Chapter One

Instantiations

I

For example

Fine art [Die schöne Kunst] shows its superiority precisely in this, that it describes things beautifully [schön] that in nature we would dislike or find ugly [Dinge, die in der Natur häßlich oder mißfällig sein würden]. The Furies, diseases, devastations of war, and so on are all harmful [Schädlichkeiten]; and yet they can be described, or even presented in a painting, very beautifully. There is only one kind of ugliness [Häßlichkeit] that cannot be presented in conformity with nature [der Natur gemäß] without obliterating all aesthetic liking [ohne alles ästhetische Wohlgefallen zu Grunde zu richten] and hence artistic beauty [Kunstschönheit]: that ugliness that arouses disgust [Ekel; Kant’s emphasis]. For in that strange sensation, which rests on nothing but imagination [Einbildung], the object is presented as if it insisted, as it were, on our enjoying it even though that is just what we are forcefully resisting [gleichsam, als ob er sich zum Genusse aufdränge, wider den wir doch mit Gewalt streben]; and hence the artistic presentation of the object [die künstliche Vorstellung des Gegenstandes] is no longer distinguished in our sensation from the nature of this object itself, so that it cannot possibly be considered beautiful.

Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgement

This I am happy to inform you is the reversed metamorphosis. The Laurel into Daphne. The old thing where it always was, back again. As when a man, having found at last what he sought, a woman, for example, or a
friend, loses it or realizes what it is. And yet it is useless not to seek, not to
want, for when you cease to seek you start to find, and when you cease to
want, then life begins to ram her fish and chips down your gullet until you
puke, and then the puke down your gullet until you puke the puke, and
then the puked puke until you begin to like it.

Samuel Beckett, *Watt*

One “thing” alone is inassimilable. It thus forms the transcendental of the
transcendental, the untranscendentalisable, the unidealisable, and that is:
that which is disgusting [*le dégoûtant*; what Kant calls *Ekel*]. . . . It is no
longer a case of one of those negative values, or ugly or harmful objects
which art may represent and thereby idealise. That which is absolutely
excluded [*Cet exclu absolu*] does not even allow itself to be accorded the
status of an object of negative pleasure or of ugliness redeemed by
representation. It is unrepresentable. And at the same time unnamable
in its singularity [*innommable dans sa singularité*].

Jacques Derrida, “Economimesis”

Let me begin, then, with an example.

In the late 1940s a middle-aged French woman by the name of
Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil, an accomplished pianist with an en-
thusiasm for literature and theatre, was tirelessly hawking round the of-
fices of various French publishers a series of manuscripts written in
French by her partner, an Irishman by origin, who before the war, in
Dublin and London, had established a minor reputation as a prose-
writer, novelist, and sometime book reviewer, and at the time was eking
out a living in Paris as a translator and occasional art critic. But despite
the support of influential figures such as Max-Pol Fouchet and Tristan
Tzara (who had been instrumental in obtaining publication in French
of an earlier novel), Suzanne encountered rejection after rejection. It is
hard to say how many times the work was turned down. Some have said
it was dozens; others have identified at least six established publishers
who declared themselves unimpressed.

This failure to find a publisher probably came as no surprise to
those involved. Already some ten years earlier, a previous novel written

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in English had also been rejected several times over; and even as Suzanne was devoting her energies to the French manuscripts, a further novel, also written in English, was unsuccessfylly doing the rounds on the other side of the Channel; by April 1953, according to the author, it too had been turned down by “a good score of London publishers.” But finally one of the manuscripts Suzanne was struggling to place found its way into the hands of a young, twenty-six-year-old publisher by the name of Jérôme Lindon, who two years earlier had taken over as head of the wartime, formerly clandestine publishing house, the éditions de Minuit. Lindon decided to take the typescript home with him during his lunch break, started reading it in the Paris métro, and was soon convulsed in hoots of laughter. The very next day he resolved to accept for publication both the novel he was reading and its two sequels, and signed a contract with Suzanne. The date was 15 November 1950.4

The rest, of course, is history. For the title of that first all-but-unpublishable novel, as readers will have realised, was Molloy, and the name of its little-known expatriate author, Samuel Beckett—that self-same novelist, prose-writer, dramatist, and poet who, less than twenty years later, in autumn 1969, by an extraordinary reversal or reverse (not to say catastrophe, reportedly Suzanne’s verdict on the matter), found himself not only the recipient of the Nobel Prize for literature and the object of the extensive consecration that comes with such awards but also the focal point of one of the most successful international critical industries of modern times, which, then and since, has seen the academic and other comment devoted to the author’s writings proliferate seemingly without end.

