

**Relics of Bion in Beckett: 'Attacks on Linking' in Beckett's letters; Closed Systems and a Mapping of the Mind in *Murphy* and 'The Grid'**

Between January 1934 and December 1935 Samuel Beckett underwent psychotherapy at the Tavistock clinic with the then little known psychotherapist, Wilfred Bion. Bion has become best known for his work on the psychology of groups, although much of his work, such as 'The Grid', focuses on the development of and capacity for thought.<sup>1</sup>

Bion writes that 'when two personalities meet, an emotional storm is created'.<sup>2</sup> Here, I will conduct an examination of a small part of the emotional storm and its aftermath that occurred when Beckett underwent psychotherapy with Bion during the 1930s. Bion himself believed in the importance of investigating the interaction between analyst and analysand, demanding that we examine 'not the analyst; not the analysand [...] but the caesura, the link, the synapse'.<sup>3</sup> My examination of this link will consider how Bion's thinking, in particular his concept of 'The Grid', resounds in Beckett's novel *Murphy*, and will also touch upon the attempt by Beckett to attack this link in his letters in a manner which pre-empts Bion's later paper 'Attacks on Linking'. As 'The Grid' (1977) was written almost forty years after *Murphy* (1938), just as 'Attacks on Linking' (1959) was written decades after Beckett's letters concerning his therapy (1934-1936), Bion's influence upon

---

<sup>1</sup> Wilfred Bion, 'The Grid', in *Two Papers: The Grid and Caesura* (London: Karnac Books, 1989), 1-34. All quotations are from this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Wilfred Bion, 'Making the Best of a Bad Job', in *Clinical Seminars and Other Works*, ed. by Francesca Bion (London: Karnac Books, 1994), 321-332 (321).

<sup>3</sup> Wilfred Bion, 'Caesura', in *Two Papers: The Grid and Caesura* (London: Karnac Books, 1989), 35- 59 (56). All quotations are from this edition.

Beckett in this respect is inevitably retrospective: ‘*Nachträglichkeit*, or back formation’, as Steven Connor calls it, borrowing Freud’s term.<sup>4</sup> However, even if the relics of Bion in Beckett’s work *are* retrospective, this does not detract from the fact that there is a profound and important crossover in the intellectual pathways of these two men, who also worked together briefly in a therapeutic context in the 1930s. With regards to this time the pair spent working together and the effects it had upon their work, Didier Anzieu, in his 1989 paper in *The International Review of Psycho-Analysis*, asks: ‘was it Bion who taught Beckett the term splitting or Beckett who suggested the idea to his analyst?’<sup>5</sup> The ultimate unanswerability of this question does not detract from the fruitfulness of an analysis of relics of Bion in Beckett’s work, or the importance of the thought of each to the other. Even if, as Anzieu observes, we cannot be clear about exactly who influenced whom, we can still advantageously see their psychoanalytic encounter as a catalyst, a moment of mutual influence which triggered similar intellectual ideas in both men. Or to put it another way: even though, as Jung said in the lecture to which Beckett accompanied Bion during his analysis, the subject I will be dealing with is ‘a domain where speculation is so easy and where proof is so difficult’, I still share Anzieu’s conclusion that ‘Bion and Beckett will each have represented for the other his secret imaginary twin’ and similarly agree with the approach of Victoria Stevens in a recent paper on Beckett and Bion in the *Psychoanalytic Review*.<sup>6</sup> Here, Stevens explains that despite the fact

---

<sup>4</sup> Steven Connor, ‘Beckett and Bion’, *The Journal of Beckett Studies*, vol. 17.1-2 (2008), 9-34 (13).

<sup>5</sup> Didier Anzieu, ‘Beckett and Bion’, *The International Review of Psycho-Analysis*, 16 (1989), 163-169 (in original) (165).

<sup>6</sup> C. G. Jung, ‘Lecture III from The Tavistock Lectures’, in *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, 20 vols (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), XVII, 70-101 (70); Anzieu, (169).

that 'it is impossible to know' the exact ways in which Beckett and Bion influenced each other, it is undeniable that 'the question of influence is fruitful [...] in the context of the concepts and themes that are present in the work of both men'.<sup>7</sup> Shared concepts and themes abound in the work of Beckett and Bion, and beg to be explored. My specific exploration will consider *Murphy* in the light of 'The Grid', and will focus on the way in which these texts share an obsession with 'closed systems'.

