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Eliot and Beckett's Low Modernism Humility and Humiliation

RICK de VILLIERS

Eliot and Beckett's Low Modernism

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Humility and Humiliation

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Series Editor's Preface

In 1997 Apple computers launched an advertising campaign (in print and on television) that entreated us to 'Think Different', and Samuel Beckett was one of Apple's icons. Avoiding Apple's solecism, we might modify the appeal to say that *Other Becketts* is a call to think differently as well, in this case about Beckett's work, to question, that is, even the questions we ask about it. *Other Becketts*, then, is a series of monographs focused on alternative, unexplored or under-explored approaches to the work of Samuel Beckett, not a call for novelty per se, but a call to examine afresh those of Beckett's interests that were more arcane than mainstream, interests that might be deemed quirky or strange, and those of his works less thoroughly explored critically and theoretically, the late prose and drama, say, or even the poetry or criticism. Volumes might cover (but are not restricted to) any of the following: unusual illnesses or neurological disorders (the 'duck foot, goose foot' of *First Love*, akathisia or the invented duck's disease or panpygoptosis of Miss Dew in *Murphy*, proprioception, or its disturbance, in *Not I*, perhaps, or other unusual neurological lapses among Beckett's creatures, from Watt to the Listener of *That Time*); mathematical peculiarities (irrational numbers, factorials, Fibonacci numbers or sequences, or non-Euclidian approaches to geometry); linguistic failures (from Nominalism to Mauthner, say); citations of or allusions to contrarian aesthetic philosophers working in a more or less irrationalist tradition (Nietzsche, Bergson or Deleuze, among others), or in general 'the simple games that time plays with space'. Alternative approaches would be of interest as well, with foci on objects, animals, cognitive or memory issues, and the like.

S. E. Gontarski, Florida State University

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Parts of this book have appeared elsewhere in slightly different form: a shorter version of Chapter 3 in *Literature and Theology* 34.2 (2020); Chapter 4 in the *Journal of Modern Literature* 42.4 (2019); and a small section from Chapter 5 in the *New Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot* (2017).

To my parents, Gus and Hettie, and my sister, Lindi, whom I cannot thank sufficiently for their love and unceasing encouragement: ek het nie die woorde om te sê hoeveel ek julle waardeer nie – veral nie in Engels nie. And lastly, my deepest gratitude to Michelle, without whose sacrifice and love this book would not be. I humbly dedicate it to her.

Abbreviations and Conventions

T. S. Eliot

- CP1 *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 1: Apprentices Years, 1905–1918*
- CP2 *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 2: The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*
- CP3 *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 3: Literature, Politics, Belief, 1927–1929*
- CP4 *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 4: English Lion, 1930–1933*
- CP5 *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 5: Tradition and Orthodoxy, 1934–1939*
- CP6 *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 6: The War Years, 1940–1946*
- CP7 *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 7: A European Society, 1947–1953*
- CP8 *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 8: Still and Still Moving, 1954–1965*
- CPP *The Complete Poems and Plays*
- L1 *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 1: 1898–1922*
- L2 *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 2: 1923–1925*
- L3 *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 3: 1926–1927*
- L4 *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 4: 1928–1929*
- L5 *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 5: 1930–1931*
- L6 *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 6: 1932–1933*
- L7 *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 7: 1934–1935*
- L8 *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 8: 1936–1938*
- P1 *The Poems of T. S. Eliot, Volume 1: Collected and Uncollected Poems*
- P2 *The Poems of T. S. Eliot, Volume 2: Practical Cats and Further Verses*

Samuel Beckett

BDL	The Beckett Digital Library
CC	Comment c'est, How It Is <i>and</i> / <i>et</i> L'Image: A <i>Critical-Genetic Edition</i> / <i>Une édition critic-génétique</i>
CDW	<i>The Complete Dramatic Works</i>
Com etc.	<i>Company; Ill Seen Ill Said; Worstward Ho; Stirrings Still</i>
CP	<i>Collected Poems</i>
CSP	<i>The Complete Short Prose, 1929–1989</i>
Dis	<i>Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment</i>
DN	<i>Beckett's Dream</i> notebook
Dream	<i>Dream of Fair to Middling Women</i>
EB	<i>Echo's Bones</i>
Eleutheria	<i>Eleutheria</i>
HII	<i>How It Is</i>
L1	<i>The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume 1: 1929–1940</i>
L2	<i>The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume 2: 1941–1956</i>
L3	<i>The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume 3: 1957–1965</i>
L4	<i>The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume 4: 1966–1989</i>
MC	<i>Mercier and Camier</i>
MPTK	<i>More Pricks Than Kicks</i>
Mur	<i>Murphy</i>
PTD	<i>Proust and 'Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit'</i>
TN	<i>Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable</i>
TNSB1	<i>The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett, Volume 1: Waiting for Godot</i>
W	<i>Watt</i>

Reference

OED	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i> (online edition)
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General

Unless otherwise stated, all biblical references are to the King James Version.

Though no distinction is made between abbreviations referring to Eliot's and Beckett's respective volumes of letters, this should be clear from the context.

Introduction

During the Sermon on the Mount scene in *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, there is some confusion as to who exactly will inherit the earth. Standing at the rear of the multitude, a group of squabblers is dumbfounded that one particular Greek should be the lucky heir. Soon it dawns on them that they had misheard: 'Oh, it's the *meek!* Blessed are the *meek!* Oh, that's nice, isn't it? I'm glad they're getting something, 'cause they have a hell of a time.'¹ What heightens the irony of the scene is the apocryphal emphasis placed on humility. Christ blesses not only the meek, but also 'those of gentle spirit'. These are equivalent renderings of the same verse (Matt. 5:5), not separate categories of sanctity. And so, by doubling up on what is at best an ambient endorsement of selflessness, the skit can double down on its wry exhibition of self-interest. Bored with the blessings heaped on the peacemakers and other quiet souls, Brian's mother suggests going to a stoning instead. Another man makes merry with the size of his neighbour's nose, to which the neighbour responds with a boiling spirit: 'I said one more time . . . mate and I'll take you to the fucking cleaners.' And, at the moment we are meant to hear the Lord's encouragement for those who take insults in good grace, bad words are traded for blows.

However impish and irreverent, the scene opens onto two concerns that animate this book. In the first instance, it invites thinking about both the power and dispossession at the heart of humility. Are the meek those of self-effacing disposition or are they the downtrodden of society? Are they the humble or the humiliated? The distinction is not easy to make, given that humility and humiliation have an awkward, often unacknowledged intimacy. The former may be a queenly, cardinal or monkish virtue; it could attest to a diffident spirit or a slavish cast of mind. It has been framed as a component of magnanimity, an enabling awareness of human limitation, a religious ideal. Much less equivocally,

humiliation conjures bleak associations. It implies violence against autonomy and points to a state at the extreme end of shame. Yet between the two words is common ground. A shared etymology links them to lowliness (*humilis*) and, further down, to the earth (*humus*). And in ascetic traditions painfully aware of humanity's quintessence – 'dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return' (Gen. 3:19) – humiliation cultivates humility. The second concern is with humility's mimetic potential, whether this virtue that dare not speak its own name can somehow be made legible in the work of art. While the Monty Python scene is patently not interested in representing humility, it suggests an avenue by which we can arrive at the comportment's inference: responses to humiliation. In the case of Big Nose, his injured dignity prompts an injurious response. But humiliation can also be humbly met.

