

FATHERS, PHALLOSES AND FAILURE

FATHERS, PHALLUSES AND FAILURE:

BECKETT'S FICTION AS A
CRITIQUE OF PATERNALISM

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University

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ABSTRACT

The issue of "failure" in the writing of Samuel Beckett is one critics have turned to again and again. Taking up this issue, as introduced by Beckett in "Three Dialogues," this study argues through a reading of Beckett's fiction of the 'forties and 'fifties that the "failure" of Beckett and his narrators is of a highly specific sort and must be understood in the context of the sociopolitical structure depicted in the fiction. This political structure, which is characterized here as "paternalistic," is much the same as that in which Beckett wrote and in which we read his fiction. Beckett's world as depicted in his fiction, this study maintains, is repressively and violently paternalistic, demanding the conformity and submission of human subjects and leaving no room for difference. To "fail" within this context, as Beckett's narrators do, is to fail to conform to the demands of paternalistic society, and to fail knowingly and deliberately is to form a critique of this society.

In this study, then, Beckett's fiction is read as social critique. His humour is seen as having specific targets and serious implications. Like the parodies and

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Joe Adamson, for being patient, perceptive and un-paternalistic. Thanks also go out to my partner, Leah Solomon, for her support and for the joy she has brought into my life during this year (to speak only of this year), and to our family, Jake and Anna, for living with us.

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A work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself.

Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*

But it is clear that he...is beside himself, for reasons of which we know nothing and which might put us all to shame, if we did know them.

Molloy

INTRODUCTION

The issue of "failure" in the writing of Samuel Beckett is one that critics have turned to again and again. Beckett himself has been quite explicit about what he sees as the connection between failure and artistic endeavour, including his own. In "Three Dialogues," written around the same time as the works I will be concerned with here--the fictions of the 'forties and 'fifties,¹ he states that "The artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world" (15).

But fail at what? Why is failure the world of the artist, and does the artist occupy a different world from the rest of us? Why is failure, for Beckett, something to be pursued (and depicted) in art--a good thing, rather than something the artist must strive against?

I will be arguing throughout this study, through a reading of Beckett's fiction, that the failure of Beckett and his narrators is of a highly specific sort, and very much tied to the nature of the actual world in which the

¹In referring to Beckett's works "of this period," I will be referring only to the English language versions, regardless of whether or not they existed in such a form at that time. I.e., "Premier Amour" was written in 1946, but "First Love" did not exist as such until 1973.

artist lives. This world is in fact common to everyone in Western society, artists or not, and is much the same as that depicted in Beckett's works. Beckett's world as depicted in his fiction is repressively and violently paternalistic, demanding the conformity and submission of human subjects to pre-given, narrowly defined social and sexual roles and leaving no room for difference. This fictional world is seen to arise out of Beckett's own personal context, which he shares with many subjects in Western society. To "fail" within this context is to fail to conform to the demands of paternalistic society, and to fail knowingly and deliberately is to form a critique of this society.

In this study, then, Beckett's fiction is read as social critique. This is not a common reading practice in Beckett criticism. Instead, Beckett is usually read as being concerned with abstract philosophical issues which the critic sees as politically neutral, and/or as a comic author whose humour is likewise politically neutral. While I am highly appreciative of Beckett's comedic talents, I see his humour as having specific targets and serious implications. Like the parodies and satires of Jonathan Swift, which are an "assault on the pretensions, the pride, even the self-respect of mankind" (Brown 179), Beckett's writing demonstrates specific sociopolitical concerns, commenting

upon the world with the intent of exposing its cruelties and follies. For Beckett, this means confronting the alienation Western society creates in its human subjects, who like Molloy are "beside themselves", through the action of the repressive discourses and institutions of paternalism, by which I mean those discourses and institutions which enforce rigid social and sexual roles upon subjects through the agency of what Jacques Lacan calls the law-of-the-father.

I use the word "paternalism" for the most part, though not exclusively, in lieu of "patriarchy" or "phallogentrism" because of those terms' connotations of critical allegiance (and not because I wish to deny the very real existence of patriarchy as the existing social system), and because "paternalistic" has connotations of coerciveness and lack of tolerance for individual difference that apply to the political conflicts depicted in Beckett's work.

"Patriarchy" as a term has been employed by feminist critics in critiquing society's oppression of women, whereas Beckett in his fiction of the 'forties and 'fifties is concerned with the plight of male, rather than female, characters in a paternalistic society. "Phallogentrism" may be seen to have specifically Lacanian or Derridean connotations, and I do not claim any particular allegiance to the critical theories built up by and around either writer. Lacan's theories are used throughout this study, but in politicized versions that

Lacan himself may not have approved of.

These critical approaches are, however, highly relevant to my project. Feminism's assertion of the political relevance of the personal, and particularly of the familial, informs my reading of Beckett and enables me to assert the political nature of Beckett's writing. Likewise, feminism's insistence upon the gender-specificity of experience (which it shares with psychoanalysis) will provide a more adequate reading of Beckett's works than humanistic approaches which ignore gender concerns, and always, specifically, the concerns of women, when speaking of "The Human Condition." I also see Lacan's analysis of the social construction of subjectivity and of the function of the phallus (which pops up, or rather more commonly dangles, throughout Beckett's oeuvre) as important to a reading of Beckett. However, I would like to stress that in using Lacan for a reading of Beckett I do not mean to privilege Lacan's theory over Beckett's own critique. I see important similarities between the two, and Lacanian theory provides me with a way of articulating in different words (that is, reading) many of the issues central to Beckett's fiction. Lacan's reading of Freud offers insight into the politics of familial relations, and his analysis of the function of the metaphor of the Father extends beyond familial politics into language and religion, which are

concerns he shares with Beckett. These critical approaches will therefore be useful in entering the breach without reconciliation provoked by Beckett's art, wherein the world, as Foucault asserts, is forced to question itself.

One small part of the world which I believe should be forced to question itself in relation to Beckett's art is the existing body of Beckett criticism. The first part of this study, then, will focus on the ways in which Beckett's critics misread his works in order to make of them something satisfactory to their own narcissistic desire, according to their personal investments within society in general and the institution of academia in particular. In the second chapter I introduce political concerns into a reading of Beckett's fiction by looking at the violence that is recurrent throughout it and examining the sociopolitical context within which it occurs. The following chapter involves a more general look at how Beckett's fiction examines and critiques the construction of masculinity within paternalistic society. In the final section I attempt to show that Beckett's writing can and should be seen as a political response to the demands of paternalism, with the potential of being socially transformative. I argue that the fiction culminating in *The Unnamable* can act upon the human subjects who read it much as Lacan's discourse of the Analyst does, alienating the reader from

the master signifiers of paternalism which do not adequately accommodate desire, and encouraging the reader to find his or her own, more adequate master signifiers. I choose to look primarily at the fiction of the 'forties and 'fifties because to me it offers the most apparent and relentless critique of the discourses of paternalism, showing their action upon the consciousnesses of individual male narrators who at times nakedly display their prejudices and at others thoroughly deconstruct them. However, much of what I argue can be applied to other works of Beckett's, and at times I make reference to his drama and later fiction.

It is part of my method throughout to quote extensively from Beckett's texts, for two reasons. First, Beckett's narrators often make their own points quite explicitly, and more eloquently than I could make them for them. Second, Beckett criticism too often takes the form of pages and pages of generalizations by the critic with little support drawn from Beckett's texts themselves. I feel that Beckett's fiction challenges many of the foundations upon which generalizations are made, and therefore a reading of Beckett, if it is to avoid misrepresenting his work, must pay attention to the language of Beckett's own discourse. I therefore quote freely from Beckett in order to facilitate this and in order to allow the reader to decide if I am misrepresenting Beckett or not.

CHAPTER ONE

The Failure of Beckett Criticism,
Beckett's Failure as Critique

Henceforth...it is the world that becomes culpable
(for the first time in the history of the Western
world) in relation to the work of art.

Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*

The Failure of Beckett Criticism

It is not at all unusual, in recent times, to begin a study of Samuel Beckett by lamenting the deplorable state of Beckett criticism to date (see, for example, Wood 1981; Hill 1990; Harrington 1991). This study is obviously no different in this regard. However, while I do have specific problems with it, I find that much of the existing writing on Beckett is in its own right an interesting object for social criticism as it can be read to reveal the action of ideology upon real human subjects, Beckett's critics. It is of interest as a case study of the strategies used by society, and specifically academia, to repress that which it finds disturbing. This is evident in the ways in which critics interpret (or ignore) the issue of failure in Beckett's writing. Lawrence Miller, in *Samuel Beckett: The Expressive Dilemma*, writes that Beckett's "narrators' self-conscious error demands a critical response: their failure

can be taken as a problem, and various recuperative strategies may be employed to absolve [them] of their failure" (101). The issue of failure in Beckett's fiction, according to Miller, "draws attention away from [the] narratives themselves, and towards the operations critical understanding performs upon them."

The operations of two schools of criticism are of particular interest. The first, and more traditional, I will term "humanist" criticism for the purposes of this study,² and the second and more recently prevalent, post-structuralist. My interest in these strains of criticism stems from the fact that both tend not only to ignore, but to systematically deny, aspects of Beckett's writings which have specific sociopolitical implications, implications which question the positions adopted by these critics. Both schools of criticism do this by means of their investment in and appeal to certain master signifiers.³

Master signifiers are what Lacan terms "identity-bearing words" (Bracher 23). These words represent concepts

²When speaking of "humanism" I wish to refer only to a certain strain of humanist thought that encourages political and critical complacency through belief in a "universal" or "natural" human condition that cannot (and therefore need not) be changed by the action of human subjects. I realize that some versions of humanism are not guilty of this.

³I am indebted throughout this work to Mark Bracher's *Lacan, Discourse and Social Change* for its account of the sociopolitical effects of master signifiers.

or ideals which work to interpellate human subjects by satisfying the fundamental human desire to be recognized and loved by the other, "which at the beginning of life is typically the mother, then both parents, later one's peers, and finally any number of bodies or figures of authority, including God, Society and Nature" (Bracher 24). They do this by functioning as bearers of identity for speaking subjects, offering the subject a socially recognizable identity from which to speak and as which to be recognizable to and acceptable to others, thus granting them a position of seeming stability and wholeness within society. They act as points which "button down" (Lacan's metaphor for this function is of a *point de capiton*, literally an upholstery button) certain discourses for the subject by providing them with an unquestioned underlying concept which grants them validity. For example, academic discourses are granted validity (and funding) through the underlying master signifier of knowledge as a good in itself.⁴ However, master signifiers, in that they can only function within the larger metonymic system of the signifying chain (25), are not in any real way qualitatively different from any other signifiers. The stability of master signifiers is

⁴This is no longer true in the sciences, where academics must generally prove that their research will be of value to industry in order to be granted funding, but remains true of the humanities.

thus illusory, a matter of convention. For human beings to function as speaking subjects in society, however, some master signifiers are always necessary. Without them, discourses lose their meaning and power to represent the subject. But there can be important differences for the subject in which master signifiers she accepts as ego-ideals. Certain specific master signifiers, especially those imposed on the individual through paternalistic ideologies, can be more repressive of the subject's desire and hence more alienating (and Beckett's fiction is concerned with demonstrating the alienating effect of the master signifiers of paternalism⁵).

Humanist criticism of Beckett has tended to speak of Beckett's work as "universal" (Baire 352), appealing to the ideal of The Human Condition, which implies that the failure of Beckett's protagonists and the suffering depicted in his works are "natural," a failure common to us all, and therefore ahistorical and apolitical. David H. Hesla, for example, sees Beckett's "continuing theme" as "simply, the absurdity of human existence" (7). The value placed upon this master signifier in Western society is evident in the decision by the publishers at Picador to quote on the back jacket of their edition of the trilogy a review which

⁵In Beckett's fiction the most important of these include *The Human Condition*, *Public Decency*, *God and Manhood*.

advertises Beckett's narrators as "paradigms of humanity in general." This reflects the cherished Western belief, explicit in such things as the American declaration of independence and the slogans of the French revolution, that we are all not only equal, but also in some way identical in our "fundamental humanity." This ideal of equality also underlies the assertion of capitalists that in a free market economy everyone has equal opportunity to prosper, regardless of gender, class, age or race.

