

**SAMUEL BECKETT'S WORK IN REGRESS:  
A Study of the Fiction to 1953**

**SAMUEL BECKETT'S WORK IN REGRESS**  
**A Study of the Fiction to 1953**

By

HARRY VANDERVLIST, M.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

(c) Copyright by H.A. Vandervlist, November 1991



## ABSTRACT

This study shows how the narrative strategies of Beckett's early fiction, developed as a dialogical response to Joyce's work, lead to an implied critique of conventional notions of narrative and subjectivity. Beckett's work, the study argues, takes up the challenge posed by Joyce's "Work in Progress," and Beckett's individualistic reading of Proust, and finally "refus[es] the possibilities of modernist writing" (Said 50). Thus Beckett attempts an "impossible" fiction in which protagonists and narrators reject their roles, the presumption of audience interest is examined and sacrificed, and the speaker's power over language radically questioned. Consequently, *More Pricks than Kicks*, *Murphy*, *Watt*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* demonstrate the fictional potential of rejected and "impossible" tactics such as silence, futility, and apparent incompetence.

The study demonstrates that the isolated individualism of Beckett's protagonists is associated with a breakdown of language and self, a process that provides a fictional anticipation of the theoretical view that language removed from either actual or conventional situations of utterance and reply ("writing" as opposed to speech) becomes an autonomous sign-system which remains silent about questions

of self and identity. (Since it is only in human dialogue, in taking up an anchored subject-position within language, that a speaker's subjectivity can emerge). Beckett's protagonists, seeking to maintain their distance from the social distribution of subject positions, and seeking to propagate their personal monologue outside any dialogue, find themselves lost in a "moment before speech," or in *langue without parole*, and thus are unable to base their own subjectivity in the unmoored or ungrounded discourse they inhabit. To explicate these implicit ideas, I turn to theorists of language and the self such as Emile Benveniste and Jacques Lacan (whose ideas were developing at the same time as Beckett was writing the works treated: in Paris in the 1930's).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My supervisor, Dr. Joseph Adamson, deserves special thanks for combining patient good humour and sensitive guidance. Dr. Linda Hutcheon showed extreme generosity in continuing as a member of the supervisory committee after her departure from McMaster University, and was an invaluable critic. I also thank Dr. Gaby Moyal for his initial encouragement and valuable insights.

My wife Shelley Wall has been more than anyone could deserve, as a friend, a wise critic, and a partner.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION:	1
CHAPTER ONE	
A Perverse Project; An Impossible Art	6
NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE	42
CHAPTER TWO	
The Emerging uses of Impossibility in <i>More Pricks than Kicks</i>	44
NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO	82
CHAPTER THREE	
<i>Murphy: Savoir ne pas faire</i>	83
NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE	128
CHAPTER FOUR	
<i>Watt: Figures of Writing</i>	129
NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR	170

CHAPTER FIVE

*Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable:*

The Relation of Beginning to End 171

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE 220

CONCLUSION 221

WORKS CITED AND CONSULTED 225

## INTRODUCTION

The scope of the study reflects what I argue is a single movement in Beckett's early fiction, from a quirky set of short stories entitled *More Pricks than Kicks*, to the trilogy *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*, which is incontestably a landmark of our century's literature. The motivation of the study is threefold. First, it seeks to discover a satisfactory principle of connection behind this body of fiction. Another motivation is the wish to place this part of Beckett's work in a more convincing relation to the work of Joyce than that suggested by the inaccurate cliché which makes Beckett Joyce's protégé. Finally, there is the urge to make plain the sustained implicit critique, first of fictional convention, but ultimately of essentialist ideas of discourse and subjectivity themselves, which pervades Beckett's work. Within this implicit critique, I believe, lie the seeds of a rigorous post-modern esthetic which has yet to be fully recognized or acknowledged.

The paradigm of "regress" seems to me to satisfy this triple demand. In what sense is Samuel Beckett's fiction

before 1953 a "work in regress?" Such a description is suggested, in part, by the way these works offer a response to the tremendous challenge of Joyce's "Work in Progress." Beckett has made various statements that suggest we should consider his work as related inversely to that of Joyce. Most notorious is his observation that "the more Joyce knew, the more he could . . . I'm working with ignorance, impotence" (Shenker 1956). Recently Andrew Kennedy has described "Beckett's long-term development as . . . moving in a counter-Joyce direction" (8). This "counter-Joyce" movement is perceptible surprisingly early in Beckett's fiction, and its importance increases on the way to the trilogy. How this response develops and takes shape through Beckett's 1931 reading of Proust is the topic of Chapter One of this study.

The term "regress" also applies to the way the fiction discussed here is increasingly refined by a process of subtraction. More and more of the elements still considered essential to satisfy a (necessary and conventional) idea of "well-made fiction" are deleted from Beckett's vocabulary. This movement toward silence is what makes the term "development" inappropriate in speaking of Beckett's work. Elements that are pared away include the representation of a "complete" or "real" world of some kind; characters that are more than explicitly arbitrary collections of traits; even the presumption of an interested reader. The details of

this movement provide the focus for the chapters on *More Pricks than Kicks*, *Murphy*, *Watt*, and *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*.

Just as Watt is "lit less and less by the receding lights" until he is "scarcely to be distinguished from the dim wall behind" (14), so the very materials of Beckett's fiction are reduced. As readers we may feel cheated out of what we expect to find between the covers of a novel; that is, the revelation of a world, of a personage. On the other hand, something does emerge in the declining light--"the dim wall behind." The patient, even ruthless effort to reveal the texture of a fundamental impasse which fiction, and language itself, tend to conceal, underlies all of the works studied here.

Beckett wrote fiction, not literary, linguistic, or psychoanalytic theory. Yet that fiction participates in a cultural movement of which post-Saussurean theory is another expression, and the implications of the fiction seem best articulated using terms borrowed from these theories. Emile Benveniste paints a picture of a subject caught up in language, indeed constituted in language. It is of just such a subject, "made of words, others' words," that Beckett's novels speak (*The Unnamable* 139). The first two chapters of this study show how Belacqua and Murphy try to evade this fate, in particular the entanglement with others which it entails. In *Murphy* and *Watt*, it is an outside observer who

reports on the way Belacqua and Murphy flee from recognizing their condition. In each case the protagonist is afflicted by the knowledge that "words" are both insufficient and powerful, and that it is discourse which confers upon him all the being he has. Murphy's flight from such a condition annihilates him, while Watt's gradual recognition of his status causes a "breakdown." By contrast, the trilogy will gain much of its unique paradoxical quality from the way its narrator-protagonists are forced to narrate their own flights, and resignations: they must flee words, and themselves, *in* words. In the ways they attempt to write and speak, while fleeing writing and speech, they evoke what I have called "indeterminacy." I prefer this term to Nicholas Zurbrugg's "negative relativism" (171) because the term "negative" obscures the deliberate balance which Beckett's novels observe so scrupulously. Indeterminacy is the situation Molloy faces when his utter lack of a destination means that no road is the right road--or the wrong road. Clearly Molloy does not face an entirely negative situation, just a radically indeterminate one. Only in such a situation could he exclaim "a wrong road was an event, for me" (*Molloy* 30).

What is the interest of a fiction that, perhaps perversely, dedicates itself to evoking something so "futile," indeed so hard for readers to take, as this indeterminacy? To show the importance of the sense of indeterminacy evoked in Beckett's fiction, I turn to allied concepts in the work

of several theoretical writers. When Susan Stewart describes "nonsense," when Jean-Jacques Lecercle describes "délire," and when Jacques Lacan and his interpreters describe the Lacanian unconscious, all attempt to speak of something both ignored and fundamental: something that does not go anywhere, that does not get things done, but which speaks, or which, in Beckett's wonderfully ambiguous term, "goes on." Beckett's narrator-protagonists go nowhere, accomplish nothing, but speak in a compelling fashion. What they speak of is that ignored or suppressed aspect of language in which words do not "work," do not communicate, but instead reveal the extent to which they are material. Chapters Four and Five show how *Watt* and the trilogy act out both this paltriness of words, and their simultaneous power as the medium in which Beckett's narrator-protagonists (and ourselves, insofar as we see ourselves as linguistically-constituted subjects) have their being.

CHAPTER ONE:

A perverse project--an impossible art.

What is laid upon us is to accomplish the negative: the positive is already given.

Franz Kafka, "The Great Wall of China"

Modernism begins with the search for a literature which is no longer possible.

Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*

The force with which Beckett's early fictions thwart or dismay expectation is one of their primary features. While it may be impossible to reconstruct the specific expectations of a reader of *More Pricks than Kicks* when it appeared in 1934, it is almost certain that the collection's odd mix of the personal, the erudite, the vicious and the capricious, would evoke the same painful blend of interest and irritation as it does today. It is clear, if only from the difficulties Beckett faced in finding a publisher for *Watt*, that even readers schooled in the formal innovations of *Ulysses* or of "The Waste Land" had difficulty accounting for the peculiar fragmentation at the end of the novel. Even a present-day reader accustomed to strategies of self-parody or fragmentation, used to being called upon to construct or

complete the literary text, may be thwarted by the following introduction to the "Addenda" in *Watt*: "The following precious and illuminating material should be carefully studied. Only fatigue and disgust prevented its incorporation" (247). The placement of an injunction to "careful study" alongside an apparent rejection of the text itself--"fatigue and disgust"--stymies the reader who came *prepared* to study carefully, provided the text itself seemed apt to reward such study. But *Watt*, like most of Beckett's fiction, throws our reading strategies back in our faces, and forces us to become "Beckett readers," in place of the readers we were before. As Beckett's career unfolds, his works play with increasingly fundamental expectations, until it is the foundations of fiction themselves that come into question. Ultimately we may question not only our assumptions about such issues as plot, characterization, or motivation in fiction, but also our thinking about discourse itself, and about the status of the speaker.

Such a reading of any work of fiction raises questions about the separation of fiction from theory, especially since reading Beckett's fiction as a "critique of fiction" and even a "critique of discourse" might appear to be a way of making fiction into allegories of theory. Beckett's fiction, however, is so relentlessly and overtly *self-critical*, *self-interpreting*, both within specific texts and also in the way one text comments upon the others, that to interpret

and synthesize the implications of all of these self-critical, or sometimes self-parodic moments, is not willful, but rather motivated by the difficulties of reading the fiction in the first place. It is true that this is more obviously the case in *Watt* and the works that follow it. *More Pricks than Kicks* and *Murphy* require rather more active interpreting in order for this aspect to emerge; yet such a reading, I believe, accounts for much of the uneasiness these texts provoke in us, and ultimately forges a link connecting all of Beckett's fiction before 1953. The project of this thesis is fully to acknowledge the scope of this meta-fictional and eventually meta-discursive aspect of this period of Beckett's fiction.

To read the fiction this way means interpreting even Beckett's earliest work as fundamentally metafictional. I believe that it manifests this quality partly in the way it reacts to, and comments upon other fiction, specifically the work of Joyce. Beckett's fiction responds to Joyce's work in a fashion Bakhtin would call dialogic.<sup>1</sup> By a "dialogic" response, I mean here a reaction against the notion that Joyce had defined a literary procedure that was so powerful as to become "unitary," or all-encompassing. Beckett's work asserts alternative possibilities and, following the Bakhtinian model of response, relativizes what Beckett must have perceived as an all-encompassing, apparently unanswerable literary procedure. In order to do this,

Beckett's fiction will struggle toward an esthetic that rather than celebrating language, as all of Joyce's work does, instead stresses language's infirmity. Though spurred by the need for a response to Joyce, Beckett's fictions will ultimately move far beyond this initial motive, coming to embody a critique of fictional convention, and of the conventional wisdom concerning discourse and its speakers which underlies fiction's most basic attributes. This critique, which will be explored in later chapters, parallels the developments in modern linguistics, psychology and philosophy associated with the work of Saussure, Benveniste and Lacan.

To say that "Beckett" replies to "Joyce" is of course to rely on a form of critical shorthand. What specific aspects of Joyce's work, or of the critical image evoked by his name, do I understand Beckett's novels to be replying to? Clearly James Joyce has a privileged place in twentieth-century mythology about literature. He has been made the archetype of the artist as craftsman, or in his terminology, the "penman." The Joyce of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* perhaps offers a revision of the Romantic idea of the artist exercising a Coleridgean Primary Imagination, repeating divine creativity within a finite realm. Such a repetition of divine creation was the ideal of Stephen Dedalus, "forging" in his soul "the uncreated conscience" of his race, as if completing an original creation. With

*Ulysses* Joyce's material becomes history itself (June 16, 1904), and in particular the repetitive patterns of both Victorian history and literature. "The daughters of memory, which William Blake chased from his door, received regular employment from Joyce" (Ellmann 364). The artist thus becomes as much an investigator, discoverer, and assembler of patterns as an originator. This image draws elements from other cultural clichés--the innovation of the scientist or discoverer, the method of a Scholastic, the useless erudition of a mad pedant. This image of The Author, jostling with the still-potent image of the Romantic visionary, "creation's androgynous god" (Ellmann 364), has presided over the thinking about, and the creation of literature for decades.

The image of author-as-craftsman insists in its iconic way that the creation of literature has to do with, for instance, the mediation between personal history and circumstances (Joyce's own history and exile, the autobiographical elements of *Ulysses*). Literary creation becomes a negotiation between the observed or researched "real world" (seen in Joyce's meticulous care for veracity, and his use of Dublin directories, for instance) and the gifts of "genius" (formal and stylistic innovation, painstaking revision, unique insight, innovation and craftsmanship). The artist is conceived of as a craftsperson working masterfully in a subservient medium (in this case language) which is itself

equal to express the insights and the formal discoveries of the author.<sup>2</sup> The power and influence of such a paradigm--a paradigm legitimated within critical discourse by references to authors such as Joyce--affects our critical conceptions of the nature of art and the artist, our judgments of value, our criteria of interpretive relevance, even our interpretive procedures themselves.

Like Joyce, Beckett is associated with the idea of art as painstaking craft--there is a legendary notion of his own severity towards his productions. Yet his disdainful titles, his declining and almost self-repudiated output, point to the radical difference in orientation between Beckett's work and that of Joyce, especially if we consider the exuberant and affirmative aspects of *Ulysses*, its famous "yes," as opposed to all of the negations in Beckett. The close association of Joyce and Beckett in our literary-historical imaginations occasionally obscures this radical difference, making it harder to see the ways in which Beckett's early work actually begins to repudiate much of what Joyce has been made to stand for. Here I mean the ideas about literary creation, sketched above, for which Joyce's work has been used as evidence, along with the reverence for, or delight in, the ordinary seen in Joyce's work. Beckett's works may overflow with "the ordinary," but rather than exclaiming "welcome, O life," as Stephen Dedalus does, Beckett's narrators often treat "the ordinary" with scorn and

contempt, reserving affection, parodically, for the *hyper-ordinary*: Molloy's stones, his knife-rest, all of the hats, boots, sticks.

In what follows I will explore the fruitfulness of viewing "Beckett" as a revolt from "Joyce," as what Bakhtin would call a rejoinder in a dialogue. Every revolution involves evolution, and Beckett's early works can be shown to capitalize upon developments in Joyce's work. But where critics deem Joyce to have progressed from masterpiece to masterpiece (Anthony Burgess bases his claim for Joyce's uniqueness on the fact that he published "only masterpieces") Beckett's early fictions, dating from the period of Joyce's *Work in Progress*, grope their way toward a representation, or enactment, of failure, incompetence and silence. In fulfilling this "perverse" project, they paradoxically achieve a spectacular "success." They work their way back from the pinnacle of conscious craft and mastery seen in *Ulysses*, painting themselves ever more surely into a corner that is entirely their own. Thus Beckett's oeuvre can be opposed to that of Joyce and dubbed a "Work in Regress."

The idea that the character of this reaction is best described in negative terms--as a "regress," a flight, rather than an evolution or a transcending--was provoked partly by Edward Said's statement that Beckett's work represents "a refusal of the possibilities of modernist writing" (50).<sup>3</sup> In fact, Beckett's "literature of exhaus-

tion," as John Barth might describe it, does "pretend that it is next to impossible to write original--perhaps any--literature" (Stark 1). Ihab Hassan has also suggested this relationship between the work of Joyce and Beckett:

Joyce wrote as if language were inexhaustible and the possibilities of the novel infinite, and it may be that Joyce himself managed to exhaust both. Beckett, however, rejects the encyclopedic powers of the novel and turns his back upon the power of language to summon and alter reality . . . the total verbal competence of Joyce is supplanted by the more thorough "incompetence" of Beckett.  
(115)

How does a literature become "exhausted" and prompt the search for an alternative, even if that alternative may be charged with perversity? To ask another question (one that I believe occurs to many readers who fear to ask it out of respect for Beckett's reputation, if not for his work itself): why would a highly capable artist go down the path that Beckett clearly chose early in his career, and produce "perverse" and unpopular works whose only saving grace, according to many critics, is a kind of bleak and savage humour? To ask this is to ask questions about the forces at work in the literary world of the period, as much as about the personalities of individual authors. The answer that this thesis offers to such questions is that literature after Joyce--at least, the line of literature that felt a necessity to see itself as "post-Joyce"--conceived of itself as being at an impasse (as Kenner's *The Stoic Comedians* suggests) or in a state of exhaustion. Mikhail Bakhtin's model

of "dialogue" provides, I believe, an especially useful way to understand the workings of Beckett's response to Joyce in his first stories and novels.

According to Bakhtin's intertextual model of the history of the novel, changes and development occur when official, canonized forms are recognized as fixed and stylized. Their fixity robs them of the "openness to the present," their connection with everyday life, which for Bakhtin is the novel's hallmark. One response to this fixity is to exaggerate this stylization in parody.<sup>4</sup> Another form of response is to open up these fixed forms to the intrusions of a contemporary life they have come to exclude, as popular representations of lived experience have altered while the canonical representations of it have not. These two modes of development correspond to the traditional satiric strategies of the exaggeration of style, or of the use of a fixed style to treat subjects deemed inappropriate (usually they are deemed inappropriate because they are thought "lower" than the subjects habitually represented in that style; an example is Pope's "Rape of the Lock" or any mock-epic). Joyce's *Ulysses* abounds in both kinds of parody, of course.

Bakhtin offers a history of fictional forms based on the idea of "repetition with a difference"; the parodic renovations of canonized forms constitute such a series. This approach is well adapted to the work of Joyce, who himself adopted from Vico a view of history as a series of such

"repetitions with a difference." Like Bakhtin's model of literary history, Joyce's model of human (and literary) history saw the relation between the repeated events as a parodic relation. Such a view forms part of the essential scaffolding behind *Ulysses*.<sup>5</sup> Thus it is not surprising that Joyce's work illustrates Bakhtin's model of dialogic relationships. Throughout Joyce's writing, styles and subjects canonized by the academy or respected by Joyce himself are imitated, criticized, parodied and renovated in precisely the manner described by Bakhtin: the work of Dante, Ibsen, and Homer are all subject to this process. These discursive styles are relativised, placed in close contact with each other as well as with popular verbal styles such as newspaper writing, political rhetoric, and barroom talk. All of these discourses are subject to the kind of "interillumination" Bakhtin saw occurring in polyglot societies, and in polyphonic works of literature.<sup>6</sup> *Ulysses*, then, embodies much of what Bakhtin saw as essential to the development of the novel.

Of course the special quality of Joyce's later work is that it is to an extent "self-relativising," and thus demands a particular sort of dialogic response. Both Joyce and Proust evoked what Nicholas Zurbrugg, writing of Proust, calls a "positive relativism," which allows for infinite possibilities. It is thus hard to imagine how such a relativist vision could ever become "fixed" as Bakhtin says

of poetic forms; and it is such "fixed" forms which are relativised through dialogue. However, Beckett's gradual discovery of an esthetic of failure or impossibility allows him to reply dialogically. Beckett, particularly in *Proust*, marks out a field of what Zurbrugg calls "negative relativism," but which I prefer to describe as "indeterminacy," as a response to this "positive relativism."

After Joyce, however, it becomes more difficult for writers who might respond to Joyce the way Joyce replied to his own predecessors (following Bakhtin's model). There are of course whole schools of writing which do not assume that Joyce is an essential figure to whom all subsequent work must come as a response. Yet many have felt, and continue to feel, that it is impossible not to take account of Joyce's work in some way. Certainly this is the case in Samuel Beckett's work. How can the writer who seeks to *reply* to Joyce do so without *repeating* Joyce? Confining ourselves for the moment to a necessarily simplified version of Bakhtin's model, we find two ways to avoid repeating Joyce, two ways to avoid merely parroting what would thus become, *ipso facto*, a canonized form. One could parody Joyce's style, exposing its stylized quality and the distance from present reality which Bakhtin saw as the mark of a fixed literary form. Or one could introduce a *more* immediate representation of contemporary life, exposing in

another way the stylization and distance from contemporary experience of Joyce's narrative form. Would either of these strategies have been an effective response, in the 1930s and 1940s, to works such as *Ulysses* or the *Work in Progress*? Probably not: it is arguable that Joyce's use of parody, in *Ulysses* especially, is so all-inclusive and works from so many perspectives, that the work is effectively inoculated against the use of such tactics against itself. To do with *Ulysses* what *Ulysses* does with Homer would not be a parody, only an imitation.

Similarly, many have shown that Joyce managed to combine a parodic adoption of "high" styles (such as epic or political oration) with a reverence for the "lowest"--or most universal--aspects of contemporary life. If we accept the interpretation of *Finnegans Wake* offered by Joyce, that it represents the experience of a sleeping protagonist, then where can we hope to find a greater acceptance of the mundanely human, of experiences thought too unextraordinary to be narrated? How might one further open up such a work by introducing a more immediate representation of everyday experience? Wouldn't one again be trapped into a repetition rather than a parodic renovation of Joyce's work? To turn back to a more realistic, less self-conscious literary form would perhaps be to repeat one's predecessor's predecessors; to re-use forms and materials irrevocably transformed by Joyce's innovations, in a way that fails to take account of

those innovations. The two "Bakhtinian" modes of response sketched above (parody of Joyce, or greater openness to the present, to everyday reality) seem unviable when applied--in a narrow sense--to Joyce.

It does not seem unreasonable to hypothesize that those influenced by such a model, embedded as it is in Joyce's novels, and convinced of the need to respond in their own work to that of Joyce, would conceive of post-Joyce fiction as confronting an impasse. The following interpretation of Samuel Beckett's early fictions presumes some such point of departure for Beckett's work. Whether the impersonal, intertextual development of modern fiction drove narrative down this path, or whether living human authors felt such a dilemma as part of their experience, the starting point remains the same. The already monumental, yet still vital work of James Joyce must somehow be acknowledged without being repeated; and the obvious ways to move on from Joyce's work seem pre-empted by that work itself. Some alternative needed to be found. The alternative taken up in Samuel Beckett's early work is one that seems, at first consideration, open to dismissal. Yet by virtue of this quality it fulfills at least part of the criteria implied in Bakhtin's dialogic model--that new, renovating forms will propose as valid what earlier forms dismissed.

Beckett's early fiction responds to Joyce's work by retreating from the all-inclusive, encyclopedic scope of

*Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, in favour of a preoccupation with the minimal conditions necessary for the survival of narrative, or if not of narrative, then of utterance itself. This is linked to the (impossible?) attempt to avoid representing the actual at all, in favour of an unconcretized, thus unutterable and inexhaustible, potential. Beckett extends Joyce's ambivalent relation to language as both a sufficient medium, and one in need of and amenable to deliberate modification, as in *Finnegans Wake*. Beckett, as Joyce did, rejects the view that sees language as a tool, but he displays a much deeper skepticism toward not only words, but also the human faculties of memory and perception, in whose name words are allegedly controlled to form representations. Following his interpretation of Proustian memory, Beckett will try to repudiate the sort of recollective or anecdotal memory that furnished much material for Joyce. Ultimately this implies the end of the separation of self (memory and perception) from language, and leads toward a view of the self as the creation of the language of others.

Joyce's affirmation of commonplace life becomes, in Beckett, an attempt to discover the limits to which the narration of the futile, the aimless, or the absurd can be taken. This is initially motivated by the sense, again derived from Beckett's reading of Proust, that all narration of ordinary experience is by definition futile (because con-

cerned only with either boredom or suffering, the first worthless and the second rarely perceived clearly or represented adequately). Ultimately Beckett will attempt to locate the "unnarrateable" and evoke it--since it cannot be directly represented--by the most suitable language, that is, an *unnarrating* language. Gradually Beckett's work will thus define an impossible discursive world, a world opposed to the plane of the "merely feasible." Beckett's project will use many of the same techniques seen in Joyce's work, yet take fiction in a different and singular direction. The project is a perverse one, whose self-proclaimed impossibilities beget humorous possibilities.<sup>7</sup> It is a project that could only have been conceivable, in this particular form, during a period of revision of established views of language, representation, and human subjectivity, and of the essential links between these concerns. In its skepticism and its brand of humour, that writing reflects these developments.

An important foundation for this apparently negative approach to literary art can be found in Beckett's 1931 essay on Proust. In this essay, literary art and its possibilities are defined so narrowly as to make that art virtually impossible. The essay's sometimes arrogant, even patrician tone echoes its explicit scorn for most of what we still consider essential to fictional creation: the combination of remembered experience and insight with invention,

the depiction of an interesting action, or the representation of human relationships. Everything feasible is scorned in *Proust*. The reader of the essay is compelled to consider the famous remark in *Three Dialogues*, which claims that art, at least as Beckett defines it, must depart from "the plane of the feasible." Is the very idea a joke? Probably--much of the *Three Dialogues* is humorous, presenting "Beckett" as a cranky and distracted participant and his viewpoint as an eccentric one. Yet the idea that an art might turn away from doing "the possible" as well as possible, and consider "the impossible" as a potential arena, is not new in the *Three Dialogues*, which date from 1949, but in fact recurs in implicit form in Beckett's early writing, especially in the essay on Proust. The notion is an elusive one, for one cannot turn from doing the possible to "doing" the impossible. Something other than "doing" or "accomplishing" in the usual sense will have to become the new focus for artistic activity. Some criteria other than "success" as it is usually conceived will have to apply. Why this might be necessary, and what form its realization might take, is sketched in *Proust*. The brief discussion of this essay which follows cannot undertake to evaluate the accuracy of Beckett's criticism of Proust, of course; instead, the essay offers an indication of Beckett's own emerging conception of what literary art could be, for him. In this reading I agree with Nicholas Zurbrugg's observation that the essay

may begin "by analyzing the values of Proust" but ends "by adumbrating the antithetical values of Beckett" (170).

The point of departure for Beckett's thesis is a conception of Time, as he interprets its presentation in Proust's novel, as a "cancer" of which Proust's characters are "victims" (12-13). Time robs the subject of any unity worthy of attention, since its action on the subject results "in an unceasing modification of his personality, whose permanent reality, if any, can only be apprehended as a retrospective hypothesis" (15).<sup>8</sup> How would this retrospective hypothesis of one's own self-unity be achieved? Through memory. Memory alone can knit together the fragmented perceptions of a being subject to existence in time, and create some unity. It might seem that this outlook would lend itself to an optimistic vision of the value of art and its preservative and commemorative function; but not in Beckett's view. Beckett sees in Proust's novel the evidence of two forms of memory, one voluntary and utilitarian, the other involuntary, liable to be triggered only by chance stimuli.

The recapturing of time evoked in Proust's novel, argues Beckett, has nothing to do with the voluntary memory, the only form of memory subject to the control of the will. Any reminiscence prompted by the will comes under the species of mere habit, "the great deadener":

The laws of memory are subject to the more general laws of habit. Habit is a compromise effected

between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability . . . Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit. Breathing is habit. Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals. (19)

Voluntary memory, argues Beckett, is not really memory at all because what it remembers is conserved only out of habit, never really forgotten, yet never really perceived. That is, it is not authentically perceived because it was perceived through the veil of habit. In this seemingly idealistic argument, there is in fact a transcendent perception and an authentic memory, which are quite different from the everyday voluntary perception and recall.

Beckett describes this transcendent faculty when considering the way Proust represents the achievement of simultaneity by his characters. The recapturing of lost time leads to a moment of simultaneity, in which the character actually experiences two different times, two different places, simultaneously, thus abolishing space and time in subjective experience, for a moment. These moments achieve a unity which transcends the usual subjection to time. Such moments involve suffering, since they allow the clear perception of the full extent to which experience in time is fragmented. This suffering is the only alternative to the boredom of habitual experience; thus experience is here defined as boredom relieved by rare moments of suffering.

Beckett stresses that these rare moments are never willed, and that the recaptured time is always a moment that had been truly forgotten--that is, it never entered the everyday perceptions at all, and could remain untainted by the veil of habit.

Such perceptions, acquired "slyly and painfully and patiently under the nose of our vulgarity," contain "the best of our many selves" (31). These moments, when recaptured, are recognized but not "remembered." Proust's characters are not actively "searching" for particular moments of "lost time," Beckett stresses. At least if they do this they never succeed. Success in annihilating time and space comes only involuntarily. Involuntary memory, triggered by the chance perception, is the key to these moments of achieved simultaneity. The will has no role to play:

Proust . . . is almost exempt from the impurity of will. He deplores his lack of will until he understands that will, being utilitarian, a servant of intelligence and habit, is not a condition of the artistic experience. When the subject is exempt from will the object is exempt from causality. (Time and Space taken together). And this human vegetation is purified in the transcendental aperception that can capture the Model, the Idea, the Thing in itself. (90)

What is defined here as the "artistic experience" is linked to the actual possibility of capturing something transcendental, some kind of reality immune to the "cancer" of time and of space as well. The outlook Beckett sketches

here contains elements reminiscent of Romantic optimism about the quality of art's insights and the power reserved to the "artistic experience." In fact Beckett describes Proust as having in some ways "receded" from the starting point of Symbolism toward the Romanticism of Hugo (80). The crippling qualification which Beckett imposes upon this optimism, however, lies in the notion that the whole possibility of encountering such an insight, entering into such an experience, is subservient to chance. The artist may will a work into existence, but cannot will its quality: Beckett argues that "[Proust's] work is not an accident, but its salvage is an accident" (32). The conscious human will is radically cut off from any participation in this "transcendental aperception." Romantic optimism is disappointed into a sardonic fatalism. As the passage that appears as an epigraph to this chapter insists, imagination is a "myth," direct perception a "caricature," and voluntary memory a mere tool of the habit art is supposed to transcend:

Voluntary memory . . . is of no value as an instrument of evocation, and provides an image as far removed from the real as the myth of our imagination or the caricature furnished by direct perception. There is only one real impression and one adequate mode of evocation. Over neither have we the least control. (14)

Beckett's essay on Proust, then, disdainfully charts the "plane of the feasible" and finds that it offers no worthwhile possibilities to the artist. What can one do, if bound by this ironic dismissal of the value of conscious

perception, memory, and willed invention? Such a question provides the starting-point for Beckett's early fictions. It must be stressed that this statement speaks more of Samuel Beckett's own conclusions than about anything in Proust. Nicholas Zurbrugg demonstrates clearly, in his *Beckett and Proust*, that "Beckett's *Proust* is written with all the advantages and the disadvantages of poetic license," to the point that

[i]f Beckett's essay caricatures Proust as a pessimistic sage espousing negative relativism, then this reading of *A la recherche du temps perdu* almost certainly reflects Beckett's growing awareness of his own . . . compulsion to elaborate a poetry--or fiction--of "dud" mysticism, pessimism, and negative relativism. (171)

In fact the view Beckett outlines in his interpretation of Proust is a dialectical vision of experience. The dialectic moves between boredom/habit/subjection to Time, and suffering/involuntary remembrance/transcendence of Time. The basic structure is that of a dialectic of lack and excess, which Lacan describes as essential to signification in language. Just as language appears as a dialectic between something there are too many of--meanings--and something there are too few of--words or expressions--so in *Proust* Beckett establishes a dialectic between the excessive ("habit") and the lacking (the purity of the artistic experience). It is Beckett's radical skepticism about the possibility of achieving or communicating authentic perception which differentiates the view presented in *Proust* from a

Romantic hope for more direct or authentic perception.

Beckett's dialectic also differs from those of Joyce and Yeats. The excess, the clutter, the dismissible and disrespected stuff of everyday life, became for Joyce, as it did for Yeats, the necessary focus of artistic work, because it repeated (with a difference) transcendent forms. For Joyce, the ordinary has an epiphanic quality, while for Yeats, the "foul rag and bone shop of the heart" was the place "where all the ladders start" ("The Circus Animals' Desertion" l. 40). In a sense, their visions, different as they are, allow for a balanced dialectic between the disorderly, mundane "rag and bone shop" world, and the other, ordered world of aesthetic experience which confers meaning and hope upon the first. This kind of dialectic is replaced, in the vision outlined in Beckett's *Proust*, by an *unbalanced* dialectic of lack and excess in which the excess of perception, or of fragmented experience, compensates for the lack of ultimate unity, of significance. When Beckett chooses to focus on the impossible and the unrepresentable, he orients his fiction toward the lack which his vision placed at the center of experience, a lack analogous to the one which post-structuralist linguistics and psychoanalysis place at the center of language.<sup>9</sup> Gradually, in his early novels, the inseparability of language and experience will become a preoccupation, so that there is finally nothing to choose between a vision of experience as a dialectic of

boredom and suffering, and a view of language as a dialectic between excessive signifiers and lacking signification.

In the goal-lessness of a Belacqua Shuah, in *More Pricks than Kicks*, and the more reasoned passivity of a Murphy, we see the development of that repudiation of the will which Beckett describes in *Proust*. These are incompetent protagonists. More accurately, they do not see the point of what is normally considered competence, since they wish for little that such competence can achieve for them. In fact desire is so attenuated in them that there is no engine for their narratives other than that provided by chance, or by an (arbitrarily) imposed external framework. Their stories are presented in fictional forms that enact the same skepticism toward the desire for what can be had, the achievement of what it is possible to achieve. Belacqua and Murphy insult conventional expectations about narrative and characterization. As the insult is pursued it dignifies itself into a critique of such expectations, and of the deeper conventions concerning language and the self which well-made narratives habitually reinforced. In *Watt* and the works that follow it this critique is pursued, with consequences for both the language and form of Beckett's fictions.