With this ambivalence and these two concerns in mind, I turn to T. S. Eliot and Samuel Beckett. Granting their imperfect likeness, this book nevertheless recognises between the two writers a common if differently handled interest in the low and the lowly. They share a fascination with suffering. Both are driven by an endless carrying 'on', whether towards 'lessness' or the extinction of personality. And in crowding their works with those having a hell of a time, they recuperate something of the affinity between humility and humiliation. Elaborating on this affinity, this study develops a framework for complementary performances of humility across three categories: the affective, the ethical and the aesthetic. It emphasises, first and foremost, the singularity of the work of art in nuancing the relation between humility and humiliation. But it also sheds light on the authors' debt to a theological tradition within which lowliness is a constitutive aspect of subjectivity. This filiation pits 'low modernism' against interpretations that play up humility's affirming aspects. And, in drawing out these parallels and oppositions, I contend that Eliot and Beckett have shaped our modern minds in a particularly unmodern way.

Two Subtraction Stories

There are two assumptions behind this claim. First, by bringing humility and humiliation into closer contact, Eliot and Beckett evince an attitude unaccommodating of modernity's ideals about self-sufficiency and human flourishing. Disobliging towards social utility and progress, this attitude brings out sharply that entrenched

antipathy to civilisation many have seen as a central feature of modernism. Recall the myriad complaints against Eliot's ascetic brand of Christianity: that it was deeply unhealthy, medieval rather than modern, antiquated as well as anti-social.² In its turn, Beckett's beyond-the-pale *via negativa* may be indexed by the 1969 Nobel Committee's doubts about awarding him the prize for literature.³ His art was deemed incompatible with the spirit of Nobel's will, which stipulates that recipients' work should exhibit an 'idealistic tendency' and confer 'the greatest benefit to humankind'.⁴ The reading public, it seems suggested, deserve to have set before them examples of strength and uplift.⁵

This brings us to the second point about our unmodern attunement: if we grant lowness as a concern for these two writers around whom towering cultural edifices have been erected, we must also grant that these edifices testify to our transcendence of the 'modal difficulty' implied in the first point. Modal difficulties, as George Steiner conceived of them, confront us with the limits of our critical tolerance. We may understand a work's intellectual complexity yet be unable to reconcile its sensibility with our own, since it 'challenge[s] the inevitable parochialism of honest empathy'.⁶ But absorbed as it is into the culture industry, modernism's lowness no longer seems to present the hurdle to taste and decency that once it did. Think of that proliferating marker of assimilated abasement, the 'fail better' tattoo, or of pop star Harry Styles's smiling pose with a copy of *The Waste Land*.⁷ As a more scholarly gauge of this transcendence we may take the 2004 'Low Modernism' special issue of *Critical Quarterly*. There, the editors remark that '[m]any of the key texts of so-called "high" modernism are entangled in all that is low: obscene bodies, animals and objects; masturbation, shit and piss'.⁸ Put in decidedly un-euphemistic terms, the reclamation is also a provocation. On the one hand is the assertion of corporeal humility's thematic significance for modernism; on the other hand, the subtle suggestion that this theme's neglect could be explained by a critical squeamishness that hesitates before the exploration of 'shit and piss', let alone its naming.⁹ The vanquishing of modernism's modal difficulties seems implied in the distance – in freedom of expression, in sexual politics, in LGBTQIA+ rights – between our moment and the moment of the obscenity cases brought against D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce, of the scandals caused by Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, of the censorship that long dogged Beckett. That these issues are now the

province of literary history could, unhumly, be taken to supply the measure of a moral and intellectual emancipation from earlier codes of inhibition and decorum.

The previous two paragraphs highlight a paradox key to this book: that we can stomach and even turn extreme degradation in Eliot, Beckett and other modernists into an object of analysis, while also maintaining that humiliation, by definition, is something that most people do not desire.¹⁰ This paradox – this unmodern making of our modern mind – inheres in the simultaneous telling of two 'subtraction stories', Charles Taylor's term for those ideological positions arrived at by casting aside 'confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations'.¹¹ The first story, fleshed out more fully below, centres on the secular conception of humility as a social virtue. Whether in the guise of modest behaviour or as a mode that drives communal endeavour, humility is an enabling and voluntary motion of assent. It is a comportment that encourages accurate self-assessment and disallows both boasting and deprecation. It implies at once the recognition of our shared limitations and the effort to transcend them. Subtracted from this account is not only the moral prostration that a penitent might feel before an overawing divinity, but humility's historical overlap with humiliation.

The second story also involves humility. It refracts through a critical trend which, disabused of modernism's overhyped claims of strength, turns its gaze towards aesthetic weakness – towards powerlessness, passivity and shame.¹² Indeed, 'make it weak' is the call to disarmament in a recent *Modernism/modernity* special issue.¹³ The revised Poundian imperative is both *of* and *for* modernism. *Of* modernism in that a sense of vulnerability and insufficiency runs through the modernists' anxious, compensatory reworkings of tradition.¹⁴ But *for* modernism insofar as 'modernism' is itself taken as a provisional marker by which to grab a protean bundle of works, writers and interests. In fine, scholarship's recent swerve towards the low and weak follows a methodological injunction to cast off modernism's vaunted associations with the high and strong.

Eliot and Beckett's Low Modernism brings these subtraction stories together. Its primary concern is with humiliation's capacity to make humility legible in the work of art: how embarrassment gives onto a recognition of otherness, how sacrifice becomes the image of obedience, how textual penury facilitates a letting-go of intertextual riches. In pursuing these questions, this study offers

a theory of mimetic humility by involving modernist literature in the conception of a virtue that has almost exclusively been defined by theology, philosophy and medieval studies.¹⁵ At the same time, it keeps in view those discourses that have rejected humiliation as hostile to a post-Enlightenment understanding of humility. By heeding the ideals that have led to humility's secular reinvention – community building, the redress of structural injustice, the safeguarding of human dignity – we might wonder at the relative ease that has come to subtend uneasy elements in Eliot and Beckett. How does one read the tortures and cruelties in Beckett and still glimpse in these a supposed affirmation of humanity's resilience? Can the deeply anti-social, anti-humanist streak that runs through Eliot be squared with the blessedness of the meek? The conjunction of the two subtraction stories necessitates the recognition that, at times, the humility–humiliation nexus we find in Eliot and Beckett troubles the honest empathy of modernity. At other times, however, this alignment speaks to those impulses that Lionel Trilling saw lurking 'somewhere in the mind of every modern person' – impulses towards suffering, surrender and self-undoing.¹⁶ My aim is to bring that 'somewhere' out of the margins and into a critical clearing.

Performances of Humility

The difficulty in getting to this clearing, however, is locked up in humility's elusiveness. On the one hand, it is a virtue known not to know itself. A long theological tradition holds that humility can remain intact only so long as it is not regarded as something achieved or summited.¹⁷ Forever guarding against finality, humility must be endless. On the other hand, humility seems absent when too obviously present. Think of Belacqua who determines to 'efface himself altogether' (*MPTK*, 155) only to impress those around him, or of *Murder in the Cathedral's* Thomas Becket spurred to earthly sacrifice by thoughts of eternal recompense. The opacity of humility's motives means that we are apt to regard its bowings-down as bent on personal gain.