But in the late 1940s and early 1950s all this lay in the future. At the time, it was no doubt legitimate for French publishers to ask themselves: who was this foreigner who had opted to write in French and, far from concealing his national origins, perversely flaunted them by giving his novel the unmistakably Irish, far from French-sounding name of Molloy? Who wrote so tastelessly, among other things, about masturbation, ejaculation, and horses’ rumps?5 Whose characteristic gesture was one of “fatigue and disgust,” as neatly worded in the Addenda to Watt, Beckett’s last novel written in English, eventually published in Paris in 1953 by Maurice Girodias’s controversial and—to some—disreputable Olympia Press? And whose nihilistic assault on inherited
values, indeed on language itself, seemed beyond all bounds? “The absurdity of the world and the meaninglessness of our condition are conveyed in an absurd and deliberately insignificant fashion,” wrote Maurice Nadeau—an influential admirer—apropos of *Molloy* in April 1951, and concluded as follows: “never did anybody dare so openly to insult everything which man holds to be certain, up to and including the very language on which he could at least rely to scream his doubt and despair.”

But to whom did the name Samuel Beckett refer? Early in 1947, in the unpublished *Eleutheria*, written shortly before embarking on *Molloy*, Beckett had provided a kind of prospective answer of his own, with self-conscious but typically self-lacerating humour, by having the character of the Spectator denounce, in the play’s own words, the author of the “rubbish”—or “navet,” literally a turnip—that Beckett at that very moment was busily writing. (Other more grotesque parts, it may be remembered, were written for characters called Krap, Piouk, and Skunk.) Garbling the author’s foreign-sounding name, but politely invoking it nonetheless, the Spectator went on: “Beckett (*il dit: ‘Béquet’) Samuel, Béquet, Béquet, ça doit être un juif groenlandais mâtiné d’Auvergnat,” “a cross between a Jew from Greenland and a peasant from the Auvergne,” as Barbara Wright’s translation ably puts it. The self-portrait was no doubt designed to be protective as much as it was provocative. Either way, it was a measure of Beckett’s unapologetic perception of his cultural outlandishness, that state beyond reassuring linguistic, national, or even aesthetic affiliation, to which, in the years that followed, he was to remain rigorously faithful, by declining for instance to give interviews to explain or explicate his work, or otherwise give it any public profile beyond that which was affirmed in and by the writing itself. The textual signature, so to speak, was enough; and it was all. As Beckett wrote in 1954, celebrating the work of his friend Jack Yeats, “l’artiste qui joue son être est de nulle part. Et il n’a pas de frères,” “the artist who stakes his being is from nowhere, has no kith.”

It is perhaps hardly surprising, then, that Beckett did not at first enjoy significant commercial success with his French works. True, in later years he was to save Minuit (and Lindon) from financial crisis more than once. Initial sales were, however, modest. The French translation of *Murphy*, published in 1947, had not done well either, selling only four (four!) copies in its first year, and the failure of that first book
in French explained why the publisher Pierre Bordas, offered *Molloy* in 1948, turned down the manuscript. Six years after publication, as James Knowlson reports, there were still 2,750 unsold copies of *Murphy* (in French), which Lindon was able to buy up and reissue under the Minuit imprint. Early sales of *Molloy* were similarly disappointing. In its first year of trading, which would typically be the most successful period, especially in the case of a relatively unknown author, the book sold some 694 copies. If anything, sales were probably aided by a number of generally favourable reviews by prominent critics such as Maurice Nadeau, Jean Blanzat, Bernard Pingaud, Georges Bataille, and Jean Pouillon. *Malone meurt* (*Malone Dies*), for its part, published later the same year, to less explicit critical acclaim, managed to sell only 241 copies. *L’Innommable* (*The Unnamable*), coming out in July 1953, several months after the controversy surrounding the first run of *En attendant Godot* (*Waiting for Godot*), fared somewhat better, achieving sales of 476.