What fictional forms, we might ask, can appropriately accompany such negative preoccupations? One element of the Romantic legacy which the modernists seemed to adopt wholeheartedly was that of "appropriate form." The doctrine

holds that any new or unique statement must arrive at its own unique form. Coleridge expresses the view when he states that "No work of true genius dares want its appropriate form, nor is there any danger of this" (qtd. in Richter 303-306). The belief in absolute appropriateness of form is upheld among the modernists by Ezra Pound when he avows in his 1916 essay "Vorticism" that "I believe in an absolute rhythm. I believe that every emotion and every phase of emotion has some toneless phrase, some rhythm-phrase to express it" (106). The implication of this doctrine is, of course, that to distinguish "form" from "content" is naive. The "new" will be new in its every aspect. We see the impact of this doctrine in the fragmented form of "The Waste Land," and a formalist evolution of it (via Clive Bell and Roger Fry's theory of "significant form") in Virginia Woolf's search for an appropriate form for works such as *To the Lighthouse* or *The Waves*. Once again, Joyce's own work reinforces and develops this modern axiom, as when Stephen's childhood memories are rendered as a decontextualized mosaic of recalled adult voices, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Of course Joyce's later work takes the doctrine of appropriate form to a kind of limit, stretching the notion of "appropriate" in *Ulysses*, where so many different styles turn out to be in some sense appropriate that the whole notion collapses in the overwhelming abundance of pure discursive variety. *Finnegans*

Wake again challenges the notion of appropriate form by taking it to another kind of limit, where language itself must change to accommodate the appropriate expression of a state that transcends individual human subjectivity.

Beckett himself seems to have taken *Finnegans Wake*, in its earlier incarnation as *Work in Progress*, as an exemplar of "appropriate form," or of the direct correspondence of form and content. He uses these terms in his 1928 essay "Dante . . . Bruno. Vico . . . Joyce," as follows:

Here is direct expression--pages and pages of it. And if you don't understand it, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is because you are too decadent to receive it. You are not satisfied unless form is so strictly divorced from content that you can comprehend the one almost without bothering to read the other. (13)

Beckett goes on to describe "the form that is an arbitrary and independent phenomenon" as stimulating merely a "reflex of dribbling comprehension" (14). We find here also Beckett's oft-quoted observations about "Work in Progress," that "Here form *is* content, content *is* form," and "[this] writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*" (14). While I do not wish to adopt this form/content distinction, it is clear that in 1928 Beckett himself was motivated to find ways for writing to "be the thing itself," rather than to describe something. The earlier novels are, I believe, "about" the things which Watt and later work succeed in enacting rather than describing.

Beckett's early novels possess a distinctive thematic preoccupation with the themes of (necessary) failure and incompetence, and with the defects of competence itself. It is the problem of how to write at all, in the light of these preoccupations, which furnishes one concern of the following chapters which consider individual works. The increasingly metafictional aspect of Beckett's early works manifests itself in various ways, involving direct parodic reference to other works at times, yet also appearing as a consciousness of the conventions of fiction or of discourse, rather than of specific fictions, specific pieces of discourse. In either case we find the "auto-critique of discourse in its relation to reality" that Linda Hutcheon sees as a hallmark of self-referential fictions (82). At times this critique questions or denies the "reality" to which the discourse should supposedly refer, while at other times the inadequacies of the discourse are stressed, implying the power of the "reality." Beckett's maturer fiction, as I hope to demonstrate, will find ways to perform both of these "critiques" at once.

I would like to sketch briefly the trajectory of this auto-critique of discourse, embodied in the humorous perversities of Beckett's early novels, and the ways in which it parallels developing views of language and subjectivity. Although these relationships will be examined at greater length in connection with particular novels below, it will

be helpful to outline the general pattern of the critique beforehand. As the discussion of *Proust* above shows, a concern for the relation between discourse and reality informs Beckett's earliest published writing. *Proust* also recognizes the profound links between representation (in the memory, in language, in literary texts) and subjectivity. In his essay Beckett explicates the Proustian view of subjectivity as an illusion, a creation of habit, which serves to veil the fact that the continuity of the individual is ruptured by time. There is no "I" apart from a succession of "I's" whose discontinuity is merely disguised by habitual defects of perception.

Despite this radical discontinuity in everyone's subjectivity, the impression of continuity is essential for the continuation of social life, and for the functioning of discourse. In *Proust* Beckett identifies both of these with habit. The linguistic theorist Emile Benveniste also links social life, discourse, and the impression of a continuous subjectivity, in his discussion of the importance of the personal pronouns. Benveniste accepts, as Beckett does in *Proust*, that subjectivity has no external or objective reality. It is an impression, an effect:

[Subjectivity] is defined not by the feeling which everyone experiences of being himself (this feeling, to the degree that it can be taken note of, is only a reflection) but as the psychic unity that transcends the totality of the actual experiences it assembles and that makes the permanence of the consciousness. Now we hold that "sub-

jectivity" . . . is only the emergence in the being of a fundamental property of language. "Ego" is he who says "ego." That is where we see the foundation of "subjectivity," which is determined by the linguistic status of "person."  
(224)

Benveniste's claim is in keeping with the movement towards seeing language as primary and constitutive of self, rather than as a tool of consciousness. Language is a differential system establishing meaning by way of contrast; similarly, consciousness of self is established through contrast. By inserting oneself into the differential system of language, by saying "I," one enters both discourse and the social world.

Now this triangle--self, discourse, and the social world, or Other--is fundamentally important to Beckett's work. The texts to be examined here embody a complex and fascinating interplay between a horror of the social, and a wish to preserve the self as independent from the world of Others, while at the same time they offer a sense that the self is not self-sufficient (not "properly born"). A paradoxical compulsion to discourse accompanies these tensions. In various ways, both *Murphy* and *Watt* either narrate or enact the torments of characters who need to enter the social world in order to properly exist, partly because they see some necessity to speak, to tell; yet they see the social world as inevitably destroying whatever sense of self they possess.

The idea that the social world is one the characters must enter, if they wish to enter into discourse, finds a reflection in post-Saussurean theories of subjectivity. For example, Benveniste's claim for the radical primacy of language in the formation of subjectivity has been extended by several others. Louis Althusser's concept of "interpellation" develops from this point of departure, and itself demonstrates the fact that to link discourse and subjectivity is to recognize that language is an inextricably social phenomenon, and subjectivity, by consequence, can only be intersubjective.<sup>10</sup> Jacques Lacan's adoption and extension of Benveniste's insights into the realm of psychology also emphasizes this point.

Beckett's early fiction after *Murphy* expresses several elements of Lacan's views concerning the interrelatedness of language and subjectivity. This is not to say that Beckett read or adapted Lacanian or any other psychology; it is simply the case that Beckett's fictional explorations of language and representation lead into the same territory explored by linguistics and psychoanalysis, and that through the concepts offered by those disciplines we can better appreciate the implications of the fiction. What is most important to the present reading of Beckett's work is the Lacanian account of the subject's entry into language, and of the structure of signification. This will be dealt with in more detail in subsequent chapters. In his Foreword to

Paul Smith's *Discerning the Subject*, John Mowitt offers a capsule summary of the significance of the subject's entry into language:

Because human reality is irreducibly mediated by language and because language is the differential system described by Saussure, the subject that arises in language is structured by the differential logic of the linguistic signifying chain. In short, the subject is divided by that which enables it to articulate its experience as its own. Second, the linguistic constitution of the subject predisposes it toward others . . . Thus, the subject is not only divided, but is energetically entangled in the social construction of reality. Third, the subject's desire (structured by its linguistically mediated intersubjective constitution) not only destabilizes the subject, but also attaches the impossible structure of the subject to the lived inadequacy of social reality.  
(xv)

As I have suggested above, *Murphy* and Beckett's earlier work take up the problem of desire and entanglement in a social world that is seen as destructive. In *Watt* and later writing, Beckett explores the mediation of subjectivity by language, and the paradoxical way that, as Mowitt phrases it, "the subject is divided by that which enables it to articulate its experience as its own." These thematic preoccupations arise naturally, in Beckett's work, as a consequence of the formal play that work undertakes. In other words, I do not believe that Beckett set out to explore the linguistic constitution of the subject, but rather that, in the course of formal experimentation, the paradoxical qualities of language and their infringement on subjectivity

emerged and became both formal and thematic material for further fiction.

How can formal experimentation lead to this concern with language and subjectivity? This occurs as a result of insights into the structure of one's material--in this case language and narrative form--that impose themselves as that material is taken to a kind of limit. In their attempts to refuse conventional narration, to retreat from conventional significance, to ignore accepted hierarchies of relevance, and in their metafictional self-consciousness, the works discussed here uncover that Lacanian dialectic of lack and excess referred to above. As Jean-Jacques Lecercle describes it:

The main characteristic of language is . . . excess: more meaning creeps into the sentence than the author intended, echoes and involuntary repetitions disturb the careful ordering of the linguistic units. . . . But to this excess there corresponds a lack: the absence of a central all-mastering subject, who means what he says and says what he means. . . . The lack of the signified and signifying subject is compensated for by the excess of signifiers. Such is the "logic of the signifier." (80)

Alexander Pope, though working with a more straightforward conception of words and their "sense" as discrete units, was perhaps led to similar skepticism about language and signification. "Words are like Leaves," he wrote, "and where they most abound, / Much Fruit of Sense beneath is seldom found" (*Essay on Criticism*, II, 309-10). To take seriously the proportion implied here between unitary "words" and

"sense" would be to accept that the most meaningful utterance would be no utterance at all. This would be taking Pope's point to an absurd limit, which is precisely where the fictions examined here reside. At this absurd limit, Beckett's early writing enters a narrative realm where texts (imitating their protagonists) "go nowhere." In declining even the appearance of direction or effectiveness, texts such as *Watt* and *Molloy* create what Susan Stewart calls an "impossible context":

Not only does the text itself appear as a surface replete with signification, but it also makes conscious aspects of context that would remain unarticulated in everyday life and the fictions of realism. The text thus comes to pack its own context, to carry its own set of interpretive procedures "spelled out" on its surface. This is the moment of nonsense with its impossible context--a context that is unrealizable, that "no one can stand" in everyday life precisely because it is overburdened with consciousness. (87)

As a result, then, of formal transgressions, the boundaries of the "possible," the "feasible," are questioned and mocked. Beckett's works experiment with the appearance of willful incompetence. This too, as Stewart observes, is an aspect of metafiction, or metacommunication:

[T]exts that are metacommunicative involve the making conscious of skill. With increasing reflexivity, they involve a making conscious of the very procedures by which the unconscious is made conscious. With nonsense, skill itself becomes gratuitous and suspect, and is systematically inverted in a movement towards a flaunted, a skillful, incompetence--an incompetence that implies competence and the limits of competence with every gesture. (88)

This account of a skillful and mocking incompetence could describe the protagonists of Beckett's earlier fictions--Belacqua, Murphy--as much as it describes the form and language of *Watt* or *Molloy*.

Early in this chapter I stated that the incompetence of such protagonists, and of their narratives, develops beyond the point of merely insulting expectation. Eventually such texts come to bear important critical implications. How can texts that "make no sense" perform any critical function? In fact, French theorists such as Foucault, Deleuze, and interpreters of their work such as Jean-Jacques LeCercle, are coming to recognize a tradition of rule-breaking writing which overlaps with what Stewart calls nonsense. This emerging tradition, for which LeCercle sees no equivalent in Anglo-Saxon culture, has been called "*délire*," after a "*délire* which is not really delirium" (3). It consists of the texts resulting from either pathological or literary mishandlings of language and narrative, in ways which illuminate the ordinarily repressed paradoxes of language, communication and the linguistic constitution of the subject: "a corpus of delirious texts (not produced only by mental patients but also by poets, novelists or linguists) and of analyses of *délire*" (3). LeCercle includes in this corpus work by Artaud and Beckett, Saussure's investigations of anagrams, and the productions of mental patients such as Schreber, Wolfson and Brisset.

The salient feature of this body of writing, for LeCercle and others who have investigated it, is not so much its link to madness as its capacity to reveal and criticize the assumptions of everyday communicative language:

[D]élire . . . is a form of discourse, which questions our most common assumptions of language (whether expressed by linguists or philosophers), where the old philosophical question of the emergence of sense out of nonsense receives a new formulation, where the material side of language, its origin in the human body and desire, are no longer eclipsed by its abstract aspect (as an instrument of communication or expression). (6)

Typically, the texts gathered into this corpus present language as autonomous rather than as an instrument. As several of Beckett's characters find, or fear to find, the entry into language is not the adoption of a tool, but the constitution of oneself by a structure that is other, that entangles oneself with others. While everyday communication represses this fact, adopting the necessary fiction of a unified subject and a subservient medium, "*délire*, as an experience of possession, of loss of control by the subject, reverses the relation of mastery" (9). In other words, delirious texts enact the relation between language and self which Benveniste and Lacan had theorized. It is the nature of delirious texts to be difficult, ironic, uncomfortable, irritating--and perhaps humourous. LeCercle's description of the reader's experience of such texts will ring true for many who recall their first encounter with Beckett:

[T]here is something paradoxical in a delirious text: it appears to lack meaning (partly or

utterly) and yet, somehow, it always means. Even if the reader fails to understand what it means, he is certain that the text means to mean. (107)

It is this paradoxical quality that leads many to describe Beckett's works as "impossible," in the colloquial sense of being frustrating, uncooperative. Theorists of *délire* see such writing as pointing out repressed impossibilities, the repressed paradoxes of language. By doing so, such texts threaten the world of common sense, by revealing the ways in which sense can be made, and by revealing that it is in fact necessary to *make* it. However, rule-breaking or "nonsensical" texts do not simply signal the extent to which sense is made instead of given; they also offer a vantage point different from that of "common sense," a place from which sense-making procedures can be re-evaluated. The dangerous possibility that the boundary between sense and nonsense, linguistic competence and *délire*, rests on interpretation alone, is contained in many rule-breaking texts.

Ultimately, such texts pose a fundamental threat:

In nonsense, hierarchies of relevance are flattened, inverted and manipulated in a gesture that threatens the idea of hierarchy itself--a gesture that threatens an arbitrary and impermanent hierarchy . . . Both "author" and "audience" are continually fractured and rearranged. While all language assumes a possible society, while all language is utopian, all nonsense divides and rearranges any idea of society as coherent and integral. Nonsense threatens the disintegration of an infinite "making conscious," an infinite movement of undercutting the world all at once and over and over again. It refuses the uplifting note by which the world assumes a happy ending. (Stewart 209)

In their radical skepticism, in their flight from the rewards and the necessary illusions of a masterful competence, Beckett's early novels move deeper and deeper into this difficult and dangerous territory.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

<sup>1</sup>For a definition of "dialogism," see M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson, Michael Holquist (Austin; University of Texas Press, 1981), 426-27.

<sup>2</sup> There is of course a fascinating tension to Joyce's relationship to the words he worked in. It might be said that although a language may not be equal to the artist's demands upon it, it is as if the language belongs sufficiently to the artist that he can, "masterfully," modify and improve it for his purposes.

Ellmann cites an incident illustrating this attitude of Joyce's:

He sometimes used *Ulysses* to demonstrate even English, that best of languages, was inadequate. "Aren't there enough words for you in English?" they asked him. "Yes," he replied, "there are enough, but they aren't the right ones." He had to make neologisms. "For example, take the word *battlefield*. A battlefield is a field where the battle is raging. When the battle is over and the field is covered with blood, it is no longer a *battlefield*, but a *bloodfield*." (Ellmann 397)

Not only did Beckett obviously lack this sense that English was "that best of languages," but he clearly avoided devising ways out of language's limitations, preferring to expose and accentuate them.

<sup>3</sup>Edward Said mentions this point in the context of a discussion of "the self-confirming will to power from which many texts can spring" (50). He states that "[t]he minimalist impulse in Beckett's work is, I think, a counterversion of this will, a way of refusing the opportunity offered to him by modernist writing" (50).

<sup>4</sup> Bakhtin perhaps extends the Russian Formalist idea of "defamiliarization" here. Defamiliarization is only one aspect of the transformational process of dialogue. A work such as *Ulysses* goes much further than to simply defamiliarize, say, sentimental writing in the "Nausicaa" episode. It also finds a new appropriateness for a rigidified style, places it in a new context, and thus renovates it and transforms it. The novel that discovers fixed discourses that are "capable of being creatively transformed" (422), and the work of such transformation, are what Bakhtin has

in mind.

<sup>5</sup> "He admired also Vico's positive division of human history into recurring cycles, each set off by a thunderclap . . . followed by a *ricorso* or return. Joyce did not share Vico's interest in these as literal chronological divisions of 'eternal ideal history,' but as psychological ones, ingredients which keep combining and recombining in ways which always seemed to be *déjà vu*." (Ellmann 554)

<sup>6</sup>"Interillumination" refers to the way one discourse "sees itself in the light of another" (Bakhtin 430). "Polyphonic" is another of Bakhtin's metaphorical terms: novels that allow more than one discourse to exist within them are polyphonic. See also the glossary to Bakhtin *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson, Michael Holquist (Austin; University of Texas Press, 1981), 429-30.

<sup>7</sup>Linda Hutcheon, in her *A Theory of Parody* (1985) uses the term "perverse" to describe texts that go beyond the "authorized transgression" of parody, into the realm of "unauthorized transgression": "the closest to total subversion that is possible within the elastic confines of comprehension" (83). Her example of such a text is *Finnegans Wake*. Beckett's work, in pursuing, albeit in another fashion, such "total subversion," does build upon Joyce's project in the *Wake*.

<sup>8</sup>There is a clear parallel to existentialist versions of subjectivity here: Sartre's "*faire, et en faisant, se faire*" equally assumes the lack of any completed self as long as the individual is subject to time--that is, before death. Only at the time of death is existence completed, and the "retrospective hypothesis" of individual essence can be created only then.

<sup>9</sup>See Lecerle, Jean-Jacques. *Philosophy Through the Looking Glass: language, nonsense, desire* (Lasalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1985).

<sup>10</sup>See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation)" in *Lenin and Philosophy* (Ben Brewster, trans.). New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971: 170.

## CHAPTER TWO

### "Faint inscriptions": the emerging uses of impossibility in *More Pricks than Kicks*

It would be misguided to attempt to impose a simple model or paradigm upon the several works in verse and prose that make up Beckett's early career. For one thing, they are too various. They include an essay prepared for a Master's degree (*Proust*, 1931), a verse item hastily cooked up for a contest ("Whoroscope," 1930), a series of short fictions (some eventually finding publication as *More Pricks than Kicks*, 1934), and the novels *Murphy* (1938) and *Watt* (1942-44), themselves highly dissimilar. There were several "Becketts" before the "Beckett" of the trilogy and the drama.

In reading this series of works as a "Work in Regress," the last thing I want to do is homogenize them or make them all instances of something else. Passages from *More Pricks than Kicks*, *Murphy* and *Watt* offer some of the most peculiar and hilarious writing of their time; the sheer variety these works contain suggests the range of writing of which Beckett was capable. (When the trilogy *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable* is read with this variety in mind, its disciplined austerity and humor take on added significance, culminating as they do a long process of artistic selection and

rejection). On the other hand, the early works are in fact linked, both explicitly and implicitly, to each other,<sup>1</sup> as well as to the works of Joyce with which they are conversant, and which they variously emulate, parody, and celebrate.

In one of the best accounts of the development of Beckett's fiction, J.E. Dearlove describes the ambivalent nature of *More Pricks than Kicks*. The narrative voice here, as distinct from that of Beckett's very earliest fiction,<sup>2</sup> is no longer entirely entranced by what Dearlove calls the "Apollonian" image of the artist, which Dearlove associates with Joyce, "the superb manipulator of material." On one hand, "it is still very much an early work exhibiting Joyce influence, coterie language, interlocked images and master craftsmanship" (Dearlove 15). Yet on the other hand the collection of these short stories into a linked series allows for a larger context than the very earliest pieces enjoyed, a context in which "[s]uddenly, not only the telling, but also the possibility of telling a story become issues. Images of impotence begin to qualify those of control" (Dearlove 21).

*More Pricks than Kicks* often seems to evoke one fictional procedure only to abandon or mock it, and the targets of its parody seem to shift along with the fiction's view of itself. Dearlove touches on this aspect of the stories, describing them as "a comedy of manners without an accept-

able social norm," one that displays "an almost decadent dependence upon the forms it debunks" (22). I have resorted to the term "uneasy" to describe this quality in the collection--because it makes readers uneasy (in the sense that we are uncertain what conventions to apply in our reading); because the protagonist is an uneasy figure (that is, evasive and not at home anywhere); and because the fiction seems ill at ease with itself and its antecedents.

However, these are impressionistic remarks. A closer analysis of a particular story from *More Pricks than Kicks*, both in relation to Joyce's work and in its own right, will permit more substantial observations. The story "A Wet Night," in its complex relation to Joyce's "The Dead," provides a starting-point. The following passages from the two stories suggest some of the ways in which *More Pricks than Kicks* responds to Joyce's writing:

Yes, the newspapers were right. The snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and farther westward into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. ("The Dead," *Dubliners* 223)

But the wind had dropped, as it so often does in Dublin when all the respectable men and women whom it delights to annoy have gone to bed, and the rain fell in a uniform untroubled manner. It fell upon the bay, the littoral, the mountains and the plains, and notably upon the Central Bog it fell with a rather desolate uniformity. ("A Wet Night," *More Pricks than Kicks* 83)

The passage from "The Dead" is so well-known among students of modern literature that one hesitates to quote it again. It is the culmination of a culmination, the final epiphanic moment in the final story in *Dubliners*, last in that series of epiphanies. The snow, the westward movement, Michael Furey in his churchyard grave, are all part of a gracefully developed symbolic structure. The kind of pattern that is completed here, in this particular story, will be repeated thousands of times in short stories indebted to the Joyce model, for decades to come.

In contrast, the passage from Beckett is little read, and when quoted is likely to surprise readers or hearers who do not associate such a garrulous, almost glib, satiric voice with the parsimonious irony of the later plays. Its position in its original context does not parallel that of the excerpt from "The Dead"--it is not the crucial epiphany that closes Beckett's story, which is in fact devoid of epiphanies. The allusion to one of Joyce's most acclaimed moments appears as a mere aside, a diversion along the way to . . . to where? To the end of the story, and no further; for "A Wet Night" makes smaller claims than "The Dead," and although it explicitly links itself to Joyce's story, it hardly proposes itself as a rival attempt, a rival vision of Dublin life or of fictional possibilities. In fact, the story "A Wet Night" has an uneasy sort of parodic relation to Joyce's famous story. The movement from snow to rain is

the most explicit signal to compare the stories, and also suggests the shift in tone, in aim, and in the vision of fiction's possibilities between the two stories.

Both stories present Christmas gatherings in Dublin. "The Dead" masterfully juggles the idioms and visions of at least three generations of Dubliners, and compels a meditation on such themes as time, inheritance, and the legacy of all of the absent but ever-present dead. "A Wet Night" is concerned only with Dublin's youthful *soi-disant* intelligentsia. These are perhaps the very people, or the counterparts of the very people, about whom Joyce's Gabriel Conroy expresses such doubts:

But we are living in a skeptical and, if I may use the phrase, a thought-tormented age: and I sometimes fear that this new generation, educated or hypereducated as it is, will lack those qualities of humanity, of hospitality, of kindly humor which belonged to an older day. (203)

Many of Belacqua's actions in "A Wet Night" seem calculated to bear out these criticisms. Belacqua spends more of the evening postponing and trying to avoid his hostess's hospitality than he does enjoying it. He also flees from other characters, such as the hypereducated Chas, a "clock-work Bartlett." Chas is literally a literary character in that he is made up out of bits and pieces of literature: his mind is "a tattered concordance" (49). Such reductive characterization is typical of *More Pricks than Kicks*. The "humanity" of the characters in Beckett's Christmas celebra-

tion is savagely denied them by the venom of Beckett's caricaturing descriptions:

Her features, as though the hand of an unattractive ravisher were knotted in her chevelure, were set at half-cock and locked in a rictus. She had frowned to pencil her eyebrows, so now she had four. The dazzled iris was domed in a white agony of entreaty, the upper lip writhed back in a snarl to the untented nostrils. Would she bite her tongue off, that was the interesting question. The nutcracker chin betrayed a patent clot of thyroid gristle.  
(61)

"A Wet Night" could be read as a reinterpretation of "The Dead" set in the future which Gabriel Conroy envisioned, and told this time from the point of view of a youthful but equally "tight" Freddy Malins (Belacqua). Conroy's role as the after-dinner speaker anxiously reviewing his lines is parodied by "the homespun Poet" whose anxiety over the composition and delivery of his mock-extempore "Calvary by Night" parallels Conroy's anxiety over his speech. The Poet, however, is as unsympathetic as all of the characters in "A Wet Night." He is a narcissist whose verse production (unlike the villanelle in *Portrait*) will never excite debates about whether it is intended as a serious example of quality verse. (His line, "Untroubled bow of petaline sweet-smellingness"--to cite only one of his poetic circumlocutions for "flower"--gives some idea of the aggressive inanity of the fictional verse).

The inconsistent Belacqua is not content with arriving late, soaking wet, and drunk, thus recalling the role of

potential party-spoiler Freddy Malins in "The Dead." He also wants to play the role of Michael Furey, who died for love of the young Greta Conroy-to-be. Furey caught pneumonia by exposing himself to the harsh elements, while lingering to catch a glimpse of his love. Belacqua's reasons for similarly exposing himself have to be inferred. Belacqua has passed hours drinking and postponing his attendance at the party, has become drunk, and has vomited on the boots of a policeman. After moving on as directed, he subsides onto a stone bridge railing and strips to the waist. Perhaps he exposes himself out of remorse; perhaps in order to become sober:

He bundled the skirt of the shirt under the fringe of his pullover and rolled them up . . . until they were fastened hoopwise fast across his thorax. The rain beat against his chest and belly and trickled down. It was even more agreeable than he had anticipated, but very cold. It was now, beating his bosom thus bared to the storm vaguely with marble palms, that he took leave of himself and felt wretched and sorry for what he had done. He had done wrong, he realized that, and was heartily sorry. He sat on, drumming his stockinged heels sadly against the stone, wondering whence on earth could comfort spring, when suddenly the thought of the bottle he had brought pierced his gloomy condition like a beacon. (73-74)

The action of exposure to the weather may itself be an allusion to Michael Furey; but unlike Furey's love, Belacqua's repentance or remorse lasts only long enough to be fled, in favour of the refuge offered by another bottle of stout. His stupor renewed, Belacqua can finally make his appearance

at the long deferred party, with its artistic performances mirroring those in "The Dead."

In "the Dead," both Freddy Malins and Michael Furey play the role of *trouble-fête*, Freddy disturbing the party and Michael Furey posthumously troubling Gabriel's relations with his wife. It is significant that Belacqua recalls elements of both characters. Belacqua's own traits often conveniently echo the characteristics of the fiction he inhabits (this is appropriate in a reflexive work) and thus we can say that *More Pricks than Kicks* itself "troubles fiction's feast," or rains on the long parade of fiction in which Joyce perhaps played the role of the clever clown in the rear who both sums up and ridicules the whole procession. The parody in "A Wet Night" (and parody of some kind there is), clearly has a less unified aim than the work it parodies. The reader senses the shifts in the targets of the parody, as if, uncertain of its overall goal, the satire had seized upon mere targets of opportunity. Pompous displays of learning, exemplified by the "professor of Bullscrit and Comparative Ovoidology" (66) vie with indiscreet displays of physical yearning at the party which is the main event of the story. Belacqua scorns both, yet shares in both. This ambivalence in both sympathy and focus adds to the sense of restlessness, of indecision, that informs the collection.

It is clear from this brief analysis alone that *More Pricks than Kicks* intends to take Joyce's work into some sort of account. Apart from the network of allusions to "The Dead," the collection makes numerous other direct references to the whole range of Joyce's published writing--including the excerpts from *Work in Progress* that began to appear in 1924.<sup>3</sup> For instance, "a divine creature, native of Leipzig," who plays no other part in the collection, replies to Belacqua's quotation of the rainfall for December as follows:

Himmisacrakrüzidirkenjesusmariaundjosefundblütigeskreuz!" Like that, all in one word. The things people come out with sometimes! (82)

Along with this reference to the thunder in *Work in Progress*,<sup>4</sup> there is a guest at the party, who, like Tristram in the *Wake*, is a "violinist d'amore" (*More Pricks than Kicks* 65).

Despite this clearly signalled awareness of *Work in Progress*, *More Pricks than Kicks* would not immediately strike any reader as obviously "post-*Finnegans Wake* fiction." The collection thus raises the same question for readers that, one can speculate, Beckett faced himself: what difference can *Finnegans Wake* make for the practice of fiction? On the surface it appears to have made little difference to *More Pricks than Kicks*, which echoes none of the astonishing formal features that have made *Finnegans Wake* such a formidable monument for literary tourists.

Because of this one is tempted to look mainly to Joyce's earlier work for parallels, on the assumption that if *More Pricks than Kicks* includes so many references to Joyce, it is to signal its debt to some other of his works, the allusions to *Finnegans Wake* being merely a kind of token homage, but reflecting no real influence. It is worth taking a moment to acknowledge the temptations and dangers of pursuing any alignment of Beckett's early career with Joyce's, in a way that would make *More Pricks than Kicks* more of a parallel to *Dubliners* than a reaction to the whole body of Joyce's work. In rough summary, the two careers are somewhat similar: each author produces first miscellaneous verse (*Pomes Penyeach*, *Chamber Music*; "Whoroscope") then a collection of linked stories (*Dubliners*; *More Pricks than Kicks*). This is followed by a first novel with autobiographical elements (*Portrait*; *Murphy*), then by a second novel much more experimental in its form (*Ulysses*; *Watt*). Then each writer produces a strikingly different, major prose work, much longer, more difficult and impersonal, that reinvents the novel to a degree (*Finnegans Wake*; trilogy). Of course Beckett himself is the one who has warned that "the danger is in the neatness of identification" (Samuel Beckett, "Dante . . . Bruno. Vico . . . Joyce" 3); and far from even being so neat, these parallels must elide such enormous differences that they can be sketched

only in order to be retracted. *Ulysses* and *Watt*? *Dubliners* and *More Pricks than Kicks*?

Nevertheless, although such a parallel may be in substance reductive and untenable, there remain some ways in which *More Pricks than Kicks* is a "version" of *Dubliners*. Like Joyce's *Dubliners*, *More Pricks than Kicks* is a collection of short stories that take place in and around Dublin. It is almost impossible not to place them in direct comparison with *Dubliners*, and fascinating to consider how Beckett, another native of the same city, would undertake a parallel task after a lapse of years, during which ideas about fiction had significantly changed (partly as a result of Joyce's later work). Of course many assumptions implied here must be qualified: were Joyce and Beckett ever really natives of the same Dublin, coming as they did from different social and religious backgrounds, different generations? Do the two collections of stories actually share any common elements that would allow readers to describe them as "undertaking parallel tasks"?

What we can know about the impulses behind the two collections suggests that they are motivated by different conceptions of what writing can be. Much has been made of Joyce's debt to Ibsen,<sup>5</sup> and there is enough internal evidence in *Dubliners* to suggest that this group of stories is meant to serve partly as social criticism. The project of the fictional Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait*--to "forge the

uncreated conscience of [his] race" (*Portrait* 253)--marks the presentation of Dublin life in the stories. Although they exhibit a virtuosic formal accomplishment, they do not imply a vision of art as formal play. There is a strong sense here of art as the mirror of social reality. The "nets" that Dedalus's soul must "fly past" are presented mimetically. The ability of language to represent sensible reality is vaunted; but more, the centrality of language to the expression of character is stressed. Joyce develops further the method of characterization by way of associating characters with a particular lexicon and a particular set of phrases and conceptions. The famous notion that a short story can both represent, and enact within the reader, a process of "epiphany," is explored and given its canonical examples here in a form that will dominate much short-fiction writing for decades.

Already in *More Pricks than Kicks*, Beckett's writing is much less susceptible to interpretation as social criticism, or in terms of any other kind of direct connection to the world. As we shall see below, although *More Pricks than Kicks* is outwardly conventional and certainly not a piece of pure formal experimentation, it seems to conceive of itself from the start as more of a purely literary artifact--it takes for granted the notion that, in Northrop Frye's phrase, "literature is made out of other literature," and consciously works within a literary universe, rather than

imagining that it is a question of a represented real universe. *Dubliners* enacts the movement around Dublin of a narrating voice that renders connected fragments of Dublin life in a "style of scrupulous meanness" (Stanislaus Joyce 204). (Some of the descriptions of characters in Beckett's stories--especially of women--tempt one to describe its style as one of unscrupulous meanness). *More Pricks than Kicks* enacts the aimless wanderings of the indolent Belacqua, a character improbably lifted from Dante and dumped in Dublin. It might better be said that *More Pricks than Kicks* enacts nothing more than itself, in that, more than much other writing, it resists suggesting larger coherences in which its overall unity might be located. While Beckett's later fictions will do this more self-consciously, here the gratuitous and metafictional quality of the writing seems less than fully recognized, expressed in parody and in an exasperating self-mockery.

*More Pricks than Kicks* demonstrates how Beckett's early fiction begins by being "impossible" in the sense of misbehaving; it is inconsistent, alternately humorous and humorless, seemingly unresponsive or unrewarding to interpretation at times. These aspects explain the relative obscurity the collection has enjoyed despite its author's notoriety. But these exasperating impossibilities beget openings for fiction as well. By exploiting some of the ways that *More Pricks than Kicks* misbehaves or even "fails,"

Beckett's subsequent works develop a more deeply rooted resolution of the problem posed by Joyce's innovation. Some of these developments of new fictional openings out of what might be called defects will be discussed in what follows.

*More Pricks than Kicks'* satiric viciousness toward many of its characters is only the most spectacular evidence of the collection's lack of interest in conventional characterization. The narrator in *Murphy* will in fact dismiss all of the characters except the protagonist as "puppets"; and readers are likely to feel this scornful attitude in *More Pricks than Kicks* as well. On several occasions the narrator of the stories asks "Who shall silence them?" This places readers in a difficult position: certainly we can "silence" the characters by closing the book. But isn't it a kind of bad faith on the author's part to create a narrator so openly contemptuous of the represented characters, one so unhappy with the usual satiric tactics that he is forced to confront readers directly with his exasperation?