Such suspicion perhaps seems implied in the phrase 'performance of humility'. Gripped by the pincers of misgiving, it suggests attunement to the stratagems behind self-lessening. This might be a necessary precaution against critical hagiography, particularly when approaching writers whose concern with humility is firmly established in their own work and in scholarly discourse. Given

how widely and sometimes peremptorily Eliot treats the subject in his writings, an unkindly reader might be tempted to reverse his pronouncement on Byron: it is difficult to say whether Eliot was a humble man, or a man who liked to pose as a humble man.¹⁸ In Beckett's case, the sceptic looks warily on those well-worn narratives about the author's saintly acts, or wonders with Nietzschean distrust if the embrace of impotence – reified by scholarly consensus as *the* Beckettian thing – could be a means of asserting strength.¹⁹ Is there not something eminently assured in the deprecation of '*Posthumous Droppings*', the title Beckett playfully proposed for a volume by which posterity might come to know his lesser works?²⁰ Thinking of performances of humility encourages discernment between sanctimony and sincerity, between the 'pharisee's tarantara' and the 'publican's whinge' (*Dis*, 68).

But responding to the performance of humility goes beyond a bad-faith hermeneutics of suspicion. Instead, it means keeping alive an indeterminacy by which humility's dynamism is made perceptible. For an accounting of lowliness must pursue the dialectical tensions that enable the onwads-and-downwads trajectory wherein humility assumes an infinitely specular, infinitely mobile relation to itself. Not in the spirit of Pyrrhonism, then, but with a suspension of belief, I want to outline three ways in which this iterative intensity can be understood, three theories that cast in relief humility's making and unmaking. Two of these – the Aristotelean and humanistic models – make up the first subtraction story discussed above which sees humiliation as excessive and unnecessary to modern notions of humility. The third account, Christian religious humility, takes the two forms of lowliness to be deeply imbricated. What follows does not pretend to be a comprehensive account of theories on humility. Nor are the designations necessarily representative of the way in which the virtue theorists, philosophers and theologians engaged below label their own work. Rather, these categories emerge in proportion to their congruence or incompatibility with what I am calling Eliot and Beckett's low modernism.

In the Aristotelean or realistic account, as the latter term suggests, humility is regarded as a just estimation of self-worth: the humble person neither overvalues his merit nor succumbs to self-deprecation. The pursuit of this mean has its basis in Aristotle's 'great-souled' or magnanimous man. As depicted in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, this is a figure who shuns both vanity and expressions of inferiority, expects acknowledgement level with his (decidedly

his) virtue, and is motivated by honour and not altruism.²¹ He likes to be a benefactor, though resents being a beneficiary. Most importantly, his accurate self-assessment is anchored in respect for truth; he therefore takes fair measure of his worth and works.²² By contrast, both the boaster and self-deprecator fall foul of the mean at opposite ends. The boaster exaggerates his merit, while the self-deprecator wilfully underrates himself. The evil of these two lessers is self-deprecation ('smallness of soul'), judged the more grievous affront for its vulgarity.²³

From this brief sketch, it should already be clear that Aristotelian magnanimity ill fits Christian understandings of humility. Despite Thomas Aquinas's attempt to consolidate them as complementary aspects of reason and temperance, the two qualities remain incongruent.²⁴ Beckett would have known this from his philosophy primers. Archibald Alexander's *A Short History of Philosophy* sees Aristotle's 'aristocratic' list of virtues as 'marred by significant omissions', most notably humility.²⁵ And from Arnold Geulincx's *Ethics* – a work Beckett recommended 'most heartily' (L1, 329) to his friends and whose axiom of morals ('wherein you have no power, therein you should not will') he identified as key to much of his work (L2, 427, 669) – Beckett copied the sure and succinct dismissal: '*Humility foreign to the ancients*'.²⁶ Though slight, Geulincx's treatment of the *Nicomachean Ethics* conveys his fundamental disagreement with the idea of virtue as the perfection of good habits or as a 'disposition' towards moral excellence.²⁷ He is pointedly critical of the ancients 'abysmal ignoran[ce]' of humility, and is generally dismissive of the utilitarian purposes that govern their moral philosophy.²⁸

Eliot would have been even more intimately familiar with the pragmatics of Aristotelean self-assessment. He read Aristotle in the original and in its entirety, and was well-versed in virtue theory of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁹ Henry Sidgwick, whose ethics Eliot treated sceptically in a graduate paper, was alarmed both by the cognitive dissonance that humility seems to require, and also by its potential to short-circuit civic duty.³⁰ For Sidgwick, true humility demands weighing up one's worth in order to worthily weigh in:

[I]f our merits are comparatively high, it seems strange to direct us to have a low opinion of them. It may be replied, that though our merits may be high when compared with those of ordinary men, there are

always some to be found superior, and we can compare ourselves with these . . . But surely in the most important deliberations which human life offers, in determining what kind of work we shall undertake and to what social functions we shall aspire, it is often necessary that we should compare our qualifications carefully with those of average men, if we are to decide rightly. And it would seem just as irrational to underrate ourselves as to overrate . . .³¹

Another roughly contemporaneous version of this realism is Hastings Rashdall's, who argues that humility should transcend its traditionally 'non-utilitarian' and 'non-teleological character'.³² Despite rejecting the 'revolting picture' of the original magnanimous man, Rashdall's theory operates on the same assumption of giftedness as the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The difference is that while Aristotle attributes this giftedness to an inborn aristocratic superiority, Rashdall more humbly credits luck, grace or a good upbringing. And although the public duty of his humble individual is not dispassionate like the great-souled man's, it is still activated by an awareness of elevated status and self-sufficiency. Such a view explains in part why Eliot saw parallels between Rashdall's thought and Unitarianism, the faith of his own family that Eliot denounced as 'bad preparation for brass tacks like birth, copulation and death, hell, heaven and insanity' (*L3*, 228). Rashdall's position also explains why Eliot, long before his own conversion, ridiculed the theologian's attempts to water down the demands of Christian self-abnegation.³³

Given the apparent incompatibility between magnanimity and humility, virtue ethics has generally favoured the term 'modesty' in its retrieval of truthful self-assessment.³⁴ Modesty more readily speaks to publicly coded conduct and less obviously leans on a lowly regard of the self. It is a civilised trait of those highly gifted individuals who accept their due in good grace while declining to trumpet their own achievements. Adopting a modest but evaluative conception of self allows us to appreciate our accomplishments in relation to others' and so direct our talents where most needed. With this comes the avoidance of false humility. Like Sidgwick, Norvin Richards rejects negative self-valuations and suggests that it would be specious for the 'rather splendid among us' to subject ourselves to unwarranted abasement.³⁵ In his turn, Aaron Ben-Ze'ew proposes a comparative framework that allows us to regard our worth as similar to – though not the same as – that of others.³⁶ And, more recently, Steven Connor has claimed for humility a concomitant 'magnificence', since the act of giving way presupposes 'grandeur, authority, or power'.³⁷

Though turning himself to noble ends, the great-souled man does not have humble beginnings.