In Western societies this ideal is put into practice in our system of law, and this is one of the ways in which this belief manifests itself in Beckett's work. Early on in his narrative, Molloy is arrested for violating "public decency," his violation being his personal manner of resting on his bicycle, a way necessitated by his physical infirmity:

But there are not two laws, that was the next thing I thought I understood, not two laws, one for the healthy, another for the sick, but one only to which all must bow, rich and poor, young and old, happy and sad (*Molloy* 21).

Those of Beckett's critics who read Molloy as a paradigm of humanity in general reinscribe this law, and affirm the ideal behind the law (the universality of The Human Condition), despite the fact that Beckett's text presents various specific and mutually exclusive conditions under which different humans may exist: healthy or sick, rich or

poor, young or old, happy or sad. Beckett does not affirm the commonality of Humanity In General. He instead parodies the law's pretensions of universality by providing a number of pairs of mutually exclusive terms describing different conditions of human existence, the first terms of which (healthy, rich, young) are associated with prosperity (happy), and the second terms of which (sick, poor, old) are associated with suffering (sad). Furthermore, there is an implicit critique of the law in not recognizing the specific sufferings of certain individuals, and indeed in perpetuating them; those who conform to the favoured first term are left alone, while those to whom the second term applies, like the old, infirm Molloy, are hassled due to their violation of Public Decency, adding to their suffering.

In taking the very specific forms of suffering attributed to Beckett's narrators to be "simply" a common feature of *The Human Condition*, certain of his critics seem to me to be taking a little too seriously Malone's dictum that "It is better to adopt the simplest explanation, even if it is not simple, even if it does not explain very much" (*Malone Dies* 5). The fact that many critics are satisfied with such non-explanations is reflective of the high premium placed within Western society upon such ideals as a fundamental human essence which is seen as guaranteeing the

commonality of *The Human Condition* (despite massive evidence to the contrary), and which in practice is often used as justification for the failure to account for and deal with such phenomena as racism, poverty and gender discrimination.

The second approach I wish to discuss responds to Beckett's work in an ultimately similar way. Although post-structuralist theory makes much of its own resistance to master signifiers and its disruption of hegemonic reading practices through attention to the slippery workings of language, in practice it tends to submit to its own master signifiers. Post-structuralist critics make much of the "unreadability" of Beckett's text. They see the "failure" of the writing as its deliberate failure to ultimately mean anything, which, as it confirms the tenets of post-structuralist theory, is a good thing. In one of the most sophisticated and thoughtful post-structuralist studies of Beckett, Jean Yamasaki Toyama sees Beckett as using "expression to negate itself," "subvert[ing] expression through deception by opposing, contradicting, refuting whatever is represented. This is exactly what happens in the trilogy" (15). This is of course fairly obvious in the trilogy: in the famously contradictory and self-negating ending of *Molloy*, in Malone's explicit use of a methodology of "aporetics" (*Malone Dies* 3), and in the narrator of *The Unnamable's* plan to proceed by "aporia, pure and simple....

Or by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later" (3). And so such a reading is in some ways supported by parts of Beckett's texts. However, aporia and the subversion of expression only work up to a point in the novels. What is there, for instance, to negate or contradict the (fictionally represented) violent and repressive behaviour of Jacques Moran Sr. towards his son? Furthermore, in the instances of affirmation and negation which are so common in the trilogy, what often happens is that the second term supersedes or corrects the first rather than the two terms mutually canceling each other out. Malone asserts early on in *Malone Dies* that he will tell a single story about a man and a woman who later become Macmann and Moll. Supposedly, only one story is needed for both because "there is so little difference between a man and a woman" (3), and thus "there is not matter there for two" (4). Later, however, he begins telling Moll's story from her own point of view, separate from Macmann's, only to stop short because "Unfortunately our concern here is not with Moll, who after all is only a female, but with Macmann" (92). In this instance, it is obvious not only that there is matter for two stories, one of which Malone consciously rejects (but which Beckett will return to in his later drama), but also that there is a difference between a man and someone who is "only a female," a difference which is

decisive as to whose story gets told and whose does not. What happens here, then, is not the action of two different statements canceling each other out, but rather a prior statement being superseded by a second, contradictory statement whose meaning, overt or implicit, remains intact. Toyama's post-structuralist overvaluation of aporia and uneasiness about "the risk of imposing a philosophical sense on [Beckett's] work" (11) results in a vision of Beckett's writing as an ever-multiplying "free play" that, because it is "infinite" (16), resists making any philosophical sense. The assertion of the prevalence of "free play" becomes an end in itself.⁶ And so it must, for its critical use is severely limited. For instance, a political reading of Beckett would be futile, according to Toyama's theory, since any reading would as such be negated. However, post-structuralist criticism, despite its valuation of instability, in practice paradoxically offers the critic her own stable, secure subject position. In demonstrating the ultimate "unreadability" of the text the critic has the satisfaction of her own final dominance and mastery over the text, having precluded the possibility of any other reading.

⁶The use and valuation of such terms as "free play," "unreadability," and "the infinite deferral of meaning" do, of course, have some value as professional commodities in the academic publishing market as well. Poststructuralist studies of literature have been for some time quite publishable, given the intellectual climate of North American university presses since the 1970's.

As Patrick McGee has pointed out (regarding post-structuralist criticism of Joyce),

Calling a book unreadable, after all, is a reading of it; and I would go a step further to argue that it is the most hegemonic reading practicable on a text. The reading that excludes all readings withdraws from the political and social space in which textual productivity is realized in practice (6).

So while what I here term humanist readings of Beckett naturalize political conflict and the suffering that results from it out of existence, post-structuralist readings lose the political in a haze of indeterminacy and infinite free play. Both use their own master signifiers in order to ignore the problem of suffering in Beckett's narratives. One approach tames the fiction's confusion and violence, sloppily reconciling them with platitudes about The Human Condition. The other weakens it by reducing it to the status of "play," the idea of which is treated so ironically at the beginning of *Malone Dies*: "What tedium. And I call that playing" (12). Both approaches serve to offer the critic a secure subject position, either as a fellow sufferer of The Human Condition, or as the master of an unreadable text and a complex body of literary theory.

Both approaches, importantly, satisfy the critic's own narcissistic desire to be recognized and loved by others, including the work of art itself; the fellow sufferer of the human condition imagines himself an object

of sympathy, just like Molloy, for example, and the master of text and theory gains the submission of the text (a kind of love) and the recognition and adulation of her peers. Either way I find myself in agreement with Leslie Hill's assessment of Beckett criticism in *Beckett's Fiction: In Different Words*:

Beckett's critics - despite exceptions - have often seemed too willing to domesticate the author's texts and too ready to recuperate them within well-worn and reductive norms. Set beside the emotional fervour and intellectual disarray voiced in Beckett's own writing, the critical response to the task of interpreting Beckett's work has been, to a large degree, bland and unconvincing (x).

The blandness and unconvincingness of critics' "solutions" to the problem of Beckett's "failure" reflects the inability of the master signifiers of society, including academia, to engage the problem of suffering in the world that is the model for the sufferings undergone by Beckett's narrators.

Beckett's Failure as Critique

I do believe, as both Hill and McGee implicitly argue, that *interpreting* Beckett's work, reading a philosophical sense in it,⁷ is in some ways a worthwhile task for the critic. Textual interpretation as it is

⁷Such a reading need not be an "imposing" of a philosophical sense, as Toyama fears. Any text, existing in a historical and cultural context, will participate in the creation of a philosophical sense, both explicitly and implicitly. Fiction will do this as much as will "theory."

usually practiced, I recognize, is likely to do little more than merely produce new and hopefully better readings of the text. Such an approach has the danger of (over-) valuing new knowledge for its own sake, much as post-structuralist readings over-value aporia or "free play," and thus of accomplishing nothing more than "doing a little better the same old thing, ... going a little farther along a dreary road," as Beckett once put it regarding art whose aim was new and better expression ("Three Dialogues" 17). However, I see yet another reading of Beckett as potentially having more worthwhile results than this in that it has the potential to have (admittedly limited, given the contexts in which Beckett is currently read) socially transformative consequences which I see as more valuable than the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake.

I see Beckett's writings as relentlessly deconstructing the master signifiers that are formative of human subjectivity in Western society and serve to smooth over the existence of oppression and suffering. Therefore I place the "failure" of Beckett's characters and narrators, and of his texts, into the proper context of the social system depicted in those texts, and argue that this failure implies a critique of that social system which is relevant for readers and students today. In exposing specific master signifiers of Western society as shams, responsible for the

repression and psychological and physical suffering of the people who cling to them or live in a society where they dominate, Beckett's works offer their readers the opportunity of rejecting these ideals, and the possibility of constructing others, more adequate to their desire, with which to replace them. For, like an analyst, Beckett exposes the readers (and society's) lack, and confronts it with a void, a moment of silence which the reader must fill themselves.

Subjects entering analysis usually begin by seeking the analyst's love and approval, which, "were one to get it would simply reinforce one's ego ideal by gratifying one's passive narcissistic desire and giving one a feeling of well-being" (Bracher, 69) I have already shown this operation at work in Beckett criticism. Beckett's texts, obviously, are not actual analysts and cannot take reactive steps to counter this situation; the physical nature of a book, as well as the nature of the act of reading, as opposed to talking and listening as in analysis, are such that a reader may easily pay attention only to those pages which gratify his own narcissistic desire, and ignore those pages which refuse to acknowledge it.

Mark Bracher writes of the duty of the analyst:

The analyst must refrain from providing the passive narcissistic gratification that analysands seek and instead help the analysands recognize the alienating

effect of the ideal ego, that is, realize that... all those attributes that they usually take as characterizing the core of their being, are to a significant degree an illusion, a sham, a travesty (69).

This means "recognizing the questionable, relative nature, and the debilitating effect, of certain values or ideals--master signifiers of the ego ideal--that one has been taking as absolute" (71). Beckett's fiction performs in a similar way, depicting the alienating effects of the master signifiers of paternalism (God, Country, Manhood, overvaluation of the phallus), and refusing to gratify the narcissistic desires of the reader (through being the kind of writing a reader can "make sense of," for instance). The ideal result of this is that the analysand finds for himself "a new master signifier that accommodates the previously repressed desire" (73). It is in this way that reading Beckett's fiction can be potentially transformative, but in order to be so it must be read and taught in a way that rejects the complacency of certain of society's and the university's master signifiers, such as *The Human Condition* or *Knowledge For Its Own Sake*. For the mechanisms of the university have proved to be capable of appropriating and taming the most disruptive texts.

CHAPTER TWO

The Sociopolitical Roots of Violence,

Or, If We Are "In a Skull," Then Where's the Skull?

Our world...so stingily admitted to Beckett's work, is nevertheless the essential background for the appreciation of that work.

Ruby Cohn, *Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut*

...already in *Molloy* we can see that in fact metaphysical cruelty is only a fable invented by man in his state of abandonment, a projection of himself, a reflection of all the things that seem on the human plane to reflect it: paternal tyranny and cruelty, all the manifestations of the father-figure in human affairs towards the figure of the son in all its various forms.

Jean-Jacques Mayoux, "Samuel Beckett and Universal Parody"

In order for Beckett's art to force the world to question itself it must in some way refer to that world; that is, it must have some historical and cultural referents. Beckett's critics have rarely argued that this is so, emphasizing instead the isolation of Beckett's characters, to the extent of speaking of the worlds they act in as "skull scapes," or seeing Beckett's art as "nonrelational." For this they can perhaps hardly be blamed, as Beckett's writing depicts the most extreme situations of personal isolation, and his narrators often

draw attention away from their own sociopolitical contexts: "we are needless to say in a skull," says the narrator of "The Calmative," and I suggest that he is only partially mistaken. On the one hand, it *is* needless for critics to say, again and again, that Beckett's writings take place "in a skull"--Beckett's narrator has already said it, but we should be wary about his over-simplification. Beckett's narrators are not "reliable" narrators, after all,⁸ and to take their assertions at face value is rather naive. Nonetheless, Beckett has obviously taken pains to remove historically and culturally specific references from his works. Dierdre Baire recounts in her biography how Beckett excised a line from *En Attendant Godot* which mentions "Bim...[et] Bom, les comiques Staliniens" specifically in order to avoid placing the play within an identifiable historical milieu (426). In the trilogy he uses absurdly fictional place names like "Bally," "Hole," and "Turdy" rather than real place names that would situate the novels geographically.⁹

The result of this is that the political hierarchies

⁸This is so for a number of reasons, not the least of which is their alienation from certain discourses prevalent in society, which they nonetheless try to speak through.