In opposition to the view of fiction that looks for "round," "fully-realized" or "living" characters--an approach that might have found some satisfactions in *Dubliners*, for instance, but none in *Finnegans Wake*--*More Pricks than Kicks* trumpets its scorn for even the bare physical presentation of many of its characters. To take this sort of representation as a goal would be to fall into "the miserable statement of line and surface" which Beckett

decries in Proust (76). Of an old farmer met in "Fingal," who in some works might be lavishly described for the sake of naturalistic local color, the narrator says only that "[t]here was nothing at all noteworthy about his appearance" (27). In another instance, Lucy, Belacqua's betrothed in "Walking Out," is described in a manner that manifests the narrator's self-conscious impatience with this particular narrative chore:

In face and figure Lucy was entrancing, her entire person was quite perfect. For example, she was as dark as jet and of a paleness that never altered, and her thick short hair went back like a pennon from her fanlight forehead. But it would be a waste of time to itemize her. (105)

As it mocks stock romantic description-of-the-loved-woman vocabulary such as "jet" and "pale," the description undermines itself with contradiction and incongruity. Shouldn't the romance heroine's thick hair be *long*? In any case, such description is dismissed as "itemizing." The term is merely literally accurate, of course. The description of a lover in the form of the *blazon* or inventory of beauties *does* itemize. In *Murphy*, the central female character Celia will suffer a similar bald enumeration:

Age	Unimportant
Head	Small and round
Eyes	Green
Complexion	White
Hair	Yellow
Features	Mobile
Neck	13-3/4"
Upper arm	11." (10)

The thrust of the satire is against the folly of fictional characterization generally--if all it can aspire to is such an enumeration of size, color, habits of motion, then of what value is it?

Elsewhere the narrative appeals to the theme of the body's corruptibility, and to the grim future of the "disposable" characters, as an alibi for its own impatience with description:

Truly there was no fault or flaw in the young woman. Yet we feel we must say before we let her be, her poor body that must wither, that her nether limbs, from where they began even unto where they ended, would have done credit to a Signorelli page. Let us put it this way, that through her riding-breeches they came through. What more can be said for a woman's legs, thighs included? Or is all this merely ridiculous?  
(106)

Even the parodically stylized description of this flawlessly ample heroine is presented as a dubious waste of time:

"merely ridiculous." Yet if one of fiction's tasks has been to evoke, as fully as possible, the observed human being, then to reject the task (or even a parody of the task) is to imply a rejection of one of the fundamental aspects of fiction. Beckett's work pursues this rejection further and further until, in the trilogy, there will only be evocation-from-within, in the form of monologue, and even the reliability of this as any kind of faithful record will be questioned. In the interim, Beckett's early novels face the difficult task of reconciling the fictional convention of

physical descriptions with the views of their own characters, like Belacqua, who "scoffed at the idea of a sequitur from his body to his mind" (29).

In sum, *More Pricks than Kicks* clearly shuns the task of presenting fully realized characters with whom we can become sympathetically involved. In fact, the sudden shockingly arbitrary death of Belacqua, and the inclusion of posthumous scenes that make it clear that this is not, after all, "Belacqua's story," help distance readers from the protagonist. These techniques, employed in *Murphy* as well, demonstrate that the conventional concern for character is hardly a priority here. Turning to another conventional element of narrative, that of the presentation of human action, we can see that the choice of Dante's Belacqua as protagonist (for Beckett purloins rather than invents Belacqua) indicates *More Pricks than Kicks's* fundamental lack of interest in itself as story, as portrayal of action. By enacting the aimless wanderings of the indolent Belacqua, the collection becomes partly a reply to Joyce's *Dubliners*, which enacts the movement around Dublin of a narrating voice that renders connected fragments of Dublin life. We must take pains to read this choice literally enough: Beckett's Belacqua is really Belacqua from the *Purgatorio*, and thus an impostor in a world of action and plots. Moreover, the narrating voice of *More Pricks than Kicks*, unlike that of *Dubliners*, retains this impostor as its single focus for

eight of the ten stories (one of the other two is a letter Belacqua receives, and the last follows his death). The narrator and Belacqua "were Pylades and Orestes for a period," but it is crucial that this narrator has become exasperated with his subject. He rejects him, as we shall see below, as an "impossible person . . . not serious" (37-8).

Belacqua Shuah is uncertain about his powers and his goals; he doubts his fitness for the world. His unease is expressed in disease, in the form of a massive boil on his neck, a "baby anthrax" that plagues him but also "guarantees identity." (As a guarantor of identity, a boil is a contingent and transient marker. Belacqua dies during surgery for its removal). *More Pricks than Kicks* shares a similar anxious self-directed dissatisfaction, an incipient rejection of its own form, which gives rise to grotesque and seemingly unmotivated eruptions. It is a self-rejecting fiction, seemingly uncomfortable with the way it must feed upon that which it hopes to afflict. The image of an enormous boil, treated with affection and horror, is both an example of the way this fiction turns its characters into grotesques, and also an expression of its own bitterly ambivalent self-consciousness.

For Dante's Belacqua, the indolent spokesman for the late-repenting in Ante-Purgatory, life is reduced to a long wait. Trapped in a perfectly circumscribed given world--

that of the *Purgatorio*--he can accomplish nothing by his own efforts, for himself or anyone else, until he has paid the price for late repentance by passing the equivalent of his earthly life in Ante-Purgatory. Dante asks him "why are you sitting here?" and he replies:

O Brother, what's the use of going up? For God's angel who sits at the gate would not let me pass to the torments. First must the heavens revolve around me outside it, so long as they did during my life, because I delayed good sighs until the end--unless prayer first aid me which rises from a heart that lives in grace . . . (*Purgatorio* IV 127-134)

What are the connotations of this character for Beckett's fiction? His situation dramatizes the theme of *Geworfenheit*, the condition of being "thrown into being"; unready for this second "birth" into Purgatory, he was "thrown into it," improperly prepared (by repentance) and unsuited to any effective existence there. Belacqua is a type of the ironic character, in Frye's sense of being limited in power and scope (Frye 34), useless to all but the most perverse builder of narratives. He does nothing, he has no power to do anything, he does not belong in the world in which he finds himself. He has next to no history and what history he does possess might be summed up in the admission: "I did *almost* nothing. So now I am condemned to do *precisely* nothing." Nor is he about to generate a history.

However, the context in which Dante's Belacqua waits is different from that which Beckett's characters inhabit. Dante's Belacqua awaits a progression toward the absolute which, in his case, is merely postponed. Beckett's characters wait in an absolute absence of the absolute, unlike Dante's Belacqua who waits "in eternity, but not eternally" (Strauss 252, 259). Thus their waiting adapts what, in Dante, is a fascinating hiatus in a progressive narrative, and turns this static moment into an entire narrative-without-progress. The very decision to adopt such a character implies a fiction devoid of culminations or epiphanies, a fiction without conflict, apart from the conflict between the individual and time; a fiction in which the potential is in a sense more real than the actual, because the present exists only as a prelude to such pure potential. The situation of Dante's Belacqua is a useful occasion for Beckett: here is a protagonist whose story is to be without a story, who can only do nothing for the present lifetime. He embodies the "stasis" that Joyce's Stephen Dedalus associates with the response to art. For anyone determined to write what we call "short stories," and yet reluctant to implicate himself in the game of storytelling, Belacqua offers a perversely inactive protagonist who subverts the whole game from the beginning.

Though it is this choice of protagonist which most strongly implies an attempt to deny the necessity for action in this fiction, the narrative structures of the stories also support the implication. The best-known story of the collection, "Dante and the Lobster," is one of the best illustrations of the sort of narrative movement typical of these stories. The opening image is one of doubled immobility. Belacqua, reading Dante's *Purgatorio*, is immobile in his chair, and his thinking is "stuck" as well:

It was morning and Belacqua was stuck in the first of the canti in the moon. He was so bogged that he could move neither backward nor forward. (9)

Belacqua is saved from "running his head against this impenetrable passage" any longer (9), by the striking of a clock which signals midday. It becomes clear that the progress of Belacqua's daily itinerary is not governed by accomplishments, but by the cycle of clock time and by the enactment of rituals. Noon strikes and Dante is punctually abandoned, his enigmas unsolved. The passage of time does not resolve the dilemma in Dante, but allows Belacqua to feel he is "moving on," although we shall see how in a sense he does remain stuck in the passage. (In fact the description of being stuck in the passage is surely an image of fetus-like entrapment, which raises the question why Belacqua, nostalgic for pre-natal existence, would welcome the interruption of his fruitless toil.) Belacqua's attitude to clocks and time is as contradictory as his feeling about

movement in space (which we shall examine later in the story "Ding Dong"). Eventually Belacqua "would not tolerate a chronometer of any kind in the house" and for him "the local publication of the hours" becomes "six of the best on the brain every hour" (129). Here, however, the striking clock temporarily frees him, or permits him to think himself freed, from futility and inaction.

The remains of Belacqua's day are ordered under the theme of the obligation to "do something next": "Then he ventured to consider what he had to do next. There was always something one had to do next" (10). Belacqua's immediate obligation is to have lunch--and this is not merely a matter of locating and ingesting nutriment. Belacqua's lunch is clearly a sacred ceremony, and the description of it is one of the most carefully put-together comic passages in *More Pricks than Kicks*.

Ritual purity is a main condition attached to the action of lunching. There must be no contamination by other action:

[I]f he were disturbed now, if some brisk tattler were to come bouncing in now big with a big idea or a petition, he might just as well not eat at all, for the food would turn to bitterness on his palate, or worse again, taste of nothingness.

(10)

What Belacqua's ritual seeks to evade is just this "taste of nothingness." The sandwich is a careful avoidance ritual--of the sort familiar to students--whose taste depends upon

Belacqua's artifice, and especially upon its function as a replacement for something else: the problems of Dante, tedious company. This despite the exaggerated pungency of its ingredients: Gorgonzola cheese, mustard, salt and cayenne pepper, on burnt toast. Thus the food itself is really "nothing," the act of preparation "everything." And the act of preparation is, above all, not-studying-Dante, not-talking-to-anyone.

Every part of Belacqua's Gorgonzola-and-mustard-on-toast must answer to rigid conditions: the toast must be burnt all the way through, the Gorgonzola must be "rotten" (14). If all of the conditions can be met, the result will be a comical triumph:

[H]e would devour it with a sense of rapture and victory, it would be like smiting the sledded Polacks on the ice. He would snap at it with closed eyes, he would gnash it into a pulp, he would vanquish it utterly with his fangs. (13)

The bogged-down student Belacqua is metamorphosed by this language into Hamlet's father or Fortinbras, a conqueror, smiter of Polacks. This seems to be one case where allusion grounds a particular interpretation, yet significantly, the allusion itself evokes one of the most notoriously disputed actions in the canon of English literature. What is it, to smite sledded Polacks? Or should that be Poleaxe? (See for instance Harold Jenkins' two-page note on this "much-disputed phrase" in his edition of *Hamlet* [425-27].)

A ludicrously elaborate structure of imagery is built up around the sandwich and its manufacture. The Christian imagery of the *Purgatorio*, presumably lingering in Belacqua's mind, merges with the current events narrated in the newspaper spread on the table (the events themselves reflect the hanging episode in *Ulysses*). Even the name of the paper plays into this structure: it is a "Herald" which Belacqua "deploys" on the table. The main story in the newspaper is that of "McCabe the assassin," whose "petition for mercy" has been rejected. Belacqua learns this as he eats his sandwich in a pub, after hardening himself against any "petitions" that would interrupt the enjoyment of his lunch.

The condemned McCabe and Belacqua's sandwich are identified with one another throughout the passage, and both are linked to the sacrificed Christ. The slices of bread for toast emerge from "prison" and are sawed off "on the face of McCabe" (11). Belacqua says of the bread that "he would very quickly take that fat white look off its face" (11), personifying the bread and allowing it to merge more fully with the murder suspect. The untoasted slices of bread are called "candidates," an allusion to the Latin *candidus*, denoting purity and whiteness, and also one elected or chosen (in this case, as a sacrificial victim). The grocer who supplies Belacqua with "a good stenching rotten lump of Gorgonzola cheese, alive" to place between the

burnt slices of toast, gives up the cheese with Biblical gestures:

The grocer, instead of simply washing his hands like Pilate, flung out his arms in a wild crucified gesture of supplication. (14)

Finally the punishment of the murderer and the enjoyment of the sandwich merge as "Belacqua, tearing at the sandwich . . . pondered on McCabe in his cell" (17).

The lunch episode is the core of the story, occupying seven of its thirteen pages. Although it elaborates a structure of imagery which will extend to link the lobster, eaten for dinner, with Dante's sufferers, the murderer McCabe, and with the Gorgonzola sandwich, the story narrates only the most pointedly mundane dramatic events. In the seeming imbalance between the extravagance of its methods and the slightness of its occasions, it appears as a fabric of imagery and allusion deployed for their own sakes in a parody of master craftsmanship. What is there in the episode that could possibly motivate the weight of commentary it can be made to bear? Belacqua's main action in this part of the story, making lunch, is itself parodied by the allusion to Shakespearian "men of action," then dwarfed by the significances thrust upon it. In return, the banality of the action undermines the seriousness of the figurative freight. The story does echo the three-part structure of Dante's *Commedia*: it is concerned with the themes of suffering, sacrifice, and the struggle to

understand their necessity, as well as the triumph of pity; but it is nevertheless mainly a recipe for an exotic and pungent sandwich.

The sandwich, in contrast to Belacqua's deliberations over Dante, is a "notable success." Belacqua's day is redeemed by it, and is going "swimmingly" as he arrives at his Italian lesson after lunch. "Where were we?" he asks of his teacher. "Where are we ever?" she replies, "where we were, as we were" (20). Pondering this reply Belacqua links the condemned murderer McCabe and himself as he totes home a live lobster for supper:

Where we were, thought Belacqua, as we were.  
 . . . and poor McCabe, he would get it in the  
 neck at dawn. What was he doing now, how was he  
 feeling? He would relish one more meal, one more  
 night. (21)

Even for those facing execution, "there is always something one has to do next." Relishing a meal, as Belacqua ostentatiously does in the story, is one such thing, but behind it is a strong sense of futility, of avoiding something to which a reply is impossible--the passage of time, death.

Belacqua's second meal of the story is to be the lobster. He doesn't know about cooking lobster, and cries out when he unwraps it: "My God . . . it's alive, what'll we do?" (This, after all, is how Beckett characters generally react to the unwelcome surprise of their own existence.)

Belacqua's aunt does what one does next, hurls the lobster into boiling water:

Well, thought Belacqua, it's a quick death, God help us all.  
It is not.

The story ends with this flat denial from the narrator, made as if over the head of Belacqua.<sup>6</sup> Indeed the lobster "cruciform on the table" is linked to Christ, as Belacqua's sandwich was linked to McCabe, neither of whom, it is suggested, enjoys the mercy of a quick death. Perhaps Belacqua senses that to act, to "relish one more meal," is to join into this chain of murder which so appalls him. He strives never to move beyond his paralyzed question, "It's alive-- what'll we do?" His solution, in the story "Ding-Dong," is to avoid doing anything in particular, since he can't avoid doing. He seeks to balance action and inaction, movement and stasis, in a mutually canceling fashion--he would enact oxymoron.

Belacqua's evasiveness is described as a taste for pure movement, which he calls "moving pauses," or "gress" (38). Belacqua sees this as an equivalent to stasis. On one hand, "the best thing he had to do was to move constantly from place to place" (36). On the other hand Belacqua is "by nature sinfully indolent, bogged in indolence, asking nothing better than to stay put" (37). While he lacks the funds to roam endlessly "Hither and thither on land and sea" (36) neither has he "the means to consecrate his life to

stasis, even in the meanest bar" (42). In fact Belacqua "had a strong weakness for oxymoron" (38), and he relishes "a double response, like two holes to one burrow" (42). When he attempts to describe all of this to the narrator, he takes pleasure in the failure of his explanations: "All this and much more he labored to make clear. He seemed to derive considerable satisfaction from his failure to do so" (43).

The exasperated narrator responds to Belacqua, as perhaps we do ourselves, with the judgment:

[H]e wriggled out of everything by pleading that he had been drunk at the time, or that he was an incoherent person and content to remain so, and so on. He was an impossible person in the end. I gave him up in the end because he was not serious. (38)

Like its contradictory protagonist, *More Pricks than Kicks* is openly exasperated with its own procedures, yet offers itself to readers nonetheless, as if there were no choice but to present the stories in this unsatisfactory condition. In the end, this is a fiction that tries, like its protagonist, to be nowhere for as long as possible.

The narrator's comments upon Belacqua's evasive movements might likewise be applied to Beckett's early fiction as well:

Not the least charm of this pure blank movement, this "gress" or "gression," was its aptness to receive, with or without the approval of the subject, in all their integrity the faint inscriptions of the outer world. Exempt from destination, it had not to shun the unforeseen nor turn aside from the agreeable odds and ends of vaudeville that are liable to crop up. This

sensitiveness was not the least charm of this roaming that began by being blank, not the least charm of this pure act the alacrity with which it welcomed defilement. But very nearly the least.  
(38)

The narrative movement of many of the stories in *More Pricks than Kicks*, as in *Murphy*, and explicitly in *Watt*, often seems arbitrary, like Belacqua's movements as described here. This paragraph is an embedded description of Beckett's own fictional procedure at this point: the stories enact a sort of evasive narrative strolling, wriggling out of the tiresome conventions of storytelling, not welcoming but enduring the parodic or otherwise humorous "bits of vaudeville" that come up along the way. The result is a parody of the movement of the narrating voice of *Dubliners*, as it roams purposefully around Dublin in search of the most telling and epiphanic episodes. In its apparent purposelessness, Beckett's narrative is behaving "impossibly," as the narrator of "Ding-Dong" uses the term (that is, the narrative behaves unreasonably and disrespectfully). The collection finds other ways to evoke purposelessness as well. The narrative outlines of several of the stories offer figures of inconclusiveness or evasiveness, as seen in the way "Fingal," "Love and Lethe," and "Walking Out" all share the pattern of a walk into the countryside that terminates in a missed appointment or a broken vow.

In "Fingal," the second story of the collection, the protagonist effectively flees his own story, bringing it to

an abrupt and arbitrary end. Belacqua, out walking with Winnie, "the last girl he went with" (23), persuades her to walk with him to the Portrane Lunatic Asylum. Winnie agrees because she knows a Dr. Sholto who works there. Belacqua's reason for wanting to walk to the asylum is that, as he says, "my heart's right there" (26). It is very discreetly implied that Belacqua and Winnie make love twice on the way to the Asylum (the chaste hint is the description of Belacqua as "a sad animal," which possibly alludes to the tag *omne animal post coitum triste est*). The Asylum has the power to distract Belacqua from Winnie, however, and on the way to it he finds something that can distract him from the Asylum:

They followed the grass margin of a ploughed field till they came to where a bicycle was lying half hidden in the rank grass. Belacqua, who could on no account resist a bicycle, thought what an extraordinary place to find one. The owner was out in the field, scarifying the furrows with a dry fork. (27)

After arranging to return to Winnie and her friend Dr. Sholto at the Asylum, Belacqua leaves the pair, ostensibly to visit a ruined church nearby. Instead he steals the bicycle, visits the church briefly, then rides off to "Taylor's public-house in Swords," where he drinks plentifully and alone (35). Belacqua's abrupt abandonment of Winnie is as startling as the story's abrupt contraction. Once there was a large outdoor setting, a love-interest, a possible rival in Dr. Sholto, enigmas in the form of the Asylum

and the ruins visible from there. Suddenly there is only Belacqua at a table, drinking and going nowhere. The movement is a small paradigm for the overall contraction of Beckett's fiction to the smallest number of elements: a solitary narrator-protagonist, and his reflections.

In "Love and Lethe" Belacqua has persuaded another woman, Ruby, to join him in a suicide pact. They climb an isolated hill with a picnic lunch, and with both poison and a pistol to allow them a choice of endings. Fortifying themselves with whiskey, the pair bicker about who shall go first. Then, when their pistol "providentially" misfires the first time, they abandon their pact in favour of sex (fueled more by relief than by affection), so that the suicide bargain comes to seem a macabre seduction gambit. Once again a pattern of expectation is established; this is a story that is going to be about a pair of lovers and their confrontation with death. "Love and Death," those twin great themes, are replaced by "Love and Lethe," and the mythic confrontation is forgotten. Alcohol and sex offer a detour that avoids the main fictional crossroads that we thought we were approaching, and the grandiose thematic development that seemed to be beginning just trails off.

In "Walking Out," another of Belacqua's solitary field walks is interrupted by "his dearest Lucy, his betrothed, astride her magnificent jennet" (104). The narrator's lack of sympathy for the characters, seen in the touch of scorn

or cruelty with which the potential suicides are presented in "Love and Lethe," becomes explicit here. Lucy is a parodic pulp-romance heroine. She is introduced only to be victimized in a perfunctory paragraph:

A superb silent limousine, a Daimler no doubt, driven by a drunken lord, swept without warning round a bend in the narrow round and struck the jennet a fearful blow in the sternum. Lucy came a sickening cropper backwards down the rampant hind-quarters, the base of her spine, then of her skull, hit the ground a double welt, the jennet fell on top of her, the wheels of the car jolted over what was left of the jennet, who expired there and then in the twilight, *sans jeter un cri*. Lucy however was not so fortunate, being crippled for life and her beauty dreadfully marred. (110)

While this catastrophe unfolds, Belacqua skulks through the woods nearby to enjoy "sursum corda," or the pleasures of voyeurism (107). It is for this that he left Lucy on the road earlier, provoking understandable doubts in her about their future marriage.

Unfortunately Belacqua is caught in the act of spying on a couple he refers to as the Fraulein and the Tanzherr. The latter beats him with a stick and leaves him almost as badly off as Lucy. She and Belacqua marry nonetheless, and instantly become an old married couple, both deprived now of their "youth and vigor" (113). The romance heroine, satirized and brutalized, ends up listening to phonograph records with the similarly punished solitary voyeur she married. In this ironic satire, both the initial target (romance conventions) and the alternative (unromantic and "perverse" solitary pleasures) are undermined.

If we contrast the experience of reading these stories with that of reading Joyce's *Dubliners*, we can see that Joyce's reader is offered an experience of gradual coalescence, as the stories begin to add up to a picture of the city. Though the characters are alienated, isolated, and paralyzed, the life of the city is multifarious and in "The Dead" it is easy to feel a sense of culmination, and of charity towards the represented world. Depending on how one reads the whole collection, the equivalence of "all the living and the dead" under the general covering of snow may suggest either a judgment upon the frozen, paralyzed life of the city and nation, or a positive continuity between past and present, a sense of community. Surely this ambivalence ought not to be dispelled. In any case, either alternative would offer a total view of the story which would satisfy, as Wolfgang Iser puts it, "an expectation we all have about the meaning of works of art: that meaning should bring the resolution of all the disturbances and conflicts which the work has brought into being." However, Iser points out, "this view of meaning constitutes an historical but by no means normative expectation, and Beckett . . . is concerned with a very different sort of meaning" (Iser 715).

*More Pricks than Kicks*, struggling to be a different kind of fiction, offers no such coalescence. Indeed Iser's description of Beckett's trilogy applies to *More Pricks than Kicks* as well:

in this narrative process we experience an increasing erosion of what we expect from a narration: the unfolding of a story. This expectation is actually encouraged by the many fragments of stories, but these serve only to show up the narrative process as one of continual emptying out. (Iser 713)

Where Beckett's later prose will subject the surface of the text itself to such fragmentation and hollowing out, these earlier stories use their protagonist to enact the process. If *More Pricks than Kicks* tolerates any "inscription" on its digressive, evasive, "pure blank movement," it is the inscription of Belacqua's disintegration. Beginning with his identification with the lobster he buys for supper, first "crucified," then tossed into a pot of boiling water, the stories trace Belacqua's disintegration either directly or by proxy--the death or disablement of his (various) spouses standing in for his own debilitation. Finally, at the hospital where he dies he is to undergo a double amputation--of his great toe and of the "baby anthrax" on his neck. He requests that the severed toe be given to the cat (this was almost the lobster's fate). The image of dispersion, of a body-in-pieces, is the state to which Belacqua has ultimately regressed, before a negligent anesthetist confers upon him his abrupt, arbitrary end. Thus "the perpetual effort to retract what has been stated has its counterpart in [Belacqua's] physical existence as well" (Iser 717).

We might echo Dante's Belacqua, and ask of such a narrative, "Brother, what use . . . ?" *More Pricks than Kicks* says no to many of the conventional pleasures of narration-- a sense of direction, the satisfaction of a journey accomplished, the epiphanic "discovery" of coherences. In doing so, the collection clearly addresses itself to readers who are already schooled in these pleasures, and able to reverse their delight and enjoy the irony of a narrative that unexpectedly rejects them. A different kind of pleasure results from the surprise and humor evoked when these "impossible" stories show up the conventional nature of "possible" and gratifying narratives.

So does *More Pricks than Kicks* merely allow us to see that purposeful and complete narratives make something out of nothing, *imposing*, perhaps their structures and their completeness? If so "the time and energy spent . . . would be out of all proportion" (Iser 716). Does *More Pricks than Kicks* in turn seek to make nothing out of something? Or simply to avoid making something? That isn't the case either, since we have the stories to read and comment upon. Either way, the stories fail. Belacqua's quest to "be nowhere for as long as possible," to make of his story a blank sheet, is always frustrated by "inscriptions." What are the implications of this double negative, the desire to evade narrative and the failure of this evasion? The accomplished incompetence of Beckett's protagonists, and of

their narratives, develops beyond the point of merely insulting expectation. *More Pricks than Kicks* shows, twenty-two years before Beckett gave the idea a clear formulation in *Three Dialogues*, the struggle to provide the minimal artistic expression. In *Three Dialogues* Beckett outlined the situation of an artist for whom "there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express" (103). Belacqua's position with respect to action is the same as that of Beckett's artist with respect to expression. Thus *More Pricks than Kicks* is an early manifestation of Beckett's struggle to find fictional means to reduce fiction to the paradoxical presentation of "no one, nothing, nowhere," which is a negative complement to the vision of "everyone, everything, everywhere" evoked in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. If *Finnegans Wake* gains its encyclopedic scope by multiplying the possibilities it affirms in each of its sentences, words, or syllables, then Beckett's characters and narratives demonstrate an inverse procedure. For Belacqua, and later Murphy and others, not to act is a way of keeping all possible alternatives intact, at least on the mental level of pure potential. To preserve the idea of potentially infinite possibilities, Beckett's protagonists refrain from acting or confine themselves. To avoid saying more than they mean (for Beckett "constantly takes language at its

word, and as words always mean more than they say, all statements must be qualified or even canceled" [Iser 715]) Beckett's narratives cancel themselves and thus open up enormous indeterminate possibilities of meaning. In employing these strategies even *Belacqua* and *More Pricks than Kicks* possess the "play of negativity" Iser sees in the later prose, in which "finiteness explodes into productivity" (Iser 718). We must be careful not to mistake this productivity for action however: it is an endless production of discourse, and an endless production of the self by the negative strategy of stating, canceling the statement, and then further canceling the seemingly positive act of correcting an error. All of this issues from a source who, like Dante's *Belacqua*, is going nowhere. As we shall see in the discussion of *Murphy*, Georg Lukacs castigated Beckett for this reason, for presenting an endless abstract potential that is never realizable, that goes nowhere and does nothing (Lukacs 66). Beckett's fiction implies that if we think we are going somewhere or doing something, it is always in fiction, within those necessary fictions that allow us to act, and that in that unspeakable space outside them we remain like *Belacqua* "where we were, as we were."

A text like *More Pricks than Kicks* demands that we invert the hierarchy which sees action as more interesting and more meaningful than inaction. Beckett's early novels, in their radical skepticism about action and meaning, in

their flight from the rewards and the necessary illusions of a masterful competence, ruthlessly present us with a black hole where we are conditioned to find the utopia of artistic coherence and wholeness. This fiction exposes the involuntary nature of our attempts to see this Utopia as merely deferred, but still recoverable, so that our helpless insistence that "this must mean" becomes comically repetitive. In the end Beckett places his readers in the same position as his protagonists, and we become the victims rather than the masters of meaning. For *More Pricks than Kicks*, this inescapable and thus compulsory meaning, which the text seeks hopelessly to evade, is placed at the level of action. Beckett's later works will refine their focus upon the compulsory aspect of meaning, and place it at the level of the act of narration itself. Belacqua, an "actor" rather than a narrator, struggles to avoid "doing something next," yet can only cancel or repudiate the actions he cannot help but perform. Molloy, Malone and others will struggle to end their narration, and succeed only in producing more narrative, more words that "mean to mean," even in spite of their "user."

## NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

<sup>1</sup> "A new Beckett novel or play represents a critical reflection on previous achievements. Each novel, each play, overlaps the others, each character serves as a prototype for his heirs." (Federman 16)

<sup>2</sup> Portions of *More Pricks than Kicks* originated in the unpublished *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932). Other portions of *Dream* appeared separately: "Assumption" in *transition* (Paris) 16-17 (June 1929); "Sedendo et Quiesciendo [sic]" in *transition* 21 (March 1932); "Text" in *New Review* 2 (April 1932); "A Case in a Thousand" in *The Bookman* 86 (August 1934). Dates and locations taken from Dearlove 154n.

<sup>3</sup> A chronology of the composition and publication of episodes of *Work in Progress* appears in Ellmann 794-96.

<sup>4</sup> See for example *Finnegans Wake* 3.

<sup>5</sup> See B. Tysdahl, *Joyce and Ibsen: a Study in Literary Influence* (New York: Humanities Press Inc., 1968). Tysdahl summarizes and extends the work of many others on this subject before 1968. The influence of Ibsen reaches far beyond *Dubliners* and the play *Exiles*, and finds expression, in allusions at least, throughout *Finnegans Wake*.

<sup>6</sup>In this instance we might remark, as Edmund Wilson does of the "Cyclops" episode of *Ulysses*, that "we are astonished at the introduction of voices that seem to belong neither to the characters nor to the author" (206). I would emend Wilson's terminology and say that the voice which states "it is not" in "Dante and the Lobster" seems to belong neither to Belacqua nor to the narrator, who has not previously made a habit of this kind of absolute, factual pronouncement. Later Beckett narrators will occasionally resort to such unqualified assertions, often in the form of a *non sequitur*, for humorous purposes: see for example, "constipation is a sign of good health in pomeranians" (*Molloy* 12).

### CHAPTER THREE

#### *Murphy: "Savoir ne pas faire"*

Like *More Pricks than Kicks*, *Murphy* takes place in a recognizable, real world, with locations that one can actually visit the way Joyce's readers visit Stephen's Green or Eccles Street. After Belacqua's Dublin in *More Pricks than Kicks*, *Murphy's* West Brompton and Brewery Road will be the last such straightforwardly real locales to be presented in Beckett's work. *Murphy* echoes *More Pricks than Kicks* in its protagonist's attempts to escape that actual world, a world which is represented with all the scorn for mundane non-esthetic existence which animated *Proust*. To that scorn, however, is now added a humorous skepticism--or in Hugh Kenner's words, a "rich pedantic resignation"--concerning the possibilities for any mental escape from that world (*Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* 53). The need to flee, and the impossibility of fleeing, form one of the "eternal seesaws" of *Murphy's* paradoxical humor.

*Murphy's* attempt to repudiate the actual world is more decisive and radical than that of Belacqua; however *Murphy* too will have to face death and physical dispersal to make good this escape. The symbolism of these events will be

made clearer by a preceding mental "breakdown" as well. The ambivalence and uneasiness of *More Pricks than Kicks* is thus clarified in *Murphy*, and has become an outright refusal of the everyday world, the world of *others*, in favour of what the novel shows as an impossible "mental home" with *Murphy* at its center. The focus of the novel, then, is *Murphy's* attempted radical refusal of the consensual real world.

This thematic focus has consequences for the novel's implicit conception of fiction. The transition from *More Pricks than Kicks* to *Murphy* is the transition from the linked-short-story form to the novel form, as well as the beginning of an intense focus on the question of character in the novel. The titles of the series of works inaugurated by *Murphy* suggest, in themselves, that the writing will now stress the presentation of a central character, and that this task will be seen as less and less achievable. The titles themselves--*Murphy*, *Watt*, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*--suggest the way the protagonists will give their names to novels, yet slowly slip from the novels' grasp, dying and eventually evading naming altogether. It is as if the very titles of this series of novels ask us to interpret them as enacting the gradual renunciation of one of fiction's long-standing aims: the aim of revealing human character in some satisfactory way.

Stated this way, it sounds as if Samuel Beckett's novels depict the elusiveness of human character, or the

inadequacy of language to capture something so unique, essential, and ungraspable. This is partly true: the infirmity of language is part of Samuel Beckett's thematic and comic arsenal. On the other hand, these novels also display the power of language, as an autonomous medium functioning in a void, without substantial content, without certainty about meanings or events, and yet capable of producing structure and meaning despite everything. From this point of view, it is human character itself that becomes the nullity, the cipher, which only language invests with a semblance of reality. This view appeared as early as *Proust*, where Beckett spoke of "a succession of identities" rather than a single stable identity. Thus Beckett develops a Modernist preoccupation with an unstable or fragmented self,<sup>1</sup> and exposes the paradoxes and contradictions of the attempts to incorporate this into the genre of the "realist novel," which *Murphy* parodies.

When the elements of this paradoxical blend are identified, it becomes clear where the themes of "nothingness" and "emptiness" come into Beckett's work. If it is simultaneously true that human character is so essential that an infirm language cannot grasp it, and that only the power of language gives unity to the impression of human identity which is nothing "by itself"--then the result is that we have two elements, language and identity, each of which is nothing by itself, each supporting the other and

producing the fragile moment-by-moment illusion of stable identity and determinate "reality." Beckett's later novels show this illusion breaking down rapidly under the probing of formal play with language and reflections on memory and the meaning of events. In *Murphy*, the formal play is not as developed, and so the novel approaches the impossibility of rendering human character on a more directly thematic level.