Such privilege is unknown to Beckett's moribunds: lowliness is their station in life, not a goal to which they can aspire.³⁸ For instance, when Watt is struck by a maliciously cast rock and carries on without fuss, the narrator remarks that 'he deserved no credit for this' (W, 25). We are to infer that Watt's self-minimising manner can neither be understood as disrupting the *lex talionis*, nor as the ingathered force of indignation. Such 'credit' is due either to those who turn the other cheek or those who, in the ominous words of 'Sonnet 94', 'have power to hurt and will do none'.³⁹ This general incompatibility notwithstanding, we find in Beckett also a more pointed rejection of Aristotelean magnanimity. As mentioned earlier, the magnanimous man likes to do good deeds but cringes at the prospect of the charitable gesture. Indebtedness, after all, marks the inferior, which is why the *megalo-psychos* 'repay[s] benefits with interest'.⁴⁰ Beckett travesties this moral economy in various ways. I return to this matter in Chapter 4, though it is worth mentioning a few examples here. Malone is grateful that his 'aphony' (TN, 263) has spared him the humiliation of being able to ask someone for a favour. In *Rough for Theatre I*, a man is horrified by the prospect of being done 'a service for nothing' (CDW, 231) and seeks immediately to restore an equitable relation of exchange. Perhaps the most bleakly humorous example occurs in *Watt*, with the exchange of kisses between the antihero and his patrician paramour, Mrs Gorman:

From time to time, hoisting his weary head, from waist to neck his weary hold transferring, Watt would kiss, in a despairing manner, Mrs Gorman on or about the mouth, before crumpling back into his post-crucified position. And these kisses, when their first feverish force began to fail, that is to say very shortly following their application, it was Mrs Gorman's invariable habit to catch up, as it were, upon her own lips, and return, with tranquil civility, as one picks up a glove, or newspaper, let fall in some public place, and restores it with a smile, if not a bow, to its rightful proprietor. So that each kiss was in reality two kisses, first Watt's kiss, velleitary, anxious, and then Mrs Gorman's, unctuous and urbane. (W, 120)

In a clear effort to resist the dues of love, Mrs Gorman repays Watt's awkward affection with the lofty meekness of the great-souled. Her genteel alchemy transforms intimacy into courtesy,

fumbling into refinement, vulnerability into self-sufficiency. These oppositions are clinched in the half-rhyme heard between 'anxious' and 'unctuous'. Grotesque though they seem, Watt's kisses are attended by the awful daring of a moment's surrender, the heart-stopping uncertainty of giving yourself away. But Mrs Gorman's kisses politely decline love's equality: they are 'unctuous' not only because smug, but also because they effect an unguent separation between giving and getting, between the haves and the have-nots.

Such a separation is alien to humanistic understandings of humility. If modesty is personified in the great-souled man, then humanistic humility's exemplar is Prometheus: not the defiant hero hailed by Romanticism, but that democratising figure in Plato's *Protagoras*. In this version of the myth, Prometheus pilfers fire and practical wisdom from the gods so that humans, in their naked and vulnerable state, might stand a chance of survival.⁴¹ His efforts are impelled by necessity rather than by vaulting ambition or a desire for plenitude. Indeed, the word that differentiates humanistic humility from the realistic assessment account is 'incompleteness'. Mark Button, who prefers the term 'democratic humility', writes that this kind of humility 'cultivate[s] sensitivity toward the *incompleteness* and contingency both of one's personal moral powers and commitments, and of the particular forms, laws, and institutions that structure one's political and social life with others'.⁴² What sets Button's theory and others like it against the Aristotelian accounts is a fundamental belief in human finitude.⁴³ Epistemically, such a view approaches religious humility in its negative valuation of self-worth, though it does not require belief in transcendental dependence. Practically, it deflates notions of individual self-sufficiency in order to facilitate communal endeavour and social change.

Humanistic humility is thus marked by an aspirational quality: the admission of universal limitation should not result in apathy but serve as a spur to better the status quo. Martha Nussbaum's notion of 'primitive shame', for instance, falls into this category, since it suggests our awareness of lack and fragmentation.⁴⁴ In its healthiest manifestation, primitive shame encourages positive striving: recognising our shortcomings, we are driven to overcome them. Nussbaum argues that this longing for restoration to a state of fullness may be turned into a practical value which anchors our march onwards and upwards in the belief that the type of completeness or perfection one craves 'is a type of completeness or perfection that one rightly ought to have'.⁴⁵ Or, as Norman

Foerster (one of Eliot's principal opponents in the humanism/religion debate) puts it: 'An adequate human standard calls for *completeness*; it demands the cultivation of every part of human nature . . .'⁴⁶ Such belief should not encourage a spirit of entitlement or an attitude of complacency (contra the great-souled man). Instead, it is meant to foster a kind of hopeful hardiness in spite of failures and disappointments – failures and disappointments that pave the way for progress. Ideally transmuted, a realisation of finitude enables rather than stultifies.

Humanistic humility is clearly a product of post-Enlightenment subjectivity. While it emphasises universal limitations, it asserts with equal force the inherent dignity of each individual. In short, its impulse is affirmative and its project ameliorating. Given that its theorists are chiefly concerned with promoting egalitarian forms of government and compassionate law-making, it is unsurprising that humiliation is not a complementary aspect of humanistic humility. The reduction of humility 'to a medieval state of self-mortification' is rejected, and humiliation is unequivocally seen as the intentional stripping away of human dignity.⁴⁷ So although sacrifice is an integral concept to humanistic humility, it is always underpinned by the ideals of human flourishing, self-realisation and sometimes even perfectibility.

These words bring to mind the debates around humanism that preoccupied Eliot throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s. Whether under the classicism/romanticism rubric, or in his cultural-critical jousting with Irving Babbitt, Norman Foerster, H. G. Wells and others, Eliot was wary of a too-credulous faith in the human species.⁴⁸ This may be recognised even without considering his post-conversion stance: the early prose variously disparages the humanitarian 'belief in the fundamental goodness of human nature' (*CP*, 471), while the poetry of this period sees Emersonian enlightenment and self-reliance eclipsed in Sweeney's shadow (*P*, 37).⁴⁹ The humanism Eliot opposed is not the kind he admired in figures like Lancelot Andrewes, or his contemporary, Paul Elmer More.⁵⁰ Rather, it is a humanism which sets itself up as an alternative to religion and positions civilisation as the highest good, as we will see in Chapter 3. Underpinning Eliot's well-documented denigration of liberalism and progress is his profound belief in original sin, a belief that was strengthened and sustained by his reading of Dante, Pascal, Stendhal, Dostoevski, Baudelaire and many other writers who were preoccupied

with the problem of evil. One such other was T. E. Hulme, whom Eliot praised in the essay 'Second Thoughts on Humanism' for acknowledging that 'there is an *absolute* to which Man can *never* attain. For the modern humanist, as for the romantic, "the problem of evil disappears, the conception of sin disappears"' (CP3, 621). This distils Eliot's position on the subject: humanism errs in disavowing the supernatural, in harbouring hopes of perfection, in making man the measure of all things.

