly, however, his satirical re-enactment of colonial attitudes towards history through the mouth of Stephen serves to check the bad faith he sees as inherent in any historiographical model.

Stephen thus re-enacts the manipulative historiographic strategies and conceptions of identity employed by Deasy and Haines in the opening episodes of *Ulysses*, albeit self-consciously and often to humorous effect. In ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ he plays the ‘jester’ (25), although unlike the playfully obliging Mulligan he is a jester who mimics his master not out of gainful acquiescence but in order to advance his revolt against servitude. If Stephen does internalise or coopt colonial stereotypes of the Irish, then in ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ perhaps the ‘apish’ Irishman is aping the historiographic stratagems which reinforce colonial ideology. Stephen seems to be conscious that he is adopting techniques characteristic of his ideological rivals: ‘Walk like Haines now,’ he impels himself, as he follows the ‘lubber jester’ Mulligan out of the library (206). He is also more than aware of the corruptible power of language, in his own mouth as well as others’. Stephen describes language as a weapon: ‘Unsheathe your dagger definitions,’ he prompts himself (178). He also likens his attempt to persuade his companions of the value of his theory to the poisoning of Hamlet the elder: ‘They list. And in the porches of their ears I pour’ (188). In ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ Stephen exploits the malevolent power of language which he elsewhere condemns in others, utilising it as a poison with which to
manipulate the present and the past towards ideological ends. While the specific targets of his historiographical deconstruction are clear, Joyce ultimately implies that there can be no version of history which is not corrupted; in *Ulysses* every party distorts history to their own advantage, whether the perpetrators are Irish nationalists, representatives of colonialism, or purportedly non-partisan figures such as Stephen Dedalus. Joyce suggests that we may walk through history, meeting any number of cultural figures and archetypes but always, to paraphrase Derek Attridge, meeting a version of ourselves with which we can live (79).

‘*Lie or Hold Your Peace*: *Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable*.

Joyce thus undermines the idea of objective historiography by calling into question the relationship between human records of history and the reality of historical events, challenging the adequacy of accounts of the past by illustrating the selectiveness of historical memory. All attempts at reconstructing the past, though they may rendezvous with genuine historical information, are ultimately revealed to be epistemological impostors, inadequate accounts which are invariably mediated by the personal, political, and ideological motivations of those who uphold them. Even that great unmasker of historiographical sleight of hand, Stephen Dedalus, has to be unmasked as a historiographical propagandist by a text which, though rejecting absolute relativism, vigorously opens up the gap between linguistic representation and extra-linguistic reality, between historiographic signifier and historical signified. Beckett similarly challenges the authenticity of historical representations by questioning both the capacity of language to adequately represent the past and the ability of human observers to accurately perceive
and record the events which become written history; indeed, his works are much more explicitly relativistic and epistemologically sceptical than Joyce’s, displaying no faith in human ability to gain access to ‘reality’ – present or historical – beyond the inadequate access provided by language. Like Joyce, Beckett primarily seeks to destabilise representations of the past in response to political and ideological cooptation of the historicising process, although like his approach to language itself the specific targets of his literary subversion are less than clear. Nevertheless, his work performs a deeply political function, subjectivising the past in order to preclude all claims of final authority over it, thus rejecting historical representation as a tool for ideological or political advancement. The Beckett oeuvre is densely populated by characters who exemplify such a subjectivised approach to history: from Molloy, to Malone, to the collection of voices conventionally known as the Unnamable, Beckett’s narrators exist in a state of constant doubt about the ability of their memories to accurately reconstruct the past, and the ability of language to represent non-linguistic reality – to take examples from the Trilogy alone. As Iain Wright points out, many of Beckett’s narrators appear to be full-blown poststructuralists, who ‘don’t need Saussure to tell them that the relation between the signified and the signifier is arbitrary’ and who certainly wouldn’t imagine that a linguistic reconstruction of history might objectively reflect what actually happened (15).

There is however, amid these characters saturated in linguistic scepticism and historiographical indeterminacy, one notable exception: Jacques Moran. Moran, apparently some kind of private investigator, stands alone in the Trilogy in his possession of a stable, unified worldview, and in his conviction in his ability to know himself and the world around him through language. In the second part of Molloy, Moran narrates a
mission in which he is sent in search of Molloy, a figure antithetical to his epistemological self-confidence. As he proceeds in his pursuit of the unfathomable Molloy, however, his structured worldview slowly disintegrates, until he ultimately comes to embrace the incertitude which characterises the other narrators of the Trilogy. To a more radical degree than Joyce, Beckett challenges all ideologically-motivated representations of the past and present by calling into question the very epistemological and translational foundations on which such conceptions are based.

At the beginning of Part II of Molloy, Moran displays an apparently unambivalent conviction in his ability to apprehend the world around him. In contrast to the uncertainty and confusion which characterises Molloy’s narration, Moran is able to clearly situate his story in terms of time (‘It was a Sunday in summer … It must have been about eleven o’clock’) and place (‘I was sitting in my little garden, in a wicker chair’), and shows no hesitance about his recollection of even minor details, such as the scent of lemon-verbena which he recalls permeating his garden (92). Richard Begam describes the manifest knowability of Moran’s world:

Moran appears to occupy a world about which definite statements can be made, useful information given and received. Here the clockwork of time runs through its wonted cycles, enabling us to locate ourselves at a particular point, to assert, for example, that ‘it is midnight’ [Three Novels 92] … In brief, Moran’s is, or appears to be, a world in which we may confidently chart the coordinates of time, space, and causality, a world in which things may be known. (102)

Moran prides himself on his knowledge of both the external dimensions of his property and the internal landscape of his mind: ‘I wandered in my mind,’ he recalls, ‘slowly,
noting every detail of the labyrinth, its paths as familiar as those of my garden and yet ever as new, as empty as the heart could wish or alive with strange encounters' (106). For Moran, understanding the world is equated with being able to order and control it, and understanding is imperative: ‘I found it painful at that period not to understand,’ he reflects (102). Incomprehension is ‘painful’ for Moran because it jeopardises the manageable order of his worldview, and thus threatens his self-efficacy; in Moran’s dichotomous world everything must be known or knowable, with any suggestion of the unknown or unknowable construed as a fatal weakness. Thus he also equates fallibility with a loss of authority, believing that, as an authority figure to his son, he must be seen to be right at all times or suffer authoritative impotence. Consequently, he refuses to review his decisions once they have been made: ‘I finally decided that to go back on my decision, freely taken and clearly stated, would deal a blow to my authority which it was in no condition to sustain’ (121). Whether right or wrong, Moran sees the world in black and white; he must understand the world infallibly in order to maintain the illusion of control over it, and he must be seen to be infallible by others, in order to maintain his control over them. As he says of the messenger Gaber, ‘it was not enough for him to understand nothing’ about the messages he carries, ‘he had also to believe he understood everything about them’ (106).

With regard to his ability to know the world, Moran thus exudes a self-confidence worthy of Joyce’s Mr. Deasy, whose ‘common sense’ interpretation of the world around him is manifest, rigid, and undebatable. Indeed, the Anglo-Irish headmaster casts a long shadow over Moran’s narrative. Like Deasy, Moran’s epistemological self-confidence extends to knowledge of the past, although his sense of history is largely vicariously
experienced through the education of his son and namesake Jacques – a boy of ‘thirteen 
or fourteen’ (94) whom Moran unfailingly strives to mould in his own image. Jacques 
excels at the study of history, a subject which, like the version taught at the Dalkey boys’ 
school in Ulysses, appears to consist of a series of dates and names: ‘The veriest dunce 
when it came to literature and the so-called exact sciences, he had no equal for the dates 
of battles, revolutions, restorations and other exploits of the human race, in its slow 
ascension towards the light, and for the configuration of frontiers and the heights of 
mountain peaks’ (130). The version of history learned by Moran’s son comes straight out 
of the Deasy textbook. Moran remarks that, at his son’s school, history and geography 
are ‘for obscure reasons regarded as inseparable’ (130). Presumably, the reason that 
these subjects are seen as being so akin is that, for those responsible for the education of 
Moran fils, history is a rock-solid and tangible domain of knowledge, the ‘facts’ of 
history and their significance being as quantifiable and indisputable as the altitudes of 
mountains. As in the artefactual history prescribed by Deasy, historical information here 
is static, obvious, and irrefutable, a series of datum to be learned by rote. It is also, as 
Moran casually affirms, a teleological history, historical events being successive 
manifestations of progress in humanity’s ‘ascension’ towards the divine light. This is 
apparently a conception of history which Moran advocates; he rewards his son’s 
mnemonic prowess with the progressive names and dates of history with the gift of a 
scout-knife. ‘He deserved his scout-knife,’ Moran declares, with a rare semblance of 
paternal pride (130). Moran’s history, like the world around him, is tangible and 
manifest, and it is only appropriate that he should validate his son’s grasping of such a 
history with a material reward.
Moran shares with Deasy not only his sense of history and his faith in metaphysical order, but also the headmaster’s sense of custodianship. The Deasy-esque nature of Moran’s relationship with his son and protégé becomes further apparent when, after commenting on the prize scout-knife, he reflects on his son’s economic status:

For where a scout’s knife is, there will his heart be also, unless he can afford to buy another, which was not the case with my son. For he never had any money in his pocket, not needing it. But every penny he received, and he did not receive many, he deposited first in his savings-box, then in the savings-bank, where they were entered in a book that remained in my possession. (130-31)

Jacques’s ‘savings-box’ recalls Deasy’s ‘savingsbox,’ the virtues of which he extols to Stephen in ‘Nestor.’ For Deasy, the savingsbox is an extension of his obsession with order, a means of keeping everything in its place: ‘—Three, Mr Deasy said, turning his little savingsbox about in his hand. These are handy things to have. See. This is for sovereigns. This is for shillings, sixpence, halfcrows. And here crowns. See’ (Ulysses 30). Like the history represented in the antique coins he keeps encased on his sideboard, Deasy’s strict organisation of his currency represents a reduction of complex systems to petty, ordered and manageable symbols; if history can be contained in the artefacts arranged in his study, so can the workings of economics be made containable, and therefore manageable, in the systematic arrangement of petty cash. As he exhorts Stephen, whose change, like his history, is disorderly and roaming free: ‘Don’t carry it like that … You’ll pull it out somewhere and lose it. You just buy one of these machines. You’ll find them very handy’ (30). Similarly, Moran’s insistence on depositing his son’s
pennies ‘first in his savings-box, then in the savings-bank’ is indicative of his fixation on order and control; money, like knowledge, is to be stored away in an orderly fashion.

