

## The Limited Edition Unlimited Samuel Beckett's Fugal Artefact

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The act of printing is often regarded as a freezing point. This metaphor is probably as old as the history of the book. A notable example is Goethe's description in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* of the way in which *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* took shape, when all of a sudden the fluid text became "eine solide Masse, wie das Wasser im Gefäß, das eben auf dem Punkte des Gefrierens steht, durch die geringste Erschütterung sogleich in ein festes Eis verwandelt wird" ["a solid mass, like water in a container on the verge of freezing, which by the smallest agitation is suddenly turned into ice"].<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the history of print is also marked by an opposite tendency. Many authors show a different attitude and regard their writing as a process, in which the printed product is only a temporary freeze. For instance, Thomas Mann saw his writing as a constant process of deliquescence and tried to remelt what had become a solid product and to keep productivity in a state of flux.<sup>2</sup> This continuous polarity in attitudes is reflected in different forms of reading. With reference to Samuel Beckett's later prose fiction, Andrew Renton recognizes the petrifying effect of publication, but also emphasizes its fleetingness: "What we read as a published text is a temporary solidification."<sup>3</sup> Instead of focusing on the stasis of the finished product John Bryant calls the reader's attention to a more dynamic concept of "the fluid text".<sup>4</sup> In his typology of literary drafts the French genetic critic Pierre-Marc de Biasi

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<sup>1</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethes Werke in 14 Bänden*, ed. Erich Trunz (Hamburg: Christian Werner Verlag, 1967), IX:585.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Mann, *Über mich selbst: Autobiographische Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1994), 74.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Renton, "Disabled Figures: From the *Residua* to *Stirrings Still*," John Pilling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 167-183; 170.

<sup>4</sup> John Bryant, *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 62.