More than half a century after *Molloy*, *Malone meurt*, and *L’Innommable* were written, it is hard to imagine how these novels once seemed beyond the pale of what was publishable, worthy at best of marginal attention on the part of a select few. It seems almost superfluous to say this now, but in the course of the 1950s and 1960s, and perhaps even more so since, a remarkable transformation came about, totally redefining Beckett’s status as a literary figure. As I write, all his works, virtually without exception, enjoy the unrivalled status of modern classics. They are the subject of close and devoted attention, and figure in countless university curricula throughout the world. Performances of his plays are staged, revived, and regularly reviewed as integral parts of the established repertoire. Far from the work being almost unpublishable, there is now a ready audience, on the evidence of the author’s name alone, for almost everything in existence that Beckett wrote: draft manuscripts, abandoned works, notebooks, translations, correspondence, and marginal doodles. And this is not just a French or an English-language phenomenon, for Beckett’s audience counts a multitude of different readers in many diverse languages, all eager to discover what new information or knowledge critics or editors may have to impart.

No longer a recalcitrant or barbarous outsider, then, Beckett today stands by common consent at the very heart of modern literary culture. As such, he is one of a select but oddly revealing band of writers—
including such strange bedfellows as Sade, Proust, Joyce, Kafka, or Sacher-Masoch—whose names do not merely denote bodies of work, but have spawned adjectives whose application extends far beyond the confines of those actual texts. “Beckettian” in this sense no longer means purely and simply whatever pertains to the author’s work. It has come to identify an entire disposition, a philosophy, a worldview, an attitude to language, a way of feeling, thinking, talking, to which the only plausible response today appears to be one of knowing familiarity: “Ah, yes . . . ” Beckett’s reputation today, it would seem, has always already preceded the work; and even before reading occurs or a performance takes place, audiences believe they know what to expect. In other words, Beckett’s work has ceased to be a singular, enigmatic, barely recognisable event. Instead, like some established rhetorical paradigm, it has come to exemplify a host of assumptions, conventions, judgements, or adjudications which now follow Beckett’s name wherever it appears, providing readers with a series of ready-made evaluative frames or interpretative strategies from which they can select at will. And the list of off-the-peg readings made available to new or aspiring readers is a long one, with Beckett serving variously but persistently as an instantiation (in no particular order) of modernism, postmodernism, classicism, stoicism, scepticism, quietism, existentialism, absurdism, humanism, anti-humanism, pessimism, optimism, poststructuralism, nihilism, Irishism—and many others besides.

Admittedly, this metamorphosis in the status of Beckett’s work is not unprecedented in the reception of literary works. Any process of canon formation necessarily implies changes, shifts, or upheavals by which previously unread or unreadable texts are discovered in hindsight, according to this or that critical perspective, to merit a place at the centre of literary or artistic culture. The reverse occurs too, when established, even celebrated works, justly or unjustly, depending on the point of view of critics, suddenly find themselves relegated to the periphery. Reception takes time; expectations are modified; fashions change. Critical judgements are subject to numerous contingencies, vagaries, or disagreements. All this is the stuff of literary critical debate, its everyday reality, and its life’s blood. In this sense, there is nothing out of the ordinary in Beckett’s change in fortune. It was nevertheless dramatic, partly because of the speed with which, in less than twenty years, the work
travelled from margin to centre, from the barbarous to the familiar, the unpublishable to the canonic, the unreadable to the always already read, partly too because of the overwhelming critical unanimity with which the transformation occurred.

A case in a thousand, perhaps. But who today would risk ridicule by protesting about the offensive tastelessness of Beckett’s writing?

Something, then, between 1947 and 1969, must have happened.

What happened, I shall argue, has to do with the possibility and impossibility of critical evaluation itself, with the comic inconsistency, the erratic uncertainty, and the necessary blindness that, as Beckett’s writing testifies, betray the imprint of the irregular, the unpredictable, and the incalculable: in other words, the future.

To evaluate any literary work is to refer a judgement, whether positive or negative, to some implicit or explicit rule, norm, belief, or prejudice. It is to seek to justify or legitimate a given response to a text by appealing to a value—that is, some established measure by which each singular item might be converted into some general equivalent that would allow it to be compared, in principle, with each and every other item in the system—which the given object of judgement may then be thought to confirm, either positively or negatively, by illustration or default. In the process, the individual case is judged according to the extent to which it can be held to endorse, embody, and exemplify a given value. It becomes valuable or valid to the extent it can be portrayed as an instantiation of the rule it is thought to illustrate; and what counts, henceforth, is less the singularity of the case than the value it is considered to be promoting, defending, or threatening.