As is the case in the economic exchange between Deasy and Stephen, Moran’s management of his son’s finances also points towards the wider, unequal power relationship between the two. As Deasy proclaims, ‘[m]oney is power’ (30), and in both cases the exchange of money highlights the relative power positions of the parties involved. While Deasy’s remuneration of Stephen underscores the didactic authority of his role as employer, Moran’s control of Jacques’s finances is emblematic of his authoritarian relationship with his son. Moran asserts his supremacy over his son by denying him financial autonomy; Jacques is dispossessed of money and therefore power. The economic roles which Deasy and Moran enact are also indicative of the social roles they both assume. Much as Deasy’s condescending interactions with Stephen are directed by the former’s Anglocentric, colonialist reading of history, Moran’s paternal micromanagement presupposes the need for a very specific kind of order and discipline. Moran declares his willingness to appease his son’s fancies, provided that such indulgence occurs strictly within his defined framework of decorum: ‘When I can give pleasure, without doing violence to my principles, I do so gladly,’ he states (104). Thus while Moran considers himself to be generous, he must also be just: like Deasy he sees himself as tempering leniency with the paternalistic authority appropriate to his role. Moran’s assumption of the custodial role may be more legitimate than Deasy’s – Jacques is, after all, his dependent son – but it is nevertheless indicative of his conviction that he ultimately knows what is best for other people. As a self-appointed custodian of others, Moran advocates the infliction of suffering if it is ultimately beneficial to those on whom
it is inflicted: ‘My trees, my bushes, my flower-beds, my tiny lawns, I used to think I loved them. If I sometimes cut a branch, a flower, it was solely for their good, that they might increase in strength and happiness,’ he says of the flora under his charge (127). While the pain suffered by those he presumes to nurture may be necessary, he also admits that it is regrettable: ‘I never did it without a pang,’ he concedes (127). It is this same philosophy of tough love which legitimates Moran’s persistent verbal and physical abuse of his son. Supremely confident in his own judgement, Moran, like Deasy and Haines, presumes unequivocally to speak on behalf of others. He says of his son: ‘I managed finally to articulate [the question], Are you capable of following me? He did not answer. But I seized his thoughts as clearly as if he had spoken them, namely, And you, are you capable of leading me?’ (130, emphasis added). As he assumes control over Jacque’s finances, denying him the opportunity of exercising economic rights, Moran also presume to be in command of his son’s thoughts, thereby denying him the right of speaking or thinking for himself. Beckett thus re-enacts the issues of history, epistemology and social inequality which Joyce confronts on a grand scale at the microcosmic level of the family; as in his comical re-enactment of nationalist concern with storytelling and ownership in Malone Dies, such a trivial setting is belittling to such ostensibly weighty discourses, perhaps also suggesting that the kinds of political inequalities presented in Joyce’s Ulysses are merely the inequalities of the family writ large.

As for Deasy the social inequities of colonialism are justified by providence, so too is Moran’s domineering social authority legitimated to an extent by religion – something to which he takes an essentially economic approach. Moran esteems the coin
of tribute over the fulfilment of religious obligations, arguing that the finer points of
curch doctrine, such as observance of the Sabbath, can be disregarded ‘so long as you
go to mass and contribute to the collection’ (92). For Moran, the church is a provider of
goods and services, religion being a product from which he demands satisfaction: having
received communion, he complains that he feels ‘like one who, having swallowed a pain-
killer, is first astonished, then indignant, on obtaining no relief’ (102). Moran’s
engagement with religion is founded on an economic rather than a spiritual exchange, his
contribution to the church collection apparently being made in direct exchange for
absolution. Seemingly disinterested in bona fide theology, Moran essentially employs
God as a mercenary underwriter of his earthly actions. When his son falls ill as they
prepare to leave in search of Molloy, he considers invoking God in order to absolve
himself of responsibility for failing to obey commands from his boss Youdi, asking
himself: ‘Was not this the providential hindrance for which I could not be held
responsible?’ (118). God also provides Moran with a teleological model of history,
history being an ‘ascension towards the light’ (130). As Deasy pointedly directs his
teleological ideas against Jews, women, and colonial subjects, Moran too is quick to
utilise theological teloi as a tool of subjugation, an inclination which is expressed in his
use of language. Like those of Deasy, Moran’s ‘jokes’ are pointed and malicious: ‘That
reminds me of the old joke about the female soul. Question, Have women a soul?
Answer, Yes. Question, Why? Answer, In order that they may be damned. Very witty’
(137). In his witticism Moran wields his teleological notions of history and theology
against others, invoking religious principles as justification for the subjugation of women.
The model of metaphysical order and teleology offered by religion reinforces the stability
and hierarchical organisation of Moran’s worldview. Moran’s conviction in hierarchical order, in turn, legitimates his own position of authority; while he accepts his own subordinance within the hierarchy, as a subject under God, he asserts the prerogative of being absolute ruler of his house and those who reside there. ‘I liked punctuality,’ he states, and ‘all those whom my roof sheltered had to like it too’ (98).

Moran takes his authority not just from God, but from the social order as well. As an ‘agent’ of an unspecified mandate, Moran situates himself in relation to the ‘vast organization’ of which he likes to believe himself to be a part:

when I speak of agents and of messengers in the plural, it is with no guarantee of truth. For I had never seen any other messenger than Gaber nor any other agent than myself. But I supposed we were not the only ones and Gaber must have supposed the same. For the feeling that we were the only ones of our kind would, I believe, have been more than we could have borne. (107)

Moran’s imagined community allows him to enact a diffusion of responsibility, wherein he offloads responsibility for his actions onto those who he takes to be his superiors in the organisational hierarchy. Like both Deasy and Haines, Moran absolves himself of any responsibility for outcomes which he has not caused directly: despite pushing his ailing son to his physical limit, he reflects ‘with bitter satisfaction that if my son lay down and died by the wayside, it would be none of my doing. To every man his own responsibilities’ (122). Moran appeals to the collective to absorb liability for actions in which he has partaken; he places the onus of responsibility on Youdi, the apparent source of the demand that he be accompanied by his son, while taking comfort in his own passive role as a mere follower of instructions. Later, after apparently beating a stranger
to death, he expresses hope that his boss will intervene to ensure his exoneration: ‘Youdi will take care of me, he will not let me be punished for a fault committed in the execution of my duty,’ he assures himself (154). Moran’s evasion of responsibility for acts carried out in the ‘execution of his duty,’ as he sees it, seems to reflect on the workings of the Nazi regime. It is no coincidence that Moran, in one of the very few specific historical allusions in the Trilogy, should make reference to Goering (143), who, as Anthony Uhlmann notes, was largely responsible for the existence of the Gestapo (48). As Uhlmann argues, Moran’s reference to the Nazi commander, along with the clandestine, espionage-related nature of his professional responsibilities, associates him with the surveillance and policing arms of the Third Reich (48). His deflection of liability onto his superiors, however, more generally links him with the complicit masses who participated in or failed to make a stand against the brutalities executed under fascist rule, relying, as Moran does, on the justification of merely following orders. Beckett, of course, bore witness to the atrocities carried out in Hitler’s name, both in Germany and in France under the Vichy government; as a member of the French Resistance, he also spent months in hiding from the Gestapo (see Knowlson 273-308). In Molloy he illustrates how social hierarchies, such as that in which Moran invests himself, can be made the basis for a diffusion of responsibility which allows such atrocities to occur. If Haines blames ‘history’ and Deasy cites God, Moran more than anything deflects his complicity in acts of abuse by passing the blame to those higher in the social and religious hierarchy into which he inserts himself. Moran’s faith in his ability to apprehend the ‘facts’ of the natural world, in God, and in the social structure in which he serves, all ultimately serve to legitimate his actions; like the colonial apologists of Ulysses, Moran represents both
the past and present in ways which validate his social position and acquit him of culpability or complicity. Beckett, along with Joyce, addresses the political and ideological cooptation of history through his representation of the self-serving constructions of the past employed by those in positions of social authority.

While in *Ulysses* Stephen acts as the major counterpoint to the stable, self-evident and teleological historiographies which underwrite social and political subjugation, in the works of Beckett historiographical uncertainty and scepticism about the capacity of language to represent the past and present are the norm rather than the exception. In contrast to Moran’s structured, unambiguous worldview, every other narrator in the Trilogy occupies a position of constant epistemological doubt. From the outset, the eponymous narrator of the first part of *Molloy* is characterised by bewilderment and ignorance. Molloy, in the words of Begam, ‘inhabits a condition of generalized uncertainty’ (102); from the beginning of the novel, he is able to ascertain little other than his presence in his mother’s room, not even knowing how he got there. While in the process of searching for his mother, Molloy finds that he does not know her address (22), her name (23), or the name of the town in which she lives (31). He finds that even the knowledge of his own name momentarily escapes him (22). It is a solipsistic world which Molloy inhabits, although at times even his self is not verifiable: ‘there were times when I forgot not only who I was, but that I was, forgot to be,’ he admits (49). In *Malone Dies*, Malone is similarly doubtful of his ability to know what he calls ‘the outer world’ (237). Although confined to a single room, Malone cannot even speak of his meagre chattels personal without being overwhelmed by uncertainty: ‘I am perhaps attributing to myself things I no longer possess and reporting as missing others that are not missing,’ he
suspects (250). Malone is also keenly aware of the existence of things which fall outside
the realm of knowability altogether: ‘there are others,’ he says of his possessions, ‘over
there in the corner, belonging to a third category, that of those of which I know nothing
and with regard to which therefore there is little danger of my being wrong, or of my
being right’ (250). The Unnameable, too, is characterised by metaphysical doubt,
unconfident in his authority to ‘speak of facts’ (291). He is unable to ascertain what he is
or even if he exists: ‘it has not yet been our good fortune,’ he remarks near the end of his
narrative, ‘to establish with any degree of accuracy what I am, where I am, whether I am
words among words, or silence in the midst of silence, to recall only two of the
hypotheses launched in this connexion’ (388).

