

"ABSENCE SUPREME": NARRATIVE  
STRATEGIES IN  
BECKETT'S POST-TRILOGY PROSE.

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BECKETT'S POST-TRILOGY PROSE.

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the ways in which Beckett, in his post-trilogy fiction, challenges the "meaning-ful" structures of the traditional novel (character, plot, action) and offers the reader, in their place, new narrative strategies. These strategies (mnemonic, canonic, catechetical, recursive) are an experiment with linguistic and narrative structures and can be seen to "dis-close" what Beckett terms as the chaos and flux behind form.

Chapter II establishes those sorts of "meaning-ful" structures which give form to the chaos of experience, structures which, according to Frank Kermode, make sense of man's life, both in myth and in fiction, by enabling him to place a "telos" on nothingness. In this way, man constructs a world filled with teleological sequence, and consequently, "objectifies" and "spatializes" his life by insisting that there is concordance and consonance in the world.

Chapters III and IV deal primarily with the "syntax of weakness" and the "rhetoric of abstraction" that are characteristic of Beckett's narrative strategies. On the levels of language and narrative, Beckett's prose can be

seen to subvert the traditional form of fiction (sequential progression of plot; motivated action; character development and presentation; ordered fictional universes with space-time co-ordinates; and linearity) and to deprive language of its accustomed, grammatical form.

Chapter V shows the sort of fictional world we are left with when such human consonances (normal linguistic structures and ordered fictional universes) are removed. The reader is denied that traditional fictional world, a world which, as Beckett shows us, is illusory, and which both defies category and works to dismantle--de-construct--its form.

Beckett's fiction becomes all the more provocative when we see that his denial of closure in fiction--the formal need to have beginnings and ends--opens up the hermeneutic potential of the text. Readers, accustomed to more traditional narrative structures, are involved in a dialectic when they attempt to impose order and form on a body of language that, replete with ambiguities and abstractions, defies that impulse to establish consonance and continues to sabotage the reader's pre-conditioned impulse to construct meaning.

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## INTRODUCTION

"... I don't know, I'll never know,  
in the silence you don't know, ..."

Unlike Joyce that "superb manipulator," who could make "words do the absolute maximum of work," Beckett professes not to feel master of his material. In drawing a distinction between himself and Joyce, Beckett describes the aesthetic code within which he works:

The more Joyce knew the more he could. He's tending toward omniscience and omnipotence as an artist. I'm working with impotence, ignorance. I don't think impotence has been exploited in the past. There seems to be a kind of esthetic axiom that expression is an achievement-- must be an achievement. My little exploration is that whole zone of being that has always been set aside by artists as something unquestionable --as something by definition incompatible with art.

I think anyone nowadays who pays the slightest attention to his own experience finds it is the experience of a non-knower, a non-can-er. 1

Here, Beckett rejects the type of art that defines the artistic endeavour as an "achievement," in that such art gives rise to a vision of universal harmony and meaning. In Joyce's fiction,<sup>2</sup> the achievement would be the epiphany.

Diametrically opposed to such a vision of art, says Beckett, are ignorance and impotence, the "unquestionable" elements which some authors designate as incompatible with "the esthetic axiom." Yet these elements of ignorance and impotence are what interest Beckett. According to him, the art that claims to disclose omniscience and omnipotence conspires with the illusion that harmony and order are naturally inherent in the universe. In fact, argues Beckett, when stripped of such illusions, man's experience--his reality--is shown to be rooted in "the flux beneath the form," in the aporia of ignorance, and in the abulia of impotence.

From such a favouring of those "unartistic" properties, Beckett has created a very unconventional fictional world, one which is not governed by the laws of harmony or traditional form. In the "residual" or post-trilogy<sup>3</sup> works, in particular, the Beckettian world is presented as indeterminate, obscure, and entropic, a world which Malone of Malone Dies earlier described in terms of "forms...in which the unchanging seeks relief from its formlessness" (p.197). In this inchoate realm of nothingness, which is not unlike that projected by "black hole" theorists, as we shall see, we are in a world of empty and formless space from which the contours of the phenomenal world--the co-ordinates of space and time--are removed. This

region lacks objective reality, teleological concordance and even determinate elements. Instead, it is fundamentally unknowable, "unquestionable," indeterminate, devoid of chronology, and unconstrained by the normal contingencies of space as well as time.

This conception of a universe, antithetical in many ways to our own, creates certain technical difficulties--for both author and critic--in terms of finding an appropriate terminology capable of creating and describing it. The phenomenal world, which we encase in a space-time grid of "meaningful" connections, tends to require a language which reflects its natural reification and objectification of life into form, that is, into units with beginnings and ends. Consequently, even "nothingness" can take on meaning: elements can be counterpointed into significant formal units. Thus, since Beckett's fictional world essentially challenges this formal ordering impulse, the sort of terminology normally relied on to isolate the properties of this region tends to be negational: for instance, non-being, meaninglessness, timelessness.

In his essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" in The Dialogic Imagination, Mikhail Bakhtin<sup>4</sup> employs the label "chronotope" (literally "time

space") to express "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (p.84). Although **originally** a mathematical term coined by Einstein, "chronotope" exemplifies the type of terminology that has been used by literary critics, but that Beckett's fiction forces us to re-evaluate. Chronotopes fuse "temporal and spatial indicators" into "one carefully thought out, concrete whole" so that time "thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible," and space, likewise, "becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (p.84).

Beckett's world is of another order. Therefore, the spatio-temporal model described in Chapter II is, in fact, counter to this chronotopic model offered by Bakhtin. Beckett's world seems better served by other theories, such as those of Richard Palmer,<sup>5</sup> William V. Spanos,<sup>6</sup> and Frank Kermode.<sup>7</sup> In their work, the origin or source of the world model is suggested by man's desire to systematize the formless world and to make it conform to a structural pattern, a picture that is unified and concordant. This artistic chronotope is what Beckett dismantles and "discloses" in his challenge to form (in space, time, and narrative). We return then to a conception of the world before it was formed, or before it was structured by man

to accord with his patterns of space and time.

For Bakhtin, narrative time is either a highly developed type of adventure time (p.87) (as the hero undergoes ordeals), or it can consist of "everyday time" (the ancient hero's "movement through space, his pilgrimages, lose that abstract technical character" and "space is filled with real, living meaning, and forms a crucial relationship with the hero and his fate" so that "everyday life" is realised within it [p.120]). The third and final temporal category described by Bakhtin is the episodic, one that encompasses everyday life (ancient biography and autobiography). Into this category falls the Augustinian "soliloquia" "solitary conversations with oneself" and the biography in which the "seeker's" life "is broken down into precise and well-marked epochs or steps" (p.130). Beckett's narratives, especially the later prose, do not abide by any of these principles. Temporal divisions, in which life progresses on a horizontal line, in units, are abandoned in favour of vertical time, "the synchrony of a single moment" (p.157). Hence, diachrony becomes synchronized.

The early novels--Murphy and Watt--are, therefore, important to any study of those features which challenge novelistic conventions of space and time.<sup>8</sup> In

both of these early works, we are presented with fictional worlds which preceded and anticipated the author's presentation of the rather different universe just described. If we take the spatio-temporal world of Murphy (1935) --with its occasional lapses into the "hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe" (p.107) --and compare it with the timeless world of Company (1980) --one which perpetually recalls "the close of the day when in darkness Christ at the ninth hour cried and died" --certain stylistic links become apparent. In terms of the form and content of space, time, character, and plot, we see (a) that Beckett is increasingly concerned with what the critics Knowlson and Pilling refer to as "ontospeleology,"<sup>9</sup> or the archaeological investigation of the ontological self, and, therefore, that he is less and less concerned with the traditional novelistic elements of character and plot; (b) that this "ontospeleology," or excavation, involves the contraction, abstraction, and internalization of the novel's spatio-temporal world into the inner surreal world of pure consciousness and cerebration. This abandonment of character, plot, and fictional world obviously will result in the subversion of schematized formal plot structures and of chronotopic forms.

In a literary historical framework, Beckett's



later work can be seen to mark, both in style and in content, an "ingression." Beckett can be described as exemplary of what Joe Bellamy, in his introduction to Superfiction or the American Story Transformed, calls "the contemporary superfictionist":

In traditional fiction, we meet 'characters' who are looking out -- at society, manners, plots; in the early Twentieth Century novel of consciousness or modernist short fiction, we are inside a character (or characters) looking out. In the world of the contemporary superfictionist, we are mostly inside a character (or characters) looking in. 10

Beckett further internalizes this process by excising all those character traits to which we normally become attached in fiction. In fact, character itself, in the post-trilogy prose, is shown to exist as only plural or disparate figments within the fiction-making processes of the mind. No longer bound to the phenomenal world, the self can neither be contained by nor contain any permanent form. Each gesture towards self-identification only reveals the futility and insignificance of making any such gesture.

The trilogy can be said to be the point of connection between Beckett's earlier loyalty to characters such as Murphy, Watt, Molloy, and Malone and their stories

and his subsequent revocation of all of that and of the chronotopic, traditionally meaningful world. In The Unnamable, Beckett actually goes beyond the dimension of "character looking in" mentioned by Bellamy. The voice is caught in an "inverted spiral," and occupies the vortical point between two universes, the phenomenal world and its negative: "Two holes and me in the middle, slightly choked. Or a single one, entrance and exit, where the words swarm and jostle like ants, hasty and indifferent, bringing nothing, taking nothing away, too light to leave a mark" (p.355). Involved in self-plagiarism, "blathering away," yet simultaneously, "bereft of purpose," "of all reason to exist" (p.385), the voice at first perceives himself "in words, made of words, others' words" (p.386). But no sooner does he identify and create a fictional world than "everything yields, opens, ebbs, flows, like flakes," "meeting, mingling, falling asunder" (p.386). Insubstantial and dis-located, the voice becomes "a wordless thing in an empty place, a hard shut dry cold black place, where nothing stirs, nothing speaks" (p.386), and where, ultimately, he becomes "the absentee again" (p.413).

Each of the techniques employed by Beckett to open up or "dis-close" this other possible world in the later fiction can already be found in The Unnamable, the work which

directly precedes Texts for Nothing. The post-trilogy fiction contains within it three major narrative strategies with which Beckett had earlier experimented. These strategies, which are analysed further in Chapter III, become central to his fiction in the manner in which they undermine the structures and sequences of traditional fiction. These are the antiphonal or catechetical strategy of Texts for Nothing, the mnemonic formula of How It Is, and the canonic structural principle of Six Residua, For To End Yet Again and Other Fizzles, All Strange Away, and Company. Of course, each of these works actually contains two or three of these structural features. The emphasis placed here on one strategy, as opposed to the others, will therefore vary according to the respective works.

One of the most direct ways in which Beckett reverses the traditional 'sense-making' structures of prose is by subverting the natural teleological, sequential progression of the novel's action in time. In addition, he also disrupts the grammatical and syntactical structures of prose, by extending the associative limits of language so that language resembles stream of consciousness. We enter not only the realm of intellection, but also that of heuristic thinking, in which, proceeding by trial and error, the mind seeks to

understand itself, but cannot (in the end) determine the nature of its being. In Texts, for example, the voice questions "Where would I go, if I could go, who would I be, if I could be?" (Text IV, p.91). All that he can affirm is that he exists, paradoxically, "in the pit of my inexistence, of his, of ours, there's a simple answer" (Text IV, p.91).

Of these three strategies favoured by Beckett in the later phase, it is the antiphonal or catechetical one that we see in the "Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning" (p.291) situation of The Unnamable. This clearly foreshadows the techniques and contents of the fictional realm of Texts. In this latter piece, the self speculates on the enigma of his universe: "How are the intervals filled between these apparitions?" (p.101). The result of such questioning is a series of hypothetical statements made by the "speaker" which only reveal an incapacity to determine the world's ontological status:

What can have become then of the  
tissues I was, I can see them no  
more, feel them no more, flaunting  
and fluttering all about .... Did  
I ever believe in them, did I ever  
believe I was there, somewhere in  
that ragbag, that's more the line  
of inquiry." (p.103)

By offering only a hypothetical world, one in which the "speaker" does not know what or where he is, Beckett

subverts the basis of the traditional concept of character within fiction. The Beckettian self is then seen to be as cryptic and as paradoxical as its environs.

In the traditional realist novel, the thoughts and actions of the protagonist are specific; they form a coherent plot pattern. In the case of Texts, the only action is that of naming "this unnamable thing." Because the "speaker" is in a questioning state of "wonder," he cannot even form a coherent thought:

And yet I wonder, whenever the  
hour returns when I have to wonder  
that, if the wheel in my head turns,  
I wonder, so given am I to thinking  
with my blood, or if it merely  
swings, like a balance-wheel in its  
case, a minute to and fro, seeing  
the immensity to measure and that  
heads are only wound up once, so  
given am I to thinking with my  
breath. (pp.108-9)

This antiphonal or catechetical format persists throughout the course of Texts, signaling the "speaker's" inability to determine any sense in the universe. The second strategy, the mnemonic formula, is mainly developed in How It Is in order to convey other aspects of the sort of meaningless, hypothetical world inhabited by the voice. In this work, the self does not exist in a phenomenal world, but in an abstract and formless continuum, in the remembrance of "how it was" before Pim,

with Pim, and after Pim. These three stages indicating past ("before"), present ("with"), and future ("after") are aligned with the present, "How it is." The cycle of time from past to future is contained within memory, within a world that no longer exists. Because the self in How It Is lives in the evocations of the past, actually in a "quotation" of the past, he, in effect, denies his present and his presence. The text ends with: "good good end at last of part three and last that's how it was end of quotation after Pim how it is" (p.147). The form of his "quotation" is the only form and presence he has. Yet, although the mind naturally gives rise to forms, these forms dissolve, for the Beckettian self is ultimately incapable of either sustaining or accommodating them.

What we conclude from this process of recollection is that the only thing knowable about the speaker is his history. His future merely consists of recapitulation and retrospection. Moreover, his life rests in limbo since he only exists, on the one hand, as "the voice qua qua from which I get my life these scraps of life in me when the panting stops" (p.113). On the other hand, this supposed life among "victims" and "tormentors" turns out to be a fallacy. They are "inexistent," and the voice is "the unthinkable first," conceiving fictional figures "numbered 1 to 1000000" and journeying asymptotically on "a closed

curve" (p.117). What he finally admits at the end of his "quotation" is that his recapitulation is really "rumour transmissible ad infinitum in either direction" (p.120).

Inasmuch as the reader is denied the normal progressive growth of character, a growth determined by events constituting an experiential reality, we are made aware of the fact that this fictional self functions as an anti-protagonist. Beckett's unmasking of the form and function of the traditional novelistic protagonist here challenges the related axiom that life is complete and coherent, that it has a sequential, meaningful course and shape--in reality or in art. The mnemonic structuring strategy, in How It Is, therefore draws our attention to a series of dichotomies: illusion/reality, presence/absence, and significance/non-sense. These are dichotomies sustained by the Beckettian life as lived in recollection.

The "speaker" of How It Is denies his presence by his very namelessness. Filtering his very identity through various dissolving forms, he finds he can neither sustain nor accommodate those evanescent forms. Living a hypothetical, detached existence, the "speaker" cannot affirm his presence; he cannot know what he is, or

where he is. By implication, then, the Beckettian self is seen to be absent, and, living in memory, he impotently succumbs to the random fluidity of anamnesis. The random appearance of the unpunctuated text is a kind of textual objective correlative to this state of fluidity. It too undermines the normal, sequential progress of language toward a meaningful, significant statement. By being forced, in reading, to deconstruct the causality of the usual syntactical progression of a text, we become aware of participating in the evocation of a state of non-causality. Although, as the voice tells us, past, present, and future coalesce in a memory of the past, we are also told that "all these calculations yes explanations yes the whole story from beginning to end yes completely false" (p.144). Time exists, but its comforting forms are missing.

The self's evocation of a different mode of existence and his statement that his memory of "how it was" is only a fiction inform us that Beckett is showing us, in the physical publication of words, that language here serves as an archival memory for the self. For the "speaker" to end the "quotation," then, he must indirectly acknowledge and recognize the end of his own personal civilisation. Any fixed value that his words gave to his ideas are erased in the "speaker's" ultimate belief:



all is false, meaningless and absurd."

Company offers an example of the third Beckettian narrative strategy: the canonic style, or echo-chamber effect. This is found in the companion residual pieces For To End Yet Again and Other Fizzles, Six Residua, and "All Strange Away." Here, the heuristic nature of Beckett's work becomes even more evident. "From nought anew" (p.49), "devising figments to temper his nothingness" (p.46), the self fills the void with questions:

For why or? Why in another dark  
or in the same? And whose voice  
asking this? And answers, His  
soever who devises it all ....  
Who asks? And in the end answers  
as above? (p.24)

The "speaker" answers: "Nowhere to be found. Nowhere to be sought. The unthinkable last of all" (p.64). He denies the possibility of presence in the phenomenal world, and therefore, also denies the possibility of his existence as a spatial entity. In indicating only his own absence, he reveals his experience to be that of the Beckettian "non-knower." Each response given in the text, like that of a zen parable, posits an answer based on the unknowability of any answer. Ultimately, we come to realize that this fiction is oriented towards denying sense or meaning, and instead offers the reader a series

of disconfirmations and eclipses: the reader cannot be sure of the significance of the passage, because new evocations delete and replace old ones by undermining their value. In such a way, the text perpetually disconfirms itself; by implication, it negates its formal status, a codified, meaningful whole.

This dismantling of traditional narrative space-time architecture--that significant form offered by character, plot, and causality within the novel--serves to emphasize the "no-thingness" of the fictional elements remaining. The formal, 'sense-making' components of the traditional realist novel are dissolved; offered in their place are what we could call "non-sense-making" structures. The strategies used to create the indeterminate worlds of Texts and How It Is show a clear relation between the recessive quality of these works and the "non-sense-making" disposition of the style. Although we progressively turn the page, we are also made aware that the heuristic quality of both the antiphonal and mnemonic strategies fosters the sense of regression. The progression of the text is not oriented to a logical development of information and meaning, but, instead, to an undermining of meaning. The text, in a sense, can be said to contract, to recede.

The formless zone evoked in Beckett's work subverts the traditional axiom of temporal causality. Chapter III explores the antiphonal, mnemonic, and canonic strategies I have just outlined and makes possible closer consideration of Beckett's fictional language--the way in which a strategy of "dis-closure" is articulated by what can be considered an open syntax and grammar. This is what I have called Beckett's rhetoric of abstraction (see Chapter IV). The stylistic devices used to articulate this open structure of non-closure are those of hyperbation (inversion of word order), parataxis (omission of connectives), anacoluthon (sentence lacking grammatical sequence), and repetition. Many of these devices can be seen in "Ping": "Light heat white planes shining white one only shining white infinite but that known not" (p.43). Each consecutive word here does not satisfactorily qualify the preceding one. The general effect of such rhetorical devices is to disrupt the syntactical flow of the prose and create a kind of grammatical enigma. Such a rupture of the lexical surface of the text--more precisely, a rift in which the reader's grammatical conditioning leads him to expect--promotes a sense of syntactical freedom. Beckett here undermines the mental structures which the reader naturally forms and then places on the text, in

the course of reading. Consequently, meaning--which should develop with the normal progression of the fiction--continually dissolves. By not conforming to set grammatical rules, the text is freed from the strict formal dimensions of a series of grammatical units. The reader is entertained by the riddles of meaning which the syntax momentarily offers.

What we have here is a text in limbo, a work which, because it is open to the influx of meaning, cannot take on any fixed, traditional forms. Consequently, the reader, frustrated by the fiction's tendency to nullify contexts as soon as they are created, turns to alternate means of structuring. He can listen, for instance, to certain resonances in the text: the unpunctuated surface of the printed page is transformed into a script to be heard, in the hope that meaning will arise from an aural rendition of the passage. The reader experiences the work by listening for recurrent rhythms which might reveal significance. Thus, the text is transported into "the active and activating consciousness" of the interpreting reader.<sup>12</sup> It is temporarily liberated from the printed page to become a second text, one that exists in the reader's mind.

In this way, Beckett further distorts that which Frank Kermode refers to as "the sense of an ending," that

self-contained, architectural framework found in traditional narrative. When any written text is transposed from the printed page to the mind of the reader, the result of such a hermeneutic<sup>13</sup> transaction, according to William Spanos is as follows: the reified text, a "graspable icon," emerges explicitly as verbal text, a text to be heard. Transformed into an "event," and experienced hermeneutically as event, the fiction comes to be entertained within the atemporal mind of the reader, within his or her reality. Annexed to the reader's/ listener's cerebral process, it exists there as a reality. In Beckett's world, this hermeneutic truism is made explicit and functional.

What we find then is a narrative and a language that have destroyed their own sustaining forms and conventions. The voice in Beckett's fiction is unsure of the nature of reality; he invokes this through the grammatical uncertainty surrounding the sequence of words. This sort of inverse, fictional world, in which the language creating it is freed of sequential necessity and causality, is self-cancelling and self-negating. In Chapter V, we will see how such a world denies notions of stable meaning and permanent value.

These sorts of perplexities, riddles, and paradoxes within the post-trilogy fiction have provoked

exasperated responses from critics, responses leading to a questioning of the style, and ultimately, the genre of Beckett's work. Such exasperation is not dissimilar to that felt by the critics and readers, in the early years of this century, when confronted with Joyce's stream-of-consciousness novels, especially the Work in Progress (later Finnegans Wake). In Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress,<sup>14</sup> Beckett defends Joyce from the accusations of those critics who state that his work "is not written in English": "It is not written at all. It is not to be read--or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not about something; it is that something itself."<sup>15</sup>

Beckett's retort here serves the dual purpose of supporting not only Joyce's prose but also Beckett's own cryptologicistic style, "the savage economy of hieroglyphics." Beckett's work is not imitative of reality, as in the Aristotelian mimetic tradition; it is reality. Chapter VI looks at the question of genre in this light. Because Beckett's later prose is so telegraphic and compact, on the one hand, and yet, so ambiguous, fluid, and multi-directional, on the other, we are forced as Brian Fitch says "d'adopter une approche plus souple."<sup>16</sup> This approach would depend on "la participation d'une subjectivité, la nôtre, sans laquelle le texte resterait muet" (p.12). The literary

work of art only becomes/is transformed as such when it is beheld, appreciated. Art demands, relies on subjective participation, and human understanding and awareness (p.12). The ambiguity and the challenge to form of Beckett's post-trilogy texts suggest that a less structural and more hermeneutic approach might prove fruitful. It is through the interpretive act of reading that the static text is liberated from the printed page. The fixed written word is transformed into the verbal, temporal process of the interpreting mind of the reader. This becomes, therefore, an experience of transforming space into time. Here, Spanos notes:

...the interpreter also allows the 'object' of interpretation to undergo a liberating or, better, an e-man-cipating metamorphosis: the reified text, the text that the privileged Medusa eye of the metaphysical interpreter "looks at" and petrifies, and thus turns into something present-at-hand-- a "graspable" icon (or Euclidean map) --now emerges explicitly as verbal text--a text to be heard--from its context in the realm of deposited knowledge. It becomes, that is, an event in my temporal horizon of circumspect care, an event I experience hermeneutically, as event, in the sense ...of dis-covering the temporal being that spatialization covers over or conceals. 17

To move, as I have in this study, from "structure," to "strategy" is a hermeneutic tactic that seems the only

appropriate way to deal with the Beckettian texts' constant subversion of forms and structures--those of time, space, narrative, language, and consciousness. To see life and language in terms of its relation to an end, or "telos," is to think in the light of ultimate purposes or goals. This teleological process entails a structural procedure; it is a natural human imposition of form and limits upon experience, in the name of comprehension. In the novel genre, characterization and plot sequence work to fix and impose form on the contingency of experience. Beckett defies this impulse to formalization, this desire to give structure to what is "no-thing." Instead, he deconstructs experiential, narrative, and linguistic forms, thereby opening them up to new possibilities.

This is Beckett's subversive strategy of "dis-closure": in the post-trilogy fiction, narrative forms become arbitrary; language becomes ambiguous. The text is always plural and diffuse; beginnings and ends negate each other; sequences are reversed. According to Allan Wilde,<sup>18</sup> this "Bossanova style," or "ludic" fiction, operates on the level of abstraction. An abstraction, he comments, "frees fiction from the representational and the need to imitate some version of reality other than its own, so improvisation liberates it [fiction] from any a priori order and allows it to discover new sequences and interconnections." This too is the "dis-closed" universe of Beckett's later fiction.



## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup>Cited in Judith Dearlove, Accommodating the Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Nonrelational Art (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1982), p.6. There seems to be some confusion around the source of this quotation. For classification, I refer to Dearlove's footnote: "Israel Shenker, 'Moody Man of Letters: A Portrait of Samuel Beckett, Author of the Puzzling Waiting for Godot.'" New York Times, 6 May 1956, Section 2, p.3. Deirdre Bair points out in Samuel Beckett: A Biography (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p.651, fn.22, that it is problematic whether the phrasing in this interview is Beckett's or Shenker's. Bair quotes a letter sent to her by Shenker which says that he had been careful not to say anywhere in the article that he had actually interviewed Beckett, but he had used an obvious literary device in order to write it as one long quotation of Beckett's speech and thought.

<sup>2</sup>James Joyce A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973). Here, Stephen Dedalus, the Joycean artist, comments on the experience felt by the artist when the esthetic image is first conceived in his imagination: "The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure" (p.213).

<sup>3</sup>References to Beckett's "residual" fiction do not relate specifically to Six Residua, but to that corpus of short fiction subsequent to How It Is and Texts for Nothing: For To End Yet Again and Other Fizzles, All Strange Away, "Still," Company. Because of the fragmentary nature of this fiction, the respective works will be considered in terms of a combined whole. Examples drawn from the residual fiction will be used accordingly to describe its canonic structural pattern. Less emphasis will be placed on the **differences** The Beckettian self, presented as voice or speaker, will be referred to in the masculine since that is the gender used in the texts.

<sup>4</sup>Edited by Michael Holquist; translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981). Henceforward all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>5</sup>Richard Palmer, "Postmodernity and Hermeneutics," Boundary 2, 5 (Winter, 1977), pp.363-93.

<sup>6</sup>William V. Spanos, "Breaking the Circle: Hermeneutics as Dis-Closure," Boundary 2, 5 (Winter, 1977), pp.423-453.

<sup>7</sup>Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

<sup>8</sup>See Edwin Muir's The Structure of the Novel (London: The Hogarth Press, Ltd., 1957), cited in The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. Robert Murphy Davis (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., (1969)). According to Muir, "the imaginative world of the dramatic novel is in Time, the imaginative world of the character novel is in Space. In the one, this roughly is the argument, Space is more or less given, and the action is built up in Time; in the other, Time is assumed, and the action is a static pattern, continuously redistributed and reshuffled, in Space. It is the fixity and the circumference of the character plot that gives the parts their proportion and meaning; in the dramatic novel it is the progression and resolution of the action (p.229).

<sup>9</sup>Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett (London: John Calder, 1979), p.xiii. Knowlson and Pilling use this term to support their argument that the "late" period of Beckett's literary career involves the "always cerebral artist," one who "has been engaged in an unprecedented archaeological investigation, or better, 'ontospeleology', as Beckett himself describes it." Unfortunately, Knowlson and Pilling do not reveal their source of the term.

<sup>10</sup>Joe David Bellamy, "Introduction," in Superfiction, or the American Story Transformed, ed. Joe David Bellamy (New York: Vintage, 1975), p.8.

<sup>11</sup>Existentialism and Absurdism contradict the idea of life as meaningful and take as first principle the idea that man is cut off from his transcendental and metaphysical roots, roots which imply an underlying teleology, a primum mobile importing meaning and reason into man's life. On this issue, see Martin Esslin's The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1969). Esslin ascribes this tradition to

Beckett and, in his chapter "The Significance of the Absurd" makes critical reference to Nietzsche's Also Sprach Zarathustra, in Werke, II (Munich: Hanser, 1955), p.279. Esslin states: "When Nietzsche's Zarathustra descended from his mountains to preach to mankind, he met a saintly hermit in the forest. This old man invited him to stay in the wilderness rather than go into the cities of men. When Zarathustra asked the hermit how he passed his time in his solitude, he replied: 'I make up songs and I sing them; and when I make up songs I laugh, I weep, and I growl; thus do I praise God.' Zarathustra declined the old man's offer and continued on his journey. But when he was alone, he spoke thus to his heart: 'Can it be possible! This old saint in the forest has not yet heard that God is dead.'" (Esslin, p.350.)

<sup>12</sup> Stanley E. Fish, Self-Consuming Artifacts (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p.401.

<sup>13</sup> Since I will be using the word "Hermeneutics" throughout this thesis, some clarification as to its meaning and use is needed. For classification, I refer to Richard Palmer's book, Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969.) In his explanatory chapter, "The Origins and Three Directions of The Meaning of Hermeneuein-Hermeneia," Palmer says:

The Greek word hermeios referred to the priest at the Delphic Oracle. This word and the more common verb hermeneuein and noun hermeneia point back to the wing-footed messenger-god Hermes, from whose name the words are apparently derived (or vice versa?) Significantly, Hermes is associated with the function of transmuting what is beyond human understanding into a form that human intelligence can grasp. The various forms of the word suggest the process of bringing a thing or situation from unintelligibility to understanding.

Moreover, says Palmer, "something foreign," "separated in time, space, or experience is made familiar, present, comprehensible." In terms of literary interpretation, although the text may be "separated in its subject from us by time, space, [and] language," the task of interpretation is to transform the text into something "intelligible" (pp.13-14).

Important here, is the hermeneutical emphasis on

language as the spoken word:

Saying and oral recitation as "interpretation" remind literary people of a level too many of them tend to discount or even forget. Yet literature derives much of its dynamism from the power of the spoken word. From time immemorial the greater works in language have been meant to be spoken aloud and heard. The powers of spoken language should remind us of an important phenomenon: the weakness of written language. Written language lacks the primordial "expressiveness" of the spoken word. Admittedly, the writing down of language fixes and preserves it, gives it durability, and is the foundation of history (and literature), but at the same time it weakens it. (p.15)

See also Jacques Derrida Of Grammatology, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976). Derrida discusses the relationship between "phonocentrism" and "logocentrism," believing that "the first and last things are the Logos, the word" (Translator's preface, p.lxviii).

<sup>14</sup>Samuel Beckett, "Dante...Bruno. Vico...Joyce," in Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress (London: Faber and Faber, 1929.) Henceforward, this work will be referred to as Our Exag.

<sup>15</sup>Our Exag., pp.14-15.

<sup>16</sup>Brian T. Fitch, Dimensions, structures et textualité dans la trilogie romanesque de Beckett (Paris: Lettres modernes, 1977), p.8. Henceforward, all further page references will be placed in parentheses in the text.

<sup>17</sup>Spanos, p.445.

<sup>18</sup>"Ludic Fiction," Boundary 2, Fall (1976), p.50.

## CHAPTER I

### The Literary and Critical Context of the Post-trilogy Prose.

Finding the figure in the carpet:  
"... it is a kind of humour on  
his part to divert you a little  
bit, to put you on the wrong  
scent." 1

Beckett's earliest substantial fiction is Dream of Fair to Middling Women<sup>2</sup> which still remains unpublished because Beckett considers it "immature and unworthy" (Bair, p.146). In fact, this piece is often considered to be related to the collection of short stories, entitled More Pricks than Kicks, published in 1934. Yet, as Deirdre Bair notes, characters, exclamations, phrases, and descriptions found in Dream of Fair to Middling Women are also incorporated in all of Beckett's other prose works. Even the well-known phrase, "nothing to be done," with which Waiting for Godot (1953) opens, derives from Dream of Fair to Middling Women. We can therefore assume that More Pricks than Kicks is not that much closer to Dream of Fair to Middling Women than other prose fiction (Bair, p.146).

Apparently, one reason for Beckett's resistance to publication of Dream of Fair to Middling Women is that the work is filled with satirical sketches of many of Beckett's

acquaintances and friends.

Dream of Fair to Middling Women was evidently written because the author needed money. On completing the manuscript, however, Beckett discovered that it was too long for magazines, and that it would need extensive revision for him to adapt it to serialization. These were not the only problems. The references to wet dreams, masturbation, rape, and illicit affairs rendered the work unacceptable for publication in Ireland and, since it was written in English, publication in Paris was equally unlikely. Beckett's final choice was London, but there too the manuscript was rejected by the company Beckett liked to refer to as "Shatton and Windup"<sup>3</sup> (in Bair, p.146).

In this early work, Beckett is quite traditional in his use of character, action, and geographical location. However, we are also introduced to Beckett's constant and favourite topics: silence, thought, and the nature of fiction. This last emphasis on the nature of fiction, becomes especially relevant to our study of the narrative strategies in the post-trilogy prose when Belacqua, the protagonist, based on Dante's Lutemaker, muses on the types of fiction that he enjoys, and makes derogatory remarks on what he considers to be bad fiction. Into this latter category he places the Balzacian, traditional realistic novel, and attacks Balzac's control and precision

in characterization, concluding that he [Balzac] has merely reduced novelistic heroes to automatons, "clockwork cabbages" (in Bair, p.151), without life or freedom.

In his more solipsistic moments, Belacqua entertains his own concept of the novel, one which will "state silences more competently than ever a better man spangled the butterflies of vertigo." The experience of the reader "shall be between the phrases, in the silence communicated by the intervals, not the terms of the statement" (in Bair, p.149). This statement, as well as references to the "accidents of style" that make up, for Belacqua, "the best narrative," can be seen to foreshadow the sort of narrative style we find in the post-trilogy fiction. In the later prose, we actually see those strategies that defy grammatical laws to create a text that seems to consist of such "accidents of style."

During the fall of 1934, Beckett began Murphy, and here again we see Beckett's early loyalty to novelistic conventions in his creation of a traditional picaresque novel filled with characters, story, and action. The Bethlehem Royal Hospital in Beckenham, England was the model for the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat (a psychiatric residence) in Murphy.

The novel was beset by numerous problems surrounding its publication. Bair notes that Houghton Mifflin thought the title too Irish, and that Chapter VI --"Murphy's mind"--was too confusing (p.242.) Beckett retaliated, saying that he refused to remove the section because deletion would disorganize the structure of the work: "The wild and unreal dialogues cannot be removed without darkening the whole thing. They are the comic exaggeration of what elsewhere is expressed in elegy, namely, if you like, the Hermeticism of the spirit.... And of course the narrative is hard to follow. And of course deliberately so."<sup>4</sup> Dent, Faber and Faber, Secker, and Hogarth were among those companies who refused to publish the work (Bair, p.247.) In December, 1937, after two years and forty-two publishers, the work of the "Bawd and Blasphemer from Paris"<sup>5</sup> was finally accepted by Routledge. Translation was begun by Beckett, in collaboration with Alfred Péron, in Paris, and was finished by Beckett alone between 1938 and 1939.