Two difficulties are immediately apparent, which have a clear bearing on the reception of Beckett’s writing from 1950 onwards.

The first has to do with the account that evaluative criticism takes of those writings that resist, disobey, or flout the explicit or implicit rule according to which evaluation is being carried out. Various responses are possible. First, a critic may simply refuse to read what he or she has been reading, by abandoning reading altogether, or failing to read while apparently still doing so. Second, a critic can roundly condemn what she or he is evaluating because it fails to endorse the norms being applied. Or, thirdly, with more apparent generosity or tolerance, a critic can agree to judge the object of criticism allegedly on its merits, but to
do so only in negative terms, on the basis of what the artwork is not, as a rejection, transgression, or critique of a still binding norm.

In Beckett’s case, there is little doubt that all three strategies have been employed at one time or another. Today, the third is probably the most common. It reflects the inability of evaluative criticism to respond in affirmative fashion to that which is new, innovative, or unprecedented: that writing which, in whatever way, is resistant to the horizon of expectation deployed by the norm according to which evaluation is being performed. This may seem to be a criterion that has only limited relevance: how many works, one might ask, are genuinely innovative? This is to miss the point. For any text, before it becomes an object of evaluation for criticism, is a novelty: an unexpected event, the character or quality of which cannot be decided, at least for the moment, and possibly for considerably longer. This, of course, is how and why evaluation is possible at all, and why some think it necessary. For if the character or quality of the event were decided in advance, there would be no reason to evaluate it, nor any means to do so, and one would probably conclude that it was not an event at all. But if this resistance of the event to evaluation makes evaluation both possible and necessary, it also makes it inevitable that the act of evaluation will not meet its goal and reach any definitive conclusion. If evaluation is dependent on the unpredictability of the event, without which it cannot even occur, then it follows that the event’s resistance to evaluation cannot wither away in the face of judgement. The challenge of the one to the other remains. Whatever the judgement proffered by a critic, the possibility always exists for that evaluation to be inappropriate or inadequate, or for it to be mistaken on any number of grounds, as a result of which it is always likely to be contested today or tomorrow by some other act of evaluation claiming for itself the same degree of entitlement or legitimacy as the first.

Evaluation, then, is never final; by its nature it can only ever be provisional. To be what it is and remain faithful to its vocation, at times seduced, at times rejected, at times acknowledged, at times ignored, it has to contend with that which resists its reductive ambitions. What resists is the incalculable, and the incalculable is what escapes the imposition of value, contests its authority, challenges its legitimacy and possibility. If it is to occur at all, it seems, critical evaluation is condemned to fail. It stumbles over its own final impossibility. For it can only
address the incalculable by treating it as what it is not, that is, by refusing to read. Rather than responding to the singularity of the textual event it is allegedly evaluating, it remains trapped within an economy founded on identity, familiarity, or repetition, for which each and every new case is the duplicate or double of another that has always already been submitted to calculation. All of which explains, as traditional commentators are only too keen to remind their readers, why critical evaluation is by nature a conservative, conformist act, whose decisions are informed first of all by precedent, established standards, and pre-existing ideology, that is, by those very values it insists on applying.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that having been initially ignored or condemned by critics, Beckett’s work today is largely read in negative terms: either as testimony to the impending failure, disintegration, or collapse of (post)modern(ist) culture, or, alternatively, as a subverting, undermining, dismantling, overturning, or mocking of established certitudes or verities. This negativity, in turn, is but the obverse of the normative positivity of value or values. It is essentially a dialectical trait; and such is the irresistible power of the dialectic that it is an easy step “magically,” in Hegel’s famous phrase, to convert these negative readings into positive ones: anti-humanism into humanism, despair into hope, corrosive humour into stoic cheerfulness, bodily grotesques into models of mindful perseverance, with Beckett’s work being used now to rehabilitate the very values—human dignity, say—it was previously seen so doggedly to be attacking.