In the Trilogy, Moran thus stands alone in his confidence in his self-knowledge
and his ability to perceive the ‘facts’ of the world around him. When it comes to
reconstructing the past, Moran’s co-narrators are even less certain of their capacity to
access any super-linguistic truth. For Molloy, any representation of the past ultimately
represents a ‘lie,’ a distortion or fabrication of ‘what really happened’:

> every time I say, I said this, or I said that, or speak of a voice saying, far away inside me, Molloy,
and then a fine phrase more or less clear and simple, or find myself compelled to attribute to
others intelligible words, or hear my own voice uttering to others more or less articulate sounds, I
am merely complying with the convention that demands you either lie or hold your peace. For
what really happened was quite different. (88)

For Molloy, historiography is a convention of falsity, the attribution of an ‘articulate’
narrative to an inenarrable past. In narrating his own story, he is unsure whether the
information he produces reflects genuine recollection, or whether it is merely a falsified product of the narrative imperative: ‘She had a somewhat hairy face,’ he says of a former lover of uncertain sex, ‘or am I imagining it, in the interests of the narrative?’ (56). Molloy’s uncertainty suggests that the past may not be so much accessed through language as it is created in language, objectivity being superseded by the need to tell a good story. For Malone too, as Jean Yamasaki Toyama argues, ‘[r]emembrance and invention go hand in hand’ (21). ‘Remembering’ for Malone is merely the construction of a fictional narrative to fill the void of the absent past: ‘I have often amused myself with trying to invent them, those same lost events. But without succeeding in amusing myself really,’ he declares (183). On finding the bowl of a broken tobacco pipe, Malone devises a story about its previous owner and the series of events which led to its abandonment – all of which, as he admits, is ‘mere supposition’ (247). Precluded from accessing the real history of the bowl, all he can do is hypothesise on what might have been: as the Unnamable later muses, ‘[w]hat can one do but speculate, speculate, until one hits on the happy speculation?’ (369). Malone notes the apparent need of people to devise such speculative narratives in order to explain the present state, and suggests that such a need for myths of origin and existential narratives is a purely human imposition: ‘to tell the truth God does not seem to need reasons for what he does, and for omitting to do what he omits to do, to the same degree as his creatures, does he?’ he asks (245). While Beckett is not necessarily unsympathetic to this human need to narrativise the past, along with Joyce he deconstructs in his texts the use such narratives as tools of political or ideological advancement.
The creation of the speculative narratives which constitute history is portrayed in the Trilogy as a process governed by rhetorical rather than epistemological factors. Malone sees the construction of the historical record as a linguistic struggle, susceptible more to the powers of persuasion than to the weight of any objective evidence. He describes the process by which his fictional Lambert family reach a historical consensus: ‘if at first they were not in agreement about what they had seen, they talked it over doggedly until they were, in agreement I mean, or until they resigned themselves to never being so’ (205). ‘And agreement,’ he adds subsequently, ‘only comes a little later, with the forgetting’ (217); once again, language fills the void of unknowability, and consensus can only be reached once the chaos and plurality surrounding any event has faded from memory. Thus while Moran displays an unambivalent conviction in his ability to apprehend both the past and present, Molloy, Malone, and the Unnamable all question the ability of memory to accurately ascertain historical truth, ultimately portraying historiography as a process of fictionalising an inaccessible past; for them, all accounts of history are misrepresentations or fabrications. Such a state of epistemological or historiographical bankruptcy, however, is not necessarily a horrific realisation of the nihilism which is occasionally suggested by Joyce’s critique of historiographical models; as in Ulysses, in the works of Beckett the ungrounding of historiographical processes serves to undermine representations which exonerate or justify the actions of those who employ them. Relativism or nihilism thus represent philosophical alternatives to the historical master narratives which underpin oppressive social hierarchies, however inadequate or uncomfortable alternatives they may be. Moran, along with Deasy, Haines, Stephen, and the narrators of ‘Cyclops,’ represents the past in accordance with a narrative
which serves his own purposes, legitimating his position of social authority and his abuse of those around him. By calling into question the very means by which Moran knows the world, the other narrators of Beckett’s Trilogy undermine the legitimacy of such a self-serving historiography – a subversion of epistemological authority which is reinforced as Moran himself descends into a state of uncertainty and bewilderment.

While in the Trilogy Moran alone epitomises epistemological certainty, throughout the course of the second part of Molloy his stable, ordered, and self-certain worldview gradually disintegrates. Moran’s descent into instability and uncertainty is apparently catalysed by his mission to find Molloy, a figure entirely antithetical to the structured worldview he espouses at the beginning of his narrative. Moran describes Molloy as being ‘[j]ust the opposite of myself, in fact’ (113). Molloy is incompatible with the structured framework of Moran’s world, defying assimilation into any ordered system: ‘To apply the letter of the law to a creature like me is not an easy matter,’ he declares. ‘It can be done, but reason is against it’ (24). From early on in his narrative, despite his overriding self-confidence, Moran begins to display elements of inconsistency and uncertainty which foreshadow the disintegration of his structured, manifest worldview. As he prepares to leave in search of Molloy, he suddenly experiences uncharacteristic doubt about his judgements: ‘Thus to my son I gave precise instructions,’ he states. ‘But were they the right ones? Would they stand the test of second thoughts? Would I not be impelled, in a very short time, to cancel them? I who never changed my mind before my son. The worst was to be feared’ (103). As he endeavours to evoke Molloy, Moran cannot decide whether his name is really Molloy or Mollose, and is confounded by internal contradictions: ‘How little one is one with oneself, good God. I
who prided myself on being a sensible man, cold as crystal and as free from spurious depth’ (113). Furthermore, in visualising Molloy he experiences uncertainty about the veracity of his memory which is typical of his counterparts: ‘images of this kind the will cannot revive without doing them violence,’ he says. ‘Much of what they had it takes away, much they never had it foists upon them’ (114).

Moran also begins to display nihilistic aspects of his personality which differentiate him from his prototype Mr. Deasy and prefigure his loss of theological certitude. Where Deasy sees in the future the certain revelation of God, for Moran the future also holds a certainty of a very different kind: his interment in the grave he has already earmarked for himself. Shortly after leaving his house, Moran passes the graveyard and remarks on the plot he has purchased: ‘Some twenty paces from my wicket-gate the lane skirts the graveyard wall … It is there I have my plot in perpetuity. As long as the earth endures that spot is mine, in theory. Sometimes I went and looked at my grave’ (130). If history for Moran is an ‘ascension towards the light’ for humanity (130), it is also a certain descent towards oblivion for himself as an individual. Moran awaits interpellation into a state of death: ‘The stone was up already. It was a simple Latin cross, white. I wanted to have my name put on it, with the here lies and the date of my birth. Then all it would have wanted was the date of my death’ (135). The certainty of his own demise even seems to give him some comfort: ‘Sometimes I smiled, as if I were dead already,’ he remarks (135). Moran’s nihilistic embracement of death marks a strain of unorthodoxy which continues to intensify as he pursues the elusive Molloy.

Moran’s religious faith begins to deteriorate as he contemplates his impending departure: ‘As for God,’ he says, ‘he is beginning to disgust me’ (105). Having departed,
Moran foresees a postlapsarian existence in which he is banished from the Edenic order and simplicity of his domestic domain:

Does this mean I shall one day be banished from my house, from my garden, lose my trees, my lawns, my birds of which the least is known to me and the way all its own it has of singing, of flying, of coming up to me or fleeing at my coming, lose and be banished from the absurd comforts of my home where all is snug and neat and all those things at hand without which I could not bear being a man, where my enemies cannot reach me, which it was my life’s work to build, to adorn, to perfect, to keep? (132)

Moran indeed suffers ‘banishment,’ but rather than from the material comforts of his home it is a banishment from the psychological security and certainty he relishes before he imbibes the ‘poison’ of the order to pursue Molloy (96). His attitudes towards the faith which underwrites him descends from need, to ‘disgust,’ to complete rejection; the Moran who felt compelled to request a private communion at the beginning of his story comes to describe himself, at the end of his journey, as ‘wily as a serpent’ (174). In this he is linked to the fallen, serpentine Molloy, who comes to locomote by ‘crawling on his belly, like a reptile’ (90), and who ends his narrative after ‘lapsing’ into a ditch (91).

Moran’s pragmatic faith gives way to a series of nonsensical theological questions, such as ‘What value is to be attached to the theory that Eve sprang, not from Adam’s rib, but from a tumour in the fat of his leg (arse?)’ and ‘Did Mary conceive through the ear, as Augustine and Adobard assert?’ (166). The absurdity of Moran’s questions underscore another aspect of what he calls his ‘disintegration’ (157); Moran falls not only from grace as his religious faith is corroded, but from his former state of epistemological certainty as
his faith in logic and in his ability to apprehend the world around him order give way. Begam, too, sees the disintegration of Moran’s structured, logical worldview as an Edenic fall:

[A]most despite himself, Moran finds his garden transformed into the place of his own fall, the surroundings where his ‘last moments of peace and happiness’ [Three Novels 93] slip away when Gaber introduces into its midst the fatal knowledge that is to become the ‘Molloy affair.’ Once this happens, the world that Moran has inhabited, a world of property, orthodoxy, and complacency, ceases to be sufficient. (107)

Banished (or perhaps emancipated) from his world of ‘property, orthodoxy, and complacency,’ Moran comes to accept what he does not understand. By the time he returns home, incomprehension is no longer ‘painful’ but something to celebrate; on the mystifying movements of his bees, he says, ‘with rapture, Here is something I can study all my life, and never understand’ (169). As well as embracing unknowability, Moran comes to reject the idea that the past can be accurately reconstructed in language. He ultimately admits that the narrative he has recorded is a fabrication; echoing the opening words of his narration – ‘It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows’ (92) – he ends with a negation: ‘It was not midnight. It was not raining’ (176). By negating the truth value of his words, Moran affirms the primacy of language and the failure of historiography; language is ‘primary’ in the sense that Moran is finally confronted simply with words themselves, irreparably detached from any signified, and unable to gain access to any extra-linguistic reality. As Ludovic Janvier argues, in Moran’s final contradiction ‘we can see the extent to which the reality of events has no other basis than
obedience to a discourse that, unsubmitive to the world, supersedes it' (56). Moran, too, thus comes to accept the unnameable nature of extra-linguistic reality and the inerrable nature of the past, completing the textual state of linguistic and epistemological bankruptcy by which the Trilogy enacts its philosophical resistance to ideologically-motivated representations of history.