The following discussion of *Murphy* will focus, therefore, on the ways the novel backs away from its own ostensibly conventional form, showing a seemingly perverse lack of interest in the mainsprings of the traditional novel: *human action in the world*. Each element in the phrase is important, the word "human" evoking the obligation of the novel as a genre to present character in depth, the word "action" recalling the importance of story, and the final element stressing the importance of the actual world as the context for the novel.<sup>2</sup> *Murphy* ironizes the classical novelistic interest in human action, first by the way the novel treats its actors, the characters. Action proper, that is, the novel's plots, are made and presented in ways that undermine conventional notions of voluntary and effective action. The accompanying habits of thought concerning the voluntary and autonomous nature of human action are implicitly repudiated in the novel. The "instrument" of the novel, language itself, is presented as comically unreliable. As *Murphy* retreats from all of these aspects of

"life"--other people, action, the physical world, language--his narrative, identifying itself mainly with its protagonist, begins more and more to evoke its own insufficiency (though not on the scale seen in *Watt*). Finally, the disintegration of the protagonist is not enacted in the narrative as it will be in *Watt*, but instead the unnarrateable is symbolically evoked in a lyrical conclusion.

In this way *Murphy* moves toward the full-blown "Beckettian" fictional world of the trilogy, while still retaining some elements of the conventional comic novel. These conventional elements have led Hugh Kenner to label the novel an "exception" among Beckett's works:

*Murphy* is not a typical Beckett book. No reader of his earlier writings would have expected him to be able to deal with a character like Celia, and in no obvious way does the more celebrated later work derive from it. To write it he simply evaded the madness in himself. To write the later books he confronted this madness.  
(52-53)

Kenner certainly has reason to see the novel as an exception --it is the only Beckett novel likely to prompt commentators to make specific comparisons to Cervantes or Dickens, as I will do below. However, his reference to Beckett's "madness" is at once too conjectural and figurative. Kenner alludes to no hard biographical support for such a reference, and if his use of "madness" is figurative, it is hard to say what it suggests here, except that *Murphy* is not

as strange a book as *Watt*. Such a view also separates *Murphy* from Beckett's early fiction in a way that only diminishes our understanding of the later work. Kenner subsequently explains that "what went into abeyance" in the writing of *Murphy* emerged "metamorphosed" in Beckett's French verse of the same period, and by this detour Beckett arrived at the trilogy (54). Certainly Beckett's verse has relevance to the development of the fiction, but there are also ways in which the fictional world of the trilogy has some relation to "conventional" fiction--like *Murphy*.

Simply to label the trilogy a radical innovation would be to deny or overlook its clear connection to its formally more conventional precedent. To trace such a connection, and thus shed light on the way the trilogy develops out of a self-conscious encounter with such a conventional fictional world, will be one main task of this chapter. The later work's more fully realized flight from the "house of fiction," and the critique thereby implied, may then be better appreciated. The following discussion will treat each of these aspects in turn, beginning with the question of character in *Murphy*, then proceeding to investigate how Beckett's novel presents action, and finally, discussing the role in the novel of the actual worlds of London and Dublin.

*Murphy*, as we might expect of a novel with someone's name on it, concentrates on presenting the title "character" and his "story." While *Watt* will frustrate the expectations

created by its title, *Murphy* lives up to them. *Murphy's* mind is explicitly, in fact over-literally, presented to the reader in a special section devoted to that purpose ("Section Six"). The chapter parodies conventional concern for the revelation of character by overstressing it. Like *Watt* as a whole, this chapter will turn out to provide a blend of great factual detail and small enlightenment. However this novel, unlike *Watt*, actually begins with the presentation of the main character, although in a surprising position:

He sat naked in his rocking-chair of undressed teak, guaranteed not to crack, warp, shrink, corrode or creak at night. It was his own, it never left him. . . . Seven scarves held him in position. Two fastened his shins to the rockers, one his thighs to the seat, two his breast and his belly to the back, one his wrists to the strut behind. Only the most local movements were possible. (5)

This passage serves notice that, although there will be lunatics in this novel, for most of the narrative there is no character as firmly on his rocker as *Murphy*--even if his rocker will shortly be inverted in a catastrophic crash. The wordplay is typical, exploiting the possibility of apparent redundance--"naked" and "undressed" with their separate referents--and ambiguous reference: is *Murphy* "guaranteed not to crack, shrink, warp or creak at night"? The rocker functions as *Murphy's* main material attribute, like the sticks and bicycle-horns to which later characters cling. When he is separated from his rocker, his own dissolution has begun.

Murphy inhabits "a medium sized cage of northwestern aspect, commanding an unbroken view of medium-sized cages of south-eastern aspect" (5). An indigent expatriate Dubliner, he lives on "small charitable sums" (14). He rooms with Celia, a London prostitute enjoying a hiatus in the practice of her trade.<sup>3</sup> One major strand of *Murphy's* plot concerns Celia's efforts to prod Murphy into gainful employment, and spare her the return to the streets which they both dread (but to which Murphy can better resign himself). Murphy has bargained Celia into hanging their futures upon the word of an astrologer, who will forecast the most auspicious conditions for Murphy's search for work. The verdict provides him with a celestial warrant for his indolence, until one day the auspices all line up and he stumbles upon an opportunity to work as an attendant at an asylum, the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat. After a week's trial, Murphy's permanent move to the Mercyseat is signalled when he collects his rocker; the next day the novel's Dublin characters arrive in a mob, seeking Murphy at his former apartment, but he has escaped the entanglements they represent and will emerge from his asylum only as a parcel of cremated ash.

Murphy as a character is the ultimate patrician, and in a sense the ultimate hypocrite: so refined that he hopes to "refine himself out of existence," he nevertheless has his servant (that is, Celia) to "do his living for him," and also to provide a corporeal heaven for him at night. This

self-deceiving system will inevitably break down, and Murphy flees it for a seemingly safer venue at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat. It is here, in an asylum, that Murphy hopes more successfully to appease his bodily existence and free his mind. As he puts it, in the asylum he hopes to find "the part of him that he loved," the purely mental self, and to leave behind "the part of him that he hated"--the body with its desires and needs--which "craved for Celia" (109). Even here, however, he can find only a "lovingly perverted and simplified" version of himself (102).

In its effort to present the mind of its protagonist, in Chapter (or "section") Six, *Murphy* shows most clearly the way that Beckett's early fiction will deal with the presentation of character. First, it is important to note the tone of weary dutifulness, and the sense of futility, which open the section. "It is most unfortunate," the narrator declares, that the novel is now compelled to undertake "a justification of the expression 'Murphy's mind'" (63). Note that it is a necessarily inadequate "expression" which is being justified--the novel can only deal in "expressions," after all, and their connection with any other order of reality is not an issue. In any case, as the narrator admits, to present Murphy's mind, this "apparatus," as it really is, would be impossible, and so the novel concerns itself "solely with what it felt and pictured itself to be" (63). This limitation is not solely a function of language

itself, however, but implies a sense of the subjectivity of impressions, which is a different limitation of perception. In other words, the novel passes on Murphy's word-picture of his own mind, with the acknowledgement that first, it is a word-picture and no more, and second, it is Murphy's word-picture, and thus further limited. This immediate concession of the impossibility of presenting the "real" and the lapse into presenting the subjectively perceived will be emphatically repeated in *Watt*. The tedious business of describing Murphy's mind so bluntly is excused with the declaration that "a short section to itself at this stage will relieve us from the necessity of apologizing for it further" (63).

The key fact about Murphy's mind is that it sees itself as a "closed system" (64), not "an instrument" but "a place" (101), with only an indirect and puzzling connection to the physical world. In this closed mental world, ethical criteria do not exist, only the principle of mental pleasure:

There was the mental fact and the physical fact, equally real if not equally pleasant. . . . The mind felt its actual part to be above and bright, its virtual part to be beneath and fading into dark, without however connecting this with the ethical yoyo. The mental experience was cut off from the physical experience, its criteria were not those of the physical experience. . . . It did not function and could not be disposed according to a principle of worth. . . . It felt no issue between its light and its dark, no need for its light to devour its dark. The need was now to

be in the light, now in the half light, now in the dark. That was all. (63-64)

Several important elements for all of Beckett's subsequent fiction emerge here. First, the idea of the closed system, expressed in various ways in *Murphy*, which will be discussed shortly. Second, the absence of ethical criteria to judge mental experience--this mental world is isolated from others and free from the constraints that impinge on a world of action. Third, the existence of forms of purely mental pleasure, and fourth, the consequent perception of the physical world as an intrusion into the enjoyment of these pleasures. From this perception springs the perplexed notion that the physical and mental worlds, though essentially distinct, do affect one another, but only according to some incomprehensible and occult system of no interest in itself. From Belacqua's unfocused "gression" in *More Pricks than Kicks*, which is a strategy to avoid being anywhere, Murphy has developed much more fully elaborated strategies and rationales for the evasion of everyday experience.

Murphy, the solipsistic hedonist of the mind, is the creature of "his own system" (103), his view of his mind. His evaluations of his position in the physical and social worlds, and the goals that guide his acts, stem from this view. For instance, his scorn for "ordinary experience" comes from his sense of its insufficient mental richness and from the idea that the physical is essentially a nuisance tolerated by the mental:

Murphy could think and know after a fashion with his body up (so to speak) and about, with a kind of mental *tic douloureux* sufficient for his parody of rational behaviour. But that was not what he understood by consciousness. (65)

What Murphy understands by consciousness--the laying to rest of his body, and coming alive in his mind, as he pursues it in his rocker--looks a lot like unconsciousness, or coma, to the uninitiated. The scene in which Murphy manages to crash his rocker epitomizes the comic potential of his picture of himself as a primarily mental creature. A futile attempt to answer the telephone while strapped into the rocker leaves him as follows:

Murphy was as last heard of, with this difference however, that the rocking-chair was now on top. Thus inverted his only direct contact with the floor was that made by his face, which was ground against it. . . . Only the most local movements were possible, a licking of the lips, a turning of the other cheek to the dust, and so on. (20)

Strapped naked into the chair, enjoying mental bliss, Murphy is cursed with a physical eardrum that cannot help but register the ringing telephone. The mental *tic* that guides his normal functioning cannot help but realize that the landlady will enter the unlocked door to answer the ring, and find Murphy there, bound and naked. Thus Murphy's flight into his mental paradise is vexed by the involuntary physical processes to which he is "fastened," to use Yeats' word, more securely than he is fastened to the rocker.

The notion of an obscure and incomprehensible link between these two attached aspects of the self affords much

of the comedy in Beckett. Beckett characters are like the clowns who repeatedly hit themselves in the back of the head with the ladders they carry, or manage to kick themselves in the rear without understanding how it happens. Having rejected the link between the mental and physical, they cannot find the causal link that brings about the physical "kicks" they suffer from, or learn how to gain the physical "caress" they would enjoy:

Thus Murphy felt himself split in two, a body and a mind. They had intercourse apparently, otherwise he could not have known that they had anything in common. But he felt his mind to be bodytight and did not understand through what channel the intercourse was effected. . . . He neither thought a kick because he felt one nor felt a kick because he thought one. Perhaps the knowledge was related to the fact of a kick as two magnitudes to a third. Perhaps there was, outside space and time, a non-mental non-physical Kick from all eternity, dimly revealed to Murphy in its correlated modes of consciousness and extension, the kick *in intellectu* and the kick *in re*. But where then was the supreme Caress? (64)

This separation of the mental self (Murphy's "best self") from the physical world establishes a typically Modernist alienated self. From this position, the surrounding world offers the kind of opaque, smooth surface described by Robbe-Grillet: "The world around us turns back into a smooth surface, without signification, without soul, without values, on which we no longer have any purchase" (71).

What remains significant is the mental realm itself, divided by Murphy into "the three zones, light, half light, dark, each with its specialty" (65). Since it is in these

three zones that Murphy sees his real life as occurring, it is worth investigating their qualities. The first zone contains the mental parallel to the physical world, "a radiant abstract of the dog's life" (65). The mental pleasure of imagining "real" events rules here: "Here the kick that the physical Murphy received, the mental Murphy gave. It was the same kick, but corrected as to direction. . . . Here the whole physical fiasco became a howling success" (65). The second zone contains "forms without parallel" in the physical world, and remains a purely mental realm in which Murphy enjoys the stability of mental pleasures that cannot be affected by physical realities. The third zone seems to signal an abandonment of ego and an entry into some kind of pure flux--here we have a truly "impossible" world from the point of view of structured perception and description. The modernist "fragmented self," which remained haunted by the idea of some lost coherent selfhood, no longer holds sway here. The account of this zone describes a paradoxically unstructured structure:

The third . . . was a flux of forms, a perpetual coming together and falling asunder of forms . . . . neither elements nor states, nothing but forms becoming and crumbling into the fragments of a new becoming, without love or hate or any intelligible principle of change. Here there was nothing but commotion and the pure forms of commotion. Here he was not free, but a mote in the dark of absolute freedom. He did not move, he was a point in the ceaseless unconditioned generation and passing away of line.

Matrix of surds. (66)

This extraordinary description of what, for Murphy, is the preferred mode of being, raises some interesting questions about what *Murphy* is doing with the realistic novel, the novel that presents character in depth. A surd is, in phonetics, a sound that can be expressed without vibration of the vocal cords (f, k, p, s, t). In mathematics, it is a quantity that cannot be expressed in whole numbers, such as the square root of two. The Latin root means, literally, "the unheard." *Murphy's* protagonist, then, is one who prefers this unheard-of realm of mental abstractedness, over the world of "unavoidable and tedious" doing (25). Although the novel allies its point of view with that of Murphy, to the extent that he is the focal character, obviously it cannot hope to follow Murphy into this third zone. Once again the novel is faced with trying to express that which flees from the world of the expressible, into a zone foreign to "functional" language, if everyday language can be made to parallel the whole numbers that fail to express the "surd," Murphy himself. Murphy feels that the world recognizes that he is in fact such a surd, as when he fails in one of his attempts to gain employment, and imagines to himself that though all of the voices of ridicule he hears are different, "their content was one: 'Thou surd!'" (47).

It would be tempting to see some kind of parallel between Murphy's threefold description of his own mind, and the three-part psychic structures proposed by Freud or

Lacan. But neither the Freudian ego-superego-id, nor the Lacanian imaginary-symbolic-real, is meant to describe a consciously alienated psyche, or a willfully solipsistic mind. Both of their three-part structures attempt to account for *development*, which is not part of Murphy's self-conception. Both describe the psyche's entanglements with other psyches, through the elaboration of the superego based on an Oedipal process (for Freud), or through the entry into the social and linguistically maintained symbolic order (for Lacan).

Murphy's *principles*, which he compromises most notably in his relationship with Celia, insist on the effort to elude such entanglement with others. In the attempt to live consistently, coherently, mirroring the wholeness and integrity of Stephen Dedalus' artistic artifact, Murphy retreats within the fortress of his closed system. The novel reveals the self-deception involved in this attempt, however, and emphasizes Murphy's debts to the others that surround him. To the extent that we detect this self-deception, *Murphy* becomes a critique of the modernist myth of the alienated self, showing that Murphy, the epitome of such a self, can only be an absurdity. (The extent to which this implied critique overlaps with that of Georg Lukács, an adherent of realism, will be seen below.) Future Beckett characters will acknowledge their own composite nature, and the entire secondariness of their own most seemingly essen-

tial aspects. Similarly, future Beckett narratives will remain more scrupulously within this "closed system" of the mind that feels isolated in itself but faces puzzling intrusions from another world of physical events. This combination of greater isolation and greater secondariness will create the heightened indeterminacy that afflicts every aspect of characters like Watt or Molloy.

It is from the vantage point of this view of mind that the paradox of *Murphy* appears most clearly; the reader's sympathy is manipulated to allow us to sympathize with Murphy's view to an extent, but also to see its contradictions. In *Watt*, this paradox will be resolved, in favour of other paradoxes, by having Watt himself speak. But *Murphy* is not told by Murphy himself, and thus while it supports Murphy's sense of the unreality of everything outside his mind to some degree, it also laughs at his self-conception and "quiets his body" permanently by having another character pull the toilet-chain which floods Murphy's room with gas and flushes out Murphy's real nature, that of a physical being to the end. *Murphy's* apparently serious attempt to provide a revelation of Murphy's character crumbles under the limitations imposed by Murphy's own conception of himself. He sees himself in terms that make him incommensurable with any fictional presentation--he is a mark that is doomed to be missed.

As for the other characters in the novel, the narrative anticipates Robbe-Grillet's observation that "the creators of characters, in the traditional sense, no longer manage to offer us anything more than puppets in which they themselves have ceased to believe" (28). *Murphy* stands out among Beckett's novels, as Kenner noted, precisely because it does what "creators of characters, in the traditional sense," are supposed to do: it describes the misadventures of a collection of "puppets." Yet while *Murphy's* narrator explicitly discredits this undertaking as one in which he has indeed "ceased to believe," he also attempts to do *more* than this by depicting Murphy himself in greater psychological depth. Murphy is the only character not called a puppet, and the only one for whom there is "for once, a right word" (39). There is no "right word" for the others; they are unessential enough to be begotten by one term as much as any other. For example, echoing the treatment accorded the farmer in "Fingal," the narrator of *Murphy* says of Austin Ticklepenny that "[t]his creature does not merit any particular description" (51).

The supporting characters, or "puppets," are emphatically subordinated to Murphy; though Celia, with whom the novel will end, provides a partial exception to this rule. If Murphy wishes to see himself as a mind ("as described in section six" [6]) then Celia is, emphatically, a body. The initial description of her by way of a list of body measure-

ments (quoted in Chapter Two above) stresses that she is a creature of quantity. She is presented as measurable, able to be circumscribed with a tailor's tape, unlike the best part of Murphy, his elusive mind.

Celia also provides a link between Murphy and Mr. Kelly, who, along with Mr. Endon, provides an analogue to Murphy. Celia places Murphy and Mr. Kelly in a single category, declaring to her uncle that "[y]ou . . . and possibly Murphy" are "all I have in the world" (11). In fact Mr. Kelly presents a picture of one possible future for Murphy. Murphy's taste for inaction and the supposedly tenuous link between his mind and his body are figured in the description of Mr. Kelly:

Mr. Kelly's face was narrow and profoundly seamed with a lifetime of dingy, stingy repose. Just as all hope seemed lost it burst into a fine bulb of skull, unobscured by hair. Yet a little while and his brain-body ratio would have shrunk to that of a small bird. He lay back in bed, doing nothing, unless an occasional pluck at the counterpane can be entered to his credit. (11)

Murphy is also described as birdlike, his eyes "cold and unwavering as a gull's" (5). Both Murphy and Mr. Kelly frequent Hyde Park--Kelly to fly his kite, Murphy to nap and daydream. Perhaps Mr. Kelly is one who succeeds where Murphy fails, in that he does manage to pursue an existence focussed around his sole interest--kite-flying--while Murphy never finds the means to devote himself entirely to his rocking-chair stasis. The way Kelly achieves this, of

course, is by relying upon Celia, and perhaps Murphy might have taken his place had Celia not "lost" the two men almost simultaneously at the novel's end. In the novel's closing incident, Mr. Kelly loses his grip on his kite and collapses. Is he dead? Certainly his dissolution (the loss of his main attribute, the kite) mirrors the death of Murphy. As he collapses, the park warden's cry of "All out" suggests that now all of the novel's characters save Celia have fled.

On the whole these supporting characters form two groups belonging to two worlds, that of London and that of Dublin. London is a place of hiding, of "asylum" (where Murphy can continue Belacqua's avoidance of Irish acquaintances). At the same time as London permits Murphy's solitary pursuits and allows him more isolation than Dublin, it is also, contrarily, the place he finds Celia. She provides a companionship we are surprised to find granted to one of Beckett's characters. While Murphy enjoys and exploits Celia, however, he fears the self she wants him to become (a functioning, earning self) and callously flees her for the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat. Finally, London is also a realistically presented version of the "real" contemporary world of tram rides, lunch restaurants, and jobs "where livings are made away." These elements, and the comic grotesque characters that Beckett includes in it (the old boy, Miss Carridge, Miss Dew), recall a Dickensian London.

Although Murphy is hardly satisfied with the London world, he has chosen it over Ireland, the only alternative in the novel. The Irish characters evoke a vision of an Ireland dominated by an insistent nationalism and preoccupation with the past, and a charlatanish mysticism. To these national failings is added a slavish sexuality of the kind satirized in *More Pricks than Kicks*. All of these traits are summed up in the image of the Dublin yogi Neary (a George Moore caricature) banging his head on the bronze bum of the statue of Cucchulain in the Dublin General Post Office. These national traits are the forces that Murphy, like Stephen Dedalus, must flee in order to become himself. In the case of Stephen Dedalus, these "external pressures--national, religious, familial--seek to repress [the self] into integrated definition" (Brown 36). Murphy, by contrast, feels the national and religious pressures, but not the familial, since unlike later Beckett protagonists, whose mothers at least figure largely, Murphy seems bereft of relations. The Dublin world he has left behind might be seen as hounding him in the exile, or asylum, he has chosen; but in fact Murphy knows little about the quest of the Dubliners for him. (This ignorance and indifference on the part of their object is one way the Dubliners' quest is ironized.)

The kind of self presented in *Murphy* is, axiomatically, individualistic and isolated. The notion that these

qualities are somehow definitive and unavoidable, confronts the sense, which emerges in Kojève's philosophy and Lacan's psychoanalysis, that the self is not self-sufficient, and is constituted via others. These competing views of the self meet in *Murphy*, which presents simultaneously the ideas that the self is isolated, autonomous, and individualistic in the way Murphy seeks to be, but also that it needs others and is in fact generated through others, as part of a family, a nation, a language group. The latter view of selfhood as defined through affiliation most often applies to the subordinate characters in *Murphy*. What mediation can there be between these two conceptions of the self?

Dennis Brown, in his study of the "modernist self," has shown how, in *A Portrait*, Joyce has Stephen rebel against the affiliations that claim him, and put himself together out of his own freely adopted set of elements. Self-creation becomes an artistic pursuit. In *Murphy* this sense of freedom to create is curtailed; this is a world where the sun shines on "the nothing new" (5). Thus the novel emphasizes another sense of the closed system, an inescapable matrix out of which one has no choice but to be constituted one way or another--much as Benveniste portrays the function of language as a definitive limit to self-knowledge and self-construction. Any conception of oneself prior to or beyond language has no function in a human, thus languaged, world. Benveniste's ideas describe the kind of

closed-system world Murphy inhabits, and show how the ideas that the self is constructed through language (Benveniste), and that the self is constructed by way of others (Lacan), are two ways of saying one thing. Benveniste claims that language is in fact the medium of the differentiation between self and other which allows self-definition. It is thus the concrete form of the social culture that preexists individuals like Murphy, who must enter a story that has already begun. Beckett's narrators, in claiming that they were not properly born, or that they cannot make any real beginning, register this idea of a society and its medium, language, which preexists the self and cannot therefore have anything to do with an absolutely essential or original aspect of the self. On the other hand it is all that permits the identification and articulation of the self.

The supporting characters in *Murphy* emphasize the entangling quality of the social world which Murphy abhors, by forming a kind of vortex of selves which form new relations and redefine themselves as against one another. Mutual need and desire overwhelm their separate selfhoods. Murphy's Quixotic quest to "need no one," to assert his essential self-sufficiency, fails through a similar process. He denies himself with the aid of Neary, the Irish yogi who is able to stop his heart for relief from social tedium or frustrated lust, and whose disciple Murphy had become for a time in Dublin. It is perhaps Neary's example that teaches

Murphy to satisfy his basic needs by way of "transcendental" means, such as astrology. Celia and the mental patient Mr. Endon also help to define for Murphy what he is and what he is not. In the end, he needs no one only when he is dead, in which circumstance he is no longer "Murphy needing no one," but simply the dust on a pub floor.

Murphy cannot, in fact, escape the entanglements of the social world and his relations with others, and his own aloofness from that world is finally put into question. It is significant that although the distinctive "essence" of Murphy is supposed to be rendered in the early-heralded "section six," this section is actually presented as a tedious obligation and a doomed undertaking. There the depiction of the mere fictive hand-puppets from whom Murphy supposedly differs is condemned as not worth the trouble, and Beckett's subsequent fiction will in fact move in two directions, distinguished by their treatment of this question of character. One direction, tending ultimately toward the later drama, will, as in *Mercier and Camier*, restrict itself to unessential puppets and leave out the dominating meditative Murphys. Alternatively, the later fiction such as *Watt* and the trilogy, dispensing with the kind of supporting cast found in *Murphy*, will restrict itself to the tedious and doomed obligation of presenting a "real," essential selfhood such as Murphy's. In fact the sense of the obligation to do this, of its futility, and of its

impossibility, will be emphasized to such a point that it forms the actual substance of the account, whose real aim can never be achieved, and whose ostensible content--the full revelation of Watt, of Molloy--never even begins to exist.

*Murphy's* treatment of character offers a double-edged satire which elevates the self-sufficient Murphy by downplaying the value of the secondary characters, defined by their group affiliations, yet which at the same time undercuts the supposed self-sufficiency of the "essential" Murphy by exposing his dependence upon others. Such a conception of character in the novel leaves little scope for a whole-hearted presentation of action. Murphy himself scorns "doing," arguing with Celia that "you do a fraction of what you are, you suffer a dreary ooze of your being into doing" (25). For Murphy, as for Watt or Molloy, it is plain *being* that is of interest. This is not to say that there is no action in *Murphy*, or that what action there is is unimportant. The realistic quality of the novel's events is underlined by the narrator's painstaking attention to time, place and date. It is possible to trace all of the events on a calendar, and the narrator is openly "pedantic" about the exact date, and the position of the sun and moon, when Murphy meets Austin Ticklepenny, who will find him his job at the asylum:

The encounter, on which so much unhinges, between Murphy and Ticklepenny, took place on Friday,

October the 11th (though Murphy did not know that), the moon being full again, but not nearly so near the earth as when last in opposition.  
(67)

The central themes and images of *Murphy's* action are those of exile and asylum, the circuits of love and the stars and of circular pursuits, and the short-circuiting of extremes (past/present, lover/loved or self/other, action/inaction, need/indifference or lack/satisfaction, death/birth). The motif of quest or pursuit, whether for love or money, presents the idea that such quests are usually futile and circular. The very circularity of much of the novel's action evokes the idea of the "closed system" in which there is a fixed quantity of lack/need and of satisfaction, so that any increase in satisfaction or decrease in need is impossible within the system. The novel abounds in references to such systems. For instance, Neary's rival Wylie contends that

the syndrome known as life is too diffuse to admit of palliation. For every symptom that is eased, another is made worse. The horse leech's daughter is a closed system. Her quantum of wantum cannot vary. (36)

The advantage of such a system is its stability: "things . . . will always be the same as they always were" (36). Such is the world in which "the sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new," at the opening of the novel (5). The closed system will persist without overall change "until the system is dismantled" (36). Such a dismantling

is what Murphy seeks, and finally obtains at about the same time as he is inadvertently gassed in his room, and merges with "superfine chaos" (142).

In such a context action is inevitably futile, from the global point of view. Thus the quests the characters undertake are trivialized and ironised from the start. There are two main quests presented this way: the quest of Neary, Wylie, Miss Counihan and Cooper for Murphy, which ends in failure, since Murphy has died, but also ends in a reorientation of the quest so that Murphy becomes merely contingent (as he was in the beginning). The other quest, that of Murphy for money, is the occasion for savage satire of the world where "livings are made away" (42) rather than made, and where any material gain is more than offset by corresponding losses of other kinds (bodily, mental). Ultimately this satire of utility identified with Murphy is itself undermined by the way Murphy repeatedly succumbs, despite his attempts to escape from need into indifference and pure potential, to small undeniable needs and desires (the desire of a dog for Murphy's biscuits, his own desire for heat). Thus the novel's third quest--that of Murphy for the mental world he imagines--is also shown as futile. Both the self-interested quests for satisfaction undertaken by Neary and the other Dubliners, and their parody in Murphy's flight from all goals and questing, his quest for cessation of questing, all come to nothing.

It is not that these characters are not needy--but their knowledge of the relations between "themselves," their needs, and the world in which they must be satisfied is not conclusive knowledge. Their greatest successes are in talking about their needs and their desires, not in satisfying them through action. If they could each accept that their greatest satisfaction would be to speak endlessly without any certainty even of what they were saying, on the topic of their needs, their losses, their desires, the ends of their desires, and so on, then they could be "satisfied," in a certain sense. This kind of "satisfaction," however, would have to co-exist with the acceptance of language's autonomy, its separation from anything outside itself. This is the world of Beckett's trilogy, and if the characters in *Murphy* were to move from the world of doing, in which this novel remains, into the world of autonomous discourse, they would have entered the world of the trilogy and would become "Beckettian" narrator-protagonists.

Finally, the question of a larger quest for "truth" on the part of the novel as a whole, or on the part of its characters, or even of its readers, is answered with the image of a fixed quantity of such "truth," or at least of what passes for insight: "Once a certain degree of insight has been reached . . . all men talk, when talk they must, the same tripe" (37). The sense of a definite limit to human insight, and the presence of a qualification on the

need to express it--"when talk they must"--typifies the ironic, closed world in which these fictions take place.

The image that presides over all of the novel's goal-oriented activity is itself a parody of such activity: the chess game which Murphy plays with the mental patient Mr. Endon. They play not in order to win, but to prolong the play to infinity. Murphy's reasoning seems to be that if the goal is to win and have the game over, why start (or, if all life is oriented to the goal of earning a livelihood, what is left for that livelihood to serve)? In reasoning this way, Murphy adopts a paradigm of modernist thinking--the closed system--and applies it to his own acts. Hugh Kenner describes, in "Art in a Closed Field," the importance of this paradigm to fiction after Flaubert. In such work, the independence of writing from speech is manifested by the use of language as a closed system of elements for combination, rather than a spoken act of communication. Joyce is one of Kenner's main examples: "Discourse, for Joyce, has become a finite list of words" (603). The catechism in *Ulysses* is one example of the resulting combinatory art. Beckett, Kenner argues, picks up this method in *Watt*. Kenner sees in this something "more significant than Joyce implying a method, and Beckett playing with it" (605). In fact, Kenner argues, what both are doing is pursuing "the dominant intellectual analogy of the present age," that of a closed field of elements whose importance lies in their

relations with one another, not in their individual characteristics. Clearly this analogy describes Saussurian linguistics, though Kenner sees General Number Theory as its most important exemplar. *Murphy* only hints at the importance such a paradigm will assume in *Watt* and *Molloy*. The secondary characters in *Murphy* perhaps form such a system of unessential elements, since their fluctuating relations are given importance in the novel, while their individuality is downplayed.<sup>4</sup>

Murphy's logic leads him to believe that, in a closed system where everything is linked to everything else and the quantities of need and satisfaction are fixed, the quest for self-preservation leads inevitably to self-annihilation--clearly the only recourse for him is to retreat to his "mental home," and try to stop seeking anything at all. But even there he fails to extricate himself from the tangles of love. A previous affection between Ticklepenny and the head male nurse is what prepared the way for Murphy to find employment in the first place. Also, the Dubliners' romantic quest for Murphy follows him to the asylum. Even there he cannot escape the needs of bodily existence (he must have "fire"--a gas heater--in his room, and this kills him in the end). When Murphy seeks to have done with "endless, tedious doing," he leads us to ask "what else is there to do but doing?" To answer this question, Murphy will resort to his own comical *savoir ne pas faire*, a talent

attributed to Wylie, but held by Murphy as well (68). He will try to seek a refuge in a state of all-but-death, or all-but-silence, and his resulting actions will point up the comic aspects of such a project. Yet the story of Murphy's impossible aims also demonstrates that such apparently perverse aims might find their motivation, not only in the resulting comedy, but also in a well-founded discontent with the world of doing and of "livings" which *Murphy* depicts.

The fact that the endless potential of Murphy's sought-for world is unrealizable only makes it more attractive to the anti-utilitarian Murphy. That the novel portrays this flight, but does not seek to enact or embody it (as Beckett's subsequent work will increasingly do), makes it outwardly more conventional, despite its thematic links to the singular "Beckett world." In *Murphy* we do not see the same kind of repudiation of conventional language and narrative structure that we find in *Watt*. In its deformation of language and its problematic structure, the later novel not only portrays, but actually embodies an attack upon conventional communication. While *Murphy* does not go as far, the kind of action and thinking it portrays are nevertheless incommensurable with the sort of language and narrative we must rely on from day to day, as a functional tool. Though Murphy himself seeks to get nothing done, the narrative about Murphy still uses language to get things done. We might say that because the satire in *Murphy* cuts two ways--

both vindicating the protagonist's rejection of his world and undermining the impossible alternative he seeks--the novel remains "masterful." The narrator who can see both sides of this situation remains outside, beyond, or above the conflict within Murphy. The novel mocks Murphy's attempt to escape or remake a world he repudiates, yet it retains the right to create the determinate world in which Murphy plays out his doomed attempt. Later novels such as *Watt* will descend into their protagonists' dilemmas, and become themselves afflicted by the indeterminacy and limitations that their protagonists face.

In this way the later novels go further in enacting the "madness" they portray in their protagonists. Insofar as the later novels do this, they recognize an implication of *Murphy* itself. *Murphy* focuses on the twinning of the "sensible" (perceptible, material) world with the "sensible" (conventional, coherent) world of everyday functioning thought and language. For *Murphy*, both of these are to be fled, and such flight can only move into an "insensible" (mental) world that is also "nonsensical" or "senseless" (the world of the patients at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat). Because the sensible world and the habits of thought and language that support and cohere with it are inseparable, to maintain effective, functioning language habits is to remain in this conventional world with its everyday sacrifices, as *Murphy* sees them.