The emphasis on insanity, central to Murphy, is indirectly related to the mental meanderings of Watt which was begun in 1944 and finished in 1946. The creation of the work was itself a therapy during Beckett's schizophrenic breakdown in Roussillon. According to Bair, the work was an attempt to stave off complete mental breakdown, and



offered space and intellectual relief. Not surprisingly then, it sometimes verges on autobiography, and contains elements of landscape similar to Foxrock (p.328). Watt, himself, is unable to differentiate between fantasy-- "what the figure appeared to be, in reality" and "what the figure was, in reality" (p.227).

As with Murphy, Beckett encountered problems trying to publish Watt. When Routledge rejected the manuscript, Beckett asked George Reavey in London to act as his agent. He also committed a copy to Denis Devlin to take to America in the hope of finding a favourable response there (p.340.) It was not until 1953, nine years after the completion of the work, however, that it was finally published in England, by a group who had created a small literary quarterly, Merlin, in Paris. Actually, the work had only gained popularity with the group, because Seaver, the editor, had read Molloy, part one of the trilogy, and enjoyed it (p.432).

In 1947, Beckett had begun Molloy, which he finished in 1948. This date also marks the point from which Beckett concentrated on writing his novels in French. He worked arduously during this time with Marie Péron to make sure that the work was a French roman and that it would seem the work of a Frenchman and not merely a French translation (p.368 In Molloy, Beckett began for the first time

to thematize the narrative experience in his hero's transcription of his own thoughts and experiences. Again, as with Watt, the landscape is Beckett's familiar Foxrock, and most of the characters (Molloy, Murphy, Moran, Yerk, Mercier) Beckett apparently borrowed from Thom's Dublin Dictionary (Bair, p.371). Malone Dies, the companion piece to Molloy, written in French in 1948 and published in 1951, focuses on Malone who writes to pass the time while he is dying. Part III of the trilogy, The Unnamable, written in 1949 and published in 1953, emphasizes the compulsive, obsessive need to speak, to utter the ineffable. Here, Beckett has eliminated conventional narrators and we are left with a voice, a skull, a jar. There is no 'I', no 'we', no 'being', no nominative, no accusative, no verb.<sup>6</sup> This is the point at which Bair feels that Beckett had written himself into a corner. During 1950, Beckett worked with Patrick Bowles on the English translation of Molloy and Malone Dies, and on the composition of The Unnamable. By November 1950, Lindon of Les Editions de Minuit agreed to publish the first two parts, Molloy and Malone Dies, which were successful, and which consequently led to Lindon's desire for Waiting for Godot and The Unnamable (p.414).

Although Beckett's success with Waiting for Godot was widespread by 1956, such fame did little to stave off

the general criticism of his work as both obscure and unreadable.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the increasingly abstract nature of Beckett's later fiction continues to foster vastly divergent critical claims as to what critics understand as fundamental to Beckett. Such confusion seems to be a carry-over from that experienced by Beckett's earlier audience and publishers. In Hélène Baldwin's<sup>8</sup> words: "Any close explication of Beckett's work runs the risk of appearing to be as absurd a rational enterprise as the sucking-stone routine of Molloy" (p.7.) Baldwin continues:

Let no skeptical reader assume that I attempt such explication without a considerable degree of self-irony. What impels me is the hope of revealing some layers of richness in these undramatic dramas and unnovelistic novels. Beckett's work is a synthesis of poetry, religion, philosophy, myth, etymology, erudition, and acute self-consciousness, arranged in formal structures, somewhat perhaps as Herman Hesse conceived the glass-bead game. (p.7)

Naturally enough, literary critics are aware of such "self-irony," especially when they attempt to place Beckett within the framework of the modern literary tradition.<sup>9</sup> The inherent difficulty of this task is further enhanced by the fact that we are dealing with a bilingual, often self-translating, author.<sup>10</sup>

We have seen that Beckett's fiction is more than a vehicle for the exposition of plot, character, and action. Beckett's prose tends towards obscurity, not only because of its inversion of the formal principles of traditional narrative, but also because of its "abstract" style. Such textual obscurity, however, should not be considered a hindrance to understanding the text, but rather, it is indicative of the extremely suggestive openness or "dis-closure" of the text. This suggestiveness is, in part, the result of the reader's hermeneutic interactions with the potential meanings available. This meaning-potential arises, as we have noted, mainly because the texts are abstract, ambiguous, and therefore, unpredictable. Multiple layers of meaning are implied by the fact that there is no clear, easily discovered, single level of meaning provided by the text. In Beckett's case, the text's unpredictability is, in part, born of a language which the author has divested of its formal, syntactical pattern. When confronted with Beckett's asyntactical language, the reader tends to follow the path of least resistance: he looks for significant structures-- or creates them-- and thus, opens up the hermeneutic potential of the text, "dis-closing" many possible meanings (where perhaps none may exist). Faced with textual ambiguity, the reader is called upon to establish his own form, his own code of order. Texts such as those of Beckett, John Barth, and Vladimir Nabakov

play on the reader's tendencies to do so.

We have seen in the Introduction that texts as complex as Beckett's seem to demand a hermeneutic or reader-response approach, for their meaning is made out of the relationship between the art and the experience of the reader/interpreter. Brian Fitch<sup>11</sup> also feels the need to find a more flexible means of dealing with Beckett's texts. In his consideration of what he calls the dimensions and textuality of the trilogy, Fitch remarks that Beckett's language "se situe en deçà de toute littérature" (p.14). Moreover, the ontology of the trilogy,

ne soit pas autre chose que  
l'intrusion dans notre conscience  
d'un langage qui n'est pas le nôtre,  
l'empreinte subie par notre  
conscience lorsque celle-ci donne  
naissance aux probabilités sémantiques  
de ce langage qui, tout en étant  
d'origine étrangère, ne peut être  
éprouvé par nous-même que comme  
expérience intime. (pp.14-15)

But few other critics have taken this approach. The main problems encountered in Beckettian criticism centre on attempts to define the form and style of Beckett's fiction. Alain Robbe-Grillet's early Pour un Nouveau Roman (1963)<sup>12</sup> was instrumental in promoting a different, non-traditional approach to Beckett's work. Although not dealing specifically with the post-trilogy

prose, Robbe-Grillet isolated a number of important and necessary considerations. He re-defined Beckett's fiction in generic terms, including it under the label of New Novel, and he focussed attention on the semantic ambiguities of the style of this New Novel. In so doing, he provided a flexible and less traditional approach to Beckett's work. Pour un Nouveau Roman also introduced the important notions of subjectivity of perspective (or narrative point of view) and of the stream-of-consciousness technique of the New Novel to discussions of Beckett's work. Essentially a manifesto for the New Novel's form and techniques, Robbe-Grillet's study emphasizes its presentation of the dissociated perspective of the psyche, and thereby downplays the more traditional novelistic elements of character and story. Following this book's appearance, Beckettian criticism had a new possible focus: it could look to the texts' innovative means of structuring subjective reality in fiction. As a result, style and the operative nature of language became much more important considerations.

Although Robbe-Grillet is ultimately more interested in Beckett's theatre than in his fiction, his description of Beckett's characters--as the condition of "being there"--is relevant to the post-trilogy prose as well. However, it is clearly the theatre that presents

this condition of "being there" more naturally than any other artistic mode of representing reality: "The dramatic character is on the stage, that is his primary quality: he is there" (p.111). While Beckett's literature is not primarily concerned with representing moral, political, social, and economic issues, Beckett does not banish or eliminate man from the world; he does not aim at some ideal, perfect objectivity in the text's presentation of the self as "presence." Instead, Beckett's fiction, Robbe-Grillet says, is immersed in subjectivity, insofar as objects have no significant presence outside the protagonist's ego-centred perspective. In addition, the object of perception is controlled and presented by the subject's viewpoint, by his natural tendency to make forms that are meaningful to him.

The nineteenth-century realist novel, says Robbe-Grillet, "tended to impose the image of a stable, coherent, continuous, unequivocal, entirely decipherable universe" (p.32). The "intelligibility" of the world was assumed and elements of fiction followed its logic: "unconditional adoption of chronological development, linear plots, regular trajectory of the passions, impulse of each episode toward a conclusion" (p.32). In this more traditional fiction, objects formed the significant "fabric of the plot" (p.20). In opposition to this sort

Here, in "Time and Description in Fiction Today" (1963), Robbe-Grillet stresses this other way in which man--as reader--is involved in the fictional world of the New Novel. This essay also emphasizes that this sort of "subjective" hermeneutic work does not go on only when specialists interpret the texts.

Because of the basic unconventionality of the form of the New Novel (with no traditional plot, it stresses instead the psychological presentation of reality), it offers new possibilities of structure or strategy. Instead of following the conventions of the realist novel, the new fiction offers new possibilities of form in its very challenge to the form-making impulses. Freed of the ready-made structures and significance of the old novel, the New Novel aims at something close to total subjectivity, often involving an almost obsessive engagement that gives us distorted vision and delirious imaginings. Versimilitude is not the prime issue. Objects only gain significance when observed by the subject. Significance cannot be pre-established, because, as Robbe-Grillet says, for art to claim such fixed significance predicates a "lie": once literature begins to signify something, it "begins to retreat, to disappear" (p.41).

Robbe-Grillet correctly suggests that Beckett's work denies the world of significance, and that it



of "significant" fiction stands the New Novel. It denies narrative chronology and linear progression, and emphasizes a time that is in the present indicative, a perpetual present in which "space destroys time, and time sabotages space." As Robbe-Grillet notes: "Description makes no headway, contradicts itself, turns in circles. Moment denies continuity" (p.155). As we will see, Beckett's post-trilogy prose, in its capacity as New Novel, also abolishes the "impulse of each episode toward a conclusion."

In addition, says Robbe-Grillet, "if temporality gratifies expectation, instantaneity disappoints it" (p.155). In mentioning gratification and expectation, he draws attention to the role of the reader and the reader's involvement in the work. In suggesting that the onus of interpretation is placed on the reader, Robbe-Grillet is an early reader-response critic. He is very aware of responsibility placed on the reader to co-operate, actively and consciously, in the production of the text:

far from neglecting the reader, the author today proclaims his absolute need of the reader's co-operation, an active, conscious, creative assistance. What he asks of him is no longer to receive ready-made a world completed, full, closed upon itself, but on the contrary to participate in a creation, to invent in his turn the work--and the world.(p.56)

demonstrates his concern for the formal and the technical at the expense of traditional plot, characterization, and signification: "it is in [its] form that [its] reality resides" (p.43). Beckett's structural concerns in the later fiction have provided a focus for recent analyses of his style, and his fiction reveals more and more of a movement away from the traditional description of character, and from the more normal spatialized fictional world-picture still found in the landscapes of Beckett's earlier fiction (Watt and Murphy). His subsequent focus is more on the abstract language of the disembodied voices in the post-trilogy work and on a universe where time's forms do not hold, where "before" and "after" have no meaning. In Robbe-Grillet's words: "To this ineluctable here corresponds an eternal now" (p.123).

Robbe-Grillet's work seems to establish the critical context most adequate to Beckett's post-trilogy work. For a New Novel provides a flexible terminology in which to discuss works that defy traditional narrative demands for "integritas" or "consonantia"; at the same time, it provides a definite tradition in which to situate Beckett. But although the New Novel certainly shares the same subjective perspective and technical methods as Beckett's work, there are reasons for not labelling the post-trilogy prose as New Novels. While the affinities

between Beckett's prose and this new tradition are clear, Robbe-Grillet is primarily comparing the New Novel to Beckett's plays. It is the presence on stage that Robbe-Grillet is thinking of when he says that everything is present "in time as it is in space" (p.123). Off-stage is nothingness, non-being, and an uninhabitable pseudo-world. Yet, in the post-trilogy prose, this area "off-stage," and not the world of presence, is precisely what is most important.

The stage naturally presents a physical and conceptual space, a grid within which events occur during a specified time period. Hamm may expostulate in Endgame: "I was never there. Clov!...I was never there... Absent, always. It all happened without me," but such a claim is actually deceptive for he is there physically. In fiction, though, such non-presence can be indicated by others means --through lies, allusions, and paradox. The self, through the word, can exist as a fictional and fictive entity. Such a concept of non-being is more difficult to engineer on stage, when the audience is faced with the phenomenal reality of actual physical presence in space.

Admittedly, as Robbe-Grillet notes, form and technique are important features of Beckett's work. But

it is also true that everything in Beckett's form and technique paradoxically works to dismantle form. Beckett's interest is in the world of non-significance lying behind form. Essentially, his stress falls on that chaos that art cannot bear and so has to make consonant by imposing form and aesthetic order on disorder.

This formal paradox of Beckett's work has engendered much critical debate regarding the post-trilogy fiction. For Mary Ann Caws,<sup>13</sup> "[e]ven essays of the most minimal art are composed of traces" (p.14), and, in her eyes, "the bare outlines of three intersecting traces" form the "limited" framework of Texts:

the reductive lines of the consciousness (that "infaisable être"), the gradually exhausted line of the writing hand ("ce soir je tiens la plume,"), and the utterance or the will to utterance of the "impossible voix," on which the texts close ("dit-elle, murmure-t-elle,"). (p.14)

Caws considers these three "lines" reductive, a decrescendo as "definite statement is reduced to qualified determination" (p.15). "The writing hand, taking dictation from a voice it does not understand, leaves the traces of the dictation" (p.16). Finally, the "greater consciousness, this impossible voice, which would leave traces, is a simple will to écriture" (p.16).

Yet Caws finds that, amid the aura of despair in Beckett's work, there are occasional "allusions to gestures calling for a certain strength or signaling a confidence" (p.18). These gestures "provide the basis for hope" (p.19). She feels that the frequency of "significant" verbs such as "vouloir" and "pouvoir" actually indicate the existence of hope in Beckett's works. But this is only a "minimal gesture" of hope, and ultimately, any allusion to hope and to the self's ability to do or accomplish anything is negated by admissions such as "that's all meaningless" (Text III, p.89), and by conclusions such as "[d]epartures, stories, they are not for tomorrow. And the voices, wherever they come from, have no life in them" (Text III, p.90).

Raymond Federman<sup>14</sup> also considers the formal structure of the post-trilogy works in his analysis and he too takes into account the styles of the earlier prose. Federman maintains that Beckett has reduced the novel to its most basic elements, "stripping it of all pretense of realism, dehumanizing its people, voiding its landscape" (p.23). He sees this process occurring over three stages. The first stage is that of the early collection of short stories written in English: More Pricks than Kicks (1934), Murphy (1938), and Watt (1953). In this stage, labelled as "The Truth of Fiction," Beckett presents social

realities, although he sets them up only to mock them. The second stage described by Federman involves "The Lie of Fiction," and is comprised of the Nouvelles (1945), the trilogy (1959), and Textes pour rien (1950). Here, moving towards a state of negation, the fiction reveals itself as a lie. The final stage, that of "The Impossibility of Fiction," yields the "rumours" and "ejaculations" of the prose after How It Is (1960).

Although an interesting way to structure the Beckettian literary canon, Federman's argument, like that of Caws, does not account for change in narrative convention. It ignores change in the novelistic presentation of the world in the post-trilogy prose, a major change from that of the novels prior to The Unnamable. The world we get, in fact, is a direct inversion of the earlier one: the self in "From an Abandoned Work" envisions that it might "vanish from view" (p.21), "my body doing its best without me" (p.21). We have entered into another realm, one which was briefly glimpsed in the earlier works. The Unnamable signalled the end of the mimesis of any phenomenal world (still present in Watt, Murphy, Molloy, and Malone Dies), and emphasized the being's future as a purgatorial existence in some sort of inverted spiral, in which time does not pass so much as "pile up." In the later fiction, as in "The Lost Ones," figures move in a formless

space between the arena of activity and "the state of the sedentary":

In the beginning then unthinkable as the end all roamed without respite including the nurselings in so far as they were borne except of course those already at the foot of the ladders or frozen in the tunnels the better to listen or crouching all eyes in the niches and so roamed a vast space of time impossible to measure until a first came to a standstill followed by a second and so on.... If they recognise each other it does not appear. Whatever it is they are searching for it is not that. ("The Lost Ones," p.67)

The paradoxical nature of the post-trilogy universe too is that of this shifting of the self between form and non-form. Without form, space seems empty. Time cannot be measured if it has no form. Without form, nothingness dominates. When Murphy "began to see nothing" (p.246):

His other senses also found themselves at peace, an unexpected pleasure. Not the numb peace of their own suspension, but the positive peace that comes when the somethings give way, or perhaps simply add up, to the Nothing, than which in the guffaw of the Abderite naught is more real. 15

In Texts, we find this same idea of the fundamental illogicality of a formless world devoid of shape and intelligible meaning: "what a blessing it's all down the drain, nothing ever as much as begun, nothing ever but

nothing and never, nothing but lifeless words" (Text XII, p.135).

In all of Beckett's fiction, normal (experiential and narrative) universes appear inverted; voices are heard within voices. Beckett's paradoxical fictional works are constructed by dualities, by macrocosm/microcosm relations, and by tensions between conceptual opposites. In Our Exagmination this took the form of:

The maxima and minima of particular contraries are one and indifferent.  
 ....The principle (minimum) of one contrary takes its movement from the principle (maximum) of another.  
 Therefore not only do the minima coincide with the minima, the maxima with the maxima, but the minima with the maxima in the succession of transmutations. Maximal speed is a state of rest. The maximum of corruption and the minimum of generation are identical: in principle, corruption is generation.  
 (p.6) 16

Eugene Webb is another critic concerned with the form of Beckett's post-trilogy prose. In his discussion of the composition of Beckett's novels, Webb takes into account the form of Beckett's recent short fiction, "Imagination Dead Imagine," "Enough," "Ping," and the then untranslated "The Lost Ones." Webb suggests that the composition of How It Is is "something very close to music,"<sup>17</sup> resulting in a work patterned on the sonata.



Drawing a distinction between How It Is and the earlier fiction, Webb says that "How It Is expressed essentially the same vision with surer control, while at the same time ... making important steps forward in exploring the ways in which pure forms like those used in the other arts can be adapted to literary ends" (p.109). In The Novels of Samuel Beckett,<sup>18</sup> John Fletcher also notes this progressive movement towards what all seem to want to call a "purer" style. However, he considers this movement towards purity as a fundamentally disintegrative action:

It is, surely, one of the paradoxes of contemporary literature that its greatest destroyer should at the same time be one of its greatest glories. Beckett is unique in his conception of fiction as something which collapses in upon itself from book to book; no other writer has pursued an issue as remorselessly as Beckett in his search for the essential story and the elusive being. Having stripped away the last layers of the fictional onion, he is left, in Bing and Sans, ruefully contemplating the core. (p.238)

This kind of consideration of Beckettian style as moving towards a "purer" form has other implications. According to Hélène Baldwin: "Beckett's work is certainly, among other things, an exploration of the available voices of fiction." "These voices are the character in the tale, the narrator, the literal author, the real author." She continues:

In a way the three novels [the trilogy] particularly are a series of variations which illustrate the range of technical possibilities of fiction. For Beckett as for most authors, writing is a compulsion, a word-game he has to play and part of his anguish comes from the fact that he has hidden behind, lived through, his characters, rather than in his own self. Thus, the trilogy and the plays demonstrate a shifting coalescence of masks and also a progressive stripping off of them until the writer is down to the bare, forked "I" of The Unnamable or Not I. (pp.5-6)

Baldwin, however, does not deal with these "metafictional" implications of Beckett's work, preferring to focus on the theory of Beckett's "negative" mysticism. However, Knowlson and Pilling,<sup>19</sup> in Frescoes of the Skull (1979), consider that "Echo" and "Narcissus" are central to Beckett's work, and describe the post-trilogy artist as:

an always cerebral artist [who] has been engaged in an unprecedented archaeological investigation, or better, "ontospeleology," as Beckett himself describes it. Beckett's shapes may seem a long way from the cave-paintings of Lascaux or Les Eyzies, and they can hardly hope to outlast them. But they are in their own way quite remarkable and testify to Beckett's continuing dedication to an art that is both "totally intelligible" and "totally inexplicable." (p.xiii)

Judith Dearlove, in Accommodating the Chaos:  
Samuel Beckett's Nonrelational Art (1982),<sup>20</sup> also handles

the metafictional issue, but does so in a different way. Her preface examines Beckett's "unremitting efforts to find a literary shape for the proposition that perhaps no relationships exist between or among the artist, his art, and an external reality" (p.3). She labels the narrative processes used by Beckett "fragmentation" and "tessellation," or Apollonian and Dionysian respectively. These narrative processes represent for Dearlove the variety of strategies and chaos-accommodating forms that Beckett adopts in his efforts to create a nonrelational art. In "'Last Images': Samuel Beckett's Residual Fiction," Dearlove asserts:

While the nature of language prevents Beckett from totally escaping an external structure, the fantasies free him from pre-established implications and innuendoes. Like the second zone of Murphy's mind, the images are of forms without parallel in another mode. Though art cannot attain the formlessness of the dark zone, it can at least avoid the mimetic parallels of the light. The resulting works of the half-light compose a new type of intellectual novel. The burden of meaning is thrust upon the reader. "Lessness" presents a random collection of words, images, and sentences which the reader must organize. It is the reader who must order Beckett's structures in order to glimpse the ineffable beyond art. 21

Starnos Metzidakis<sup>22</sup> also voices this increasing difficulty in interpreting Beckett: "Comment entreprendre l'analyse d'une véritable mise en abîme de l'entreprise

d'entreprendre?" (p.6). He also sees the basic problem in interpreting Beckett's prose as stemming from an absence of clear narrative structures or any defined novelistic convention (p.6). On the subject of Comment C'est, Metzidakis concludes that Beckett "nous laisse toujours en suspens quant à des réponses définitives, des vérités éclaircissantes" (p.8). Beckett's prose, especially Comment C'est, lacks, for him, any "standard spatio-temporal, aucune norme par rapport à quoi il pourrait tirer des conclusions" (p.8). He is not alone in his conclusion.

Since the post-trilogy prose, many critics have had difficulty coming to terms with the more abstract universe presented in these texts that openly challenge traditional narrative and linguistic conventions. Apart from the work of Dearlove and Knowlson and Pilling, the only other major full-length studies, aside from dissertations,<sup>23</sup> that deal with these issues are Eric Levy's Beckett and the Voice of Species (1980)<sup>24</sup> and Brian Finney's Since 'How It Is': A Study of Samuel Beckett's Later Fiction (1972).<sup>25</sup> Otherwise, most recent criticism tends to be article-length, and to deal with only isolated issues--linguistic, structural, or metafictional.

Susan Brienza,<sup>26</sup> however, addresses herself to the role of the reader as one of those figures present in "The Lost Ones." Brienza argues that "the [real] reader gets no sense of progression through time" and "is trapped in the present as the searchers are" (p.152):

The vision of the readers is given as much consideration as the vision of the searchers. The narrator describes the abode first in general and then in detail; that is, he provides an overview first and then moves us closer for a better look. His visual descriptions are introduced with such phrases as "at first sight" and "first impression." The reader is referred to as "an observer." (p.153)

The reader himself is labelled "scientific experimentor" coldly intent "on analysing data and evidences" (p.154). In conclusion, Brienza argues that, as the structure of the abode "torments the searchers," so too does "the structure of 'The Lost Ones' frustrate the reader's need for order" (p.167). The "syntactic maze" of Beckett's structural patterns create deliberate dead ends for the reader, and the plot circles back on itself (p.168). The reader, like the text's searcher, is trapped by a paradox: "the harder he searches for an allegorical meaning to the story, the farther away he gets from the meaning the text offers" (p.168). Although correct in seeing abundant confusions in the text, confusions which abort the growth of a set meaning, Brienza's argument fails

to consider the reasons for these thematic obscurities and ambiguous phrases. We shall soon see that the root of the problem lies in the fact that we are dealing with a labyrinthine world of indeterminacies.

Inger Christenson,<sup>27</sup> like Brienza, sees Beckettian metafiction in terms of a tendency to represent narrative art allegorically (p.153). He sees Beckett's narrators in the trilogy as representative of the artist's concern with his own aesthetic situation, in both its technical and existential aspects (p.97): "Obviously, the narrator's physical deterioration through the three novels expresses metaphorically the narrator's growing feeling of exhaustion and struggle with his subject" (p.98). The "identity crisis" expressed by the narrators, is for Christenson Beckett's own exploration of "the existential consequences for man in the modern world" (p.152). The fact that Beckett's narrator addresses himself is to Christenson evidence that he does "not care very much about creating an art that should try to enlist the attention of the audience" (p.154), and so "the possibility of salvation through the word" (p.154) is denied.

The problem with this conception of the narrative voice in Beckett's fiction is that it presupposes a pre-established and accessible identity, that of the artist.

In talking of a reader in the text, as does Brienza, we also presuppose another identity, that of the reader. But all we actually have is the text. "Closed Space" tells us: "There is nothing but what is said. Beyond what is said there is nothing. What goes on in the arena is not said" (p.49). Even then, the voice declares the futility of saying something: "What goes on in the arena is not said" (p.49); therefore, the arena contains "nothing." Allegorical readings tend to ignore this formless nothingness and distort the fiction by offering, by imposing alternate structures of meaning.

Nevertheless, readers cannot help trying to make sense of the texts. In Beckett's later prose, however, the reader is denied the comforting narrative forms of action, event, and character. He is not provided with any traditional narrative framework: the text's time lacks the form of chronology and sequence. The texts refuse to shape fictional time; they offer a narrative gap which is left unbridged. Although the reader participates in the creation of the fictional world, it is a universe in which temporal conventions cease to have meaning. In "Closed Space," therefore, as in the companion pieces Six Residua, Texts, How It Is, and Company, the connections --grammatical and narrative--needed to bridge that gap are never articulated. The unreliable voice often gives

only unconnected words, from which the reader builds multiple hypotheses of meaning.

This increased critical attention to the form and technique of Beckett's fiction and to its denial of the forms and conventions of traditional narrative has raised the question of genre. In "Imagination Dead?" (the title, a play on Beckett's "Imagination Dead Imagine"), John E. Grant emphasizes precisely this issue of how we are to label this unconventional fiction:

It is impossible to discern the genre of a work without backing up from it to see what goes next to it. And the reader is in peril of misunderstanding a particular work unless he is alert to the kind of conventions one should expect to encounter in the kind of work in question. Dante, Cervantes, and Fielding, to instance three, strove explicitly, that is critically, to keep their readers on the right track; likewise does Beckett. In the long, evidently Beckett-inspired, if not authorized, statement on the dust jacket of "Imagination/Dead/Imagine" the reader is told that it is an "essay into a new kind of science fiction" and assured that, appearances to the contrary, it is also a "novel." This helps. 28

Beckett is clearly doing something new with the old traditions, though. In "Beckett, Lowry, and the Anti-Novel," Ronald Binns sees Beckett as one of the central figures of that "strain of contemporary writing which has abandoned traditional humanist notions of culture." 29



Gerald Graff and Leslie Fiedler are cited in support of this view of Beckett as a "post-modern" writer, precisely because of this abandonment of those traditional humanist notions of culture. For Binns, there is a radical aesthetic self-consciousness and a commitment to experimental narrative in Beckett, "but the problem is to give it definition" (p.93). Binns turns for help in this task to Gabriel Josipovici's structuralist-based The World and the Book; "[i]n the era of a zero degree of writing," Beckett is seen as celebrating "the novel of lexical foregrounding, where text is prior to or other than the world" (p.91).

Binns is wise to be leary of categorizing Beckett. He implies that Beckett is an exponent of the anti-novel, by citing Josipovici's general statement that the modern novel is really an anti-novel:

And the modern anti-novel is a text which plays with natural techniques to create a world which seems life-like, but which suddenly crumbles "when the work reveals itself as 'pure object.'" The reader, suddenly aware that what he is reading is not reality, life, but truly a fiction, a man-made object, is pitched "into reality." (pp.91-92)

Linda Hutcheon's Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox<sup>30</sup> offers, in passing, another context for Beckett --that of Roussel, Joyce, Sanguineti, and the writers of

the French New Novel. Beckett's work too, is metafictional and so has certain implications for the act of reading:

We know pre-verbal experience exists, but we cannot be conscious of it without verbal concepts. Articulation is understanding. The primacy of language in the creative and cognitive processes is what Nabokov, Joyce, Beckett, and even Flaubert have suggested to their readers. (p.90)

The reader of the post-trilogy work, in particular, encounters many hermeneutic difficulties. But even in the trilogy, reading is not an uncomplicated task, as Baldwin notes:

Reading Samuel Beckett's trilogy...is an exhausting, irritating experience which produces either enervation and apathy or a sick exhilaration, like standing on a high and perilous ledge and contemplating what is below--or above. It is easy enough to lose one's sense of balance in this seemingly insane jumble of squalid characters, names all beginning with "M," who against a background of either "the city" or "the forest" perform incredible feats of endurance and legerdemain, without legs riding bicycles, crawling through the woods, living in jars, turning into each other. The author himself, using words like a master juggler, eventually jumps through hoops, balls and all. A good metaphor that, considering that he is interested in nothing less than the most fabulous circle of all, call it God or Zero. And jumping through hoops is a neat trick if you happen to be armless, legless, mute, blind or suffering from prolapsed genitalia in the manner of Beckett's characters. (p.1)

Indeed, after "jumping through [the] hoops" of the trilogy, the reader is almost equipped to deal with the form of Beckett's prose in the later fiction. In the work up to and including the trilogy, there are many absurd elements such as Murphy's "biscuits," Molloy's "bicycle," and his "sucking stones" to which we can still give some significance. In the later fiction, few such elements appear.

But, as Beckett's fictive world is reduced, the critical response--and confusion--is increased. In his review-essay, "Samuel Beckett and His Critics Enter the 1970s," Melvin Friedman states that Beckett's winning the Nobel Prize in 1969 marked the end of a decade which started with two important events: the publication of Beckett's last full-length novel, How It Is, and the appearance of the first book in English about him, Hugh Kenner's Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study. For Friedman:

[t]here is a certain irony in this juxtaposition. In a decade when Beckett found words more and more difficult to come by, his critics seemed to come by them with increasing ease and assurance. A page-long review of a number of Beckett items in the December 11, 1970, London Times Literary Supplement put the case very neatly: "Thus, as the author's writings diminish to a thin trickle the volume of criticism swells to a flood." 31

Beckettian criticism has certainly continued to increase in volume and, despite the decrease in the number of texts he produces, Beckett still seems to feel a compulsion to compose, an "obligation to express." But what we still need is a more flexible critical approach that will take into account the role of the reader in Beckett's work. Essentially, the shift from the realist novel to the New Novel was one which increased the demands on the reader's active, hermeneutic participation. Although Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy (1760) and Cervantes' Don Quixote (1605) played with the idea of the reader as literally part of the dramatis personae of the novel, those novelists still wrote in conventional narrative form--using characters, plots, chronological time, and recognizable space. The author/narrator figure tended to refer to the reader in a playful manner, co-opting and incorporating him within the boundaries of the fictional world.

In the Beckettian novel, however, the onus on the reader is more serious than genial. In Literary Theory: An Introduction,<sup>32</sup> Terry Eagleton points out that it is reception of reader-response theory that explains best how the text taxes the reader's pre-understanding of literary conventions, causing him to reflect on his own assumptions. This reflection comes about because no text

is "equipped with definite meanings" (p.138). Beckett's texts seem archetypal examples of this defiance of determinate reading. Consequently, the effects of texts on readers are fundamental to a description of its meaning. Fiction cannot be conceived as a separate object, an entity divorced from the interpreting self. Brian Fitch terms Beckett's language "un code sans valeur référentielle" (p.102). Fitch adds: "Il en résulte une sorte de permutation des formes calquées sur la même racine qui donne naissance par la même occasion à une transformation continuelle de sens pour réaliser, et parfois épuiser, toute la gamme de potentialités sémantiques" (p.136). Beckett's language allows for a spontaneous, semantic production of meaning: "Lorsque le même mot se trouve repris non pas une fois mais plusieurs fois, nous assistons à autant de variations sinon sur un thème, sur un mot" (p.135). The reader is, therefore, directly involved in the process of making meaning, making sense of Beckett's texts.

Stanley Fish<sup>33</sup> states that all textual meaning is dependent on the interpreter's experience of the text. As the reader negotiates, decides, anticipates, reverts, and revises the work, sense is made in his mind. It is not extracted from the printed page, because literature is not a stable "artifact." The text "does" something to us

as readers and involves us in its structuring, because there is no determinate, immanent meaning in the text itself. But although the reader of Beckett's text is caught in the act of interpretation (of trying to make sense of the text), he cannot give final meaning to these works that challenge form and form-making, that stubbornly retain their "insignificance." Beckett's fictional world of the "non-knower" is that which "dis-closes," which opens fixed, closed meaning by fostering a free play of words.

In "Ping," we read:

Ping fixed last elsewhere legs joined  
 like sewn heels together right angle  
 hands hanging palms front head haught  
 eyes white invisible fixed front over.  
 Given rose only just one yard invisible  
 bare white all known without within  
 over. (p.43)

It is difficult to determine the point of reference of this passage. For example, "elsewhere," "without," and "within" indicate location. But what is to be done with the nouns ("legs," "heels," and "eyes"), adjectives ("haught," "white invisible," "bare white"), and conjugated verbs ("fixed," "given," "joined," "sewn," "known")?

These words are juxtaposed so that the reader imposes form, but comes up with conflicting ideas, thereby sabotaging any possibility of determining one single meaning. The text, therefore, offers us a variety of equipotential directions, directions forged by what can be considered

the asyntactical quality of the prose.

This, as we shall see, is Beckett's rhetoric of abstraction. Ordinarily, we would expect that the more complex and rich the passage, the more determinate the meaning we would be able to make. In this case, the opposite is true. We are presented with revolving frames of reference in the text (as in the proliferation of "Pings" throughout the whole piece). The text appears random again and any accumulation of meaning by the reader is disconfirmed.

If, for example, we take a line from "Lessness," "Legs a single block arms fast to sides little body face to endlessness" (p.48), what we confront is a series of syntactical gaps. The sense of randomness of the line lies in the potential number of words available to the reader to fill in the gaps. He is at liberty to impose any form he feels is suitable: "[His paralysed/chained] legs [anchored to] a single block [and his] arms fast [ened] [tightly] to [his] sides [,] [his] little body face to [face with the] endlessness [of such an imprisonment]." The hermeneutic blanks underline the reader's role in the realization of the absence of meaningful form within the post-trilogy prose. These gaps in syntax set up certain dichotomies: the self, contained in language, dissolves into silence, fluctuating between

matter and form, objectivity and subjectivity, signification and absurdity.