If Beckett, as James Olney argues, ungrounds personal identity by ‘calling into doubt … memory’s capacity to establish a relationship to our past and hence a relationship to ourselves grown out of the past’ (863), he also ungrounds history by calling into doubt both the veracity of historical memory and the capacity of linguistic representations to adequately portray the past. Along with Joyce, Beckett sets up a dichotomy between worldviews which are stable and manifest, and those characterised by uncertainty and perspectivism; as in Ulysses, Beckett deconstructs historiographies which serve to legitimate the actions and values of those who employ them. While characteristically differing in their textual approaches to the political and ideological issues which inform the portrayal of history in their work, Joyce and Beckett share a concern with the abuse of historical representation which drives their linguistic and epistemological scepticism. The particular groups whose ways of representing the past and present the two writers subject to scrutiny are often identifiable, if not always made explicit: Beckett fascism, Joyce the twin hegemonies of colonialism and Irish cultural nationalism. Both, however, seek primarily to subvert all master narratives of history which perpetuate political and social subjugation, challenging all claims of authority over the past.
Chapter IV:

Teleology, Heteroglossia and Silence

But my good will at certain moments is such, and my longing to have floundered however briefly, however feebly, in the great life torrent streaming from the earliest protozoa to the very latest humans, that I, no, parenthesis unfinished. (*Three Novels* 322)

If Joyce and Beckett reject teleological notions of progress and historiographical or epistemological authority thematically, their works also enact a structural rejection of teleology, and indeed a final rejection of authority, be it authorial or otherwise. While the works of both authors are replete with rejections of teleology within the structure of the language and the texts themselves – see, for example, the thwarted account of human progress in this chapter’s epigraph – I will discuss these ideas primarily with reference to two works which seem to be representative of the two authors’ broader approaches to notions of progress and linguistic and extra-linguistic authority: Joyce’s ‘Oxen of the Sun’ episode of *Ulysses* and Beckett’s *The Unnamable*. It is characteristic that these two works, while they share many of the same premises, enact contrasting responses to the issues of language and authority with which they are both so concerned – contrasts which shed light on the convergences and divergences of the two authors’ broader artistic projects. Joyce’s text, similarly to the ‘Cyclops’ episode which I have discussed previously, engages in a rampant dialogism, incorporating into its structure a myriad of different representational styles, each of which exists in relation to the others but none of which can claim final authority or centrality. Revelling in a multifarious excess of representational language, Joyce offers a heteroglossic and multi-perspectival text which
questions the authority of any singular perspective and also, as we will see, ultimately rejects the notion of teleological progress in either literature or history. The Unnamable, while along with many of Beckett’s other works it rejects ideas of literary or historical progress in its very structure, rejoices not in a carnivalesque excess of language but in language’s obliteration and absence. Seemingly endorsing what Gabriele Schwab calls a ‘secret teleology of ultimate silence’ (48), Beckett paradoxically attempts to use language to point towards what exists outside of language and, ultimately, to the absence of language. That such an anti-linguistic use of language should be an impossible task – silence, after all, can never be achieved through language – is also illustrative of the differing approaches taken by Joyce and Beckett: Joyce, ever the cunning artificer, attempts to transcend the limitations of representational language by freeing it from the restrictions of any single perspective or style and casting it anew, while Beckett, for whom ignorance is an aesthetic keystone, embarks on a forestalled project of deconstruction and liberation which must go on even if it cannot. In the discussion which follows, I will use ‘Oxen of the Sun’ and The Unnamable as representative samples to draw some more general conclusions about the broader aesthetic projects which inform the more specific concerns of Joyce and Beckett which I have discussed over the last three chapters.

‘A Frightful Jumble’: James Joyce and ‘Oxen of the Sun.’

While Ulysses offers several examples of historical, national or theological teleology being rejected in the structure of its language, some of which I mention in the previous
chapter,¹⁹ these concerns are perhaps most clearly realised in ‘Oxen of the Sun.’ Rather than providing a detailed textual analysis of ‘Oxen,’ I will use the episode as a general illustration of Joyce’s literary response to such ideas. ‘Oxen,’ like ‘Cyclops,’ consists of a series of different styles or linguistic frameworks, each with its own ‘terms, characterizations, and interests,’ as Mark Nunes suggests (175). ‘Oxen’ can be seen as a history of representational styles, mimicking the language of various authors from successive stages in the history of English literature. Joyce explained the technique of the episode in an oft-quoted letter to Frank Budgen:

Am working hard at Oxen of the Sun, the idea being the crime committed against fecundity by sterilizing the act of coition. Scene: Lying-in-hospital. Technique: a ninepart episode without divisions introduced by a Sallustian-Tacitean prelude (the unfertilized ovum), then by way of earliest English alliterative and monosyllabic and Anglo-Saxon ... then by way of Mandeville ... then Malory’s Morte d’Arthur ... then a passage solemn, as of Milton, Taylor, Hooker, followed by a Latin-gossipy bit, style of Burton/Browne, then a passage Bunyanesque ... After a diary-style bit Pepys-Evelyn ... and so on through Defoe-Swift and Steele-Addison-Sterne and Landor-Pater-Newman until it ends in a frightful jumble of pidgin English, nigger English, Cockney, Irish, Bowery slang and broken doggerel. This procession is also linked back at each part subtly with some foregoing episode of the day and, besides this, with the natural stages of development in the embryo and the periods of faunal evolution in general. The double-thudding Anglo-Saxon motive recurs from time to time ... to give the sense of the hoofs of the oxen. Bloom is the spermatozoon, the hospital the womb, the nurse the ovum, Stephen the embryo.


¹⁹ See my discussion of Stephen’s open-ended stories and riddles (105-07).
While many critics have focussed on the episode’s relationship to discourses about fertility, an element which Joyce emphasises in his description to Budgen, I will concentrate on its heteroglossic use of borrowed literary language. For the purposes of this discussion, I will also focus somewhat broadly on the episode’s structure rather than his relationship to the individual writers he parodies; indeed, Joyce himself seems to have placed more emphasis on the genealogy of style in general rather than the techniques of specific authors, utilising chronological surveys of literature rather than individual specimens in his composition of the episode. Joyce’s debt to anthologies of English literature is well-documented: his major sources for the episode’s progression of literary styles are known to have included William Peacock’s *Prose from Mandeville to Ruskin* and George Saintsbury’s *A History of English Prose Rhythm*, along with others (Gibson 172-73). As I have discussed throughout this thesis, literature for Joyce is always intimately linked to politics, and his parodic survey of English literature in ‘Oxen of the Sun’ is no different. Andrew Gibson remarks that ‘[w]hat he surely understood was the cultural politics represented by the contemporary prose anthology as genre. This is the crucial defining context for the styles in “Oxen,”’ and Joyce responds to it with a number of different literary (and political) strategies’ (176). As I will discuss, Joyce uses the varied voices of English literature in a way which precludes the claim of any to be a final or ultimate representational style, but which also rejects ideas about literature as a teleological progression; while his literary goals in the episode are indeed ‘High,’ ‘Oxen’ is ultimately overcome by ‘pidgin’ language rather than the ‘high’ styles of the English authors he imitates.
Along with 'Cyclops,' 'Oxen of the Sun' can be fruitfully analysed using M. M. Bakhtin's ideas about 'unitary languages,' or 'systems of linguistic norms' (270), which I discuss in Chapter II. For Bakhtin, these 'unitary languages' are the product of the 'centripetal' forces at work in language, the centralising and unifying forces which 'struggle to overcome the heteroglossia of language ... or else [defend] an already formed language from the pressure of growing heteroglossia' (270-71). In this respect, 'Oxen' is much concerned with the centripetal, unifying forces at work in language: a succession of such unitary languages dominates the narration of the episode as the text moves through numerous 'developmental' stages, or distinct stylistic phases which (ostensibly) progress in a fashion analogous to the development of the human embryo. Language here acts a shifting lens, each stage of representation exhibiting its own potentialities and limitations like the monocular parodic passages in 'Cyclops' as Nunes describes them: 'the delineation of various genres ... forces the reader's attention on the means by which the “narrative frame” serves as both limit and condition of possibility for narration' (175).  

The shifting representational styles of 'Oxen' come to supersede the 'reality' of that which they are describing; as the styles progress, we do not move any closer to the events being depicted, but are rather made aware of how the various prose styles act as systems of language. In 'Nestor,' Stephen senses that, while historical events did occur 'in some way,' historical reality is inaccessible in that the events of the past can only be evoked as human memory has 'fabled' them (Ulysses 24; see this thesis 101-02). Similarly, in 'Oxen of the Sun' the 'plot' is inextricable from the language in which the

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20 For a more detailed discussion of how Joyce exploits the differing emphases of different linguistic frameworks, see my analysis of the parodic passages of 'Cyclops' in Chapter II.
events are portrayed, in that a layer of ‘realistic’ action does not exist behind the successive, distinctive styles in which Joyce renders the episode. ‘Events’ in the text are entirely eclipsed by the language in which they are written, so that signifier comes to take precedence over signified. As Derek Attridge says of *Finnegans Wake*, ‘language and its chance patterns’ seem to gain ‘absolute primacy over non-linguistic reality’ (81). He goes on to argue that

this does not constitute any kind of claim about the existence or non-existence, or the true nature of, the Real; what it does do is demonstrate a few facets of the immense power of language (and the systems of cultural signification with which it works) to create an impression of access to that inaccessible Real while at the same time drawing attention to the linguistic and literary processes through which this effect is achieved ... (81)\(^2\)

Similarly, ‘Oxen’ offers no final judgement on the ‘reality’ it supposedly deals with, but only on the ways it can be represented; the characters and events of the episode cannot be separated from the language in which they are written, being products of that language. Bloom, for example, becomes variously ‘the traveller Leopold’ (369), ‘childe Leopold’ (370), ‘Mr Cautious Calmer’ (378), ‘Leop. Bloom’ (379), ‘this alien’ (389), ‘Mr Canvasser Bloom’ (390), ‘young Leopold’ (393), ‘Mr L. Bloom (Pubb. Canv.)’ (399), ‘the stranger’ (401), and ‘the johnny in the black duds’ (406; see Jeri Johnson’s note in *Ulysses* 906). As Susan Bazargan notes, while the metamorphic representations of Bloom in the episode are more dependent on the stylistic-developmental stage of the text than a sense of continuity of his character, ‘to ask “what were Bloom’s thoughts really

\(^{21}\) See also Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 35, some ideas from which I discuss in the previous chapter.
“like?” is a useless question since at this point Joyce’s primary intention is not to reveal his characters’ thoughts but to explore the various ways language can shape and reshape our perception of any situation’ (275-76). As the styles progress, we do not move any closer to the ‘events’ being depicted, but are forced to contend with the idiosyncrasies and inadequacies of various systems of language. James Fairhall remarks on the primacy of language in the episode, saying ‘[f]inally, in “Oxen of the Sun,” language has become the hero: the progression of parodic styles from Anglo-Saxon to the slangy commercial-religious lingo of an American evangelist, imitating the growth of an embryo, overshadows the representation of any felt human reality’ (206).