Beckett's misgiving about just such a measure is neatly captured in Lucky's scatological stuttering, 'the Acacacademy of Anthropopometry' (CDW, 43), while his distaste for humanist striving is intimated by the Unnamable's unequivocal dissociation from Prometheus: 'between me and that miscreant who mocked the gods, invented fire, denatured clay and domesticated the horse, in a word obliged humanity, I trust there is nothing in common' (TN, 297). A more direct and nominally apt gauge, however, is the short essay, 'Humanistic Quietism', published in 1934.⁵¹ Ostensibly a review of his close friend Thomas MacGreevy's *Poems*, the piece really constitutes a lapidary *ars humilis*, a theory on the art of humility. Here Beckett draws the line between pharisaic and publican poems, and also tips his hat to Eliot, however circumspectly: 'To the mind that has raised itself to the grace of humility "founded . . . not on misanthropy but on hope," prayer is no more (no less) than an act of recognition' (*Dis*, 68).⁵² But it is the essay's concluding words that show the countervailing quality of Beckett's own humanism:

To know so well what one values is, what one's value is, as not to neglect those occasions (they are few) on which it may be doubled, is not a common faculty; to retain in the acknowledgement of such enrichment the light, calm and finality that composed it is an extremely rare one. I do not know if the first of these can be acquired; I know that the second cannot. (*Dis*, 69)

The confusing syntax stands in apposition to confused self-appreciation: just as the reader struggles to parse subjects and predicates, so Beckett seems unable to take fair measure of himself. The tone, too, is ambivalent. Something critical or even parodic is suggested by 'doubled', a word that belongs to the objective world of accounting and is therefore out of place in a passage otherwise marked by apophatic expression and quiet resignation.⁵³ In the background, the directive force of Geulincx's

axiom of morals is discernible, particularly if the piece is held up to Beckett's loose translation in *Murphy*: 'to want nothing where [one is] worth nothing' (*Mur*, 107). Reabsorbed and reformulated, the imperative is not meant to assert an abject nihilism but rather a form of negative capability that allows one to inhabit a position of lowliness without an irritable reaching after 'light, calm and finality'. Gesturing towards something almost diametrically opposite to humanistic humility, 'humanistic quietism' implies a radical imperfection which can neither be overcome nor ever fully known.

It is within the third framework – religious humility, and specifically Christian humility – that such radical imperfection is admitted. As a totality, Christian humility is marked by the inversion of a worldly calculus: 'And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted' (Matt. 23: 12). The Gospel verse not only promotes a countercultural attitude but also a countercultural imperative. To modern readers, the King James's use of the verb 'humble' here obscures its synonymity with 'humiliate' – a dissociation that sets in after the Enlightenment, as the *OED* reflects. There is an aptness about the fact that many accounts of humility start with the word's etymology. In thinking through its roots, we necessarily consider the soil of its making. The effect is vertiginous: we have to dig deep in order to make the connection between our contemporary understanding of humility and earlier notions that tie it to abasement. An example of usage from Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) (copiously copied in Beckett's *Dream* notebook) implies the reflexive meaning of the verb 'humiliate' ('to humble or abase oneself'): 'How much we ought to . . . examine & humiliate our selves, & seek to God, & call to him for mercy.'⁵⁴ This captures three aspects of Christian humility: dependency on God, inspection of oneself, and active humiliation or self-lowering. It is during the eighteenth century that 'humiliation' begins to signal an interpersonal rather than intrapersonal act: humiliation is degradation visited by one person on another. By the nineteenth century, a clear definitional gulf had arisen between 'humility' and 'humiliation', with the *OED* supplying the following: 'I think "humiliation" is a very different condition of mind from humility. "Humiliation" no man can desire; it is shame and torture.'

The undesirability of humiliation is at the core of Christian humility: not doing as one likes but as commanded. It is for this

reason that the virtue centres on the notion of kenosis: the God-head's humble submission to a humiliating incarnation. The scriptural basis for kenosis is Philippians 2: 5–7: 'Christ Jesus . . . Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.' In addition to supplying the inimitable example of humility, Christ's kenosis endows the concept of humiliation with twofold significance. It implies a degradation of being (the Word become flesh) but also material suffering: low birth, poverty, death on a cross. For Kierkegaard, the recognition of the first point – kenosis as radical ontological displacement – dwarfs any consideration for the personal humiliations Christ would endure on earth. However, some theologians regard the kenotic mode to be equally determined by Christ's bodily and material humiliations.⁵⁵ So while the incarnation is a unique event (what Eliot calls 'supermiraculous' [*CP*4, 351, n. 24] and thus unrepeatably), Christ's sufferings as a human being supply the template for holy living and holy dying. It is in suffering – not triumph – that Estragon identifies with Christ ('All my life I've compared myself to him' [*CDW*, 51]); it is through bodily affliction that the narrator of *Watt* sees a likeness between the title character and Bosch's depiction of 'Christ Mocked' (*W*, 139).⁵⁶

Like the realistic and democratic accounts, religious humility implies self-knowledge – only here it is distinguished by intense scrutiny, both of one's individual weakness and also of the deficiencies inherent to all humanity. As such, it qualifies the Delphic imperative to know oneself as a unique soul and as a member of the species. Taken together, these two aspects of self-knowledge form part of what is variously called cognitive, imperfect or rational humility.⁵⁷ Superficially, imperfect humility appears to amount to a combination of the realistic and democratic accounts of introspection. Inspection of oneself shares with Aristotelian theories an evaluative perspective, though here comparisons are exclusively negative.⁵⁸ Hence the seventh step of St Benedict's ladder of humility urges the sinner to not only 'denounce himself as inferior to all and more worthless, but also believe it in his inner consciousness, humbling himself and saying with the prophet: "But I am a worm and not a man, a shame of men and an outcast of the people".'⁵⁹ Similarly, while admitting that all humanity is 'weak and frail', Thomas à Kempis urges his reader to 'hold . . . no man more frail than thyself'.⁶⁰ Or, in the ever-unsatisfied comparatives of Beckett's

Worstward Ho (*Com etc.*, 95): ‘Say that best worse. With leasening words say least best worse. For want of worser worst. Unless-able least best worse.’

The second part of self-knowledge is a general awareness of human fallibility. In this regard it appears to correspond with humanistic humility. But where the latter instrumentalises human weakness by turning it into a means for upward mobility, religious humility treats it as the grounds for further abasement. Jeremy Taylor, whose *Holy Living and Dying* both Eliot and Beckett read closely, claims that humanity’s manifold feebleness should inspire a negative self-regard:

1. The spirit of a man is light and troublesome. 2. His body is brutish and sickly. 3. He is constant in his folly and error, and inconstant in his manners and good purposes. 4. His labours are vain, intricate, and endless. 5. His fortune is changeable, but seldom pleasing, never perfect. 6. His wisdom comes not till he be ready to die, that is, till he is past using it. 7. His death is certain, always ready at the door, but never far off.⁶¹

Imperfect humility, however, has a ‘perfect’ or ‘affective’ counterpart, which emphasises the affirmative reinforcement of divine love. As Jane Foulcher explains, ‘[i]t is in the “inpouring of love” that allows the movement from a cold, rational understanding of the humiliating truth about oneself to a warm, affective, and ultimately liberating reality where one is no longer afraid to be known’.⁶² The author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* typifies perfect humility as permanent since its source is everlasting. It also induces a self-forgetfulness that is attendant on humility (Mary of Bethany is exemplary because her imperfect humility is supplemented and even overwhelmed by perfect humility).⁶³ In getting to grips with her own inferiority, the sinner humbles herself; by contemplating the greatness of God, the believer forgets herself. Humility then transforms from thinking less *of* oneself to thinking less *about* oneself.