⁹This is not to say that there are no historical or geographical indicators in Beckett. It has been widely noted that the place names and the countryside in the trilogy have a "vaguely Irish" character. Likewise, the existence of such things as bowler hats and bicycles serve to place the narratives historically.

and conflicts depicted in Beckett's narratives are often attributed to conflicting forces naturally present within the human mind itself, presumably those forces responsible for The Absurdity of The Human Condition. In thus naturalizing away the violent political conflicts Beckett depicts, some of his critics have been, to borrow Molloy's words, "rather inclined to plunge headlong into the shit, without knowing who was shitting against whom" (*Molloy* 42). David Hesla places Beckett among a historically recent group of writers who "have tended to look away from people, other people, and the world they live in, and... have looked rather at themselves, and the world which is in them" (125). Beckett undoubtedly does look unflinchingly at the world "inside" the minds of solitary characters, but it is important to remember--and here the value of psychoanalysis to Beckett criticism is clear--that the world "in" the mind is socially constructed through and reflective of experience within a society always already created by others. Moran, while he claims to be "far from the world," asserts that he is also "plunged in it beyond recall" (*Molloy* 151). And when Beckett's most isolated characters like Malone and the unnamable tell themselves stories, as they constantly do, the stories are narratives about other people and the world they live in. The Sapòscats, the Lamberts and Mahood all move about in a decidedly social world, and these worlds

"inside" Beckett's narrators inevitably reflect the world we all live in, with its social and political conflicts. For, says Malone, "I too must have lived, once, out there, and there is no recovering from that" (*Malone Dies* 47).

Hesla denies the specific sociopolitical situation of the narrated others within the narratives of Molloy, Malone and the unnamable by applying to Beckett Heidegger's theory of "Being-With-One-Another:" "These Others...are not *definite* Others. On the contrary, any Other can represent them" (quoted 127, Heidegger's italics). However, certain of the others in the trilogy are of a definite, socially relevant position in relation to the narrators. The appearance of these others in Beckett's fiction cannot be adequately understood as symbolic of a naturally occurring aspect of the narrator's own mind. For instance, The "unavoidable" policemen who keep appearing in Beckett's fiction would be hard to attribute solely to Molloy's (to name only one of Beckett's characters who gets hassled by The Man) own mind, since the signified "policeman" is composed of a number of entirely social signifiers (badge, uniform, stick) and is granted authority through the political institution of the state.

The policeman is an external, regulating force, who monitors the behaviour of Molloy and keeps it within socially acceptable norms through the threat of physical

violence: "I have gone in fear all my life," says Molloy about being questioned by the policeman, "in fear of blows" (28). The threat of violence from an other characterizes many of the relationships depicted in the trilogy: in *Molloy*, Moran both inflicts violence on his son and fears it from Youdi; in *Malone Dies*, the young Mrs. Lambert fears violence from her older husband if she does not make herself sexually available to him. The social relationships described above are paternalistic, with a father-figure (a subject who internalizes the ego-ideal of paternalistic discourses) violently exerting social control over a less powerful other. Moran simultaneously occupies both roles in relation to different others.

The issue of violence in Beckett calls into question the validity of another topic much favoured by Beckett's critics. The prevalence of a Cartesian mind/body dualism in the trilogy is repeatedly asserted by critics without being questioned. The fact that societal norms are enforced upon Molloy and others through the threat of harm to their bodies points to a different reading of the relationship of mind and body. This reading insists that the "mind," the character's subjectivity, is shown in Beckett's writings to be constituted through the social experience of the body, and that a mind/body dualism therefore does not hold. The validity of this dualism is questioned in Beckett's texts in

other ways as well: the assertion that the narratives take place "in a skull" emphasizes the materiality of the bone in the human body over abstract concepts of "mind:" "the body *including the skull*" (*Malone Dies* 70, my italics). The social experience of the body is especially important for the construction of a gendered sense of self, and the experience of Beckett's characters as engendered bodies will be the focus of the next chapter.

The violence in Beckett's work can be better understood as a conflict between different aspects of an otherwise isolated character's self only if it is recognized that these different aspects are the result of that character's living in a society which is itself conflicted as a result of certain of its master signifiers, which repress the desire of human subjects. Society's master signifiers, inadequate to the desires of the individual, are nonetheless internalized by the individual, with the result that the conflict may seem, superficially, to originate from within the individual itself.

Jean-Jacques Mayoux, in an early (1960) essay, argues that the "metaphysical cruelty" suffered by Molloy et al. is in fact "a reflection of all the things that seem on the human plane to reflect *it*: paternal tyranny and cruelty" (78). Mayoux recognizes that this metaphysical cruelty, another name for The Absurdity of The Human Condition, is "a

fable invented by man" in order to (to borrow words of Moran's) "gild [his] impotence," or at least the impotence of those men--to say nothing of women--who are the victims of paternal cruelty, by universalizing it into a mythology of sin and atonement, for example. Malone is explicit that Macmann is "addicted it is true to that chimera" (*Malone Dies* 67). While this fable is at times resorted to by Beckett's characters, this is no reason for his critics to believe in it, especially since Beckett explicitly exposes it as a sham or fable. By attributing his suffering to the will of an other (such as God), Macmann expresses his desire to be recognized by the other, as in Thomas Hardy's poem "Hap:" 'If but some vengeful god would call to me/From up the sky, and laugh: "Thou suffering thing"' (quoted in Bracher 45). However, in these cases the subject is too alienated from the master signifier of God and the discourse of Christianity to obtain the feeling of being both recognized *and* loved through belief in them.

Mayoux's insight should result in an awareness of how paternal tyranny operates "on the human plane" within Beckett's work and of the effects that living under this tyranny has on Beckett's narrators. Instead, Mayoux, like Hesla, takes a critical turn away from "other people, and the world they live in" and into the solitary mind. Contrasting Beckett's work to Joyce's *Portrait of the*

Artist, the centre of which he describes as "the preaching of hellfire and the implanting of terror in the soul," Mayoux writes that "Beckett is almost beyond terror, and he has put the torments of hell back where they belong, inside man's head" (79). He objects somehow to the attributing of "terror" or personal suffering to an identifiable discourse, as Joyce does in the *Portrait*, identifying Stephen Dedalus's torment with the oppressively paternalistic discourse of the fire-and-brimstone sermon which appears near the middle of the *Portrait*. Mayoux, despite his structuralist notions of the dissolution of "what can only provisionally be called [the] self" (79), ironically aligns himself with Heidegger's Heideggerian theory of the self as "Being-with-one-another" when he speaks of the ego as "a terrible nest of vipers, with an obscure They" (80). The obscurity of this "they" leaves "them" as closed to political critique as Heidegger's "not definite others" and obscures the workings of paternalistic discourses upon the subject.

Beckett, however, demonstrates an engagement with these issues which can be seen to grow out of his own personal experience, especially his experience of World War II. In an interview first published in 1961 Beckett stated that the subject of his writing was something he called "the mess" or "the confusion:"

The confusion is not my invention. We cannot listen

to a conversation for five minutes without being acutely aware of the confusion. It is all around us and our only chance now is to let it in. The only chance of renovation is to open our eyes and see the mess (quoted in Hesla 6).

The rhetoric of this statement, were not Beckett widely supposed to be concerned only with aesthetic and abstract issues, could be that of a social reformer. Beckett identifies something--the mess or confusion--that is wrong in the world. He sees it as widespread, and manifested in discourse (conversation). What is more, Beckett the renowned pessimist even admits of a chance of "renovation." Still more, he intimates that his own work is actually motivated by this very chance for amelioration. Beckett's expressed method also hints at Lacan's discourse of the analyst, revolving around the necessity of identifying "the mess," which as it is manifest in discourse must be comprised of certain signifiers, and acknowledging its debilitating effect.

Elsewhere in the same interview Beckett makes even more explicit the connection between his writing and social conditions in the world:

At a party an English intellectual--so called--asked me why I write always about distress. As if it were perverse to do so!... I left the party as soon as possible and got into a taxi. On the glass partition between me and the driver were three signs: one asked for help for the blind, another help for the orphans, and the third for relief for the war refugees. One does not have to look for distress. It is screaming at you even in the taxis

in London (quoted in Cochran 100-101).

Statements such as this are obviously incompatible with the notion, expressed in J. E. Dearlove's *Accommodating the Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Nonrelational Art*, of "Beckett's unremitting efforts to find a literary shape for the proposition that perhaps no relationships exist between or among the artist, his art, and an external reality" (vii). Dearlove relies heavily upon "Three Dialogues" to demonstrate Beckett's intentional "unremitting efforts" to examine in his art the lack of relation between art and artist.¹⁰ There Beckett writes that the artist must make "a new term of relation" out of the "acute and increasing anxiety of the relation itself" (21). I read this as indicative of Beckett's concern with the human subject's alienation from certain pre-existent discourses, which because they are involved in the subject's social formation are present in her every attempt at representation, including (and especially, for Beckett) artistic endeavor. He sees this alienation as "acute" in the world and in the artist who lives in the world, and thus as the most responsible subject for art: "The only chance for renovation is to open our eyes and see the mess." Relationships do

¹⁰ I trust that the contradiction inherent in relying upon Beckett's intentions to demonstrate the lack of relationship between himself and his art does not need much spelling out

exist between the artist's experience of reality, screaming at him in the taxis of London, and his art, and not only is Beckett explicitly conscious of this fact, but an attentive reading of his fiction makes consciousness of it inescapable for the reader as well.

Beckett was far from incapable of being politically motivated. It is widely known that he risked his own life as part of the resistance during the Nazi occupation of France in World War II (see Baire 302-20). He wrote the trilogy fresh with the knowledge that his close friend Paul Léon had been murdered as a Jew by the Nazis during the war,¹¹ and I believe that a reading of *Watt* or *Molloy*, or the other works written around this time, will bear up the assertion that a substantial part of "the mess" that Beckett says we must open our eyes to is the violence of Western society, as particularly manifest during Beckett's time in

¹¹Baire writes that 'Léon's incarceration was just one of the events which led to Beckett's abandonment of neutrality: "I was so outraged by the Nazis, particularly by their treatment of the Jews, that I could not remain inactive," he said. Long after the war, when an interviewer asked Beckett why he had taken an active political stand, he replied, "I was fighting against the Germans, who were making life hell for my friends, and not for the French nation" He was being consistent in his apolitical behaviour' (308). In saying that Beckett was behaving apolitically Baire is emphatically wrong (even according to her own implied, overly narrow definition of "political" which recognizes only nationally-identified struggle). Beckett was behaving utterly politically in fighting against the Germans and for the Jews, and against what the Nazis represent--the socially sanctioned authority to make others, arbitrarily defined as such, suffer. The fact that he was not fighting for the French nation may be due to the fact that he recognized the same mindset as the Nazis in the French, many of whom were actively complicit with the Nazis during the German occupation, a fact which, according to Baire, pained and disgusted Beckett (ibid).

the mess of the War. *Mercier and Camier*, the most bitter and forthright of Beckett's novels, contains "several comments on the insanity of warfare" (Ben-Zvi, *Samuel Beckett* 72), and its critique of the ideals of patriotism and patriotic violence can be found in Beckett's other novels as well. In *Molloy* Mrs. Loy, or Lousse, mourns her "dear departed, fallen in defence of a country that called itself his and from which in his lifetime he never derived the smallest benefit, only insults and vexations" (43). The living conditions during wartime extend to the peacetime of Beckett's narratives. Baire writes that during the Nazi occupation, "All around Beckett senseless arrests and killings were commonplace" (308), and this is echoed by senseless arrests and killings in *Molloy*.