Self-consciously precluding any access to the ‘Real’ except via the filter of language, the episode also draws attention to the ability of language to distort that which it purports to represent. Bazargan notes too the transformative and corruptive powers of representational language in ‘Oxen’: ‘As we listen to a “language so encyclopaedic” in the halls of Horne [Ulysses 397], we witness the multiplicity of ways to conceptualize a given situation and renovate the modes of perception through the medium of language. Indeed, “Oxen” explores the fertility of the human language and also its limitations, the ways it can be abused and corrupted’ (274). Robert Spoo makes a similar point, linking the text’s indeterminate relationship to non-linguistic reality to the problematics of historiographical hermeneutics:

Their rich comedy notwithstanding, there is a claustrophobic quality to the styles of ‘Oxen,’ a sense that life has been covered over by the fabrics of textuality, hushed away in the ruddy wool of historical parody, as indeed the events in the maternity hospital have been. More than any other episode in Ulysses, ‘Oxen’ brings the reader face to face with the problem of history in the very
act of reading, forcing him or her to experience the ways in which interpretations of the historical process, textualizations of the past, can stifle genuine contact with life and blunt the historical sense. (150)

Its content inseparable from its form, the text, like written history, never approaches ‘reality’ without being mediated by the shifting and evolving properties of language. ‘Oxen’ thus provides a fitting example of the limitations of linguistic representation, and the problematic textuality of the historical past, ideas which I discuss in Chapters I and III respectively.

Significantly, the succession of styles which make up ‘Oxen of the Sun’ do not progress in a teleological fashion, though in their developmental phases they initially appear to mimic English literary history. Rather than achieving some higher or final representational state, at the end of the episode the text ultimately descends into linguistic chaos. The successive ‘unitary languages’ or ‘poetic genres’ (Bakhtin 271) are replaced by a seemingly non-structured, eclectic blend of colloquial language which Joyce variously described as a ‘frightful jumble’ and a ‘tailpiece of ... chaos’ (Letters, Vol. I 139; Letters, Vol. III 16):

bigsplash cryears cos frien Padney was took off in black bag? Of all de darkies Massa Pat was verra best. (406)

In contrast to the centripetal forces at work in the various unified perspectives provided by the earlier prose styles, the text is ultimately overcome by what Bakhtin terms ‘centrifugal’ forces, the ‘uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification’ which exist alongside ‘ideological centralization and unification’ (272). Spoo sees this triumph of the centrifugal as a critique of teleological ideas about both literature and history:

What is most striking about ‘Oxen’ from a historiographic standpoint is the way Joyce grounds language and literature on dominant models of historical process – teleological and organicist-developmental models – only to allow what he called the ‘progression’ of styles … to culminate in a misbirth with a trailing navelcord of ‘chaos’ [Letters, Vol. III 16]. The episode seems designed to expose, as T. S. Eliot observed of Ulysses as a whole, ‘the futility of all the English prose styles,’ but it assails no less aggressively the big words about history that so trouble Stephen. (136)

Firstly, Joyce’s centrifugal dispersal and degeneration of literary language represents a subversion of ideologically-driven ideas of literary or historical teleology as manifested in popular anthologies. As Spoo notes, ‘[i]n the period we are considering, the prose anthology … could promote English values and at the same time offer itself as an emblem of the pageant of history and the glorious destiny of empire’ (140). Prose anthologies such as those studied by Joyce in his composition of ‘Oxen’ could offer their selections as prime specimens of a ‘national’ literature, affirming the strength and virtue
of a cultural identity which spans time; their chronological structures, however, could also be seen to imply a narrative of national progress from relatively humble beginnings through to modernity and maturity. Jameson discusses the notion of progress implicit in ‘diachronic’ conceptions of history, arguing that ‘individual period formulations always secretly imply or project narratives or “stories” – narrative representations – of the historical sequence in which such individual periods take their place and from which they derive their significance’ (Political 28). Jameson’s formulation indicates the extent to which sequential histories of (national) literature – such as Peacock’s and Saintsbury’s – implicitly promote a narrative of national progress, their individual specimens ostensibly representing successive ‘periods’ in a teleological progression from past to present and, implicitly, onwards to the future. In response to the neatly ordered paradigm of English literary progression Joyce no doubt saw in his sources, the chaotic ending of ‘Oxen’ represents a structural subversion of such a teleological model; as Gibson states, ‘[t]he chapter works as a sly corruption of the tradition [of English literature] as promoted by the anthology and its supposed historical shape’ (180).

Furthermore, idealistic or puristic conceptions of literature are also subverted throughout the episode by the presence of linguistic anomalies and historical anachronisms. Like the incongruous ‘shifts in level’ which contaminate the parodic passages of ‘Cyclops’ (Gibson 116), the various prose styles of ‘Oxen’ are occasionally invaded by incongruous language, as well as inevitably encountering information historically anachronistic to their particular literary or representational styles. For Gibson, citing a specific example from ‘Oxen,’ Joyce

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22 For my discussion of the function of these phraseological anomalies in ‘Cyclops’ see Chapter II (71).
refuses the subservience of parody, its residual structure of fidelity to the master text: fidelity, in this instance, to [English literary historian Thomas Babington] Macaulay’s grandiose rhetoric and his stately periods. The movement towards freedom is uncompleted. This, in miniature, is Joyce’s response to those of his nationalist contemporaries who argued for a radical separation of Irish from English culture. The radical break from established forms risks a replication of their cardinal features in the very posture of diametric opposition. This is the case throughout the chapter. Joyce is less concerned with parody or pastiche than with a strategy of adulteration. (178)

Joyce actively undermines grandiose and teleological conceptions of English literature and culture, both by having his procession of English literary styles culminate in what Spoo calls a ‘trailing navelcord of “chaos”’ (136), and by tainting the purity of each stage of the succession. As Gibson argues: ‘Everywhere, the rule appears to be contamination: contamination, that is, of the ostensibly homogenous with what does not belong to it, or what Karen Lawrence calls the “strange mélange” [139]. This is the case with many lapses into modern idiom’ (180). Joyce’s bastardisation of English literary language can be seen as a colonial response to ideas of national superiority and progress – ideas intimately linked to colonialism, as I have discussed in the previous chapter – which are implied in the ‘national’ anthologies of literature he draws from. Gibson writes of English fear of ‘national degeneration’ and ‘“foreign contamination” of the national literature’ in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; as an outsider to the political and cultural dominance of the British Empire, Joyce seeks to pollute and diffuse the literary expression of its power, and thus as Gibson states ‘[c]ontamination becomes an active cultural practice, part of a cultural politics’ (182). Through a process of linguistic adulteration and structural disintegration, Joyce rejects the progressive notions of colonial
cultural identity articulated by anthologies of literature; as Spoo argues, "‘Oxen’ is a carefully constructed representation of the historical process as it was understood at the turn of the century, and Joyce’s primary target was the discourse of history contained in literary anthologies of this period’ (138).

Spoo’s comments point towards a broader and, perhaps, more important aspect of what he calls the ‘explosively countereological finale’ of ‘Oxen’ (144): the relationship between history and language. As I have implied earlier, in ‘Oxen of the Sun’ the idea of history as language is explored in the structure of the text as the prose moves through successive, distinct styles of literary depiction, or ‘common unitary languages’ to use Bakhtin’s phraseology (270). As Bazargan points out, the episode ‘also bears a historical dimension if we regard history as a nation’s ways of perception of and response to the world, recorded in a language that attempts to recreate that experience in particular modifications’ (277). She goes on to suggest that ‘each prose style’ in the episode ‘evokes a historical era, the consciousness of an age,’ although ‘the reconstruction of the past always occurs from the perspective of the present’ (278). The evolving styles of ‘Oxen’ thus reflect also the evolving representations which constitute written history. As Fritz Senn argues, ‘[t]he episode presents a succession of fictive paragraphs as writers of the past might have composed them, style in cheek. It dresses up as a historical pageant; it adopts linguistic costumes of times gone by’ (‘History’ 54). Similarly, Spoo sees the episode as an analogue of historical representation, arguing that ‘[n]o episode of Ulysses is more thoroughly shaped by ideas of history than “Oxen of the Sun.”’ Indeed, the episode offers itself as an image of the historical process, a pageant of English prose styles from the Anglo-Saxon period to the late nineteenth century, ending in a babel of
modern slang, dialect, and other extraliterary forms' (136). Joyce structurally renders the notion of history as a linguistic construct by making the narrative accessible only through a series of prose styles or linguistic lenses, each with its own particular vocabulary and emphases, a technique which parallels the subjective and shifting representation of history as recorded in human language. Following from Stephen’s rejection of historical teleology in ‘Nestor,’ the chaotic ending of ‘Oxen of the Sun’ represents a subversion of notions of historical teleology and linear progress through a centrifugal explosion of the language of which history is made. As Spoo argues, ‘[a]lthough separated from it by eleven episodes, “Oxen” is the historiographic twin of “Nestor,” accomplishing structurally and stylistically what Stephen attempts to do thematically in his curious ripostes to Mr. Deasy’ (136). If Stephen rejects the teleological notions of history which underpin colonial rule, ‘Oxen’ enacts a rejection of teleological historical principles in its very structure; similarly, if Stephen rejects the authenticity of any single historical perspective then ‘Oxen’ satirically demonstrates the failure of any particular style of representation, ultimately re-enacting the failure of the unifying, stabilising forces at work in language. While such a fatal attack on representational language might appear to be something of a Pyrrhic victory, Joyce’s main concern is to rescue language from the service of hegemonic social, political or ideological agendas. As Trevor L. Williams argues, ‘[t]he end of the chapter, the so-called afterbirth … is often characterized as a degeneration of language, but it could also be seen as a potential democratization, as a diffusion of ownership’ (9). As I discuss in the previous chapter, Joyce rejected both ideas of teleological progress and final authority because of the way such ideas could be used to legitimate and perpetuate social and political oppression; in ‘Oxen,’ notions of
teleological progression in literature or history are undermined as the succession of
centralised representational styles are overcome by heteroglossia and diversity.