In situations such as these, criticism’s main priority, if only for its own survival, is to assert its authority, its ability to decide on the value (or lack of value) of a given text. If so, it is apparent that any act of critical judgement, to the extent that it is a judgement, while it may believe itself genuinely to be committed to a certain conception of justice, will always run the risk of perpetrating or perpetuating injustice. All judgement, even a judgement that seeks to legitimate itself by appealing to universal values, implies the possibility of misjudgement, however defined, just as the claim to dispense justice must always carry with it the risk of committing an injustice. It cannot be said with certainty, of course, that any reader or critic of Beckett, whatever his or her conviction of remaining just in respect of Beckett’s writing, has ever avoided these pitfalls, and the fact that they are by definition ineluctable perhaps
explains why so many early publishers or readers, not to mention subsequent audiences, found it so hard to rise to the challenge of Beckett’s writing and do so in affirmative manner: that is, to read what was written.

For that was and remains the pressing question for any reader confronting Beckett’s writing, either for the first time or for the last: how to read, that is, how to accommodate within the established parameters of literary judgement a body of writing in which the gesture, theme, or fantasy of expulsion (oral, nasal, and anal) is endowed with such uncompromising violence, a body in whose name Beckett’s writing, faithful in this respect at least to Kant’s prescription, forces itself upon its sometimes reluctant readers, demanding they enjoy what is on offer, to the point where the reader of Watt, say, is enjoined in Arsene’s memorable words to “puke the puke, and then the puked puke until you begin to like it”—all the while continuing, like Arsene the well-named, to snort “down the snout—haw!—so,” as Watt puts it some pages later, not to mention the future narrator of the second part of Molloy who, in similar vein, likens his fate (inviting the reader to consider his or her own position on the matter) to that of “la merde qui attend la chasse d’eau,” “the turd waiting for the flush.” And if it is not possible to salvage such assertions for artistic representation and the pure judgements of taste it requires, as Kant thought necessary, how then to respond to the irresistible demand that Beckett’s writing makes of the reader, including that reader who might indeed want to resist the very reading that is forcing her or him to resist? Is it ever certain, it might then be asked, that Beckett’s work is readable at all?

The grotesque scatological charge that runs through Beckett’s writing, and caused such offence to legal authorities in Dublin, Paris, and London, reveals more than a jejune desire to shock complacent middle-class audiences, the Church, or other would-be arbiters of taste. It is a symptom of the bodily materiality and irreducible contingency of the texts themselves, a sign of their recalcitrant objection to the idealising, sublimating, essentialising movement of traditional aesthetics. For while the Beckettian body is everywhere to be found in the thematic content of Molloy, say, it exceeds that thematic horizon too, inscribing itself within the consonantal and vocal texture of the writing not as a source of meaning but as a singular textual signature or imprint. For it is hardly by chance that Bécquet, Samuel, this Greenland Jew or peat-
ant from the Auvergne, in turning to a language not that of his mother or of his father, should not only rewrite his own name—should we pronounce it bekIt or bekEt, and should we say mclwa or mclOI?—but also provide himself in so doing with a series of prosthetic crutches or béquilles (B-E-K), not to say a bicycle (bicyclette [B-K-ETT], never the more common vélo), to help figure his exemplary (dis)embodiment within the language of the other, this otherness that is language itself, which is never mine.13

This insistent presence of the body in Beckett’s writing raises an acute question of readability. For it is never certain what reading entails. What qualifications, diplomas, or certificates does it require? By what authority does it occur? Moreover, reading, in the same way as writing, is not an operation that it is easy or even possible to delimit. For one thing, it always already incorporates its own opposite. Just as declaring something unreadable or refusing to read is itself a decision taken by a reader who has already begun to read, so it is entirely possible to continue reading a text without reading it. Distraction, in a word, enables and disables reading at one and the same time. What one reader cannot put down, another cannot pick up. What is all too legible for one is unreadable for another. And so on. Not to read, then, is just as much a mode of reading as reading itself. It could always be argued, then, that the negative reaction of publishers to Beckett’s work in the early phase of its reception was paradoxically somehow more adequate—if any reading can ever be deemed adequate—to the recalcitrant singularity of Beckett’s writing than the response of those for whom the author’s work was subsequently an object of cultural consecration. That Beckett himself may also have believed this, as early as 1950, is what lies behind the fact that, instead of celebrating the signature of his contract with Minuit, Beckett was moved to express his unhappiness “at the realization,” recalls Jérôme Lindon, “that the publication of Molloy would lead to our bankruptcy.”14