The only escape can be into a "mad" world beyond. However, it is important to distinguish this theme in *Murphy* from the Romantic theme of madness as the excess and transcendence of reason. Through madness the Romantic can transcend ordinary limits and attain some kind of ultimate or authentic experience. But *Murphy* is not a Romantic novel, and its two-edged satire (both supporting Murphy's discontent and satirizing him as well) shows that madness has its own mundane side. It is not an escape, but the establishment of an alternate regime of habit. As Beckett says of Gide in *Proust*, merely to replace habit with the in habitual makes the in habitual into a new habit, and it becomes a rule that one must break rules. Furthermore, if madness is really a different kind of experience that is *incommensurable* with the normal modes of thought that one is fleeing, then it must be silent and inaccessible, and nothing can be said of it. Already in *Murphy*, Beckett's fiction has begun to grapple with the problem posed by the desire to move away from writing the possible, the effective, and to write instead the impossible, the ineffective: it is this pursuit of the ineffectual which finally becomes identified with "madness." Thus *Murphy* participates in the development of what we now see as the full-fledged "Beckett world" in fiction, a literature which, in Shoshana Felman's terms, "speaks, precisely, out of what reduces it to silence" (*Writing and Madness* 17).

Although *Murphy* may not exemplify such a fully-realized "Beckett world," it does sketch the outlines of Beckett's future fictional territory. Murphy's preference for a self-induced physical incapacity, his manifest rhetorical skill and his distrust of and self-consciousness about that skill, his reiterated longing to return to the womb, or the caul--all these help to define the "Beckett world." Indeed Murphy might best be described as a character *struggling* to be a "Beckett narrator," yet one who finds himself outside the fictional world in which he belongs, a world of inaction where the inner life pursues itself in isolation from the contingencies of the everyday. In this way Murphy's situation is Quixotic, for like Cervantes' character, Murphy finds himself in a dried-up, sterile "real world," even though he is in fact better adapted to a non-existent fictional world. Murphy's London, no less poverty-stricken and bereft of opportunity than Cervantes' La Mancha, is a reduced world where the characters count pennies and have nothing to lose but their bodies or their minds.

It is this Quixotic quality which best reveals the social-critical side of Beckett's novel. Murphy's search for employment provides the occasion for most of his limited dealings with the "real world" of London. Murphy's encounters with other characters, and their reactions to him, echo the shape of Quixote's encounters with the "real world" of La Mancha. Murphy, however, does not harbour

Romantic illusions about the nature of the world he ventures into; on the contrary, he seems to harbour an over-skeptical disillusion about the absolute lack of any place for him in the mundane world. The episode of his application for a position as "smart boy" has a particularly Quixotic ring. Murphy's appearance, like Quixote's, is that of a kind of "gay monster" who inspires, as Quixote does, fear or loathing followed by laughter. His aged, stiffening jacket resembles a bell, and his trousers a pair of corkscrews. They are complemented by a "lemon made-up bow tie presented as though in derision by a collar and dicky combination carved from a single sheet of celluloid, of a period with the suit and the last of its kind" (45). As the narrator puts it, "regress in these togs was slow" (45). After finding little success by "expos[ing] himself vaguely in aloof able-bodied postures on the fringes of the better-attended slave markets" (47), Murphy applies for a definite position as "smart boy" at a chandler's:

"E ain't smart," said the chandler, "not by a long chork 'e ain't."  
 "Nor e' ain't a boy," said the chandler's semi-private convenience, "not to my mind 'e aint."  
 "'E don't look rightly human to me," said the chandler's eldest waste product, "not rightly."  
 (47)

Like Quixote, Murphy turns his back on ridicule, and behind it he is "multiplied in burlesque" (83). Also like Quixote, Murphy finds self-definition in what the rest of the world sees as a form of lunacy, while those around him (Celia)

seek to "cure" him and remodel him as a normally functioning person.

Just as *Murphy's* satire cuts two ways, both sympathizing with Murphy and undermining him, so Cervantes' *Quixote* works on both the generic and the ethical levels. *Quixote* reveals both the dried-up excessively formulaic nature of some Romance, and the dessicated life of a patrician who turns to books because he finds them more real than the everyday life around him. *Murphy* may also function as ethical satire as much as generic satire, the way *Don Quixote* does. The overall argument of this study is that, from the starting point of generic parody and formal play, Beckett's work develops into a critique of excessively limited views of language and speakers, the subjects of language. This critique has its ethical dimension. Beckett's verbal art is so rigorously true to its own logic that it may seem hermetic, self-absorbed, and unconcerned with any statement about the world its readers inhabit. Yet it is not a misreading to recognize the plausible conclusions that readers may draw about the nature of language and the self from these apparently hermetic texts, conclusions which develop the important implications of the texts themselves.

If *Murphy* is a satire of a kind similar to *Don Quixote*, then what "blocking ideology" does it attack? What are its targets? Unlike *More Pricks than Kicks*, *Murphy* does not (deliberately) evoke direct comparisons with other literary

works, such as those of Joyce. Its targets or models are less often identifiably literary artifacts, and more often ways of speaking and thinking. We see in *Murphy*, then, an element of what Kenner sees in *The Unnamable*, "a work from which Beckett has succeeded in abolishing all content save the gestures of the intellect":

The comedy he has made his province brings something new to the resources of literature. It is prior to action and more fundamental than language: the process of the brain struggling with ideas . . . (*Critical Study* 14-15)

Thus any ethical satire in the novel will find its targets at a general and fundamental level. The greatest concern of the protagonist is the relation of self and world: how is he connected to this world to which he feels so little attachment? How can he evade the seemingly forced attachments of occupation, routine, affection, that bind others there? The targets of *Murphy's* satire include, then, the quest itself, the very idea of satisfaction, the self-deceived nature of human relationships. These targets belong to the parts of the novel that deal with Neary and Miss Counihan. In the sections devoted to Murphy himself, the satire strikes his absurd solutions to his own selective vision of the dilemma of the self in the world.

To be more specific, *Murphy* satirizes not only outworn and "blocking" views of how the self fits into the world, but also conventional answers to the question of what this linguistic division between self and world means, how the

boundary falls, and what the aims of this self in entering this world might be. In *Proust* Beckett attacks the idea of memory as a purely utilitarian faculty, and idealizes the useless, uncontrollable, Proustian involuntary memory which can serve neither livelihood nor warfare. At the same time, the idea of the meditating self as the ultimate source of human certainty--the Cartesian model--is undermined in Beckett's examinations of singular meditative selves. As Kenner points out, the philosophic concerns of Beckett's fiction cannot be isolated from generic implications:

The Cartesian focus here is something more than a pedantic coincidence. The philosophy which has stood behind all subsequent philosophies, and which makes the whole of intelligible reality depend on the mental processes of a solitary man, came into being about the same time as . . . the novel, which has since infected all other literary genres. (*Critical Study* 17)

*Murphy* attacks the idea of an autonomous, controlling mind and a servile, useful body. The body is rarely servile in Beckett, often only barely useful, and the mind is more often its victim than its master. *Murphy* also satirizes the corresponding view of language, as the body or clothes given to the mind of sense, which serves the mind's already formed meanings. (This development, first emerging in *Murphy*, is pursued more and more in the later novels, growing in importance in *Watt*, and becoming central in *Molloy*). *Murphy* wishes to escape his body because he sees it as such an extraneous garment. He divides himself into his best self

and the remainder, the dross, which he wishes to discard. Only by substituting Celia (who is for Murphy "all body") for his body, and sending her out to do his living for him, can he succeed. This relationship, a parody of the view that sees the body as servant of the mind, reduces Murphy, in his reluctant role as a being in the world, to the status of a pimp, the go-between mediating for the aloof mind and allowing it its luxury. Murphy's hypocritical expediency does not even have the virtue of consistency, for his nights with Celia are nights of bodily pleasure.

Murphy, then, would like to find a way to privilege mental life over (unfortunately necessary) physical life. Similarly, his Quixotic, self-invented worldview privileges unrealized, and preferably unrealizable, potential over any concrete actuality. This appears when Murphy contemplates a series of biscuits he is about to enjoy, and realizes that the contemplation of potential enjoyment will always be far superior to the actual eating of the biscuits. Also, the potential variations on the order in which he can consume his five biscuits is enormous, until he begins to differentiate among them and make preferences; this differentiation is a bad thing for Murphy, because it limits a (purely hypothetical) potential. Murphy seeks "the freedom of indifference, the indifference of freedom" (61):

He always ate the [ginger biscuit] first . . . and the anonymous last. . . . On his knees now before the five it struck him that these prepossessions

reduced to a paltry six the number of ways in which he could make this meal. But this was to violate the very essence of assortment. . . . Even if he conquered his prejudice against the anonymous, still there would be only twenty-four ways in which the biscuits could be eaten. But were he to take the final step and overcome his infatuation with the ginger, then the assortment would spring to life before him, dancing the radiant measure of its total permutability, edible in a hundred and twenty ways! (57)

Sensing that in order to give the potential for assortment the widest possible scope, he must abandon preference altogether, Murphy realizes "the tragedy of any attention that is focused--its essential incompleteness" (Stewart 20). Of course, if focus is tragic, the completeness it misses is inaccessible except in a purely mental sense. As he says, the biscuits are like the stars, "one differed from another, but . . . he could not partake in their fullness until he had learnt not to prefer any one to any other" (57).

This tendency to exalt a potential which vanishes as soon as one begins to exploit the choice it offers belongs to what Lukács calls "the ideology of modernism" (17 ff.). Lukács criticizes "modernist anti-realism" in terms that describe Beckett's fictions and their characters acutely. Modernism, according to Lukács, depicts the individual as ahistorical, solitary and "thrown-into-being": "this implies, not only that man is constitutionally unable to establish relationships with things or persons outside himself, but also that it is impossible to determine theoretically the origin and goal of human existence" (20-21). This

is exactly the position of Murphy the "seedy solipsist," and later Beckett characters. (Although they do in fact establish relationships with "things outside themselves," such as rocking chairs, this only stresses their isolation from other people.) The interest in pure, abstract potential seen in *Murphy* is, for Lukács, a typical and deplorable feature of the modernist ideology. Lukács speaks of "concrete potential," which may actually be realized, as "the dialectic between the individual's subjectivity and concrete reality" (24). Modernism fails to distinguish this from what Lukács calls the "bad infinity" of "purely abstract potentialities". Although a purely mental or subjective realm appears to offer a kind of imaginative infinity, Lukács argues, in separation from "concrete reality" it can offer nothing of any value at all. (Murphy's enjoyment of "the essence of assortment" suggested by his biscuits was dependent upon his never eating them in any particular order--on never eating their "concrete reality" at all.) "If the distinction between abstract and concrete potentiality vanishes, if man's inwardness is identified with abstract subjectivity, human personality must necessarily disintegrate," argues Lukács (24-25). This criticism is simply an accurate description of what Beckett characters such as Murphy, Belacqua and Watt undergo.

The specific form taken by such dissolution of the personality is often represented as madness. Thus for Lukacs all modernist writing privileges psychopathology:

[W]ith many . . . modernist writers, psychopathology became the goal, the *terminus ad quem*, of their artistic intention. . . . The protest expressed by this flight into psychopathology is an abstract gesture; its rejection of reality is wholesale and summary, containing no concrete criticism. It is a gesture, moreover, that is destined to lead nowhere; it is an escape into nothingness. (29)

The "nothingness" that Lukacs sees as the destination of modernist writing might, on the contrary, provide a vantage point from which to critique the same things Lukacs deplores: "the prosaic quality of life under capitalism" (29). In fact *Murphy* contains elements of such critique, depicting a world where "livings are made away" (42) and "where the only natural allies are the fools and the knaves," and "a mankind sterile with self-complicity" (97). This is, after all, the world that impels *Murphy* to flee into his rocking-chair stasis, and finally into an asylum. This study argues that Beckett's early fiction seeks a way, unimagined by Lukacs the realist, to move beyond the fictional genres and the language that must remain commensurate with the "prosaic world." This marginal terrain, offering a vantage point for criticism on the generic, linguistic and finally, in an implicit way, the ethical levels, can only be a paradoxical, "impossible" space. As Susan Stewart describes it, it is "nonsense": "a field where one can critique

the interpretive features used in manufacturing that world [of common sense]" (206). *Murphy* may not embody such "nonsense" in its own form the way *Watt* will, but it dramatizes its own protagonist's flight toward such a paradoxical exile, or asylum.

The world of unrealized and unrealizable potential, opened up in *Murphy* as a satirical tactic, allows Beckett's novels an effective vantage point from which to criticize that world of the "feasible" alluded to in *Three Dialogues*. The world of pure potential, of closed systems, is not a "functional" world, but it is an imaginable one. It is from within this world that certain aspects of language, of communication, and of the construction of self in language can be seen more clearly, or represented in a way that lets their hidden side emerge. Along with the opening up of this "impossible" or "nonsense" world--*Murphy's* personal utopia--the novel also opens up new directions for Beckett's subsequent fiction in its treatment of character. As pointed out above (108), the treatment of character in *Murphy* suggests two complementary directions for Beckett's later writing. The treatment of the novel's secondary characters suggests a fictional world in which the characters are inessential, are puppets, burlesques of human beings, from the start. There is no effort to provide a full revelation of their nature, since their nature is to be trivial, to have no "right word" to which they correspond. The sort of

action they pursue will yield a busier fiction than that of the trilogy, a fiction that looks more conventional, with more "action" and "dialogue" (if ciphers can act or have dialogue). Such works include *Mercier and Camier*, and some of the plays contain elements of this possibility, sketched out in *Murphy*.

The other direction is that suggested by the treatment of *Murphy* himself. Since he is held to have some kind of character worth presenting fully, the effort is made to do so, and this leads to meditations on the impossibility of achieving this aim. Why is it not possible to do this? The reasons come from the manifest sense of language's frailty, its arbitrariness, and the extent to which all discourse is "produced by the iteration of habitual rhetorical postures."<sup>5</sup> As well, the ideas that the subject is isolated, and fragmented in time so that it is never fully present even to itself, militate against successful portrayal. Beckett had already argued in *Proust* that artistic success depended upon factors that escaped voluntary control--so that all of these elements conspire against the writer's power to give a full revelation of an "authentic" character.

It is not necessarily the existence of such an essential self which is put in question in Beckett's fiction, though theoretical writers may go so far as to say such a self does not "exist." Instead, Beckett's writing struggles with the disparity between the idea of an essential self,

and the limitations of language which render it unable to serve as the vehicle for knowing such a self. Against the background of the ideal presentation of a fully-expressed essential self, an ideal now understood to be unrealizable within language, Beckett's fictions unfold their fabric, sometimes composed entirely of a sense of their own futility. Even in the trilogy, we never encounter the sense of having been freed from the influence of such an ideal, and left free to play with the varying manifestations of unessentiality. This branch of Beckett's work remains subject to the aim it has disavowed: the fictional presentation of the "fullness" of some "authentic" individuality.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

<sup>1</sup>See Dennis Brown, *The Modernist Self in Twentieth Century Literature: A Study in Self-Fragmentation* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

<sup>2</sup>See for instance Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987). Moretti's opening chapter, "The *Bildungsroman* as Symbolic Form," opposes the novel to psychoanalysis in the sense that "the *raison d'être* of psychoanalysis lies in *breaking up* the psyche into its opposing forces," while the novel has

the opposite task of fusing, or at least bringing together, the conflicting feature of individual personality. Because, in other words, psychoanalysis always looks *beyond* the Ego-- whereas the *Bildungsroman* attempts to *build* the Ego, and make it the indisputable centre of its own structure. (10-11)

*Murphy* is motivated by the psychoanalytic movement beyond the Ego and the everyday world; but it makes parodic use of the novel's attempt to place the ego at "the indisputable centre of its own structure" by placing Murphy at the centre of the asylum. The illusory quality of this triumph is stressed by Murphy's subsequent dissolution.

<sup>3</sup>Celia is allegedly "born for the life," and the expression is of the kind Beckett favours, since apart from its idiomatic reference to prostitution, its literal meaning is so unchallengeably tautological.

<sup>4</sup>The only reason to exclude Murphy himself from such a "system of inessential elements" is that he is placed in the foreground, and, for a while, attempts a kind of escape from this condition. The novel's ending, of course, savagely returns him to the "elemental" level of "the sand, the beer, the butts, the glass, the matches, the spit, the vomit" which are "swept away" (154).

<sup>5</sup>Brown, *Modernist Self*, 34.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Watt: Figures of Writing

[H]enceforth, language was to grow with no point of departure, no end, and no promise. It is the traversal of this futile yet fundamental space that the text of literature traces from day to day.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*.

What here opens, limits, and situates all readings (including yours and mine) is hereby, *this time at last*, displayed: as such. It is shown through a certain composition of overturned surfaces.

Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*.

The impossibility is practiced.

Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*.

That *Watt* is a pivotal work in Beckett's career is widely recognized (Rabinowitz 124: St. Pierre 6). Critics notice its formal difference from *More Pricks than Kicks* and *Murphy*, or, in biographical studies of Beckett, stress the importance of the circumstances of composition during the Second World War. Much attention has also been paid to the idea of "structure" in the novel, for instance by Di Pierro (1981) and Martel (1972), and to the various structuring systems that may govern it: games, series, systems of infinite regression, and so on (Moorjani 1982). What all of

these studies point up, directly or indirectly, is the change that takes place between *More Pricks than Kicks* and *Murphy*, and *Watt*. The earlier works present themselves as representational narratives, however self-exasperated they may be, while *Watt* emphasizes that it is above all a piece of writing, a written text. Every formal means possible is used to stress the idea that *Watt's* nature is not that of a "tale," or an entertainment (although it is entertaining). Instead it is the written record of a kind of report, given to Sam, the recorder, by Watt. Nor, perhaps, is Watt himself the sole origin of the report's contents, for "Watt spoke as one speaking to dictation, or reciting, parrot-like, a text, by long repetition become familiar" (154). Other narratives contained in *Watt* are told by other characters to Watt, then retold by Watt to Sam, the narrator. Yet each time they are misheard, or misrecorded (167), and thus the novel raises the question whether it is itself a new narrative, or a simple reportorial transmission.

This idea of a report that is both *compulsory* and *written* will return in the trilogy, where Molloy writes pages under some external direction, and Moran must report on his search for Molloy. Both of these ideas are important--the idea of obligation and that of the written text. The first aspect, that of compulsion, emerges in the obligation *topos* which pervades Beckett's novels from this point on and appeared as early as *Murphy*. The unfortunate

"necessity" of "attempting some justification for the expression, 'Murphy's mind'" is an example (*Murphy* 63). In *Molloy*, a similar effect will be created by describing sections of the narrative as like "a pensum," an obligatory piece of writing--in fact a punishment. In *Watt*, the sense of obligation is less developed than the second aspect, the sense that this is above all a piece of writing. It is in fact primarily a manuscript with gaps and illegible passages (238, 240) rather than a representation of something beyond writing. Paul St. Pierre observes that "*Dans Watt, la langue est écrite*" (6), and like much in Beckett, this textuality must be taken so *literally* that its importance is often missed. It is often difficult for readers trained in interpretation to take Beckett's narratives *literally enough*. For instance, one form taken by such literalism is found in the way *Watt* acts out in its own fabric, as a piece of writing, the material that the narratives of *More Pricks than Kicks* and *Murphy* presented thematically. Those aspects of writing of which we often speak using metaphors of *depth* (the ideas of penetrating, uncovering, of different levels, and so on) have here become *surface*. Where *More Pricks than Kicks* depicted a protagonist who fled any functional involvement in the world, and sought to be nowhere for as long as possible, *Watt* will try to offer a report *from* that nowhere. Where *Murphy* showed the action of Murphy seeking to avoid tedious unavoidable "doing," *Watt* will often,

rather than "doing" things with narrative, simply "be text"; that is, it will simply make sentences and paragraphs and fill pages. The fictional situation of *Watt* is very limited. There is not much action, and what action there is is cloaked in indeterminacy. There are "characters" whose proper names are all they have to offer. Ultimately, the text itself dissolves into fragments, relegated to an Addenda because of "fatigue and disgust" (247). These aspects of *Watt* allow little scope for much else besides "writing" in an extremely literal-minded, reduced sense. Ultimately, however, with irony and regret, the narrative in *Watt* will self-consciously acknowledge that it has inadvertently done something (115). But not the kind of thing *More Pricks than Kicks* or *Murphy* do. Above all, it is important that as readers we do not move too quickly toward "understanding" what this writing is "saying." Instead we should examine its surface and acknowledge our difficulties, in much the same way as Jacques Lacan advises analysts to "be very careful not to understand the patient, [lest] in the name of intelligence, what should stop us in our tracks, what isn't comprehensible, is simply dodged" (*Seminar II* 87).

This disjunction between the earlier works and *Watt*, between writing as medium and writing as subject, becomes apparent even in the seeming *continuities* between the works. One obvious continuity between *Murphy* and *Watt*, for example,

is both protagonists' apparent alliance with "madness." Murphy works at an asylum and experiences a kind of breakdown there. Watt also undergoes a species of alienating breakdown, and seems to have reported his experiences from a kind of asylum (the series of "pavilions" or "mansions" referred to in Chapter III). Yet Watt conveys this notion of "breakdown" in the context of a profound disintegration of discourse itself, rather than simply narrating it as an occurrence that befalls a protagonist. We might question whether or not this "breakdown" should properly be discussed in terms of the actual "madness" of an individual at all. Watt certainly seems to invite critics to speak of madness: it is, writes David Hesla, "a tale told by a psychotic to a psychotic and then retold to us" (60). One among the various reasons for such a response is the peculiar difficulty of the novel. Watt is peculiarly difficult because it lacks the sorts of difficulty to which we are accustomed. The plot offers little in the way of complexity: "Watt takes a tram, then a train, to Mr. Knott's house, stays there in service for an indeterminate period, and (presumably) is institutionalized at some later period" (Cohn 66). The style is neither elevated nor fragmented; nor must we follow up arcane allusions to make sense of the text. Far from being difficult in the manner typical of many modernist texts, Joyce's for example, much of *Watt* suggests someone at pains to keep things simple, denotative, and clear. In a

paradoxical way, it is the novel's concern for clarity "to a fault" that begets much of its real obscurity. The extreme literal-mindedness upon which *Watt* thrives has some very funny consequences, but also provokes long and exasperating attempts to deal with the most trivial issues.

Apart from this problematic literalism, there are other obvious difficulties. The narrative insists at length upon its own unreliability, citing "the notorious difficulty of recapturing, at will, modes of feeling peculiar to a certain time, and to a certain place, and perhaps also to a certain state of the health," and "the obscurity of *Watt's* communications, the rapidity of his utterance and the eccentricities of his syntax . . ." (72). These and many other factors suggest "the difficulties experienced in formulating . . . the entire body of *Watt's* experience, from the moment of his entering Mr. Knott's establishment to the moment of his leaving it" (72). As if giving way in the face of these difficulties, the text itself disintegrates into fragments in the final section, labelled "Addenda." The accumulation of such features creates, throughout the novel, a sense of relativity and arbitrariness. We know that this text might have been made otherwise--above all that it is made, an artificial verbal construct, not a true or false representation of anything.

If, however, as commentators have concluded, *Watt* is "schizophrenic" or "a tale told by a psychotic to a

psychotic," then in what exactly does this madness of Watt's consist? He simply feels, from his arrival at Knott's, the weight of certain twentieth-century conceptions of language. Watt is an absurdity, a satirical creation, in the same way that a character who fears that the rotation of the earth will muss his hair is an absurdity: he takes to heart one or two of the counter-intuitive findings of a science. I believe this is a more precise way of making essentially the same observation as Mitchell Morse, who describes Watt as "seeing everything whole, under the aspect of eternity," a perspective which leaves him "unfit . . . for mortality." (512-24). In other words, Watt is so literal-minded as to be bereft of "common sense," the veil of prejudice, of pre-interpretation (or even intelligence) that conceals difficult literal truths from actors in real life, and from readers of fictions. Because Watt confronts several particularly modernist "literal truths"--for instance, the idea that language is an autonomous system, that names and things have no essential connection--we might call him a "naked modernist." Confronting some of the ideas and themes of modernist thinking in an unprotected and literal way, Watt inevitably offers an implied critique of the way these themes are often dealt with.

The imputation of schizophrenic or psychotic attributes to Watt can help us interpret some of the novel's difficult features, but only, I believe, if we go beyond the gesture

that uses the word "mad" to dismiss these features as unresponsive to further analysis. This has often been the reaction to texts such as *Watt*, as Phillipe Sollers notes:

What is contested [in what Sollers calls "limit-texts"] is linear history which has always enslaved the text to a representation, a subject, a truth; it represses the enormous work undergone by limit-texts in using the theological categories of sense, subject and truth. The limits worked by these texts seem to be characterized by those names which linear history--within which we speak--has given them: mysticism, eroticism, madness, literature, unconscious . . . . In all these texts the theory of writing is there, immanent, proved: but it is generally perceived as delirium, fantasy, poetry, obscurity, individual deviation . . . (qtd. in Coward and Ellis 43)

If there is "madness" in *Watt*, we ought to investigate it in detail, trace its symptoms, and so on, in order to learn what these works teach us of the "theory of writing" embedded there. Sollers' analysis explains both why a text like *Watt* is so often rejected as "impossible," as well as the reason for giving such texts more careful attention. *Watt* presents, in a particularly literal-minded or "naked" fashion, the usually suppressed foundations of a modernist paradigm, in particular the independence of language and the things we try to "use" language to discuss, recall, or control. Because it is important for such literal-minded problems to be ignored if we are to "go on," we naturally judge *Watt* to be "difficult" or eccentric. If, however, we can learn to understand and accept the altered terms on which *Watt* offers itself to us, we may recognize that this novel

in fact provides an entertaining and telling critique of interconnected conceptions of narrative, the self, and discourse which cohere with "linear history"--history as linear as the tram and railway lines from which Watt diverges on his way to Mr. Knott's.<sup>1</sup>

The interpretation of *Watt* as a critique of certain views of language and meaning, rather than as the portrait of a schizophrenic who is alienated from language and meaning, is supported by the novel's own attention to questions of meaning and ambiguity. Part of the reader's uneasiness at Watt's situation as described here surely results from its radical ambiguity. If only Watt either did, or did not, succeed in "foisting meaning" (74) upon the unnameable things and events presented to him, then we ourselves could put a name to his state. But Watt's ability to make meaning is intermittent, and intermittent situations (in psychology, linguistics, or electrical circuitry!) are the most difficult to diagnose (because they may imply single or multiple causes, may be solved in one instance but recur in another, and so on). If Watt is schizophrenic, he is so only "north-by-northwest," while his "normal" moments remain pervaded by a skepticism, a sense of fraudulence about his normal capacity to make meaning.

This intermittence suggests, in two ways, the critical function of this aspect of Watt's character. First, its ambiguity makes it harder to diagnose and then dismiss. It

places the reader in a position analogous to Watt's: he cannot fix a name to his state, and neither can we, so we are forced to "undergo" it powerlessly, just as Watt is. Second, this intermittent quality of Watt's problems with meaning also suggests that the "madness" in *Watt* is probably not offered with the intent of portraying a certain kind of schizophrenic *individual* (who could in that case be "consistently mad"), but rather as a device in a satiric work that comically exposes the frailty of "sense" itself. At any rate, undecidable intentions aside, this is arguably the effect of Watt as he is presented. If in fact Watt is intermittently "mad" in a certain way, and if in fact this madness of his serves to advance some kind of critique--of assumptions concerning language and meaning, the self, and fictional conventions committed to these assumptions--then we need to diagnose this madness in more detail in order to grasp this critique. As Watt's problems center on language, it is an analysis which combines concern with both language and the psyche which I find most helpful here. It is therefore Jacques Lacan's revision of Freudian psychoanalysis, described by Lacan himself as simply a more literal-minded reading of Freud,<sup>2</sup> which will be most useful in understanding *Watt*.

Both Lacan's special relevance and the real relevance of madness to *Watt* lie in the fact that at the novel's center is a breakdown of language, which, as the novel itself

shows, must bring in its train a breakdown of self as well--since, according to Emile Benveniste, "subjectivity . . . is only the emergence in the being of a fundamental property of language" (224). The novel enacts the breakdown of the twin concepts of language as a medium for communication and of the self as prior to language. Moreover, as a novel whose title is the proper name of a character, *Watt* proposes itself as the kind of novel that presents the narrative of a person, assuming or implying by doing so that language and experience have a certain essential compatibility: that narrative unity can successfully be conferred upon human experience, and that human experience is susceptible to expression in language. *Watt* implicitly critiques these tenets, which are absolutely fundamental to language's function as a medium of communication and representation in the hands of a controlling subject.

The critical aspect of this novel is suggested in the fact that, for most readers, *Watt* hardly appears to be a novel. That is, it is a novel with difficulty. From the title, a proper name, promising a biographically-structured novel about the adventures of a protagonist about whom we will learn much, it is all downhill. The manner in which *Watt* is introduced suggests the brand of critical self-consciousness about fictional conventions that will govern the rest of the work. The opening scenes focus not on *Watt*, but on Mr. Hackett, who is himself abandoned by the novel

after the opening scene or "prologue." Watt is present as an afterthought, almost, in a scene which shows Mr. Hackett and the Nixons engaging in conjectures about Watt's motives and origins, in true detective style. But these conjectures are soon abandoned, and the interest they hold for the characters (and by implication, for readers) is questioned:

What does it matter who he is? said Mrs. Nixon. She rose.

Take my arm, my dear, said Mr. Nixon.

Or what he does, said Mrs. Nixon. Or how he lives. Or where he comes from. Or where he is going to. Or what he looks like. What can it possibly matter, to us?

I ask myself the same question, said Mr. Hackett. (21)

The novel subverts one of the enabling assumptions of narrative--that it may be of interest to some audience--by acknowledging through the words of its characters that Watt does *not*, a priori, interest anybody. Yet it also recognizes that any novel, just as it creates meaning despite itself, *creates* interest in its characters (neither Mr. Nixon nor Mr. Hackett give up their discussion of Watt merely because they assent to Mrs. Nixon's objections), and this process is farcically pursued in Watt's case, by making Watt so perversely implausible and eccentric that he becomes interesting.

It is worth noting that all of the usual elements of plausible narrative--identity, origin, destination, corporal features--are itemized and dismissed, as they apply to Watt.

His story, as well as his person, are evoked together and deemed of no interest. This is a distinct strategy, to be discussed as such elsewhere: the narrative that takes itself back. This might of course be a device that makes of Watt an enigma, that creates interest in him by introducing him in mysterious circumstances. And Mr. Hackett and friends may all be part of a framing device that will intensify the reader's curiosity about Watt. The indirect presentation of Heathcliff via Nelly and Lockwood in *Wuthering Heights*, for instance, is often described as having this effect. In any case, Watt is *decreasingly* revealed as the novel continues; he is first glimpsed as "a solitary figure, lit less and less by the receding lights, until it was scarcely to be distinguished from the dim wall behind it" (14). Watt, the primary signified of the novel that bears his name, recedes, until there are only signifiers whose claims to represent become less credible, in light of the apparent lack of anything but themselves to be represented. Paul St. Pierre uses this passage to show how Watt "*est représenté sous le signe du 'moins.'* *Il est absence et négation . . . dans un monde de la plénitude où on est perçu sans problèmes*" (77). So much for the increasing revelation of character.

Meanwhile the characters and the reader pursue inferences about Watt in the knowledge that such conjecture is unverifiable and concerns an object of no interest. The hope, presumably, is that continued inference will lead to

some knowledge worth having about the object, or about the process itself. As the novel goes on this hope has to be abandoned, however, at least as far as learning about Watt is concerned. Watt does not learn about himself, nor does the reader. In fact it is not long before Watt discovers that "of himself he could no longer affirm anything that did not seem as false as if he had affirmed it of a stone" (79). Logical readers might well ask why a thing is false merely because it is said of a stone? (Certainly statements describing stones *may* not be true of Watt, but they may still be true). Only a Beckettian degree of literalism could prompt such a question, of course. The phrase might be motivated by the value of "a stone" as an image linked to Watt: stones are dumb, soulless, mere things, which just fall anywhere. Watt himself is presented as subject to similar arbitrariness, in the novel's opening.

In retrospect, Watt's entry into the novel seems to be, not a dramatizing device, but rather an appropriate way of falling--as if accidentally or arbitrarily--into "his story." He appears much as a vaudeville clown might, staging an entrance by falling or being kicked onto the stage, although Watt makes less of a claim upon the reader's or the other characters' attention than this image implies. When Watt does finally take possession of center stage, he will literally "enter falling," colliding with a railway porter (22). More appropriately, Watt might be described as having

missed or been late for his own beginning (the French verb *rater*, with its connotation of failure, would be appropriate). This is something true, in one sense, of all human beings, since we are not (consciously) present at our own beginnings, and we enter a history that started without us, or (in Lacan's terms) we are caught up in the gears of language: "*l'être humain n'est pas le maître de ce langage primordial et primitif. Il y a été jeté, engagé, il est pris dans son engrenage.*" (Seminar II 353)

As suggested above, the novel's opening invites readers to agree that the interest in *Watt* does not lie in the novel's referents, in the characters and events it so perplexingly proposes. Instead the interest lies in what we observe of the process at work in making narrative and meaning, impossible as that is, out of the "nothing" that namelessly occurs around a "nothing" called *Watt*. *Watt* seems to appeal to a philosophical standard, to raise philosophical or epistemological questions rather than esthetic ones in its critique of narrative conventions. In this way *Watt* might join the group of "radical" or "limit-texts" that fit the following description:

It is possible to consider texts like those of Robbe-Grillet, or *Bleak House*, as unveiling the logic of realism, pushing it to its absurd conclusion. But there exist more radical texts that can be seen in no way as "closed in the proposition of their own structure," and cannot be referred to a narrative structure or any other such system. These are texts like *Finnegans Wake*, or those of Mallarmé or Artaud which are witness to something

more than a crisis in the relations of bourgeois representation. They work within the productivity of the signifiers, to the extent that the word and grammatical relations are dissolved in the play of signifier and signified upon which the whole of Western discourse is ultimately based. This crisis reveals what is repressed in order that the sign should function as the representation of something. (Coward and Ellis 43)

In its very literalism, *Watt* "reveals what is repressed" when language becomes the automatically functioning vehicle of a representation. By playing down the "content" it might represent, questioning the possibility of any "true" representation, and accenting the literal, material being of language, the novel makes language less and less a medium, and more and more an object of our attention in its own right. Thus from one perspective *Watt* fails: it fails to tell a story, fails to "present" the essence of some people named Watt and Knott. On the other hand, it does not succeed in the apparent alternative, that is in offering a volume of pages containing empty language, pure language without content or representation; for language *makes* sense, even where no "sense" seems to have preceded the flow of words, letters, or punctuation. Some kind of sense is compulsory, necessary, and *Watt* emphasizes the paradox and the non-sense of this fact, for, as Watt himself observes, "it is rare that the feeling of necessity is not followed by the feeling of absurdity" (131). *Watt* thus continues that aspect of Beckett's early work which responds to Joyce's *Work in Progress* (as discussed in Chapter 1, above), but extends its

play with language and meaning and adds a more explicit preoccupation with epistemological and psychological considerations.