From self-knowledge there is a clear trajectory to self-lowering – an aspect alien to both the realistic and democratic theories. ‘Once we have understood that we are nothing,’ says Simone Weil, ‘the object of all our efforts is to become nothing.’⁶⁴ In this translation from the epistemic into the ethical – from knowledge to sacrifice – humiliation shifts from being a baseline condition to

a measure by which that baseline condition is rendered yet more visible. In extreme cases this means self-mortification: hair-shirts, self-flagellation, fasting, prostration and other shows of penance. But most writings on humility urge detachment. Geulincx, for instance, advocates 'disregard for the self', which requires the acceptance of affliction rather than the active pursuit of self-harm.⁶⁵ Again, Christ's life stands as paragon: turning the other cheek, living in poverty, enduring extremes of physical and mental affliction – all are instances of humbly accepting humiliation. And, in appreciating the revelation and realisation of humility that comes with such afflictions, humiliation is endowed with positive potential.⁶⁶ Weil again: '[i]t is impossible to forgive whoever has done us harm if that harm has lowered us. We have to think that it has not lowered us, but has revealed our true level.'⁶⁷

Pseudo-Couplings

It is against the background of these positions and performances that I read humility and humiliation in Eliot and Beckett. The rest of the book follows a loosely chronological trajectory with the chapters paired according to three categories: the affective, the ethical and the aesthetic. The first two chapters locate us at the start of the writers' careers where humility is not only in question but sometimes actively resisted. Chapter 1 posits 1917 as a watershed year in Eliot's writing. I argue that with his only short story, *Eeldrop and Appleplex*, Eliot edges away from social embarrassment towards theological shame – that is, a sense of sin. Undoubtedly the least 'canonical' of Eliot's creative works, the story embodies diffusive feelings out of which humility emerges in the lower case. That is to say that in its blurring of grave religious commentary and self-directed mockery, the story refuses to take itself too seriously. Situating *Eeldrop and Appleplex* in relation to Eliot's early poetry, I first consider moments of embarrassment and disgust, and how these affective experiences impede an appreciation of a given situation's moral reality. Contrasted with this is Eliot's valuation of private truth and fixed moral standards, both in *Eeldrop and Appleplex* and in Eliot's criticism. The short story is shown to anticipate Eliot's critique of '*bovarysme*': the effort to dramatise oneself against one's environment so as to not lose face or sink into shame – an act that resists humility.

Chapter 2 explores the relation between embarrassment and pride in Beckett's early works. Juxtaposing personal letters and selected stories from the 1934 collection, *More Pricks than Kicks*, embarrassment emerges as a marker of the superiority Beckett himself regarded as a symptom of his anxiety neurosis. After discussing certain pre-emptive strategies against embarrassment, I proceed to close readings of stories in which we see embarrassment being counteracted through Belacqua's identification with Christ – a manoeuvre that does not confer humility but rather reinforces the character's sense of proud otherness. Beckett's early and incidental embarrassment is then briefly contrasted with the later work's representation of an existential embarrassment. The latter is conceived as an aspect of humility in which the embarrassed human condition is accepted without recourse to self-protective reflexes.

The middle chapters approach humility and humiliation through an ethical lens. Chapter 3 focuses on specific theological reiterations that define Eliot's understanding of Christian humility between 1927 and 1935. It grapples with humility as a component of Christian sacrifice and reflects on the relation between belief and action. The sermon of *Murder in the Cathedral* serves as a structuring device to discuss these statements, both because many of these theological statements are vicariously rehearsed in Thomas Becket's Christmas sermon and also because no other work by Eliot so pointedly dramatises the proximity between humility and spiritual pride. The chapter closely discusses the influence of the seventeenth-century divine, Lancelot Andrewes, and the nineteenth-century philosopher, F. H. Bradley – two authors who played a determining role in Eliot's conception of humility and his scepticism about human good will. It also expounds the significance of a hitherto unexamined biblical source for the sermon's verses of scripture that further threads the continuity between grace, humility and good will. In circling around recurring phrases and influences, I trace a conceptual genealogy behind the play's sermon and offer a revaluation of *Murder in the Cathedral* as the creative culmination of Eliot's ongoing engagement with secular humanism and, by extension, humanistic humility.

Chapter 4 worries the ethics of approaching others' humiliation. Here, humiliation manifests as an individuating property in Beckett's writing: the thing that 'mobilises' his creatures and

also confers identity. In the first instance, this invites meta-critical reflection on the dangers of overly familiar narratives and concepts in Beckett studies. With close reference to *Molloy*, humiliation is subsequently explored as an ontologically determining phenomenon that should preclude the conflation and consolidation of private suffering. A final section draws more broadly on Beckett's mistrust of charity and posits humility as an important ethical criterion when dealing with the suffering of others.

The last two chapters are concerned with aesthetic humility. Where the earlier discussions address different ways in which humility might be represented, I am here specifically interested in the poetics of humility: how does a literary text humble itself? By engaging works produced at the height of the writers' respective powers and fame, these chapters confront the fact that a residuum of power is retained in the act of self-lowering. Any performance speaks to a measure of agency even where that agency drives towards its own diminishing. And in this regard, humility implies a paradoxical performance of subjectivity. Chapter 5 therefore tests Eliot's claim that 'humility is endless' (*PI*, 188) against the parodic and ironic procedures of *East Coker*. It explores the ways in which the poetry can be said to question its own assumptions and undermine its own importance. Humility is thus closely allied with the poet's self-ironising confrontation with his own work. In particular, Eliot's allusive relationship with Yeats configures as part of a master-apprentice dialectic that at once critiques Eliot's early works and unsettles the late work as a basis for such critique. Chapter 6 proceeds along similar lines, asking how a 'syntax of penury' is operational in *How It Is*. Broadly, this question pertains to Beckett's engagement with his own writing and delineates a scepticism in *How It Is* about old foundations and new turnings. The chapter considers three aspects of the novel: its impoverished style, its self-critical appropriation of earlier works in the Beckett canon and what we are to make of the text's endless cruelties. I argue that the novel's textual penury facilitates humility in its resistance to a totalising poetics of impotence.

Lest this overview and its categorical correspondences suggest more than a complementary association between the authors, I conclude by offering a final caveat about the separation between Eliot and Beckett in this book. In his biography of Beckett, Anthony Cronin provides a suggestive if erroneous point of contact between the two authors: that *Dream of Fair to Middling Women's* allusion to

the English mystic, Julian of Norwich, arrived via *Little Gidding*.⁶⁸ Notwithstanding the fact that Beckett's novel was written in 1931 and Eliot's poem a decade later, this alternative textual archaeology telescopes something of the differences and affinities between the two authors. In *Little Gidding*, Eliot weaves the English mystic's 'Sin is Behovely' into the purgatorial yet affirmative vision of his poem (*PI*, 207). Much less reverentially, Beckett transplants the phrase into a profane context of sexual desire in *Dream* (9), while in his '*Dream* Notebook' he went a step further, editorialising Julian's stigmatic experience as 'Eschatological catamenia' (*DN*, 59) – that is, menstrual flow. What brings Eliot and Beckett together through this allusion is a fundamental belief in fallenness: sin and its wages are behovely, inescapable. What divides them is the way in which they assert their view of humanity's lowly position. For Eliot, it is mostly a question of one's relation to God; for Beckett, it is a matter of self-emptying. Though of a similar species, the way up and the way down are not the same.

