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The Lost Ones ("So on infinitely . . .")

This final paragraph which, it was noted, was written well after the first version of *Le Dépeupleur* had been abandoned, contains perhaps the only singular event in the cylinder. But this singularity is potentially refused by the possibility that the two-fold vibration of the cylinder might extend as far as its inhabitants, and the cycle of searching might begin again. Similarly, "if this notion is maintained" suggests that this "unthinkable end" might merely be supposition, as the finality of the end is, again, somewhat refused. The phrase: "The persistence of twofold vibration suggests that in this old abode all is not yet quite for the best", holds out the grim promise that life can rekindle in the cylinder, and, retaining a Leibnizian echo, looks forward to the complex economies of worst/best in *Worstward Ho*. It was noted that the sentence in *Le Dépeupleur* which reads "Dans les feux sombres du plafond, le zénith garde encore sa légende" and comes just before "The aged vanquished of the third zone . . .", has been omitted in the English version; seeming to mime the processes of lessening with which this part of the text is concerned. It was suggested that this could have occurred because the raising of the eyes at this point is overly strong. Speculation ensued as to how and why Beckett managed to provide himself with so many insoluble problems of translation. The question of why Beckett chose to translate *Le Dépeupleur* as *The Lost Ones* rather than "The Lost One" (or even, more suitably for Hollywood, "The Depopulator") was discussed and it was decided that the plural enables "lost" to refer to both searchers and searched, whilst the collocation of the one and the many in "ones" offers another instance of the oscillation and self cancellation which remains endemic in the text. The plural also enables a Dantean echo.

The penultimate paragraph of *The Lost Ones* is also surprisingly character-filled due to the appearance of the redheaded woman, the north. Her fixity offers potential orientation for those "bent on taking [their] bearing[s]", although it was noted that the rotating rings of carriers and searchers are not ultimately mappable, even for "an intelligence", as their directions remain uncertain. The redheaded woman is somewhat reminiscent of a Norse goddess, but can perhaps be more strongly linked with an unredeemed Mary Magdalen. Again, as has been remarked upon before, this is allegory which refuses ultimate reference. Her squatting pose, with the right hand clasping the left forearm, is reminiscent of Billie Whitelaw's May in *Footfalls* and, in turn, one of Donatello's figures. But perhaps she can be viewed as a "philosophical red herring", offered only to be spirited away. It was noted that even the vanquished get inspected and their eyes searched, although precisely what is being searched for remains unclear. The searching for scars and birthmarks becomes almost parodic of those nineteenth century novels in which a concealed identity is finally revealed on the basis of such identificatory marks. But "birth blots" are, of course, marks which have been smudged and traced over, thus with their status as unique and unchanging points of identification refused.

It was suggested that there might be a connection to be made between this point in *The Lost Ones* and Daniel Katz's recent argument concerning the inspection of prostitutes in Beckett's work (Daniel Katz, *Saying I No More: Subjectivity and Consciousness in the Prose of Samuel Beckett* (Evanston, ILL: Northwestern

University Press, 1999), ch. 1.) There might also be an echo of Dante's Beatrice here. With her greater fixity, the redheaded woman becomes an object for sight, although here sight is stripped of its potential purity, as it is not clearly separated from grasping and touching. It was suggested that this text is concerned with the exploration of space, as folds, hollows, eyes and niches are opened out. There might be a similar moment in *Ill Seen Ill Said*, as the pupil dilates to the point where it ceases to be an aperture but becomes a fully disclosed blank surface. In *The Lost Ones*, there seems to be a desire for surface only, with no hidden spaces, and in this body-like cylinder, three dimensions remain perhaps rather too many. In *Lessness*, of course, the walls have fallen. The text itself also seems to aspire to blank surface, although, paradoxically, its folds and puckerings, its tiny maladjustments of fit, occlude even as the tone of the writing gestures towards disclosure.

Returning to the final paragraph, the ending (is it death?) seems problematic in its gathering of affect, and unexpected turn to the major key. The ending, so often forbidden in Beckett's texts, is characterised here by an aesthetic of losing patience, of overcoming a great resistance, as narrative replaces that strange version of anatomy which has characterised earlier descriptions of the cylinder. It was suggested that this disobedient ending might function as a Derridean supplement which both falls below and overshoots the unity of this potentially ever-repeating system. This end ruins the plenitude of an eternal return, despite the paradoxical statement that the system does continue "So on infinitely". This end also suggests a comic echo of Genesis, as the "aged vanquished . . . has none about him now but others in his image". The final sentence offers a return to the original measured tone of the narration whilst the final word "maintained"/"maintenu" retains the trace of a hand, of holding on, as the dislocated life of the body obtains even at the moment of its dissolution.

Laura Salisbury