Stevens traces the question of influence through the theme of 'Nothingness, Nothing and Nothing' in the work of Bion and in *Murphy*, and there are many other ways in which the symbolic structure of *Murphy* and the thinking of Bion overlap. Similarities could be traced in the realms of the relationship between psychotic and non-psychotic parts of the personality, bizarre objects, the container and contained and a rejection of memory and desire. All of these are evident in both *Murphy* and Bion's work, and merit further exploration. Here, however, I will focus on the portrayal of closed systems, and in particular how they relate to the representation of the mind. I use the term 'closed system' to refer to a circumstance in which there are a specifically limited number of outcomes within a possible situation and the boundaries of these possible outcomes are clearly marked and, often, approached with mathematical precision. Closed systems such as this abound in *Murphy*, and also relate to Bion's thinking, in particular, to his concept of 'The Grid', an approach developed in a paper of the same name first published in 1977. However, despite a shared focus on, and use of, such closed systems (which will be explored in depth later

---

<sup>7</sup> Victoria Stevens, 'Nothingness, Nothing and Nothing in the Work of Wilfred Bion and in Samuel Beckett's *Murphy*', *Psychoanalytic Review*, 92 (2005), 607-635 (610).

in this article), there is in addition to the general intellectual resonances between Beckett and Bion, a great resistance from Beckett to his psychotherapy with Bion, manifested in his letters. As Steven Connor observes, this resistance to his therapy in Beckett's letters, which ended in its early termination, could demonstrate an attempt by Beckett to attack the link between himself and his analyst. Bion himself believes this to be a commonplace occurrence and asserts that when a patient is in a state of mind in which he seeks to attack this link, 'emotion is hated'.<sup>8</sup> And it may have been this hatred of emotion that led Beckett, in turn, to prop his artistic creations upon mathematical closed systems which disallow emotions to overwhelm with their full force. Therefore, even in his rejection of his therapy, Beckett's actions can be traced forward to the subsequent thoughts of his therapist. Alternatively, perhaps encounters with patients such as Beckett were what allowed Bion to develop such ideas later in his career. However, when discussing this matter, it is important to bear in mind that, as Gérard Bléandonu reminds us in his biography of Bion, there is a crucial distinction to be made between personal writing such as letters as opposed to abstracted philosophical thought, such as that expressed in a novel. He writes that 'Beckett was critical of his therapy [...]. Nevertheless, the writer maintained a lasting interest in psychiatry and psychoanalysis'.<sup>9</sup> It is perhaps this lasting interest, which took place on a more abstracted and less personal level, which enabled Beckett to continue to be influenced by and also influence Bion's

---

<sup>8</sup> Wilfred Bion, 'Attacks on Linking', *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* (1959), 308-315 (315).

<sup>9</sup> Gérard Bléandonu, *Wilfred Bion: His Life and Works 1897-1979*, trans. by Claire Pajaczkowska (London: Free Association Books, 1994), 45.

psychoanalytic thinking whilst at the same time being critical of his own personal treatment in his correspondence.

Beckett's letters deal almost obsessively with his psychotherapy during the years of his treatment with Bion. His portrayal of it is one of reluctance and reticence. However, James Knowlson, Beckett's most recent biographer, seems to entirely miss the evident negativity, or the attempt by Beckett to attack the link between himself and his therapist, as he writes that 'his correspondence can be taken as tacit approval [...]. He respected Bion as a therapist [...] and obviously felt that he was deriving some benefit from the sessions', despite the fact there are many instances in which Beckett expresses the precise opposite.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Knowlson states that '[Beckett's] return home gave him the chance to see whether his consultations with Bion had helped him to cope with the stresses and strains that seemed endemic to living in the same house as his mother. In this respect too he found himself much encouraged'.<sup>11</sup> However, Beckett explicitly writes that he does not feel that his sessions with Bion to have improved his relationship with his mother. After he has made his final payment to Bion, marking the end of the analysis, he writes 'indeed I do not see what difference the analysis has made. Relations with M. [Mother] as thorny as ever and the nights no better'.<sup>12</sup> It is important to remember the partiality of these letters, as expressed by Beckett himself in *Beckett Remembering Remembering Beckett* where he states, many years later, that 'I thought it [the therapy] wasn't doing me

---

<sup>10</sup> James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 176.