Beckett, however, was soon proved wrong; and within ten or twenty years the trickle of reviews that greeted Molloy had turned into a veritable flood of books, articles, and Ph.D. dissertations. True, the discipline of Beckett Studies—the term itself is a recognition of the massive institutional response to the author’s work—boasts many impressive achievements, and it would be a foolish reader who would want to do without the scrupulous or informative work of critics and researchers.
too numerous to mention, as a result of whose efforts more is known today than was ever thought possible at one stage about the personal, familial, intellectual, social, historical, or material circumstances in which Beckett’s work was produced. But even devoted students of Beckett would have to concede that much published criticism about the writer makes little claim upon the reader, not because commentators are insufficiently discriminating or because they discriminate too much, but because they necessarily always run the risk of falling victim to the infantile disorder of all literary criticism—which may be the fate of all criticism in general—which, in the guise of enabling access to the text, is to domesticate and normalise it, to reduce it to the horizon of expectation of the already known. So was this second period in Beckett reception fundamentally different from the first? Yes. But also: no. For rejection and consecration alike are haunted, as is all reading, by the failure to read, by anxiety in the face of the barbarous singularity of Beckett’s writing, its own deep-seated refusal to allow itself to be read, as Derrida puts it, glossing Kant, notwithstanding the efforts of a generation and more of literary critics, as an object of negative pleasure or ugliness finally redeemed by representation.

The critical recuperation of Beckett was not without its costs. Just as it was dominated, to debilitating effect, by the negativity of its judgements, so its interpretations of the author soon became circular. Specific texts became plausible instantiations of Beckett’s so-called worldview, the only evidence for which, not surprisingly, was to be found in those very texts themselves. As an all-embracing, unifying vision was ascribed to the author, on the evidence of the work itself, so that vision was used to explicate the works. The singularity of the body was unjustly effaced. Whence, among others, the belief held by numerous critics, especially early ones, that the voice or discourse or narrator or character holding forth in Beckett’s texts, whether they be full-length narratives, short narratives, narrative fragments, or plays, was somehow the same self-present consciousness or persona. And whence too the equally strange conviction that the many discontinuities, discor-dances, inconsistencies, or aporetic doublings that may be observed in Beckett’s trilogy might ultimately all give way to some final statement about the truth of being.
Admittedly, it is sometimes wondered why Beckett became the subject of such an enormous critical industry. Does the fact that it was possible at all express some fatal complicity between Beckett’s work and academic criticism? Did Beckett’s professed distaste for scholarly learning conceal a greater degree of indebtedness to it, and a covert or unacknowledged reliance on that shadowy figure whom Estragon vituperated, “with finality,” as the stage directions have it, as “Critic”? Beckett’s own familiarity with literary and artistic tradition was of course extensive, and no doubt the many vestigial traces left in the work by that knowledge played a key role in attracting the attentions of academic readers. Beckett was also fortunate—or is it unfortunate?—to be active as a writer at a time when the institutions demanding and supplying literary critical discourse, that is, the media and the university system, underwent massive transformation and expansion, bringing about that strange professionalisation of literary critical activity that is such a salient feature of recent decades. Perhaps, rather than saying anything noteworthy about Beckett, the amount of work written on the writer may simply be seen as an oblique tribute to higher education policy in Europe, the United States, or the rest of the world.

But the reasons behind the prodigious development of Beckett Studies are not just historical or contextual. They have to do with the fundamental make-up of literature and literary criticism in general. For just as nothing is more real than nothing, in the famous words of one of Beckett’s own favourite philosophers, so nothing stimulates reading more than unreadability. But unreadability, as I have suggested, is not some external threat to reading; it is more like its very condition of possibility, in which case the sheer volume of commentary provoked by Beckett’s writing, rather than testifying to any implicit reliance upon literary criticism on the part of the work, may rather be said to exist in inverse proportion to its readability. In other words, it is precisely because Beckett’s work resists reading that so many readers have found themselves in the position of attempting to overcome that resistance, even though it would then have to be acknowledged that to succeed in such a task would be not only undesirable but impossible too, since to do so would mean there was no longer anything left to read. Happily, unhappily, then, the rain continues to beat on the windows. Or, after all, perhaps not. But who can ever decide?