Watt's very entry into Knott's house, which might function as a comment on the absurd mystery of the way we enter into language itself, is one example of such a preoccupation. There is no satisfactory explanation of how Watt comes to enter the house; he is outside it, and the door is locked, and then after a comical series of repeated attempts, the door is open and he is inside: "Watt never knew how he got into Mr. Knott's house" (34). Thus Watt's entry into the house is aligned with the kind of primary experience too deep to be remembered. As Nixon says of Watt, "I no more remember [meeting Watt] than I remember meeting my father" (21). When we acquire language we enter into a state that is "total"; that is, we cannot represent to ourselves a state without language, precisely because all subsequent representation becomes mediated by language. With the arrival of Arsene, the servant whose place he takes, Watt's entry into the house becomes a literal "entry into language," since Arsene is literally an avalanche of words which buries Watt and displaces him in the text until Watt is left alone (26 pages further on):

Before leaving he made the following short statement.

Haw! How it all comes back to me, to be sure. That look! That weary watchful vacancy! The man arrives! The dark way all behind, all

within, the long dark ways, in his head, in his side, in his hands and feet, and he sits in the red gloom, picking his nose, waiting for the dawn to break. The dawn! The sun! The light! Haw!

. . . .  
 Now for what I have said ill and for what I have said well and for what I have not said, I ask you to forgive me. . . . though personally of course it is all the same to me whether I am thought of with forgiveness, or with rancour, or not at all. Good night. (37, 63)

This trial-by-monologue introduces that Watt into the Knott household, and in retrospect it is clear that Arsene signals the nature of Watt's future self. Here at Knott's he too will become a creature of language, language that asserts its autonomy in the face of supposed control by its speaker. Arsene's departure inaugurates the novel's longest section, Chapter II, which focuses on Watt's experiences on the ground floor at Knott's.

Chapter II is an initiatory chapter, for both readers and Watt. The strangeness of the first chapter is essentially the strangeness of a detailed, attentive description of a seemingly absurd series of events, or an aimless journey, or an incompetent protagonist. The things described sort ill with the meticulousness of the description, which in itself implies that what is described is of some consequence. This quality of Chapter I yields to a deeper strangeness in Chapter II. At Knott's house Watt encounters a series of incidents that are "proposed" to him like hypotheses. The first of these is a visit by the piano-tuners, the "Galls father and son" or the "chooners" as they

call themselves (67). The generic quality of this, and all other incidents at Knott's is described as follows:

In a sense it resembled all the incidents of note proposed to Watt during his stay at Mr. Knott's house, and of which a certain number will be recorded in this place, without addition, or subtraction, and in a sense not.

It resembled them in the sense that it was not ended, when it was past, but continued to unfold, in Watt's head, over and over again . . . . It resembled them in the vigour with which it developed a purely plastic content, and gradually lost, in the nice processes of its light, its sound, its impacts and its rhythm, all meaning, even the most literal. (69)

[T]he incident of the Galls father and son was followed by others of a similar kind, incidents that is to say of great formal brilliance and indeterminable purport. (71)

The phrase "of great formal brilliance and indeterminable purport" may be meant to apply ironically to the reader's or viewer's experience of many modernist works, including this one. But it also describes very exactly Watt's situation. Since his arrival at Knott's, he has rapidly become aware that names and things are not intrinsically connected. A good Saussurean, he sees that the relation between signifier and signified--his own mental image--is not an essential one (Saussure 68-69). At the same time he perceives that a thing may not really "exist" until it has been named. What remains for Watt? A set of names that do not apply to any things or events in particular, and the memory, or rather the endless repetition in his mind, of events that, lacking proper names, are "nothing":

What distressed Watt in this incident . . . and in subsequent similar incidents, was not so much that he did not know what had happened, for he did not care what had happened, as that nothing had happened, with the utmost formal distinctness, and that it continued to happen, in his mind he supposed, although he did not know exactly what that meant . . . . (73)

Watt's problem here is principally that of naming. He wants to name objects (Knott's pot) or events (the visit of the "chooners") and thus lay them to rest and cease their endless repetition in his mind. It is interesting to note that the novel can do no more than allude to Watt's failures to name:

For there we have to do with events that resisted all Watt's efforts to saddle them with meaning, and a formula, so that he could neither think of them, nor speak of them, but only suffer them, when they recurred, though it seems probable that they recurred no more, at the period of Watt's revelation, to me, but were as though they had never been. (75-76)

Thus one of the many qualifications added to the account of this problem in *Watt* is the fact that it is a necessarily one-sided account. Where Watt (the character) could not speak, *Watt* (the novel) must remain silent. This is of course an important restriction upon the ability of the novel genre to communicate the lived inner experience of real characters, and an indication that it is only insofar as experience is already verbalised, already processed by language, that it is eligible for the novel at all. This might seem obvious, but a novel such as *Watt* reminds us of the potentially vast areas that the novel cannot know, and

which critics who speak of the all-inclusive scope of the novel as a form risk ignoring. What this novel can describe in detail is the nature of Watt's resolved naming problems:

Watt now found himself in the midst of things which, if they consented to be named, did so as it were with reluctance. And the state in which Watt found himself resisted formulation in a way no state had ever done, in which Watt had ever found himself, and Watt had found himself in a great many states, in his day. Looking at a pot, for example, or thinking of a pot, at one of Mr. Knott's pots, of one of Mr. Knott's pots, it was in vain that Watt said, Pot, pot. Well, perhaps not quite in vain, but very nearly. (78)

As so often in *Watt*, it is impossible to read this tortuous description without laughter--the judicious use of cliché and everyday speech rhythms, and the silly rhymes on monosyllables (Knott, pot) make the comic intent clear. It is important not to lose sight of this primary comic element during the present analysis. However, though it is amusing, Watt's predicament has its frightening side as well, because it stems from a loss of control over language that finally becomes a loss of the sense of self. His distress stems not from the simple absence of names, but from the disappearance of names once known. He senses that this afflicts him alone. Worst of all, the problem is not restricted to objects owned by Knott, but applies even to Watt himself, as one object among others:

Then, when he turned for reassurance to himself . . . he made the distressing discovery that of himself too he could no longer affirm anything that did not seem as false as if he had affirmed it of a stone. . . . Watt's need of semantic suc-

cour was at times so great that he would set to trying names on things, and on himself, almost as a woman hats. Thus of the pseudo-pot he would say, after reflection, It is a shield, or growing bolder, It is a raven, and so on. But the pot proved as little a shield, or a raven, . . . as a pot. As for himself, though he could no longer call it a man, as he had used to do, with the intuition that he was perhaps not talking nonsense, yet he could not imagine what else to call it, if not a man. (79-80)

The narrator's attribution to Watt of the term "it" as a reference to himself, emphasizes that Watt is confronting (Rimbaud's) perception: "*Je est un autre.*" The detachment of language from its objects somehow entails the detachment of Watt from his "self." What Watt longs for, in the face of this perception, is "a voice . . . to speak of the little world of Mr. Knott's establishment, with the old words, the old credentials" (81). It is this credence, the fragile intuition that divides nonsense from meaning, that has slipped through Watt's fingers.

It is not true of Watt, at this stage, that he has ceased in his attempts to communicate. In fact Watt is often anxious to communicate, if only with himself. His efforts to give names concern, after all, only his communion with himself: he is distressed at his inability to say to himself what has happened. The text owes its existence, ostensibly, to Watt's communication with Sam, the putative narrator explicitly introduced in Chapter III. Nevertheless, his attempts to communicate may seem to cease, to any outside observer (just as his smile may seem only an

expression of bodily discomfort, or "a simple sucking of the teeth," 23). The novel focuses not on Watt's lack of interest in communicating (although some critics seem to read it this way) but rather on the question of language's suitability to this--or any other--task.

We have seen above the fragility of the "intuition" that allows Watt to go on using language in his own processes of thought; once this intuition collapses, Watt is wordless and lost. Elsewhere in the novel, and particularly in the episode in which Watt and Sam converse in a series of distorted forms of speech, basic questions of meaning are raised in a comic fashion. In this episode, to which we will next turn, we encounter what one theorist describes as

the dialectic of lack and excess which governs the relationship between the two series, the one signifying, the other signified. . . . [T]his is a central characteristic of Nonsense: too much signifies, and too little is signified; the abundance of words balances the lack of meaning. (Leceracle 107)

The novel, then, parodies the simple idea that any arrangement of mere words can translate experience or perception into some kind of understanding, and finally, in Watt's case, allow it to be forgotten. Although apparently language has always performed this service for Watt, at Mr. Knott's house, for some reason, words begin to fail him. For words to fail Watt is something that takes quite a lot of failure to accomplish. Watt asks so little of words that when they fail him, we are asked to consider the possibility

that language may always fail, or succeed only partially, and to ask how we know the difference. For Watt, words need not be a "true" inscription, as long as they might be made to mean something, anything. Indeed the precise connection between Watt's own history and his personal narrative of it is problematic. The two exist; whether they correspond in any detailed way hardly seems to matter. Watt has never questioned their relation until now:

[H]e had lived, miserably it is true, among face values all his life, face values at least for him. . . . Whatever it was Watt saw, with the first look, that was enough for Watt, that had always been enough for Watt, more than enough for Watt. (70)

At Mr. Knott's this first look becomes too much for Watt. Experience, apparently unmediated, thus nameless and perplexing, becomes unlinked from words. Where before sense had arisen with perception--events came as if pre-verbalised for Watt--now they are independent of words and Watt sees that sense must be made of them. Why does this happen? Perhaps Watt begins to perceive with greater immediacy in the special ambience of Knott's house; perhaps the change of locale breaks the chain of habit which made it possible for Watt to say that

he had experienced literally nothing, since the age of fourteen, or fifteen, of which in retrospect he was not content to say, This is what happened then. (70)

Now, at Knott's, Watt can no longer be content with the habitual words. Perceptions themselves overwhelm and

dominate him. Watt's dilemma thus has two elements. We have seen the first--the overwhelming insistence of raw perception detached now from the words for it--in a prototypical experience, the visit of the piano-tuners to Knott's (cited above, 146).

The other element in the dilemma is the fact that Watt nevertheless "desired words to be applied to his situation" (70). Note that words are characterized here as something to be "applied to" some other, separate thing, which suggests that Watt already accepts the distinction between words and things. He asks not for true words, authentic meanings, but only for "semantic succour":

So Watt did not know what had happened. He did not care, to do him justice, what had happened. But he felt the need to think that such and such a thing had happened then, the need to be able to say, when the scene began to unroll its sequences, Yes, I remember, that is what happened then. (71)

Watt . . . was obliged, because of his peculiar character, to enquire into what [events, perceptions] meant, oh not into what they really meant, his character was not so peculiar as all that, but into what they might be induced to mean, with the help of a little patience, a little ingenuity. (72)

In fact all that Watt asks of language is that it reduce his perceptions to a level of intelligibility that will allow him to dismiss them:

[I]f Watt was sometimes unsuccessful, and sometimes successful . . . in foisting a meaning there where no meaning appeared, he was most often neither the one, nor the other. For Watt considered, with reason, that he was successful, in this enterprise, when he could evolve, from the

meticulous phantoms that beset him, a hypothesis proper to dismiss them, as often as this might be found necessary. . . . For to explain had always been to exorcise, for Watt. (74-75)

Watt's exorcising spells lose power when he sees how, alongside the absolute impact of perception, the sense words can make of it seems artificial and provisional. We see this in the conclusion to Watt's lengthy inquiry into the trivial question of which hypothetical famished dog might be found to devour Mr. Knott's dinner scraps. The theoretical and practical difficulties seem to be resolved, finally, with the help of the improbable Lynch family (of whose generations we hear far too much, as the clan struggles toward the "Lynch millennium," the day when the sum of the ages of all living Lynches will total one thousand). The narrator finally confesses (after twenty-seven pages of what would, in any other text, be a digression) that Watt "attached to this matter an importance, and even a significance, that seem hardly warranted" (114). Watt gains nothing from his inquiry into this "little matter of the food and the dog" (109). But what he does succeed in making of it is "a pillow for his head":

[H]e had turned, little by little, a disturbance into words, he had made a pillow of old words, for his head. Little by little, and not without labour. . . . how he had laboured to know which the doer, and what the doer, and what the doing, and which the sufferer, and what the sufferer, and what the suffering, and what those shapes, that were not rooted to the ground, like the veronica, but melted away, into the dark, after a while. (115)

Words do not faithfully translate experience, do not communicate, do not increase knowledge, but merely provide solace, a way back into oblivion.

Watt seeks refuge, not in the power of language, but in its impotence, its nullity. Only inscription into language allows compelling perceptions to recede into darkness, leaving Watt at peace. But even this modest aim is frustrated, for at Mr. Knott's, Watt can no longer work the change from things to words at all. His difficulty appears most clearly when he tries simply to name things, as we have seen in the episode of the pot (78). Watt is of course attempting an unsophisticated use of language in that episode: he just wants handles for things. Ruby Cohn suggests that the extreme literalism of the novel's language is part of an "agonized and agonizing [attempt] to explain the world through language by confining that language to the most literal and inartistic level--naming phenomena, explaining them, situating them in a series" (87). The detachment of words from (nameless) "things" and the desire to "apply" the one to the other, establish a situation in which two separate series must somehow be linked or mapped onto one another. Of course this model of "series" is an important one in modern theory: we see it in Saussure's diagram of the twin levels of signifier and signified, with one floating above or sliding across the other, and in Lacan's adaptation of Saussure, in which signification insists along the sig-

nifying chain instead of consisting in a direct link between signifier and signified, or sign and referent. Watt experiences this revised conception of language--no longer a transparent instrument but an autonomous, opaque signifying system--as a crisis. To resolve it he turns to what both Benveniste and Lacan would see as the appropriate site: himself. It is important that it is "to himself" that Watt turns for "reassurance" (80), for he is turning to what Benveniste sees as the root of his existence as a speaking subject: his ability to name himself, to insert himself into language by discoursing and calling himself "I." The move is a failure, for of himself he says not "I", but "IT" (as we have seen above). Looking for a vantage point outside the relativity of the signifying chain, a position from which he can confer a proper name on himself rather than occupying the empty space of the "I" in language, he remains outside. As Gerald Bruns observes of Beckett's narrators, Watt dwells in *langue* without *parole* (183). Benveniste insists that such an inhuman position can only be "pure fiction": "We can never get back to man separated from language . . . to man reduced to himself and exercising his wits to conceive of the existence of another. It is a speaking man we find in the world, a man speaking to another man" (224).

At Mr. Knott's, Watt lacks an interlocutor much of the time, and must indeed exercise his wits to conceive of Mr. Knott's upstairs existence. Until he narrates all of this

to the narrator Sam, much later, the situation--and Watt himself--resists formulation because the essential Other who would guarantee Watt's utterance is lacking. There is no "you" to mirror and anchor Watt's "I". Without some anchoring point between the two series, language cannot be effective in translating experience, nor, as Watt discovers here, can the subject's unity be expressed, or perhaps even "experienced." Watt lacks what Lacan calls *points de capiton*: "that fixed relationship to a symbolic function which," as Anthony Wilden describes it, "is the prerequisite for any messages at all to pass between subjects." Wilden notes that "this 'fixation' . . . is rejected in advanced psychosis, where all attempts to communicate apparently cease but speech may not" (275). In fact, the *point de capiton*, that which anchors the two independent series of signifiers and of signifieds, has to do with the "personalisation" of discourse. Watt discovers an impersonal quality to language, which affects even himself, insofar as his name is part of language. It is this phenomenon which Lacan addresses in his discussion of the *point de capiton*:

*Où, dans le signifiant, est la personne? Comment un discours tient-il debout? Jusqu'à quel point un discours qui a l'air personnel peut-il, rien que sur le plan du signifiant, porter assez de traces d'impersonnalisation pour que le sujet ne le reconnaisse pas pour sien? (Seminar III 305)*

Such moments, where discourse can become impersonal or automatic, can occur, for instance "*quand, nous souvenant*

*d'une rupture d'illusions nous sentons la nécessité de réorganiser notre équilibre et notre champ significatif."*

(Seminar III 305)

The impact of such insights, felt here with a particularly literal-minded force, turns Watt into both a victim and a buffoonish kind of clown. Like those clowns whose tools--stepladders, hammers, or mousetraps--turn against them, Watt loses control over the language that was supposed to serve his purpose. Thus he faces the end of the illusion that he is the originator of signification, and that his place in discourse is a secure one; reorganizing his signifying field, he no longer uses words as essentially meaningful, but instead as units to be combined. The result is a form of discourse that "stands up," but is not communicative in the usual sense. When Watt hands on, to the narrator Sam, the narration of his stay at Knott's, Sam responds to the systematic recombination of words as follows:

These were sounds that at first, though we walked face to face, were devoid of significance to me. Nor did Watt follow me. Pardon beg, he said, pardon beg.

Thus I missed much I suspect of great interest touching I presume the first or initial stage of the second or closing period of Watt's stay in Mr. Knott's house. (163)

When Watt inverts letters rather than words, according to his "*réorganisation du champ significatif*," Sam again responds:

These were sounds that at first, though we walked breast to breast, made little or no sense to me. Nor did Watt follow me. Geb nodrap, he said, geb nodrap.

Thus I missed much I suspect of great interest touching I presume the second stage of the second or closing period of Watt's stay in Mr. Knott's house. (163)

Notwithstanding Watt's series of inversions, Sam manages to understand "fully one half of what won its way past my tympan" (167).

Clearly, although the novel *Watt* is full of language, it is skeptical about communication or effective speech. Thus we return to the notion of psychosis or schizophrenia in the novel. Lacan refers to the case of Judge Schreber for illustrations of "the language of psychosis," noting that such language, like dream work, treats words like things and things like words. This seems precisely Watt's situation as the novel progresses. Watt shifts his furniture, for instance, without regard to its function:

[I]t was not rare to find, on the Sunday, the tallboy on its feet by the fire, and the dressing-table on its head by the bed, and the night-stool on its face by the door, and the wash-hand-stand on its back by the window; and, on the Monday, the tallboy on its back by the bed, and the dressing-table on its face by the door, and the nightstool on its back by the window, and the wash-hand-stand on its feet by the fire . . . (and so on). (204)

Similarly, as we have seen, Watt recombines the elements of his speech as if sentences, words, syllables, and punctuation were mere concrete counters without function.

Eventually he manages the simultaneous inversion of all the elements of his speech:

Then he took into his head to invert, no longer the order of words in the sentence, nor that of the letters in the word, nor that of the sentences in the period, nor simultaneously that of the words in the sentence and that of the sentences in the period, nor simultaneously that of the letters in the word and that of the words in the sentence and that of the sentences in the period, ho no, but, in the brief course of the same period, now that of the words in the sentence, now that of the letters in the word, now that of the sentences in the period, now simultaneously that of the words in the sentence and that of the letters in the word . . . (and so on). (166)

The narrator Sam confesses that "I recall no examples of this manner" (167).

Once the relation between words and things has broken down, the two series become relatively equivalent--series in the pure sense, subject to all kinds of arbitrary or purely mathematical manipulations. Once language is an autonomous, closed system, its elements exist to be combined and recombined according to its own rules, not according to essential links with outside reality. From the point of view that looks at language as prototypically speech, and its function as communication and representation, the loss of these functions is, simply, *disfunction*. Watt is disfunctional when he can no longer sustain the "fragile intuition that he was perhaps not talking nonsense." The ability of language to found his sense of himself as an "I," to guarantee his place in an ordered discursive world, is lost when language comes to appear unfounded, without any essential link to the being of the things it represents.

When Watt experiences the separation of words from signification, so that proper names float freely and can be swapped, making Watt himself as much "box" or "urn" as "man," he acts out (in a kind of allegory) Foucault's terms from *The Order of Things*. He leaves behind the Classical regime of language as representing, and signifying, and enters the literary regime in which language regains a certain autonomous being of its own:

In the modern age, language is that which compensates for (and not that which confirms) the signifying function of language. . . . [F]rom the nineteenth century, literature began to bring language back to light once more in its own being: though not as it had still appeared at the end of the Renaissance. For now we no longer have that primary, that absolutely initial, word upon which the infinite movement of language was founded and by which it was limited; henceforth, language was to grow with no point of departure, no end, and no promise. It is the traversal of this futile yet fundamental space that the text of literature traces from day to day. (44)

Foucault gives an account of cultural history in which, before the Renaissance, language partook of the endless series of analogies guaranteed by a primary Logos. When the power of this theological Logos gave place to a scientific classification and taxonomy, language became a medium, something between the things and their names. It served representation. As he argues above, modern literature restores the pre-Renaissance quality of having an autonomous being to language, but without the foundation of a limiting Logos. Language is no longer subordinate to representation, but is

now that which enables representation to occur: "in the Classical age, languages had a grammar because they had the power to represent; now they represent on the basis of that grammar" (237). If we move from Foucault's historical interpretation back to the text, we can see that for Watt, language has become a material that can be ordered--it is subject to grammatical transformations, even invented ones as seen above--but its connection to objects is uncertain. Watt approaches the limit at which "the madman loads all signs with a significance that ultimately erases them" (50). Yet he does not erase them, for they remain significant to Sam, who reports them. Yet Sam himself recognizes that he may attribute a significance of his own to them, and so Watt's signs remain, not erased and void, but indeterminate. They *must* mean, but *what* they mean is difficult to say.

In fact, *Watt*, in its interrogation of language, poses the whole gamut of questions that Foucault sees as the focus of contemporary curiosity. The Mallarméan theme that it is language itself that "speaks" (the theme of the autonomy of language) inaugurates a series of questions, which Foucault lists as follows:

What is language? What is a sign? What is unspoken in the world, in our gestures, in the whole enigmatic heraldry of our behaviour, our dreams, our sickness--does all that speak, and if so in what language and in accordance with what grammar? Is everything significant, and if not, what is, and for whom, and in accordance with what rules? What relation is there between language and being, and is it truly to being that language

is addressed--at least, language that speaks truly? What, then, is this language that says nothing, is never silent, and is called 'literature'?" (306).

*Watt*, in its literalism and its self-consciousness, asks many of these questions. In particular, it asks the one that conventional critical practice in reading novels tends to have answered in advance for readers: "is everything significant?" While the conventional answer to this is that we must read the cues that signal different degrees of relevance, *Watt* ignores conventional hierarchies of relevance and significance, illuminating the genre's dependence on such unrecognized hierarchies. *Watt* also implies Foucault's other questions, and thus touches on debates such as that concerning the "grammar" of the unspoken and of behaviour and dreams (in Lacanian psychoanalysis), and the question of language and being (in deconstructive philosophy and criticism).

The novel *Watt* thus presents a situation which Lacanian psychoanalysis, as one example of a series of twentieth-century responses to the sense of language's autonomy, places at a primary level. *Watt* inhabits a space of pure, empty, available structure. Words, like things, are there for him to organize, but they don't tell him anything any longer, either about himself or about the world. Lacan's distinction between language and speech is important here, for *Watt's* world is that of language without speech, a world

without that consideration of the other to whom speech is addressed which separates "normal" discourse from autonomous language, or "madness":

In madness, of whatever nature, we must recognize on the one hand the negative freedom of speech that has given up trying to make itself understood . . . and, on the other hand, we must recognize the singular formation of a delusion which--fabulous, fantastic, or cosmological; interpretative, demanding or idealist--objectifies the subject in a language without dialectic.

The absence of speech is manifested here by the stereotypes of a discourse in which the subject, one might say, is spoken rather than speaking . . . . (*Écrits* 69)

When Lacan seeks a principle that would reestablish some foundation beneath the pure potential of autonomous language and a subject undefined by any dialectical position, he inserts the Freudian Oedipal structure and the idea, adapted from post-Saussurean linguistics, of the endless slippage of discourse, and hence of desire. Watt enters a world which had already begun speaking without him, and he can find a place for himself there only by entering into the apparently anchored inter-subjective discourse that calls him "Watt" or "a bonny little man" (80). Once he has fallen outside this, out of anchored speech and into language as writing, as he does at Knott's, it is in vain that he looks for any self-sufficient, essentially rooted markers to orient himself.

From one point of view, then, Watt has "broken down." This breakdown on the part of Watt, or of language, or of Watt's former relation to language, is the key to the novel.

It capitalizes upon all the aspects of the novel's own language, a language which from the beginning emphasizes the arbitrariness and opacity of the linguistic sign. This breakdown also refers back to the seemingly unmotivated opening episode of the novel, which occurs before Watt is introduced. This episode concerns the birth of a child into the midst of an ongoing conversation. We might interpret it as a representation of the subject's entry into language, as a conversation that has begun without her, and is indifferent to her, until she takes up a place within it and begins to speak. We can also see the novel as representing Watt's belatedness--he enters his own story late, after the beginning; not only is the beginning inaccessible to him, it has literally nothing to do with him! This breakdown adds weight to all of the jokes implied in Watt's own name.<sup>3</sup> This breakdown also clears the way for the continuing erosion, in the novel, of the relation between things and words.

What does it mean for the novel *Watt*, then, if we situate at its center such a breakdown in Watt's rapport with language, and consequently a breakdown of self? Such a reading does not necessarily serve the biographical enterprise which sees the novel as the record of its author's struggles with mental disintegration. Nor does the novel need to be seen as a case of the successful representation of failure, of a narrator who falls into a kind of madness

and the difficulties in relating his story. Rather than either of these interpretations, I would prefer to have this reading of *Watt* serve to demonstrate what Beckett and others might be talking about in *Three Dialogues* when they refer to "working with failure." Not *representing* failure, its consequences and dilemmas, but accepting the position of the painter in Beckett's dialogue with Georges Duthuit, who has "nothing to paint and nothing to paint with" (103). In the *Three Dialogues* we see an attempt to present an art of impossibility, an art that that illogically refuses to work on the "plane of the feasible" and rejects the dichotomy of occasion and expression, of a humanity that seeks to express and a vehicle that it seeks to express with.

We can recognize Watt's situation here: there is "the nothing to express," a perceiver, who is literally nothing while he remains separated from words, and there is "the nothing with which to express"--that is, language, which is "literally nothing" until put to use by this speaker. Somehow the sum of the two is supposed to produce worlds of possibility. The novel *Watt* looks to the moment of crisis or farce before they come together, Benveniste's "purely fictional" moment of humanity without language and language without speakers, and speaks of the world of impossibility which exists in that moment. Gerald Bruns, writing of modernist writing and its fascination with "language," that

newly autonomous structure, defines the "impossible" in terms of Beckett's work:

It is impossible to imagine this moment that precedes speech, because the very effort to imagine involves us in processes that begin the shaping of an utterance. Yet Beckett has sought to imagine this moment . . . dramatizing acts of speech that never quite escape the uncertain void from which in our ordinary experience, utterances routinely depart, leaving trails of meaning as they move. (276)

However, this model of language as functional and communicative, and of the notion of self that depends upon its position at the origin of meaning, is only one model for what happens in *Watt*. Another way of describing the same process would involve turning to another response to the perception of language as an autonomous system. Lacanian psychoanalysis is one such response, one which seeks to account for the sense of self after the subject has lost its privileged place as the generator of meaning and coherence, and is seen instead as itself "spoken" by the unconscious and its linguistically modelled structures. A philosophical response is Derrida's account of "writing," and textuality, as a model for the function of language which does not base itself upon the image of "a man speaking to men," but rather on the image of a free-floating writing, unanchored and unfounded by anything beyond itself. As an alternative or a complement to seeing *Watt* as the representation of the "breakdown" of self that accompanies the revelation of language's unessential quality, we can see the novel as a whole

as an example of what Derrida sees in Sollers's *Drama*: the representation of representation itself, pure "text," or, as Sollers puts it, "a generalized graph":

His story is no longer his story, but simply this statement: something takes place. He tries to become the center of this new silence, and indeed everything comes up and becomes hesitant and unbalanced in his vicinity . . . . Spoken words and gestures (beside him, outside him) rediscover their geometric roots: he enters into a generalised graph. (qtd. in Derrida 1981: 311)

*Watt* is a maddening novel, certainly--so much so that one may be tempted to call it simply mad. Yet to do so is an act of implicit dismissal, and surely the fates of such seemingly mad texts as Blake's prophetic poems or *Finnegans Wake*, with their inexhaustible interpretive richness, should dissuade us from such a wasteful gesture. I hope I have shown that simply because much about *Watt* is "maddening," this need not lead to the critical equivalent of throwing one's hands in the air, or of consigning the work to a sort of penal custody for "difficult" texts. It can be an effective starting point for interpretation as well, one that opens as many doors as the epithet "mad"--with its connotation of "meaningless" or "failed"--has so often served to close. *Watt* does not play the novel game by the rules but is a rule-breaking and rule-making text. Some would argue that most significant texts or even utterances must do this, must both transgress and uphold the rules of their particu-

lar discursive genre, in order at once to extend their field of expression and to conserve their communicative effectiveness. *Watt*, however, goes beyond this perhaps necessary subversiveness, partly because the novel engages the theme of the possibilities and impossibilities of expression. In doing so it exhibits the kind of simultaneous excess and lack that characterize nonsense, "mad" language, and perhaps the suppressed qualities of "common-sense" language itself. It is probably cold comfort for readers to understand that if we have trouble making sense of *Watt*, *Watt* struggles at least as much with making sense; not that he struggles to make sense, but rather he struggles with the notion that sense is made, not given, that sense and nonsense are not easily separable, and that "sense" depends on boundaries, limits, distinctions. Yet our capacity to make sense, rather than simply recognize it continually overruns these necessary bounds.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

<sup>1</sup>Lacan comments on the way that a linear conception of our speech, as propagated in a direct line from "ourselves" to our interlocutor (rather than, as he describes it, meandering through a network of intersubjective and imaginary relations), helps us to repress our knowledge of the ignorance which is the basis for our speech:

In everyday chat, in the world of language as it's taken for granted, the subject doesn't know what he's saying--at every moment, the sheer fact that we speak shows we don't know that. . . . We don't know what we're saying, but we address it to someone, someone who is imaginary and endowed with an ego. Because speech is propagated in a straight line . . . . we have the illusion that speech comes from the location we give to our own ego, rightly separated off . . . from all other egos. (*Seminar II* 267-68)

<sup>2</sup>That Lacan sees himself as returning to a more literal reading of Freud, of Freud's *language* above all, is suggested in his address known as "The Freudian Thing, or the meaning of the return to Freud in Psychoanalysis":

What such a return [to Freud] involves for me is . . . showing what psychoanalysis is not, and seeking with you the means of revitalizing that which has continued to sustain it . . . namely, the primary meaning that Freud preserved in it by his very presence . . . .

How could this meaning elude us when it is so clearly apparent in a body of written work of the most lucid, most coherent kind? (*Écrits* 116)

<sup>3</sup>The earliest published version of the opening section of the novel punned on Watt's name in a way deleted from the published novel:

"You haven't told us his name," said Mr. Hackett.  
 "Watt," said Mr. Nixon.  
 "You haven't told us his name," said Mr. Hackett.  
 "Watt," said Mr. Nixon.

This passage is quoted in *St. Pierre*, 1977 (78). It originally appeared in *Envoi*, I, 2 (January 1950), 13.

## CHAPTER FIVE

*Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*: The relation of  
beginning to end.

Writing does not begin. It is even on the basis of writing, if it can be put this way, that one can put into question the search for an *archie*, an absolute beginning. Writing can no more begin, therefore, than the book can end.

Jacques Derrida, *Positions*.

Well anybody who is trying to do anything today is desperately not having a beginning and an ending but nevertheless in some way one does have to stop. I stop.

Gertrude Stein, "What is a masterpiece and why are there so few of them" (1940).

The search for the means to put an end to things, an end to speech, is what enables the discourse to continue.

*Malone Dies* (15)

From nearly the beginning, with *More Pricks than Kicks*, Beckett's writing has demonstrated a specific variety of self-consciousness. Certainly all of the novels discussed here are "metafictional" in various ways, but *Molloy* creates a more extreme and more literal-minded version of the self-conscious and metafictional qualities seen in the earlier texts. *More Pricks than Kicks* and *Murphy* showed a tendency to identify the narrative with the protagonist, in the sense that descriptions of the protagonist could double as self-

reflexive statements about the narrative itself. Belacqua's taste for aimless movement in order to avoid disrupting his "stasis quo" is an apt figure for the condition of a piece of writing that seeks to avoid more than to accomplish. In this way *More Pricks than Kicks* follows the logic of the aesthetic outlined in *Proust*, which makes artistic aims appear futile and sees their accomplishment more as a matter of chance than of voluntary control or mastery. What to do, in this self-defined circumstance, but to avoid the ridiculous and the self-contradictory? That is, avoid falling into imitation of those who, somehow, managed to achieve an artistic aim; and avoid contradicting one's own severe and rigorous limitations on artistic possibility by appearing to undertake any such aim without the most fundamental and pervasive sense of irony.

In *Murphy*, the narrative's *savoir ne pas faire* is undermined as much as Murphy's own. Both the protagonist and the novel are seduced, tricked, or coerced into doing something, and thus inevitably fall into self-contradiction. As Murphy says, "to die fighting was the perfect antithesis of his whole practice, faith and intention" (26). Thus both Murphy as a character and the novel *Murphy* are rescued, by Murphy's convenient death, from having to sustain themselves in the farcical impasse that they have reached. When critics detect a "difference" between *Murphy* and Beckett's other writings, what they see is the acquiescence of the

novel in a set of forms and appearances which are foreign to Beckett's other works, and with which *Murphy* itself is as little at home as Murphy is at home with the idea of earning a wage. *Murphy*, for once in Beckett's oeuvre, seems the kind of fiction that repays the reader's investment in the conventional currency: a sewn-up quest, an unequivocal death for an ending, a sense of character revealed. But the savagery of Murphy's end, his ashes soaked in spilt beer and worse fluids on a pub floor, suggests the tension that this semblance of conventional structure generates.