<sup>11</sup> Knowlson, 185.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1929-1940*, ed. by Martha Dow Fehsenfeld (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 299. All quotations are from this edition.

any good [...]. But I think it probably did help', demonstrating the change in perspective effected by time.<sup>13</sup> Further complications arise when we consider these letters in light of Bion's ideas in 'Attacks on Linking', in which the patient seeks to disrupt and dismantle the emotional connection between himself and his analyst. Bion explains that the patient's thoughts during this attack cannot even be considered entirely his own in a traditional sense, writing: '[g]ratitude for the analyst coexists with hostility to the analyst [...]. The destructive attacks upon this link originate in a source external to the patient or infant, namely the analyst or breast'.<sup>14</sup>

Despite such cautions, I will take the opinions expressed in Beckett's letters as at least some sort of reflection of his feelings on the matter at the time of writing, as is customary when reading letters. At the very least they can be seen as textual reflections, able to be considered alongside *Murphy*, even if they imperfectly mirror the feelings of the man himself at the time of writing. Anzieu buys into the truth of the letters when he writes that 'Beckett's correspondence with [...] MacGreevy, provides some information on his analysis with Bion'.<sup>15</sup> Either way, Beckett's reluctance to continue with his own analysis and the feeling that it is something he is obliged to do is frequently evident in his correspondence with MacGreevy and elsewhere in the letters.<sup>16</sup> From these letters it is evident that

---

<sup>13</sup> *Beckett Remembering Remembering Beckett: Uncollected Interviews with Samuel Beckett and Memories of Those Who Knew Him*, ed. by James and Elizabeth Knowlson (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), 68.

<sup>14</sup> 'Attacks on Linking', 313.

<sup>15</sup> Anzieu, 164.

<sup>16</sup> The following examples are taken from Beckett's letters of 1934-1936, the period during which Beckett was both undergoing psychotherapy with Bion and writing *Murphy*: 'Indeed for the moment I have no choice in the matter, but must remain on here as long as this treatment lasts, and God knows how long that will be, probably more months than I like to contemplate. Anyhow I

Beckett harboured a great deal of negativity and resentment towards his sessions with Bion, and believed in the possibility that the whole experience would be nothing but a joke and a failure. However, we have also seen that in the long run he did acknowledge their benefit, and this, along with his 'intellectual twinship' with Bion, proves that the relationship was much more complex and ambiguous than the picture painted in the letters suggests. Furthermore, the rejection itself may speak of influence: Bion observes that the attack on the link with the analyst often takes the form of a rejection of language (as is demonstrated through his example in the paper of the stammering patient), and Steven Connor traces this in Beckett's rejection of Bion, and his subsequent belief that all good writing ought to take a dismantling of the truth of language as its central function.<sup>17</sup> This process can be particularly seen at work in Beckett's later work such as the *Trilogy*.<sup>18</sup>

---

can't stop now, and dare not if I could' (*Letters*, 189); 'I have hopes of analysis going a bit faster now. If I could get it over by Xmas I'll be crowned' (*Letters*, 222); 'I feel I must go and squabble with Bion, and so I do.' (*Letters*, 247); 'I go on with Bion...histoire d'élan acquis [just a matter of momentum]. I see no reason why it should ever come to an end' (*Letters*, 253-4). When in Dublin in May 1935, Beckett writes to MacGreevy that 'I loathe the thought of returning to London. However, it must be' (*Letters*, 266). This loathing stems from the fact that he must continue his treatment with Bion: 'I don't think I shall go on with the analysis after Xmas. I don't expect the troubles I hoped first and foremost to get rid of via analysis will be gone then any more than they are now. Tant pis [too bad]. I must use me to them [I must get used to them]' (*Letters*, 283); 'If I god myself with all this I cod myself and that is all. It will have been an expensive canular [slang for practical joke]. I have tried to face the possibility of its failing to render the business of remaining alive tolerable, and I have not been able to' (*Letters*, 259).

<sup>17</sup> 'Attacks on Linking', 308-11. The idea that writing should dismantle the truth of language is expressed by Beckett in a 1983 letter to Axel Kaun, quoted by Connor (20), in which he writes 'my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it. Grammar and style. To me they have become as irrelevant as a Victorian bathing suit or the imperturbability of a true gentleman'.

<sup>18</sup> Samuel Beckett, *The Beckett Trilogy* (London: Pan Books, 1979).