Beckett, unlike Camus in *The Plague*,¹² is concerned with opening his eyes to the violent nature of his own society, indeed of all of Western society (this would go some ways towards explaining the systematic lack of specific historical and geographical indicators starting with *Watt*). Aware that the mess is "all around us," Beckett does not attribute the world's violence and cruelty to foreign others, easily separated from oneself. His fiction from

¹²In Camus' allegory the Nazis are changed from human beings into a disease carried by rats. Fascism thus becomes something that originates from outside of human society.

Watt on is filled with domestic agents of paternal violence: police officers, good bourgeois Christians, even his own disempowered narrators. This violence is not merely a desperate reaction to The Absurdity of The Human Condition, but exists within a specific social context, that of the paternalistic discourses of Western society. As Ruby Cohn puts it, "It is, finally, to blows on the head, trunk, and buttocks that Beckett reduces the vast areas of learning of the European University tradition" (4).

The presence of brutal and often graphic violence in Beckett's fiction has never been adequately discussed, despite the fact that it is a recurrent motif throughout Beckett's fiction of the 'forties and 'fifties--that portion of his oeuvre which has received the greatest amount of critical commentary. Generally it is ignored entirely, or at best explained away as comic "slapstick," despite the fact that its brutality is often emphasized at the expense of its comic effect, and despite the fact that it occurs within an explicitly defined social context. An example from *Watt* follows:

Though not a timorous woman, as a rule, thanks to her traditions, catholic and military, Lady McCann preferred to halt and wait, leaning on her parasol, for the distance between [her and Watt, whose manner of walking offends her] to increase. So, now halting, now advancing, she followed the high stamping mass [Watt], at a judicious remove, until she came to her gate. Here, faithful to the spirit of her cavalier ascendants, she picked up a stone

and threw it, with all her might, which, when she was roused, was not negligible, at Watt. And it is to be supposed that God, always favourable to the McCann's of ? , guided her hand, for the stone fell on Watt's hat and struck it from his head, to the ground. This was indeed a providential escape, for had the stone fallen on an ear, or on the back of the neck, as it might so easily have done, as it so nearly did, why then a wound had perhaps been opened, never again to close, never, never again to close (31-32).

It may be objected that this scene is clearly in the slapstick tradition, with a prim, uppity and upper-class lady throwing a projectile at our hero, the comical tramp, who nonetheless escapes serious physical harm, the recipient of the intended violence being instead that standard prop of slapstick humour, the hat. But whereas one never really worries about Laurel or Hardy, for example, being critically harmed--it is not a serious possibility, Beckett takes pains to emphasize that Watt could "easily" have been hurt, and in fact nearly was: The potentially gruesome, and permanent, effects of violence are described, despite the comic tone, in realistic terms.

Just as importantly, it is emphasized that the root of Lady McCann's violent act is social. Lady McCann throws the rock at Watt, who offends her sense of Public Decency, "in the spirit of her cavalier ascendants" who are described as coming out of the two singularly paternalistic traditions of (Irish) Catholicism and the military (this last must have had special resonance for the author as the novel was

written during the latter part of World War II while Beckett was forced into hiding). Furthermore, the narrator, who it must be remembered is apparently a resident of a mental institution, resorts to the fable of metaphysical cruelty which Mayoux saw as exposed in Beckett's work. Lady McCann's religious background is made to seem particularly sinister, since it "must be supposed" that God, conceived of by the narrator as on the side of the military and violent McCanns (the side of the socially and economically powerful), assists Lady McCann's violence by guiding her hand. It is ambiguous as to whether God assists Lady McCann by improving her aim, or by causing the stone to strike Watt's hat rather than his head, thus saving Lady McCann from a potential prison sentence. I am inclined to the former reading, which makes Watt's escape indeed "providential," as it is an escape not only from Lady McCann's malevolence, but also from that of God, the idea of whom is portrayed as quite malevolent elsewhere in *Watt*. Either way, the attribution of malevolent intent to the concept of God indicates the narrator's alienation from the subject positions offered by the master signifiers of Christianity; favourable only to the McCanns and their ilk, they are inadequate to the desire of subjects like Watt and Sam, *Watt's* narrator.

I have already mentioned Molloy's fear of blows from

the police sergeant who questions him while threatening him with a cylindrical ruler, all because Molloy's manner of resting on his bicycle is "a violation of I don't know what, public order, public decency" (26). Molloy's fear of blows is not metaphysical, but is rooted in his experience, apparently the result of his having received many of them: "I could never get used to the blows" (*Molloy* 28). Malone has likewise been a frequent victim of violence: "How great is my debt to sticks! So great that I almost forget the blows they have transferred to me" (*Malone Dies* 28). The protagonists in Beckett's drama are also done violence by others. Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* is apparently beaten on a regular basis, whether by "the same lot as usual" or not is unknown (7). The plot of *Catastrophe* consists of its protagonist being violently degraded by the paternalistic director through the agency of his assistant.

As perpetrators of violence, policemen are a frequent threat to Beckett's narrators, and are connected to the idea of God as tyrannical father by the narrator of "The Expelled:" "I advanced down the street.... A policeman stopped me and said, The street for vehicles, the sidewalk for pedestrians. Like a bit of Old Testament" (*Stories* 15). The narrator likewise fears violence from the upstanding Christians, "most correct, according to their God," who throw him out of his home. The possibility of his being

beaten, quite real for the narrator since it is only "for once" that "they had confined themselves to throwing me out and no more about it," is described in terms reminiscent of a religious service:

they were not pursuing me down into the street, with a stick, to beat me in full view of the passers-by. For if that had been their intention they would not have shut the door, but left it open, so that the persons assembled in the vestibule might enjoy my chastisement and be edified (10).

The hypothetical edification of those assembled would be in the nature of "conform to the social demands of paternal authority or be beaten." "The Expelled" makes it clear that violence is made to serve the political needs of paternalistic society, which, as Molloy realizes, are also at this stage in history the needs of capitalism:

It [Molloy's way of resting while on his bicycle] 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 (*Molloy* 31-32).

Thus Molloy conceives the reason for his arrest. His identification of Public Decency with the needs of capitalism, which serves the economically powerful, denaturalizes that master signifier, revealing it to be arbitrary and questionable. The narrator of *The Unnamable* does away altogether with the notion of a natural Public Decency in explaining his position within society: "Though

not exactly in order I am tolerated by the police. They know I am speechless and consequently incapable of taking unfair advantage of my situation to stir up the population against its governors." He has no illusions about ideals of public decency serving any other function than to keep the population from being "upset and temporarily diminished in their capacity for work and aptitude for happiness" (55).

The most vivid encounter between Beckett's societal misfits and a policeman occurs in *Mercier and Camier*, and is about as far from slapstick as one can get. When a rather brutal police constable attempts to arrest Camier, first "seiz[ing] his arm and screw[ing] it," then dealing him "a violent smack" ("the profession ha[s] its silver lining," thinks the constable), Mercier interferes by kicking the constable in the testicles. What follows is worth quoting:

The constable dropped everything and fell howling with pain and nausea to the ground.... Camier, beside himself with indignation, caught up the truncheon, sent the helmet flying with his boot and clubbed the defenceless skull with all his might again and again, holding the truncheon with both hands. Help me! roared Camier.... Cover his gob.... They freed the cape and lowered it over the face. Then Camier resumed his blows. Enough, said Mercier, give me that blunt instrument. Camier dropped the truncheon and took to his heels. Wait, said Mercier. Camier halted. Mercier picked up the truncheon and dealt the muffled skull one moderate and attentive blow, just one. Like partly shelled hard-boiled egg, was his impression (93).

While the constable's pleasure in the violent deployment of the power granted him by his profession is emphasized, the

brutality of Mercier and Camier is relentlessly described in the most concrete and graphic terms, which I believe precludes any but a literal reading of the incident. The killing of the policeman, conceived of as "good fortune" by Mercier, is a reaction against oppressive power, an expression, however disgusting itself, of disgust with paternalistic society: "The bastard... And they talk of law and order" (94). Camier's epithet for the policeman is a denial of the validity of the social structure which grants him the authority to do violence; in calling the constable a bastard Camier asserts the absence of the Father, from whom originates the law that the constable violently enforces. The attack on paternalism is both physical and verbal.

Lemuel's murder by hatchet of two manly sailors, characterized as "brothers in law," during the boat outing from the insane asylum at the end of *Malone Dies* is similarly motivated. Lemuel kills these two "decent, quiet, harmless men, ... there are billions of such brutes" because, as brothers in law, they are representatives (sons) of the law-of-the-father from which he is alienated. The implications of Lemuel killing one of the sailors while he is "filling his pipe" are also important, and should become clear in the next chapter. Lemuel kills the sailors while sparing Murphy, Watt, Molloy, Moran and Macmann, who are also with him, but like him are alienated from paternalistic

law (118).

The smashing of a skull by a Beckettian protagonist is not unique to *Mercier and Camier*. Moran is accosted by a man in part two of *Molloy*, blanks out (he has explained that he "go[es] blind" when angry) and next is aware of the man "stretched on the ground, his head in a pulp" (207). This murder has of course its parallel in part one with Molloy's savage beating, and possible murder, of the charcoal burner. As in *Mercier and Camier*, Molloy's violent episode is narrated at great length and with much concrete particularity (113-14). After knocking the charcoal burner down with a blow from his crutch, Molloy notices that his victim "had not ceased to breath" and so decides further beating is necessary. This Molloy narrates in loving detail, although it is never determined whether or not the charcoal burner survives (the possibility of a burst kidney is brought up). The violence in *Molloy* has its counterpart in *Watt*. In part three Sam, the narrator, tells of the senseless murders of non-human animals which he and Watt were in the habit of committing:¹³

Robins, in particular, thanks to their confidingness, we destroyed in great numbers. And Larks' nests, laden with eggs still warm from their mother's breast, we ground into fragments, under our

¹³The murder of non-human animals for the satisfaction of humans becomes a motif in the trilogy, with Lambert's pig-butcherer and the recurrence of slaughterhouses and shambles.

feet, with peculiar satisfaction....

Or seizing suddenly a plump young rat, resting in our bosom after its repast, we would feed it to its mother, or its father.... (155-56)

In all three of the above instances the violence is of a noticeably different order than that of Mercier and Camier's or Lemuel's. The violence in *Molloy* and *Watt* is not against a figure of repressive paternalism, but against a figure of inoffensive weakness.¹⁴ The animals Sam and Watt kill are defenseless, "thanks to their confidingness," and the men beaten and killed by Molloy and Moran are desperate for their companionship. Why then do they act so violently towards others who are both powerless and disposed to be friendly? The narrators themselves offer an answer. In their own disempowered social position, these others provide them with the opportunity to momentarily be on the inflicting end of the paternal cruelty which normally tyrannizes over them: "Where did I get this access of vigour?", says Molloy of his uncharacteristically energetic kicking of the charcoal burner, "From my weakness perhaps" (114). Sam could not be more explicit about the motivation for his and Watt's violence: "It was on these occasions, we agreed, after an exchange of views, that we came nearest to God," the figure of paternal cruelty normally on the side of

¹⁴Similar instances of violence directed against the disempowered by Beckettian protagonists are also to be found in the drama, in the intimation of Mr. Rooney's murder of a child in *All That Fall*.

the McCanns (156). Beckett's characters are caught up in a self-perpetuating cycle of violence, well documented in modern Western society, wherein the abused become abusers in their turn.

In every case, the protagonist's violence is strategically situated near the end of each narrative. This has the effect of disorienting the reader, who has until then likely identified to some degree with the emotional sufferings and intellectual confusion of the characters which, as they are the sufferings of subjects in a society similar to ours, resonate with our own situation. The violence radically disrupts this identification at the precise moment in the narrative in which this rupture will have the most effect. The reader, unless he determinedly ignores the violence in Beckett's works, cannot easily identify with Beckett's protagonists as fellow sufferers of The Human Condition unless he is willing to identify as well with their murderous acts. Beckett makes this complacency particularly hard to maintain by having the narrators' violence be directed against innocents.