The post-trilogy prose, therefore, directs us toward an unconventional conception of fiction as anti-representational and absurd. Beckett's challenge to traditional narrative is to move beyond the form and content of the realist novel. Beckett even pushes to the limits the forms and techniques of the New Novelists. For even though he deals with a similar world of nonsense, he goes beyond the New Novel's reliance on specific structures and techniques: the reader of Beckett's fiction is confronted with rhetorical and syntactical gaps, with total disruptions in the cumulative build-up of interpretive meaning. These gaps, in fact, point to the chaos beneath the representation of order and form, beneath the temporal and spatial architecture of the phenomenal world Beckett proceeds to dismantle.



## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup>A.J. Leventhal in New Theatre Magazine, Samuel Beckett Special Issue, XI, No. 3, n.d. Cited in Hélène Baldwin, Samuel Beckett's Real Silence (University Park: Penn. State University Press, 1981), p.7. Henceforward, this work will be referred to as Baldwin and further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>2</sup>In 1964, "Beckett gave what appears to be the only extant typescript to Lawrence Harvey, who in turn gave it to Baker Library, Dartmouth College. Professor Harvey appended the following information to the typescript: 'Unpublished, 214 pages, an earlier version of the ending (replaced by pp.213, 213 and 214 verso in Beckett's handwriting in the final version) is appended and numbered pp.197, 198 and 199. Corrections in Beckett's handwriting on a considerable number of pages. [Dream is] ... the only extant record of Beckett's earliest substantial prose work. It is valuable for the insights it provides into the temperament, intellect, talent, and interests of the young Beckett and constitutes the necessary point of departure in assessing his development as a writer.'" Cited in Deirdre Bair's Samuel Beckett: A Biography (New York and London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1978), p.662. Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>3</sup>The manuscript was eventually tailored into "Dante and the Lobster," which was published in More Pricks than Kicks. For the most part, the collection received favourable reviews, except in Ireland (Bair, p.179). The title itself comes from the Bible, Acts 9:5: "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to prick against the kicks" (Bair, p.180).

<sup>4</sup>Samuel Beckett, Letter to George Reavey, November 13, 1936. Cited in Bair, p.243.

<sup>5</sup>J.M. Fitzgerald, K.C., to Beckett during the case of Sinclair vs. Gogarty. This quotation from the trial is from the account given in the Irish Times November 23 - 27, 1937. Cited in Bair, p.268.

<sup>6</sup>Samuel Beckett "Moody Man of Letters," Israel Shenker, New York Times, May 6, 1956. Cited in Bair, p.450.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Alvarez, Samuel Beckett (New York: The Viking Press, Modern Masters Series, 1973). Alvarez comments: "However inexhaustible a mother lode for quarrying academics the book may be, for the ordinary, even devoted reader, The Unnamable gets perilously close to being the Unreadable" (p.63). Cited in Bair, p.402.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Beckett's Real Silence (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981). Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>9</sup> The issue that needs clarification is that of terminology. Throughout the course of this thesis, Beckett will be referred to as a modern writer, and not as a postmodern writer, a term generally used to accommodate the metafictional tendencies in modern literature. Metafiction, itself, connotes textual self-awareness inasmuch as the fiction "includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity." See Linda Hutcheon's Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1980). In her introduction, Hutcheon examines the issue of definition, stating that the term "postmodern" appeared, in the criticism of the Seventies, to accommodate contemporary self-conscious, metafictional works. In Hutcheon's words: "John Barth conferred upon this label the status of fact in his recent address to the Modern Language Association in December, 1979 and in his subsequent article in the January, 1980 issue of the Atlantic, entitled 'The Literature of Replenishment: Postmodernist Fiction.'" Although Beckett's work is to a large extent self-conscious, that aspect of self-consciousness in his fiction will be referred to as metafictional, the term postmodernist being a misnomer with regard to contemporary literature. This issue of terminology also arises in Gerald Graff's "The Myth of the Postmodernist Breakthrough," in Tri-Quarterly 26, (Winter, 1973), pp.383-417, and in Robert Alter's "The Self-conscious Moment: Reflections on the Aftermath of Modernism," in Tri-Quarterly, 33 (Spring, 1975), pp.209-230.

<sup>10</sup> Ekundayo Simpson's "Samuel Beckett: traducteur de lui-même: Aspects de bilinguisme littéraire" (Quebec: Centre International de Recherche sur le Bilinguisme, 1978):

Le bilinguisme de Beckett pose plus de problèmes bibliographiques que celui de Nabokov du fait de la simultanéité. En effet, alors qu'on peut parler d'une époque de création russe suivie de celle de création anglaise, donc d'un bilinguisme quasiment séquentiel chez Nabokov, nous

savons que Beckett continue toujours à créer tantôt en anglais, qu'il s'acquitte sérieusement de la traduction de son oeuvre, la plupart du temps sans collaboration. (p.19)

Although Beckett takes great care not to follow the "mot à mot" method, maintaining both "anglicismes" and "gallicismes" without endangering the "jeu de mots," certain perplexities arise. For instance, problems with the English listed by Simpson are: "l'étoffement de la préposition, l'économie par évidence, le chassé-croisé" (p.165). And between the two languages, English being the more metaphorical, the difficulties proliferate:

[L]a prépondérance des mots signes en français, par rapport à celle des mots imagés en anglais; la tendance statique du français et la tendance dynamique de l'anglais (aidé par ses prépositions et ses postpositions); la notation explicite des aspects verbaux en anglais, tandis que la notation des aspects se fait implicitement en français; le style substantif du français où le nom constitue une force d'attraction, tant par la démarche naturelle de la langue que du fait de plusieurs lacunes de dérivation, face à l'anglais (p.165).

See also George Steiner, "Of Nuance and Scrupule," New Yorker, 44 (27 April, 1968), pp.164-174. In his article, Steiner says "one must lay side by side the French and English versions of Godot or Malone Dies, then do the same with All That Fall or Happy Days":

After which...one ought to rotate the eight texts round a common center to follow the permutations of Beckett's wit and sensibility within the matrix of two great tongues. Only in this way can one make out to what degree Beckett's idiom ...is a pas de deux of French and English with a strong dose of Irish tomfoolery and arcane sadness added.

11 Dimensions, structures et textualité dans la trilogie romanesque de Beckett (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1977). Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

12 (Paris: Gallimard, 1963); translated as For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction (New York: Grove Press,

-1965). Henceforward, all further page references to the English translation will be in parentheses in the text.

13 Mary Ann Caws, "A Rereading of the Traces," L'Esprit Créateur, 11, 3 (Fall 1971), pp.14-20. Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

14 "The Impossibility of Saying the Same Old Thing the Same Old Way-- Samuel Beckett's Fiction Since Comment C'est," L'Esprit Créateur, 11, 3 (Fall, 1971), pp.21-43. Henceforward, page references will follow the quotations in the text. Federman sees Beckett's prose as self-conscious insofar as "[a]ll great fiction, to a large extent, is a reflection on itself rather than a reflection of reality" (p.23).

15 See Alice and Kenneth Hamilton, "The Guffaw of the Abderite: Samuel Beckett's Use of Democritus," Mosaic 9, 2, (Winter, 1976) pp.1-13. Although this article deals mainly with Beckett's use of Democritus in Molloy, it highlights the question of nothingness that is fundamental to Beckett's fiction:

What remains when the most exact statement that man can make is one of sheer contradiction, overturning reason and silencing the intellectual process? The answer which Beckett finds in Democritus is--nothing! Therefore he speaks of art in our day preferring

The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.

Whether Beckett is justified in drawing the conclusions he does from the "Naught exists just as much as aught" of Democritus is another matter. The Nothing which Democritus asserted to be real was a concept belonging to his theory of the atoms. He had taken over from Leucippus the view that the universe was composed of atoms moving in a void which was empty space. The Pythagoreans, on the

other hand, held the void to be a material body, namely, the atmosphere. Since matter was universally believed to be unchanging, Democritus realized that the only way in which change could be asserted to be a real feature of the universe was to insist that empty space (or nothing corporeal) was as real as the atmosphere (or some corporeal). The atoms could then be understood as free to move in any direction in "the nothing," just as motes dance in a sunbeam.

Beckett, as he reminds us, is not a philosopher. He is not concerned with cosmology--that of Democritus or of anybody else--since the cosmos appears to him to be simply a mess. He draws from Democritus that which accords with his artist's vision, and here Democritus gives him confirmation of his own conviction that man faces the Nothing. (pp.9-10)

16

Samuel Beckett "Dante ... Bruno. Vico ... Joyce," in Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress (London: Faber and Faber, 1929), p.6.

17

Samuel Beckett: A Study of His Novels (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1973), p.169. Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

On this topic, see also:

- Marilyn Rose, "The Lyrical Structure of Beckett's Texts for Nothing," Novel, 4, 3 (Spring 1971) pp.223-230.

- John Mood, "'Silence Within': A Study of the Residua of Samuel Beckett," Studies in Short Fiction, 7 (1970), pp.385-401.

- John E. Grant "Imagination Dead?," James Joyce Quarterly, 7, 4 (Spring 1971), pp.336-362.

- Elizabeth Segrè "Style and Structure in Beckett's 'Ping': That Something Itself," Journal of Modern Literature 6, 1 (February 1977), pp.127-147.

- Brian Finney "Assumption to Lessness: Beckett's Shorter Fiction" in Beckett the Shape Changer: A Symposium, edited by Katherine Worth (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1975), pp.63-83.
- J. Coetzee, "Samuel Beckett's Lessness: An Exercise in Decomposition," Computers and the Humanities, 7, 4 (March 1973), pp.195-98:

Lessness clearly signals that its word stock is finite. The signal is this: Whereas in normal discourse each extension of the length of the text adds, though more and more slowly, to the number of different lexical items called on (the phenomenon described in the so-called Zipf-Mandelbrot law), Lessness calls on 166 lexical items in its first half and not a single new one in its second half; furthermore, it displays (flaunts?) a compositional procedure which would allow it to extend its length almost indefinitely without drawing on new items. Words 770 --1,538 of the text turn out to be nothing but words 1--769 in a new order. It is this fact which suggests a mathematical approach to the text, an approach not only via the mathematics of indeterminacy, namely probability theory, which we use to compare properties of an infinite set (a language) with those of a finite subset (a text in that language), but also via combinatorial mathematics. A mathematical approach of some kind is certainly invited by a work which, like the combinatorial poems of Emmett Williams, overlays natural syntax with its own syntax of combination, thereby pushing into the foreground its rule-governedness and presenting itself as linguistic game rather than linguistic expression (p.195).

<sup>18</sup> (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972). Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>19</sup> (New York: Grove Press, 1979), p.xiii.

<sup>20</sup> (Durham, D.C.: Duke University Press, 1982). Henceforward, all further page references will be in

parentheses in the text.

<sup>21</sup> Journal of Modern Literature, 6, I (February 1977), p.105.

<sup>22</sup> "Du commencement de Comment C'est: L'écriture du moulin de discipline," Chimères, 12, I (1978), pp.6-8. All further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>23</sup> See Susan Brienza, "A Stylistic Analysis of Samuel Beckett's Recent Fiction" (Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1976). Brienza argues that after The Unnamable, Beckett reached a stylistic impasse. His fiction she sees as reduced to a repeated string of words--especially in Ping and Lessness. In Lessness, Brienza feels, however, that Beckett does write himself out of a box and achieve the "syntax of weakness" he has mentioned in interviews.

See also Paul Joseph Corr, "'Têtes-Mortes': A New Direction in Samuel Beckett's Fiction" (Dissertation, Washington University, 1976). Corr feels that Beckett's quest for a new fictional language is in the direction of poetry.

See also Paul St.-Pierre, "Langues et Langage dans Cinq Textes de Samuel Beckett" (Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1978). St.-Pierre discusses the language of Beckett as both writer and translator, and the relationship between creative writing and its translation.

<sup>24</sup> Eric P. Levy, Beckett and The Voice of Species (Dublin, New Jersey: Gill and MacMillan, Barnes and Noble, 1980).

<sup>25</sup> Brian Finney, Since 'How It Is': A Study of Samuel Beckett's Later Fiction (London: Covent Garden Press, 1972).

<sup>26</sup> "The Lost Ones: The Reader as Searcher," Journal of Modern Literature, 6, 1 (February 1977).

<sup>27</sup> The Meaning of Metafiction: A Critical Study of Selected Novels by Sterne, Nabokov, Barth and Beckett (Oslo: Universitet sforlaget, 1981). Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

28 James Joyce Quarterly, 8, 4 (Spring 1971),  
p.347.

29 The Contemporary English Novel, edited by  
Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer (Stratford Upon Avon;  
New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers Inc., 1979; 1980),  
pp.91-92. All further page references will be in  
parentheses in the text.

30 (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press,  
1980). Henceforward, all further page references will be  
in parentheses in the text.

31 Studies in the Novel, 5, 3 (Fall 1973),  
p.383.

32 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited).  
Henceforward, all further page references will be in  
parentheses in the text.

33 See Stanley E. Fish, Is There a Text in the  
Class? The Author of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge, Mass.:  
Harvard University Press, 1980).



## CHAPTER II

### Beckett's De-construction of the Euclidean World 1

"Maximal negation is minimal  
affirmation."

Beckett's fictional universe reveals itself by contraries. But in order to form an understanding of this world, a world which we have seen to be abstract, indeterminate, and lacking our comforting, recognizable forms, we must perforce subscribe to Beckett's own vehicle of exposition: "by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered" (The Unnamable). Since language tends to concretize the abstract, Beckett not only relies on a language that, paradoxically, stresses its inability to mean anything, but he also reverses and negates any conception of the phenomenal world. In "Lessness", he writes:

Ruins true refuge long last towards  
which so many false time out of  
mind. All sides endlessness earth  
sky as one no sound no stir....  
Blackened our fallen open four walls  
over backwards true refuge issueless.  
(p.47)

In this passage, the more concrete images of the "ruins," the "sides," and the "walls" establish the limit of phenomenal structures fixed in space. Yet references to

"time out of mind," "[a]ll sides endlessness," "earth sky as one," and "refuge issueless" denote the improbability of such forms being sustained or maintained. The limits demarcated by the images are counterpointed and undercut by references to limitlessness. Ultimately, the reader receives the idea that the process of deterioration and deconstruction is the dominant motif of "Lessness," as suggested by the title. Thus, Beckett's novelistic universe can and actually does compete with the empirical world in its capacity to provide alternate narrative strategies.

Our normal conception of the world is a "spatialized" one--perceived and structured according to the forms of space-time relativity. It is precisely this spatialized world picture that is revoked by Beckett in his post-trilogy fiction. As the reader's attention is directed away from that spatio-temporal vision normally inherent in traditional narrative, and called upon to consider its abstract converse, he becomes aware of an imploding, unfathomable realm, one which is, in fact, an inversion of the phenomenal world. Ultimately, Beckett refers the reader to a universe that is by implication absent, one which is not unlike that conceived by "black hole" physicists. But to describe such a universe, as the epigraph to this chapter suggests, we must proceed according to Beckett's own paradox: "Maximal negation is

minimal affirmation."

In "Postmodernity and Hermeneutics,"<sup>2</sup> Richard Palmer discusses the effect of the "rise of perspective" and "the structure of modern consciousness" in terms of the tendency within that consciousness to spatialize objects and time. This is close to what we have seen Beckett rejecting in his tendency to rob space and time of comforting, meaning-generating forms. Such a perspective, says Palmer, bred of the Renaissance desire to measure everything scientifically and rationally, stimulates a response which codifies "being" as "being-in-space" and time as a "measured, linear continuum" (p.369). Man needs to give form to the chaos of time and space, but in Beckett's world, he is ultimately denied the usual means to do so.

In the section of the article entitled "Transcending Objectivism and Technological Rationality," Palmer explains those features which he considers to be characteristic of modernity. These are features which he ascribes to the growth of science and technology (p.369):

In premodern times (say, before 1480), human calculative reason was rated as only one among the several capacities of man, and it was always kept "in its place." With the rise of perspective (for with perspective came the spatializing and mathematizing of human reason), the powers of the mind to control nature technologically were multiplied many fold. Perspective also separated the viewer of the world from what surrounded him, and by defining

objects in terms of extension, of mass,  
 perspective laid the foundations for  
 the familiar Cartesian (and modern)  
 dualism between a nonmaterial  
 consciousness and a world of material  
 objects. . (p.369)

This rise of perspective caused the reduction of the world\_\_  
 model to one of spatial squares, to a "mental world of  
 measurements, formulae, and conceptual thinking" (p.369).  
 At the same time, it also increased the ability of modern  
 man to take charge of his world (p.369). In the world of  
 the post-trilogy prose, such a spatialized formal  
 conception of the world by man is ultimately seen to be  
 untenable, if tempting. In Beckett's fiction, the self  
 exists at the behest of an arbitrary principle, and any  
 sense of control over its environment is only an illusion.  
 By the same token, any fiction pretending that such order  
 and form exist in the fictional world is equally false in  
 its testimony. Consider, for instance, this passage from  
 "Imagination Dead Imagine":

No trace of anywhere of life, you  
 say, pah, no difficulty there,  
 imagination not dead yet, yes,  
 dead, good imagination dead imagine.  
 Islands, waters, azure, verdure,  
 one glimpse and vanished, endlessly,  
 omit. (p.35)

This prose piece opens with an exotic image of the  
 phenomenal world, one conjured up by the imagination. Then,  
 this image of order vanishes; it is eclipsed and replaced.

by Beckett's conception of an underlying reality of disorder. When the exotic image of order vanishes, the voice then gives us the geometrical dimensions of the "rotunda." But even that illusion is diminished in the last line when "life ends" and "there is nothing elsewhere" but "the stress of that storm" (p.38). Thus, the concrete forms of the spatial world in fiction are progressively undercut to provide us with a more abstract image of the world as indeterminate and formless.

But Beckett's concern with space in fiction goes beyond dealing with inverted worlds. The style and structure of his fiction is an experiment with the forms of space and time in the text. In order to understand in more precise terms what is meant by the spatial and temporal perimeters of the text, let us look first of all at Frank Kermode's theory in The Sense of an Ending (1966)<sup>3</sup> which deals with the forms of space and time in myth. According to Kermode, man needs, in life and in fiction, to place a "telos" on the essential endlessness of existence. He gives form to, or "spatializes," life by imposing a "telos" on the essential nothingness of life and gives it and its fictional analogue a form. Consequently, existence appears to be imbued with mythological meaning:

'The artifice of eternity' [Yeats]  
is a striking periphrasis for 'form,'  
for the shapes which console the

dying generations.... [T]here is still a need to speak humanly of a life's importance in relation to it [eternity] --a need in the moment of existence to belong, to be related to a beginning and to an end. (pp.3-4)

This imposition of both a concordance and a formal framework on the chaos of nothingness is born of man's desire to make sense of his life, and it involves a formalizing spatialization of time, primarily by means of forging temporal units. By establishing the fixity of form amid the flux of the nothingness and endlessness of existence, man camouflages chaos, and transforms his own life into "fictions of concord": "For concord or consonance really is the root of the matter," and to modify the past and allow for the future "we need, and provide, fictions of concord" (pp.58-9).

Genesis and Apocalypse, says Kermode, are both a type and a source of this "sense making impulse." Men, like poets, are born "in medias res," and die "in mediis rebus." To make sense of their life span, they fictively fulfill their need for concords with origins and ends. Man therefore gives meaning to both the actual world and the fictional world through form:

For one thing, a systematic submission ... is almost another way of describing what we call "form." "An inter-connexion of parts all mutually implied;

a duration (rather than a space)  
 organizing the moment in terms of the  
 end, giving meaning to the interval  
 ...because we humanly do not want it  
 to be an indeterminate interval....  
 One thinks again of the Bible: of a  
 beginning and an end....As the theologians  
 say, we "live from the End," even if the  
 world should be endless. We need ends and  
kairoi....We recreate the horizons we have  
 abolished, the structures that have  
 collapsed....Ends, for example, become a  
 matter of images, figures for what does  
 not exist except humanly. (pp.57-58) 4

Beckett 's world overtly lacks this consonance of ends and  
 beginnings.

"Consonance" is not Kermode's term; it is that of  
 Festinger, who uses it to describe man's impulse to replace  
 and restore any disconfirmation of an end. According to  
 Festinger, it is because of the end's consonance with middles  
 and origins that we can never have a permanently falsified  
 end. Consonance is the recurring need for adjustments in  
 in the interest of reality; and in fiction, as in life, man  
 creates concord--beginnings and ends--fulfilling in a  
 paradigmatic way the desire and need for "sense-making" that  
 Beckett challenges in his fiction. Kermode considers that  
 novels foster the idea of disconfirmation of such concord  
 and in so doing so imitate the historical disconfirmation of  
 any eventual Apocalypse found in myth. But disconfirmation  
 only leads to the establishment of a new consonance. For  
 the most part, "all novels imitate a world of potentiality  
 ....They have a fixation on the eidetic imagery of

-beginning, middle, and end, potency and cause" (p.138), even if the world lacks such contingency. Contrasting myths to fictions, Kermode considers the former to be agents of stability, the latter, agents of change: "Myths call for absolute, fictions for conditional assent. Myths make sense in terms of a lost order of time....fictions, if successful, make sense of the here and now" (p.39).

Kermode's thesis becomes particularly relevant to Beckett when he argues that a disconfirmation of an expectation must precede the readjustment and the re-establishment of yet another consonance. In reaction to this disconfirmation, our expectations of the novel's path undergo rerouting, and a new sense of an ending reveals itself. Not surprisingly, Kermode finds a clear example of such fictional peripeteia in that exponent of the New Novel, Alain Robbe-Grillet, whose own remarks are so useful to understanding Beckett. His art "repeats itself, bisects itself, modifies itself, contradicts itself, without even accumulating a bulk to constitute a past--and thus a 'story,' in the traditional sense of the word" (p.19). Kermode refers to such fiction as eschatological. The narrative voice, unconcerned with formal chronology, allows memory, fantasy, and anticipation of the future to intrude. Although the story does move forward, it does so without reference to the narrative forms of real time .



familiar to us from conventional novels (p.20).  
Consequently, the reader is denied "the gratification to be had from sham temporality, sham causality, falsely certain description, clear story" (p.19).

Beckett's later prose, too, denies such "gratification to be had from sham temporality," and "sham causality." In "Enough", the voice destroys the reader's assumption that the text will have a teleology, and "disconfirms" any fixed measurement of time. For instance, the phrase, "It is then I shall have lived then or never" (p.29), at first refers to a fixed time "then." Having established a fixed point in time, the voice then offers us a distinct verbal unit of time, that is a duration, which is stated in the future-perfect tense, "shall have lived then." Becoming increasingly indeterminate, the conditional time-frame is then further placed in limbo by the final word "never," which obliterates along with sequential order, even the possibility of the temporal event. Yet "never" has just been qualified by the hypothetical "or." The voice perpetually shifts references to different formal paradigms of time, only to disconfirm them all. The reader is then rerouted; his normal expectations are not satisfied by the voice's revelation that any reference to temporality and causality is "sham." Something else is happening in Beckett's world.

Given this theory of man's compulsion to give spatial and temporal form to the world, and so to forestall his apprehension of his essential nothingness, a number of Kermode's arguments are therefore particularly relevant: first, as we saw earlier, in revoking the nothingness of infinity, man mythologizes his life, and makes mythical "sense" of his time on earth. Second, he places an end on endlessness in order to foster the fictive illusion of a teleological process. Thus, he reifies, concretizes, and "spatializes" time by giving it a structure and a human meaning. In this way, life--which to Beckett is nothingness--is made to seem meaningful and significant.

Beckett's denial of such an ordered conception of the world can be clearly seen in his challenge to the meaning-making forms of time, as well as space. Time, too, opens up, breaks out of its usual comforting boundaries, as the true nothingness is "dis-closed" to the self, which is in articulo mortis. As the voice in "Horn Came Always" says: "These allusions to now, to before and after, and all such yet to come, that we may feel ourselves in time" (p.33). For Beckett, the self cannot be situated in ordered time since its very nature is outside of those formal structures. Although the passage indicates that amid this nothingness "we may feel ourselves in time," ultimately, this ordered experience of time, this fiction, is shown to be illusory.

Beckett's "dis-closure" of nothingness works to dismantle such illusions that time can be codified, and to make the Beckettian self aware of its own essential emptiness.

William Spanos, a Heideggerian, sees hermeneutical implications inherent in such an action of "dis-closure." The term, in fact, is his. In "Breaking the Circle: Hermeneutics as Dis-closure,"<sup>5</sup> Spanos mentions the formal effort by contemporary writers like Sartre, Ionesco, Beckett, William Carlos Williams, and Charles Olson to break out of what he calls the "symbolic circle" (p.434). By this, he means the formally ordered, "spatialized" "world-picture" of our logocentric,<sup>6</sup> metaphysical world. By "spatialization," Spanos means to suggest the "presencing of absence": "in 'seeing' existence me-ta-physika, in grounding temporal existence in presence, the beginning and the middle in the end, being in Being, the tradition's spatialization of time, we may add, assumes its ultimate iconic form in the auto-telic and inclusive circle, whose center is the logos as presence" (p.433, his italics).

"Logocentrism" is related to the concept we have been examining, and it pertains to man's imposition of a "telos" on form, on time, and on nothingness. Spanos, having recourse to Heidegger, argues that this "objectification of nothingness is the spatialization (and

thus covering up) of time and, by extension, of being" (p.427, his italics). He feels that our "literature has by and large existed to fulfill, to certify and strengthen, the teleological expectations (the logocentric hermeneutics) of the readers" (p.448). Beckett's reader, of course, finds these expectations raised and then frustrated, primarily due to the fact that, in the post-trilogy prose, Beckett actually works to break down the forms of the space-time landscape still present in the early fiction. He also excises any notion of a traditional story/plot form (the fictional analogy through which we understand life as meaningful). But he does even more. He even weans language from syntactically coherent dialogue or speech, offering, instead, fractured soliloquy and asyntactical utterance. As a result, any concept of narrative character is reduced to that of an unidentifiable voice, caught forever in its own fallacious reasonings.

Increasingly, throughout the course of Beckett's fiction, we move from the more traditional characters of Watt, Murphy, Molloy, Moran, and Malone; within their stories, though, Beckett has digressed, and finally regressed to the source of the enantiomorphic Unnamable. Through Unnamable's "vice-existers"--Worm, Mahood, Sapo, and Macmann--we enter the domain of the disembodied voices of consciousness, voices which are devoid of identity

and context, and which are aware only of their own soliloquy:

Let them be gone now, them and all  
the others, those I have used and  
those I have not used, give me back  
the pains I lent them and vanish,  
from my life, my memory, my terrors  
and shames. There, now there is no  
one here but me, no one wheels about  
me, no one comes towards me, no one  
has ever met any one before my eyes,  
these creatures have never been,  
only I and this black void have ever  
been. And the sounds? No, all is  
silent....Nothing then but me, of  
which I know nothing, except that I  
have never uttered, and this black,  
of which I know nothing either,  
except that it is black and empty.  
(The Unnamable, p.304)

This formless sphere is that of history, fable, cerebration,  
and the imagination, of the limitless parameters of the  
mind turned inward, wherein the contiguity and continuity  
of the normal forms of the space-time grid dissolve.

The chiaroscuro play with light and dark within  
this fluid interior is the only way of measuring the  
mind's activity and motion. Once space and time are  
robbed of form and meaning, all illusion of objectivity  
is lost, and the mind, no longer attached to a tangible  
and ordered reality, is subject only to these strange  
measures--light and dark, sound and silence:

By the voice a faint light is shed.  
Dark lightens while it sounds.

Deepens when it ebbs. Lightens  
with flow back to faint full is  
whole again when it ceases. You  
are on your back in the dark....

When the shadowy light? What  
company in the dark! To close the  
eyes and try to imagine that.  
Whence once the shadowy light.  
No source. As if faintly luminous  
all his little void. (Company, p.19)

As a complex labyrinth of holes, tunnels, vacuums, and webs, this universe in Company is emptied of familiar objects. Deepening and ebbing, it reveals itself to be some sort of metageometric hypersphere, antithetical to the three-dimensional (Euclidean) world of space. Here, Beckett exposes a universe reduced to inverse proportions, one which becomes a kind of emptying x-ray version of an ordered formal world. As a result of this presentation of the fictional universe, the consciousness that operates within it is presented in terms of the cerebral exercise of "imagination imagining itself imagine." The self is intrinsically related to the introverted processes of the universe.

Beckett shows that the self is indistinguishable from this universe (and that consciousness and language are also inseparable). Nevertheless, in our discussion of the texts, we will, for the sake of clarity, distinguish between self and universe. The self will be treated as an annex of the universe. In spite of this separation, however, we

should not lose sight of the fact that, ultimately, they are correlative; the self is the "bourneless dark," and the fulcrum, the primum mobile of Beckett's inverse fictional universe:

The fable of one with you in the dark. The fable of one fabling of one with you in the dark. And how better in the end labour lost and silence. And you as you always were.

Alone.

This passage, with which Company ends, articulates the main modelling principle of this Beckettian universe: to use an apt analogy, the self can be conceived as a holographic model existing only within language, reflecting on itself and thereby "dis-closing," in Spanos' terms, its universal formlessness and meaninglessness. It therefore remains distinct from the phenomenal world of reduced space and time for it can neither accommodate nor sustain those phenomenal forms.

Instead, Beckett's fiction continually directs the reader's attention to the abstract qualities of his universe. The stylistic devices used to convey such a world to the reader involve the subversion of the medium --language--that tends to concretize abstract ideas and to present the fictional world as dominated by form and space. In Beckett's work, the reflective act of the

"fabling" self is an act which finds its echo in the metafictional technique of mise-en-abyme<sup>7</sup> in narration. Structures of reduplication, repeated ad infinitum, simultaneously foster and emphasize the distortion of the normal man-made structures of space and time. The dimensions of the fiction increase; they augment out of proportion ( ad infinitum ), as one facet of the "devising" consciousness is mirrored in the fable of another's voice. We are given the impression of voices and fables superimposed on each other, self-reflexively receding into seeming endlessness.

On the other hand, the Beckettian universe is also presented as reduced to the dimensions of one consciousness. This compression, in its turn, however, also represents a kind of expansion: all consciousness, as the mirroring structure implies, becomes part of an open, endless continuum of fields within fields. Aside from this narrative self-reflexivity, which tends to subvert any linear narrative flow, we see other features which work to make the reader aware of several important elements: besides presenting the voice's own "dis-closure" of its nothingness, or the "absencing of presence" (inverting Spanos' statement that "spatialization" is the "presencing of absence"), Beckett also employs certain strategies to challenge the hegemony of form within fiction. These



strategies or mechanisms dismantle both the spatial confines of the Beckettian universe and the chronological sequence that might normally structure fiction. Instead, Beckett offers, as we have seen, the heuristic, catechetical "who now?" of Texts, the mnemonic "as it was" of How It Is, and the "divining," "wild imagining," within "maxima and minima," of the subsequent "residual fiction." Ultimately, these strategies, which we will see to be recursive, reverse the causal flow of fictional time (beginnings which could lead to ends) and lay bare the stream of consciousness that constitutes Beckett's universe. All begins and ends here: "skull last place of all black void within without" ("For to End," p.11). On the level of language, words within the context of a clause (within what we call the formal features of grammar) do not qualify each other, but refer, through association, to other clauses, to yet other contextual spaces:

Little body little block heart  
 beating ash grey only upright.  
 Little body ash grey locked rigid  
 heart beating face to endlessness.  
 Little body little block genitals  
 overrun arse a single block grey  
 crack overrun. ("Lessness," p.5)

Here, "Little" is repeated five times, "body" three times, "block" three times, "grey" three times, "overrun" twice, and "lock(ed)" connects with "block." The linguistic form relied on in fiction is destroyed as the grammatical

units break down under the stress of a network of associations.

This mirroring mode is one of the dominant strategies for challenging formal structures used in the post-trilogy work. Instead of a fixed and predictable narrative line with traditional characters and plot action, Beckett gives us interpenetrating consciousnesses as fables within fables--which have no particular source or anchor. Consequently, both time and space within fiction are voided of their comforting forms in order to evoke Beckett's very different universe, one which is empty of both content and form.

In the earlier prose, in Watt, for instance, emphasis at first is on the subject's awareness of a more conventional mimesis of the phenomenal world of ordered time and space. Yet, within this world there is already a disharmony, perceived by Watt's awareness of the emptiness in the universe. When all perception of distance and position in space and time dissolve to mirror the vacancy within the self, the fictional world of the earlier prose is presented as a form collapsing in upon itself.

It is precisely this latter feature of the awareness of the compatibility between essential universal

nothingness and the emptiness within the self (caused by the emptying and breaking down of form) which dominates the later works. In abolishing the distance between self and universe, Beckett presents the two concepts in terms of mutually penetrating zones of consciousness. Here, the mirror image discussed earlier has another role: it reflects the dialectical, cerebral process of absorption and refraction that we see occurring between self and universe. In the later prose, as one voice "fables" himself, his voice proclaims and "dis-closes" his essential nothingness. In revealing his absence, he finds himself absorbed into another fable, absorbed into that other's vacuum. Thus, deflected and reflected, "someone divines me, divines us" ("For to End," p.11). Such a process (one "alone on his back in the dark" ["Company," p.9] becoming "company") involves a depletion of self, a contraction, an implosive absenting of self in a realm of pure consciousness.

From Company's conception of the disembodied voices existing in a seemingly interminable present-- "The Unthinkable last of all. Unnamable. Last person I" (p.24)--we can see that, in Beckett's work, self is not a corollary of an ordered, meaningful world, but rather of "Nowhere," "No Source." Such a claim to "sourcelessness" on the self's part suggests that, in this universe,

ontological priority is given to different, non-conventional forms of temporality. In maintaining this different ontological priority in the text, Beckett dismantles the iconic fictional structure of what Spanos calls "an inclusive, self-bounded, or autotelic microcosm of the macrocosm," a "world-picture" in miniature (p.436). In addition to "dis-closing" the time and space of this universe as unordered and in fact, as refusing form, and showing the world to be absent, the loquacious voices of the post-trilogy prose also proclaim themselves as purely verbal beings. They exist only as "rumour transmissable" (How It Is, p.120), as oral, more than written creatures. They may dictate to the pen, but "when the pen stops I go on" ("Enough," p.25), and their existence is no longer bound to script, as it is in Malone Dies. In Malone's case, his life and story temporarily end when he loses his pencil, and his fictional life completely ends when he no longer writes:

or with his pencil or with his stock or  
 or light light I mean  
 never there he will never  
 never anything  
 there  
 any more. (p.288)

The proclamation on the part of the voices--that

they do not live in any three-dimensional familiar world --is actually made possible by the nature and structure of Beckett's prose. As was earlier suggested, the texts are opened up or "dis-closed" through the disruption of linear narrative flow (point 1 not necessarily leading to point 2) and the breaking of the formal circle of the plot (that of coherent beginnings, middles, and ends which are implied in beginnings). What then follows from the reader's awareness of such a disruption is his abandonment of any idea of the text as a formal, meaningful whole. Beckett presents being as verbal and formless and thus empty of meaning, and he does this through what I have called his rhetoric of abstraction: he frees language from any normal spatio-temporal context created by syntactic form. For instance, in "For to End Yet Again," deleted punctuation and displaced clauses disrupt the progressive accumulation of meaning that is normally expected in orthodox syntactical structures, and so they actually work to destroy the inherent semantic assumptions fostered by grammatical form:

For to end yet again skull alone  
 in the dark the void no neck no  
 face just the box last place of all  
 in the dark the void. Place of  
 remains where once used to gleam in  
 the dark on and off used to glimmer  
 a remain. Remains of the days of  
 the light of day never light so  
 faint as theirs so pale. (p.11)

This disruption of the normal subject-verb-object structure

undercuts the reader's teleological expectations of the text's (and language's) natural progression. What the reader is presented with is a paratactic arrangement of clauses which lack connectives and which do not indicate co-ordination or subordination of any particular clause to another.