In *Watt*, the pretenses of plot, character, even of artistic intent and control, give way to a set of exercises on the motif of the autonomy of language, and the resulting condition of utterance and art itself as the recombination of a finite set of elements, which are by necessity aloof from any essential connection to speakers. In *Watt* writing--literal writing--is given its head more than before, and it is acknowledged that autonomous writing can say little on behalf of the "I-here-now" that is presumed to be its speaker.

If we accept the existence of this kind of linear development in Beckett's work, this is the starting-point for *Molloy*. Here language, that is, writing, is not to be mastered in the usual sense. Here "characters," as something more than flimsy "puppets," are not worth trying to present, since language cannot reveal anything essential,

final, or original about any self. It can merely offer that self a position in a discourse that "goes on" without going anywhere. Like Watt, the speaker can board the tram of discourse, ride for a while, and get off, but the questions raised by the Nixons in *Watt's* opening scene--"Who is he? Where is he going? Where did he come from?"--will remain unanswered by any amount of tram-riding. At this point, the value of constructing a "plot," understood as a kind of imitation of a human action, also becomes questionable. Without language as a useful tool, without characters and without action, how will *Molloy* proceed?

Suffused with a sense of obligation, *Molloy* does what it has to do, what it can do, under the circumstances. It inaugurates a three-part death scene for the novel. Here the merging of narrator with protagonist becomes complete. *Molloy* is in a literal sense "the novel" narrating its own impossibility-to-be-composed. The "ditch" *Molloy* inhabits is that impasse reached by the novel itself, within the strait limits Beckett has imposed upon it. There is of course no necessity governing the way fictions are made. We can and will go on writing as if none of these constraints had any weight. But the singular territory Beckett has created for himself results from his taking these intellectual scruples *à la lettre*.

In the impasse to which Samuel Beckett's "work in regress" has brought him by the time of *Molloy*, the act of

beginning a narration at all has become problematic. To end one is at least as difficult. To quote *Malone Dies*, "it is too late, you have been waiting too long, you are no longer sufficiently alive to be able to stop" (68). Indeterminacy makes even the act of "getting it over with" difficult--to end implies having begun, and beginning and ending together define a bounded identity which in *Molloy* both the narrator-protagonist and the text itself will lack.

These problems and issues were first evoked in *Watt*, which inaugurates a series of narratives centered around a character who is both narrator and protagonist, and a series of narratives that are explicitly written. In *Watt* these characteristics were obscured by the fact that initially *Watt* speaks his narration to a recorder, Sam, who has written it. Nevertheless the change from *Murphy* is striking, and *Watt* is rightly called a pivotal Beckett text. In *Watt* already the narration was explicitly disordered; *Watt* speaks in a variety of manners resulting from the re-arrangement of letters, words and sentences. Sam, the narrator, reports what he can interpret of these utterances, in sections of narrative that he has himself re-ordered. Although these tactics succeed in blurring the link from the narrative's origin to its present state, they still do not undermine the notion of *some* original, essential order. The present state of the narrative is linked to its origin, however problematically, by a set of known transformations. With *Mol-*

loy, however, the relation of beginning to end becomes an explicit theme. The "beginnings" or origins of both the narrator-protagonist Molloy, and the text itself, are at issue. *Molloy* creates for itself an intra-textual world where beginnings and endings are difficult to disentangle-- and this difficulty spills over into the extra-textual realm as well.

One aim of this study is to establish some link, some continuity between Beckett's pre-trilogy fiction and the better-known work represented by the trilogy and the dramatic and narrative work that followed it. In one sense this link consists of the "regress" from the fully-furnished representational fiction which *More Pricks than Kicks* and *Murphy* both exemplify and undermine to varying degrees, toward the discovery in *Watt* of more radical formal means, with more radical implications for fiction. The subsequent movement from *Watt* to *Molloy* looks like being a smooth transition, if we consider only those two works. It seems that this transition is signalled mainly by the fact that the role of Sam, who serves as the intervening recorder-narrator character in *Watt*, is dispensed with in *Molloy*. *Molloy* writes without any intermediary reporter or third-person narrator,<sup>1</sup> and thus the mature Beckettian narrator-protagonist is born. The protagonist is now compelled, against his will, to "write himself". *Malone Dies* and *The*

*Unnamable* both continue and "refine out of existence" the performance offered in Part One of *Molloy*.

Yet it turns out that the line from *Watt* to *Molloy* is not nearly so straight. Between the two novels lies *Mercier and Camier*, the first novel Beckett wrote in French (though it was not the first French novel he published). There are also the *nouvelles* of 1945-46: "*La Fin*" ("The End"); "*L'Expulsé*" ("The Expelled"); "*Le Calmant*" ("The Calmative"); and "*Premier Amour*" ("First Love"). Critics have dealt with this sudden prolific output in two ways. First, an order to all this plenty is sought in the chronology of composition. Second, a kind of continuity in development (of the kind I locate in the concept of "regress") is sought within this chronology. However, critical accounts of the *development* of Beckett's fiction in this period tend to confound themselves when measured against the chronology of composition. As well, that chronology of composition is itself unclear in places. The doubling of each text, as it is written in both English and French, further complicates the creation of any simple outline. This is where the line from *Watt* to *Molloy* becomes snarled, and where the difficulty of making certain distinctions begins to evoke, *avant la lettre*, the indeterminate world of *Molloy*.

Hugh Kenner, in his 1961 study (revised 1968), presented the chronology this way:

Date of Writing		Date of Publication
1938		<i>Murphy</i> (in English)
1940-42	Translated <i>Murphy</i> into French.	
1942-44	<i>Watt</i> (in English)	
1945	<i>Mercier and Camier</i> (novel in French)	
1945-46	<i>nouvelles</i> --("La Fin," "L'Expulsé," "Le Calmant," "Premier Amour"--in French	
1947	<i>Eleutheria</i> (play--in French)	<i>Murphy</i> (in French)
1947-49	<i>Molloy</i> (in French) <i>Malone Meurt</i> (in French) <i>En Attendant Godot</i> (in French) <i>L'Innommable</i> (in French). (Kenner 26-27)	

In 1970 Raymond Federman clarified the chronology from 1945 to 1946. He leaves *Mercier and Camier* in 1945, but also places "Premier Amour" in the same year, citing a statement from Beckett. Federman supplements Kenner's chronology of composition, noting that an early version of "La Fin"

appears in 1946 in *Les Temps Modernes*, under the title "Suite." "L'Expulsé" also appears that year (Federman 219-20). Taken separately, both Kenner's chronology of composition and Federman's publication dates offer a relatively simple picture. However, the complexity of the interrelationships among all of the texts produced between 1945 and 1953 is a challenge to the critical assumption that makes Beckett's first French writing into "preliminary sketches for the trilogy . . . moons orbiting its dominating mass" (Connor 82).

The discrete textual outlines of Beckett's works of the 1940s remain very difficult to pin down. Is there perhaps a principle of development or a continuity which exceeds the limits of each separate text? Beckett wrote to John Fletcher explaining that he saw "L'Expulsé", "La Fin" and "Le Calmant" as reflecting an order he labelled "Prime, Limbo, Death" (Bair 359). Ruby Cohn factors in "Premier Amour" as "pre-prime," thus organizing the four *nouvelles* into a group discrete from the trilogy itself (Bair 359). When scrutinized they do appear to form "an indefinite series" rather than a set of "wholly independent narrations" (Levy 106). Steven Connor thus prefers to see *Mercier and Camier* and the *nouvelles* not as a sensible lead-up to the trilogy, but as an invasion of the trilogy itself, a set of texts to be "interleaved" with Molloy's and Moran's stories.<sup>2</sup> Connor advances the idea of a "narrative order"

as follows: first Moran's narrative, then "*Premier Amour*," "*L'Expulsé*," then Molloy's narrative. *Malone Dies* and "*La Fin*" are placed together afterward (Connor 84). This ordering is based on similarities in subject (the "stages of life"--youth, middle age, death--dealt with in the stories and the trilogy); or in the narrator's position ("The narrator of "*Le Calmant*" is, like Malone, 'alone' in his bed"[Connor 84]). Seen in this light, the trilogy opens in two directions, referring back to previous works and characters such as Watt (despite the fact that *Watt* remained unpublished at the time), and also allowing invasions by the *nouvelles* and *Mercier and Camier*. These shorter works provide details of clothing, incident, and phrase which suggest that their characters are "earlier versions of the narrators in the trilogy, or successive versions of a single self" (Connor 83).

Yet as we shall see below, *Molloy*, as published, challenges the very idea of a "narrative order" by deliberately placing Molloy's narrative *before* Moran's. Beckett's personal history also fails to provide a convenient biographical authority for the appealing idea of a "narrative order." This is shown by Deirdre Bair's account of the order of composition, and by Beckett's statements about it. According to Bair, the chronology of composition was as follows: "*La Fin*" (in an earlier version entitled "*Suite*"); *Mercier and Camier* (with qualifications); "*L'Expulsé*"; "*Premier Amour*";

and finally "*Le Calmant*" (Bair 352-59). Although she is categorical about the dates of composition for the *nouvelles*, *Mercier and Camier* is in fact difficult to place, as is the commencement of *Molloy*. Bair, contradicting Kenner's separation of the two works, notes that "*Mercier and Camier* was written just before *Molloy*, or possibly during the same time" (Bair 354). On the other hand, *Mercier and Camier*, if begun in July 1946 as Bair states (359), may not overlap with *Molloy*. Beckett wrote to George Reavey on August 15, 1947, that "I am getting on with another book in French probably entitled *Molloy*" (Bair 366). *Mercier and Camier*, if begun in 1946, would have to have been under way for the better part of a year for it to be written partly at the same time as *Molloy*. This seems unlikely, since this was a period of rapid work for Beckett. On the other hand, he did write all of the other *nouvelles* during this time, perhaps delaying *Mercier and Camier's* completion. Either way a clear picture still eludes both us and Deirdre Bair, who remains imprecise about *Molloy's* origins. Elsewhere she states that "[Beckett] began to write *Molloy* in September, 1947, and by January, 1948, he was finished" (Bair 368). And elsewhere: "He had finished *Molloy* just before Christmas" (372).

In the end it appears that this blurring of the borders between Beckett's 1940s texts, with the difficulty in assigning priorities of subject, style, or even positive

chronological priorities, is a spilling-over into history of the theme and manner of the trilogy itself. Beckett's narratives, mimicking the condition of their protagonists, offer us no

verifiable centre, to which every other portion of the sequence can be subordinated and related, nor any consistent, universal 'self'; all that we have are relationships, and especially relationships of repetition, resemblance and recall . . . . Each text is merely a point of incision into a body of fiction which, once penetrated, will prove never to have been imaginable as a self-contained volume, but always to have been split and dispersed. (Connor 87)

Certainly the trilogy presents itself in this way, as having been "always" split; and yet it is a fact that it is a piece of writing to which the term "always" cannot strictly apply. Before 1947 it was not split, dispersed, or anything else, if it had not yet been begun.

The interesting question is, why does the trilogy seem to compel us to speak of it in this way? My answer is that its central concern is the state of indeterminacy itself, a fictional territory developed from Murphy's "mental home" in the land of unrealized potential, and Watt's nameless things. Molloo, unlike Murphy, Watt, or even Moran, has no named, mysterious (male) other around which he orbits; he has no Mr. Endon, Mr. Knott, or Youdi. "They," a multiple, nameless presence, command his writing. *Molloo* presents an indeterminate condition in which language is an autonomous and closed system. In such a condition, language's "user,"

who still clings despite himself to ideas of essence and identity, finds that language victimizes and humiliates rather than empowers him. In order to enact and not simply describe this condition, it is crucial to exclude or confound the idea of origins as much as possible. The speaker/writer's origin, the genesis of this text in particular, and the roots of communication itself, must be inaccessible, obscure, always already annihilated. The attempt to present this closed world of the "always already"--the world of language and culture as closed system--might potentially be undermined by the literal fact that the text itself was not "always already" anything, that it did not always exist. This is why the trace of a root, an origin, must be effaced in order for a work such as the trilogy to have its full effect. Beckett himself has been careful to avoid supplying even a biographical datum for this text to which indeterminacy is fundamental: claiming that he "himself is not sure when the idea for *Molloy* came to him" (Bair 354).

The way into the trilogy is not a straight road then, but a circling back (always *back*). This is embodied in *Molloy* from its opening pages, which immediately raise the question of endings and beginnings. A narrator is writing (not speaking) from his mother's room; this narrator's identity will be unknown until, under duress, he announces, "my name is Molloy" (23). He asserts that his aim is "to

finish dying"--that is, to make an *end*. Yet things are not as simple as the narrator would wish them to be; the matter of his ending is not entirely in his control. An outside force dictates how and when he shall end, or begin. This outside force is, in fact, the engine that drives him to write, and it is to some external compulsion that the text owes its existence. This force is the "he" that "gives me money and takes away the pages" (7). We do not even know for certain whether this force is singular or plural, since it is also the "they" who do not wish Molloy's ending to occur quite yet: "What I'd like now is to speak of the things that are left, say my goodbyes, finish dying. They don't want that" (7). This "they," or "he," represents a control exerted over Molloy from outside, which rejects his desire to make an end. This same outside force has already rejected his beginning:

It was he who told me I'd begun all wrong, that I should have begun differently. He must be right. I began at the beginning, like an old ballocks, can you imagine that? Here's my beginning. Because they're keeping it apparently. I took a lot of trouble with it. Here it is. It gave me a lot of trouble. It was the beginning, do you understand? Whereas now it's nearly the end. (8)

The tangle of beginnings and ends has the reader asking "which end is which?" A text that blurs its own outline, Molloy's first task is to induce this question and force us to recognize that we do not know *par quel bout le prendre*.

The briefest attempt to untangle this difficulty shows how little the reader has to go on, and how important it is

simply to glide over the apparently smooth surface of the text, if any progress is to be made. In other words, we can hardly begin unless we ignore the text's insistence that we do not know whether this is the beginning or not. And yet at the same time we are forced to confront the issue by the statement "This is my beginning, Here it is" and the repetition of the words "beginning" and "end."

Is this "beginning" merely the beginning of the end, a completion of a decline (both Molloy's and the novel's) already begun? It is still not even clear that what we are reading is what Molloy calls "his beginning" in the sense of "the start of my text." The indeterminacy of the pronouns ("It" was my beginning; "It's" nearly the end) opens the possibility that Molloy has started a text, and not necessarily this one, which "they" have condemned because it began at the beginning. Where should it have started, if not at the beginning? At the end? *In medias res*? Only an "old ballocks" would start at the beginning. In a sense, Molloy manages to undermine the idea of "beginning, middle, end"--a minimal requisite for narrative--by starting in all three places. "They" have condemned one beginning, but now are keeping a beginning: "they're keeping IT apparently." So did Molloy begin once, meet rejection, and begin again? Then we would face two texts, which furnish perhaps the two sections of Molloy itself. Or did he begin, meet rejection, then find that rejection reversed (signalled by "they're

keeping it")? The indeterminacy of the "IT" which is all that designates what Molloy has written, leaves us unable to know. Yet the gamut of tenses through which "the beginning" or "it" passes suggests more than one written "beginning":

1. I began
2. Here is my beginning.
3. They are keeping it...
4. It was the beginning.
5. Now, it is nearly the end.

To sum up, either Molloy botched his beginning, in "their" judgment, but "they" are keeping it anyway and this is the text that we are reading, or this text before us is a new attempt, a second beginning. If it is, what happened to the other version?

It is tempting to leave these questions unresolved and merely point out that the issue of beginnings and endings is "at stake" here, that the text alerts us to the elusiveness of definite origins and ends. This is certainly true of *Molloy's* opening. Yet it may be fruitful to attempt a solution by seeing Part Two as that rejected beginning, both rejected (as *Molloy's* beginning) and kept (for later). The "new" beginning, with its discussion of the preceding rejected attempt, appears to be (in a chronological sense) "nearly the end" of *Molloy's* narrative. It seems to be a revision of the "prior" and more coherent narrative that begins with Moran. Such a shuffling of chronology would be in keeping with the strategy of *Watt's* "I" as reported by Sam, the narrator. It also echoes, within *Molloy*, the way

Beckett's texts of the 1940s were composed, then often withheld, only to be published later, though now "out of order."

Another reason for readers to begin with Moran's narration in Part Two is that it certainly offers a more convenient starting-place for analysis. The start of Part Two offers a depiction of order and self-satisfaction from which the rest of Part Two, and the whole of Part One, systematically decline. Thus the opening of Moran's narrative strikes a note rare in Beckett's work, as the first-person narration possesses none of the exasperated tone of *More Pricks than Kicks* or *Murphy*, and yet represents to its readers, at first, a perfectly coherent fictional world of the kind not seen since the earliest narratives. Indeed this oasis of determinacy within Beckett's own fiction exists only long enough for Moran's expulsion from his own personal paradise to be narrated. The scene is a peaceful enclosed garden, where the self-satisfied Moran reflects on his own opinions, watches his bees, and occasionally warns his son not to dirty himself. Moran is master in his own house, with his son and a servant to command, a clear sense of himself and none of the self-conscious scruples about language, memory, and identity that haunt Molloy. Part Two narrates his *fall* from this condition, beginning almost immediately with the unheralded arrival of Gaber, who represents whatever structure of power it is that can compel

Moran to search for Molloy, and to write a report on his search.

If we see this power as the same one that compels Molloy to write in Part One, and see Part Two as the "botched" beginning that Molloy first offered to "them," then Molloy and Moran become effectively two versions of a "single" self, and this explains many of the convergences of the two narratives. On the other hand, the two narrations are not identical, and their divergences suggest the lack of any "single" self behind either of them, whether taken together or separately. The strongest link between the two parts remains this compulsion to write, to report, which has generated the text of both parts. Thus a principle even more fundamental in *Molloy* than that of the self and its attempts to narrate itself, to relate its beginning to its end, is the principle of power that commands this narration. This power always seems to remain outside Molloy and Moran, yet is related somehow to Moran's "profession."

Moran says that he is an "agent" and Gaber a "messenger" employed by a "chief," Youdi (106-7). They think of themselves as "members of a vast organization" a notion which they can never verify. It is as he reflects upon what he knows of this extremely Kafkaesque "organization" that Moran first begins to take on some resemblance to Molloy. For though at one moment he assumes the existence of this "vast organization," at the next it seems "obvious that we

were perhaps alone in what we did" (107). When he writes of this organization Moran's idiom echoes Molloy's: "trouble shared, or is it sorrow, is trouble something, I forget the word" (107). What troubles Moran above all are his "moments of lucidity" in reflecting upon this organization, and its messengers, such as Gaber. This is the source of doubts as corrosive as those of Molloy: "this lucidity was so acute at times that I came even to doubt the existence of Gaber himself" (107). Moran, however, retreats into "darkness," convinced that he is unequipped for such lucidity, and should remain "a solid among other solids" (108).

Gaber's visit, then, and the reflections it spurs, are the "poison" which, even more than Gaber's explicit order for Moran to leave his home, destroy the little paradise of certainties in which Part Two begins. As he carries out Gaber's order to find Molloy, Moran will gradually lose all the qualities that distinguish him from Molloy; above all his solid place in the world, his sense of himself, his position of (somewhat sadistic) *control* over his servant, his son, and even his bees (who die while he is away).

Part of Moran's difficulty will stem from the incompleteness of his orders. Apparently he is to seek Molloy, but he is not told enough about the ends of his quest: "For how can you decide on the way of setting out if you do not first know where you are going, or at least with what purpose you are going there?" (98). Moran is put in the

same position Molloy encounters when seeking his mother's house, without any certainties to guide him. When Moran does reflect on what he knows of Molloy, his subject begins to proliferate. There are first two Molloys, "the Molloy I stalked within me and the true Molloy" (115). Soon these become "three, no, four Molloys. He that inhabited me, my caricature of same, Gaber's, and the man of flesh and blood somewhere awaiting me" (115). Then a fifth Molloy, "that of Youdi," must be added. For Moran, Molloy is a trap door that opens in his stable world, plunging him from security and self-satisfaction into a bewildering intersubjective network in which multiple images of self and other intertwine.

Yet from Moran's own point of view, he still simply faces a quest for an object, Molloy, which is hard to define. The quest will appear in a different light later on, taking on terms that identify it more closely with the act of writing itself: "I gave fitful thought . . . to Gaber's instructions. . . . What was I looking for exactly? It is hard to say. I was looking for what was wanting to make Gaber's statement complete" (136). Now Moran is "looking for" a way to make sense of his instructions, but the phrasing here carries the suggestion that the entire quest in Part One might be placed on a discursive level. It is literally a quest to complete an utterance. Indeed Moran recalls previous "missions" which bear the names of Bec-

kett's earlier protagonists, and which align Moran with the writer of their stories:

Oh the stories I could tell you, if I were easy. What a rabble in my head, what a gallery of moribunds. Murphy, Watt, Yerk, Mercier, and all the others. I would never have believed that-- yes, I believe it willingly. Stories, stories. I have not been able to tell them. I shall not be able to tell this one. (137)

This passage sets up Moran as a writer who is "uneasy" and thus unable to tell stories, including the one we are now reading in his "report." As Part Two progresses, then, it takes on the aspect of a narrative in the process of being composed, which is central to Part One. Moran's previous "missions" even sound much like narratives he was obliged to construct, parodic sketches of stories like those in *More Pricks than Kicks*, with the characters appearing as the author's "clients":

I had always to deal with the client, in one way or another, according to instructions. . . . The Yerk affair, which took me nearly three months to conclude successfully, was over on the day I succeeded in possessing myself of his tiepin and destroying it. . . . On another occasion my mission consisted in bringing the person to a certain place at a certain time. (136-7)

For instance, the difficulties faced by Moran in his quest for Molloy, and of Molloy in his quest for his mother, reflect parallel difficulties faced by the narrator-protagonists in constructing their narrative, and by the reader in reading it. In all of these cases, the purpose or goal is unclear, adequate instructions and guidance are

lacking, and there is, paradoxically, too much freedom and too little direction. For instance it is all too easy for these characters to fulfill the command to narrate, as we shall see. At first Moran does not feel this radical freedom, since he only gradually admits the depth of his uncertainty about himself, about his separateness from Molloy, about his control over language. Thus his narration only gradually comes to resemble that of Molloy, who in Part One, possesses and broods upon these doubts from the start. Moran becomes more like Molloy as he recognizes that his sense of himself exists only in language; that language is not entirely subservient to his will (which he can articulate only in words); and that finally, even memory and imagination are penetrated, and the distinction between them blurred, by their reliance on language. The two narrator-protagonists enact the entry into a realm of pure potential, opened up by a language severed from determinate situations. Indeed the characters, who are so closely identified with their narratives as to become themselves texts, suffer from the too-great freedom which Jean-Paul Richter identified as a problem of the novel in 1804:

The development of a pure novel form suffers from its breadth, in which almost all forms have room to lie and rattle about. . . . Artists themselves do not reckon on it, and, as a result, begin well, continue in a mediocre fashion, and then end miserably. (Simpson 313-14)

Moran, judged by *his own* standards, follows this movement, as Part Two narrates his decline toward the condition of Molloy in Part One.

Part One makes it plain that this narrative is "a contrivance," as Moran calls himself, a narrative that is made up as it goes along. The benefits of composition and revision are alien to this compulsory writing. Not trusting himself to be consistent as he writes, Molloy warns the reader that "if I speak of the stars it is by mistake" (15). Similarly, he admits that he might forget the infirmities he has attributed to himself in his writing, so that it is important for the reader to concede that "If I ever stoop, it will not be me, but another" (36). When he narrates the episode of his initiation into love and sex, he exclaims "I didn't think I knew this story so well" (58), undermining the notion that we are reading authentic reminiscence. In fact although he may appear to be telling "his story," Molloy prefers naked invention to reminiscence, even warning us that "perhaps I'm remembering things" (8). Finally, he abandons the half-hearted pretext of telling his story, or any continuous story, in favour of a fabric of digressions: "And as to saying what became of me, and where I went, in the months and perhaps the years that followed, no. For I weary of these inventions and others beckon to me" (68). The outline of a continuous narrative in Part One is in fact blurred and broken down by its more and more explicit frag-

mentation into a series of digressions. Indeed we can hardly call them digressions, since the ostensible "core narrative" of Part One, Molloy's trip to visit his mother, is so attenuated as to barely even get under way. Molloy seizes upon this idea of a visit to his mother as a way of finding something to write, since he is compelled to write. To write he must have a purpose; yet as soon as he finds a single purpose, he loses interest in it and digresses. Thus his statement about the journey to his mother applies to the movement of the narrative as well: "Good. Now that we know where we're going, let's go there. It's so nice to know where you're going, in the early stages. It almost rids you of the urge to go there" (19). Of course Molloy does not "know where we're going," since the location of his mother's house remains as undefined for Molloy as the distinction between himself and his mother, or between himself and anyone else. Also, since "where we're going" is ostensibly his mother's house, and Molloy has already told us that he is in his mother's room, we are plainly going nowhere.

Yet can we in fact insist on clear distinction between "here" and "there," between self and other, in *Molloy*? The novel blurs all kinds of borders--borders between texts, between beginnings and endings, between characters such as Moran and Molloy, between the living and the dead (since "decomposition is living too"). The border between the ordinary and the unusual breaks down, as "there is a little

of everything in nature, apparently, and freaks are common" (14). But the most important border to be blurred is that which would serve to define "Molloy." He begins to merge with his mother at the very start: "I have taken her place. I must resemble her more and more" (7). They are both "so old . . . like a couple of old cronies" sharing "the same memories, the same rancours, the same expectations" (17). Molloy seems to blur into almost anyone he can imagine. "People pass," he notes, "hard to distinguish from yourself. That is discouraging" (8). Such are A and C, the "characters" he remembers or invents. As he describes C's anxiety he wonders "who knows if it wasn't my own anxiety overtaking him" (10). And how *would* Molloy distinguish himself from others? The official marks of identity are parodied by the "papers" he carries, "bits of newspaper to wipe myself, you understand, when I have a stool" (20). It is these that he proffers to a policeman who demands "[his] papers." These papers, blackened with words, but failing to reply to the request for a name and identity, parodically misrecognize the policeman's demand. They stand in for the text we are reading, one that bears the name "Molloy" but can't finally offer us what Moran calls "the man of flesh and blood" (115). The writing Molloy offers is detached from any particular person, because it preexisted that person and its proper names can be made to serve anyone's turn.

Perhaps, if words are unsatisfactory at defining a being such as Molloy, numbers would be more reliable. Molloy employs arithmetic in an obscene parody of self-analysis, when he counts his farts and discovers that he is not nearly so flatulent as he had always thought:

"extraordinary how mathematics can help you to know yourself," he remarks (30). Such is the height of self-knowledge in *Molloy*. It is the search for such self-knowledge that is implied behind all of the supposed "quests" in *Molloy*. The search for his mother suggests a search for his origins, finally for some knowledge of himself. This quest is never more than a pretext or a joke, since Molloy flees introspection, declaring "I try my best not to talk about myself" (13). The topic of Molloy himself is something to avoid, and even Molloy's invented characters are attributed Molloy's own horror of his introspective moments:

There I am then, he leaves me, he's in a hurry. He didn't seem to be in a hurry, he was loitering, I've already said so, but after three minutes of me he is in a hurry, he has to hurry. I believe him. (13)

Significantly, Molloy's introspections seem to bring on the bleakest, most savagely pessimistic passages in *Molloy*.

When he resorts to the subject of himself, Molloy's tone becomes black. It is after he has been "restored to himself" that Molloy describes "the whole ghastly business" as "senseless, speechless, issueless misery" (13). Any

"digression" from the topic of himself leads to a much more even tone, until the "digression" can no longer hold Molloy's attention and he returns to the vexed topic for which the novel is titled. Thus the "digressions," beginning with the narrative of A and C, and including Molloy's rhapsody to his bicycle, the tale of Lousse and her dog, and his trip to the seashore with the episode of the sixteen sucking stones, are all part of the flight from introspection. They become increasingly desperate, obscene, or openly arbitrary, as Part One goes on. This movement is accentuated by Molloy's physical decline, as if physical immobility and confinement reflect the increasing difficulty of the flight from himself.

The successive impairments to Molloy's progress, from limping to crawling, are the only things that "progress" in Part One at all. We might say that Molloy's disabilities become his only opportunities to narrate (just as Beckett makes his fictional opportunities out of what he sees as the self-contradictions and impasses of the novel as genre). Molloy greets each new handicap with glee, and with a sense of impatience or exasperation with his failure to see its possibilities earlier: "Walking! What a story!" (77); "Christ! There's crawling!" (89). Problems that seem impossible to resolve are Molloy's meat and drink. The best way to suck sixteen stones, what happens to the moon while he is at Lousse's house, whether A and C did meet the way he

thinks he recalls: these are irresolvable questions because they can't be settled with proof. They are indeterminate, and in the philosophical sense, trivial. They are of course also purely fictional, and through them *Molloy* confronts the sheer triviality of fiction. Fictional problems can in fact be solved by any convenient invention (it is convenient that Lousse has in her garden the *only* kind of tree Molloy can identify). That the problems in *Molloy* are both irresolvable, and easily solved, is only a contradiction if we think of them as real rather than fictional problems.

The issue of the unreality and triviality of *Molloy's* fictional world is pressed, with a great deal of humor, throughout the text. Finally the text, reiterating an implication of *Watt*, compels us to concede that it "just got made up this way." It could have been made up another way. There is a deep-seated arbitrariness to it, which analysis will never resolve--even though its self-consciousness and reflexiveness create an ironic gap, which analysis endlessly rushes to fill. The "condition of Molloy," then, or the "world of Molloy," is one in which the novel's conventional possibilities for satisfying readers have been given up. Yet the restraints of the novel have disappeared as well. *Molloy*, and *Molloy*, can do as they wish. The extremely bleak introspective passage mentioned above consists of a commentary on this "freedom":

[F]ree to do what, to do nothing, to know, but what, the laws of the mind perhaps, of my mind,

that for example water rises in proportion as it drowns you and that you would do better, at least no worse, to obliterate texts than to blacken margins, to fill in the holes of words till all is blank and flat and the whole ghastly business looks like what it is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery. So I doubtless did better, at least no worse, not to stir from my observation post. (13)

Throughout *Molloy*, words are presented as *material*. Silence is a space they can fill, and their function is a negative one: to fill up, blacken, block out. Molloy says that "to restore silence is the role of objects" (13). But as in *Watt*, words have themselves become objects: independent, autonomous, distant and unknowable. Often in both *Watt* and *Molloy*, objects reject the adjectives the narrator may seek to apply to them, as for instance when the adjective is left in suspense in *Watt*: "The stands . . . so ? when empty" (27). The novel, *Molloy*, becomes from this point of view a series of blackened pages, a "something gone wrong with the silence." Once again action is portrayed as a defect of inaction. Despite everything, at the end of *Molloy* pages have been filled, and a paradoxical completeness is signalled by the repetition at Part Two's conclusion of the phrases describing the rain at midnight that began it. If nothing else, a movement from "it was raining" to "it was not raining" has been completed. A purely discursive event has taken place in the movement from "was" to "was not," one that at least serves to bring the trilogy beyond the

troublesome point of beginning and allows *Malone Dies* to proceed on different terms.

*Molloy* concerns itself with the impossibility of beginning, and the inextricability of a single origin, and yet, by a fictional "bootstrap operation," manages to produce a kind of doubled and qualified beginning for the trilogy as a whole. *The Unnamable* will concern itself with the even greater difficulty of ending, of letting something else speak, something besides the autonomous and involuntary discourse of language speaking itself through the linguistic subject. Meanwhile the middle text, *Malone Dies*, freed of these two larger concerns, can offer the most "circumstance" of the three novels, and can parody what takes place between the impossible beginning and the impossible ending. What takes place there is representation itself, especially representation of the human subject of which novels speak, and of which Saposcat or McMann become parodies.

Thus the three-part structure of the trilogy works to assign differing roles to each part. The second novel of the trilogy benefits from the "already" which has been established by the preceding narrative. *Malone Dies* can seem to foresee its own direction more confidently than *Molloy*: "I'll soon be quite dead in spite of all" (1). Nevertheless, the voice of *Malone Dies* will not be "quite dead" at the end of the novel. Enough voice will remain to narrate *The Unnamable*, though it will be difficult to

situate that voice. Neither will the voice that narrates *Malone Dies* be dead "soon," since there remains a series of digressions and inventions, "circuits of substitution," before the voice can appear to "die."

The presence of this "already" behind *Malone Dies* allows Malone to allude more confidently to a future "end," to be marked by the inventory of his possessions which he hopes to perform at the last moment before his death. Malone also benefits from the past narrative in being able to assert that "something must have changed" (1), even that "This time I know where I am going" (2). This ostensible knowledge opposes Malone to both Molloy and Moran, who undertook their quests without maps or clear objectives. Malone explicitly contrasts his own case with the previous situation:

I used to not know where I was going, but I knew I would arrive, I knew there would be an end to the long blind road. What half-truths, my God. No matter. It is playtime now. I find it hard to get used to that idea. The old fog calls. Now the case is reversed, the way well-charted and little hope of coming to its end. But I have high hopes. (4)

Less scrupulous and literal-minded than Molloy, Malone seems willing to overlook "half-truths," instead of obsessively qualifying each utterance. If it is "playtime," then he can truly say "no matter," perhaps even going on to utter what *The Unnamable* will call "any old thing" (138). *Malone Dies* takes place in a cleared space, a less consequential space,

in which what matters is waiting for the right moment, the last moment, in order for Malone's inventory to be made; since "dying without leaving an inventory behind" is the one thing Malone wishes to avoid, though he questions his ability to wish. (Perhaps the timing of this inventory reflects the hope that the very last impulse to self-examination can be forestalled by paying attention to objects during his dying moments.) In its deliberate playfulness and arbitrariness, its voluntary telling of stories (parodies of traditional *Bildung* plots), *Malone Dies* recalls *Murphy* more often than any of the other two parts of the trilogy do. Buttressed by the other two novels, *Malone Dies* is the most clearly *situated* novel of the trilogy, with Malone's room, bed and stick providing the most stable and representable decor since *Murphy*.