I have chosen to conclude my analysis of Joyce with a discussion of ‘Oxen of the
Sun’ because the episode seems representative in many respects of Joyce’s broader
artistic project. Linguistically, the ending of ‘Oxen’ prefigures the multivocal linguistic
amalgam which he went on to develop in Finnegans Wake, consisting largely of
portmanteau words and incorporating a range of different languages and dialects. The
adoption of such a conglomerate linguistic style can be seen as an attempt on Joyce’s part
to evade the confines and ‘traditions’ of individual languages – whether ‘national’
languages such as English or the various dialects or ‘unitary languages’ which exist
within them – and the ideological and ontological claims entailed within them. As David
Sidorsky argues, ‘[t]he rejection of the use of any single historical language in Finnegans
Wake parallels the work’s denial of the reality of any sequential narrative of history’
(318). ‘Oxen’ is also representative of Joyce’s structural techniques, both in its dialogism
and in its characteristically excessive use of language as a subversive strategy. The
multiple relationships between language and reality which make up the episode reflect in
microcosm what Gregory Castle, in another context, calls ‘the perspectivism at work at
large in Ulysses’ (315). As in Castle’s analysis of Bloom, Joyce’s embrace of
various and often contradictory perspectives serves to question the authority of any one:
‘By tolerating the coexistence of multiple and opposing historical perspectives, he calls
into question the value and authority of any single, dominant point of view’ (317).
Writing from his position as a colonial subject, Joyce employs literary heteroglossia as a
technique to subvert ideological and political claims of authority as they are manifested
in systems of language – those employed by both apologists for colonialism and advocates of monolithic nationalism (see Chapters III and II respectively). If he does not provide an adequate alternative to the limited and ideologically-motivated representations of the present and past which he subverts, Joyce at least undermines the ability of any one to claim authority; Joseph Valente characterises Joyce ‘as a decolonizing writer but not necessarily a nationalist writer, rather a negative dialectician engaged in interrogating and discrediting the conceptual and verbal underpinnings of hierarchical social arrangements’ (64).

Interestingly, Joyce displayed an enthusiasm for the recurring, circular theory of history advanced by Giambattista Vico (see Ellmann 340, 554). While such a structural account of history may seem, as Jameson suggests, to imply an ‘allegorical master narrative’ as much as a providential or teleological conception (Political 29), as a series of random repetitions and variations rather than a pre-ordained or natural progression with a clear goal it cannot be co-opted in order to legitimate the status quo. As Ulrich Schneider argues:

This idea of a meaningless cycle of repetition is perhaps one of the reasons why Joyce is at pains to draw parallels between events and figures of different historical epochs throughout the novel, although, of course, there are other important reasons as well. By means of these parallels he underlines the notion that certain constellations repeat themselves, without in any way suggesting that the world has moved nearer to the fulfilment of a divine plan. (48)

‘Oxen of the Sun,’ as well as Ulysses as a whole (and, it might be added, Finnegans Wake), rejects ideologically-motivated, progressive conceptions of history and calls into
question the power of language to authoritatively convey such conceptions, alternating, as Patrick McGee suggests, between the two poles of ‘form without content (the ritual words and Latin-like English at the beginning) and content without form (the sexual explosion of dialects and slangs at the end)’ (114). In the face of self-justifying and hegemonic representations of the past and present employed by British colonialists and Irish nationalists alike, Joyce produces, as Declan Kiberd states, ‘a text without any final authority’ (*Inventing* 339).

The centrifugal explosion of language at the end of ‘Oxen of the Sun’ also illustrates another characteristic aspect of Joyce’s broader literary techniques: his excessive or exhaustive use of language as a subversive strategy. In ‘Ithaca’ and ‘Wandering Rocks’ he takes the representational impulse behind realism to an extreme, revealing the impossibility of comprehensively representing the external world in language; in ‘Nausicaa’ the abundance of the language of pulp fiction and tabloid journalism suggest the socially-constructed identity of its subject; in ‘Cyclops’ the discourses of Irish nationalism are parodically ‘gigantised’ so that the biases and limitations of each style of representation are made apparent; and similarly in ‘Oxen’ the varied styles of English literature are depreciated through the exaggerated specificity and idiosyncrasy of their terms and focuses. In each of these examples Joyce enacts an extravagant recirculation of various styles, exploiting the specificity and therefore limitation of each system of representation in order to undermine the authority of the ideological perspective behind them. Tadeusz Pioro argues that ‘[e]xcess in the work of Joyce and Beckett … can be seen as a mode of resistance in the tradition of the carnivalesque: the inversion of relations of power and ownership immediately allows the
dispossessed to become extravagant and apodictic’ (123). Like Bloom in McGee’s account, Joyce ‘produces a surplus of linguistic value because he never subordinates one discourse to another in a hierarchy of representational forms’ (80). Excess and exaggeration serve to expose the systems of language in question to interrogation and ridicule; in Bakhtin’s terms, *Ulysses* exposes ‘the official languages of its given time’ to the heteroglossic laughter of the clown (273). It would be somewhat anachronistic to suggest that Joyce’s texts are unequivocally or primarily concerned with the issues of semiotics and relativity which Beckett so overtly deals with some thirty years later. As Sidorsky cautions, ‘[a]n experimentally modernist novel whose plot-line develops an opposition to the reality of history is not to be interpreted as a postmodernist essay on the relativity of historical knowledge’ (323). Nevertheless, ‘Oxen of the Sun’ and more broadly *Ulysses* vigorously questions the relationship between language and reality, and challenges the authority of any singular point of view.

**The Workshop of Icarus: Samuel Beckett and *The Unnamable*.**

In the Trilogy Beckett also rejects literary or historical teleology through the resistant structure of his texts, and in fact undermines ideas of greater order or progress much more radically than Joyce. While *Ulysses* may at times seemingly descend into chaos, in the macrocosm it is finely ordered; however lightly one takes Joyce’s Homeric structure, there is little doubt that *Ulysses* is a meticulously organised piece of work, containing countless wider structural correspondences and resonances – an orderedness which is made clear in the schemata Joyce provided to Stuart Gilbert and Carlo Linati (see *Ulysses* 734-39). In *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*, on the other hand, if in places
they display an obsession with logic and order, chaos rules in the macrocosm: as Molloy says, ‘in the cycles taken together utter confusion [is] bound to reign’ (73). Moran’s faith in teleological progression in history, which I discuss in the previous chapter, is undermined more than anything by the fact that in the Trilogy there is no narrative resolution to speak of; the three novels are seemingly without narratological teloi. Moran never finds Molloy, his mission ending abortively at the very moment when he might have found success; he also loses his son, rendering defunct his project of making the boy his protégé. Molloy never reveals if he found his mother, or how he came to be in her room. Similarly, in Malone Dies, Malone never completes the three stories and inventory of his possessions which he vows to write. The list of examples of thwarted narrative progress or resolution in the Beckett oeuvre could go on ad nauseam: Godot never arrives; Willie’s final intentions towards Winnie are never revealed in Happy Days; whether or not Clov finally leaves Hamm in Endgame is left ambiguous; and so on. Beckett’s seeming refusal to carry any narrative arc through to an ‘adequate’ conclusion represents a rejection of notions of teleological progress at a level which exceeds that of Joyce in its scope and its pervasive embeddedness in the structure of his texts. S. E. Gontarski, in a thinly disguised reference to Joyce, describes Beckett’s refusal of order or closure as ‘an aesthetics which rejects the teleology, the overall, all-embracing metaphor characteristic of modernism, be it id, ego, memory, or the temporal metaphor of the single day or the passing seasons’ (59). Thus while Joyce subverts notions of teleology and progress within a wider structure of meticulously ordered artifice, Beckett’s works offer a shaggy-dog aesthetic which firmly rejects principles of order or progress either within literature or outside of it. Perhaps, as I have suggested earlier, in response to the
nightmares of twentieth century authoritarianism, Beckett enacts through literature a thorough assault on teleological conceptions of human history and the epistemological, theological and historiographical certainty which underlies such conceptions.

Just as I have used ‘Oxen of the Sun’ as a representative sample of Joyce’s broader aesthetic concerns and techniques, my discussion of Beckett’s wider approach to issues of language and authority will focus on *The Unnamable*. *The Unnamable* represents not just the chronological end of the ‘trilogy’ but also the culmination of the literary and philosophical deconstruction which takes place in the three novels. Stripped of any recognisable elements of plot or character (the narrator imagines himself in various manifestations without ever reaching any satisfying conclusion as to who or what he actually is), *The Unnamable* does not so much subvert literary conventions as refuse to engage with traditional expectations of novelistic form or content, its refusal to have any recognisable narrative arc representing a clear rejection of teleological principles in historiography or epistemology. *The Unnamable*’s structural rejection of historical teleology is enacted not just in its narrative arc (or rather lack thereof), but more fundamentally in its sentence structure: the text’s very ability to convey meaning is constantly thwarted through counter-statements and contradictions, a technique which its narrator describes as the employment of ‘affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered’ (291). In one respect, the self-defeating nature of *The Unnamable*’s narrative technique constitutes a deliberate failure to represent external reality. Beckett once commented that ‘to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail’ (Beckett and Duthuit 563). As I discuss in Chapter I, his texts reject the possibility that life can be adequately represented in language (or in any other form), hence the doomed nature of
representational art in his formulation. At the same time, he suggests, the artist has an obligation to create, and to deal with such failure through creation: ‘unable to act, obliged to act, he makes, an expressive act, even if only of itself, of its impossibility, of its obligation’ (Beckett and Duthuit 563). Since representational art is for Beckett doomed to ‘fail,’ it must concern itself with its own failure – an imperative of impotence which he also described as ‘[t]he expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express’ (Beckett and Duthuit 556). In *The Unnamable* Beckett takes failure as an aesthetic foundation, using negation to deliberately and overtly thwart the already forestalled process of representing external reality.