Obviously, violence is a prevalent motif in Beckett's work, and the violent scenes in *Watt*, *Molloy* and *Mercier and Camier* are certainly among the most striking and disturbing parts of the works in which they occur, owing to their descriptive force, the attitude taken towards them by

the narrator, and their placement within the narrative. Beckett's fiction unflinchingly exposes the violence and repressiveness of Western society. The narrators' acts of violence, and of course those of the policemen and upstanding Christian citizens, pull the reader, if she is willing to pay attention, out of the complacency inherent in ideas of a natural human condition, and effects a critique of society in which the Western world becomes culpable indeed. The violence is there to shock and to be questioned. And in questioning this violence we are led to question the discourses out of which it arises.

CHAPTER THREE

Male Bodies, Failed Inheritances

The penis, well now, that's a nice surprise, I'd forgotten I had one. What a pity I have no arms, there might still be something to be wrung from it.
The Unnamable

While talk of *The Human Condition* has been the norm for some time in discussions of Beckett's works, attention has recently been paid to the specificity of gender in Beckett's fiction and drama. This has been the subject of two recent books, Mary Bryden's *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama*, and the collection edited by Linda Ben-Zvi, *Women In Beckett*. Both works are concerned with Beckett's portrayal of women, and tend to concentrate on either the misogyny of the early fiction (*More Pricks Than Kicks* and *Murphy*), or the more complicated and sympathetic portrayal of women in the later dramas wherein they figure as protagonists (*Happy Days*, *All That Fall*, *Not I*, *Footfalls*). Nonetheless, Ben-Zvi's recent work is helpful in clarifying the gender issues in the trilogy, wherein the narrators are male and women are specifically excluded (as in the case of *Moll*).

Critics have felt sanctioned to downplay or ignore

the issue of gender in the trilogy, drawing upon Malone's assertion that "there is so little difference between a man and a woman, between mine I mean" (*Malone Dies* 3), as well as Western society's ideal of the universal equality and sameness of all humanity, regardless of gender. Ben Zvi, however, cites Beckett's own remarks in asserting

his keen awareness of, and commitment to revealing, those elements that fix his people in time and place and tie them to stultifying gender roles.... Therefore, he has adamantly opposed changing the sexes of his characters. When asked if women could play the parts of men in *Waiting for Godot*, he said, "Women don't have prostates." Beckett's refusal to cross cast should not be seen as exclusionary, implying that women do not experience the suffering of being the play depicts. Rather it indicates that *for the author*.the *form* such suffering takes in the play is structured upon those behavioral roles socially sanctioned for males...and that when Vladimir says, "All mankind is us," he is not using the term generically (Introduction x, her italics).

Ben-Zvi's remarks apply with equal force to Beckett's fiction. The suffering experienced by Watt, the narrators of the *Stories*, Molloy, both Morans, Malone and the unnamable hinges on their subjection to the cultural master signifier of Maleness, which sanctions only certain behavioral roles for males, and specifically on the failure of this signifier and the discourses which center upon it to adequately accommodate their desire. In turn they fail, because Beckett has them fail, to adopt these socially acceptable roles.

The reason Beckett gives for why women could not act

in *Waiting For Godot* indicates the importance of the body in his work, and specifically of the crucial social role it plays in marking sexual difference. While Beckett's characters are often dressed in huge, shapeless, gender-concealing coats or, as in the case of the unnamable, described as a sexless, noseless ball, it is always explicit just what is under the greatcoat, just as the ball inevitably sprouts a marker of gender identity. Indeed, it is absolutely imperative in Beckett's writing that gender identity is established, and this always happens through the signifying role of the body. So insists the speaker of a *Text for Nothing*: "the lower regions, you'll be needing them, and say what you're like, have a guess, what kind of man, *there has to be a man, or a woman*, feel between your legs" (*Stories* 86, my italics). Society allows for two and only two gender positions, and each and every subject must assume one or the other. Nor is this a choice they make themselves, for as soon as their bodies are born with either one set of genitals or the other, society, beginning with the child's parents, begins foisting one of the two pre-existent roles upon the subject. In *Malone Dies*, the body as indicator of sexual difference becomes an issue that is emphasized rather heavily, flying in the face of Malone's early assertion that there is "so little difference between a man and a woman." Malone could scarcely be more specific

in differentiating his own sex: "Now my sex, I mean the tube itself, and in particular the nozzle" (61). Likewise, he is insistent upon specifying the sex of the people in his narratives, particularly when they are male, like Macmann: "living flesh and needless to say male" (52). Obviously, for Beckett and his narrators, it is not needless to emphasize the importance of gender.

That bit of living flesh which in our society serves as the primary marker of sexual difference and gender identification, that is the tube itself and its annexes, plays a crucial role in the trilogy. From Molloy and Moran's respective testicles, to Malone's tube, to the unnamable's penis, the male organ hangs over the entire trilogy, marking its narrators as male both for the society in which they live and for the reader. In both the world and in Beckett's work the penis is not merely a bit of flesh, but as the supposed representative of the phallus takes on a political role. Freud saw the phallus as the concept solely responsible for differentiating the two genders from each other within society. For Lacan the phallus takes on a more specific significance in inaugurating the subject's entry into language, which enables social relations. However, feminist and otherwise politicized readings of Lacan have emphasized that "the phallus is the crucial signifier in the distribution of

power, authority and a speaking position, a kind of mark or badge of a social position" (Grosz 125). Beckett's writing is likewise concerned with the importance granted by society to, in Beckett's own words, "the reigning penis" (*Stories* 29), and the patriarchal law which it comes to represent.

In the male episode of Freud's family romance, the boy's first experience of differentiation from the world around him (which forms the precondition of the subject's emergence into language) is the traumatic experience of his mother's absence. The emergence of desire then is the wish to be what the mother desires, thus ensuring her continual presence. According to Freud, the boy sees the means to realizing this desire to be "having the phallus which is [seen by the boy as] the object of the mother's desire" (Mitchell 7). This is forbidden by the intervention of the father,¹⁵ who, as supposed possessor of the mother's love and cause of her absence, is seen as possessing the phallus, and so the boy turns away from the mother and learns to identify with the paternal law-of-the-father. This law

¹⁵According to Lacan, it is not a real, specific father so much as the "metaphor" of the father that matters, but this metaphor operates very specifically. Jacqueline Rose explains: "Lacan uses the term 'paternal metaphor', metaphor having a very specific meaning here. First as a reference to the act of substitution (substitution is the very law of metaphoric operation) whereby the prohibition of the father takes up the place originally figured by the absence of the mother. Secondly, as a reference to the status of paternity itself which can only ever logically be inferred. And thirdly, as part of an insistence that the father stands for a place and a function which is not reducible to the presence or absence of a real father as such" (38-39).

seems to the boy to offer the promise that he too will one day possess the phallus, which then becomes a substitute for the mother's presence in assuring the child an identity through recognition by the other. Thus the phallus is that which initially positions the boy within a paternalistic hierarchy: "The phallus represents the-name-of-the-father, through which the subject is positioned in culture" (Grosz 126). It is this metaphor of the father who

teaches the child that it must take up a place in the family which is defined by sexual difference, by exclusion...and by absence.... In accepting all of this, the child moves from the imaginary register into what Lacan calls the 'symbolic order': the pre-given structure of social and sexual roles and relations which make up the family and society (Eagleton 167).

This is the child's cultural inheritance, passed down through the paternal metaphor. In a patriarchal culture the phallus, as symbolized by the presence of the penis, defines half the population (needless to say male) as possessing access to a privileged term and characterizes the other half by their supposed lack.

However, the idea of the phallus is based upon difference and exclusion and therefore cannot truly function as a positive term: "The selection of the phallus as the mark around which subjectivity and sexuality are constructed reveals, precisely, that they are constructed, in a division which is both arbitrary and alienating" (Mitchell 7). The

boy's identification with the phallus arises only out of his acceptance of the loss of the feeling of wholeness and fusion with the mother, and so in itself constitutes a kind of castration. The "struggle to represent [the phallus]," must always be fruitless and yet to do so remains for men "the insoluble desire of their lives." A man in society is therefore at best "not far short of a man, just barely a man, sufficiently a man to have hopes one day of being one" (*The Unnamable* 38). And while this is the condition of all men in society, Beckett's narrators in particular could be case studies of Elizabeth Grosz's assertion that

'Having' a penis, i.e. being a man, is no guarantee of warding off lack. On the contrary, rendering [the penis and the phallus] equivalent has problems of its own, manifested in anxieties about sexual performance (impotence fears) as well as a sometimes desperate search for the other through whom the man can have his position as the possessor of the valued/desired organ confirmed (118).

This desperate need for a sexual other who is "lacking" and thus will recognize and love the man as possessor of the phallus achieves its most eloquent expression in the question repeatedly posed by the narrator of *How It Is* to Pim: "DO YOU LOVE ME CUNT" (90, 96).¹⁶

¹⁶*How It Is* is a powerful demonstration of the arbitrary nature and constructedness of gender roles. For, although Pim is referred to by the narrator as "CUNT" and thus constructed by him as a sexual other who will confirm his own phallic mastery, Pim is in fact a man, like the narrator: "having rummaged in the mud between his legs I bring up finally what seems to me a testicle or two the anatomy I had" (54). What matters is not the anatomy itself, but the pre-given structure of phallic dominance and feminized subordination.

As the penis is always already symbolic of the phallus, the penises of the trilogy's narrators serve to indicate their placement in the pre-given social structure. The rather decrepit state of their penises and testicles symbolizes their relative position within the hierarchies of this never truly stable structure:

Molloy: "from such testicles as mine, dangling at mid-thigh at the end of a meagre cord, there was nothing more to be squeezed, not a drop" (*Molloy* 47).

Moran: "I trembled for my testicles, which swing a little low" (215).

Malone: "I do not expect to see my sex again, with my naked eye, not that I wish to" (*Malone Dies* 61)

the unnamable: "The penis, well now, that's a nice surprise, I'd forgotten I had one. What a pity I have no arms, there might still be something to be wrung from it" (*The Unnamable* 62)

They conceive of their genitals as impotent, endangered or inaccessible--effectively absent, Beckett's satire making the phallus, the very basis of patriarchal culture, appear frail and ridiculous. In the unnamable's case, he recognizes his possession of the phallus, privileged by society, but is too alienated from the social structure to derive any benefit of power and authority from it; he has not the arms with which to wield the rod.

The need for a sexual other who lacks the phallus in order to confirm one's own possession of it is manifest in Molloy's affair with "Ruth:" "perhaps she too was a man, yet

another of them. But in that case surely our testicles would have collided, while we writhed. Perhaps she held hers tight in her hand" (*Molloy* 76). His anxiety over whether Ruth was woman or man, whether or not it is "true love, in the rectum?," is anxiety over his inability to confirm the sexual difference that is demanded by society, and thus confirm his own possession of the phallus.

The impotent state of the penises of Beckett's characters is symbolic of their impotence within a phallogocentric society in which a person's "identity as a subject...is constituted by its relations of difference and similarity to the other subjects around it" (Eagleton 167). Indeed, to return to Ben-Zvi's assertion that in Beckett's writing the form taken by depictions of suffering is structured around socially sanctioned gender roles, it is his male characters' failure to inherit the socially sanctioned role for males, that is, to achieve a relation of similarity to other male subjects, that is the prime cause of their sufferings. It is in this sense (and not due to a failing of the mother) that Beckett's male narrator's are "not properly born;" they do not take up a "proper" place within a society structured by the father's law. The paternalistic nature of the society in which they live will thus not recognize as men *Molloy*, Moran (as he is by the end of *Molloy*), or Malone. Thus Moran speaks of himself as "a

man..., exiled in his manhood" (*Molloy* 233), for he is a man (possessor of a penis) who is not a man (possessor of the phallus).