The results of this syntactical discontinuity are twofold. The language of the text becomes freed of any normal context, of any spatio-temporal reference within a clause. Obviously, this works to challenge the imposition of both form and meaning. Nevertheless, the reader also begins to import substitute words into the text in order to create his own coherence. As a result, the "dis-closed" text becomes open to an infinite variety of potential meanings. The text both contracts and expands, as meaning is "absented," but also implied. In freeing the text of its context in this way, Beckett creates what Stanley Fish<sup>8</sup> calls a "self-consuming" structure for his literary "artifact": in other words, the structure of the work undermines its "referential self" by pointing "away from the temporal-spatial vision it naturally reflects" (p.42). A case in point would be the voice's reference to "Bourneless dark" in Company, a reference which phonetically directs the reader's mind to variant readings (borne, born).

Apart from their capacity to imply meanings other than those prescribed by the immediate context, these texts point away from and undercut themselves in other more explicit ways: by declarations, nullifications, repudiations, and contradictions. But, in Beckett's own words, in the appendix to Watt: "No symbols where none intended" (Watt, p.254). So, statements such as the "mute imprecations" (p.41) which make "no sound" of How It Is, demonstrate "an art liable to consume itself on its own pyre" (Malone Dies); or, to borrow Fish's terminology, they indicate a style that is "deprogressive, or retrogressive" (p.56). The prose refuses to move to a conclusion; it continually short-circuits, "calling attention to what it is not doing...proclaiming not only its own insufficiency, but the insufficiency of the frame of reference from which it issues" (Fish, p.42). Beckett's text's denial of meaning, its refusal to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion, alerts the reader to its inability to contain, or to identify, value and identity in fiction.

Such a linguistic recession, along with such a compact, concise style, function within the prose to create a retroactive progression towards silence. In Texts, we have an explicit statement of the paradox of verbal silence implicit in the inverse universe of the

mind: the text's voice reveals or "dis-closes" a "farrago\_ of silence and words, of silence that is not silence and barely murmured words" (Text VI, p.104). He seeks to "put in the negative, a new no, to cancel all the others, ... to an absence less vain" (Text XI, pp.130-1).

In How It Is, however, the surface of the prose, with its apparent gaps, spaces, lacunae, and sudden breaking-off in mid-speech (aposiopesis), not only does offer some kind of punctuation (in the form of breath pauses), but also serves to perpetuate, conceptually and visually, those ideas basic to Beckett's post-trilogy universe: the "vast tracts of time" (p.25) and the silence piercing the monologue, "the silence [he] must break" (p.13):

The essential would seem to be lacking

This solitude when the voice  
recounts its sole means of living  
it

my life we are talking of my life

unless it recounts it the voice my  
life during that other solitude....  
(p.129)

These blanks, which visually promote the idea of empty space also foster the idea that the text is interspersed with areas of muteness.

We have seen that the text can imply silence and



absence through a device such as syntactical discontinuity. But the narrative process does not solely work to convey silences within the text. What is also elicited in the reader is an awareness of the infinity within the Beckettian self, and this sense of infinity is conveyed to us through the textual use of repetition or linguistic self-reflexiveness: Beckett specifically uses the devices of epistrophe (the repetition of one word at the end of successive clauses) and epizeuxis (repetition for emphasis). Douglas Hofstadter, in Godel, Escher, Bach,<sup>9</sup> refers to such a style as "canon per augmentationem contrario motu," or as a "literary fugue" on the language of infinite regression.

This "literary fugue" not only involves the re-invocation of lexical items and phrases, but implies a rhythmic procedure which could go on infinitely. J.M. Coetzee has, in fact, analyzed "Lessness" according to the Zipf-Mandelbrot law of variants, and has convincingly demonstrated this concept of endlessness in the text's language. In Company, we read: "devised deviser devising it all for company. In the same figment dark as his figments...crawl and fall. Crawl and fall again" (p.46). The structure of repetition is obvious. Through this interplay of repeated words, through the chiasmus of certain key terms, the unconventional structure of the text is seen

to be an intricate network of lexical reverberations.

These echoes create a sense of flux, of verbal elements incessantly connecting and fracturing and then disconnecting again. The reader, in his unsatisfied need for form, makes certain chiasmic alignments within the text. Thus, the newly organized wording of the text does not correspond to its printed order. As was earlier stated, when the reader recalls a former use of a similar word, that word is then freed from its fixed spatial context on that particular printed page. By being freed from its space and transported into the reader's temporal memory, the text itself, in a sense, loses its material concreteness. Instead, it too becomes fluid, eliciting readings that are both anachronistic (readings based on recall of the past) and anticipatory. The text, therefore, opens up, "discloses" directions and readings other than those first found in the reader's normal sequential progression page by page.

This same textual freedom can be brought about through other rhetorical devices, through paronomasis (punning) for example: in the French version of How It Is, Comment C'est phonetically becomes "commencer." As a result, the reader's normal way of interpreting the intrinsically relational functions and assumptions of language dissolves and the text becomes multi-directional.

Because of this hermeneutic flexibility, the text becomes, in a sense, abstract. By implying infinite meanings, indeterminacy, and the absence (or divestment) of meaning, the fiction directs the reader's attention away from any single determinate meaning that could possibly be latent within the passage. Because of the dual (fictive and referential) nature of language, the reader must respond to what turns out to be the freedom-inducing properties of fiction.

Aside from liberating language from the confines of its normal syntactical and grammatical form (and thereby allowing experiments with poetic rhythm within prose) such a rhetorical strategy also serves another function. By enhancing the abstract potential of language, Beckett has also reinforced in his reader the awareness of the fluidity and formlessness of the fictional character or self. Unlike Joyce's Stephen Dedalus of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, a hero who experiences epiphanies, visions of wholeness in a "luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure,"<sup>10</sup> Beckett's residual figures exist as part of what Beckett describes as the "consternation behind the form," in the indeterminacy and fragmentation of chaos.

What can identity mean for such a view of consciousness? For Beckett, who plays the "dispeller of

figments" ("Lessness," p.47), any attempt to give form and meaning to consciousness--or fiction--is a "lie." As the voice in Texts states, "no more denials, all is false, there is no-one, it's understood" "and the voices cease, it's only voices, only lies" (Text III, p.85). As we see, even the form of sound dissolves and, therefore, any concretization of utterance into language soon diffracts, denying its capacity to come together as meaningful form.

How It Is is an exemplary text in which to study this tension between form and emptiness. Revolving on the axis of "vast tracts of time," the spatial as well as temporal configurations of the fictive universe blur: "no more time" "fertile in vicissitudes and peripeteias" (p.56). By implication, we have been transported through the involutions of "monster silences vast tracts of time" to "perfect nothingness" (p.81). In How It Is, Beckett also despatializes the landscape; he deprives it of "warmth of primeval mud impenetrable dark" (p.11). Despite many references to fixed space, the real structuring principle of this work is the echoed conundrum of "how it is."

Not surprisingly, however, considering the number of textual references devoted to the spatial aspects of Beckett's pantamorphic world, it would seem tempting (on the surface) to consider Beckett's work as, in fact, exemplary of the stylistic process of objectification and

spatialization in art. Yet such a view is considerably less convincing in the light of the fact that Beckett's presentation of the world of space is a presentation of it as a false one. The majority of these references to space are relentlessly counterpointed by allusions to its distortion or instability: "in the endlessness" ("Lessness," p.48); "black void within without" ("For to End," p.11); "a vast space of time impossible to measure" ("The Lost Ones," p.67); "imaginary edge" ("The Lost Ones," p.64); and the "endless Equinox" (Enough," p.31). Here we can observe a process of--literally--spatial "de-forming" in the texts. Ultimately, the impression we are left with is one of "a space with neither here nor there where all the footsteps ever fell can never fare nearer to anywhere nor from anywhere further away". ("For to End," p.15).

In "The Lost Ones," we are also told: "For in the cylinder alone are certitudes to be found and without nothing but mystery" (p.70). Here again is that polarity of spatial form and formlessness. Similarly, the overall emphasis on mystery and on incertitudes also controls Company's queries: "For why or? Why in another dark or in the same" (p.24). Beckett's focus on the "contourless" (p.33) universe is underlined by the voice's plaint: "Nowhere to be found," "Nowhere to be sought. The

unthinkable last of all" (p.29).

We have seen that the repeated interplay of light and dark imagery throughout Beckett's works plays an important role in Beckett's alternative to normal temporal and spatial boundaries. Being "in the light" or "in the dark" (All Strange Away) is what controls the self's perception of the universe: "Light flows, eyes close, stay closed till it ebbs....Light on, down on knees, sights pin, makes for it, lights out, so on, years of time on earth" ("All Strange Away," p.1). By Company, space itself appears as only a product of the mind's lamentable need to particularize and codify existence in a structure. Beckett's universe is controlled by perception; as demonstrated by that light-dark control system in "All Strange Away," the void is empty of both content and form. Any forms offered are those contained in the self's memory of his history in the phenomenological world of space and time. Beckett is dealing primarily with a formless world of fractured space and time (contrary to that world of ordered space and chronological time in the naturalistic and realistic novel), and so, his stylistic devices aim to provide the reader with new perceptions through space and time-montage, multiple-view, slow-ups, fade-outs, cuttings, close-ups, panoramas, and flash-backs.

Robert Humphrey<sup>11</sup> describes as "cinematic" the effect of stream-of-consciousness technique in the modern novel. "Control devices," such as those listed above, serve to reveal (or suggest) a challenge to narrative time: "the infinite expansion of the moment" (p.49). Montage, says Humphrey:

is designed to show interrelation or association of ideas, such as rapid succession of images or the superimposition of image on image or the surrounding of a focal image by related ones. It is essentially a method to show composite or diverse views of one subject--in short, to show multiplicity. (p.49)

Beckett carries this stream-of-consciousness technique as far as he can. Although Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, early practitioners of the method, might be said to have employed similar stylistic devices, characters such as Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway and Joyce's Leopold Bloom of "dear dirty Dublin" remained identifiable within a world of time and space, in Dublin and in London. Yet, Beckett has gone beyond such an ordered and familiar world into the formless realm of pure stream of consciousness, into an area with no boundaries. This is how Beckett subverts "human calculative reasoning": he challenges the idea of Being as "being-in-space" (Palmer), and inverts the Yeatsian "artifice of eternity." Form is shown to be the sense-making illusion that it is--be it in the

space and time of fictional worlds or real ones. In both narrative and language, form imposes meaning, but it falsifies the experience of chaos. This is the paradox of Beckett's prose.



## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup>The term Euclidean is used here to describe the formal world of geometric, three-dimensional space and time.

<sup>2</sup>Richard E. Palmer, "Postmodernity and Hermeneutics," Boundary 2, 5 (Winter, 1977), pp.363-393. Henceforward, all page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>3</sup>Frank Kermode The Sense of an Ending (1966; reprinted, New York: Oxford University Press, 1967). Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>4</sup>Kermode uses the term "Kairos" to explain "a point in time filled with significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end" (p.47). On Beckett's How It Is, Kermode says: "Time is an endless transition from one condition of misery to another, a passion without form or stations, to be ended by no parousia. It is a world crying out for forms and stations, and for apocalypse; all it gets is vain temporality, made, multiform antithetical influx" (p.115).

<sup>5</sup>William V. Spanos, "Breaking the Circle: Hermeneutics as Dis-closure," Boundary 2, 5 (Winter, 1977), pp.423-453. Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>6</sup>Spanos bases his argument on Jacques Derrida's Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs, translated and introduced by David B. Allison (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973). See, too, Jacques Derrida's Dissemination, translated, introduced, and annotated by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981). The term "logocentric," however, deserves more clarification. In her introduction, Johnson states: "Best known in this country for having forged the term 'deconstruction,' Jacques Derrida follows Nietzsche and Heidegger in elaborating a critique of 'Western metaphysics,' by which he means not only the Western philosophical tradition, but 'everyday' thought and language as well. Western thought, says Derrida, has always been structured in terms of dichotomies or polarities: good vs. evil, being vs. nothingness, presence vs. absence, truth vs. error, identity vs. difference, mind vs. matter, man vs.

woman, soul vs. body, life vs. death, nature vs. culture, speech vs. writing'" (p.viii). The second element is usually considered a "fall" from the first, an "undesirable" "negative," "corrupt" version, and hence the former is given priority, "in both the temporal and the qualitative sense of the word." Moreover, "in its search for the answer to the question of Being, Western philosophy has always determined Being as presence" (p.ix). In addition, continues Johnson, because of immediacy of response-- there being no temporal or spatial difference between speaker and listener--the spoken word is considered in hierarchy to be precedent, an "image of perfectly self-present meaning." "Writing, on the other hand, is considered by the logocentric system to be only a representation of speech, a secondary substitute designed for use only when speaking is impossible. Writing is thus a second-rate activity." In the course of his critique, Derrida does not reverse the system of polarities by saying that writing is better, but instead shows such dichotomies to be an illusion, "since speech is already structured by difference and distance as much as writing is" (p.ix).

<sup>7</sup>See Linda Hutcheon, Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1980), pp.53-56. Hutcheon makes references to Jean Ricardou's Le Nouveau Roman ([Paris]: Seuil, 1973) which discusses the functions of this device, and she refers the reader to the horizontal and the vertical ones, the latter being relevant here, in its "allegorical" capacity to mirror, as Lucien Dällenbach suggests in his study of "regressus in infinitum" in Le Récit spéculaire (Paris: Seuil, 1977). In Hutcheon's words: "Dällenbach feels that the mirroring image is central to the concept of the mise-en-abyme, but there are three distinguishable kinds. One is simple reduplication, in which the mirroring fragment has a relation of similitude with the whole that contains it. A second type is a repeated reduplication 'in infinitum' in which the above-mentioned mirroring fragment bears within itself another mirroring fragment, and so on. The third type of doubling is labelled 'aporistique,' and here the fragment is supposed to include the work in which it itself is included" (pp.55-56).

<sup>8</sup>Stanley Fish, Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972). Henceforward, all page references will be in parentheses in the text. Although Fish employs this critical premise to analyse the literature of Donne, Herbert, Bacon, and Bunyan, we

can see the applicability of such a structural principle to Beckett's fiction.

<sup>9</sup>Douglas Hofstadter, Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid (Vintage Books; New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1979). Hofstadter shows the process of recursion and self-reproduction to be basic to Escher's lithographs and engravings, Gödel's metamathematics, and Bach's canons. In his passage entitled "Strange Loops as the Crux of Consciousness," (p.70), Hofstadter describes the brain's processes in a terminology which suitably describes the compulsive circularity involved in the Beckettian self's mnemonic reflections on himself and on others.

<sup>10</sup>James Joyce (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973), p.213.

<sup>11</sup>Robert Humphry, Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel: A Study of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, William Faulkner, and Others (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), p.49. Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

### CHAPTER III

#### The Narrative Strategies of Beckett's Post-trilogy Fiction

"From time immemorial....No  
source...from nought anew."

The post-trilogy fiction--How It Is, Texts for Nothing, Six Residua, For To End Yet Again and Other Fizzles, "All Strange Away," and Company--utilizes three dominant rhetorical strategies: the antiphonal or catechetical structuring of Texts for Nothing; the mnemonic formula of How It Is; and the recursive strategy of the voice's stream of consciousness in the residual fiction and Company. Although the fiction after Texts and How It Is contains elements of antiphonal and mnemonic structuring, neither dominates the hermeneutic processes of the residual fiction to the same degree.

These various strategies serve to present the self, as Beckett describes him in Proust, in terms of "a sequence of dislocations and adjustments,"<sup>1</sup> "a life so protracted in the past and so meaningless in the future" (p.50). This conception of the self as dislocated is related to his "shrinking from the nullity of extracircumferential phenomena, drawn into the core of the eddy" (p.48). Regarding the Proustian conception of

memory, self, and habit, as it relates to this "meaningless," "protracted" life, Beckett explains: "It [memory] presents the past in monochrome. The images it chooses are as arbitrary as those chosen by the imagination, and are equally remote from reality.... The material that it furnishes contains nothing of the past, merely a blurred uniform projection once removed of our anxiety and opportunism--that is to say, nothing" (p.18). "Rememoration" says Beckett, involves "inattention," "absence of mind" (p.18), and what we see in the post-trilogy prose is precisely this involvement with memory, self-excavation, or what others have called "ontospeleology."

The inner universe, as presented in the three structuring modes, is abstract, indeterminate, and chaotic; it is also inescapably limited, in Beckettian terms, to the aural and the vocal, as we shall see. The heuristic, questioning processes of the post-trilogy fiction take shape thanks to those three modes. Beckett's questions address the abiotic voice's inability to find a determinate, absolute answer to his problems of ontological identity; they also offer the explanation that this inability to isolate and to identify the self stems from the nothingness within being. As Beckett stated, "when a man faces himself, he is looking into the abyss."<sup>2</sup> This confrontation is the

experience of the Beckettian "non-knower." The main reason for this state of what Beckett calls "ignorance," and "aporia" lies in the fact that this fictional self (that has replaced traditional character designations) exists in what Kurt Vonnegut, in The Sirens of Titan, describes as "chrono-synclastic infundibula."<sup>3</sup> In other words, his being is scattered about in space and time and in this, he differs from the "punctual" man of the phenomenal world, one who is anchored to a point in both time and space.

How does Beckett manage to create such an impression of the abyss within the self? How does he move the reader into the world of that self? The mnemonic and the catechetical structuring principles, combined with a fluid, associative, recursive stylistic technique allows Beckett's prose to move the reader into the echoing processes of memory and cerebration. In freeing language, as well, from its logical, syntactical context, as we have seen, Beckett offers the reader a sense of abstraction within and through language. These modes of structuring indicate the way in which he has liberated himself from more traditional "formal contexts."<sup>4</sup> This liberation is the result of Beckett's radical questioning of the human need to impose form and order. He disrupts the linear narrative movement based on both the progression of an eventful

story and the development of character. Beckett, in other words, breaks that ordered form of fiction described by Spanos and Kermode. Because Beckett destroys this desire for consonance, he challenges our notions about the order and content of the phenomenal world.

In Murphy, Watt, and the trilogy, we are presented with the representation of a conceivable and tangible world: Magdalen Mental Mercyseat (Murphy), Mr. Knott's House (Watt), the forest in Molloy, Malone's room, and the Unnamable's jar, the "inverted spiral," and "infundibulum." However, Beckett was, at that time, already experimenting with the more abstract world he would create in the post-trilogy fiction. In Molloy, for instance, linear time slows down and spatial dimensions disintegrate as the self is "drowned in a deep and merciful torpor shot with brief and abominable gleams" (p.54): "I misjudged the distance separating me from the other world, and often I stretched out my hand for what was far beyond my reach, and often I knocked against obstacles scarcely visible on the horizon" (p.50). Later Molloy adds: "But now I do not wander anymore, anywhere anymore, and indeed I scarcely stir at all, and yet nothing is changed. And the confines of my room, of my bed, of my body, are as remote from me, as were those of my region in the days of my splendour. And the cycle continues, joltingly, of flight and bivouac, in an Egypt

without boundaries" (p.66). But the "flight" continues in the cycle of time: although Moran, in Part II, begins to extricate Molloy from the depths of his consciousness, he still lives in a recognizable, ordered phenomenal world. In the post-trilogy fiction, Beckett progressively shrinks and compresses the spatial dimensions and forms of the novel's world, leaving only the voices of thought.

Kermode's theory of novelistic space and time in The Sense of an Ending presents life as a period of transition involving the "sense of living at the turning point of time": "Time is an endless transition from one condition of misery to another....It is a world crying out for forms and stations, and for apocalypse; all it gets is vain temporality, mad, multiform, antithetical flux."<sup>5</sup> It is not that he [Beckett] denies the paradigm in favour of reality, but that his form and order constantly cancel out. The paradigm, says Kermode, is only usable in terms of irony.

Kermode is right to situate Beckett among those who deal with "time as an endless transition." Beckett's fictional world is indeed a world "crying out for forms and stations," but only because it has already deliberately deconstructed the illusory, if comforting, forms of space and time. For Beckett, such a "telos" of origins, middles, and ends is a corruption of the true endlessness of reality.



Beckett's fiction progresses rather like the knight's movements in chess. We sense connections, but the overall direction is not easily discernible, although there has been a visible passage and movement.

Kermode's analysis is important, as we have seen, inasmuch as it demonstrates man's need to give form to his life, to give it the framework of a "world-picture." In Beckett's work, we can see a consistent, progressive effort to revoke such formalization and to convey, instead, formlessness. How to do so is the challenge for the writer of fiction. Time is no longer presented as linear and coherent: "I gave up before birth, it is not possible otherwise, but birth there had to to be, it was he, I was inside, that's how I see it...impossible I should have thoughts, and I speak and think... I should know, I'll know...I should tell, I'll tell, in the present" ("I Gave Up Before Birth," p.45). In telling a tale of death, the voice simultaneously refers to a pre-natal, a post-partum, and a posthumous situation. It speaks in the present, the simple perfect, and the conditional, and yet exists retrospectively in the imperfect--in the past continuous--and still generates a narration forward in time.

By sabotaging the conventional temporal structures of fiction, Beckett denies the world of

concordances, and in its stead, offers subjective consciousness and formlessness. To establish such a process of consciousness as endless, Beckett shows his fictional form negating its familiar temporal points of reference. It is a form which places itself in question, re-presenting itself, and thereby validating its inexhaustability, its endlessness. In "The Lost Ones," the voice recounts: "In the beginning then unthinkable as the end all roamed without respite" (p.67). Incapable of concluding their actions, those who "never again" "ceaselessly come and go" (p.67) do so "without ceasing to search with their eyes" (p.67). Recognition and identification are impossible because the selves do not know what is the object of their search. Their search seems to stem from a compulsion, a desire which is both insatiable and undefined. Hence, Beckett's presentation of inexhaustable action. Contemporary writers like Beckett break or break out of the straight-jacket of fictional form by creating what Spanos calls: "a literature that plays havoc with both the sense of an ending (i.e. linear narrative) and of symbolic form (circular narrative)."<sup>6</sup> Although there is obviously form in Beckett's work, it is a form which contests with the conventional teleology of linear narrative. Beckett opens up new possibilities for literary form.

The post-trilogy work can certainly be seen as a reaction to the formal conventions of the realistic novel. But we should examine in more detail the narrative strategies which Beckett employs in their place, since he is increasingly concerned with that abstract, un-formed reality usually denied by the novel form. Novelistic characters, like his own earlier "Homo Mensura" (Molloy), disappear. Consciousness is all. This "ingression" to an abstract world seems to occur in Malone Dies: Beckett's hero feels years passing in seconds, as he wonders whether or not, in his words, "I am dead already and that all continues more or less as when I was not" (p.219). Struggling towards "the vanishing point," "the inaccessible boon," "the rapture of vertigo, the letting go...the gulf...the relapse ...to nothingness" (p.195), Malone dies into the Unnamable's posthumous self, in vivo, a "soul denied in vain, vigilant, anxious, turning in its cage as in a lantern, in the night without haven or craft or matter or understanding" (p.222):

The question may be asked, off the record, why time doesn't pass, doesn't pass from you, why it piles up all about you, instant on instant, on all sides, deeper and deeper, thicker and thicker, your time, others' time, the time of the ancient dead and dead yet unborn, why it buries you grain by grain neither dead nor alive (The Unnamable, p.389).

This passage, both thematically and stylistically, indicates several changes in Beckett's prose, changes which prevail in the post-trilogy work. First, the fictional world of space and landscape diminishes and shrinks into that distorted formless realm evoked by stories of the "gallery of moribunds. Murphy, Watt, Yerk, Mercier, and all the others" (Molloy, p.137), that "fatidical procession of phantoms going from nothingness to nothingness." Second, all matter has been absorbed, imploded into the vortex of the mind, a mind that is the "narthex" (The Unnamable, p.293) of "the long sonata of the dead" (Molloy, p.31). This vortical universe, apparently empty of content and form, is described in a language which invalidates meaning "by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later" (The Unnamable, p.291). This rhetorical strategy of affirmation and denial creates a sense of indeterminacy, chaos, absence of meaning, or abstraction. As Malone predicts, this universe will be composed of words that "do not endure, but vanish into thin air" (Malone Dies, p.249).

With its emphasis on "the space of an instant," The Unnamable foreshadows the formless state of contraction and implosion that dominates the post-trilogy fiction. The formless chaos of what the Unnamable calls an "inverted

spiral" of shrinking space (p.316) is incarnated in style based on certain structuring dynamics which accommodate, but do not order, the chaos, and continually indicate an aural (even more than written) modality: the voice's requiem. The appropriate dynamics are, once again, those of antiphonal, heuristic questions and answers ("Who now? Where now?"), of mnemonic evocations of the voice's cerebrations, and of the overall flow of stream of consciousness revealing the "ontospeleological" quest of the self. These strategies summon forth the "I, of whom I know nothing" (The Unnamable, p.304), "the irrepressible ephemeral," "born of my absence."

One of the most basic strategies of the early post-trilogy period, beginning with Texts for Nothing (1958), is the antiphonal or catechetical one. Its roots are clearly visible in earlier words, as in the Unnamable's "Where now? Who now? When now?....Questions, hypotheses" (p.291). Basically, each text presents a question and a provisional answer. This format not only offers an inconclusive response to a query, but also serves to imply, enigmatically, other possible answers. In his work, Beckett and the Voice of Species, Eric Levy offers the following divisions:

Text I: Why did I start the narration?  
 Answer: I'm doing the same thing over  
 and over again. Text 2: Where can I  
 go with my story? Answer: There is no

more hope of going anywhere. Text 3: What matter who's speaking...? (p.85). Answer: No one has spoken. Text 4: Who is narrating, claiming to be me? Answer: As soon as I speak, the voice is no longer mine. Text 5: Why do I want the story to be mine? Answer: I am haunted by phantoms through whom I speak. Text 6: How are the intervals filled between these apparitions? (p.101). Answer: If I could enter an interval and know that I was in one, then perhaps I could at least begin a story that would end. Text 7: Have I looked everywhere to find me? Answer: I am not to be found where life is, i.e. where time actually moves ahead. Text 8: Were things always so? Answer: I have always been asking that question. Text 9: Why don't I say "There's a way out there?" (p.117). Answer: If I could say it, it would pass out of here. Text 10: Can mere utterance make sense? Answer: All I am trying to do is go on. Text 11: What am I saying? Answer: "... that is all I can have had to say this evening" (p.131). Text 12: Will the words succeed in slipping me into him they describe? Answer: Here are nothing but lifeless words. Text 13: How do I get out of here? Answer: I am nowhere. 7

Levy argues that this catechetical format is merely a device indicating that narration has entered "a realm where impulse to ascertain truth and falsehood still remains but where every attempt to do so is doomed to fail" (p.73).

However, Levy ignores one important point: the fact that the heuristic, questioning process might be more important than the resolution. The

"obligatory" impulse to validate the self is eternal; for Beckett, there can be no resolution.<sup>8</sup> But the indeterminacy involved in the insoluble but irrevocable process of questioning is essential to the self.

Overwhelmed by questions, yet determined to "seek by the excessive light of night, a demand commensurate with the offer" (Text II, p.81), the Beckettian self in Texts basically cannot ascertain truth and falsehood because the primacy of the indeterminate, formless world over any ordered and concrete vision prevents empirical validation. The self seeks to discontinue this incestuous dialectical inquiry and to be absolved of his confession by "expiating" the "sin" of his history. Yet, in trying to adjourn the "proceedings," the voice succeeds, as we saw in the Introduction, in "revealing" his non-being--ironically, the very thing sought. Such is the paradoxical power available to the voice: by seeking to become absent, he "shows" himself to be divested of meaning, to be already absented, "void of existence" (Text IV, p.91).

The power of "dis-closure" that is available to one existing in nothingness is all the more apparent in the scene wherein the voice stipulates that he will provide the reader with a backdrop, a location, a spatial setting: "I'll describe the place....The top, very flat, of a

mountain, no, a hill, but so wild, so wild, enough"

(Text I, p.75). The source of the self's power here is in his "lack": all form is missing, knowledge of anything is disallowed, even self-knowledge. If nothing prevails, then nothing can be known:

There's a way out there, no no, I'm  
getting mixed, I must be getting  
mixed, confusing here and there, now  
and then, just as I confused them then,  
the here of then, the then of there,  
with other spaces, other times dimly  
discerned, but not more dimly than  
now, now that I'm here, if I'm here,  
and no longer there, coming and  
going before the graveyard,  
perplexed...all the night  
long before me when the dead lie  
waiting, on the beds where they  
died, shrouded or confined, for  
the sun to rise? (Text IX, p.120)

The bewilderment and perplexity of the self are revealed in the text by the question mark with which the passage concludes. The ambiguity of his situation lies in the fact that he has no criterion by which to gauge his own identity or validity.

"Where would I go, if I could go, who would I be, if I could be, what would I say if I had a voice, who says this, saying it's me?" (Text IV, p.91). To such a question the answer must, perforce, be hypothetical: "It's the same old stranger as ever, for whom alone accusative I exist, in the pit of my inexistence, of his" (Text IV,



p.91). With no apparent form or content to his universe, the voice is a stranger to his own intangible self. The world of chaos, lacking coherent form, is prohibitive to the voice's associating the sound of his voice with language, with some form of communication which is comprehensible to others. He is aware of sound and "murmur." Somehow, sound formed into the vehicle of language is alien to him, and he can only comprehend a confused medley of noise and the vacuum in which he is trapped: "resurrection in and out of this murmur of memory and dream ... mute, uncomprehending" (Text XII, pp.133-134). We are told: "And when he feels me void of existence its of his he would have me void, and vice versa" (Text IV, p.91). Hence, the self exists between "the two parting dreams, knowing none, knowing of none" (Text XI, p.131).

Essentially, the voice cannot know failure or success because there are no boundaries or limits by which to gauge them, or even, therefore, to validate existence. The experience of this inability to validate is irrevocable and perpetual because, knowing no dimensions, the self multiplies, mirrors, and echoes himself continually:

I'm the clerk, I'm the scribe, at  
the hearings of what cause I know  
not....To be judge and party,  
witness and advocate....It's an  
image, in my helpless head, where

all sleeps, all is dead, not yet  
 born ...to look for me there  
 in the silence of a quite different  
 justice, in the toils of that  
 obscure assize where to be is to  
 be guilty. (Text V, p.95)

The fact that the self alludes to himself as a "scribe" indicates Beckett's concern with the written, as well as the vocal aspects of language. In this case, to be a "scribe" can also involve the vocal side of language--in the sense of dictation--since the self is attending his own "hearings." What is of additional interest is the fact that, in this case, the voice is dictating to itself. This consideration of both the spoken and written word, on Beckett's part, occurs throughout the Texts. In Text IV, the voice refers to "talking, having my figments talk" (p.93). Further on, he explains "once there is speech, no need of a story, a story is not compulsory" (p.93).

References to the rejection of speech and language formed into a meaningful "story," can also be found in Beckett's earlier fiction. In Malone Dies, Malone mused: "I wonder what my last words will be, written, the others do not endure, but vanish, into thin air. I shall never know" (p.249). The later voice, in speaking and being unable to associate sound with form, becomes his own listener, "always muttering, to lull me and keep me

company, and all ears always." The voice here attests both to the generative power of language and to himself as belonging to the aural "space of an instant." He lives in a state of exile without "a form and a world" (Text IV, p.91).

Were the questions he posits to receive satisfying answers, they could be integrated into an ordered vision, a concordant view, admitting a "telos" (insofar as the reader's expectations would be fulfilled). In Texts, however, this cross-examination by the voice is an apparent inheritance from the "inverted spiral" of language in which Unnamable found himself, and is, instead, an endless procedure.

Beckett's use of this antiphonal format to present the voice's self-questioning cross-examination also serves to alert the reader to the formal openness of the Texts. In the inability of the self to answer his questions is implied the realization that these questions could go on forever. For the reader, then, there is no end to this narrative. The fiction does not conform to the standard formal pattern of the traditional novel, which tends to satisfy the reader by answering whatever questions the text's story provokes. Hence, the normal fictional unity offered by a formal conclusion is broken in favour of disunity and inconclusive argumentation.

The Texts are replete with questions, not statements, and these questions, heuristic in nature, posit an openness, a "dis-closing," within the Texts because they allow for variations in implied meaning. The reader, in this case, becomes involved in a dual hermeneutic movement: the first part is a projection forward. The reader expects that the interrogative sentence will complete its meaning: the answer will be provided. Yet, contrary to his expectations, there is also retroactive action, back to the generative source of the question, for it remains unanswered. For instance, the voice's question, "And I can desire them?" (Text VIII, p.112), is an affirmative statement, with punctuation that places it in the interrogative, thereby throwing doubt on its very affirmation, "I can desire." The succeeding sentence is in the form of a real question but with no interrogative punctuation: "Who says I desire them, the voice, and that I can't desire anything, that looks like a contradiction, it may be for all I know" (Text VIII, p.112). In these sentences, the abnormal form and sequence of, paradoxically, interrogative answer and unmarked question do not allow for any logical creations of meaning. When affirmations are undermined by interrogation marks, and words bearing the structure of a question ("who says") lack the reinforcement of a question mark, the sentence can have only a hypothetical

meaning.

