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SAMUEL BECKETT

THE TRILOGY
OF
SAMUEL BECKETT

By

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Where reference is made to the three novels of Samuel Beckett's trilogy, the text being used is Three Novels by Samuel Beckett: Molloy; Malone Dies; The Unnamable . (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

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INTRODUCTION

Oh I am ashamed
Of all clumsy artistry
I am ashamed of presuming
To arrange words
Of everything but the ingenuous fibres
That suffer honestly.

"Casket of Pralinen For a Daughter,
of a Dissipated Mandarin." 1931¹

This excerpt from a poem by Beckett was written two years after his first published work "Assumption".² To those who know him, Beckett is a shy and unassuming man, but, as this excerpt implies, his pre-emptive concern, even at this early period of his artistic career, is to attempt to communicate truthfully his creative vision.

Beckett's aim in his work is to define the paradoxes which man experiences as a member of the human race. Murphy, Watt, Molloy, Malone and the Unnamable all try to explain away the inexplicable, define the chaos of the human condition, and give some semblance of order to man's intellectual dilemmas:

The confusion is not my invention... It is all around us and our only chance now is to let it in. The only chance of renovation is to open our eyes and see the mess. It is not a mess you can make sense of.³

The paradox which colours Beckett's work is that he is trying to make sense of something which, by definition, cannot be rationalised. As a result, we are forced to acknowledge the truth in Beckett's statement concerning the

endeavours of the artist; for him "to be an artist is to fail, as no others dare fail, that failure is his world and to shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living." ⁴

Murphy, Beckett's first complete novel, was published in English in 1938. Up to this point he had published only poems, essays, short stories and reviews. Thus Murphy marks the beginning of his career as a novelist. It was written while he was a self-imposed exile in London, during the years from 1933 to 1935. While there he visited a doctor friend who worked at a mental institution, located on the border of Kent and Surrey. Beckett's reaction to this experience was the seed of Murphy. Of all his novels, this work is the most conventional in terms of the traditional idea of the novel's form. The characters move in the easily recognisable worlds of London, Dublin and Cork. They all have immediately identifiable human likes and dislikes, and, though the plot is loose, the story moves fluidly from beginning to end.

Watt, Beckett's second novel, was written between 1942 and 1944, but was not published until 1953. In this novel, the protagonist, Watt, has acquired the idiosyncracies which will be assumed by all Beckett's future heroes. He is obsessed by mathematical permutations and combinations, talks very little, and behaves in an abnormal way by conventional social standards. The extreme difficulty Watt has of communicating verbally with his fellow-man is one of the

more puzzling traits of the Beckettian heroes, in general. The greater implications of this inability will not be explored, in depth, until one reaches the final novel of the trilogy.

Watt is even more concerned than Murphy with the Cartesian ideas concerning the dualism of mind and body. In the totally irrational world of Mr Knott, Watt tries ceaselessly to impose "what Descartes implied and Hegel stated: 'the real is rational and the rational real'".⁵ In keeping with Beckett's primary artistic premise, Watt fails to make sense of the Knott-world. Since his failure is a result of trying to impress order on chaos, it is ironic that he spends his final years in a lunatic asylum. There, he represents chaos in an ordered world of routine and habit.

At this stage in his career, Beckett began to write in French. Between 1946 and 1950 he wrote four stories, six poems, two plays, thirteen texts and some art criticism: "I took up writing again, in French", Beckett said, "with the desire of impoverishing myself still further. That was the purpose."⁶ His trilogy, Molloy, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable, is numbered among these. All of the trilogy but The Unnamable, which was published in 1953, were published in 1951. The English translations are Beckett's own, except for Molloy, on which Patrick Bowles collaborated.

Raymond Federman has stated that Beckett's fiction

"follows a culminating process that draws towards a single image, a single expression, repeated stubbornly to an irrational infinity."⁷ Perhaps the process might be said to have been initiated by Belacqua, the hero of a collection of short stories published in 1934, entitled More Pricks Than Kicks. Belacqua Shuah is a man who finds living up to his responsibilities an extremely boring and uninteresting affair. His main concern and source of wonder is himself and he views the rest of the world with an indifferent, and, at times, an indulgent, eye.

The original Belacqua is the character who appears in the fourth canto of Dante's Purgatorio. His fate is to remain in ante-purgatory since he has committed the sin of having delayed his repentance. He must stay there for a period equal to the duration of his earthly lifetime. His outstanding feature is his slothfulness as he curls, foetus-like, in the lee of a rock. When Dante reproaches him for his idleness, Belacqua is supposed to have replied: "It is by sitting and resting that the soul grows wise."⁸

All Beckett's fictional heroes have a penchant for idleness. In his desire to live in his mind rather than the world, Murphy frequently has recourse to rocking in his rocking-chair for hours on end. Malone writes his tale from his bed. Molloy interrupts his journey to his mother and avails himself of Lousse's offer to reside with her indefinitely. For approximately one year he seems quite content

to spend his days there, doing nothing more strenuous than eating, sleeping, and taking the occasional constitutional walk in her garden. Murphy more clearly defines the symbolic overtones of Beckett's use of Belacqua. For him "Belacqua bliss" (III) is found in what he calls the second zone of the mind:

Here the pleasure was contemplation. This system had no other mode in which to be out of joint and therefore did not need to be put right in this. Here was the Belacqua bliss and others scarcely less precise.