Through his deliberate failure to represent, Beckett also attempts to undermine the properties of language which allow it to be a vessel for ideology. The ‘aporia’ (291) and self-invalidation which characterise *The Unnamable* represent an all-out assault on semiotics, and by extension the ideological prejudgments contained within the binary structures of representational language. While Joyce subverts the ideological content of language by playfully exploiting the biases and limitations of various ideologically-saturated systems of representation, Beckett undermines the ability of language to be an ideological vessel by constantly destabilising the text and nullifying the features of language which allow it to contain meaning. For Schwab, Beckett’s use of paradox and self-negation serves to undo the structural features of language which allow ideological or political thought to exist:

While mapping out and traversing the territories of language and the discourses of Western philosophies, Beckett erases the binary oppositions in which they are grounded. If we were to find
a formula for his territorial politics we might say that he swallows up the spaces of difference, differentiation, and discrimination in language in order to unsettle the basic premises of language as a system. (42)

Using language against itself, Beckett attempts to undermine the differential features of language which allow oppressive ideological and political discourses to exist: as the Unnamable states, ‘you announce, then you renounce, so it is, that helps you on, that helps the end to come’ (406). Amongst the various (hypothetical) ends to come implied by this oblique statement we might include the end of the various national, political and ethnic hierarchies which surrounded Beckett during the events and aftermath of the Second World War.

Beckett’s ‘anti-representational politics of language,’ as Schwab describes it (48), might more specifically be described as a politics of ‘meaning.’ J. D. O’Hara writes that ‘[m]eaning, for Beckett, is one of those big words which make us so unhappy; it is probable that from his point of view his novels are not meaningfully about anything. The admiring statement he made about Joyce might with equal justice be made about his own work: “His writing is not about something; it is that something itself”’ (69; see Beckett, ‘Dante’ 503). Rejecting the impossible task of direct representation, Beckett’s texts also evade the expectation of literature to ‘mean’ something, meaning being an external imposition by which ideological and political biases are imposed. Leslie Hill, too, remarks on Beckett’s texts’ refusal to articulate absolute meaning, seeing their hermeneutic irreducibility as an act of political and ideological resistance: ‘Reading Beckett, it is hard not to be aware at almost every moment of the single-minded way in which the work makes a virtue of its resistance to all forms of external representation,
including political ones, and refuses to be co-opted into any cause other than that of its own irreducible singularity’ ('Up' 910). While both Joyce and Beckett seek to escape from the binds of socially-constructed systems of meaning and representation, Beckett’s challenge to linguistically-mediated ideology is enacted on the more fundamental level of semiotics. Williams describes Stephen’s tactics in ‘Nestor’ as an attempt to escape from the ‘tyranny of fact’ (38); similarly, in The Unnamable Beckett attempts to ‘free words’ from what David Cohen calls the ‘tyranny of representation’ (49) – or rather, perhaps, the tyranny of meaning. As the Unnamable comments, and as I discuss in Chapter I, '[i]n the moment the silence is broken in this way it can only mean one thing’ (337). Language for Beckett inevitably imposes a limiting, oppressive meaning on the chaos of non-linguistic ‘reality,’ and thus as Christian Prigent states, ‘[i]t is only the fact that there exists the unnamable that there resides the chance to escape subjugation’ (68). By thwarting language’s signifying value and hinting at the existence of what cannot exist in language, Beckett attempts to allow space for ‘the desire and free in-significance that make the present’ (Prigent 68-69). This is an intrinsically political task, not identifiable with any specific political cause but directed at the ideologies which underlie political causes in general. Hill goes on to discuss the ideological and political resistance inherent in Beckett’s linguistic and epistemological subversion:

[S]o long as the question of politics is construed as a problem of inside and outside, and so long as critics assume the task is to decipher within the artwork a sociologically intelligible statement about this or that external political issue, then I believe they have failed to respond to the political

23 It is worth noting that several commentators have discussed ways in which Joyce’s texts, too, point towards that which cannot exist in language. See in particular Nels Pearson, ‘Death Sentences: Silence, Colonial Memory and the Voice of the Dead in Dubliners’ and Christine Van Boheemen-Saaf, Joyce, Derrida, Lacan, and the Trauma of History: Reading, Narrative, and Postcolonialism.
challenge of a writing such as that of Beckett. For what Beckett’s texts do is to call into question any such possibility of mediation, communication, translation. (‘Beckett, Writing, Politics’ 216-17)

By subverting the signifying and communicative properties of language, Beckett thus rejects the imposition of meaning from the outside. Beckett’s is an almost poststructuralist politics which, in destabilising all modes of discourse, rejects the grounding of all political forms.

Although like many of Beckett’s works it has a thoroughly counterteleological structure, The Unnamable seems to endorse what Schwab calls a ‘secret teleology of ultimate silence’ (48). Concerned with the limitations imposed by linguistic representation, Beckett paradoxically uses language to point towards what exists outside of language: that is, the ‘unnamable’ and, ultimately, ‘silence restored’ (Three Novels 360). Silence is, apparently, the telos towards which the Unnamable’s contradictory and anti-linguistic musings aspire: ‘I believe in progress, I believe in silence,’ he states (406). The Unnamable, and indeed all of the Trilogy, apparently displays a yearning, as Iain Wright suggests, for ‘an Edenic world of which all the narrators thereafter dream nostalgically: a world of signifieds without signifiers’ (22). Schwab discusses Beckett’s paradoxical use of language to transcend or nullify language:

[T]he unnamable does not share the optimism of mysticism and knows that it would not suffice simply to stop talking in order to breach the gap between language and the subject. He intimates that a mere renunciation of speech would not grant the peace of an empty consciousness … Nevertheless, the notion of silence as the only possible space of an impossible self-pretence persists throughout the text. While speaking, the difference between the subject and its speech
cannot be transcended. Only silence could possibly erase this difference. Since a first person narrator is by definition condemned to speak, he can at best use his discourse to project himself toward silence. (48)

Trapped in a linguistically-mediated world, the Unnamable can only use language to indicate the absence of language. Thus while Joyce may try to transcend the confines of ‘unitary languages’ or even broader ‘national’ languages such as English, Beckett looks towards an escape from language altogether; as Moran says in Molloy, ‘[i]t seemed to me that all language was an excess of language’ (116).

While The Unnamable’s ‘secret teleology of ultimate silence’ might seem to belie the countereleological chaos of the text’s structure, it is, of course, an impossible project: the goal of silence cannot be achieved through language. If the text indeed points towards ‘an Edenic world … of signifieds without signifiers’ (Wright 22) then, like Eden itself, such a situation is inherently unrecoverable. As the Unnamable bemoans, ‘this futile discourse … brings me not a syllable nearer silence’ (307); the limitations of language are matched by the unfeasibility of casting language aside altogether, and thus for him ‘the inability to speak’ is coterminous with ‘the inability to be silent’ (396). Trapped between these two impossibilities, he is faced with the dual imperative of not being able to speak meaningfully and, unable to escape speech altogether, having to speak about what cannot be spoken about: ‘The fact would seem to be, if in my situation one may speak of facts, not only that I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak, but also, which is even more interesting, but also that I, which is if possible even more interesting, that I shall have to, I forget, no matter. And at the same time I am obliged to speak. I shall never be silent. Never’ (291). It is in fact the urge towards
silence which compels, or allows, his use of language to go on: ‘The search for the means to put an end to things, an end to speech, is what enables the discourse to continue’ (299). This duality of silence and speech reflects the necessity and simultaneous impossibility of the anti-political and -ideological project of deconstructing and dissolving language. As Schwab remarks, ‘[s]ilence and infinite discourse are the two poles of a contemporary obsession with transcending the conditions of representation and the symbolic order. They also mark a politics of profound suspicion – against representation, manifestation, confinement’ (49). If it is the artist’s obligation to fail to represent, however, then in the case of the writer who attempts to circumvent meaning and representation altogether it is inevitable that he or she should fail to fail – without succeeding either. Jean Yamasaki Toyama discusses the impossibility of a ‘nonexpressive’ use of language due to its inevitable ability to generate meaning, however incomplete:

The writer even more than the painter is doomed to failure. An art that does not express appears more feasible in the plastic arts, since the medium supposedly can be taken for itself. Literature, however, is made of words, and words, no matter how one might try to deny it, express. Words are always pointing to something(s) other than themselves. The word is that which fills up the space between perceiver and perceived, representer and representee. How then can a writer even conceive of a nonexpressive literature? If the realist always falls short of what he wishes to represent, Beckett’s writer will certainly fail to represent nothing. The only way is to use words against themselves, to use expression to negate itself. In his search for negation he might subvert expression through deception by opposing, contradicting, refuting whatever is represented. This is exactly what happens in the trilogy. (15)
Despite the impossibility of continuing to represent, and the impossibility of failing to represent, Beckett’s characters are nevertheless obligated to continue an impossible project of discourse and anti-discourse – thus, as in the final paradox of *The Unnamable*, literature is placed in a position of ‘I can’t go on, I’ll go on’ (414). In the face of the linguistic and epistemological bankruptcy at the heart of Beckett’s works, and his evasion of recognisable historical or cultural allusions, Tirus Miller sees the futile discourse which arises out of search for an end to discourse as a sombre affirmation of literature following the psychological apocalypse brought about by the Second World War: ‘In negating any ascertainable historical reference, Beckett manages to place at the centre of his work the unmanifest, because unmanifestable, reality of history in the post-war epoch: its absence, its horizonless. At the same time, Beckett squeezes one last “I’ll go on” out of autonomous art, by giving artistic form to its penultimate “I can’t go on”’ (55).