Further ambiguities are created in this work by the various antinomies--silence/voice, no/yes, birth/death:

Last everlasting questions, infant  
langours in the end sheets, last  
images, end of dream, of being past,  
passing and to be, end of lie...  
the silencing of silence, it wonders,  
that voice which is silence, it  
wonders, that voice which is silence,  
or it's me...whose the screaming  
silence of no's knife in yes's wound,  
it wonders. And wonders what has  
become of the wish to know...born  
of the impossible voice, the  
unmakeable being, and a gleam of  
light, still all would be silent  
and empty...it says, it murmurs.  
(Text XIII, pp.139-140)

By implication, then, because no conclusion is attainable, the text becomes open and endless. The inability to distinguish among "that voice," the silence (sounds "to which the words have made me deaf" [Text VIII, p.111]), and the ensuing "murmuring" are also exemplary of the self's state of flux in nothingness and in emptiness. Although, at times, capable of "knowing" or intuiting information, the voice can never retain such "figments" because, caught in a vacuum, he must always surrender to his non-existence. Hence, the voice is aware of the irony of his situation: "the long silent guffaw of the knowing non-exister, at hearing ascribed to him such pregnant

words...nothing ever but lifeless words" (Text XII, pp.134-135).

The rhythmic process of expansion and contraction between sound and silence, significance and meaninglessness, presence and absence, creates a feeling of textual fluidity in this fiction. The "abstraction" of meaning, created in the reader's mind by the voice's conviction that he is formless, meaningless, and mendacious, attests to the generative power of language--generative, that is, in its capacity continually to posit a series of heuristic questions, while at the same time invalidating them. Consequently, the texts do not direct the reader to see them as closed structures, or as circular arguments. On the contrary, in accordance with the connotation of the title, "Texts," they enjoin the reader to understand them as a series of dilatory statements, the starting points or even the products of some absent discussion. This dilatory aspect of Texts is reinforced at the end when the words trail off in "a bar's rest" ("mesure pour rien" is the French version).<sup>9</sup> They do not, as Knowlson and Pilling suggest, "circle back to their point of origin, after a consideration of related issues." Knowlson and Pilling see this circular action as "an attempt to complete a truncated opening, or to end with as much finality as can be mustered in the light of the self-

questioning that has been going on" (p.43). But no finality is really possible in Beckett's world.

The Texts even begin in medias res. Hence, the voice's awakening to the issue at hand. Text I begins: "Suddenly, no, at last, long last, I couldn't any more, I couldn't go on. Someone said, You can't stay here. I couldn't stay there and I couldn't go on" (p.75). The abrupt denial at the beginning ("Suddenly, no,") bears little relation, in structure or in tone, to the preceding Text. In Text XIII, the voice is desirous of a future "when all will be ended" (p.140). Instead of returning to the beginning, in which the voice speaks in the first-person singular, "I," third-person narrative takes over, and continues the narration. The self, therefore, becomes estranged and dissociated from himself, and out of this rift, with which the Texts end, comes a new direction which is not at all a circular movement back to the point of origin.

This continuation of narration is what Levy sees as Beckett's "aesthetic of failure": "The Text narrator is so unable to relate himself to either the subjective or objective pole that his utterance is no more than a repeated admission of impotence" (p.75). Levy considers this "futile act of expression" as indicative of Beckett's closed narrative system (p.28), ignoring the

fact that, although the voice wishes to declare his end, he cannot do so because of the "dis-closed" openness of the narrative structuring. Thus, what Levy considers a stylistic flaw is essentially a statement on Beckett's part of the plenitude in language in the face of the void. Yet, Levy seems to be unaware of the implications of his view: "The act of speech or expression, instead of enabling an agent or subject to realize his end, itself generates two further acts--listening and then speaking about that listening: 'I say it as I hear it'" (p.75).

Another point of interest in Levy's analysis is the emphasis he unwittingly places on the temporal and aural quality of language, a quality which plays an important role in establishing the openness of these texts, and which, by extension, attests to the voice's own formlessness, its fluidity and nothingness. This sense of formless flux, suggested by the heuristic questions of the Texts, is Beckett's method of "accommodating the chaos." Perhaps closer than Levy to explaining the method employed by Beckett is Judith Dearlove's aptly entitled Accommodating the Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Non-Relational Art. This study focuses on "the proposition that perhaps no relationships exist between or among the artist, his art, and an external reality" (p.3). The artist, says Dearlove, cannot assume that



his works exhibit any connection, much less a traditional mimetic one, to any external order: "Certainty, meaning and order disappear as relationships become problematic. Similarly, because the relationships are questioned but not rejected, all sense of assurance, completion and fixity disappear. Nothing may be affirmed or denied absolutely: all possible permutations must remain available. Ambiguity and fluidity characterize nonrelational arts" (p.3). Nonrelational narratives are inevitably paradoxical, because literature is inherently ordered. Thus, Dearlove claims, in order for Beckett to form a nonrelational narrative, he "must discover strategies and structures by which his medium may be induced to suggest its antithesis" (pp.3-4). These strategies--referred to by Dearlove as the dual processes of fragmentation and tessellation--undermine the assumptions beneath rational art until they explode into intentional ambiguity (p.14), and so shatter traditional associations of time, space, identity, and even language, to reveal nothingness.

Dearlove extends her analysis of this process mostly in the early fiction--Murphy, Watt, and the Trilogy--to include a commentary on How It Is. There she finds Beckett less concerned with equating form and content than with exploring the possibilities of a voice unrelated to any world and hence unrestricted (p.14).

According to Dearlove, Beckett's artistic emphasis shifts here from the separation of the mind from the external world, to an affirmation of "the internal, arbitrary, and self-appointed world the mind creates." This interior focus is what makes possible the highly self-reflexive and formless constructions of the "residua." Beckett's acceptance of the impossibility of both a "nonrelational" and a relational art enables him, through that very impossibility, to find yet another shape, an unconventional new form, for the ambiguity, fluidity, and uncertainty which, to him, constitute the human condition (p.14).

Dearlove's argument is important in that it points to the tendency in Beckett's work towards the gradual excision of the relational aspects of language and narrative form. However, her analysis mainly considers the artist's own relation to art and the universe he creates, and it avoids the issue of Beckett's presentation of the self as a void, atavistic creature, existing in a state of formless time and space. Indeed, Beckett's world is ambiguous, fluid, and indeterminate, as Dearlove notes, but it is mainly so because the position and motion of consciousness are, by their very nature, governed by association within the field of memory.

From the more heuristic strategies of Texts, Beckett turns to the more mnemonic structuring mode (of

consciousness and of narrative) developed in How It Is. Although we are conscious of a definite landscape within this work--mud--again, as in Texts, the space in which the self exists proves to be only an hallucination, first evoked and then banished. Taking place in "primeval mud impenetrable dark," How It Is centres on the axis of immemorial "vast tracts of time" as recalled by the "false skull foul with mould" (p.87):

no more time I say it as I hear it  
murmur in the mud I'm sinking sinking  
fast too strong no more head imagination  
spent no more breath

the vast past near. (p.103)

The text, itself, can be compared to "vast tracts" of language, insofar as it lacks a form-giving exordium, and opens in medias res: "how it was I quote before Pim with Pim after Pim how it is three parts I say it as I hear it" (p.7). Developed as a continuous block of words and sounds, this text only allows for breaks in the shape of empty space. Given the sound rhythms that are created within the prose by these intervals between the blocks of words, the usual terms used to describe Beckett's form here seem inadequate. Paragraphs, versets, and stanzas all imply conventional linguistic and literary forms, but Beckett's rhythmic prose escapes all of these traditional formal designations.

Except for the occasional, capitalized exhortation, invective, and proper name, the unpunctuated prose is in small case, yielding periodically to empty spaces, as if arbitrarily truncated, unfinished, or as if the orator/writer--to catch his breath or to await inspiration--has temporarily halted his rhetorical flow. The text is also devoid of orthodox, syntactical structures such as complete sentences and clauses. According to John Fletcher in The Novels of Samuel Beckett, Beckett originally intended to publish the text as an unbroken block of words, free from typographical punctuation marks of any kind,<sup>10</sup> and subject only to the "breath-pauses" of the reader reading it aloud. Fletcher states that the extract from an early version, published a year before Beckett wrote the final draft, bears this theory out:

The extract translated into English, on the other hand, and published in the Evergreen Review a month or two before M. Lindon received the French text, is already divided into what have been called versets, or biblical-style verses. They vary in length from one line to ten or more, but usually contain about five. Apart from a line-gap between each, there is no other punctuation whatever ....Inside each "verse" the breath-pause alone divides the period. (p.218)

The suppressed main verbs and conjunctions, says Fletcher, accord with a colloquial style of the language "as a French peasant or labourer would speak it" (p.219).

Fletcher's view, however, does not take fully into account the source from which this "block" of language derives: it is the structure of memory, and Fletcher's term "biblical-style verses" implies a coherent form that is composed to be either expository or exegetical in its form. Since Beckett is dealing with a de-mythologized self, the very nature of the self's voice, coming out of "the silence I must break when I can bear it no more" (p.13), can hardly be considered expository. The voice's language is that of "a dream" (p.13) and a "quotation," and Beckett gives it an appropriate if unconventional form.

This "tenement of naught," as the narrator names it, opens in mid-sentence, as if silence, out of which the sound came, was just interrupted by that "ancient voice in me not mine" (p.7). The impression is one of having just tuned in to a hitherto unheard sound-pattern. The voice tells of his task, which is to "recapitulate the sack the tins the mud the dark the silence the solitude" (p.8), before rhetorically presenting the listener/reader with the tripartite structure of the life recalled:

Part one before Pim before the  
discovery of Pim have done with that  
leaving only Part two with Pim...how it  
was then how it is vast tracts of  
time.(p.16)

This structure can also be considered in terms of memory. It too, like the antiphonal format of Texts, implies a formless, unknowable, and empty region within the remembering self. In Part I, before Pim, the voice queries whether or not there are "other inhabitants besides me here with me for good in the dark the mud long wrangle" (p.13). This image of dark is counterpointed with the image of light: the "blue and white of sky a moment still April morning in the mud" (p.31), a "life in the light first image" (p.10).

This world of memory frequently involves for the self a demand for self-validation, as we see in the court-room situation of Texts for Nothing:

that's the speech I've been given  
part one before Pim question do I  
use it freely it's not said or I  
don't hear it's one or the other  
all I hear is that a witness I'd  
need a witness. (p.18)

But Part I ends: "abandoned here effect of hope" (p.46), "seeking that which I have lost there where I have never been...so there it ends part one before Pim my travelling days" (pp.46-47). The Beckettian self states: "where I have never been but others perhaps long before not long before it's one or the other or it's both a procession what comfort in adversity others what comfort" (p.48).

Part II is "fertile in vicissitudes and peripeteias" (p.56) and the narrative voice self-consciously introduces the "happy time in it's way Part two we're talking of Part two with Pim how it was good" (p.51). In this posthumous situation, the mind is fluid, boundaryless, symbiotically absorbing other zones of consciousness. The processes, though, are presented not as single, solitary recapitulations of one's own life, but as a series of digressions. As a result, "how it was with Pim" opens into a narrative digression into Pim's history. Speaking through Pim, the voice disembodies himself, becoming Bom, transposing words onto his "friend's" back, because Bom is mute:

silence more and more longer  
and longer silences vast tracts of  
time we at a loss more and more  
for he answers I for questions sick  
of life in the light one  
question how often no more figures  
no more time vast figure vast  
stretch of time on his life in  
the dark the mud before me mainly  
curiosity was he still alive your  
LIFE HERE BEFORE ME utter confusion

God on God desperation utter  
confusion did he believe he  
believed then couldn't any more  
his reasons both cases my God. (p.73-74)

The coupling of the self and Pim duplicates ad infinitum to create many selves, so that there are "millions millions there are millions of us and there are three I place

myself at my point of view Bem is Bom Bom Bem let us say  
Bom it's preferable Bom then me and Pim me in the middle"  
(p.114).

This logic-twisting procedure demonstrates that  
self becomes an axis for other realms of consciousness (or as  
the Unnamable called it, this point is the "narthex.")  
These other confluent realms of other consciousnesses  
translate into the voices of "tormentors" and "victims."  
But there is yet another voice, that of the dictator, in  
whose memory our narrator belongs. Thus, the colloquy--  
"quick then end at last of part two how it was with Pim  
leaving at last only part three and last how it was after  
Pim before Bom" (pp.98-99)--is both an interpolation and  
an interlocution on another voice's part, an interlocution  
which interrupts the main voice's requiem among the "mutes"  
and "misnomers": "rumour transmissible ad infinitum in  
either direction...from left to right...from right to left  
left through the confidences of the victim to his  
tormentor who repeats them to his" (p.120).

This development from the memory of one into that  
of the other is a process of decrement and compression, an  
ebbing into the life of another. Confusion ensues  
primarily because the history of the monologist merges  
with and synthesizes the other's. He is absorbed into  
another's history, only, in turn, to be again centered in



yet another voice. The language of each realm and voice simultaneously projects itself in a relief convexo. Each voice jostles for precedence. Here, the personal pronouns "I" and "he," and the nouns Pim and Bom indicate various aspects of the self converging in "little scenes" or "memories of scenes":

ABOVE the light goes on little  
 scenes in the mud or memories of  
 scenes past he finds the words for  
 the sake of peace HERE howls this  
 life he can't or can't anymore he was  
 able once ... I've said it I've been  
 able I think so as I hear it and say  
 to make an end with him a warning to  
 me ... then the little that is left  
 add it quick before Bom before he  
 comes to ask me how it was my life  
 here before him the little that is  
 left add it quick how it was after  
 Pim before Bom how it is.(p.98)

According to this narrator, the journey through memory occurs in a time other than our usual ordered sequences and durations. This process becomes relentlessly self-perpetuating, like that of "a closed curve." This parabolic scheme is emphasized by the mathematical correlative offered by the test itself:

let us be numbered 1 to 1000000 then  
 number 1000000 on leaving his tormentor  
 number 999999 instead of launching forth  
 into the wilderness towards an inexistent  
 victim proceeds towards number 1

and number 1 forsaken by his victim  
 number 2 does not remain eternally  
 bereft of tormentor since this latter

as we have seen in the person of  
 number 1000000 is approaching with  
 all the speed he can muster right leg  
 right arm push pull ten yards fifteen  
 yards. (p.117)

But even this predictable passage of mathematical "figures" ruptures, and this system--like all others-- becomes an unfeasible means of identification: "for when number 814336 describes 814337 to number 814335 and number 814335 to number 814337 for example he is merely in fact describing himself to two lifelong acquaintances" (p.120). The situation now becomes "impossible." In the "monster silences vast tracts of time perfect nothingness reread the ancient's notes pass the time beginning of the murmur" (pp.80-81), "814335" is forgotten by "814337" and eclipse follows:

the four phases through which we  
 pass the two kinds of solitude the  
 two kinds of company through which  
 tormentors abandoned victims travellers  
 we all pass and pass again being  
 regulated thus are of equal duration.  
 (p.125)

In his description of the endless recesses of memory, the voice's narration is ironically eclipsed in a lapsus memoriae; consequently, "the ancient voice in me not mine" (p.7) is flooded with yeses and noes fading into an inundation of "Roman Capitals" expostulating "I SHALL DIE" (p.147). Within this realm of memory, we are

presented with a universe that has no boundaries. Any attempts on the part of the voice to fix the self within the boundary of an identity (Pim, Bom, Bem) is self-defeating, since identity cannot be fixed. Instead, How It Is demonstrates how the traditional character of the novel has been transformed within the inverse universe of Beckett's fiction. It becomes an identity-less voice existing within the foreign and formless realm of another's fiction and another's memory:

someone had come Bom Bem one  
 syllable on at the end all that  
 matters Bem had come to cleave to  
 me see later Pim and me I had come  
 to cleave to Pim the same thing...  
 Bem came to cleave to me where I  
 lay abandoned to give me a name his  
 name to give me a life make me talk  
 of a life said to have been mine.  
 (p.109)

The landscape of the fiction, that is, the space evoked by the recollections of the voice--the "mud," the "tins," the "sack," and finally, the "journey" itself --turns out to be another illusion. As the voice has told us, his "quotation" is a "tenement of naughts": "so eternally I quote on something lost there so eternally now" (p.115). The only space in which he lives is that of memory: "past moments old dreams back again or fresh like those that pass or things things always and memories I say them as I hear them murmur them in the mud" (p.7).

Mud, here, is the shapeless, malleable base in which the self exists, and in which all memories converge, becoming indistinct and confused. How It Is does not present us with any distinct place, any horizon, but gives us instead a formless space.

But the text of How It Is ends with the words "good good end at last of part three and last that's how it was end of quotation after Pim how it is" (p.147). The repeated tripartite structure of "how it was before Pim, with Pim and after Pim" would therefore seem to suggest a formal narrative structure with a beginning, middle, and an end. However, as the voice has stated, because the form of words dies into sounds, the text's final words do not end; we just do not hear them anymore. Thus, we can infer that his "quotation" of another's history, of "the ancient voice," has not permanently been closed. As the axis of another's obloquies, the self fuses his words with those of other voices and so the process will constantly start up again. In this world of the "closed curve" of time, there is no real past. The "how it was" is less a fact of the past than a temporal designation of the present--of "how it is"--the fading words of quotation. We see, therefore, that memory does not form a closed circuit; it mixes the present and the past, and provides an exit to the future as well. In other words, although,

in Beckett's universe, memory recedes into the past and provides a horizon for the future, it is also bound to the hub of the present. Consequently, the apparently circular route of narration in How It Is spirals out, and the Beckettian mnemonic strategy offers us a conception of a life without form or ending, but one which does echo. This echoing indicates that the sound will continue indefinitely, thereby providing a hypothetical future for the voice. The structuring of How It Is, therefore, denies a conclusive, reified, closed form--in narrative as in consciousness.

The prose written after How It Is and Texts For Nothing can be called residual because, comparatively speaking, it is sparser and shorter than the earlier works. It is, however, no less demanding for the reader. Using both the antiphonal and mnemonic strategies of the prior works--although not in as dominant or as elaborate a fashion--this fiction reveals Beckett's compulsion to prune and excise the extraneous from language, so that in its sparsity, in the breakdown of syntactical form, the fiction literally embodies the abstract, un-formed flow of consciousness.

Instead of creating a complete, traditional, formal pattern in the Six Residua, All Strange Away, For to End Yet Again and Other Fizzles, and Company, Beckett

challenges the very possibility of conventional form. He does this through strategies of repetition and refraction. In creating an unconventional, repetitive, and reverberating syntactical structure, one that goes nowhere and that only duplicates itself, Beckett again (as in his earlier use of the other structuring principles) disrupts Spanos' symbolic circle, and Kermode's progressive linear narrative sequence. Beckett rejects the "telos" that fictions usually place on endlessness, and shows thought to be an excavatory, echoing process of infinite regress. In this fiction, the self expands, breaks all formal limitations, and, no longer identifiable as character, he is conceivable only as a series of dissociated mental events; existence, in turn, is shown as lacking both continuity and resolution.

In addressing the nature of "self-referential," "aleatory literature," Douglas Hofstadter suggests that this process of duplication (which we have noted in Beckett's prose) relates to what he calls the "Eternal Golden Braid" within the mind.<sup>11</sup> This "harmonic labyrinth" of "Strange Loops" is a recursive process which "never defines something in terms of itself, but always in terms of simpler versions of itself." Therefore, we find: "(stories inside stories, movies inside movies, paintings inside paintings. Russian dolls inside Russian dolls

[even parenthetical comments inside parenthetical comments!] ...)" (p.127). This isomorphic reductionism is organized around a central axis, "the concept of infinity, since what else is a [strange] loop but a way of representing an endless process in a finite way?" (p.15). Such a concept of a "metaphorical fugue" on a larger, literary scale is relevant to Beckett's structuring of the residual fiction: certain recursive structures are used to reveal the "dis-closed" nature of the mind.

Essentially, the residual fiction relies on the "Strange Loops" process on two different levels. On the first, within the texts themselves, recurring key phrases, such as "sacral ruins" in "Lessness," "for to end yet again" in the work of that title, and the verbatim transposition of a passage in "Afar a Bird" into "I Gave Up Before Birth," set up a clear resonance within the prose. This canonic process of "Strange Loops" within the texts will be more fully dealt with in the next chapter in terms of Beckett's rhetoric of abstraction. The second level on which the "Strange Loops" process operates involves a more extensive structuring principle. Beckett's unconventional literary structure is, in fact, analogous to the musical form of the fugue: the subject is introduced and then reworked. Since Six Residua and For To End Yet Again and Other Fizzles contain between them

fourteen texts (or "fizzles" and fragments), any analysis of the fugal or canonic structure of these individual pieces would soon turn into an endless game of comparison and contrast. Nevertheless, in order to study Beckett's "Strange Loops," we cannot avoid drawing on the obvious examples from Six Residua ("Enough") and For To End Yet Again and Other Fizzles ("For To End Yet Again").

Similarly, we cannot ignore Company which, apart from "The Lost Ones," is the longest work to date (since How It Is and Texts). In "Enough," Company, and "For To End Yet Again" we see the extended recursive structure developed in such a way that the text implies that it has taken us back to a point prior to its beginning.

Despite the fact that "Enough" is considered part of the Six Residua, it is also seen as an aberration, a departure from Beckett's seeming preference for the male or neuter voice. The text has a female narrator speaking in the first-person singular. In an analysis of recursive structures in the post-trilogy prose, "Enough" provides an interesting alternative to the confluent voices of Company, and to the genderless commentator of the piece "For To End Yet Again." "Enough" begins: "All that goes before forget. Too much at a time is too much" (p.25), and ends with "Enough my old breasts feel his old hand" (p.31). Thus, the work opens with an eclipse of all



that has preceeded it; in so doing, it erases, in lapsus memoriae, all but the present, although the narrator declares that nothing else is important, save the momentary experience of her companion. Here, the text economically includes her recollections, the "sacral prognosis" of their "geodesy" which "covered several times the equivalent of the terrestrial equator" (p.27). But the expertise of the "art and craft" of this voice mainly lies in her capacity to obliterate memory, in her ability to extricate any sense of origins from her mind: "What do I know of man's destiny?" (p.31). Logically, having erased the past, she has trouble gauging the future. Her statement, "Now I'll wipe out everything but the flowers" (p.31), indicates that, unlike the narrator in How It Is, she is in control of memory. Essentially, she becomes the silence pervading--and also absorbing to the point of annihilation--the language of the self. Interestingly enough, in fact, this notion of her as fundamentally mute and silent is implied in a passage in the French version, a passage which the English rendition omits:

Toutes ces notions sont de lui. Je  
ne fais que les combiner à ma façon.  
Donnée quatre ou cinq vies comme celle-  
là j'aurais pu laisser une trace.

The implication here is that even the narrator does not really exist ("j'aurais pu laisser une trace"). It is

as if the text has recursively doubled back on itself, returning to a point preceding its inception. According to Beckett, "Every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness."<sup>12</sup>

This recursive structure is not unlike that used in Molloy. In Part II of that work, Moran's story begins: "It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. I am calm. All is sleeping" (Molloy, p.92). During this section, Moran is commissioned to search for Molloy-- whose story was developed in Part I--and to make a "report." During the course of this "report" we learn of the hunt for Molloy, and Moran's eventual return home. Ultimately, Moran's report is an untold story. The negating sweep of the closing lines of the novel obliterates the fiction, recursively taking us back to a point before the novel, the time of the unwritten report. Thus, the story of Molloy turns out to be nothing other than the exercise of a mendacious mouth, and the story of Molloy's quest for his mother, it is revealed, takes place only in the sub-conscious of Moran:

But in the end I understood this language. I understood it, I understood it, all wrong perhaps. That is not what matters. It told me to write the report....Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining. (Molloy, p.176)

The report is eclipsed, blanked out in the point between the rain and the point prior to it.

In the piece, "For To End Yet Again," Beckett establishes in the reader's mind the structural process governing the entire volume of the same name. Not only does this initial piece reiterate the title of the book and, like a literary fugue, introduce and then play upon the subject matter, but it also implies that, "yet again," we will be presented with a series of inconclusive fictional traces. In each supposed conclusion lies a new beginning. Moreover, there is no specific point of departure, only a voice breaking the silence:

For to end yet again skull alone in  
a dark place pent bowed on a board  
to begin. Long thus to begin till  
the place fades followed by the  
board long after. For to end yet  
again skull alone in the dark the  
void no neck no face just the box  
last place of all in the dark the  
void.(p.11)

Here, the spatial contours of the fictional landscape have been diminished to "void," "skull," and a "place" that "fades." The text ends with references to this "wilderness" of "timeless air," in which one "dream[s] of a way in a space with neither here nor there" (p.15). What conclusion means here, as stipulated in the penultimate sentence, is the relentless process of "end[ing] yet again

by degrees" (p.15). Moreover, the text terminates with a supposition: "if ever there had to be another absolutely had to be" (p.15). The assertive comments--"had to be," and "absolutely had to be"--point to an absolute, unconditional statement. Yet this emphasis on an absolute "end" is undermined, and the possibility of the conclusion being remotely close to an absolute is weakened, by the "if" which governs the entire sentence. In this way, the end of the text does not direct us to see the implied conclusion as a confirmation of an end, as Kermode's "consonance." The symbolic circle, suggested by Spanos, spirals on and on; projected end after end piles up on those which are both anticipated and undermined.

Consequently, we see the text as bound only to a hypothetical, unordered space and time. The voice or word that purveys the scene for us is outside of the text. The text itself is composed of the description of a "sepulchral skull," and "ruins." The observer does not give us any clue as to his own position in space or time. Although his account provides us with a text, and within that text spatial references ("the box last place of all" [p.11]), the only other "cardinal point," or "antipode" (p.12) is the one which we assume the observer to be. Yet, when the reading of the printed text ends, that hypothetical imagined point in space and time, from which

the voice seemed to come, disappears. Thus, by implication, the text has doubled back to the empty, silent space out of which the voice came; it has recursively gone back to that point of origin, which is "For to end yet again." This echo becomes, so to speak, a recollection forward in terms of our expectations of repetition.

Company also operates recursively, but in two other ways. First, it represents a miniaturized encapsulation of The Unnamable's voice of company, "them and all the others....There, now there is no one here but me" (The Unnamable, p.304): "I shall not be alone, in the beginning. I am of course alone. Alone. That is soon said. Things have to be soon said. And how can one be sure, in such darkness? I shall have company. In the beginning" (The Unnamable, p.292). Echoing the work out of which the post-trilogy fiction grew, Company reinvokes the earliest patterns of recall and recursion. It must be noted, however, that Company is less rich in images, and stylistically more bare and sparse than The Unnamable. In the latter, a voice comes out of nowhere and, imposing a formal story on a figure, tells of his birth, youth, death, and posthumous state. Intermittently, he deserts the story, questioning himself, and his "untraceable" origins:

For why or? Why in another dark or

in the same? And whose voice asking this? Who asks, whose voice asking this? And answers, His soever who devises it all. In the same dark as his creature or in another. For company Who asks in the end, Who asks? And in the end answers as above? And adds long after to himself, Unless another still. Nowhere to be found. Nowhere to be sought. The unthinkable last of all. Unnamable. Last person I. Quick leave him. (p.24)

The cryptogenic voice then returns to the story that then trails off into the final expostulation: "Alone."

The second recursive principle in this fiction operates within its own formal structure, rather than with reference to earlier works. This structure implies a break from that formal ordering by which Kermode and Spanos define fiction. The story, instead, derives from nowhere and is spoken by the "Deviser of the voice and of its hearer," which "Himself he devises too for company" (p.26). Not only does the voice conjure up his own story, but he too "devises," divides, and creates himself as speaker and listener: "Similarly image of hearer" (p.31). "Let the hearer be named H. Aspirate. Haitch," we are told: "He imagines to himself as voice and hearer pall" (p.33). The idea that he is both speaker and listener is frequently underlined: "No. Then let him not be named H. Let him be again as he was. The hearer. Unnamable. You" (p.32). Earlier in the text, Beckett wrote: "Use of second person

marks the voice. That of the third that cankerous other. Could he speak to and of when the voice speaks there would a first. But he cannot. He shall not. You cannot. You shall not" (p.8).

This voice of the imagination comes out of nowhere, "[r]eceding afar," "[f]rom above and from all sides and levels with equal remoteness at its most remote," "[s]uggesting one lying on the floor of a hemispherical chamber of generous diameter with ear dead centre" (p.32). Here, all the expostulations and exhortations also claim to come from nowhere. They have no "telos," except that of the beginning and end of sound as it falls on the mind of the reader. These internal monologues are denied the permanence of stable form and consonance; the flow of linear narrative continually recedes into infinity, denying any familiar formal structure.

In several ways, Company can be viewed as setting in motion all of the structuring strategies involved in the earlier prose. For instance, it employs both heuristic, antiphonal structuring and the mnemonic associative principle to convey the "ontospeleological" excavation within:

In another dark or in the same  
another devising it all for company.  
This at first sight seems clear. But  
as the eye dwells it grows obscure.

Indeed the longer the eye dwells  
 the obscurer it grows. Till the  
 eye closes and freed from pore the  
 mind inquires, what does this mean?  
 What finally does this mean that at  
 first sight seemed clear? Till it  
 the mind too closes as it were. As  
 the window might close of a dark empty  
 room....Unformulable gropings of  
 the mind. Unstillable. (pp.22-23)

In addition, "Company," the vision of fragmentary personalities (dramatized outer circles of the central zone of consciousness) dissolves in the mind of the narrator, and the work closes with the disembodied voice's "fable of one with you in the dark" (p.63). Although in articulo mortis, the voice, having hermeneutically expanded the fiction's horizon with the invocation "imagine," demonstrates that the work's progress actually is a retreat into itself, recursively moving back to a point prior to even language and thought. This regression is underlined by the final solitary word of the text, "Alone," which, situated beneath the closing lines of the prose, emphasizes two points: the compression of the language of the text into one word, and the fact that that word has been strategically situated beneath the text amid empty space. It is as if language has been almost obliterated, drawn into the vacuum of abstraction.

Company's bringing together of the various formal processes in Beckett's stream-of-consciousness technique



creates the sense of a digression or an expansion based on a structure which basically disavows all formal narrative and which presents form only as hypothetical. Such narrative "un-structuring" implies not only endlessness, but also disintegration. But Beckett's "rhetoric of abstraction" has the same effect on language itself: by breaking down the grammatical logic of language, Beckett makes each linguistic form buckle under the weight of the other. Or, in Beckett's words, "Sounds a crooked straight reading to me."<sup>13</sup>

## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup>Samuel Beckett, Proust (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1931), p.50. Henceforward all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>2</sup>Samuel Beckett in an interview with John Gruen, "Samuel Beckett Talks About Beckett," Vogue, 154 (December 1969).

<sup>3</sup>Kurt Vonnegut, The Sirens of Titan (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1959), p. 14.

<sup>4</sup>Samuel Beckett in an interview with John Gruen, "Samuel Beckett Talks about Beckett," Vogue 154 (December, 1969), p.210. Cited in Judith Dearlove's Accommodating the Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Non-Relational Art (Durham, N.C.:Duke University Press, 1982). Beckett states: I think perhaps I have freed myself from certain formal concepts. Perhaps like the composer Schonberg or the painter Kandinsky, I have turned toward an abstract language. Unlike them, however, I have tried not to concretize the abstraction--not to give it yet another formal context" (p.155). Henceforward, all further page references pertaining to Dearlove will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>5</sup>Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.115.

<sup>6</sup>William V. Spanos, "Breaking the Circle: Hermeneutics as Dis-Closure," Boundary 2, 5 (Winter, 1977), p.448.

<sup>7</sup>Eric P. Levy, Samuel Beckett and the Voice of Species (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1980), p.73. Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>8</sup>Samuel Beckett, Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit (London: Calder, 1965), p.103: "The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, together with the obligation to express."

<sup>9</sup>See James Knowlson and John Pilling, Frescoes of

the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1979), p.42. The authors state that John Fletcher, in The Novels of Samuel Beckett (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), p.196, was the first to note that the title derives from the musical term "mesure pour rien," which, in literary terms, means "a group of words conveying nothing." Henceforward, all further page references pertaining to the Knowlson and Pilling work will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>10</sup> John Fletcher, The Novels of Samuel Beckett (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), p.218. Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>11</sup> Douglas Hofstadter, Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p.127. Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Beckett in the interview with John Gruen, "Samuel Beckett Talks about Beckett," p.210.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Beckett, letter to George and Jean Reavey, April 10, 1975. This comment pertains to the Reaveys' request, for the second time, for permission to perform Cascando. Although Beckett was unhappy with the changes made by them, he still gave permission to the Mabou Mines Company. Cited in Deirdre Bair, Samuel Beckett: A Biography (New York and London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1978), p.640.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Rhetoric of Abstraction

"Syntax upended in opposite corners. Such variations of rise and fall, combining in countless rhythms."

"All that goes before forget," the narrator in "Enough" instructs us, and in that opening statement we become aware of an indirect suggestion: that the creative source of this fiction also wishes to be obliterated. By denying the work's origin in the world, Beckett challenges the natural structure of the novel: the traditional novel's form, that of concordant beginnings and endings, is not that of Beckett's fiction. The only conclusion possible in these works is: "For to end yet again." These words comprise the title both of an entire volume and of the first piece in the volume. The irony here lies in the fact that in that first text we are beginning to read works that pretend to have no beginning and which, when protracted, have no logical conclusion.

The structural and hermeneutic natures of these works are paradoxical or contradicting; they make no claim to beginnings and ends, yet are begun and completed by readers. The fictional fragments and "fizzles" lack

all traditional narrative form. Beckett strives to shatter those structural elements which we have come to know as the space and time of the traditional realistic novel. The unconventional form of the post-trilogy prose is, for many, evocative of "life in a big empty echoing room" ("From an Abandoned Work," p.19). What becomes apparent is Beckett's insistence on the invalidity of imposing ordering principles on chaos. In a conditional state of existence, the voice can only ascertain that it "would have lived." The human act of constructing an ordered vision of the world--of harnessing chaotic reality to a systematic mental structure--becomes an imposition of artificial order on real incoherence. In his presentation of the mnemonic and catechetical strategies of the narrative voice's stream of consciousness, Beckett suggests the associative and heuristic qualities of these mental processes which try to know the equally indeterminate and unknowable realm of the mind. Existence, within such a universe, is the arbitrary state of "rumour transmissible" (How It Is). In this realm, no criteria remain by which to validate life hence, as Beckett says, "life gone from knowledge" ("From an Abandoned Work," p.19):

He has already a number of memories,  
from the memory of the day he  
suddenly knew he was there...to

that now of having halted to lean  
 against the wall....But it is  
 all still fragile. And often he  
 surprises himself...as destitute of  
 history as on that first day...  
 memory returns and takes him back, if  
 he will, far back to that first instant  
 beyond which nothing...and toward  
 oblivion. ("He is Barehead," pp.28-30)

Beckett is not content, however, only to de-construct the traditional fictional universe or fiction; the linguistic foundations too of his heterocosm<sup>1</sup> are shaken--through what Beckett calls the "syntax of weakness." Through subversion of both language and narration, the universe is seen as inchoate and formless. The sense of this universe is created, linguistically, through various rhetorical devices such as hyperbation, anastrophe, ellipsis, anacoluthon, anomination, parataxis, and incremental repetition. The accumulated effect of these devices results in a disruption of the syntactical sequence of the prose. This textual rupture or, more precisely, this hermeneutic rift in the reader's grammatical expectations, promotes a sense of syntactical freedom. By writing this kind of prose, Beckett has undermined the various structures the reader normally would place on the text. Meaning, then, which should naturally come with the natural linear progression of both the language and the narrative, continually dissolves and loses its form and substance.