Notes

1. *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, dir. Terry Jones (1979; UK: Paramount Home Entertainment, 2003), DVD, my italics.
2. I return to these objections in Chapter 3.
3. A recently released report on the 1969 Nobel Committee's deliberations shows that the strongest opposition to Beckett's nomination came from Anders Österling. He asserts that even when given the broadest possible interpretation, Nobel's will limits the criteria to works of literature that 'can be used to help and benefit humanity' – an 'element . . . missing in Beckett's work'. Anders Österling, 'Yttrande av Herr Österling', in 'Utlåtande av Svenska Akademiens Nobelkommitté, 1969', compiled by Anders Ryberg, 10–11, Swedish Academy Archive. https://www.svenskaakademien.se/sites/default/files/nobelkommittens_utlatande_1969.pdf. My thanks to both Madeleine Broberg from the Swedish Academy, who supplied me with this report, and to Ellinor Mattsson for her kind assistance with the translation.
4. Alfred Nobel, 'Testament', 27 November 1895. <https://www.nobel-prize.org/alfred-nobel/full-text-of-alfred-nobels-will-2/>.
5. After his arrest on the apparent charge of offending public decency, Molloy (*TN*, 20) remarks: 'It is indeed a deplorable sight, a deplorable example, for the people, who so need to be encouraged, in their bitter toil, and to have before their eyes manifestations of strength only, of courage and of joy, without which they might collapse, at

- the end of the day, and roll on the ground.' I return to Beckett's disruption of normative conceptions of the good and beautiful in Chapter 4.
6. George Steiner, *On Difficulty and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 40.
 7. Truncated into a motto, the phrase is taken from Beckett's *Worstward Ho*: 'Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better' (*Com etc.*, 81). Swiss tennis player Stan Wawrinka has the full quotation tattooed on his left forearm. For the picture of Harry Styles and his copy of *'The Waste Land' and Other Poems*, see <https://twitter.com/styleslookbook/status/1199782010643976193>.
 8. Rachel Potter and David Trotter, 'Low Modernism: Introduction', *Critical Quarterly* 46.4 (2004): iii.
 9. The authors continue: 'The idea that the obscene or low bits of modernism are disconnected from the world challenges one model of interpretation, which sees modernist texts as defined by their imposition of cultural hierarchies onto the low facts of modern life.' Potter and Trotter, 'Low Modernism', iii–iv.
 10. The modern definition of humiliation is discussed below in the section on Christian humility under 'Performances of Humility'.
 11. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 22.
 12. To name a few studies representative of this turn: Anthony Cuda, *The Passions of Modernism: Eliot, Yeats, Woolf, and Mann* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010); Arthur Rose, *Literary Cynics: Borges, Beckett, Coetzee* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); Ben Hutchinson, *Lateness & Modern European Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Justus Nieland, *Feeling Modern: The Eccentricities of Public Life* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Barry Sheils and Julie Walsh, *Shame and Modern Writing* (Routledge, 2018).
 13. Paul Saint-Amour, 'Weak Theory, Weak Modernism', *Modernism/modernity* 25.3 (2018): 443.
 14. In this regard, Marianne Moore's understanding of humility as defence is instructive: 'Humility . . . is armor, for it realizes that it is impossible to be original, in the sense of doing something that has never been thought of before.' Moore, 'Humility, Concentration, and Gusto', in *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, ed. and intro. Patricia C. Willis (New York: Viking, 1986), 420–1.
 15. Jeredith Merrin's fine study, *An Enabling Humility: Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, and the Uses of Tradition* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), deserves mention, though it is not concerned with formulating humility as an aesthetic category.

16. Lionel Trilling, 'On the Teaching of Modern Literature', in *The New York Intellectuals Reader*, ed. Neil Jumonville, 223–42 (New York: Routledge, 2007), 241.
17. This can be gauged by considering three very different points of view. For Martin Luther, humility can never know itself as such without transforming into pride – a result predicated on eventual stasis and satisfaction, and thus not endless (*The Annotated Luther, Volume 4: Pastoral Writings*, ed. Mary Jane Haemig [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016], 334–5). For Gabriel Marcel, Eliot's contemporary, it can remain intact only so long as it is not regarded as a 'possession' (*Being and Having*, trans. Katharine Farrer [Westminster: Dacre Press, 1949], 159). And the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* – from whose chapter on 'a stirring to meekness' Eliot directly quotes in *Little Gidding* (PI, 208) – asserts that human efforts at humility ('imperfect humility') can never find fulfilment without divine Love ('perfect humility') (see James Walsh, 'Introduction', *The Cloud of Unknowing* [New York: Paulist Press, 1981], 64–7).
18. 'It would be difficult to say whether Byron was a proud man, or a man who liked to pose as a proud man . . .' (CP5, 432).
19. See 'Arrow' 31 in *Twilight of the Idols*: 'A worm will twist back on itself when it is stepped on. In the language of morality: *humility*.' Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman; trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 160.
20. Beckett (*L2*, 446) writes to Jérôme Lindon in 1954 about the republication of *Mercier and Camier*: 'I really could not bear it if that text were released in my imitation lifetime. It can always take its place, if you really want it, in a volume to be entitled *Posthumous Droppings*, together with all the false starts for example . . .' Christopher Ricks identifies the a similarly proud downplaying in Beckett's title, *Film*, and in Eliot's decision to label some of his works as 'Minor Poems'. See Ricks, *Decisions and Revisions in T. S. Eliot* (London: British Library and Faber and Faber, 2003), 14.
21. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. and ed. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 32, 68.
22. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 33.
23. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 72.
24. 'Humility restrains the appetite from aiming at great things against right reason while magnanimity urges the mind to great things in accord with right reason. Hence it is clear that magnanimity is not opposed to humility: indeed they concur in this, that each is according to Right reason.' Aquinas quoted in Howard J. Curzer, 'Aristotle's Much Maligned Megalopsychos', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*

- 69.2 (1991): 148. For further discussion of irreconcilability of humility and ancient virtue, see also Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Third Edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 149. Equating ancient Cynicism and Christian humility, Michel Foucault points to an exception and draws parallels between Christian humility and Cynic humiliation. See *The Courage of the Truth (The Government of Self and Others II): Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983–1984*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 262. Possibly one of the most striking compromises between humility and magnanimity occurs in a sermon by one of Augustine's most famous translators, E. B. Pusey, who equates the former with the foundations of a beautiful building ('sunk deep, unseen, unhonoured, in the earth') and the latter with the structure's 'high glorious canopy'. 'Blessed Are the Meek': A Sermon, Preached at the Opening of the Chapel of Keble College (London: Rivingtons, 1876), 20–1.
25. Arch. B. D. Alexander, *A Short History of Philosophy* (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1907), 74–5.
 26. Arnold Geulincx, *Ethics: With Samuel Beckett's Notes*, trans. Martin Wilson; ed. Han van Ruler, Anthony Uhlmann and Martin Wilson (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2006), 337, 311.
 27. Beckett took down Geulincx's argument against the understanding that virtue results from a certain disposition. See Geulincx, *Ethics*, 318–19.
 28. Geulincx, *Ethics*, 167.
 29. At Oxford in 1914, Eliot read Aristotle under the tutelage of Harold Joachim, one of the day's most formidable scholars of ancient Greek philosophy. During this period 'Aristotle entered [Eliot's] bloodstream', Robert Crawford remarks. Crawford also notes that Eliot attended all of Joachim's lectures on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Crawford, *Young Eliot: From St Louis to The Waste Land* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2015), 215. Eliot offered to send his notes on these lectures to his former Harvard professor, J. H. Woods (see *LI*, 74, 91, 98).
 30. Cf. Tony Milligan's much more recent discussion of the 'moral-cognitive failure' in both over- and underestimation. 'Murdochian Humility', *Religious Studies* 43.2 (2007): 220. And for an outlier among theories of modesty, see Julia Driver's ignorance account: 'The Virtues of Ignorance', *The Journal of Philosophy* 86.7 (1989): 373–84. For Eliot's graduate paper on Sidgwick, see *CP1*, 147–64.
 31. Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, Seventh Edition (London: Macmillan and Co., 1907), 334–5.
 32. Hastings Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil: A Treatise on Moral Philosophy, Volume 1* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 204.

