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Disciplinary musings and reckonings

The enabling condition for speculating on the future of any scholarly discipline assumes an assuredness in regard to its place in the world, its content, its method and relevance. These assumptions need not be articulated in order for the discipline to function both as archive, as a contemporary practice, and as a mapping of its future trajectory.

Initially, it must be said that the study of literature has morphed beyond its strict problematic and ventured into fields which have opened up in its networking with other disciplines. Those encounters have been more than productive. On this occasion, this enabling productivity will not be my primary interest. Rather, I will call attention to a different, more challenging, interdisciplinary encounter which, instead of contributing to disciplinary knowledge, works against its functioning.

I will address a number of topics originating in philosophy and (negative) theology and resulting in an impasse that disciplinary knowledge and theory have to reckon with if their work of critique is not to fall short of its mark. My intention, in short, is to show that critical (literary) theory is not itself immune to a critique which questions its very reason for being.

The first topic that will be discussed is the hubris of knowledge. Deriving from this, the next topic will be the bad infinity of scholarly production. Apophatic thinking, as understood by negative theology, will be shown to represent a logical step to take after these preliminary moves. Turning to literary matters, I will contend that a reappraisal of Samuel Beckett's work provides a rich resource illustrative of many of the above-stated issues. My presentation will conclude with the application of this problematic to our contemporary world and with the questioning of the position of our discipline in the present conjuncture.