In other words, language is used by Beckett to guarantee both "exo-linguistic" and "endo-linguistic" associations. The term, "exo-linguistic," according to Elizabeth Bregman Segrè, means that the content of words is "based on associations exterior to language, to those objects and actions to which words refer."<sup>2</sup> "Endo-linguistic," on the other hand, means that the content of words is "based on associations interior to language, on its syntactic, rhythmic, and phonetic relations" (p.133).

Beckett, as we have seen, disrupts the "exo-linguistic" or referential content of words by disturbing their syntactic relations ("endo-linguistic"). In "Lessness," the phrase, "Ruins true refuge long last towards which so many false time out of mind" (p.51), is devoid of normal syntactic relationships. The word sequence is aleatory. There is neither a proper and clear subject, nor a verb. Each word stands out, enigmatically drawing attention to itself because it has not been anchored to the hierarchical chain of meaning normally inherent in logical syntax. Thus, meaning both appears and retreats. The words are flexible, being both homonymous and polysemous.

Beckett offers, instead of normal syntax, a non-logical, non-formal language. Language is not presented

as a chain of clauses, a sequence of cause and effect out of which meaning develops. Instead, we are confronted with a dystaxic series of word groupings, a series of discontinuous utterances:

No sound no stir/ash grey sky/  
 mirrored earth mirrored sky/grey  
 air;/timeless earth/sky as one/same  
 grey/as the ruins flatness endless.  
 /In the sand/no hold/one step more/  
 in the endlessness/he will make it.  
 ("Lessness," p.49)

The inversion of word order, the lack of an apparent clearly identified subject governing the first sentence, the elliptical fragments--all these suggest linguistic pandemonium. Were we to visualize or dramatize these words, they themselves would be "The Lost Ones" in the fiction of that name; we could refer to them as "Lost bodies" "searching for their lost ones" in linguistic "acrobatics." Secure "niches" or "alcoves" of meaning self-de-(con)struct. "Ill-vanquished," "imagined extinguished," words, like "lost ones," move "counter-carrierwise," "turning in opposite directions," in a "cylinder" of "silence."

This freedom of association within the post-trilogy texts arises from what I have called a rhetoric of abstraction which engineers the "de-forming" or de-constructing of the structures of language. Freed from



fixed meaning, language becomes semantically fluid, thereby miming Beckett's conception of indeterminate consciousness. This particular strategy is even more noticeable in the residual fiction than in either Texts or How It Is. Both those works show to a greater extent Beckett's use of the catechetical and mnemonic formats, whereas in the residual fiction, greater emphasis is placed on the rhetoric of abstraction than on the antiphonal and mnemonic principles of stream of consciousness. The emphasis in this chapter, therefore, will be on the later residual fiction.

In the fragment "Sounds," we can clearly see the rhetorical devices employed by Beckett to elicit from the reader an awareness of this rhythmic, textual fluidity: "or if none hour after hour no sound of any kind than he having been dreamt away let himself be dreamt away to where none at any time away from here where none come none pass to where no sound to listen for one of any kind ("Sounds," p.155)." This unpunctuated, parataxic passage is free of the constraints of traditional English syntax. Through enantiomorphism (emphatic repetition of words), hyperbaton (violation of usual word order), anastrophe (inversion of usual word order), and anacoluthon (change of construction, leaving the first part of the sentence broken), Beckett undercuts the normal, logical progression of subject, verb, object that is found otherwise in the language, as well as the narrative form, of the traditional

"Once upon a time there was a man who...".

In the passage from "Sounds," the vowels of words such as "sound," "hour," "or," "of," "come," and "no" create a certain phonetic rhythm. Similarly, the "a" sounds in "at any time away" accumulate to form a kind of phonetic pattern. Thus, what happens, in Beckett's texts, is that certain sound patterns come into prominence, and these "endo-linguistic" relationships can actually result in new semantic oppositions. Such "endo-linguistic" phonetic arrangements, argues Segrè, are not based on associations exterior to language (its referential nature); rather, as in music, they are based on the interior form of the word, on the syntactic, rhythmic, and phonetic links between phrases (p.146). The result is that Beckett's texts follow a "musical progression," "rather than a discursive progression." This progression, as we will now see, is one based on dislocated narrative and linguistic syntax.

Traditionally, the reader has come to expect that the author will provide him with a location and a time in which to fix the plot and characters, and that he will do so in normal syntactic language. But in Beckett's *residua*, as "Sounds" illustrates, linguistic and fictional form are both denied. The reader enters the inverted linguistic syntax via the preposition and conjunction "or": "or if none the hour." Here, ~~we~~ encounter difficulty since we are

denied information as to both the exact function of the word "or" and the situating in place or time that is crucial to the reader's "sense"-making: "if none the hour"--which follows "or"--does not seem to fulfill any explanatory role. The word "or" is not logical in this context. It neither presents a second of two alternatives, nor is it indicative of quality or quantity (as in "five or six"). It does not designate whether or not there has been an indirect question or conditional protasis; nor does it seem to denote a condition or a comparative sense. In fact, it seems functionally useless or at liberty.

Thus, the impression we receive is that of some sort of delayed clause, without co-ordinating conjunctions or subordinating phrases. The use of epizeuxis in the repetition of "to where" does little to enlighten the reader as to the passage's direction or intent. Brachylogy (over-concision ) and the deletion of operative words denoting an active subject only add to the confusion. In "Still," Beckett omits all verbs pertinent to physical actions or motion, so that one is aware of movement, but only towards a point of stasis:

All quite still again then head in  
hand namely thumb on outer edge of  
right socket index ditto left and  
middle on left cheekbone plus as  
the hours pass lesser contacts each

more or less now more now less with  
 the faint stirrings of the various parts  
 as night wears on. As if even in  
 the dark eyes closed not enough and  
 perhaps ever more than ever necessary  
 against that no such thing the further  
 shelter of the hand. Leave it so  
 all quite still or try listening  
 to the sounds all quite still head  
 in hand listening for a sound.  
 ("Still," p.21)

In this passage, the self is perceived in a state of contemplation. The focus is on the inert, motionless, silence of the thinker, and on the "faint stirrings" which diminish "as night wears on." The only sound is that of the language of thought, and the only activity is that of "listening for a sound." The passivity of the self is reinforced by the suggestion: "try listening."

In other passages; Beckett further reinforces this asyntactical style with other rhetorical devices such as gerund phrases, ablative absolutes, and dislocated modifiers:

Never but imagined the blue in  
 a wild imagining the blue celeste  
 of poesy. Light white touch close  
 head through calm eye **light** of  
 reason all gone from mind. (p.51)

The gerund phrase, "a wild imagining" in the first sentence is not qualified in the succeeding sentence. This passage also lacks the modifiers needed to clarify the semantic relationship among "light white touch," "close head," and

"through calm eye." The deletion of operative verbs and connectives confuses the connections among subject, object, and qualifying adjectives and adverbs.

In Beckett's later prose style, precedence and priority is given to each single word and phrase: "light of reason" and "calm eye" are of equal semantic weight. Beckett's use of such a grammatically freed style results in the disruption of the intrinsically relational functions (and hermeneutic assumptions) involved in the normal teleology of syntax. "[A] wild imagining" could refer to a state since it is preceded by "in," or, it could be linked with "poesy," were we to insert the word "of" to make the sentence "a wild imagining [of] the blue celeste."

How It Is also reveals the same perplexities and frustrations involved in reading prose which disrupts all the sense-making structures of linear language, as well as narrative, of Kermode's "sense of an ending":

of this old tale quaqua on all  
sides then in me bits and scraps  
try and hear a few scraps two or  
three each time per day and night  
string them together make phrases  
the last how it was after Pim how  
it is something wrong there end  
of part three and last

this voice these voices no knowing  
not meaning a choir no no only one  
but quaqua meaning on all sides

megaphones possibly technique  
something wrong there

wrong for never twice the same  
unless time vast tracts aged out  
of recognition no far often fresher  
stronger after than before unless  
sickness sorrow they sometimes  
pass one feels better less wretched  
after than before

Unless recordings on ebonite or such  
like a whole life generations on  
ebonite one can imagine it nothing to  
prevent one mix it all up change the  
natural order play about with that

Unless unchanging after all the  
voice we're talking of the voice  
and all my fault lack of attention  
want of memory the various times mixed  
up in my head all the various times  
before during after vast tracts of  
time. (pp.106-7).

The repetitions of words such as "unless," "less," "before," "after," "various times," "no," "one," "wrong," and "vast tracts" create verbal echoes throughout the text. These terms attract further attention because the persistent use of them would hint at a hidden message formed in some substratum of language. Whatever logical message we might hope to construct, however, we soon find it foundering. The "quaqua" echo makes this speech similar to Lucky's seemingly nonsense speech in Waiting for Godot. Meaning empties from the text as soon as it accumulates. In addition, the word "qua" becomes relative in status to a subordinating clause, a qualificatory statement: "how it is."

Evolving out of this de-constructing of meaning is our paradoxical awareness of a certain "prison-like" quality in this "dis-closed" prose, a quality which makes it very similar to the sort of "topos" Stanley Fish found in Donne's sermon Deaths Duell (1630).<sup>3</sup> Although Fish does not deal with Beckett, we have already seen that his explanation of seventeenth-century prose as a "self-consuming artifact" provides an interesting analogue to the view presented here of the effects of certain of Beckett's rhetorical devices. Fish sees three prominent patterns in Donne's sermon and the rhetorical efficacy of all three can also be seen, in slightly different form, in How It Is. The three are: "the periodic defaulting of the argument to the verse [biblical] it was to have explained; the persistent short-circuiting of our normal modes of discursive response (by ends that are beginnings, progressions that go backward, etc.); and the refusal of the sermon to move toward a conclusion" (p.60). "In short," says Fish, "the topos has become a prison": the reader is held under what Fish calls "the arc of suspension" (p.62).

It should be noted, however, that the comparison between Donne's text and that of Beckett cannot be an exact one. In Beckett's fiction, there is no latent meaning to which to return. Donne's parishoners may be

enjoined to recall God's creation and to reject man's artificial, confounding substitute, but in Beckett's world, the reader finds no meaningful--divine--point of reference lying behind the text; he has only "the lies" of man's formal fictions of consonance. Donne subverts man's faith in the rational faculty, that Miltonic conception of the "rare devices of man's brain." He seeks to alert man to his erroneous tendency to place trust more in his own "rare devices" than in those of God.

It is interesting to note that Beckett uses these same stylistic devices, though not to the same end, to enjoin the reader to reject comfortable human forms and to look elsewhere, which is (for him) nowhere. Thus, the epistemological complexities in both texts urge the readers or listeners to seek an alternate version of meaning through rejection of traditional, expected linguistic (and narrative) structuring. But the focus here is primarily on language. Beckett's syntax is anything but conventional. For instance:

But whatever its uncertainties  
the return sooner or later to a  
temporary calm seems assured, for  
the moment, in the black dark or the  
great whiteness, with attendant  
temperature, world still proof  
against enduring tumult....  
Externally all is as before and  
the sighting of the little fabric  
quite as much a matter of chance,  
its whiteness merging in the  
surrounding whiteness. ("Imagination



Dead Imagine," pp.36-37)

The first part of this passage is syntactically logical. Although we are not given information about the subject, we do know that the self's situation vacillates between "uncertainties" and "temporary calm." The initial clarity of the passage is undermined by the next piece of information, presented in dystaxic language: "[B]lack dark," "whiteness," "attendant temperature," "enduring tumult," "the sighting of the little fabric," all suggest someone's perception and awareness of tensions within the rotunda. However, we are not given a subject as a point of reference on which to anchor meaning. Hence, these qualifying words float around "it," arbitrarily qualifying whatever else is there.

In this way, the reader is forced to reject as sense-less, as unamenable to normal linguistic form, what is literally presented on the page before him, and to accept, instead, an "implied" version of the text, one that he has, imaginatively, both extracted and abstracted from the language. "Imagination Dead Imagine" acknowledges this need for an imaginative interpreting response: "Rediscovered miraculously after what absence in perfect voids it is no longer quite the same, from this point of view, but there is no other" (p.37). Beckett's texts continually demand this creative hermeneutic response.

Meaning, we discover, lies in the interpreter. It is not latent in the text, but only constructed from this "implied" text. With the confusion and distortion of the reader's normal sense of the teleological form of fiction, a distortion repeated in the lack of syntactical and grammatical concordances, the structural, formal contours of the work become as indeterminate as the consciousness depicted. The ordered time-sequences of the traditional novel--past-present-future--are broken. Instead, time is presented as an accretion of single moments. As "Lessness" indicates, there "Never was but grey air timeless no sound figment the passing light" (p.47). Nor does the Beckettian self, we discover, exist in chronological time; he inhabits a vault of "Emptiness, silence, heat, whiteness ("Imagination Dead Imagine," p.35):

More or less long, for there may  
intervene, experience shows,  
between end of fall and beginning  
of rise, pauses of varying length,  
from the fraction of the second to  
what would have seemed, in other  
times, other places, an eternity  
....It is possible too, experience  
shows, for rise and fall to stop  
short at any point and mark a pause,  
more or less long, before resuming,  
or reversing. (p.36)

This allusion to existence as a kind of endless eternity suggests that Beckett's rhetoric of abstraction

aims at "dis-closing" form, and destroying, with it, our human constructs that make sense of space and time--in life as in fiction. Not only do the texts radically subvert the sequence of fictional chronology, but by undermining the reader's expectations of syntactical concordance, they also cause the temporal progression within the language itself to founder in a *melée* of inverted tenses, "of references to past and present":

want of memory the various times  
mixed up in my head all the  
various times before during after  
vast tracts of time. (How It Is, p.107)

In How It Is, we see clearly how Beckett can blur the distinction between tenses:

how it was that's lacking before  
Pim with Pim all lost almost all  
nothing left almost nothing but  
it's done great blessing leaving  
only *sithence* how it was after Pim  
how it is vast stretch of time  
before Pim with Pim vast tracts  
of time a few minutes on and off  
added up vast stretch eternity  
same scale of magnitude. (p.104)

The past is evoked through past tenses such as "was," "lost," "done," "added." But this past is also encroached upon by the present, as indicated in the verbs "that's lacking," "it's," "is." The present tense could also be inferred from the nouns "time," "stretch," "scale," nouns which also function as unconjugated verbs. Infinitives suggest

temporal stasis; conjugated verbs, on the other hand, are temporally marked. In addition, the text's references to the past and the present are interspersed with the prepositions "with," "before," and "after," all of which serve only to obscure the time frame. For instance, how it was "after Pim" alludes to both the past and the future, a future which ultimately is a projected eternity of recollection.

In addition to questioning the legitimacy of time structuring, the post-trilogy fiction also subverts our concepts of the written text. There is an aural quality to the language, which is created by the "endo-linguistic" resonance set up by the reiteration of certain verbal rhythms and phrases. This aural resonance implies a language of infinite regression, or, as Hofstadter describes it: "Canon per Augmentationem, Contrario Motu."<sup>4</sup> All form, therefore, both narrative and linguistic, is subverted and challenged in Beckett's work.

As in non-verbal music, repetition and echoing can be said to suggest introversion and regression: references and relations do not point to phenomena outside of the music or text itself. The number of different, repeated vowel sounds as in "Head haught eyes light blue almost white silence within" ("Ping," p.41), is reduced to a minimum (here emphasizing the various "i" sounds).

But before examining in more detail some of these echoed clauses and phrases in the texts themselves, I should like to return to Hofstadter's version of the concept of infinite regress which, applied here, would also explain the effect of re-duplication of expression and format in two different languages. Hofstadter offers the following example:

"est une expression qui, quand elle est précédée de sa traduction, mise entre guillemets, dans la langue provenant de l'autre côté de la Manche, crée une fausseté" is an expression which, when it is preceded by its translation, placed in quotation marks, into the language originating on the other side of the Channel, yields a falsehood. (p.501)

The affinity between Beckett's and Hofstadter's concept of infinite regress lies in the idea of repetition as a means of implying infinite variables of the same theme. The analogy between Beckett's and Hofstadter's theories, however, does not hold completely: the structure of Hofstadter's own language is that of an ironically neat, self-contained duplicate. But Beckett's language of infinite regress does not conform to such a systemized formal pattern. It is looser because it lends itself more to rhythm and sound, relying on the ear to create phonemic units and relationships. The text then becomes rather like an instrument, standing in for the sound-vibrations which

are, in this world, "invisible," "neverseen." The endless, formless quality of Beckett's inverse universe is what is communicated through Beckett's creative continuity and perpetuity within "Strange Loops."

In Beckett's Six Residua, the piece "Ping" clearly exemplifies the way in which duplication of sounds and words creates this untraditional fictional form of infinite regress. "Ping" contains around 1,030 words, of which 120 are repeated in various constructions. The work itself is the result of the scrapping of a much longer work The Depopulator (Le Dépeupleur, 1965), of which there are three versions, compiled in a 1965 notebook. "Ping" in itself contains 16 versions. Nevertheless, as John Mood notes,<sup>5</sup> Beckett resumed work (in the summer of 1966) on "Bing," a "miniaturization of the form and situation from Le Dépeupleur" (p.394).

Not only is this process of the production of the work indicative of Beckett's own unrelenting act of duplication, but also, within the prose itself, there is an abundance of duplicative procedures. In fact, the entire work appears to revolve around the following sentence:

all known all white bare white  
body fixed one yard legs joined  
like sewn. Light heat white floor  
one square yard never seen. White  
walls one yard by two white ceiling  
one square yard never seen. ("Ping," p.41)

Here, we are given the idea of entrapment and enclosure ("white walls," "white ceiling") as well as of immobility ("legs joined"). The insistence on this sentence in "Ping" reinforces this idea of entrapment, while at the same time, impressing on us the static quality of the passage. It goes nowhere. Although the word "white" appears ninety times, the text as a whole is dominated by the word-sound "ping." "Ping" acts as a refrain throughout the course of the work, occurring thirty-four times in the English version, and becoming more frequent toward the end of the piece. In the French version, ping translates as "bing," and is occasionally transformed into "hop," (twenty of the former and twelve of the latter). Given the emphasis on this word, "Ping," it is not surprising, as Mood notes, that it has been the focus of critical speculation:

What ping is is difficult to say and must in the nature of the case remain so. It is as ambiguous as the voices in Beckett's work (or as Godot). At times ping is within. Most often it is linked with words such as "fixed elsewhere" or simply elsewhere. Whether this means outside the skull or some box is not known. Ping can project a tiny projectile striking something, the ring of fine crystal, a nuclear phenomenon (it has always seemed to me as though those streaking sub-atomic particles in cloud chambers should make some kind of pinging sound, sonar, the ring as a typewriter carriage reaches the margin, and so on. Whatever one's association, ping as an image is like

a diamond with its score of  
gleaming facets, like an  
environment that permeates all,  
without and within. (pp.396-397)

Such speculation demonstrates the potential complexity inherent in the relationship of one specific word to the text as a whole and also the manifold effects these relationships have on the interpretation of the text. But the majority of these parallels Mood mentions seem both arbitrary and personal. In view of this, more conservative approaches to the text, like that of Dearlove,<sup>6</sup> actually seem to be more appropriate.

According to Dearlove, this sound repetition controls the flow of words and "the reader is left with a form that gestures towards formlessness and with phrases that suggest but never mean":

The movement toward sterility is reflected in the treatment of image and sound. The "pings" guide us through a world whose silence is broken neither by sounds from within the box ("silence within" [p.69]) nor by external noises ("elsewhere no sound," [p.70]). Yet, just as a fading blue somehow persists in a world of whiteness, so too brief and almost imperceptible murmurs exist in a world of stillness. (p.114)

In the text, the murmurs do seem to permeate the silence. These layers of sound and silence create a shifting paradoxical sense of sound and silence, form and formlessness.



Like the other compositions in the Residua and For To End Yet Again, "Ping" offers a paradoxical conception of Beckett's silently sounding universe.

These fictions also highlight the aural quality of Beckett's work, a quality which demands that the reader recognize and recall, through memory, earlier resonances. Moreover, "Ping's" explicitly repetitive quality suggests, on the one hand, the notion of the literary fugue, as discussed by Hofstadter, and on the other, that the text goes nowhere, that there is no end to this formal principle, there is only sound. Thus, although we realize that any individual segment of Beckett's "open" texts might be neatly and intelligibly made to conform to a pattern, we also should examine the importance of the seemingly arbitrarily placed repetitions. These repetitions disrupt the text's impulse toward linear narrative and toward conformity to the completion of Spanos' symbolic circle. They also operate to involve the text in those processes of infinite regress. Any progressive movement offered in the text is automatically curtailed by the refrain. This refrain, or echo-chamber effect, also creates a chiasmic pattern throughout the fictions, and therefore reinforces the more localized recursive structures of the prose style.

For example, in "From An Abandoned Work," the repetition of "whiteness" dominates the narrative: "White

I must say has always affected me strongly, all white things, sheets, walls, and so on even flowers, and then just white, the thought of white, without more" (p.13). Similarly in "Imagination Dead Imagine," the self refers to the "whiteness merging in the surrounding whiteness" (p.37) of the rotunda. In this case, however, whiteness alternates with "pitch black" (printed page?). "Lessness" contains within it echoes of "true refuge issueless," the "ruins" "in the endlessness" (p.49). "Searchers" and "lost ones" dominate the recursive style of "The Lost Ones," and the endless peregrination of "the searchers" recalls the "geodosy" of "Enough," in which "[i]mmediate continuous communication with immediate re-departure" forms the basis of the recursive "Strange Loops." In Six Residua, we find continuous, overt, and repeated references to endlessness, references which link the Six Residua to the eight fragments and "fizzles" of For to End Yet Again and Other Fizzles.

In "Lessness," another of the 'residual' works, the text contains roughly 1,500 words in 120 sentences which contain a series of repeated images. Again, syntax is minimal: verbs are reduced to participles, and indefinite articles are removed, as in "Ping." The entire text is structured repetitively: the first half is duplicated in the second half. The sixty sentences comprising the first contain six groups of images, ten

sentences to each image (which the Calder and Boyars cover to the book list as follows: ruin, exposure, wilderness, mindlessness, and, finally, past and future denied and affirmed).

In the text as a whole, what we are given is the juxtaposition of a series of phrases and words:

"true refuge"  
 "Ruins true refuge long last  
 towards which so many false  
 time out of mind"  
 "All sides endlessness earth  
 sky as one no sound no stir"  
 "All gone from mind"  
 "calm eye light of reason all  
 gone from mind"  
 "never but this changelessness  
 dream the passing hour"  
 "never but silences such that  
 in imagination this wild  
 laughter these cries"  
 "figment dawn dispeller of  
 figments and the other called  
 dusk"  
 "Never but imagined the blue in  
 the wild imagining the blue  
 celeste of poesy"  
 "One step more in the ruins in  
 the sand on his back in the  
 endlessness he will make it"  
 "One step more along all alone  
 in the sand no hold he will  
 make it."

Here, flux, sound, colour, texture, and mood dominate these lines. The flux is primarily determined by the repetitions and by the various polyphonic rhythms that structure the text. Moreover, the text's composition has a kind of chiasmic rhythmic structure. Faith in any such

consistency, however, is denied by Dearlove: "Beckett's method of composition in 'Lessness' is, at best, disconcerting" (p.117). She states that Beckett randomly drew his sentence groupings "from a container to yield the order of the first half of the piece" (p.117), repeating this for the second half.

Dearlove feels the inherent assumptions of the text to be mathematical, and she refers to Coetzee's statistical analysis of the 166 different lexical items analysed according to Zipf-Mandelbrot law of combinational mathematics. Consequently, her consideration of "Lessness" centres on a "chance-based" methodology to the text, for she sees this approach as being closer to Beckett's own ordering process, than any thematic, chronological, associative, or symbolic approach. "Meaning," says Dearlove, "is dependent on the random arrangement of a finite set" (p.117):

a single repetition is sufficient to suggest that all of the millions of possible reorderings are equally authoritative, equally meaningless, just as mathematics is a mental construction which is completely knowable because it is imagined, so too the concept of order is an arbitrary abstraction which originates and exists only in man's mind. By structuring "Lessness" upon the admittedly arbitrary rules of combinational mathematics, Beckett reminds us of the equally arbitrary rules of all systems and languages. (p.118)

Coetzee, working from a similar theory of the chance-based construction of the text, also concludes that there is "no principle of hierarchy or priority among the components of the work."<sup>7</sup> "This endless enterprise of splitting and recombining is language," he says, and the "subject of 'Lessness' is the plight of consciousness in a void...recombining the fragments in wholes which are never greater than the sum of their parts" (p.198).

Our concern here is with this very area of infinite regression but from another point of view. The duplicative processes in the companion works (and in "All Strange Away" and For to End Yet Again) seem best approached through the language of "Strange Loops" (though any approach will probably fall short of providing an unequivocal definition of the Beckettian style as it approaches Company). We can, however, fairly safely conjecture from this later, recursive style that, in this world of memory, the mind recalls--in panoramas, flashbacks, fade-outs, close-ups--its past in an infinite moment, an infinite moment which the repetitive processes of the text embody. It is by this process of repetition that the voice, or mind, reveals himself to be abstract. Dislocated, he surfaces in the "sacral ruins" of "[t]oo much silence is too much" ("Enough," p.26), in the "long unbroken time, without before or after, light or dark"

"From an Abandoned Work," p.148), in the "[e]mptiness, silence, heat, whiteness" (Imagination Dead Imagine," p.161), and in the "[p]lace of remains," the "skull alone in the dark the void" ("For to End," p.11).

From this ill-defined, abstract location, consciousness is free to move in time, with the result that the superimposition of ordered time on unordered timelessness emerges as a textual montage of ideas from one time imposed on those from another:<sup>8</sup>

His talk was seldom of geodosy. But we must have covered several times the equivalent of the terrestrial equator. At an average speed of roughly three miles per day and night. We took flight in arithmetic. What mental calculations bent double hand in hand! Whole ternary numbers we raised in this way to the third power sometimes in downpours of rain. Graving themselves in his memory as best they could the ensuing cubes accumulated. In view of the converse operation at a later stage. When time would have done its work. ("Enough," p.27)

Here, any consonance and harmony implied in time's normal forms undergo refraction, splintering into various separate "time-capsules." These elements fade and dissolve, as the female narrator, the first in Beckett's fiction, discusses the vicissitudes of her life and that of her male counterpart. Such "geodosies" into infinity form the governing structuring principle in For to End Yet Again.

The title chapter reiterates "For to end yet again skull alone in the dark place" (p.11) at various intervals, thereby holding the prose together as the "sepulchral skull" recants. Similarly too, in Company, intermittently the repeated phrases "To one alone on his back in the dark" and "from nought anew" mime the "[u]nformable gropings of the mind. Unstillable" (p.23).

Yet not only do these post-trilogy fictions provide an insight into the echo-chamber composition of Beckett's universe, but they also reveal the author's literal refinement of style to the point where he has pared away what he considers the extraneous in language. This tendency on Beckett's part to reduce language, to write less and yet to evoke more, has been noted by Enoch Brater in his study of "Enough":

"Reduce, Reduce, Reduce!" wrote Marcel Duchamp proclaiming a new credo for artistic composition! Beckett has taken the manifesto at its word, for in his short **prose** pieces to construct means quite literally to reduce. Ideas collapse into words, contemplation backslides into sensation, and stories revert to **colour, texture, sensibility, and sensuality**. Definitively incomplete, Beckett's formal condensation undermines the elusive and sometimes suspicious relations between his minimalist prose and all other things: 'Objects give us everything' Duchamp continued, 'but their representation no longer gives us anything.' Disengaged from representational imagery and therefore not emblematic, Beckett's

work makes us discover in residual  
 prose the literary potential of  
 compressed and frequently abstract  
 patterns, their human overtones,  
 their fleshly colours, and, above  
 all, their pervasive texture of  
 "mucuous membrane." 9

In his comment on Beckett's "new credo," Brater is correct in saying that we are no longer in the realm of traditionally ordered fiction, but more in that of mood and mystery (p.263), an obscure realm which is created by Beckett's challenge to the conventions of both narrative form and language.

Instead of linear plots presented in normal sentences, we find that the micro-structure of Beckett's fiction is that of the "Strange Loops" process. The phonetic association between words and parts of words demands a re-grouping other than that imposed by the normal syntactical structure of language. Syllabic similarities, assonance, alliteration, and onomatopoeia ("Ping") create a musical pattern, one which allows us to experience directly the aural, rhythmic aspects of language. One of the clearest examples of this emphasis on sound is "Ping." For example:

Traces blurs light grey eyes holes  
 light almost white fixed frong ping  
 a meaning only just almost never  
 ping silence. Bare white one yard  
 fixed ping fixed elsewhere no sound  
 legs joined...ping elsewhere



always there but that known not.  
 Ping perhaps not alone one second  
 with image same time. (p.43)

Most of the words here are monosyllabic, and this creates a distinct staccato rhythm. This rhythm, in turn, is further emphasized by the similarity of the consonants "p," "b," "d," "t." The clipped, abrupt delivery that would necessarily result (in an oral form) is counterpointed by the longer vowel sounds in "blurs," "eyes," "bare," "elsewhere," and "known." Consequently, the sound emitted by the vowels has a rhythmic, marked cadence in relation to the consonants.

Beckett's emphasis on phonetic structures and on the rhythm of language ("endo-linguistic" processes) demonstrates his desire to impose an inward focus and introverted structure on his work; that is, he imposes form, but a totally unconventional form for fiction. Not only do we see this inwardness in the internal rhythms of Beckett's language, but we also see it in the subject matter of the prose. This time, the moving inward takes a different form. It is manifested in the miniaturization of each work in another, in the encapsulation of one work in the other through inference. The referral of the texts to each other renders the various texts annexes of each other. Each piece is filled with historical overtones which give rise to two contrasting features: on one end of the scale,

there is compression and reduction of the various fictions into one--through quotation--and, on the other end, there is a textual expansion, a generation of references through prefigurement, or foreshadowing.

Although the prose pieces echo and rehearse each other, the effect is not that of reading a tautological facsimile. On the contrary, each text's addition to and collaboration in the engendering of the others alert the reader to the complexity involved in a style and language that can imply a dizzying, mirroring perpetuity. The success of this strategy lies in the reader's apprehension of a repeated word or phrase, and its evoking in his memory familiar impressions. Hence, the essence of a text is compressed into that word or phrase, but is then (hermeneutically) expanded or released in the activating consciousness of the reader.

All of this can be seen prefigured in The Unnamable. In Texts For Nothing, the voice comments, or states: "Spells of silence too, when I listen and hear the local sounds, the world sounds" (Text IV, p.93). This passage recalls the silence that is not silence, in which the Unnamable lives: "the silence is outside, outside, inside, there is nothing but here, and the silence outside, nothing but this voice and the silence all round" (The Unnamable, p.410). This voice "in the

skull" leads us into memory, and invention: "I'll make it in my head, I'll draw it out of my memory...I'll make myself a head, I'll make myself a memory" (The Unnamable, p.411).

From here on, "I [the Unnamable] invented my memories" (p.395), and we see Beckett moving toward the formless, meaningless state of the post-trilogy prose. The fiction is already a lie here, and the "voice that speaks knowing it lies" (The Unnamable, p.307) is the "black voice." Moreover, all time and space inherent in the stories exist only in relation to the instantaneous, but endless present. They are the lie of the original inventor's pseudo-world. Hence, we have the inventions in the geodasy of "Enough" and "the wild imaginings" of "Imagination Dead Imagine." We also have the "sepulchral skull" of "For to End Yet Again," and the seeking of the questioning "Lost Ones." In "the endlessness" of "Lessness," and in the "devising" of Company, we also discover elements of the "non-existent" Unnamable perpetuated as inventions. In addition to elements of The Unnamable being echoed and extended in the post-trilogy fiction, each individual later fiction repeats and echoes others.<sup>10</sup> For instance, "All Strange Away" opens with the line "Imagination dead imagine"--a direct reference to the work of that name. These narratives

create, through repetition, a sense of inner mirroring, rather like that of a Chinese box: "By sadism pure and simple" (How It Is) echoes "by aporia pure and simple" in The Unnamable. "I Gave Up Before Birth" finds its title in a line from the much earlier work, Malone Dies. The shorter pieces also contain passages which are verbatim quotations of another text. "Afar a Bird" contains the following passage from "I Gave Up Before Birth": "I gave up before birth, it is not possible otherwise, but birth there had to be, it was he, I was inside" (pp. 39 and 45). This inter-textual echoing pervades the post-trilogy prose, and is also found in the entire Beckettian oeuvre. The effect is one of refraction and reflection, but also of bizarre and unconventional continuity, as in an Escher lithograph.

This evidence reinforces the idea that Beckett's narrative strategies work to suggest that the self is caught in the process of perpetually recanting his life. Moreover, this dual process of refraction and reflection--made possible by repetition--is also analogous to the infinite relationships and potentialities presented within the universe of the voice's stream of consciousness. Each story, although demonstrating variations on the antinomies native to Beckett's prose,<sup>11</sup> reveals itself to be, in some way, a dissection and a

palimpsest of other works.

In turning to Company, Beckett's final work to date, we see this same mirroring pattern: a narrating voice, one of the company, recalls "[t]he unthinkable last of all. Unnamable. Last person I" (p.24). This return to The Unnamable is significant, insofar as Company also reinvokes the series of M figures peculiar to Beckett (mercier, Murphy, Mohood, MacMann, Malone, Molloy):

Or by some successful act of  
intellection as were he to think  
to himself referring to himself,  
since he cannot think he will  
give up trying. Is there  
anything to add to this equisse?  
His unnamability. Even M must go.  
So W reminds himself of his  
creature as so far created. W?  
But W too is creature. Figment.  
(p.45)

Insofar as the letter W (Watt? Worm?) is an inverted M, there are obvious associations with the novel Watt also. Company's recursive reinvocation of The Unnamable, progenitor of the post-trilogy fiction, has formed yet another "Strange Loop." Essentially, the series of voices echoing each other here reveals consciousness functioning as a screen mirroring itself. Thus, the narrative voices of the post-trilogy work (the questioner of Texts, and the narrator in How It Is) become commentators on, and facets of, one supreme consciousness. The movement

towards this state of consciousness, of course, follows the path of a spiral, as suggested earlier by The Unnamable.