Having briefly demonstrated Beckett's resistance to his therapy in his letters, the remainder of my article will focus on the shared symbolic resonances of closed systems in *Murphy* and Bion's thinking, focusing on 'The Grid'. Critics have often observed the repeated allusions to closed systems within *Murphy*. Rónán McDonald writes that 'Murphy's interest in Mr Endon, though comic in parts, is entirely consistent with a crucial facet of his disposition and of the novel generally: his infatuation with closed systems' and that 'it is as if it [the novel] is working on mechanical or clockwork principles'.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Knowlson observes that 'the situation of their room between a cattle market and a prison is not a geographical coincidence. Pens, prisons and cages are found everywhere in the book, picking up the theme of isolation and clausturation'.<sup>20</sup> Stevens likewise observes that in *Murphy* there is 'a circularity and repetitiousness of the movement within a closed system'.<sup>21</sup> I will trace this motif of the closed system, as earlier explained, through *Murphy* and relate it to aspects of Bion's thought, in particular his psychoanalytic tool, 'The Grid', a copy of which is below:

---

<sup>19</sup> Rónán McDonald, *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 76, 77.

<sup>20</sup> Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 205.

<sup>21</sup> Victoria Stevens, 624.



	Definitory Hypothesis	$\Psi$	Notation	Attention	Inquiry	Action	... n
	1	2	3	4	5	6	...
<b>A</b>							
$\beta$ -elements	A1	A2				A6	
<b>B</b>							
a-elements	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	...Bn
<b>C</b>	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	...Cn
Dreams Thoughts, Dream Myths							
<b>D</b>	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	...Dn
Pre- conception							
<b>E</b>	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	...En
Conception							
<b>F</b>	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	...Fn
Concept							
<b>G</b>		G2					
Scientific Deductive System							
<b>H</b>							
Algebraic Calculus							

(The Grid)

The Grid was a system created by Bion to aid understanding of the mind and the analytic encounter, although it was always to be a practical tool for use after, and never during, an analytic session. The horizontal axis shows the use to which

thoughts may be put and the vertical axis shows the genetic development of thoughts. Bion writes that 'the two axes should thus together indicate a category implying a comprehensive range of information about the statement', meaning that the Grid implies that for him the comprehensive range of thought exists within this closed system ('Grid', 3). In 'The Grid', Bion applies this systematising tool to some of his patients: 'I propose to give a factual account of a one-time patient who attended regularly for a psycho-analytic course. I categorise it as a fairly sophisticated account; so I label it F3 [...] I listened intently. (It was directed attention so I call it column 4 row B? Row C?)' ('Grid', 12-13). Bion also tells us that the diagnosis of 'a pathological liar [is] a diagnosis that begs all the questions but becomes more manageable if it is regarded as a definitory hypothesis (D, E, F1)' ('Grid' 20), demonstrating his desire to categorise the mind, and slot its complexities into a system. This is very similar to the treatment given to Murphy's mind in section six of *Murphy*, in which its various sections are labelled and categorised (light, half-light and dark). However, Bion tells us that 'the object of the Grid is to provide a mental gymnastic tool' ('Grid', 27), something to aid the understanding of the mind, rather than a representation of the mind itself. This connects to the fact that at the start of section six we are told this is a description of how Murphy's mind sees itself rather than as it actually is: '[h]appily we need not concern ourselves with this apparatus as it really was [...] but solely with what it felt and pictured itself to be'.<sup>22</sup> In the work of both Beckett and Bion, the closed system is an aid to understanding the thing itself, rather than a substitute for it. Bion is keen to remind the reader that 'the Grid is [...] not a substitute for observation or psycho-analysis but [...] a prelude to it' ('Grid', 33).

---

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), 3. All quotations are from this edition.

As Steven Connor writes, ‘ultimately, Bion’s attempts to generate a reliable mathematical model of psychoanalytic understanding [...] led him beyond systemisation [...] [m]athematics means nothing more than the capacity to make negativity thinkable, to give it a conceptual container’.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Beckett’s obsession with closed systems and mathematical precision in *Murphy*, as will be demonstrated, ultimately leads him to a rejection of the traditional confines of language, itself a closed system. Both Beckett and Bion employ an obsession with the closed system to lead them, ultimately, ‘beyond systemisation’.