33. Rashdall would later oppose Christian humility with more force: 'There is something singularly grotesque in the notion of a man being humble because, though he could not see any essential beauty or excellence in it, he had received a supernatural communication of the fact that he ought to be humble.' Hastings Rashdall, *Conscience and Christ: Six Lectures on Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), 249. Eliot's review of this book constitutes the most acerbic piece of writing he would do for the *International Journal of Ethics*; see CP1, 428–9.
34. See, for instance, G. Alex Sinha, 'Modernising the Virtue of Humility', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 90. 2 (2012): 265; Daniel Statman, 'Modesty, Pride and Realistic Self-Assessment', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 42.169 (1992): 429. See also Nancy E. Snow's 'selective glimpse' of modesty accounts: 'Theories of Humility: An Overview', in *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Humility*, ed. Mark Alfano, Michael P. Lynch and Alessandra Tanesini (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 9–25. And for the separation between humility and modesty in early modern contexts, see Jennifer Clement, *Reading Humility in Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 3: '[H]umility differs from modesty and meekness in that it is usually invoked as a virtue that helps the soul understand its relationship to God first of all, and only then to other people. In contrast, modesty and meekness tend to be primarily invoked towards other humans.'
35. Norvin Richards, *Humility* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 2.
36. Aaron Ben-Ze'ew, 'The Virtue of Modesty', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30.3 (1993): 235. One of the subtlest critiques of the magnanimous man's sense of specialness occurs in William Empson's *Some Versions of Pastoral*. Towards the end of his introduction, Empson ventriloquises an artist who sets himself the task of venturing from his privileged enclave to the experience of the common man. 'I must imagine [the simple person's] way of feeling because the refined thing must be judged by the fundamental thing, because strength must be learnt in weakness . . .' When Empson again assumes his own voice, he remarks on the inescapable condescension of this attitude which serves to stratify rather than to level out. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 22–3.
37. Steven Connor, *Giving Way: Thoughts on Unappreciated Dispositions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 7.
38. Even if Beckett's characters are not possessed of sufficient agency to enact Aristotelean magnanimity, Beckett himself was. Having received from James Joyce the paltry payment of 250 francs and five

- old ties for several hours of taxing proofreading, Beckett made no fuss: 'It is so much simpler to be hurt than to hurt' (*LI*, 574).
39. William Shakespeare, *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 569.
 40. Beckett was not above dramatising the pusillanimous also. In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir's thoughts about helping the fallen Pozzo are shown up as cynical and exploitative: he offers aid '[i]n anticipation of some tangible return' (*CDW*, 74).
 41. After Prometheus' theft, humans still require two essential qualities to govern civilly; Zeus eventually obliges: 'To all [give shame and justice] . . . and let all have a share. For cities would never come to be if only a few possessed these . . . And establish this law as coming from me: Death to him who cannot partake of shame and justice, for he is a pestilence to the city.' Plato, *Protagoras*, in *Complete Works*, ed. by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 758.
 42. Mark Button, "'A Monkish Kind of Virtue"? For and Against Humility', *Political Theory* 22 (2005): 841, my emphasis.
 43. Two book-length studies that fall into this camp are Julie E. Cooper, *Secular Powers: Humility in Modern Political Thought* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013); and Jeanine Grenberg, *Kant and the Ethics of Humility: A Story of Dependence, Corruption and Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
 44. Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 336.
 45. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, 184.
 46. Norman Foerster, *American Criticism: A Study of Literary Theory from Poe to the Present* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928), 241, author's emphasis. Eliot considered Foerster to be humanism's 'fugleman' (*CP4*, 227) and that his book *American Criticism* 'states the general humanistic position' (*L4*, 284).
 47. Grenberg, *Kant and the Ethics*, 190. For a notable exception, see Paul Saurette, *The Kantian Imperative: Humiliation, Common Sense, Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2005).
 48. I discuss Eliot's ongoing engagement with humanism in Chapters 1 and 3.
 49. Compare also Eliot's early attack on the 'fallacy of Progress' and the 'fallacy of the Relativity of Knowledge' in *CP1*, 94–5.
 50. See *CP2*, 819; *CP1*, 406–8.
 51. Turning also to nominally relevant scholarship, it is telling that none of the essays collected in *Samuel Beckett: A Humanistic Perspective*, ed. Morris Beja, S. E. Gontarski and Pierre Astier (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), offers an outright link between Beckett and humanism.

52. Beckett quotes from Thomas MacGreevy's *Thomas Stearns Eliot: A Study* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931), 16. Recognising Eliot's religious sympathies though overlooking the hold his New England upbringing had on him, MacGreevy writes that 'even in [Eliot's] earlier poems there were traces of a capacity for self-criticism, for humility, that penitential Catholic virtue, founded not on misanthropy but on hope, that is so utterly alien to the puritanical mind'.
53. My view here differs from that of Andy Wimbush, who argues that Beckett 'wants the poet to be sufficiently aware of his or her own worth and priorities, while still being able to see where both these things might be enhanced ("doubled")'. 'Humility, Self-Awareness, and Religious Ambivalence: Another Look at Beckett's "Humanistic Quietism"', *Journal of Beckett Studies* 23.2 (2014): 215.
54. Though the final listing under this primary sense occurs in 1776, the word had already undergone a change that signals passive and enforced rather than active and self-inflicted suffering. In these examples after 1621, 'humiliate' is no longer unequivocally used as a reflexive verb. For a fuller discussion of usage, see William Ian Miller, *Humiliation: And Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 175–6.
55. "[K]enosis" becomes a metaphor for Christ's humiliation.' David R. Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 60.
56. Mary Bryden astutely remarks that it is 'in a context of pain, violence, and victimisation that a distinction emerges in Beckett's work between the figure of God, and that of Christ. Rather than being blurred with the Father, in a triumphalist Godhead, Christ is overwhelmingly discerned in kenotic mode: emptied, made destitute, and available for suffering of the worst kind.' Mary Bryden, *Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 140.
57. See Jane Foulcher, *Reclaiming Humility: Four Studies in the Monastic Tradition* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 150–1.
58. As Button remarks, 'the humble do not simply acknowledge their limitations or resist overestimating their moral qualities but hold a positively negative view of the self and of the self's moral powers without God'. "'A Monkish Kind of Virtue'?", 844.
59. Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of St Benedict* (London: SPCK, 1931), 27.
60. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, in *The Harvard Classics: The Confessions of St Augustine and The Imitation of Christ by Thomas A Kempis*, trans. William Benham (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1909), 207.
61. Jeremy Taylor, *Holy Living and Dying: With Prayers Containing the Whole Duty of a Christian, and the Parts of Devotion Fitted to All*

- Occasions, and Furnished for All Necessities* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1913), 74.
62. Foulcher, *Reclaiming Humility*, 197.
63. Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. James Walsh (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 154–5.
64. Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (New York: Routledge, 2002), 34.
65. Geulincx, *Ethics*, 29.
66. Cf. Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society*, trans. Naomi Goldblum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 12: 'The lesson Christians are supposed to learn from Jesus' humiliating journey is to consider humiliating behavior as a trial rather than a sound reason for feeling humiliated.'
67. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 6.
68. Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist* (London: Flamingo, 1997), 112.