All of Beckett's male characters before the unnamable occupy similarly precarious places within the patriarchal continuum, banished from the community of properly masculine men while at the same time unable to shake off the ideology which demands they function within this social order. They are like hysterics, who recognize their split subjectivity but still turn their desire towards society's inadequate master signifiers. In "The Father, Love and Banishment," Julia Kristeva sees the narrator of "First Love" as unwillingly caught up in the law of the father, unable to "leave the black mourning of an inaccessible paternal function, ... a false father who doesn't want to be a father, but nonetheless believes in being one" (149-51). The narrator of the *Stories* (including "First Love") is a son banished from the house of his dead father and trying in various ways to get back; *Molloy* has no place as either son or father; and Moran begins his narrative with a place as both son and father only to lose this by the end. All fail to inherit from their ascendants the law-of-the-father which allows them a social position. All fail to obey the paternalistic command of the narrator's father in *Company* which would render them acceptable to

society: "Be a brave boy. Many eyes upon you" (18). The character of Macmann (son of man) in *Malone Dies*, is illustrative of the position of all of Beckett's male narrators.

Macmann

In Malone's story of Macmann, Macmann is, as his name indicates, placed within the patriarchal order, but is also set apart from it:

he was no more than human, than the son and grandson and great-grandson of humans. But between him and those grave and sober men, first bearded, then moustached, there was this difference, that his semen had never done any harm to anyone. So his link with his species was through his ascendants only, who were all dead (68).

This satirical passage contains a critique of the patriarchal social order which places such a premium on beards, moustaches and semen; rather than blaming the mother for the child's suffering in the world, as Molloy does ("brought me into the world, through the hole in her arse, if I remember correct. First taste of the shit"), Malone blames the father and the social order that the father represents for Macmann's suffering, and praises Macmann for having perpetuated this order and thus not having "done any harm to anyone." In Beckett's world, that part of the body (penis, testicles, semen) that represents the phallus on the symbolic level is the cause of much harm and misery.

Lemuel's desire to hit his own head with a hammer in *Malone Dies* because it is "the seat of all the shit and misery, so you rain blows upon it, with more pleasure than on the leg, for example, which never did you any harm" (97), is connected to Molloy's wish to rid himself of his testicles: "the best thing for me would have been for them to go" (*Molloy* 47).

The position Macmann occupies is typical of Beckett's characters. His place as a male subject within patriarchy is both incomplete and precarious. He is a son only, having failed to consolidate his possession of the phallus by finding an other who lacks it and then impregnating them, proving his own potency (which rests on his body being able to fulfil the symbolic function culturally attributed to it) through becoming a father. Furthermore, he is the son of a father who is dead, and thus absent and unable to function securely as a guarantor of Macmann's place within society. This is perhaps why the paternal name of Malone's creation is unstable, changing from "Saposcot, like his father's. Christian name? I don't know. He will not need one" (9), to the more general and less secure Macmann, son of man, which marks the absence of a specific father as well as of God the father (thus no need of a Christian name).

Macmann is contrasted to other men in his narrative

who more closely fulfil the demands of patriarchal masculinity; a doctor in the institution to which Macmann is consigned is described as

a man, naturally, in the flower and prime of life, his features stamped with mildness and severity in equal proportions, and he wore a scraggly beard no doubt intended to heighten his resemblance to the messiah (85).

Both Macmann and the doctor identify themselves with the pre-given patriarchal narrative of Christ's life (which involves submission to an absent father). But while the doctor identifies with Christ's socially "useful" and more fatherly messianic aspect as healer of the sick and leader of men ("Take no thought of anything, it is we shall think and act for you, from now forward. We like it"), and with the father's severity, Macmann identifies only with Christ the son's sufferings, having the habit, like Molloy, of lying down in the crucified position during times of distress. However, it should be noted that Beckett does not point out the precariousness of the male subject position within patriarchy only with regard to figures like Macmann. Beckett indicates the instability of the doctor's own position through such things as the scragginess of his patriarch's beard and his fear of being pushed, which, considering its context and the language used, must be read symbolically as his fear of his precarious, assumed God-like position within the institution and society being upset:

"Don't push, for Jesus's sake! he said, irritably. Then, suddenly turning, he cried, What in God's name are you all pushing for Christ sake?" (85). And indeed after this he vanishes from the novel, with Malone's reminder of his absence ("Where is the beautiful young man with the Messiah beard?") being his only other mention in the text (115).

The Narrator of the *Stories*

The short fictions that Beckett wrote in the mid 'forties, beginning with "First Love" and continuing through "The Expelled," "The Calmative," and "The End," dramatize the death of the father and the son's banishment from society. "First Love" describes the death of the narrator's father and an affair with a prostitute that commences at that time. That the death of the narrator's father is associated with his vomiting of eel soup is redolent with symbolic implications, the death of his father leaving him unable to internalize the phallus (13).¹⁷ The son realizes that the absent father cannot guarantee his subject position as possessor of the phallus, cannot "go on protecting me from beyond the tomb" (14). Without the father, the narrator is plunged into an uncertainty that extends to the

¹⁷This unpalatability of phallic food is not confined to "First Love;" in *The Unnamable* an entire family (excepting the father, who is absent) is "carried off by sausage-poisoning, in great agony" (42).

heavens, the alleged seat of God the ultimate father:

I looked among the stars and constellations for the Wains, but could not find them. And yet they must have been there. My father was the first to show them to me. He had shown me others, but alone, without him beside me, I could never find any but the Wains (35).

The scene recalls another in "The End" in which the father's presence is an absence: recounting a scene of gazing at stars and ship beacons, the narrator remarks "I was with my father on a height.... I would have liked him to draw me close with a gesture of protective love, but his mind was on other things" (71). This scene dramatizes the failure of the paternal metaphor to adequately respond to the subject's desire to be recognized and loved.

Significantly, the narrator draws a connection between his father's death and the beginning of his relationship with "Lulù" or "Anna:" "I associate, rightly or wrongly, my marriage with the death of my father, in time. That other links exist, on other planes, between these two affairs, is not impossible" (11). The second sentence of course demands that the reader find other links, and Lacanian theory allows us to do so. The father's death throws the son into anxiety over his subject position, and he therefore finds it necessary to confirm his possession of the phallus through intercourse with someone who lacks it. This does not work very well for the narrator in the story,

who rejects the phallic order while succumbing to it. He finds it disturbing to be

at the mercy of an erection...for one is no longer oneself, on such occasions, and it is painful to be no longer oneself, even more painful if possible than when one is. For when one is one knows what to do to be less so (18).

At the mercy of an erection the narrator is forced to act in a phallic way, while when he is "himself" he is able to consciously attempt to reject the phallic order which nonetheless shapes his subjectivity. His distaste for the phallus is similar to Malone's; like Malone he places a premium on the harmlessness of his semen, disavowing responsibility for the child "lepping" in his lover's belly: "if it's lepping,... it's not mine" (34). Of course, it is unknown whether or not the child is in fact the narrator's, for there is no physical link between the father and child, and the mother may have any number of lovers (in the story she is a prostitute). The story thus echoes Joyce's assertion that paternity is "a legal fiction" (170), functioning as a critique of the myth of patrilineage, so necessary for the continuation of patriarchy: In "First Love," "the child belongs solely to its mother" (Kristeva, 148).

"First Love" introduces the motif of the paternal hat, forced upon the boy in childhood and never to leave his head: "I have always had my own hat, the one my father gave

me, and I never had any other hat than that hat" (23). The hat appears next in "The Expelled," wherein the narrator devotes a long paragraph to the hat passed down to him from his father:

How describe this hat? And why? When my head had attained I shall not say its definitive but its maximum dimensions, my father said to me, Come, son, we are going to buy your hat, as though it had pre-existed from time immemorial in a pre-established place. He went straight to the hat. I had personally no say in the matter, nor had the hatter. I have often wondered if my father's purpose was not to humiliate me, if he was not jealous of me who was young and handsome, fresh at least, while he was already old and all bloated and purple. It was forbidden me, from that day forth, to go out bare-headed, my pretty brown hair blowing in the wind. Sometimes, in a secluded street, I took it off and held it in my hand, but trembling. I was required to brush it morning and evening... (*Stories* 11).

The hat becomes a symbol of the pre-existent law-of-the-father, exacting obedience and conformity from the son. This law is rigidly enforced, the son being forbidden to remove the hat, and reinforced, the son being forced to ritualistically maintain the hat. This enforcement of the law proves to be effective, as their hats become of prime importance to the male characters in the trilogy. Molloy and Moran secure their hats to their coats in fear of losing them. Macmann, despite a change of name, gaps in his narrative that likely encompass decades, and his outright abandoning of his hat in the middle of a field, retains the "selfsame" hat his whole life (*Malone Dies* 88), the law of

the father circumscribing Malone's self just as the hat circumscribes his head.

In part two of *Molloy*, Gaber's hat is associated with the law of his and Moran's boss, Youdi. Youdi wakes Gaber up in the middle of the night, unfortunately "just as he was getting into position to make love to his wife" and confirm his own possession of the phallus, thus in effect castrating Gaber through the law-of-the-father. After "bitterly inveigh[ing]" against Youdi for this, Gaber "wipe[s] the lining of his bowler, peering inside as if in search of something" (129).¹⁸ The hat/law-of-the-father is of course empty when removed from the head of the human subject, and provides no answers.

Nonetheless, the law of the father continues to bind the unwilling son despite the absence of the father: "When my father died I could have got rid of this hat, there was nothing more to prevent me, but not I" (*Stories* 11). This is in keeping with Keith Booker's assertion regarding Beckett's world in *Literature and Domination* that figures of authority who held unquestioned authority in the past no longer serve as "effective legitimating anchors" for structures of power, "And yet, in the absence of new authorities to replace the old, that power itself often

¹⁸This gesture is repeated in *Waiting For Godot*.

remains as fully in force as ever" (1).

For Beckett's narrators, the legitimating anchors, or in Lacanian terms master signifiers, of paternalism have lost their authority, and yet without new master signifiers more accommodating to the subject's desire to replace them, the discourses that they anchor retain their hold on the subject. Moran puts it best: "I am still obeying orders, if you like, but no longer out of fear. No, I am still afraid, but simply from force of habit" (*Molloy* 180).¹⁹ However, Booker's analysis can only be taken so far with Beckett. For many of the peripheral characters in Beckett's fiction, as for many people in Western society, traditional figures of authority and the master signifiers which legitimize their claim to authority retain their dominance. This is true of all the guardians of Public Decency that appear in Beckett's fiction to enact the violent consequences of paternalistic discourses upon those who are alienated from them.

In "The Calmative" the narrator has somewhat fonder memories of his father, who is presented as non-threatening in this story, the aim of which is to calm the teller. In

¹⁹In Beckett's drama of this period, this state of affairs is evident in Lucky's continued servitude to Pozzo in act two of *Waiting For Godot*, despite Pozzo's blindness and impotence, and especially in Clov's servitude to the impotent Hamm in *Endgame*: "Do this, do that, and I do it. I never refuse. Why?" (43).

order to calm himself, to make himself feel secure and stable as a subject, the narrator tries to tell himself a story, a story of his father's, as it happens:

Yes, this evening it has to be as in the story my father used to read to me, evening after evening, when I was small, and he had all his health, to calm me, evening after evening, year after year it seems to me this evening, which I don't remember much about, except that it was the adventures of one Joe Breem, or Breen, the son of a lighthouse keeper, a strong muscular lad of fifteen, those were the words, who swam for miles in the night, a knife between his teeth, after a shark, I forget why, out of sheer heroism (30).

The narrator is trying to fit himself into the paternalistic narratives handed down to him by his father, trying to recognize himself in the discourse of the father. The irony is that this story is exactly the sort that Beckett's characters do not fit into. Joe Breem, or Breen, is the antithesis of the Beckettian protagonist, and his story is the antithesis of a Beckettian narrative. Beckett's writings are not the linear adventure stories that the father of "The Calmative"'s narrator passes on to him, and Beckett's protagonists are not young, certainly not muscular, and kill out of their subjection, not out of mastery and "sheer heroism." While the narrator of "The Calmative" is the opposite of Joe Breem, or Breen, paternalistic ideology still has its hold on him, so that "it has to be as in the story my father used to read me," and this is of course impossible. The narrator's father has

tried to pass on to him a narrative that can act as a model for life in a paternalistic society, with a protagonist who is strong, brave, violent, and has a place in the patriarchal line ("son of a lighthouse keeper"); he is effectively telling the narrator to "be a brave boy" as in *Company*. The narrative is received by the son, who learns to need it but cannot use it. This story reappears in the first *Text for Nothing* as "the same old story I knew by heart and couldn't believe" (*Stories* 79). It is a failed inheritance.