Nevertheless, Bion repeatedly emphasises the importance of the use of models (which are in their way types of closed systems) in psychoanalytic thinking and when dealing with specific psychoanalytic situations. He explains that he seeks to provide himself ‘with models for almost any aspect of the emotional situations I can see for myself in that domain where practical psycho-analysis and psycho-analytic theories intersect’ (‘Grid’, 11). His thinking focuses on the ways in which the use of models and tools such as the Grid aid our understanding and interpretation of the mind. This practice is his answer to ‘the problem for the practising analyst, [which] is how to match his hunch, or his intuition, or his suspicion, with some formulation, some conceptual statement’ (‘Caesura’, 44). Bion believes that ‘we have to find some method by which those particular interpretations can be put into an order before establishing which one is to be given precedence’ (‘Caesura’, 46). However, he acknowledges the problem of systematising/categorising when it comes to the individual, writing;

---

<sup>23</sup> Connor, 31.

no terms – ‘autistic child’, ‘psychotic’, ‘borderline’ – are of much use because the experience in an analysis is more subtle, detailed and difficult to divide up into these somewhat crude divisions available to us when we borrow from the practice of medicine, or existing philosophies, or analytic theories (‘Caesura’, 47).

This may be why Bion believes it is essential to observe purely, without memory or desire – ‘we need to re-view commonplace formulations – psychotic, neurotic, psycho-somatic, soma-psychotic and so forth – to consider, from our own experience, what we think those things are when we meet them’ (‘Caesura’, 51). His mapping of the mind onto a closed system, the Grid, is borne both out of the desire to evade strict categorisation and the need to be limited by it. Similarly, in *Murphy*, although Murphy thinks of his mind as a closed system, with distinct sections, he is still able to exist at the boundaries of categories – for example, embodying the bridge between the psychotic and non-psychotic personalities of which Bion speaks. Despite this simultaneous resistance to it, the need to systematise and categorise is clearly evident in Bion’s use of the Grid, and his belief in the importance of models. It is also something that can be observed throughout *Murphy*.

The novel opens with Murphy tied to his chair, in one of the ‘medium-sized cages of south-eastern aspect’ (*Murphy*, 1), and again and again Murphy is found to be living either in a confined space like the garret in the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, or living his life within a system of set and closed rules. For example, when he eats his lunchtime biscuits, ‘he took the biscuits carefully out of the packet and laid them face upward on the grass, in order as he felt of edibility’ (*Murphy*, 61). But even though the order in which the biscuits are placed is of

Murphy's choosing he is nevertheless aware that there is only a certain number of ways it is possible for the biscuits to be eaten:

Even if he conquered his prejudice against the anonymous, still there would be only twenty-four ways in which the biscuits could be eaten. But were he to take the final step and overcome his infatuation with the ginger, then the assortment would spring to life before him, dancing the radiant measure of its total permutability, edible in a hundred and twenty ways! (*Murphy*, 62).

Even if Murphy were to set aside all his prejudices, or in Bion's terms, his memories and desires, the possibilities for eating the biscuits would still only exist within the dictates of a Grid-like system. Similarly, the description of Murphy's position in the chair is full of language associated with limits, or a set path – 'that was the position [...] that was the negation' (*Murphy*, 5), his hands are at 'the utmost limit of their compass' (*Murphy*, 5).

When Celia first appears in the book, she is presented as a set of characteristics, laid out clearly and scientifically, in some ways comparable to Bion's Grid. But this is a mapping of her bodily and physical features, rather than a grid of her psychical and mental ones. When Murphy kisses Celia, 'he kissed her, in Lydian mode' (*Murphy*, 89), showing how even his kisses, his passions, are dictated by unchangeable systems, such as those within music. The augmented fourth of the Lydian mode may suggest expansion, but it is an exact expansion, existing within the dictates of the modal rules and regulations. When Celia moves into the old boy's room, she begins to pace the room in the same way that he used to do when he was living in there. Both of them are 'never still' (*Murphy*, 141) in the afternoons while occupying this space. This suggests there is some sort of

connection between the room and the pacing which, like the Grid, indicates that people's selves will operate in similar ways when confronted with similar circumstances. When Celia comes to Murphy, she brings his horoscope, which has been drawn up by Suk. Murphy describes this as 'my life-warrant' (*Murphy*, 22), demonstrating that he needs this system of reference to conduct his life in the same way that Bion believes the Grid is needed to conduct analysis. But both the Grid and Murphy's star chart are systems to be consulted before the analysis/living, rather than things that determine the specificities of events within the moment itself. As Murphy says, 'the arrangement is that I enter the jaws of a job according to the celestial prescriptions of Professor Suk' (*Murphy*, 26), but Suk does not determine what exactly that job will be. The vague outcome may be fated, but the exact nature of the job's jaws is beyond the dictates of the system. Although Murphy allows the star chart to order his life in many ways, he is also 'revolted by Suk's attribution of this strange talent solely to the moon in the Serpent at the hour of his birth [...]. Between him and his stars no doubt there was correspondence, but not in Suk's sense. They were his stars, he was the prior system' (*Murphy*, 114). This relates to Bion's theories about the limits of categorisations and closed systems, which – as discussed above – he tries to evade whilst simultaneously using the Grid.

