M
μ
mu
mew
mews
muse
ΜΕΩΣ
The 12th letter of the Greek alphabet fuses, as a capital, with the 13th letter of the English alphabet. Numerically μ is either 40 or 40,000 in the Greek system of reckoning, or 0.000001 (a micron) in modern scientific shorthand. Capital M gives us a Roman 1000 whilst small m does dual service as a symbol for both 'metre' and 'mass'. Murphy is thus already overburdened with meaning potential from the first two letters of his name. Is Beckett playing such a game? Certainly - and more! Where does Murphy live? In a 'mew' - originally a cage for keeping birds of prey. In the 'mew' (the highly marked singular of mews) he hears a street cry - in other words, in the same word, a 'mew'. And Murphy's appearance? He has the eyes of a gull, that is to say a 'mew'. Such is Beckett's muse, or 'meuse' or 'mews' - the holes in language through which meaning escapes. The origin of 'mew'? From the French muer - 'to change'. And underpinning all these transformed 'mus', the authorial siglum - MEWS encapsulating in an English four-letter word all four variants of Beckett's polysemous trident.