Malone's initial confidence and knowingness, and the willful telling of stories without the self-castigation that often accompanies this act in *Molloy* or *The Unnamable*, show that something has changed in the movement from *Molloy* to *Malone Dies*. Malone even shows himself critical of the literal-minded scruples typical of the "finical" Molloy: Malone's "desire is to be *clear, without being finical*" (3, my italics). Even though *Malone Dies* finally will revert to the indeterminate, repetitive condition of *Molloy* and *The Unnamable*, it does not exist entirely on such a plane. For most of the novel, Malone shows a greater confidence in his

own words than did Molloy. He is a much more knowing narrator, and is critical of assumptions central to *Molloy*. "Now that I know what is going on" (49) or "knowing what I know" (47), Malone is able to acknowledge that "there are limits to my impotence" (48). The motifs of incapacity and impossibility that were so central to *Molloy* are now seen as themselves of limited interest: "Nothing is impossible, I can't keep on denying it" (8). This ambiguous double negative implies that now something is possible. Malone's world is one of "high hopes" and possibilities, a direct contrast to the worlds of either *Molloy* or *The Unnamable*, and their blackness. Indeed Malone is very much on guard against a resurgence of such blackness, fearing to find himself again "abandoned, in the dark, without anything to play with" (3). The tone, style and preoccupations of *Molloy* do in fact recur intermittently in *Malone Dies*, along with echoes of all the previous novels. But Malone seeks to keep these at bay for as long as possible:

But I am easily frightened now. I know those little phrases that seem so innocuous and, once you let them in, pollute the whole of speech. *Nothing is more real than nothing*. They rise up out of the pit and know no rest until they drag you down into its dark. But I am on my guard now.  
(16)

*Malone Dies* is like *Molloy* in depicting a kind of flight into discourse and away from something that is feared. Yet the narrator-protagonist of the second novel benefits from the pre-existence of the first by seeming to

know what to avoid. The discourse itself becomes an even more self-conscious fabric of repression, explicitly avoiding the "earnestness" that characterized the earlier "shapelessness and speechlessness, incurious wondering, darkness, long stumbling with outstretched arms, hiding" (2). Malone will avoid asking questions (2) or drawing conclusions (1), in favour of "telling [him]self stories" (2). He will remain "neutral" or "tepid," perhaps hoping to avoid the rage and despair that Molloy encountered when confronted with himself, when his stories failed.

The stories Malone tells himself resemble the stories of A & C in *Molloy*, or that of *Mercier and Camier*, in that they are explicitly in the process of being composed, and in that their characters are puppets, pure inanimate convention. The comical arbitrariness of Sapo's story-in-the-process-of-composition is clear from the start, and we can almost hear pure automatism take over as the story begins to rattle on:

Sapo had no friends--no, that won't do. Sapo was on good terms with his little friends, though they did not exactly love him. The dolt is seldom solitary. He boxed and wrestled well, was fleet of foot, sneered at his teachers, and sometimes even gave them impertinent answers. Fleet of foot? Well well. (12-13)

Malone is conscious of more than just the arbitrariness of the content and the turns of phrase. The question of assigning knowledge in fiction is another occasion for humor that ironically rebounds upon the narrator's own status as a

(literally) discursively constructed subject. "I have not been able to find out why Sapo was not expelled. We shall have to leave this question open. I try not to be glad" (13), jokes Malone, toying with the supposed assumption of a "reality" to Sapo's life that is being "recorded" (and allowing us to see that the supposed reality of the "recorder" has no more foundation).

Malone's knowledge of his protagonist is "incomplete"--that is, he can't be bothered to resolve a trivial question. Yet there is also the question of the knowledge that Sapo "possesses," i.e. the knowledge Malone chooses to attribute to him. Poor Sapo, explicitly a puppet, is never assumed to have any knowledge that Malone has not thought to assign to him in an explicit phrase. It is as if Sapo waits for Malone to bestow the next installment of life upon him: "Sapo dropped his jaw and breathed through his mouth . . . his dream was less of girls than of himself, his own life, his life to be" (16). Farcically, "Sapo's life" is something that Malone will finally lack the energy to finish inventing: "The peasants. His visits to. I can't" (19). Finally Malone makes a parting gesture, before resting from his labor, that recalls the addenda appended to *Watt*: "There is a choice of images," notes Malone wearily. It is as if, a resigned victim of "fatigue and disgust," he passes the task on to the reader, saying "you do it." And the story is

trite enough that we could certainly have continued it, if Malone had not summoned renewed strength and added a few more episodes.

These aspects of the stories finally succeed in subverting Malone's flight from the "darkness" of *Molloy*, for the stories only demonstrate once again the way conventions, discourse itself, have a degree of autonomy, and the way that the most explicitly pointless or absurd narration eventually finds its way to issues of the construction of self. These are issues that Malone does not want to confront, and which he has sworn to put behind him. Despite Malone's attempts not to be put off by the patent absurdity of the stories, he cannot help exclaiming, like Molloy, "What half-truths" (4) or "what tedium" (9), "this is awful" (14) and "no, I can't do it" (19). It is by this device, the gradual reassertion of the motif of discourse's simultaneous absurdity or arbitrariness, and its relentless pertinence to the construction of (Malone's) subjectivity, that *Malone Dies* is led back into the realm of reluctant self-examination, indeterminacy and repetition that characterized *Watt* and *Molloy*.

It is important to remain aware, then, of both the continuities between *Molloy* and *Malone Dies* and the differences between them. Olga Bernal, for instance, tries to inscribe both novels within a single continuous process that questions language in a methodical way; she argues that while

*Molloy* questioned words, the basic units of language, *Malone Dies* questions syntax, or linguistic structure: "*Après les mots, c'est la cohésion syntactique qui fait défaut à la structure du personnage dans Malone meurt*" (138). This sort of systematic formal undermining of language on the level of successive units was already present in *Watt*, however, and it is difficult to find examples to support the argument that this progressive undermining of language forms the main continuity between the first two parts of the trilogy. It is true that Malone observes of himself that he has been "a series or rather a succession of local phenomena all my life, without any result" (61). However the equanimity of Malone's statement about himself contrasts with Molloy's occasionally vicious self-loathing, and *Malone Dies* is in many ways a "fresh start" after *Molloy*, rather than a continuance (the second novel begins in spring, for instance).

On the other hand *Malone Dies* slowly begins to expose the willful self-deception that allowed Malone to declare that he has experienced "crystal clear . . . understanding" and that "I now knew what I had to do, I whose every move has always been a groping" (50). Indeed *Malone Dies* finally gropes its way toward the terrain covered by *Molloy*, rather than continuing methodically down an indicated path. Apparently accepting, rather than being disgusted by, the expedients of stories and inventories of objects as a way of

avoiding self-examination, Malone grows more and more exasperated with his stories, is forced into

stopping, each time disaster threatens, to look at myself as I am. That is just what I wanted to avoid. But there seems to be no other solution. After that mudbath I shall be better able to endure a world unsullied by my presence. What a way to reason. (12)

Like *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable* must also be seen in both its continuity with, and its distinction from, the previous parts of the trilogy. In a sense it goes back over the same ground as *Molloy*, because the issue of how to end revives the issue of how to begin. If *The Unnamable* can finally succeed in ending what *Malone Dies* called the "interminable prelude" (20), then something else might begin. The difficulty of ending is linked to that of beginning when the speaker snorts at the idea that he will make "The last step! I who could never manage the first!" (63). *Molloy's* motif of "finishing dying" is often evoked in *The Unnamable*, which asks "Is this not rather the place where one finishes vanishing?" (6) and declares that the narrator has been "sufficiently assassinated, sufficiently suicided, to stand on [his] own feet, like a big boy" (63). Here it is clear, however, that in *The Unnamable*, as opposed to *Molloy*, "to finish vanishing" or dying now carries the positive connotation of "to begin emerging." In fact while the third part of the trilogy carries the theme of ending,

of annihilation, to an extreme, it also discovers a motif of emergence, of "something quite different" that only such a terminal discourse can initiate.

*The Unnamable*, by its very title, designates an exploration of something that lies *beyond* language. The contempt for language in its usual sense as a bearer of meaning, and of the novel as a constructor of a plausible world, is carried further here than in any of the previous novels. Towards the end of *The Unnamable*, the process of pure repetition of questions and resolutions is accelerated. The narrator is conscious of the previous novels' arbitrariness ("the old trick worn to a thread" 33), of the extent to which they sought to narrate "any old thing" (53), of how easy it is to elicit "reams of discourse" (24). Now the narrator of *The Unnamable* recognizes more clearly than ever that to speak at all has been to fall into a trap: "But it seems impossible to speak and yet say nothing, you think you have succeeded, but you always overlook something, a little yes, a little no, enough to exterminate a regiment of dragoons" (20). The annihilating power of language is at the fore here, because this narrator-protagonist actually seeks something which he hopes can survive the act of "saying nothing"--this residue is the "I" that seems to begin to emerge at the end of *The Unnamable*. "Shall I be able to speak of me and this place without putting an end to us?" asks the narrator, implying that language annihilates,

but also that there may be something that survives the act of "speaking and saying nothing." In *The Unnamable*, the discourse of the novel seems to be envisioned as a kind of radiation therapy that will purge language itself, and the "self" inherent in language, and leave "on its own feet," something *beyond* that self.

The fact that its narrator-protagonist is no longer *writing* (either a transcription, or a report) as in *Watt*, *Molloy*, or *Malone Dies*, but *speaking*, signals *The Unnamable's* attempt to move into a new territory. The narrator of *The Unnamable* both speaks and attempts to hear something behind "his" speech. (For sometimes it is announced that "this is Mahood speaking" or "Worm speaks now," as in the substitutions of the earlier novels.) The narrator of *The Unnamable* is clearly supposed to have been the "voice behind" the earlier novels, further suggesting that *The Unnamable* seeks to arrive at something *more* fundamental than the other novels offered: "Am I clothed? I have often asked myself this question, then suddenly started talking about Malone's hat, or Molloy's greatcoat, or Murphy's suit" (23). Now the narrator of *The Unnamable* will focus on a different level of the discourse:

[W]hile unfolding my facetiae, the last time that happened to me, or to the other that passes for me, I was not inattentive. And it seemed to me then that I heard a murmur telling of another and less unpleasant method of ending my troubles and that I even succeeded in catching, without ceasing for an instant to emit my he said, and he said to

himself, and he answered, a certain number of highly promising formulae. . . . But it has all gone clean from my head. For it is difficult to speak, even any old rubbish, and at the same time focus one's attention on another point, where one's true interest lies, as fitfully defined by a feeble murmur seeming to apologize for not being dead. (27)

It is "the other that passes for me," then, that has narrated the previous novels. Another "I," held in reserve, has felt the difference between "the other that passes for me" and "me," which the narrator ventures to call "the true at last, the last at last" (28). This apparent faith in an "authentic" self or one "beyond the discourse" seems to contradict much of what the previous fiction implied about the selves evoked there, and their inextricability from language, their lack of any self-sufficient being that would permit them to "use" their discourse rather than be spoken by it.

Yet it is clear that this narrator does struggle against whatever external compulsion forces him to take up a place in language: "they will devise another means, less childish, of getting me to admit, or pretend to admit, that I am he whose name they call me by, and no other" (89). If indeed the speaker can succeed in overcoming his original "childish" insertion into language via birth and naming, such escape will be short-lived, and difficult to grasp. I believe it is a question of the attempt to evoke something best understood through a Lacanian description of "the

Unconscious itself, as the reality of the subject which has been alienated and repressed through the very process by which, in receiving a name, it is transformed into a representation of itself" (Jameson 363). The previous two novels of the trilogy, if described in Lacanian terms, might be said to have evoked the pain of representing oneself while continually perceiving one's difference from that representation. Those novels portrayed a reluctant and painful awareness of the way in which the ego, the narrator-protagonist wishing to see itself as self-sufficient, tries to repudiate its own interconnection with others, while sensing the lack of self-sufficiency which contradicts its continual assertion of control. Thus the earlier narrator-protagonists fled from the occasional insight into their constructed status by turning to substitute narratives: the story of A & C, of Murphy, of Sapo. Yet finally in *The Unnamable* the text will confess that "it's not me" speaking. Paradoxically this will allow the "I" (the "everlasting third party" [123] now become first person) to at least be indicated behind the "pretexts" that formed the substance of all the previous narrations. Arriving at this point, the speaker of *The Unnamable* will announce "It's I am talking" (139).

The narratives before *The Unnamable* presented narrator-protagonists trapped in the limbo of self-consciousness about their own discursively constructed status. Such an

awareness is implied throughout the texts, especially in the irony about agency and desire which suffuses them. When Molloy's quest for an origin, in the guise of the quest for his mother's house, becomes bogged in indeterminacy, the obvious conclusion is that Molloy cannot recover his "real" origin, that there is no "authentic" Molloy "back there somewhere" for him to discover. Malone, protesting a bit too much, pretends to accept that he cannot know himself, that he is content to play and tell himself stories until the final distraction, his inventory, can be effected. Yet he too circles back into the dilemma of Molloy. Finally in *The Unnamable*, what is perhaps a new conception of the subject in Beckett's novels emerges. This conception is described in Lacan's *Seminar I*:

[T]he complete restitution of the subject's history is the element that is essential, constitutive and structural for analytic progress . . . . The path of restitution of the subject's history takes the form of a quest for the restitution of the past. (12-14)

Such a quest formed the basis for *Molloy*, for instance, but the quest for Molloy's "true history" was an impossible one, partly for the reason that agency, desire, and for Beckett, voluntary memory, are all questioned once the discursive construction of the subject is accepted. However, Lacan goes on to say,

the fact that the subject relives, comes to remember . . . the formative events of his existence, is not in itself so very important. What matters is what he reconstructs of it . . . what is

involved is a reading, a qualified and skilled translation of the cryptogram representing what the subject is conscious of at the moment. (12-14)

"Cryptogram" is an apt term for the "cryptic" and "deathlike" images of later Beckett narrator-protagonists, as they narrate from the vases, rooms, mines or graves in which they are trapped. But the more important aspect of Lacan's observation is that despite the inaccessibility of the subject's "true history," it remains possible to approach what he calls "reconstitution," which in *The Unnamable* is perhaps the moment when "I" begins to speak at the end, a moment which recalls Lacan's description of psychoanalytic healing: "The realization of the subject through a speech which comes from elsewhere, traversing it" (*Seminar II* 232).

The speech which comes from elsewhere, once a tormenting proof of the narrator's inessential quality, now becomes an instrument of reconstitution. How can this be? As Lacan might put it, Beckett's narrators, looking for themselves in the place where they are not, have been both right and wrong. The difference lies in accepting that the self and others are intertwined, so that instead of looking for himself somewhere others could not penetrate--in silence, in nothingness--the narrator of *The Unnamable* simply listens more closely to the self within the other's voice. In losing the autonomous selfhood earlier Beckett narrators

hoped to claim, *The Unnamable's* narrator finds something close to such a self. As Malone proleptically observes, "on the threshold of being no more, I succeed in being another" (*Malone Dies* 17).

In order for the "voice from elsewhere" to be perceived in this new way, the narrator of *The Unnamable* must accept, to a much greater degree than the previous narrators, the fact that "I'm in words, made of words, others' words" (139). Now this "I," different but indistinguishable (thanks to the indeterminacy of pronouns) from the "I" that speaks at the novel's end, is certainly the subject that inheres in discourse, the "other that passes for me," as the narrator put it earlier. However the "murmur" which this "I" hears behind his own speech is *another* voice, Lacan's "speech which comes from elsewhere," and which embodies the realization that upon entry into language, something was repressed, which still survives, though "apologizing for not being dead."

This realization places the narrator upon a threshold that represents a place unattained in the previous novels:

[P]erhaps that's what I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in two . . . that can be as thin as foil, I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either, it's not to me they're talking, it's not of me they're talking. (134)

This sense of equilibrium, of a self-sufficiency beyond the distinctions that plagued Murphy (the world versus the mind) and beyond speech, compels us to recognize a change in *The Unnamable*. Something previously repressed, previously inexpressible, momentarily emerges in the final section of the trilogy:

No doubt something which isn't expressed doesn't exist. But the repressed is always there, insisting, and demanding to be. The fundamental relation of man to this symbolic order is very precisely what founds the symbolic order itself--the relation of non-being to being . . . . The end of the symbolic process is that non-being comes to be, because it has spoken. (*Seminar II*, 307-308)

The final pages of *The Unnamable* are as close as Beckett's (perhaps any) fiction comes to such a moment, when the repressed emerges and comes into being, as when the narrator begins to interject "It's I am talking" (139) and "I'm something quite different, a different thing, a wordless thing in an empty place" (139). The narrator even hazards the idea that "Perhaps I've said the thing that had to be said, that gives me the right to be done with speech, done with hearing, without my knowing it" (150). However, the next words--"I'm listening already, I'm going silent"--suggest that this emergence is short-lived. If something has come into being that had not been present in the earlier works, then from that moment it becomes subject to the conditions of those earlier works. If in *The Unnamable*, for a moment, a solution to Molloy's quest is glimpsed, then it also vanishes just as quickly, as soon as it is named.

Thus despite the fact that a new element been added that places the previous novels in a new light, the end of *The Unnamable* is not the humanistic epiphany which the words "I can't go on, I'll go on" are sometimes made to represent. Do these words express some kind of triumphant human will? Some indomitable perseverance? No--they are a return to the situation of *Molloy*, in which discourse is endlessly extorted by some external force, despite its being founded upon the repression of the "I" that briefly speaks in *The Unnamable*. The "other that passes for me" reasserts itself. The closing phrases of *The Unnamable*, far from being apt for some anthem to the human spirit, evoke the worst scenes of endless interrogation or torture from a Kafka or an Orwell, in which the subject is asked to confess "the thing that had to be said," which is either a secret inaccessible to himself, or something he has uttered unknowingly. And in either case the torment continues.

In the trilogy as a whole it is made clear that, as Andrew Kennedy observes:

The central importance of language in all modernist writing becomes, in Beckett, a dangerous immersion in language as a creative/destructive element, language as the stuff that makes up, or else annihilates, the world and the self. (2)

Kennedy's "or else," with its implication that there are alternatives and choices, ought to be replaced with "and also." Language is both the medium in which the narrator-protagonists of the trilogy have their being, and the

instrument of their torment, as they are forced to "go on" and on and on. They must continue to speak, and thus construct themselves in language, even after it becomes clear to them that going silent, and listening, is the only way to get at "something quite different, a wordless thing in an empty place" (139).

This different thing, *The Unnamable* suggests, must be a different self, a self freed from the entanglements of language, which implicates the self with others in a discursive web. For, as I have noted in earlier chapters, Beckett's fiction does not entirely relinquish the idea that lay behind Murphy's conception of his "best self," aloof and self-sufficient. *Watt* and the trilogy explore the barriers between the self that speaks, and this other, unspeakable, "self." This is perhaps the Beckettian "self" that was "never properly born," or that lives an existence like Belacqua's: when life is over, and the speaker ceases speaking, or the writer ceases writing, this thwarted and impossible "self" may once again come into its own. What would this involve? It is very literally *impossible to tell*.

In reaching as far as possible toward this impossibility, *The Unnamable* remains faithful to the kind of artistic program outlined in *Proust*. The novel finds a way to approach a plane other than that of "the feasible." *The Unnamable* evokes a tiny glimmer of such a plane, and of the

self beyond language that is conceivable only amid such impossibility. The trilogy, more than the rest of Beckett's writing, blends a modernist yearning for a selfhood plucked free of time and the social world, with what is perhaps a Post-Modernist sense of the extent to which selfhood is inextricably bound to discourse, and thus to time and to others. This combination of elements, presented relentlessly and simultaneously, gives the trilogy its pivotal place in twentieth-century writing.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

<sup>1</sup>Molloy and Moran do "report" to someone else, but though this third party (Gaber or "them") may compel the narrative, both Molloy and Moran write the narrative themselves. In *Watt*, it is Sam who has composed the narrative we read, on the basis of Watt's utterances.

<sup>2</sup>Since a narrative can combine events in any imaginable order, what is a "narrative order"? Connor seems to mean the order of autobiography here, as his use of the "stages of life" criteria suggests. It is significant that the texts under discussion *overthrow* this order, so essential to the *Bildungsroman* tradition in the novel.

## CONCLUSION

Beckett's stories and novels are, to use Robbe-Grillet's term, "limit texts." In their continuous focus upon the refinements of a singular artistic project, they move toward one of many frontiers for fiction. In doing so, they have perhaps moved further from readers. The works treated here certainly have a reputation as formidable texts, even as insufferably pessimistic and gloomy ones, and an analysis like the foregoing does little to challenge this perception. Yet perhaps one thing that has driven the immense volume of commentary on Beckett is the sense, among those who do read the texts, of something to be enjoyed--if only a way in could be opened up. Attempts, such as the one offered in this study, to provide a paradigm which helps organize the experience of reading Beckett's novels, share a secret hope that they will somehow lead more readers into the territories they try to map out. Perhaps this is an operation performable only by oneself, for oneself--yet the "ways in" mapped out by previous readers of Beckett have guided this one, and so each record of a reading perhaps aids in the next.

This study has attempted to do more than chronicle a reading, of course: it aligns Beckett's explorations of discourse and the self with those of writers in theoretical disciplines as well. Beckett's writing thus participates in a cultural movement that extends far beyond the practice of fiction, and includes work by all of those who, like the novelist, wish to examine the nature of the self and the limits faced by those who wish to speak of it. This is why Beckett's fiction invites a commentary that draws upon the work of those branches of psychoanalysis, philosophy, and literary theory that place the powers and limits of language at their center. Beckett's fiction contains the recognition of language's power to construct and configure subjectivity, by implicating named speakers in an intersubjective web, as well as the paradoxical necessity for language to suppress its own arbitrariness, its inessential quality. The resulting dynamic of lack and excess creates a powerful sense that, on one hand, language may be a closed system of finite elements, like the furniture in Watt's room, to be infinitely re-arranged. On the other hand, language may conceal, and thus potentially lead us toward, something silenced, something outside naming and outside intersubjectivity. The image of such a transcendence of the closed system haunted Murphy, and re-emerges in *The Unnamable*, showing that the idea never entirely leaves Beckett's fiction in the period studied here. The tension

between these two sides of a paradox--words that are all surface, or simply objects in a closed system, versus words that might contain "a voice from elsewhere"--generates the movement of the trilogy. In *Molloy* (as in *Watt*) it seems that Beckett has chosen to confine himself to the first half of the dilemma, but as the trilogy progresses the (tormenting) desire for transcendence, for an "elsewhere" outside the closed system, returns. Such are the abstractions derivable from a reading of Beckett's fiction. However, the works studied here give these insights into language and the self a texture, as only fiction can do, revealing both the profound irony and the humorous potential of an intellectual atmosphere that remains largely our own.

This study began by describing the difficulties of writing after Joyce, especially after "Work in Progress." I pointed out that these difficulties were real only for those who felt them, as I argue Beckett did. It is less fruitful to apply this model of response to Beckett's work after the trilogy, as the emergence of the drama opens up a new field, one freer from Joyce's shadow. (Certainly Joyce's *Exiles* casts a much smaller shadow in the history of drama than *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake* have cast over the history of the novel.) In the field of drama it is Beckett himself to whom many later dramatists have struggled to respond. But what of the response to Beckett's fiction? In this area, has the work studied here become a monument, an overwhelming ques-

tion to which later writers must find their own answers? Clearly this is not as much the case for novelists after Beckett, as it was for Beckett himself writing after Joyce. Despite what I believe is Beckett's sense of the necessity to reply to Joyce, many post-Joyce writers and readers did go on as if there had been no *transition*, so to speak. An analogous situation applies after Beckett. Many of us will continue to write, in fact have no choice but to write, as if "language [came] to us more or less ready made to represent the world" (Kennedy 2). All the reminders and qualifications in the world cannot outweigh our practice in this. What is the alternative? To become a Molloy? For those, both critics and artists, who do feel the weight of Beckett's example, Molloy's voice will always murmur in the background that "whatever I said it was never enough or always too much" (34).

WORKS CITED AND CONSULTED

- Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy: Purgatorio*. Trans. Charles S. Singleton. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.
- Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy* (Ben Brewster, trans.). New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.
- Anzier, Didier, Avigdor Arikha et. al. *Samuel Beckett: roman, théâtre, images, acteurs, mises en scène, voix, musiques*. *Revue d'esthétique numero hors série 1990*. Paris: Jean Michel Place, 1990.
- Astro, Alan. *Understanding Samuel Beckett*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990.
- Bair, Deirdre. *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.
- Bakhtin. M.M. *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. M. Holquist. Trans. M. Holquist and C. Emerson. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Barthes, Roland. *Writing Degree Zero*. New York: Beacon, 1970.
- Beckett, Samuel. "Dante . . . Bruno. Vico . . . Joyce." *Our Exagmination Round His Factification For Incamination of Work in Progress*. Paris: Shakespeare and Co., 1929, and London: Faber and Faber, 1929.
- . *Malone Dies*. New York: Grove Press, 1956.
- . *Molloy*. New York: Grove Press, 1955.
- . *More Pricks than Kicks*. New York: Grove Press, 1972.
- . *Murphy*. London: John Calder, 1963.
- . *The Unnamable*. New York: Grove Press, 1958.

- . *Watt*. London: John Calder, 1963.
- Beckett, Samuel, and Duthuit, Georges. *Proust. Three Dialogues*. London: John Calder, 1965.
- Benveniste, Emile. *Problems in General Linguistics*. Trans. Mary Meek. Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971.
- Bernal, Olga. *Langage et fiction dans le roman de Beckett*. Paris: Gallimard, 1969.
- Bloom, Harold, ed. *Samuel Beckett's Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*. New York, New Haven, Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1988.
- Brater, Enoch. *Why Beckett*. New York, N.Y.: Thames and Hudson, 1989.
- Bruns, Gerald. *Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language: A Critical and Historical Study*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974.
- Büttner, Gottfried. *Samuel Beckett's Novel Watt*. Joseph P. Dolan, translator. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984.
- Carroll, David. *The Subject in Question: the languages of theory and the strategies of fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Chambers, Ross. "Le texte difficile et son lecteur." *Problèmes actuels de la lecture*. Paris: Clancier-Guénaud, 1984.
- Cohn, Ruby. *Samuel Beckett: the comic gamut*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1962.
- Connor, Steven. *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988.
- Coward, Rosalind, and John Ellis. *Language and Materialism: developments in semiology and the theory of the subject*. London: Routledge, 1977.
- de Saussure, Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966.

- Dearlove, Joyce E. *Accommodating the Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Non-Relational Art*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1982.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. New York: Viking, 1977.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- . *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins: 1974, 1976.
- DiPierro, John C. *Structures in Beckett's Watt*. York, South Carolina: French Literature Publications Company, 1981.
- Ellmann, Richard. *James Joyce*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959, revised 1982.
- . *Four Dubliners: Wilde, Yeats, Joyce and Beckett*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987.
- Eysteinsson, Astradur. *The Concept of Modernism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Federman, Raymod and Fletcher, John. *Samuel Beckett, his works and his critics: an essay in bibliography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970.
- . *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965.
- Felman, Shoshana. *Writing and Madness (Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis)*. Trans. Martha Noel Evans. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.
- Fitch, Brian T. *Dimensions, structures, et textualité dans la trilogie romanesque de Beckett*. Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1977.
- Frye, Northrop. *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.
- Gluck, Barbara. *Beckett and Joyce: Friendship and Fiction*. London: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1979.

- Glucksberg, Charles. *The Self in Modern Literature*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1963.
- Gontarski, S.E. *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism*. New York: Grove Press, 1986.
- Graver, Lawrence and Federman, R. *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.
- Guggenheim, Peggy. *Out of this Century: Confessions of an Art Addict*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1979.
- Hassan, Ihab H. *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett*. New York: Knopf, 1968.
- Hayman, David. "Quest for Meaninglessness: The Boundless Poverty of Molloy." Sutherland, W.O, editor, *Six Contemporary Novels*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962.
- Hesla, David. *The Shape of Chaos: an interpretation of the art of Samuel Beckett*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1871.
- Hoffman, Frederick J. *Samuel Beckett: the language of self*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Parody*. New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Hutchinson, Peter. *Games Authors Play*. London: Methuen, 1983.
- Iser, Wolfgang. *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.
- . "The Pattern of Negativity in Beckett's Prose." *The Georgia Review* 29 (Fall 1975) No. 3: 706-719.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject." *Yale French Studies* 55-56 (1977): 338-395.
- Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. New York: Viking, 1964.

- . *Dubliners*. New York: Viking, 1969.
- . *Finnegans Wake*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982.
- Joyce, Stanislaus. *My Brother's Keeper*. London: Faber, 1958.
- Kennedy, Andrew K. *Samuel Beckett*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Kenner, Hugh. "Art in a Closed Field," *Virginia quarterly Review*, 38 (1962): 597-613.
- . *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study*. New York: Grove Press, 1963.
- . *Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett: The Stoic Comedians*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1962.
- Kermode, Frank. "Beckett, Snow and Pure Poverty." *Puzzles and Epiphanies: Essays and Reviews 1958-1961*. New York: Chilmark Press, 1963.
- Knowlson, James. *Samuel Beckett: an exhibition held at Reading University Library, May to July 1971*. London: Turret Books, 1971.
- Kostelanetz, Richard, ed. *On Contemporary Literature*. New York: Avon, 1964.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits: A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Tavistock, 1977.
- . *Seminar I (1953-54): Freud's Papers on Technique*. Trans. Jacques-Alain Miller. New York: Norton, 1988.
- . *Seminar II (1954-55): The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Jacques-Alain Miller. New York: Norton, 1988.
- . *Seminar III: Psychoses*. Trans. Jacques-Alain Miller. New York: Norton, 1981.
- . *The Language of the Self: the function of language in psychoanalysis*. Trans. Anthony Wilden. New York: Dell, 1968.

- Lecerclé, Jean-Jacques. *Philosophy Through the Looking Glass: language, nonsense, desire*. Lasalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1985.
- Levy, Eric P. *Beckett and the Voice of Species: a study of the prose fiction*. Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1980.
- Locatelli, Carla. *Unwording the World: Samuel Beckett's Prose Works after the Nobel Prize*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990.
- Lukacs, Georg. *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*. London: Merlin Press, 1963.
- Magnan, Jean-Marie. "Jalons I: Samuel Beckett ou les chaînes et relais du néant." *Cahiers du Sud* I (1963), 73-80.
- Moorjani, Angela. *Abysmal Games in the Novels of Samuel Beckett*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 1982.
- Morot-Sir, E. et al. editors, *Samuel Beckett: the Art of Rhetoric*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 1974.
- Morrison, Kristin. "Defeated Sexuality in the novels and plays of Samuel Beckett." *Comparative Drama* 14: 18-34 (Spring 1980).
- Nadeau, Maurice. "Samuel Beckett, l'humour et le néant." *La Littérature Présente*. Paris: Correa, 1955: 307-308.
- Picard, Michel. "Littérature/Lecture/Jeu." in Picard, Michel, ed. *La Lecture Littéraire*. Actes du Colloque tenu a Reims du 14 au 16 juin 1984. Paris: Clancier-Guénaud, 1984.
- Picard, Michel. *La Lecture Littéraire*. Actes du Colloque tenu a Reims du 14 au 16 juin 1984. Paris: Clancier-Guénaud, 1984.
- Pound, Ezra. "Vorticism" in *Gaudier-Brezka* (1916). New York: New Directions, 1960, 94-106.
- Rabaté, Jean Michel, ed. *Beckett avant Beckett: essais sur le jeune Beckett, 1930-45*. Paris: Presses de l'École Normale Supérieure, 1984.

- Rabinowitz, Rubin. *The Development of Samuel Beckett's Fiction*. Chicago: University of Illinois, 1984.
- Reiss, Timothy J. *The Discourse of Modernism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.
- Richter, David H. *The Critical Tradition*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.
- Robbe-Grillet, Alain. *For a New Novel: essays on fiction*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Grove, 1965.
- Said, Edward. *The World, the Text and the Critic*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Seaver, Richard, ed. *I Can't Go On: I'll Go On: a selection from Samuel Beckett's work*. New York: Grove, 1976.
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. London: Methuen & Co., 1982.
- Shenker, Israel. "Moody Man of Letters" (interview with Samuel Beckett). *New York Times*, May 6, 1956, Section 2: 3.
- Simpson, David ed. *the Origins of Modern Critical thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Smith, Joseph and Kerrigan, William, editors. *Interpreting Lacan. Psychiatry and the Humanities*, vol. 6. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1983.
- Smith, Joseph H. editor. *The World of Samuel Beckett. Psychiatry and the Humanities*, vol. 12. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.
- Smith, Paul. *Discerning the Subject*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988.
- Sollers, Phillipe. *L'Écriture et l'expérience des limites*. Paris: Collection "Points de la question," Éditions de Seuil, 1971.
- St. John Butler, L. and Robin Davis, editors. *Rethinking Beckett: a collection of critical essays*. New York: St. Martins Press, 1990.
- St. Pierre, Paul. "Langues et langage dans cinq textes de Beckett." Diss. University of Toronto, 1977.

- Stark, John O. *The Literature of Exhaustion: Borges, Nabokov, and Barth*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1974.
- Stein, Gertrude. *Look at me Now and Here I Am; Writings and Lectures 1909-45*. London: Viking Penguin, 1971.
- Stewart, Susan. *Nonsense: aspects of intertextuality in folklore and literature*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.
- Strauss, Walter. "Dante's Belacqua and Beckett's Tramps." *Comparative Literature* XI, 3 (summer 1959): 250-261.
- Tysdahl, B. *Joyce and Ibsen: a Study in Literary Influence*. New York: Humanities Press Inc., 1968.
- Weld, Jaqueline Bograd. *Peggy, the Wayward Guggenheim*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1986.
- Wilson, Edmund. *Axel's Castle*. New York: Scribner's, 1931.
- Yeats, William Butler. *W.B. Yeats: The Collected Poems*. Finneran, Richard J., editor. London, Macmillan, 1983.
- Zurbrugg, Nicholas. *Beckett and Proust*. Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe, 1988.