From the situation in The Unnamable, wherein one mind encompasses and mirrors others through the continual evocations of memory--its reminences, cerebrations, and fabrications--the reader is transported into the even more complex realm of those various reflections and refractions, into the universe of those mental annexes forming "company":

Use of the second person marks the voice. That of the third that cankerous other. Could he speak to and of whom the voice speaks there would be a first. But he cannot. He shall not. You cannot. You shall not. (Company, p.8)

The protean quality of this consciousness, presented in the movement from singularity ("One alone") to multiplicity ("company"), and back to singularity ("Alone"), lies in its fluidity. The sense of this fluidity is conveyed to the reader through the equivocating series of perceptions occupying the hyperacute cerebrations of the Beckettian inchoate mind.

For the Unnamable, the source of this "pensum" derives from the "absentee's" struggle to utter the ineffable. The voice is "at the centre," and "[n]o

matter where he goes, being at the centre, he will go towards them" (The Unnamable, p.356). The reader is told: "They will lay hold of him and gather him into their midst," into "the beginning of his prehistory," "the transit...from darkness to light" (p.357). The Unnamable continues: "These voices are not mine, nor these thoughts, but the voices and thoughts of the devils who beset me" (p.347):

Two falsehoods, two trappings,  
to be borne to the end, before  
I can be let loose, alone, in the  
unthinkable unspeakable, where  
I have not ceased to be, where  
they will not let me be. (p.335)

Here, the self is trapped in the moment of perception between perceiver and perceived. He also yields to the motions of light and dark, and to those of diffraction and dissolution. In this world, empirical validation is absent. There are no forms by which to give meaning to or to impose order on the universe. Thus, as Beckett describes it: the only absolute is the absolute absence of any absolute. All that one can know or ascertain is that nothing is knowable or ascertainable. Or, otherwise expressed by Murphy, who here follows Democritus: "somethings give way, or perhaps simply add up, to the Nothing, than which in the guffaw of the Abderite naught is more real" (Murphy, p.246).

Our final impression is that of the mind moving "from nought anew" to a "[m]ental activity of a low order. Rare flickers of reasoning of no avail" (Company, p.45). It aspires to the "mental or imaginative frontiers invisible to the eye of flesh" ("The Lost Ones," p.43), the "imaginative line," the "imaginative edge." In other words, through his rhetoric of abstraction, Beckett has offered an alternative to traditional narrative form and content. In so doing, he has created a form capable of presenting not only the self's stream of consciousness, in which he lives, but also the inverse universe. The reader now moves: "To the source of nought."



## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup>Linda Hutcheon, Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1980). In Hutcheon's words: "As a reader begins a novel, he does indeed read referentially in that he refers words to his linguistic and experiential knowledge; gradually, however, these words take on a unity of reference and create a self-contained universe that is its own validity (and 'truth')....What happens is that the referents of the novelistic language (which, as shall be demonstrated shortly, are fictive and not real) gradually accumulate during the act of reading, gradually construct a 'heterocosm,' that is, another cosmos, an ordered and harmonious system. This fictional universe is not an object of perception, but an effect to be experienced by the reader, an effect to be created by him and in him" (p.88).

Although the fictional "heterocosm" here falls more in the realm of the reader, its legitimacy as an expression of the created fictional world within Beckett's work can be validated in part if we consider the narrative voices as fictions of themselves "devising it all for company."

<sup>2</sup>Elizabeth Bregman Segrè, "Style and Structure in Beckett's 'Ping': That Something Itself," Journal of Modern Literature, 6,1 (February 1977), pp.127-147. Segrè's idea derives from William Bright: "Points de contact entre langage et musique," Musique en jeu, 5 (1971), p.71. Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>3</sup>Stanley Fish, Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventh Century Literature (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972). Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>4</sup>Douglas Hofstadter, Gödel, Escher, Bach (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p.9. Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>5</sup>"'Silence Within': A Study of the Residua of Samuel Beckett," Studies in Short Fiction, 7, 3 (Summer 1970), pp.385-401. Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>6</sup>Judith Dearlove, "'Last Images': Samuel Beckett's Residual Fiction," Journal of Modern Literature, 6 (1977), p.111. Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>7</sup>J.M. Coetzee, "Samuel Beckett's Lessness: An Exercise in Decomposition," Computers and the Humanities, 7 (March, 1973), p.198.

<sup>8</sup>Samuel Beckett, Proust (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1931). Here, Beckett states: "As though the figure of Time could be represented by an endless series of parallels, his life is switched over to another line and proceeds without any solution of continuity" (p.27).

<sup>9</sup>"Why Beckett's Enough is More or Less Enough," Contemporary Literature, 21, 2 (1980), p.252. Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>10</sup>Ruby Cohn, "Beckett's Recent Residua," The Southern Review, 5, 4 (October, 1969). According to Cohn: "The key to each Beckett work seems always to be hidden in the past work. Almost a decade after he published From an Abandoned Work, Beckett used it to unlock three brief pieces he calls Residua. Whiteness leads to Imagination Dead Imagine and Ping, compulsive walk-talking to Enough [written a few months earlier]. Beckett wrote of the three pieces, 'Imagination Dead Imagine and Ping are separate works. Aberrantly between the two I wrote Enough, but put it back in its place in published order' (pp.1047-48).

<sup>11</sup>Antinomies such as: light/dark, sound/silence, language/murmur, flux/stasis, death/life, imagination/reason, presence/absence, ignorance/omniscience, chaos/order, solitude/company, story/pure consciousness. The following passage (from All Strange Away, p.9) demonstrates some of these antinomies:

All gone now and never been never  
still never voiced all back when  
never sundered unstillable turmoil  
no sound, She's not here, Fancy is  
here only....Fancy dead, try that  
again with spirant barely parting  
lips in murmur and faint stir of  
white dust or not in light and dark  
if this maintained or dark alone as  
though ears when shining and dead  
uncertain in dying fall of amateur  
soliloquy when not known for certain.

## CHAPTER V

### Beckett's Inverse Universe and the Narrative Self

"Abyssus abyssum invocat"

I have been using the term "inverse universe" because the conception of it posited by physicists provides an interesting analogy to the sort of universe implied in Beckett's post-trilogy work:

It is the event horizon which constitutes the essential feature of the black hole. What happens to an object that passes through an event horizon is even more fantastic than the wildest (currently) science fiction.

If the black hole is not rotating, the object will be pulled directly to the center of the black hole to a point called the singularity. There it will be squeezed out of existence, or as the physicists say, to zero volume....and even space and time disappear. It is speculated that everything which is sucked into a black hole is spilled out again on "the other side"--"the other side" being another universe.

If the black hole is rotating, an object that is sucked into the event horizon could miss the black hole singularity...and emerge into another time and another place in this universe (through "wormholes"), or into another universe (through "Einstein-Rosen bridges.") 1

The unconventional linguistic fictional structures of

Texts for Nothing, How It Is, Six Residua, "All Strange Away," For To End Yet Again and Other Fizzles, and Company suggest this sort of formless universe that seems antithetical to the actual ordered space-time world we inhabit. And, through Beckett's rhetoric of abstraction, through its perpetual evacuation and displacement of meaning in language, this fictional universe and its correlative state of mind are seen as unknowable and untenable, abstract and indeterminate.

Essentially, this universe is inhabited by the Beckettian self in a state of consciousness that is one of inquisition and of excavation, one from which all objectivity is excised. Here, the self moves in posse, between a state of singularity and multiplicity. This world --devoid of normal space and time and their phenomenological correlates--is the home of the Beckettian "non-knower" and "non-can-er."<sup>2</sup> By the same token, it is a world deconsecrated of form and presence, directly contrasted to the empirical territory of the "knower." In an interview with John Gruen in 1970, as we have already seen, Beckett stated: "when a man faces himself, he is looking into the abyss."<sup>3</sup> The abyss, here, we understand to be that part of the self which, when physically "dis-closed" and no longer elemental or material, is no longer a definable, graspable, and knowable object. Thus, the abyss is the

essential nothingness within man, into which matter is pulled, as if the self is some metaphorical gravitational forcefield. As we have seen, the Unnamable is "a hole" (p.355) in being, trying to fill itself in order to achieve a fullness and stability of identity: "The one ignorant of himself and silent, ignorant of his silence and silent" (p.347). The post-trilogy self also exists on many levels of consciousness--levels on which he heuristically questions the selves of memory in the hope of revealing some point of origin. In Company, the voice--"[d]evising figments to temper his nothingness" (p.46)--is subsumed by language, but this process of "dis-closure" or revelation, so to speak, paradoxically only results in the identification of absence of "another then. Of whom nothing" (p.46): "From ranging far and wide as if in quest the voice comes to rest and constant faintness. To rest where? Imagine warily" (p.47).

This far, of course, Company's<sup>4</sup> rendition of the inverse universe is the most extreme one offered by Beckett, but it is also an expansion of those formless, identity-less lapses already experienced by Murphy and Watt in their worlds. Although both words depict a more tangible, cartographic world of space, this fictional landscape is periodically dissolved, providing insight into the topos of nothingness. In Murphy, for instance,

the world of space frequently disintegrates. In order to inform us of the actual process, the narrator humourously discharges the "painful duty" of "issuing" a "bulletin" (p.113) on "Amor intellectualis quo Murphy se ipsum amat." The reason for this "duty" is to relieve the narrative voice "from the necessity of apologizing for it [M's mind] further" (p.107). The narrator explains: operating on the level of "a kind of mental tic douloureux sufficient for his parody of rational behaviour" (p.110), Murphy's mind consists of three zones. In the first, that of light and retribution, "the kick that the physical Murphy received, the mental Murphy gave" (p.111), "the kick in intellectu and the kick in re" (p.109). The next zone is that of the half light, wherein "the pleasure was contemplation" (p.111). This in turn gives rise to the third, "the dark," "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" (p.112). The reader is told: "Here he was not free, but a mote in the dark of absolute freedom...in the will-lessness, a mote in its absolute freedom" (pp.112-3).

Basically, the intermittent glimpses of the inverse universe breaking through the spatial framework of the novel arise, not surprisingly, when Murphy's mind

loses touch with the phenomenal world. His mind--"a closed system," "impermeable to the vicissitudes of the body" (p.109), "a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without" (p.107)--reflects on itself, "pictures" itself, "in the universe inside it." This breakdown of the mind's capacity to perceive the world through a formal grid ( and in this way to codify existence) occurs occasionally during the course of Murphy's life. This juxtaposition of the two worlds is not relinquished by Beckett, but the emphasis formerly given to the world shifts, so that by the time of Company, Beckett has totally reversed the system: instead of our being in a phenomenal world with occasional lapses out of comforting spatial and temporal form, we are precipitated into that hermetic universe of Murphy's mind in which form falls asunder. This, as we have seen, is the post-trilogy universe.

There are other early prefigurings of this formless world. In an experience similar to Murphy's, we see Watt's perception dissolve into the fluidity of consciousness when he suffers a time-warp in Mr. Knott's house. Gazing at the picture hanging in Erskine's room, he sees:

A circle, obviously described by a compass, and broken at its lowest point, occupied the middle foreground,

of this picture. Was it receding? Watt had that impression. In the eastern background appeared a point, or dot ....Watt wondered how long it would be before the point and circle entered together upon the same plane....Watt wondered if they had sighted each other, or were blindly flying thus, harried by some force of merely mechanical mutual attraction, or the playthings of chance....And he wondered what the artist had intended to represent...a circle and its centre in search of each other, or a circle and its centre in search of a centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and a centre in search of its centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and a centre in search of a centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of its centre and its circle respectively...in boundless space, in endless time. (pp.128-129)

This doubling process is that of the mind's mirroring of itself when it relinquishes the comforting form found in phenomenological reality. This process also reveals the solipsistic self's inability to present a picture of that reality while the self is receding into the inner void. It can no longer grasp or know form because it has transcended all empirical points of reference. As a "non-knower," Watt can now perceive the chaos behind the form.

In the post-trilogy prose, we see that the brief lapses into formlessness in the previous works become the dominant motif in the later ones. Beckett develops the notion of consciousness as a part of a recursive continuum



of fields within fields; conventional formal concepts of time and space have no meaning in the universe inhabited by this consciousness. In Texts, the mind exists "scattered," "wandering," on "still the same old road...up yes and down no" (Text XI, p.127):

I can see me still, with those  
[eyes] of now, sealed this long  
time, staring with those of then,  
I must have been twelve  
of the glass...double-faced,  
faithful and magnifying, staring  
into one of the others, the true  
ones, true then, and seeing  
me there, imagining I saw me  
there, lurking behind the bluey  
veils, staring back sightlessly.  
(Text XI, p.103)

The self is presented as a series of reflecting mirrors, giving an almost Cubist effect of an assemblage of figures, a concatenation of selves, "the same old stranger as ever, for whom alone accusative I exist, in the pit of my existence, of his" (Text IV, p.91): "And when he feels me void of existence it's of his he would have me void, and vice versa" (Text IV, p.91), "in the depths of that vaulty night" (Text V, p.98).

This issue of the multitudinous self is dealt with grammatically as well:<sup>5</sup> Texts I and II refer to "I," Text III to "we," "Text IV to "him" and "I," and thenceforward, the Texts refer to "I," concluding with the third-person impersonal singular: "it says, it murmurs."

This transference of an operative grammatical or deitic subject reinforces the notion of multiplicity of selves, and also suggests the self's inability to discover any permanent form for himself. The experience of the "non-knower" then becomes the experience of formless chaos, as we see in Text IX:

What variety and at the same  
time what monotony, how varied  
it is and at the same time how,  
what's the word, how monotonous.  
What agitation and at the same  
time what calm, what vicissitudes  
within what changelessness. (p.118)

As Texts makes evident, the self cannot escape this chaos, for it is not external to him. The source of nothingness lies in the deepest recesses of solipsistic consciousness, in "the extinction of this black nothing and its impossible shades" (Text XIII, p.139), where there is no "elsewhere" to "this infinite here" (Text VI, p.102).

Yet in the trilogy, we were given indications of the eventuality of this sort of fate for the self. Although the earlier characters, Molloy, Moran, and Malone, may live and die in a spatio-temporal world, their deaths resolve nothing. Their lives coalesce into an amorphous past, a vague atavistic memory, centripetally spiralling within the Unnamable's skull only to be "ejaculated" back into activity by the words of a

loquacious mouth. This purgatory of memory, from the "spermarium to the crematorium," continues into the post-trilogy fiction. In Texts, as in the subsequent fiction, "time devours on, but not me" (Text XI, p.127):

all the old noes that buried me  
down here, deep in this place  
which is not one, which is merely  
a moment for the time being  
eternal, which is called here, and  
in this being which is called me  
and is not one, and in this  
impossible voice, all the old noes  
dangling in the dark and swaying  
like a ladder of smoke, yes, a  
new no, that none says twice, whose  
drop will fall and let me down,  
shadow and babble to an absence  
less vain than inexistence. (Text XI,  
p.131)

Granted that, in this "black hole," there is no form to accommodate the chaos, the autotelic being, existing in "the silence" and "the murmurs," is aware of the ineffectuality of language to fix chaos and to determine his own "haecceity." The function of language as a means of identification, therefore, is called into question:

Ah to know for sure, to know  
...this farrago of silence  
and words, of silence that is not  
silence and barely murmured words.  
Or to know it's life still, a form  
of life, ordained to end....Words,  
mine was never more than that, than  
this pell-mell babel of silence and  
words, my viewless form described  
as ended. (Text VI, p.104)

The doubt involved in this interpretive process, this hermeneutics of suspicion,<sup>6</sup> constantly reinforces the voice's compulsion to seek form. The only form of language open to this voice is that of "unnamable words" (p.105). He asks: "what is it, this unnamable thing that I name and name and never wear out, and I call that words?" (pp.104-105)

The compulsive inquisition of Text VIII forces the voice to comprehend that the only possible reality is formlessness: "the same murmur, flowing unbroken, like a single endless word and therefore meaningless, for it's the end gives meaning to words" (p.111). Such formlessness subverts the possibility of analysis based on empirical knowledge. Thus, the voice remains in doubt, ignorant and suspicious because it is unable to arrive at any conclusions about its life. With the exception of the activity of talking, he is incapable of acting, impotent in the face of the infinite potentials within the flux of chaos. Condemned to chaos without form, he rotates between two parting dreams, in the domain of "last everlasting questions, infant langours in the end sheets, last images, end of dream, of being past, passing, and to be" (Text XIII, p.139).

From the "pseudo-sepulture" of the voice in Texts, "whose screaming the silence of no's knife in yes's wound"

and the ambiguity involved in wondering "what has become of the wish to know" (p.139), we now turn to the voice in How It Is. Here, in the "vast tracts of time" (p.16), the speaker reveals his journey to be "one semi-side prolongation of intermediate procumbency multiplication of mute imprecations" (p.41). As in Texts, the voice here wonders whether there are "other inhabitants besides me here with me for good" (p.13). Although he stipulates that his task is to "recapitulate the sack the tins the mud the dark the silence the solitude" (p.8), that is, to tell "how it was I quote before Pim with Pim after Pim how it is three parts I say it as I hear it" (p.7), he is aware that he does not even know for sure whether Pim existed. In fact, it is even the "ancient voice in me not mine" (p.7) that speaks. The only form he can apprehend would seem at first to be that of language, but "the syllables" that "move my lips" are "the speech I've been given" (p.18). Therefore, language has form, but it is inadequate and foreign to the speaker.

This voice, Pim claims, is the designator of Pim's identity, and it comes out of the chaos which is "fertile in vicissitudes and peripeteias" (p.56). This voice, we discover, is the "ancient voice" in him, a repository of the historical multiform selves, the many who speak through him with "the savage economy of hieroglyphs"

(p.15). As with the one and the many selves in Texts, we likewise find itinerant vagrant selves proliferating in How It Is:

millions and millions there are  
 millions of us and there are  
 three I place myself at my point  
 of view Bem is Bom Bom Bem let us say  
 Bom it's preferable Bom then me and  
 Pim me in the middle. (How It Is, p.114)

This procession, reminiscent of that "fatidical procession of phantoms going from nothingness to nothingness" in The Unnamable, appears to be ignorant of its component parts. As each creature passes the other, it is reduced to "rumour transmissible ad infinitum in either direction" (How It Is, p.120).

An important similarity can be seen between Texts and How It Is. If we recall the "monster silences vast tracts of time perfect nothingness reread the ancient's notes pass the time beginning of the murmur" (How It Is, pp.80-81) and compare it with the concluding words of Texts--"it says, it murmurs"--we see that the similarity lies in their common dissolution of language into a formless murmur. In yet another instance, the "ancient voice in me not mine" (p.7) of How It Is is flooded with "yes's" and "no's," inundating the "Roman Capitals," so that in the end the voice cries "I SHALL

DIE." Whatever the voice asserts, however, is erased in the obscurity of "old words ill-heard ill-murmured" (p.134). In addition, the concatenation of negatives and affirmations echoes the statement "no's knife in yes's wound" of Texts. Such similarities work to reinforce the thematization of the breakdown of form into nothingness.

Yet such an assertion seems almost platitudinous and repetitious in the light of the current critical commonplace that the disintegration--or entropy--is the process dominating Beckett's fiction. What can be learned from this multi-level analysis of the breaking down--deconstruction--of form, however, is an awareness of the complexity of this process. The voice in Beckett's post-trilogy fiction is not one voice recapitulating everyone's biographies to give himself identity, but rather the antithesis: a series of biographies and quotations italicizing themselves, trying to form themselves. Therefore, the result is not that the one becomes a confluence of the many, but rather that the many try and fail to become one. There can be no singularity in nothingness. This realization is brought about by the very complex disintegration of all notions of conventional form: on the level of language, narrative structure, fictional universe, and, finally, the consciousness of the self.

The challenge to formal conventions is often most clear in Beckett's refusal of a traditional specific narrating voice. By shifting the narrative centre of gravity, Beckett presents aspects of the "caput mortuum of a studious youth" as described in Text XI: "and here the laugh, the long silent guffaw of the knowing non-exister, at hearing ascribed to him such pregnant words, confess" (Text XI, p.134). Essentially, by this shifting of emphasis, Beckett has implied that there is no locus vivens for the narrative voice, that the voice's utterances operate on a phatic level only, not communicating meaning, only sound.

In Company, the narrative voice is that of "one on his back in the dark" (p.7). The discarnate self in metamorphosis is an axis for multiple selves. He has his own recursive forms of organization, cross-referencing all thoughts in one frame of the brain. The mind, here, is seen to embrace and contain all things, yet it is also seen to be, in essence, void.

From such a paradoxical concept of the self, we can see that Beckett--instead of dealing with the more traditional mystic quest, and the expansion of the artistic self toward an understanding of cosmic consciousness, omnipotence, and omniscience--is dealing



with the opposite; he is concerned with a mind freed from the formal structures that make sense of phenomena, a "voice questing far and wide" (p.44), but without the help of ordering forms of knowledge, a self which follows, however, the "ontospeleological" impulse of the "non-knower," the "non-can-er":

Only a small part of what is said  
can be verified. As for example  
when he hears, You are on your back  
in the dark. Then he must  
acknowledge the truth of what is  
said. But by far the greater part  
of what is said cannot be verified.  
.... A device perhaps from the  
incontrovertibility of the one  
to win credence for the other.  
(Company, p.7)

One of the reasons that ideas remain unratiſied, is that, in this formless void, as we have seen, there can be no teleological sequence of cause and effect. Inevitably, the situation is that of Texts: "I won't understand, all dies so fast, no sooner born. And the yeses and noes mean nothing in this mouth" (Text IX, p.117).

Such indeterminacy and fragmentation of knowledge constitute the epistemological state of those dispersed listeners, "vigilant" "phantoms," "orators," "echoes," and "devisers":

Use of the second person marks  
the voice. That of the third  
that cankerous other. Could he

speak to and of whom the voice  
 speaks there would be a first.  
 But he cannot. He shall not.  
 You cannot. You shall not.  
 (Company, p.8)

Apparently, the only act either possible or predictable  
 in this state of knowledge is that of posing heuristic  
 questions: "Is he not perhaps overhearing a communication  
 not intended for him? If he is alone on his back in the  
 dark why does the voice not say so?" (p.9). By the same  
 token, because of the "dis-closed" nature of the  
 Beckettian universe, no one voice can provide an  
 unequivocal answer to any of the texts' questions.

The particular qualities of the state of  
 consciousness in the Beckettian void--those qualities  
 of ignorance, impotence, mental fragmentation, and formal  
 dissolution--raise the issue of Beckett's method of  
 evoking this world as "despatialized" and abstract, as  
 essentially formless. The reduction of formal spatial  
 dimensions in Texts provides a good point of departure.  
 At first, the backdrop initially evoked is that of a court-  
 room situation in which the self, in the dual capacity of  
 scribe and adjudicator, relinquishes his dream of being  
 "free to end" (Text XI, p.130), and to "laugh, the long  
 silent guffaw of the knowing non-exister" (Text XII, p.134).  
 De-construction of the formal contours commences when the  
 voice implies, and then explicitly states, that space

is devoid of content, that "here is empty." We are told that: "all is inexplicable, space and time, false and inexplicable" (Text VIII, p.113). The reason for this inability to make sense of experience is the failure or refusal of all temporal and spatial form or order.

In this same text, we are told: "To speak of once, is to speak of nothing." Temporal and telological form (suggested by "once") is overtly invalidated. Yet the voice seeks form to give meaning to the chaos of experience. A "sense of an ending," as described by Kermode, gives significance to both life and traditional fiction; it orders time and space. But the Beckettian life lived in extremis voices the ultimate impossibility of such ordering illusions: in reality, human experience, for Beckett, is comprised of dis-illusion, of de-construction of the normal space-time formal grid, and of the opening up or "dis-closure" of the world of consciousness. "Once" becomes "nothing":

There's a way out there, no no,  
I'm getting mixed, I must be  
getting mixed, confusing here and  
there, now and then, just as I  
confused them then, the here of  
then, the then of there, with  
other spaces, other times dimly  
discerned, but not more dimly  
than now. (Text IX, p.120)

The challenge to conventional form in Texts results in an awareness that our view of space, like that of time, is only one of the ordering modes clung to by human consciousness. The world, Beckett suggests, does not really exist: "It's an image, in my helpless head, where all sleeps, all is dead, not yet born" (Text V, p.95). What Beckett gives us, then, is a formless universe of negative mass, shrunk to a point without dimension or magnitude. It is a shadowy and unfocussed version of the phenomenal world of space and time.

This alternate landscape also appears in How It Is. What at first appears to be a tangible world of "false skull foul with mould" (p.87), "in the mud," "sinking fast" (p.103), soon disintegrates, and reveals its true formless incomprehensibility. Time too loses its form and, therefore, its meaning. The self is transported through a time warp, into the antinomies and temporal paradoxes of "the vast past near": "What land all lands midnight sun midday night all latitudes all longitudes" (p.85). By implication, we have been transported through the involutions of "monster silences vast tracts of time" to "perfect nothingness" (p.80).

In How It Is, Beckett removes the comforting

form of narrative space and, in effect, "despatializes" that landscape of "warmth of primeval mud impenetrable dark" (p.11). Despite all the references to a locus vivendi, the focus is on, not where, but "how it is." This phrase constitutes, as we have already seen, both the title and the concluding line of the work. The change of focus from the conventional time and space of narrative fiction is brought about by new concerns: the phrase itself offers a qualificatory statement on being--"how it is"--to which we are recalled after hearing "how it was." We have also seen that it is a tacit denial of the objectivity which a quantitative statement, such as "what it is" would intimate. In addition, the concluding line of the text does not bear any punctuation mark denoting an end either to the text, or to the voice's "quotation" of "how it is." This points to the un-ending formless essence of "how it is," of its extension into an eternal present, a present to which both the future and the past are annexed--paradoxically--through the process of memory:

and how there cannot be only three  
of us only four only a million and  
there I am always was with Pim Bom  
innumerable others in a procession  
without end or beginning languidly  
wending from left to right straight  
line eastward strange in the dark the  
mud sandwiched between victim and  
tormentor. (p.127)

Our sense of the temporal and spatial dimensions

of Beckett's world as being literally end-less is reinforced in the subsequent works, the Residua, "All Strange Away," For To End Yet Again and Other Fizzles, and Company. Initially, these works stress their fixed formal boundaries,<sup>7</sup> their architecture and geometrical configurations. We find, for example, that contouring of "Imagination Dead Imagine": "Diameter three feet, three feet from ground to summit of the vault. Two diameters at right angles AB DC divide the white ground into two semi-circles ACB BDA" (p.35). Projected here is the image of a mausoleum, a white silent "rotunda." Yet, as we have seen, such an emphatic insistence on physical phenomena and on images of closure can be misleading. In fact, many critics have seen this emphasis as both significant and symbolic, without taking into account the denial of both concreteness and formal closure of all kinds that is central to Beckett's work. For example, Brian Finney writes of "Imagination Dead Imagine":

Variations from an empirically established norm are plotted meticulously. Simple scientific experiments (the mirror, the murmur in the silence) are conducted to test the response of the two bodies. This is to be no ordinary fictional image but a highly particularized set of phenomena scrutinized as objectively as is permissible since the theory of relativity became commonplace. 8

Yet what Finney ignores, and what we have seen to be equally clear, is that these very references to space also hint that any attempt to order space can only be an illusion. Hence, in Company, the "hemispherical chamber" (p.32) turns out to be "contourless" (p.33). In addition to lacking form, this fictional space lacks concreteness: "The dark cope of sky. The dazzling land" (p.38) are merely insubstantial, abstract products of memory. Memory, which is an imaginative reconstruction of events freed from the demands for coherence and significance of normal sense-making, is presented as an endless process of "disclosure":

Then suddenly it was dark again  
and Horn went away....But here  
one of two things, either the final  
extinction had coincided, by some  
prank of chance...or else Horn,  
knowing his time to be up, had cut  
off the last drips of current....  
It is in outer space, not to be  
confused with the other, that such  
images develop. I need only interpose  
my hand, or close my eyes...for them  
to fade. ("Horn Came Always," p.34)

This world of imagination and memory is emptied of concrete content as well as comforting form. As in the piece "He is Barehead," "the surprise once past, memory returns and takes him back, if he will, far back to that first instant beyond which nothing" (p.29), toward "oblivion."

Admittedly, given the number of references to

the spatial contours of this world, the argument does seem weighted in favour of considering Beckett's work as exemplary of the process of formal objectification and spatialization in art. Yet it is also true, as we have repeatedly seen, that Beckett always presents the world of phenomenal space and time as a false one. Space cannot be defined or contoured in Beckett's world. It is limitless and undefinable. Dis-closure, then, is a revealing of formal closure's inadequacy on all levels --spatial, temporal, cognitive, psychological, linguistic --in a Beckettian world of uncertainty. Most of Beckett's references to space are relentlessly counterpointed with allusions such as "in the endlessness" ("Lessness," passim), "black void within without" ("For to End," p.11), and "air timeless" ("Lessness," p.49). Given these references to the dissolution of boundaries of space and time and presence, it is hard to ignore the consistent process of dis-closure, of de-construction of the spatial contours defined within the text. We arrive at the final impression of "a space with neither here nor there where all the footsteps ever fell can never fare nearer to anywhere nor from anywhere further away" (For to End, p.15).

By the same token, in "The Lost Ones," the sentence, "For in the cylinder alone **are** certitudes to be



found and without nothing by mystery," suggests that same polarity between spatial form and formlessness. A similar emphasis on mystery and incertitude controls Company's queries: "For why or? Why in another dark or in the same" (p.24). The "contourless" (p.33) world reappears in the voice's complaint (or lament):

"Nowhere to be found," "Nowhere to be sought. The unthinkable last of all" (p.24). It is the self's perception of space that voids him of his form and, thus, of his meaning. This is clear in the cliché that is played upon and literalized by Beckett throughout "All Strange Away": to be "in the light" or "in the dark" determines the self's perception of his universe: "Light flows, eyes close, stay closed till it ebbs....Light on, down on knees, sights pin, makes for it, lights out, gets pin in dark, lights on, sights another, lights out, so on, years of time on earth" (p.1). In Company, the same light, dark, and shade effects condition spatial perception:

By the voice a faint light is  
shed. Dark lightens while it  
sounds. Deepens when it ebbs  
....

Whence the shadowy light? What  
company in the dark! To close  
the eyes and try to imagine that.  
Whence once the shadowy light.  
No source. As if faintly luminous  
all his little void. What can he

have seen then above his upturned  
face. To close the eyes in the  
dark and try to imagine that.  
(Company, p.19)

By Company, space is clearly presented as existing only within consciousness. It is perception that particularizes and codifies space and time in order to give them meaning. In this way, perception both creates and controls form in space (as demonstrated by that light-dark control system in "All Strange Away"). But the only forms it can draw on are those stored in the self's memory of the phenomenological world of space and time. The self's conceptualizing of past and future is a perceptual operation only in the sense that it is aligned with the subjectivity of memory. Past and future, then, are not actual events in any reality. What true reality is, for Beckett, exists in the "dis-closed" moment of being: "And you as you always were" (Company, p.63). It exists in this "changelessness," and "in the endlessness" ("Lessness," p.50).

Because of the self's capacity to pass beyond forms, to exceed definition, and to abandon the contours of self to dissolution, he is led astray by possibility. As a protean figure, the self sees that more and more subjective elements and self-divisions become possible. Ironically, however, actualization into any of the

possible forms is an impossibility. The self becomes a mirage existing in a constant, un-formalized flux. The random evocations of the self paradoxically represent, on the one hand, the freedom of the "dis-closed" self, and on the other, the terror of being lost in verbal chaos, in the incoherent "quotations" of How It Is, for example. In fact, as Company demonstrates, there is no temporal, spatial or teleological end to the discourse, save perhaps, that of "devising it all for company" (p.8). The voice in Company, however, can only "acknowledge" and recapitulate "what is said" (p.7), what it absorbs.

This narrative self has been studied in some detail in Beckett criticism, but from very different perspectives than this one. Eric P. Levy's Beckett and the Voice of Species<sup>9</sup> considers the text's self-consciousness as the aspect of Beckett's work that has excited the most critical controversy. Levy notes that this feature has been variously handled by critics: it has been used to exemplify the artist trying to grasp his own creative act,<sup>10</sup> to thematize man's withdrawal from the world through insanity<sup>11</sup> or impotence,<sup>12</sup> or to explore the very nature of self in either Hegelian,<sup>13</sup> Kierkegaardian,<sup>14</sup> Cartesian,<sup>15</sup> Sartrean,<sup>16</sup> or Neo-Freudian<sup>17</sup> terms. Levy directs us to the source of this critical trend and, in his substantial notes, given as references to the theme

of self-consciousness, he refers us to Geneviève Bonnefoi's<sup>18</sup> early work (1956), which first suggested that the idea of the Beckettian narrator exists only in the indefinite world of thought. Although in agreement with Bonnefoi's insight, Levy extends this theory of self-consciousness into the domain of metafiction and therefore includes its artistic implications. His critical stance is rooted in the idea that Beckett's self-conscious fiction describes a movement towards what he calls, in his introduction, the pure narrator and the experience of nothing.

In the trilogy, we enter, says Levy, "the heartland" of Beckett's prose fiction (p.54). The Unnamable represents the heightened realms of introspection. Here, the Beckettian narrator, whom Levy takes to be Beckett's surrogate, "often bravely raises the question of his own insanity only just as bravely to deny it" (p.71). It is in Texts for Nothing that Levy feels that Beckett's "pure narrator" surfaces as a voice, "stranded between the two poles of narration, words and silence" (p.72). Unlike the "frantic utterings" of the Unnamable, his "utterance moves with the quiet cadence of a chant," "pursuing a series of questions and answers about his inability to enter any story" (p.72).

In How It Is (1961), however, Levy considers that

Beckett takes a new direction in his fiction, turning now to allegory (p.83). In a subterranean world, with mud symbolizing "the endless experience of Nothing" (p.84), the narrator exists through a persona, Bom. (However, this new direction into the realm of allegory would seem to be abandoned in the subsequent Six Residua.) For Levy, the self in the face of the void feels unsure and ignorant. In Murphy, Levy sees this lack of self reflected in "the closed narrative system that has no ultimate subject" (p.118). In Watt, this vacancy is expressed in the hero's "hypothetical" world; and in Texts for Nothing, we hear in the voice "the expression of his own impossibility" (p.118). The focus shifts again after what Levy calls the "fiction of time" and "the stillness of the vanquished," in How It Is and "The Lost Ones" respectively; in For to End Yet Again and Other Fizzles (1976), narration approaches the "coincidence of the minimum of being with the maximum of Nothing" (p.119). There is, says Levy, a decrease in unsureness, and a new tone which belies, if not a reconciliation with his plight, "a confirmation of his resolve to bear it" (p.119).