(Murphy, p.III)

For Watt, the purpose of contemplation is to rationalize his world. In the later novels Beckett alters the mental perspective of his people so that their contemplation serves only to provoke a recognition of the anguish of man's fate.

In the characters' persistent attempts to analyse and interpret the human condition, one thing becomes clear to the reader. The Beckettian heroes are unwilling to have faith in any code of ethics or normative system of morals other than those which they can establish for themselves. Like Descartes, however, their first step in rationalising anything is to doubt its validity. Cartesian philosophy echoes throughout Beckett's novels. Descartes and the

Beckettian heroes alike seem to believe with Francis Bacon that "the entire work of the understanding must be begun afresh, and the mind itself be, from the start, not left to

take its own course, but be guided step by step." From Watt onwards all Beckett's tramps refuse to accept established concepts. Yet, paradoxically, their constant irresolution prevents them from admitting the existence of any kind of absolute. The only valid means they accept of gaining knowledge either of themselves or of their world is through empiricism, and in this they differ from Descartes, whose rationalism was founded upon an intrinsically mathematical methodology.

A further attribute which the heroes share is their inability to coordinate mind and body so that they may function as part of one integrated system. Descartes' influence may again be perceived. He denied the possibility of interaction between body and self, not only because of their utter diversity of nature but also because, if by their wills people initiated movement in their bodies, they would create and communicate an ever-increasing quantity of motion additional to the amount originally imparted and declared constant. This belief led him to the conclusion that the two states, mental and physical, remain ever distinct, no change in either causing a change in the other. This dichotomy between mind and body, which so puzzled Descartes and forced him to conclude that the self's union with the body is discoverable but not understandable, is one which haunts Murphy, and justly explains Samuel Mintz' definition of the novel as Cartesian.⁹


The Occasionalists, taking Descartes' thought a step further, argued that God is the sole efficient cause, and created things are merely "occasional causes." Arnold Geulincx,¹⁰ to whom Beckett refers in Molloy (p.51), upholds particularly the argument "Quod nescis quomodo fiat, non facis" ('You cannot be said to do anything, unless you know how it comes to be done'). He criticises the alleged consciousness of effort, saying that one's body, the "occasion" for one to perceive other bodies, is an instrument mediating between the sole efficient Cause and one's thought. Like his contemporary Malebranche, Geulincx insisted that only private thoughts belong to the individual, whereas the body functions as part of the material world, and any connection that may exist between mind and body is achieved through the power of God. Though none of Beckett's heroes confesses to any firm or formal belief in a Christian God, merely blaspheming occasionally, they are indifferent, to the point of absurdity, to their bodies. As they retreat further into the realms of their own minds, they observe and allow their bodies to deteriorate simultaneously.

In 1921, the logical Positivist Ludwig Wittgenstein published his Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. Though Beckett's knowledge of Wittgenstein was confined to the years from 1959 onwards, Wittgenstein's philosophy is extremely helpful in condensing some of the theories concerning language which are explicated in the trilogy. Wittgenstein introduced a

new theory which attempted to show that reality as a whole cannot be described, and that the limits of the possible (or of 'what can be said') are shown in the language as a whole. But what is shown in the language as a whole cannot itself be said in language.

This particular linguistic philosophy is one which Beckett finds extremely compatible with his own. For he believes that the artist must be prepared to accept the fact that "there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express."¹¹

This problem of communication and language in general is one of the primary concerns of the trilogy. However, it does not become a clearly defined issue until one reaches the final novel, The Unnamable. There, the final protagonist, on behalf of all the previous heroes, sums up the case by telling us that "It all boils down to a question of words..." (p.335). "They're all I have and not many of them, the words fail, the voice fails, so be it..." (p.413)

The Unnamable is, in fact, the key novel of the  trilogy. In this work it is made clear that the final protagonist is the ostensible creator of all the previous characters: "...All these stories about travellers, these stories about paralytics, all are mine" (p.412). In other words, Murphy, Watt, Moran, Malone, Mahood and Worm are all variations of one particular 'self'. Each experiences his own reality, or Beckett, through the Unnamable, narrates it

in his capacity as real author. Nevertheless, they are all one, and the similarities in their lives are particularly marked.

All Beckettians are doomed to search for something, mentally, physically or both. In Molloy's case it is ostensibly his mother; with Moran, Molloy is his objective. All are driven on by an inner compulsive urge, which they personify as 'they' or 'voices'. All the characters are alienated from normal society by choice, and indeed seem totally indifferent to it. Watt, for example, ignores Lady McCann's action of throwing a stone at him, merely proceeding on his journey towards Mr Knott's house. The Beckettian tramps live a life of solitude and estrangement, only grudgingly allowing human interaction when it appears inescapable --- as when Molloy is almost forcibly persuaded by Lousse to stay with her.