This failure makes an important point. Ideals of "sheer heroism" and violent masculine bravado are rejected as means of assuring a position adequate to the subject's desire. Indeed, these narratives and the meta-narratives of maleness from which they are produced and which they serve to reinscribe, are instead presented as the cause of the repression of the subject's desire.

Molloy

Part one of *Molloy* is unique among Beckett's fictions of the forries in that neither the father nor the son of its narrator makes an appearance in the narrative. This is because Molloy is positioned neither as a father, nor as a son of fathers, as is apparent in the way in which he is named. Molloy's name is attributed not to his father,

as is Saposcat's, but to his mother, placing him outside the patriarchal continuum: "Is that your mother's name? said the sergeant." This is repeated twice in the text for emphasis (*Molloy* 23, 81). Lacking the name-of-the-father, Molloy has no position in patriarchal society. He is instead concerned primarily with his mother, and identifies to some degree with her feminized position within patriarchy: "I have taken her place. I must resemble her more and more" (8). However, Molloy is troubled by the sexual difference that the mother represents:

I called her Mag, when I had to call her something. And I called her Mag because for me, without knowing why, the letter g abolished the syllable Ma, and as it were spat on it, better than any other letter could have done. And at the same time I satisfied a deep and doubtless unacknowledged need, the need to have a Ma, that is a mother, and to proclaim it, audibly. For before you say mag, you say ma, inevitably. (18).

Molloy's simultaneous need (manifest in his fantasy of anal birth) to "abolish" the sexual difference that is symbolic of his own possession of the phallus, and his "deep" need to proclaim his possession of the phallus through acknowledging the sexual difference of his mother is typical of the relationship Beckett's characters have to the phallic order. They reject it while at the same time having a deep and unacknowledged need to affirm themselves within it.

At the same time, Molloy is most concerned with positioning himself outside the phallic order. He rejects

paternity: "Perhaps I have [a son] somewhere. But I think not.... It seems to me sometimes that I even knew my son, that I helped him. Then I tell myself it's impossible" (8). Molloy sees himself as something less than or other than a man: "a man, a fortiori myself, isn't exactly a landmark" (12); "myself the last of my foul brood, neither man nor beast" (23). He fantasizes about castrating himself (47). Molloy regards the phallic order, as does Lacan, as inherently unstable and so dissociates himself from it; in a reverie about leaving solid land on a ship he asserts "as it bears me from no fatherland away, [it] bears me onward to no shipwreck" (48). Molloy rejects the paternalistic order because he does not recognize himself within it, just as he himself is not recognized by it: "I knew I was bound to be stopped by the first policeman and asked what I was doing, a question to which I have never been able to find the correct reply" (80). Not only do the representatives of paternalism not find in Molloy what is to them correct, but Molloy finds nothing in paternalism which corresponds to anything in himself. He fails to recognize himself within its structure.

As the discourses of paternalism fail to accommodate his desire, Molloy turns away from them and back towards the mother. If the law of the father cannot give Molloy a position whereby he is recognized by the other, then it is

to the mother that he looks for recognition: "And if ever I'm reduced to looking for a meaning to my life, you never can tell, it's in that old mess I'll stick my nose to begin with, the mess of that poor old uniparous whore and myself" (23). Molloy sees his mother as an unlikely means, but still preferable to the law-of-the-father, of attaining a sense of meaning and wholeness, and throughout *Molloy* he seeks out womb-like locations and situations, visiting the sea, spending time in a dark forest which provides him with sustenance, and starting and ending his narrative in his mother's room where he "sleep[s] in her bed" and "piss[es] and shit[s] in her pot" (8). However, he questions the possibility of being able to realize his desire through his mother, due to the interference of others: "Would *they* let me roll on to my mother's door?" (123, my emphasis). This other is the metaphor of the father, who is originally seen as creating the child's feeling of lack by separating the child from the mother. For Molloy, as for Donald Barthelme in *The Dead Father*, "the father is a motherfucker" in every sense of the word (Barthelme 76).

Molloy's experience of the repressiveness of paternalism, through the agency of policemen, causes him to ridicule the idea of a benevolent father-figure who could help him. Near the end of his quest Molloy ends up in a ditch, unable to move. Here he fantasizes about hearing a

benevolent voice which says "Don't fret, Molloy, we're coming." He responds, "Well, I suppose you have to try everything once, succour included, to get a complete picture of the resources of their planet" (123). Molloy envisions the world as controlled by a paternal "they," guardians of public decency who offer him no help, only blows.

Moran, Jacques

As Beckett chooses not to specify a Christian name for the rest of the male characters in his fiction, Jacques Moran is unique in Beckett's oeuvre.²⁰ This is appropriate since Moran, alone among Beckett's gallery of moribunds, is a practicing Christian. We learn that Moran shares his name with his son: "His name is Jacques, like mine. This cannot lead to confusion" (*Molloy* 85). At issue in Moran's name is his position within the patriarchal continuum as both father and son. The confusion that Moran fears to be inherent in his naming does occur, and while Moran begins his narrative relatively secure in both his positions he ends up secure as neither (in order to myself avoid confusion I will refer to the older Moran as Moran and to the younger as Jacques).

²⁰That is, with the lone exception of the early *Belacqua*, who Beckett to a great extent disowned through refusing to have *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* published, or *More Pricks Than Kicks* reissued, for the greater part of his career. The unnamable conceives of the line of Beckettian protagonists as "beginning with Murphy, who wasn't even the first" (*The Unnamable* 145).

At the outset of his quest Moran has a relatively well defined position within a patriarchal hierarchy. He is the tyrannical father of Jacques, and occupies the position of son to the fatherly church and to Youdi, one of Beckett's vague, absent deity figures cut from the same cloth as Mr. Knott (or Quinn, as he is called in *Mercier and Camier* and *Malone Dies*) and Godot. Unlike Molloy, who ridicules the idea of a benevolent father figure, Moran, like Watt and Vladimir and Estragon, is addicted to the idea of a godlike figure who will give his life meaning and stability. As the unnamable claims to have done in the past, Moran "[speaks] for [his] master, listen[s] for the words of [his] master never spoken, Well done, my child, well done, my son" (*The Unnamable* 30). For Moran this master takes the joint form of the church and his employer, the never-seen Youdi.

Moran's attraction to the church and to Youdi is based in a structure similar to what Lacan calls the discourse of the university (Lacan, 160-61); Moran gives primacy to the structure of a discourse or system of knowledge, which is based upon an unquestioned master signifier. This produces the structure itself as the object of desire (knowledge becomes a good in itself apart from its use value, in the case of the actual university after which this discourse is named) and precludes any question of his own subjectivity. This is apparent in Moran's attitude

towards his religion, where the structure of ritual takes precedence over belief: "To work, even to play on Sunday, was not of necessity reprehensible.... [T]he Sabbath, *so long as you go to mass and contribute to the collection*, may be considered a day like any other" (126, my italics). Moran obtains no gratification from belief in God, but rather from the rituals with which this belief is associated: "I who never missed mass, to have missed it on that Sunday of all Sundays! When I so needed it! to buck me up!" (129) (note the reference to phallic potency in "buck"). Moran is similarly disposed towards his employment with Youdi, where the rituals of preparation, costuming and setting out take precedence over the nature of the work itself or the results it produces, the validity and importance of which are never questioned.

Although Moran consciously places his faith in the structure of religious practice, rather than in the master signifier, God, which buttons it down, it is clear at the beginning of his narrative that Moran's fear of punishment from God underlies his concern over the niceties of Catholic ritual, a serious business:

I remembered with annoyance the lager I had just absorbed. Would I be granted the body of Christ after a pint of Wallenstein?... [Father Ambrose] would not ask. But God would know, sooner or later. Perhaps he would pardon me (132).

Later, when the master signifier is seen to be

questionable and arbitrary, the structure built upon it loses its validity and likewise becomes open to question. After Moran experiences "a frenzied collapsing of all that had always protected me from all I was condemned to be" (203), that is, the dissolution of the master signifiers that button down the structures upon which he bases his life, the structures become open to question in one of the funniest passages in *Molloy*:

Certain questions of a theological nature preoccupied me strangely. As for example.

1 What value is to be attached to the theory that Eve sprang, not from Adam's rib, but from a tumour in the fat of his leg (arse?)?

2 Did the serpent crawl or, as Comestor affirms, walk upright?

3 Did Mary conceive through the ear, as Augustine and Adobard assert?...

5 Does it really matter which hand is employed to absterge the podex?

6 What is one to think of the Irish oath sworn by the natives with the right hand on the relics of the saints and the left on the virile member?...

8 Is it true that the devils do not feel the pains of hell?

9 The algebraic theory of Craig. What is one to think of this?...

12 Is one to approve of the Italian cobbler Lovat who, having cut off his testicles, crucified himself?...

14 Might not the beatific vision become a source of boredom, in the long run?

15 Is it true that Judas' torments are suspended on Saturdays?

16 What if the mass for the dead is read over the living?

And I recited the pretty quetist Pater, Our Father who art no more in heaven than on earth or in hell, I neither want nor desire that thy name be hallowed, thou knowest best what suits thee. Etc. The middle and end are very pretty.

It was in this frivolous and charming world that

I took refuge, when my cup ran over (228-230).

Whereas Moran's previous questioning of the place of Wallenstein lager in religious practice revolved around the serious issue of punishment or pardon by God, this series of questions is by contrast "frivolous and charming," a source of distraction and amusement no more overtly meaningful than a game of Trivial Pursuit. However, Beckett's best jokes, like Swift's, have specific targets and serious implications. After Moran conceives the absence of God the father the discourse of religious knowledge is seen as arbitrary (question 5), conflicted, with different things being affirmed by different religious writers who are all mere human beings occupying a historically and culturally specific place (2, 3), and based in theoretical speculations rather than absolute truths (1, 9). Therefore, matters of pleasure, pain, suffering and death are open to question (8, 14-16): "Is it true...", or is it not?

A number of Moran's questions (1, 3, 6, 12) reveal his anxiety over the construction of sexual difference in society, and thus over his own possession of the phallus. The questions revolve around the social meaning--what value to attach, what one is to think, whether one should approve or not--given to male and female bodies, and particularly to the penis as representative of the phallus. Lovat the Italian cobbler resonates with Molloy, who fantasizes about

castrating himself and is fond of resting in the crucified position. The question becomes one of how a man should act in the face of his own subjectivity built in a division which, as Mitchell asserts, is both arbitrary and alienating.

Moran's violence and repressiveness towards his son Jacques seem to be motivated by Moran's desire to assert his own possession of the phallus and position within paternalistic society. Lacking a sexual other (his wife is apparently dead), Moran imposes the structure of patriarchal domination and feminized subordination on his son, to the extent of penetrating him anally with a hastily prescribed enema. Moran puts into practice his belief that "There is something about a father that discourages derision. Even grotesque he commands a certain respect" (171), a paternalistic discourse with which he has identified, through commanding, and not earning, that respect from his son.

The instability of the position that Moran assumes results in the contempt of his son and his own alienation from the master signifiers of paternalism: "the misdemeanours of the son, the disintegration of the father" (216). Hierarchical structures are shown to be untenable through the questioning of the values and ideals upon which the hierarchy is based. Not only is Moran as a human

subject unable to internalize paternalistic ideals without effecting his own alienation, but he serves to demonstrate their inadequacy for the reader and for his son Jacques:

I managed finally to articulate, Are you capable of following me? He did not answer, but I seized his thoughts as clearly as if he had spoken them, namely, And you, are you capable of leading me? (178).