To move from this concern for narrative self (the relationship between self and fiction) and to deal, instead, with the relations between the self and the

universe is to see that any such confirmation of self that Levy finds inherent in the "pure narrator" on the narrative level turns out to be untenable on an existential one. In the relationship between the self and the Beckettian universe, the confirmation of the self's "resolve to bear" his plight does not exist. The confirmation that Levy's "pure narrator" found possible within its fiction is denied to all Beckett's voices up to the "Unnamable," "unthinkable last of all" (Company, p.24). Any sense of confirmation always turns out to be an illusion.

Brother I. Pius Duggan's theory in his dissertation, "Relativity, Quantum Theory and the Novels of Samuel Beckett" is more pertinent to our conception of Beckett's inverse universe in that he argues that Beckett's cosmology accords with the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. The self, "like all else that exists, is a space-time tesseract, an ego-field of perpetual flux."<sup>19</sup> Brother Duggan continues:

While Relativity theory undermined much of the foundation of classical physics, it still retained a belief in determinate laws of nature. Quantum theory, which explores the elementary particle world of the pions and neutrinos, finds that, at this sub-nuclear level, deterministic laws dissolve into probability laws, or in other words, laws of chance.

Particle-wave distinctions disappear. Particles vibrate like energy waves, while energy shoots out in disparate particles of various sizes--quanta. Furthermore, the ultimate law governing the weird microphysical world is the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, that is, that the precise measurement of both the position and velocity of any elementary particle is impossible. (p.iv)

The relationship of this theory to our view of Beckett's work can be seen in the depiction of what Duggan terms the "mess," which "derives to a large extent from his [Beckett's] understanding the far-reaching implications of the writhing flux of the relativity world and the random, plasmic world of quantum theory". (p.iii).

Brother Duggan's theory is highly suggestive in the light of the indeterminate laws we have seen to govern the Beckettian universe. He does not, however, consider that this universe is an inverted one, an interiorization of the phenomenal universe perceived by the senses. Moreover, these two universes, the ordinary one and its abstract negative, are connected through the perceiving and remembering mind, which acts by analogy as a black hole or even a magic looking-glass. Contracted to inverse proportions, the perceptual universe implodes, and is transformed into a paranormal phenomenon: a formless point without dimension or magnitude.

Consciousness then "dis-closes" itself; it is a kind of gravitational field, a geotactic horizon, not unlike a "black hole."

Ultimately, we come to recognize that the Beckettian inverse universe is a shapeless abyss within the self; it is the nothingness within. Because of this essential nothingness, the "ontospeleological" quest inwards shows the phenomenal world to be false, to be an hallucination. Essentially, in Beckett's world, space is empty and time endless, not sequential; both lack the form which provides meaning as well as shape. Consequently, we are given a series of abstractions "[f]or its affirmations. For its negations. For its interrogations. For its exclamations. For its imperations" (Company, p.20). This is an unfathomable, unintelligible world of mystery and indeterminacy, a world based on an inversion of quantum mechanics rather than founded on Newtonian physics.



## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup>Gary Zukav, The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1979), p.185.

<sup>2</sup>Beckett's interest, as we have seen in the Introduction, lies in the realm of ignorance and impotence, that zone of being untouched by those artists, like Joyce, who dealt with omnipotence and omniscience.

<sup>3</sup>"Samuel Beckett Talks about Beckett," Vogue (London), vol. 127, No. 2031, February 1970, p.108.

<sup>4</sup>Since the publication of Company, Beckett has produced yet another prose piece: I'll Seen Ill Said. First published as Mal vu mal dit in Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1981. Translation by the author first published in London: John Calder, 1982. This work contributes to our understanding of the Beckettian world as an abstract, obscure realm:

Absence supreme good and yet.  
Illumination then go again and on return  
no more trace. On earth's face. Of what  
was never. And if by mishap some left then  
go again. For good again. So on. Till no  
more trace. On earth's face. Instead of  
the same place. Slaving away for ever in  
the same place. At this and that trace.  
And what if the eye could not? No more  
tear itself away from the remains of  
trace. Of what was never. Quick say it  
suddenly can and farewell say say farewell.  
If only to the face of her tenacious  
trace. (pp.58-59)

Here, words such as "Absence," "illumination," "mishap," "Slaving," "trace," "same," and "again" indicate that this world is one to which the self is inextricably bound ("Slaving"), and which is deconsecrated of form and presence ("Absence," "remains of trace," "what was never"). This world is elsewhere described as a void

("Incontinent the void," p.39), as "Otherwise empty," (p.38), "confusion," "farrago," "fiasco," (p.40), and finally, as a "Day without end won and lost. Unseen": "Death again of deathless day" (p.40).

<sup>5</sup> Also noted by James Knowlson and John Pilling, Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1979).

<sup>6</sup> I have borrowed this term from Paul Ricoeur, The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work, eds. Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978). Ricoeur uses the term to describe the hermeneutic process involved in the interpreter's deciphering both the manifest content and the meaning of a text, and its latent meaning. The fact that the interpreter seeks for a hidden meaning in dreams and in Freudian lapsus linguae demonstrates a distrust in surface or manifest reality, and in conscious understanding of the text. Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche are considered by Ricoeur as "~~demystifiers~~," those who interpret surface reality as false. Correct thinking involves, for these figures, an exercise in "suspicion" or doubt (p.214).

<sup>7</sup> The following statements provide explicit boundaries to the landscape of the respective works: "Blacked out fallen open four walls over backwards true refuge issueless" ("Lessness," p.47); "fixed elsewhere" ("Ping," passim); "the vault and the round wall eighteen inches high...a plain rotunda" ("Imagination Dead Imagine," p.35); "scattered ruins" ("Lessness," p.50); "in the cylinder," "a secret passage," "nature's sanctuaries," "a vast closed space, 15 metres circumference," "alcoves," "quincunxes roughly 10 metres in diameter" ("The Lost Ones," passim); "skull last place" ("For To End," p.11); "valley window" ("Still," p.19); "closed place" ("Closed Space," p.49); and "Back on the stool in the shroud" ("All Strange Away," p.1). Where all these various references to space converge is in Company:

...in the little summerhouse. A rustic hexadredron. Entirely of logs. Both larch and fir. Six feet across. Eight from floor to vertex. Area twenty-four square feet to furthest decimal. Two small multi-coloured lights vis-à-vis. Small stained diamond panes. (pp.38-39)

<sup>8</sup>"A Reading of Beckett's Imagination Dead Imagine," Twentieth Century Literature, 17 (1971), p.66.

<sup>9</sup>Eric P. Levy, Beckett and the Voice of Species (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1980). Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>10</sup>See, for example, H. Copeland, Art and the Artist in the Works of Samuel Beckett (The Hague: Mouton, 1975).

<sup>11</sup>See G.C. Bernard, Samuel Beckett: A New Approach (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1970).

<sup>12</sup>See Eugene Webb, Samuel Beckett: A Study of his Novels (London: Peter Owen, 1970).

<sup>13</sup>See Joachim Schultz, This Hell of Stories: A Hegelian Approach to the Novels of Samuel Beckett (The Hague: Mouton, 1973).

<sup>14</sup>See Martin Esslin, ed., Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1965).

<sup>15</sup>See Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961).

<sup>16</sup>See David Hesla, The Shape of Chaos: An Interpretation of the Art of Samuel Beckett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971).

<sup>17</sup>See Fernande Saint-Martin, Samuel Beckett et l'univers de la fiction (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1976).

<sup>18</sup>Geneviève Bonnefoi, "Textes Pour Rien?" Lettres Nouvelles, 36 (March, 1956), pp.424-430.

<sup>19</sup>"Relativity, Quantum Theory and the Novels of Samuel Beckett," dissertation, University of Loyola, 1971, p.ii. Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

## CONCLUSION

"To make of failure a howling success."<sup>1</sup>

This writing that you find so obscure is a quintessential extraction of language and painting and gesture, with all the inevitable clarity of the old articulation. Here is the savage economy of hieroglyphs.... There is an endless verbal germination, maturation, putrefaction, the cyclic dynamism of the intermediate. This reduction of various expressive media to their primitive economic directness, and the fusion of these primal essences into an assimilated medium for exteriorization of thought, is pure Vico. 2

The critical response to Beckett's art prompts a consideration of the sort of literary genre or category within which he works. Not surprisingly, because of the increasing complexity of the later literature of abstraction, there is much room for conjecture. When an author challenges all impulse to make order through form, he provokes new considerations of his own formal alternative. Beckett's narrative prose has not changed dramatically in technique and range over the years, and in the later "residual" fiction, as it is labelled, considerable intellectual demands are made on the critic. Many of the more general problems inherent in defining what is called the modern and "post-modern" literary

traditions are also raised by these various responses to Beckett's prose. For instance, David Lodge, in "Some Ping Understood,"<sup>3</sup> cites Ihab Hassan's<sup>4</sup> statement that Beckett's work can be categorically labelled as anti-literature. Hassan's article, "The Literature of Silence," argues that: "Literature, turning against itself, aspires to silence, leaving us with uneasy intimations of outrage and apocalypse." Furthermore, continues Hassan, "If there is an avant-garde in our time, it is probably bent on discovery through suicide."

Lodge himself asks whether or not such anti-literature (or such "paleomodernist" art as Frank Kermode alternately describes it) seeks "the extinction of literary culture by denying from within the epistemological function of the literary medium itself (i.e., language)?" Lodge's concern for the death of literary culture involves the role of literary criticism as well. He asks: "Is it [literature] immune to conventional criticism; and if so, does this demonstrate criticism's impotence, or its own?" (p.85).

In view, then, of Lodge's conception of traditional aesthetic criteria--integritas, consonantia and claritas (p.88)--how is one to define (and then interpret) a piece such as "All Strange Away" which, in many ways, encapsulates all of the narrative and existential

challenges to form of Beckett's late work? The text tells us:

Within apart from Fancy dead and  
 with faint sorrow faint memory of  
 a lying side by side and in sleep  
 demons not yet imagined all dark  
 unappeasable turmoil no sound and  
 so exhaled only for the moment with  
 faint sound, Fancy dead, to which  
 now add for old mind's sake sorrow  
 vented in simple sighing sound  
 black vowel a and further so that  
 henceforth here no other sounds  
 than these say gone now and never  
 were...nothing ever in that hand  
 lightly closed on nothing any length  
 till for no reason yet imagined  
 fingers tighten then relax no sound  
 ...that here henceforth no other  
 sounds than these and never were  
 that is than sop to mind faint  
 sighing sound for tremor of sorrow  
 at faint memory of a lying side by  
 side and Fancy murmured dead. (p.9)

This, the concluding sentence to "All Strange Away," illustrates well those stylistic features studied in earlier chapters: the new conventions of Beckett's rhetoric of abstraction and of his "upended" syntax. Moreover, in the earlier section of the piece, references to "[n]o visible source," "black bottomless eye," and the command "Imagine light," suggest that the Beckettian inverse universe exists only in the realm of consciousness. And the only form the text can offer the reader is that determined by the mind's wandering associations.

Clearly, this text does not employ the usual, traditionally significant structures that we expect from conventional fiction. The "yet imagined fingers" are not the fingers of a fictional character with a clear identity; they exist only in language, only in an "imagined" state. Even then, in this "imagined" state, their existence is arbitrary. This fragment of a self of character is there "for no reason" but the fact that it is part of a "faint memory" of the self. The only space designated is that of the imagination. There is no concrete landscape; nor is there history, in the sense of specific time (other than that of a "faint memory of a lying side by side"). The normal concept of time, as well as space, is subverted. There is no teleology. Beckett's prose breaks with tradition, challenging existing critical frameworks through its total non-conformity. Richard E. Palmer, in "Postmodernity and Hermeneutics,"<sup>5</sup> comments on the sorts of texts which create problems in terms of generic definition and relates this problem of genre to a schism between today's literature and the criticism that deals with it, a schism that is being healed by new forms of analysis:

In literature [today] there is the rejection of tradition, of coherence and rationality, of nameability. (Beckett: "In the silence, you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on,

I'll go on"--The Unnamable). In literary interpretation, one finds efforts to move beyond formalism and merely rhetorical criticism--speech act theory as the basis for a new criticism, new literary history, and more recently, "deconstructionist" theories of language and text. (pp.363-364)

The new critical approaches are needed to combat the incompatibility between new art and traditional formalist criticism. "The aestheticism inherent in formalist poetics" had become "increasingly inadequate to the kinds of literature that are appearing and to the kinds of experience with a text which the reader may be seeking" (p.364).

Beckett's "new" or different narrative art certainly demands a new mode of critical expression that would counteract the "scientific" and "rational" perspective of formalism. But this perspective is ultimately that of all modern consciousness which, as Palmer states, accords with Galileo's maxim: "To measure everything measurable and to make what is unmeasurable measurable." Modern man has certainly tried to make sense of his world and his experience by measuring and ordering, by imposing his own form on flux and chaos. But Beckett's abstract universe, one that is "needed no more, gone, never was" ("All Strange Away," p.1), and which derives from "[n]o visible source" (p.1), subverts



the assumption that man's ordering is anything but an illusion. Instead of conceding to the rational conception of the world, Beckett's fiction challenges meaning and formalized measurement (evoked and then challenged by the cylindrical and geometric worlds of "The Lost Ones" and "Imagination Dead Imagine"); he shows these ordered forms to be invalid. The impossibility and untenability of such an ordering perspective are emphatically demonstrated in How It Is when the voice reveals the inadequacy of the mathematical formulae which he uses to indicate the fatidical procession of beings:

rumour transmissible ad infinitum  
in either direction

...  
but question to what purpose

for when number 814336 describes  
number 814337 to number 814335 and  
number 814335 to number 814337 for  
example he is merely in fact  
describing himself to two lifelong  
acquaintances

so to what purpose

moreover the thing would appear  
to be impossible

for number 814336 as we have seen  
by the time he reaches 814337 has  
long since forgotten all he ever  
knew of number 814335 ....(pp.120-1)

Further undermining this mathematical conception of life, the voice concludes: "in reality we are one and all from

the unthinkable first to the no less unthinkable last glued together in a vast imbrication of flesh without breach or fissure" (p.140). Beckett, here, shows us the extent to which formal codes can fail to define reality. Codes, like the meaning they pretend to convey, must surrender to flux and chaos.

Reason itself, seen here as the logical path taken by the calculating mind in response to a premiss, is a form of mental activity that Beckett shows to be untenable. The formulation of meaning out of meaningless is, as Kermode argued, the result of man's desire to make "sense" of his nothingness. Moreover, his "sense-making" impulse results in the forging of a "mythical" and "fictional" (but logical) temporal and spatial units. In Beckett's fictional world of "some reason unimaginable now" ("All Strange Away," p.4), there is no traditional narrative time, or even sequential progression; there is only consciousness and "imagination dead" (p.4). Yet this denial of a world constructed according to meaningful form does not reduce Beckett to the status of apostate or iconoclast. He does offer alternate ways to deal with this "vast imbrication of flesh." But these do not always conform to the predominantly formalist assumptions of most critics, and the result is the necessary relegation of Beckett to the category of the anti-literary.

But I would argue that, far from "painting himself into a corner," Beckett, in fact, has played a major role in the modern re-consideration of the entire issue of genre precisely because he has put all form-imposing into question.

Critics today still want to claim that the "new novel" has exhausted literature. We have seen earlier that Robbe-Grillet,<sup>6</sup> in that early defence of the French nouveau roman, pointed out that: "a new form will always seem more or less an absence of any form at all, since it is unconsciously judged by reference to the consecrated forms" (p.17). For this novelist and critic: "Art cannot exist without this permanent condition of being put in question. But the movement of these evolutions and revolutions constitutes its perpetual renaissance" (p.159). Clearly, the sort of alternative to traditional form employed by Beckett does create certain methodological problems.<sup>7</sup> Inasmuch as he is dealing in his fiction with a visual medium, the written word, he cannot literally convert that medium into something else; he cannot despatialize something which itself has status in the objective, phenomenal world. What he can do, however, and does, is to play with all the possibilities of form--on the level of narrative, language, and ultimately of the self and his perceptions

of his universe and his very existence. By putting all the structures of art and life into question, Beckett makes form question its own validity. In an interview with Shenker in 1956, Beckett admitted that what becomes more important than traditional form is some concept that "admits the chaos and does not try to say that chaos is really something else."<sup>8</sup> Form, in fiction, "exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates." Beckett's compulsion is toward apprehending "the consternation behind the form," and it is that realm which he evokes by allowing his fiction to attest to its invalidity as a formal icon.

In Beckett's fiction, the false sense of understanding established by man in order to allow himself to relate to the universe is broken. The formal structures by which he makes sense of his world are destroyed. Beckett's fiction challenges the formal relation of the analogy between self and world and, in a sense, through such a dissociation, dis-locates man, and removes him from any ordered, harmonious world. Likewise, the reader is dis-located, jarred out of his normal assumptions about language and narrative by Beckett's rhetoric of abstraction and his "Strange Loop" recursive patterning.

Ambiguity reigns on the semantic level, thanks to Beckett's challenge to normal syntactic form.

Meaning in the texts proliferates as the reader's sense-making faculties are promptly and inevitably brought into play. In a line such as "What land all lands midnight sun midday night all latitudes all longitudes" (How It Is, p.85), the reader, confronted with both open syntax and certain specified antitheses (e.g. midday/midnight), is indeed, as Stanley Fish<sup>9</sup> claims, forced to make "assumptions," "projections," and "conclusions." He does this because the text's internal polarities force him to create patterns of significance; yet the syntax undermines any such order time and time again. For instance, "midday" undercuts "midnight," its antithesis. But readers may differ as to what meaning they create. One reader may assume this to be evocative of the self in a state of limbo. Yet another may take the references to night/day and latitude/longitude to represent a conception of all time and space, of ubiquity ("all").

Clearly, such different, but equally "partial closures" made by readers are fostered in Beckett's fiction by his refusal to provide verbs or prepositions to fix and specify the relation of words to each other. As more potential meanings surface, the texts become all the more arbitrary and indeterminate. The reader's act of making meaning then becomes the analogue of the illusory imposing of fixed and fixing meaning in Beckett's world. Our tendency as readers to make "partial closures"

and to create coherent, meaningful structures in the text can obviously be exploited by an author like Beckett who deliberately writes texts that force us to make "premature closures." Moreover, because of the openness of Beckett's syntax, his texts deliberately tease us with "closures" that never happen, or deliberately prepare us for one kind of response which never can be experienced.

These "premature closures" are usually the result of the reader's learned faith that meaning can be found, that it is there to be found. For instance, "All Strange Away" opens with a reference to a "place." The common response is to assume that we are about to be introduced to a physical location. Yet the references to the phenomenal world ("shroud," "bodies") are undercut by lines such as "all gone now and never been never still never voiced" (p.9). The spatial dimensions of this "hemicycle" blur, and the reader's "premature closure," our expectation that we are to be introduced to a normal narrative place, is subverted.

Beckett's fiction tries to make us aware of the meaningless world existing behind imposed form. His "insignificant" universe is calculated to remind us of its lack of meaning through the very subversion of any possible significance including that imposed by the

reader's own "closures." Yet the very process involved in our making "anticipatory adjustments" and "partial closures" is, in fact, a mediation between the texts' potentialities of meaning and those of meaninglessness. The result of this "game-playing" with the reader's need or desire to construct meaning is our actual experiencing of Beckett's world as one that is indeterminate, chaotic, and devoid of a primum mobile. It is, therefore, mysterious, secret, and inexplicable. As Beckett said in "The Lost Ones," "inside the cylinder alone are certitudes to be found, and without nothing but mystery" (p.70). Only when we are given the certitude of form can we claim certain knowledge of a thing. Yet it is this very feature of living that is denied us in Beckett's world. We only have the mystery, the unfathomable world Frank Kermode considers as the "secret" text.

Kermode's The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative<sup>10</sup> deals primarily with what the author calls the "carnal order" of the biblical text, and the implied spiritual order beyond that text. But Kermode's explanatory chapter, "Why Are Narratives Obscure?", offers some insights into Beckett's literary method too. In his analysis of the "inexhaustable hermeneutic potential of the text," Kermode describes the

way in which sense can never be fully closed: "The apparently perspicuous narrative yields up latent senses to interpretation; we are never inside it, and from outside may never experience anything more than some radiant intimation of the source of all these senses" (p.45). He continues: "Even now, when so many theories of interpretation dispense in one way or another with the author, or allow him only a part analogous to that of the dummy hand at bridge, the position is not much altered; the narrative inhabits its proper dark, in which the interpreter traces its lineaments as best he can" (p.45). In Beckett's case, though, the obscurity of his texts themselves intentionally directs the reader to a latent, unknowable realm, one behind even the "carnal," "dark" narrative that confounds us.

For Beckett, actually to speak of this other realm, and to qualify it, can only mean failure, because to speak in any way of this "other" universe (which is always beyond our comprehension) is to risk co-opting it to our pre-established structures of thought. Hence Beckett can only emphasize the "unknowable" by professing to say little or nothing of this realm "where the language dies that permits of such expressions" (The Unnamable, p.335). In Beckett's fiction, this rhetorical strategy reveals that all is a lie--all is a fiction:



Let them be gone now, them and all  
 the others, those I have used and  
 those I have not used, give me back  
 the pains I lent them and vanish,  
 from my life, my memory, terrors, . .  
 and shames. There, now there is no  
 one here but me, no one wheels about  
 me, no one comes towards me, no one  
 has ever met anyone before my eyes,  
 these creatures have never been, only  
 I and this black void have ever been  
 ....And Basil and his gang?  
 Inexistent, invented to explain I  
 forget what. Ah yes, all lies, God  
 and Man, nature and the light of  
 day, the heart's outpourings and  
 the means of understanding, all  
 invented, basely, by me alone, with  
 the help of no one since there is no  
 one, to put off the hour when I must  
 speak of me. (The Unnamable, p.304) - - -

This fiction which attests to its own fraudulence is characterized, as we have seen, by an arbitrary or at least unconventional structure, a structure which parodies its own form. Beckett's rhetoric--the "tattered syntaxes" ("All Strange Away," p.1)--works to make us aware that, as Hutcheon<sup>11</sup> says in another context, this fiction is both "self-conscious, and self-critical": "It is a process as well as a product; both transitive and intransitive, it is itself the paradox facing the reader. It attempts representation while discarding the myth of representation" (p.141). Finally, this fiction "tries to transcend its own textual limitations while never forgetting that this is impossible."

Unfortunately, these self-conscious works are still considered by many critics to be anti-literature

in a negative sense, primarily because of the fact that, as Robbe-Grillet pointed out, "a new form always seems the absence of any form since." In fact, if we have to impose a label on Beckett's prose, that of Absurdist<sup>12</sup> almost seems to accommodate best this abstract fiction. Yet, we have a surfeit of other, already prescribed labels from which to choose: nouveau roman, anti-novel, surfiction, metafiction, post-modernist fiction, and finally, the "problematic" novel. Of these, "surfiction" would also seem to accommodate the sort of stylistic strategies that Beckett's fiction contains. According to Raymond Federman, "surfiction" challenges the very tradition that governs it. It "reveals man's irrationality rather than man's rationality," and favours the imagination over reason. It does not imitate reality but "exposes the fictionality of reality" (p.7). As Federman states, the reader is an important and integral part of such fiction that is "deliberately illogical, irrational, unrealistic, non sequitur and incoherent" (p.13); the reader works to earn a sense of actively creating a meaning and "not having simply received, passively, a neatly prearranged meaning" (p.14). Although Federman firmly fixes Beckett within this genre, Beckett's fiction deals, even more, with the ultimate surrender of "meaning" to non-meaning, even for the reader. Whatever the imagination--of self or of reader--forms is

sundered: "imagination dead imagine." It is this process of disintegration and "dis-closure" that Beckett both illustrates and provokes.

Any attempt to establish a firm form and genre in which to place Beckett's work must come to terms with Beckett's own statement that he is more interested in what lies beneath all form. He is interested, as we have seen, in what has been "set aside by artists as something unquestionable --as something by definition incompatible with art":

What I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else. The form and the chaos remain separate. The latter is not reduced to the former. That is why the form itself becomes a pre-occupation, because it exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates. To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now. 13

Beckett's resistance to form is obviously bound to conflict with the formalist impulse of much contemporary criticism. What becomes clear is that this fiction demands something different, that is, a theoretical perspective that allows for a consideration of the interaction of text and reader. In returning to these hermeneutic basics, we

can perhaps evade the need to label the fiction, and deal, instead, with the fiction itself. According to Marike Finlay:<sup>14</sup>

Il semble que Beckett y joue et déjoue la thématique et la structure de sa prose qui s'y retrouvent en miniature. Étant aussi une sorte d'exercice philosophique, les [("Foirades")], dans un style volontairement paradoxal et moqueur, peuvent être prises dans le sens d'un catalyseur critique qui par association et par superposition des structures, permet d'aller du plus petit au plus grand, du plus grand au plus petit. Entrons dans ce cercle herméneutique.

The important words here--play ("joue/déjoue") and paradoxical ("paradoxal")--are crucial to any critical consideration of Beckettian form.

The importance of paradox and game to Beckett's fiction has not been ignored, of course, especially in the French critical context. As we saw earlier, Fitch<sup>15</sup> regards the trilogy in terms of "le texte comme jeu" and "le je/jeu de mots": "Il en résulte une sorte de permutation des formes calquées sur la même racine," which, says Fitch, plays on the semantic potentials of the text in a perpetual transformation of meaning (p.136). Similarly, Paul St.-Pierre,<sup>16</sup> in his analysis of How It Is, says: "le texte moderne reste un jeu--jeu de mots--et Comment C'est s'inscrit pleinement dans cette modernité"

(p.90). Moreover, "[l]a modernité s'oppose à ce monde (dé)fini et s'installe dans l'infini du jeu" (p.90). St.-Pierre also notes that Beckett's texts deny "un signifié unique" in favour of a "pluralisation des signifiés" (p.91)--the French title, Comment c'est, becomes "comme on sait/commençait." The result of such pluralisation of meaning, though, is paradoxically semantic evacuation: "ces textes se mettent perpétuellement en abyme....Ces textes correspondraient à une nouvelle définition du signe--le signe comme renvoi...la désintégration du signe" (pp.89-90). This game or play is created through quotation and repetition: "l'opposition entre la parole et l'écriture, le statut de Je" (p.92).

Ultimately, Beckett's language is ambiguous. He offers us only a rhetoric of abstraction, and the interpreter must make his way through this Babel. Beckett has severed the connections normally expected and found within the structures or forms of grammar. As Beckettian criticism over the years has demonstrated, the potential for interpreting his texts is immense. Ironically, this is probably because Beckett's work and language have become even more lean and spare. Essentially, his fictional world is one which is freed from the narrative and existential contingencies of

implied space, time, and character, in short, freed from all identity save the linguistic. This voiding has been accomplished, in part, by the "endolinguistic" quality of his language, as we saw earlier. This is not to say that Beckett's language does not "signify," but rather that words also function in different, alternate ways, that their "endolinguistic" qualities (such as repetition) also suggest another level of intelligibility, that of music (as in the medieval chants). In becoming part of a musical structure, language asserts a function other than a purely signifying one. Meaning yields, temporarily, to tone and rhythm. Reading aloud, then, the reader moves beyond the printed page to experience, actually, the immediacy normally granted only with oral speech. This overcoming of the distance between the printed text and the reader is clearly related to the dynamics of script and theatre more than to fiction. Beckett's post-trilogy prose uses techniques that resemble dramatic strategies and forms, as will reveal a comparison of two passages. The first from a play, and the other from a fictional narrative. In the play we find:

Beside each other on ground, two  
yards from right wing, two sacks,  
A's and B's, A's being to the  
right (as seen from auditorium)  
or B's, i.e., nearer right wing.  
(Act without Words, p.137)

In the fiction, a similarity can be seen:

Two diameters at right angles AB  
CD divide the white ground into  
two semicircles ACB BDA. Lying  
on the ground two white bodies,  
each in its semicircle. ("Imagination  
Dead Imagine," p.35)

The "stage directions" of the play bear a striking resemblance to the details of description in the prose piece. Even more remarkable are the similarities of tone--impersonal, dictating, descriptive. The tone of both passages bears the clinical, directorial mark of a stage direction, and, in fact, both pieces contain elements of staging, what Peter Brook calls "the shorthands of behaviour that stand for certain emotions, gestures, gesticulations and tones of voice."<sup>17</sup>

Beckett's narratives, then, can be seen to resemble the form of his plays in their lack of plot and character development, and in their emphasis of the recording of incidents. Like the voice in "Enough" referring to the geodosy, these texts all emphasize language as an event, thereby turning fixed written form into something closer to a performance of rhythmic sound and movement. These frequent references, in all of Beckett's work, to the fluctuation between dark and light can now also be seen to operate as important stage directions:

Light out, long dark, candle and matches, imagine them, strike one to light, light on, blow out, light out, strike another, light on, so on. Light out, strike one to light, light on, light all the same, candle light in light, blow out, light out, so on. ("All Strange Away," p.1)

The script-like influence on this prose is apparent, yet, ironically, the final freedom of language here lies in its being printed in a text to be read, and not literally performed and embodied on a stage. As Stanley Fish tells us, in reading:

You will, for example, be on the look-out for latent ambiguities; you will attend to the presence of alliterative and consonantal patterns (there will always be some), and you will try to make something of them (you will always succeed); you will search for meanings that subvert, or exist in a tension with the meanings that first present themselves .... Interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of construction. Interpreters do not decode poems; they make them. (p.327)

According to Fish, patterns of expectation and counter-expectations, reversals of direction, traps, invitations to premature conclusions, textual gaps, delayed revelations, and temptations (pp.344-5) (all of which are strategies designed either to educate or to confound the reader) result in an active interrogation of the text. The "why?" evoked in the reader is, as Fish says, a



question following necessarily from the assumption that "the text is not a spatial object but the occasion for a temporal experience" (p.345), that is, "the structure of the reading experience." All of this, in fact, is taught to us by Beckett's fiction.

But the implications for narrative of such an appellation of the reader and such an abstraction of the world of fiction are troublesome to many critics. In John Wain's disparaging words:

Thus, if I am right, the present depressed and dispirited state of the novel has been foreseeable for some time. In an age when all the arts have been busily engaged in stripping themselves down to a new leanness, shedding extraneous matter and concentrating on those powers and purposes which were their own and not taken over from one another, when painting gave up the implied narrative as rapidly as music gave up the pictorial, when poetry drew away from prose and declared once and for all that its laws were not those of discourse, the novel was forced to stay where it was because its essential development was over. There is no such thing as "pure" novel form as there is "pure" poetic or dramatic or musical form. When novelists began cultivating their own individual plots in depth, the differences between them became more and more apparent, till finally the ground under their feet broke up like an ice-floe in spring. What novelists are now facing--or trying not to face, according to their temperaments--is the knowledge that

"the novel", as a category within  
which one could feel a certain  
gregarious warmth, has gone. 18

If the novel is an eternally fixed literary "category,"  
then its language and narrative are necessarily denied  
the freedom of playing with the potentialities of form.  
Such rigid genre demarcations also imply a limiting of  
the subject matter of fiction, one that Beckett's work  
challenges in its exploring of the indeterminate region  
behind form, the realm that simultaneously stimulates and  
dissolves traditional fictional constructs, and which,  
ultimately, for Beckett, is an endless "dis-closing"  
process.

## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup>Beckett cited in Raymond Federman, "Surfiction: Four Propositions in Form of an Introduction," in Surfiction: Fiction Now and Tomorrow, edited by Raymond Federman (Chicago: The Swallow Press, Inc., 1975), p.15. Reference not given. Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>2</sup>Samuel Beckett, "Dante ... Bruno. Vico ... Joyce" in Our Exagmination Round His Factification For Imcamination of Work in Progress (London: Faber and Faber, 1921), pp.15-16.

<sup>3</sup>David Lodge, "Some Ping Understood" Encounter 30, 2 (Spring, 1967), pp. 85-89. Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>4</sup>Ihab Hassan, "The Literature of Silence: From Henry Miller to Beckett and Burroughs," Encounter, 28, 1 (1967), pp.74-82.

<sup>5</sup>Boundary 2, 5 (Winter, 1977), pp.363-393. Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>6</sup>Pour un Nouveau Roman (Paris: Gallimard, 1963); translated as For a New Novel: Essays in Fiction (New York: Grove Press, 1965). Henceforward, all page references to the English translation will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>7</sup>See Malcolm Bradbury "Putting in the Person: Character and Abstraction in Current Writing and Painting" in The Contemporary English Novel (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980). Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text. Bradbury writes:

Given the referential nature of language and the history of literature, it is difficult to conceive of a totally abstract literary text, though of course we can and do have a purely abstract painting. But we can have an art that aspires toward abstraction as a mode of doubt about the depiction of reality, and in many of our poems, plays and novels

these uneasy dealings with mimesis are usual. The linear evolution of story, the detailed representation of milieu, the grammatical sureness of narrators, the fixed representation of personages: all these have been thrown into great doubt. In writing, in painting, the object, the scene, the figure have grown clouded. We are asked to look beyond them, to some larger notion of concept or compositional process, itself not fixed but provisional. (pp.184-5)

<sup>8</sup>Israel Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters: A Portrait of Samuel Beckett, Author of the Puzzling Waiting for Godot," New York Times, 6 May 1956, Section 2, p.1.

<sup>9</sup>Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in this Class: The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), p.2.

<sup>10</sup>(Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979). Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>11</sup>Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1980). Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>12</sup>Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1961). Esslin places Beckett among those belonging to the Theatre of the Absurd, and comments that Absurdist dramatists are

searching for a way in which they can, with dignity, confront a universe deprived of what was once its centre [God] and its living purpose, a world deprived of a generally accepted integrating principle, which has become disjointed, purposeless --absurd.

The Theatre of the Absurd is one of the expressions of this search. It bravely faces up to the fact that for those to whom the world has lost its central

explanation and meaning, it is no longer possible to accept art forms still based on the continuation of standards and concepts that have lost their validity; that is, the possibility of knowing the laws of conduct and ultimate values, as deducible from a firm foundation of revealed certainty about the purpose of man in the universe. (pp.350-351)

<sup>13</sup> Beckett, in an interview with Tom F. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine," Columbia University Forum, 4 (Summer, 1961), p.23.

<sup>14</sup> "'Foirades' de Beckett: métonymie à la lettre, métaphore à l'oeuvre, embrayage du discours dualiste," in Ecrivains de la modernité, ed. Brian T. Fitch (Paris: Minard, 1981), pp.65-66.

<sup>15</sup> Brian Fitch, Dimensions, structures et textualité dans la trilogie romanesque de Beckett (Paris: Minard, 1977). Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>16</sup> "Comment C'est de Beckett: production et déception du sens," in Ecrivains de la modernité, ed. Brian T. Fitch (Paris: Minard, 1981). Henceforward, all further page references will be in parentheses in the text.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Brook, The Empty Space (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, Inc., 1972), p.19.

<sup>18</sup> "The Conflict of Forms in Contemporary English Literature," in The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism, edited by Richard Murphy Davis (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 306.

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