‘Oxen of the Sun’ and *The Unnamable* thus illustrate some key differences between the respective approaches of Joyce and Beckett towards the limitations of language and the ideological or political biases entailed in linguistic representation. As Dirk Van Hulle argues, the two writers address many of the same linguistic and epistemological issues in contrasting ways, Joyce’s approach characterised by linguistic excess, Beckett’s by minimalism:

The awareness of the metaphorical nature of language, the frequent failures of communication, and the impossibility to know anything beyond language led Beckett to employ words in order to express precisely this impossibility. The resulting bareness contrasts sharply with Joyce’s verbal abundance. But these opposites are two sides of the same coin: the assumption that any text
possibly only veils the fact that there is nothing to be unveiled; that there is nothing beyond phenomenality save the negation of phenomenality, its hardly imaginable absence. (60)

While certainly influenced by Joyce’s thematic concerns, Beckett revises and rejects many aspects of his literary approach to such concerns, and this contrast is most apparent in Beckett’s fundamental disbelief in language as a vehicle of transcendence. As Michael Valdez Moses suggests, ‘[i]t is from Joyce’s last work that Beckett learned how the most fundamental narrative conventions – plot, character, description, narrative voice – could be subverted. What distinguishes Joyce from Beckett, however, is his desire not simply to negate the principal conventions of the novel but to transcend them’ (662). In ‘Oxen of the Sun,’ Joyce undermines the notion of teleology in literature by having successive styles of literary and historiographic representation descend into heteroglossic linguistic chaos. Despite demonstrating the limitations of any particular set of ‘terms, characterizations, and interests’ (Nunes 175), Joyce does, however, perhaps look toward a ‘higher’ form of language which to some extent evades the limitations of any specific form of language – a project exemplified by the linguistic conflation and heterogeneity of *Finnegans Wake*. Beckett, on the other hand, does not share Joyce’s faith in language even as a deconstructive tool, seeking instead to evade the confines of language altogether. As Stephen Connor puts it, ‘where Beckett seeks to undermine literary language, it is not, like Joyce, in order to rediscover its secret vitality but simply to dissolve the tyranny of language *tout court*’ (‘Authorship’ 151-52). Beckett discussed Joyce’s faith in language in a conversation with Lawrence Harvey: ‘Joyce believed in words. All you had to do was rearrange them and they would express what you wanted’ (in Knowlson, 439). As James Knowlson suggests, ‘Beckett never seems to have
believed that this was achievable’ (439). As a result of this crisis of faith, Beckett adopted an aesthetic of fundamental ignorance which he discussed in an interview with Knowlson: ‘I realised that Joyce had gone as far as one could go in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one’s material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realised that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding’ (319). If Joyce, as Spoo suggests, attempts to escape the linguistically-bound ‘nightmares’ of history, identity and politics by spending ‘sleepless nights labouring in the workshop of Daedalus’ (162), then Beckett labours in the workshop of Icarus, engaging in a futile project of creation and destruction which much continue even if it cannot.

**Conclusion.**

James Joyce and Samuel Beckett are both characterised by their scepticism towards linguistic representations and the ideological or political biases entailed in them. In ‘Ithaca’ and ‘Wandering Rocks’ Joyce takes the representational impulse which underlies literary realism to an extreme, documenting a vast array of events often from a number of different perspectives. What his exhaustive representation ultimately reveals, however, is the futility of attempts to comprehensively represent the world: literary or linguistic representations are always subject to a process of selection, and thus can never be as extensive or multifarious as the reality from which they derive. For Beckett, the ultimate impotence of language is a foregone conclusion; his narrators take for granted the fact that language cannot adequately represent external reality, bemoaning the unbridgeable gap between signifier and signified. While Joyce challenges the forcing of external
reality into linguistic structures which represent their subject matter both incompletely and with inevitable bias, for Beckett the very naming of the world itself is a suppressive act, language corruptively formalising the fluid nature of experience. For both writers the inadequacy of linguistic representations is to a large extent the result of the perspective inherent in them: since representations invariably entail selections both of content and how that content is portrayed, representation cannot be objective or comprehensive and all linguistic representations constitute a particular perspective, with its attendant goals and motivations. In response to the perspectivity of all representation, Joyce makes explicit the editorial forces which are invariably at work in the creation of a linguistic representation; in ‘Aeolus’ the ‘descriptive’ headlines he inserts into the text which act as overt manifestations of the often concealed editorial presence which David Hayman calls the ‘arranger.’ In Beckett’s works, once more, the issues raised by Joyce are taken for granted, and rather than making the editorial process explicit he undermines the basis by which such editorial decisions are made: his narrators, existing in a constant state of ignorance, are uncertain of their ability to select ‘the most important’ information to represent (Three Novels 253). Both thus expose the myth of objectivity in linguistic representation by illustrating and subverting the subjective processes by which such representations are created. Furthermore, for both writers the perspective inherent in language extends not just to particular styles of representation but to language as a whole; both view language, along with M. M. Bakhtin, ‘not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather … as ideologically saturated … as a world view’ (271). Joyce, for instance, complained of the ‘tradition’ inherent in the English language (Ellmann 397); as a colonial subject speaking the tongue of his oppressors, he revels in the deconstruction
of the ideologically-saturated language structures which surround him. Similarly, Beckett bemoaned the fact that English was replete with ‘associations and allusions’ (Knowlson 323), and his characters constantly lament the social values inherent in language which originates outside themselves. Beckett’s move to writing in French thus represented a self-imposed exile from a mother tongue which he was simultaneously absorbed in and alienated from, allowing him to approach anew the differential and idiosyncratic relationship that each language has with the world it represents.

The works of Joyce and Beckett are also concerned with the creation of the self, and in light of the limitations they both saw in linguistic representation in general they explore the problematic relationship between language and identity. Along with Fredric Jameson, the two authors portray personal identity as ‘the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future with one’s present’ with ‘such active temporal unification’ being ‘itself a function of language’ (Postmodernism 26-27). In ‘Circe’ Joyce explores the notion of the self as a text, arranging the experience of his characters into a pseudo-dramatic form which reflects the textuality of the self as represented in language. Memory, and the personal identity which is formed from it, is in this episode a dramatic or literary construct which is not just created but fabricated in language, genuine experience and fantasy blending together into a phantasmagoric procession of fact, figuration and fantasy. Beckett explores the notion of self-as-text much more explicitly in his play Krapp’s Last Tape; aided by the reiterative accuracy provided by the tape recorder, Krapp apparently presents a paradigm which promises an objective conception of identity, but which in fact merely emphasises its primary character’s alienation from his former self. In the absence of a genuine connection to their pasts, Beckett’s
characters construct personal fictions which compensate for the failures of conscious memory. This process of self-construction, too, is a politically-significant act: given their concern with the external origin of language and its social and ideological elements, Joyce and Beckett portray personal identity as being constructed out of pre-existing linguistic structures which articulate ideologically-driven notions of selfhood. In ‘Nausicaa,’ Gerty MacDowell is seen to experience herself and the world around her via the language of popular fiction and fashion magazines; she has adopted a socially-constructed notion of what it means to be a woman from the language structures which surround her. Similarly, in Beckett’s *Happy Days*, Winnie is immersed in an ideology of domestic consumerism which is manifested in the trivial and materially-orientated language she uses. The process of self-construction in the face of the failures of memory is thus not so much an act of self-determination as an unavoidable assimilation into ideology. Following from the ideas of Louis Althusser, both Gerty and Winnie have been interpellated into socially-constructed identities which ultimately serve to maintain a status quo of submission to a patriarchal and (in Gerty’s case at least) colonial society. Systems of language, whether ‘national’ languages such as English or the range of ‘unitary languages’ or dialects which exist within them, are thus for Joyce and Beckett inseparable from the operation of social and ideological forces. Joyce also addresses the ways in which particular language structures are deliberately constructed or employed by groups with ideological or political agendas, dismantling in ‘Cyclops’ the hyperbolic and idealistic representations of the Irish present and past employed by Irish nationalists.

Along with the Revivalist historiography which Joyce attacks in ‘Cyclops,’ both authors seek to undermine various ideologically-motivated ways of representing the past.
In ‘Nestor’ Joyce presents various models of history in order to show up their political and ideological underpinnings. In response to the static, ostensibly irrefutable history of ‘facts’ espoused by the Anglo-Irish headmaster Mr. Deasy, Stephen Dedalus questions the veracity of the historical record and contemplates alternative eventualities to the historical events which have occurred. Deasy’s is a divinely-ordained and teleological history, historical events being successive stages in the progressive ‘manifestation of god,’ a conception which Stephen, and Joyce, recognise as legitimating the oppressive social arrangements of colonialism. Joyce thus exposes and undermines the ideologically-motivated conceptions of history which underpin the inequitable and oppressive social conditions of his society. Stephen’s own manipulation of historical information in order to serve his own purposes in ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ underscores Joyce’s point that all representations of the past tend to reflect the goals and motivations of those who employ them. Beckett too rejects the historiographical authority espoused by those in positions of power; nearly all of the narrators of the Trilogy exist in a state of constant epistemological and historiographical doubt, and the one narrator who does claim – along with Joyce’s Deasy – irrefutable knowledge of a progressive and preordained history ultimately comes to accept the unknowable nature of the historical past.

Both authors also enact a structural rejection of teleological notions of progress in history or literature, their rejection of narrative progress or resolution reflecting a rejection also of wider ideas of human progress which underlie hierarchical social arrangements. While characterised by contrasting linguistic approaches, both seek to expose the limitations of linguistic representation in order to undermine the ideological
perspectives inherent in various representations of the past and present. In response to
the oppressive political situations of the twentieth century, such as colonialism and
authoritarianism, Joyce and Beckett challenge in their works the idea that the nature of
external reality can be adequately comprehended or translated into language, rejecting
ultimately the idea of final authority in literature or in society.
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