The reader is told that Murphy, too, has 'innumerable classifications of experience' (*Murphy*, 43), and that he spends his days 'walking round and round Pentonville Prison' (*Murphy*, 48). He also has a 'surgical quality' (*Murphy*, 52) that indicates a certain precision – recalling, perhaps, Bion's belief that by placing the 'pathological liar' on the Grid he may be better understood and discussed. In the famous section six, we are given a portrait of Murphy's mind as a

systematised place, laid out according to characteristics which could easily be mapped onto Bion's Grid. As I have said, this representation of the mind is not the mind itself, but a mapping of the mind that helps us to comprehend it, functioning in a similar way to the Grid. We see here that the way in which Murphy's mind pictures itself mirrors the closeted nature of the systems within which he conducts his life. His mind was 'hermetically closed to the universe without' (*Murphy*, 69). Like Bion's Grid, Murphy's mind is split into 'zones' that carry out different functions: 'there were three zones, light, half light, dark, each with its speciality' (*Murphy*, 71). In short, we are told that his mind is a 'matrix of surds' (*Murphy*, 72), a sealed womb comprised of irresolvable, irrational numbers. The reference to the numerical is again reminiscent of the Grid's mathematical quality. Murphy's mind is his 'little world' that he longs to be locked in, comparable with the padded cells he so reveres. He believes that

the pads surpassed by far all he had even been able to imagine in the way of indoor bowers of bliss [...] within the narrow limits of domestic architecture he had never been able to imagine a more creditable representation of what he kept on calling, indefatigably, the little world (*Murphy*, 113-114).

Here indeed, the use of a mathematically precise closed system makes that which is negative in the mind containable.

The symbolic climax of the novel is the chess game between Mr Endon and Murphy. Up until this point, there have also been linguistic symbols and hints relating to chess throughout the book; for example, before Murphy speaks to Celia earlier on in the novel, the reader is told, 'the next move was his' (*Murphy*, 21). Chess, self-evidently, is a game that takes place upon a grid where each

piece can only move according to fixed rules, and in which there is a pre-existing set of possible outcomes. In many ways, Mr Endon lives through this chess game, and indeed we are told that much of his life is lived in the same way, under the dictates of a system from which there is no escape:

[f]or quite some little time Mr Endon had been drifting about the corridors, pressing here a light-switch and there an indicator, in a way that seemed haphazard but was in fact determined by an amental pattern as precise as any of those which governed his chess (*Murphy*, 154).

Mr Endon could perhaps be described as the book's hero, or at the very least an embodiment of the desired state of its eponymous hero. And from the fact that his whole existence takes place within a 'matrix of surds' we can see how important this concept is within both the mind of the book and the mind as the book conveys it. Mr Endon lives, literally and metaphorically, in a 'cell' (*Murphy*, 155). It is this mapping of the mind onto a cell-like, grid-like system which is shared by Bion in 'The Grid' and elsewhere, and by Beckett in *Murphy*. As Stevens writes, 'the concepts in Bion's work that are central to *Murphy* all revolve around the following question: What promotes or inhibits knowledge?'.<sup>24</sup> The respective answers to this question are the use of the Grid, and the portrayal of the mind as a closed system, even if ultimately and paradoxically, Beckett's and Bion's use of closed systems allows them to move, elsewhere, beyond such strict confines.

As I and critics such as Anzieu, Stevens, and Connor demonstrate, there are numerous symbolic relics and an 'intellectual twinship' in the work of Wilfred Bion

---

<sup>24</sup> Victoria Stevens , 615.



and Samuel Beckett. Here I have focused on the manifestation of this through a shared use of closed systems in order to map the mind and lay down boundaries and limits for psychological experiences. Given the clearly discernible elements of Bion's thought in *Murphy* – the main work of art created by Beckett during and immediately after the period of his therapy – we might call for an interrogation of the sincerity of Beckett's letters, which imply an adverse reaction to his own psychotherapeutic treatment at the hands of Bion. We are left with the possibility that – rather than the supposedly autobiographical letters – the fictional novel, *Murphy*, may be a more truthful reliquary of Beckett's thoughts and experiences, and Bion's degree of influence upon him, throughout the time of his therapy.