As Moran begins to question his own position as a son of fathers, he begins to devalue the function of fatherhood as formerly represented by himself and offers up some platitudes to his son: "they will commiserate with him on having had such a father, and offers of help and expressions of esteem will pour in upon him on every side" (212). Moran's last gasp at a position within the patriarchal continuum is the absurd fantasy of Molloy acting as a benevolent ideal father to him: "Molloy... would...grow to be a friend, and like a father to me, and help me do what I had to do, so that Youdi would not be angry with me and would not punish me" (222). Molloy in a sense does become Moran's father, as Moran ends up, like Molloy who "could [n]ever have helped anyone" (8), with no position in the patriarchal hierarchy, unable to embody or to follow the law-of-the-father. Beckett's fiction serves to make "odious...the very idea of fatherhood" (150)--not the actual father, but the *idea* of fatherhood, the paternal metaphor.

CONCLUSION

Paternal Discourses, The Discourse of The Analyst:

The Unnamable

There's no getting rid of them without naming them and their contraptions, that's the thing to keep in mind.

.....

[Y]ou must go on, I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me.

The Unnamable

The Unnamable is a novel about the problem of representing oneself in a way that accommodates one's desire when the only way of doing so is through pre-existent discourses invented by others. As the final installment of the trilogy, it contains the fullest and most direct treatment of themes that arise in Beckett's earlier novels. *The Unnamable* lays bare the pain of being assimilated into a social order that is both alienating and inescapable, and of being forced to submit oneself to that order every time one speaks because of the very structure of language: "I'm in words, made of words, other's words," "[n]ot...able to open my mouth without proclaiming them, and our fellowship" (139, 51).

In asserting this I am not saying anything new or particularly important about *The Unnamable*. Others have made more or less the same point before. What has been lacking is discussion of the sociopolitical context in which the unnamable is subordinated to "other's words," and discussion of the nature of those others whose fellowship the unnamable turns away from in disgust. Read in context with Beckett's previous novels (which the unnamable demands we do as he claims to have written them all), it is apparent that the others or "masters" of whom the unnamable frequently speaks are the same agents of paternalism who harrass Watt, Molloy, and the rest. Indeed, *The Unnamable* itself is not as shy about providing contexts for the suffering it depicts as are most of its critics. The others whose discourse the unnamable seeks to transcend are others who, as in *Molloy*, try to force him to conform to pre-existent and alienating social roles: "And man, the lectures they gave me on men, before they even began trying to assimilate me to him!" (50); "Pupil Mahood, repeat after me, Man is a higher mammal. I couldn't" (69). And against some critics' claims of universality, I will repeat Linda Ben-Zvi's assertion that for Beckett, "Man" is highly gender-specific: living flesh and needless to say male. When the unnamable cannot accept paternalistic definitions of "Man" he is, like Molloy, found guilty of having no place within

the hierarchies of patriarchy, charged with "insults to policemen, indecent exposure, sins against the holy ghost, contempt of court, impertinence to superiors, impudence to inferiors, deviations from reason" (125). The unnamable's alienation, like Molloy's, is from specific others who act as agents of or justification for discourses of paternalism: the law, its enforcers, and God.

The unnamable therefore is presented with the problem of how to overcome or at least minimize this alienation, how to "set about showing [him]self forth" (54) when the only language he knows proclaims his fellowship with the paternalistic social order. There are parallels with the anxiety expressed in some feminist discourses over having one's subjectivity constructed through, and being forced to speak in, a language that reinscribes patriarchy every time it is spoken: "I am afraid, afraid of what my words will do to me, to my refuge, yet again. Is there really nothing new to try?" (20).

The method adopted by *The Unnamable*, and by the body of Beckett's fiction of the 'forties and 'fifties, has most striking similarities to what Lacan calls "the discourse of the Analyst," which, according to Mark Bracher, offers the greatest possibilities for social criticism and personal and social transformation:

It is only with the discourse of the Analyst

...that the subject is in a position to assume its own alienation and desire and, on the basis of that assumption, separate from the given master signifiers and produce its own new master signifiers, that is, ideals and values less inimical to its fundamental fantasy and the desire embodied by that fantasy. It is thus the discourse of the Analyst which, according to Lacan, offers the most effective means of achieving social change by countering the psychological and social tyranny exercised through language (68).

The discourse of the Analyst works through placing the subject's desire, which has been suppressed by his identification with the pre-given master signifiers which justify the discourses from which the subject is alienated, in the dominant position. This "interpellates the analysand to recognize, acknowledge, and deal with this excluded portion of being," to recognize and accept himself as lacking, "to the extent of producing a new master signifier in response to it."

The process of acknowledging the suffering produced by alienating master signifiers, rejecting them, and then producing one's own that are more accommodating to one's desire entails two steps. Lacan refers to these as alienation and separation (Bracher 69). Alienation consists of identifying the specific master signifiers that have alienated the subject through her identification with them-- "naming them and their contraptions." Separation consists of the subject disassociating herself from them and forming new identifications--"say[ing] words...until they find me,

until they say me." Such a process seems to be recounted in *Krapp's Last Tape*:

What I suddenly saw then was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely--...clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most--...unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire-- (60).

Dierdre Baire writes of a corresponding occurrence in Beckett's own life, wherein he rejected an externally imposed ideal and found another, less inimical principle: "optimism is not my way.... but what comforts me is the realization that I can now accept this dark side as the commanding side of my personality. In accepting it, I will make it work for me" (352). For Beckett, accepting this dark side meant acknowledging the full extent of "the mess."

Beckett's fiction can perform both these functions, but not in the vague, purely individualistic way recounted by Krapp. The novels and stories prior to *The Unnamable* take their protagonists and the reader, if he is willing, through the process of alienation from those specific master signifiers--Man, God, Public Decency, The Phallus--which function for all of Western society to inscribe and maintain patriarchy. Beckett's texts refuse to provide the reader with the narcissistic gratification that would result from reflecting his own ideals and values, or by being texts that could be "made sense of," giving the reader the satisfaction

of "solving" them. Unfortunately, readers can nonetheless find various ways to obtain this narcissistic gratification, resulting in readings which are severely at odds with Beckett's texts, as I have shown in the first chapter.

The Unnamable moves on to the second process, separation, while increasing the alienation, "to heighten my disgust," as the narrator says (53). The novel identifies and maintains the same alienation from paternalistic master signifiers as the previous fiction, those "things...that they have crammed me full of to prevent me from saying who I am" (51). However, alienation is shown to be an inevitable function of language itself, which constructs only difference, and which constructs the speaking subject's 'I' as split--both the producer of an enunciation and its subject: "I have to speak in a certain way...first of the creature I am not, as if I were he, and then, as if I were he, of the creature I am" (66). The 'I' in the enunciation is not the same as the 'I' who feels himself to be the origin of the enunciation, but the only way to access that I in a meaningful way is through such an enunciation. Speaking (and thinking, which is done in language) becomes something which happens to the unnamable (146), and not something which he causes to happen. Beckett's conception of subjectivity thus compares with Lacan's rewriting of Descartes' "I think therefore I am" into "I am not where I

think, and I think where I am not" (Eagleton 170) and "I am not wherever I am the plaything of my thought" (Bowie 77).²¹

For Beckett, the subject's entry into language has the same meaning as it does for Lacan: "The paternal metaphor names the child and thus positions it so that it can be replaced discursively by the 'I', in order to enter language as a speaking being" (Grosz 104). This necessitates the acceptance of castration and privation, for the 'I' of language is a replacement or displacement of the wholeness felt by the child before its entry into language:

I must have had the other [I], the one that lasts, but it didn't last, I don't understand, that is to say it did, it still lasts, I'm still in it, I left myself behind in it, I'm waiting for me there, no, there you don't wait, you don't listen (*The Unnamable* 179):

This is the meaning underlying the assertion of Mahood's parents; "And yet he was a fine baby" (43). As a child, before being conscripted into the patriarchal hierarchy, Mahood is "fine." His suffering does not begin until the

²¹Beckett subverts the Cartesian *cogito* in other ways as well. While the unnamable definitely thinks, the "therefore I am" does not, for him, necessarily follow: "I...have no longer the least desire to leave this world...without some kind of assurance that I was really there, such as a kick in the arse, for example, or a kiss, the nature of the attention is of little importance, *provided I cannot be suspected of being its author*. But let two third parties remark me, there, before my eyes, and I'll take care of the rest" (*The Unnamable* 77, my italics). The human subject is not autonomous, but needs to be recognized and acknowledged by *other* human subjects in order to exist as a human subject. One wonders how so much writing on Beckett can take his supposed Cartesianism so seriously.

imposition of the law-of-the-father. Before accepting the privation and lack that comes with the paternal metaphor and assimilation into the social order, the child exists in a state of unmediated reality, undifferentiated from its surroundings, lacking nothing, untroubled by notions of time; "you don't wait," for there is no time and nothing lacking for which one has to wait. Lacan refers to this stage of life as "The Real," which Grozs explains as "the order preceding the ego...a pure plenitude of fullness" (34). After entry into language the Real "cannot be experienced as such: it is capable of representation or conceptualization only through the reconstructive or inferential work of the imaginary and symbolic orders" (34).

The human subject is thus fundamentally alienated from itself. Desire, which results from this split, creates fantasies which act as a replacement for the fullness of being experienced in the Real. These fantasies may be accommodated to a greater or lesser degree (though never Realized) through identification with different master signifiers. Beckett's work demonstrates specifically and forcefully how the master signifiers of paternalism repress, rather than accommodate desire. In promising the subject recognition and love they transform the subject into something unrecognizable to itself. *The Unnamable* depicts the possibility of finding identifications that are more

accommodating, despite the inescapability of language. The whole 'I' of the Real is "unimaginable, unspeakable, that doesn't matter, the attempt must be made, in the old stories incomprehensibly mine, to find his" (177).

However, Beckett does not provide the reader with easy answers. All master signifiers which animate systems of knowledge as a spirit is supposed to animate a body must be questioned: "The thing to avoid...is the spirit of system" (4). If *The Unnamable* proposed new ego-ideals with which the reader is encouraged to identify, it would merely be reinscribing the discourse of the Master and repressing the desire of the reader under different pre-existent master signifiers. Instead, Beckett refuses to depict a solution. Each reader must find their own ego-ideal: "But within, motionless, I can live, and utter me, for no ears but my own" (52). The reader must not peer inside *The Unnamable* as Gaber in *Molloy* peers inside the empty hat of the law-of-the-father "in search of something" (129). Instead, they must look inside their own head, without which a hat is useless, for the way to accommodate their own desire. The desirable master signifier is unnamable indeed, as far as the novel itself is concerned. The reader must name it themselves.

For Beckett it is necessary that political change begin on a fundamental, individual level. We must do away

not only with those alienating ego-ideals which presently play decisive roles in the construction of human subjectivity in Western society, but with the very structure which has individuals submit to preexistent master signifiers. Discourses of collective revolution which seek to impose their own master signifiers on people (as certain strains of Marxism and feminism do), are seen to be just as paternalistic as discourses which work to maintain the status quo. This is demonstrated in "The End," wherein Beckett's narrator is accosted by an orator:

He was bellowing so loud that snatches of his discourse reached my ears. Union...brothers... Marx...capital...bread and butter...love. It was all Greek to me.... He must have been a religious fanatic, I could find no other explanation (*Stories* 66-67).

Beckett is suspicious of "revolutionary" discourses which function like discourses of religious fanaticism, promoting uncritical belief in pre-given ideals. His skepticism is similar to that of Lacan, who told the Marxism-inspired student revolutionaries of 1970 "what you aspire to as revolutionaries, is a master. You will find one" (Bracher 58). In order for the mess to be cleaned up, Beckett would argue, individuals must, along with the unnamable, stop "listen[ing] for the words of [their] master" (*The Unnamable* 30).

The alienating effect of language itself, as it

presently is structured in human society, precludes for both Beckett and Lacan the possibility of an easy "cure" for personal or societal woes. Both, however, insist on trying, Lacan through psychoanalysis, a practice which seeks to be transformative, and Beckett through insisting that "you must go on, I'll go on , you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me."

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