Of all the heroes, Belacqua Shuah and Murphy are the only ones to die. The later characters never gain the bliss of non-being they all seek. Rather, they must create their fictions, driven by the intangible imperative of their 'voices'. Until they do this satisfactorily, we are told by implication, they will never attain any alternate state to the one in which they find themselves.

In reality, the search upon which all the heroes embark is the search for the self. To define that quality which makes any one human being unique and distinct from another is the goal towards which the Beckettian hero travels.

Further, their task is above all then to express that 'self' in language. However, since that quintessential part of the self exists in a timeless and spaceless continuum, the methods by which they try to effect this are invalid. As Dieter Wellershoff says,

...to talk means to stand outside oneself: he who does not possess himself and remains concealed from himself is compelled to talk. Only he who has attained to his own identity can be silent. 12

This is one of the inescapable paradoxes with which Beckett's characters must live.

Beckett's tramps live in their half-worlds; existing neither as fully integrated members of society, nor as fulfilled, bodily consciousnesses. They crowd their solipsistic world with physical objects such as their hats, notebooks, bicycles and boots, assigning to them the importance that would normally be given to humanity. They express a profound disgust and horror of such normal bodily functions as sex. Moran, in Molloy, even goes so far as to instruct his son Jacques "towards that most fruitful of dispositions, horror of the body and its functions." (p.118). One is reminded of Beckett's countryman, Jonathan Swift, who treated the same subject with a similar degree of scorn.

A Beckettian hero asks nothing of any human save to be left alone; his only desire is to do what must be done, say what must be said, and then be granted his reward --- the freedom to be silent. Because of the paradoxes which beset him at every turn, we interpret his efforts both

comically and tragically. Though he illustrates the ultimate absurdity of life, his determination to continue on his quest, his fierce hope in an ultimate guerdon lends pathos to his situation. The final words of the Unnamable condense the attitude of both Beckett and his characters towards the human condition: "...In the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on." (p.414).

Notes to Introduction

- 1 Samuel Beckett, in The European Caravan: An Anthology of the New Spirit in European Literature, ed. Samuel Putnam, Maida Castelhun Darnton, George Reavey, and J. Bronowski (New York: Brewer, Warren, and Putnam, 1931), p. 477.
- 2 Samuel Beckett, Transition, nos. 16-17 (June, 1929), pp. 268-271.
- 3 Samuel Beckett, quoted in Tom. F. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", Columbia University Forum, IV, (Summer 1961), pp. 22-23.
- 4 Samuel Beckett, Georges Duthuit, Jacques Putnam, Bram Van Velde (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 13.
- 5 Ruby Cohn, Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p. 69.
- 6 Samuel Beckett, quoted in Ruby Cohn, Back to Beckett (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 59.
- 7 Raymond Federman, Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), p. 24.
- 8 John Fletcher, The Novels of Samuel Beckett (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), p. 16.
- 9 Samuel Mintz, "Beckett's Murphy: A 'Cartesian' Novel", Perspective, XI (Autumn 1959), pp. 156-165.
- 10 See "Occasionalism", Ency. Brit. (1971), XVI, pp. 835-836.
- 11 Bram Van Velde, p. 9.
- 12 Dieter Wellershoff, "Failure of an Attempt at De-Mythologisation: Samuel Beckett's Novels," in Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed., Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965), p. 92.

CHAPTER ONE

The most creative period of Beckett's literary career are the years between 1947 and 1950. Not the least among the fruits of his labours accomplished in a Paris apartment were En Attendant Godot and the trilogy, Molloy, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable. Perhaps of all Beckett's work, the trilogy could be said to condense his creative vision. In terms of the texts themselves, one becomes aware of a refining process which begins in the character of Molloy and which is completed finally in that of the Unnamable. The heroes of the three novels live in their worlds and are seen to come gradually to an understanding of those elements of human existence which must be disposed of in order to know the self. Molloy will reject learning, for example, and Moran rejects order and habit. All the codes and rules which man institutes for himself in order to function successfully in a social environment are dispensed with, until in The Unnamable the sole remaining constant is the self, free of all external influences.

As in Play (1963), a one-act play which repeats itself in toto during the course of the performance, there is a definite sense of circularity in the three novels which comprise the trilogy. In the natural processes of birth,

life and death, the latter is assumed to end that process. However, in the world of the trilogy, we can make no such assumption. Death, as we know it, does not exist for Beckett's heroes, despite the fact that they long for that state. The Unnamable points this out and confirms the quality of circularity, when in a discussion with himself about death he says: "For it has happened to me many times already without their having granted me as much as a brief sick-leave among the worms before resurrecting me "(p.342). It appears that the ultimate end which mankind has always either feared or anticipated is no longer a valid and concrete concept. The characters in the trilogy must go on living, regardless.

In order to have a complete understanding of the general thematic concerns of the trilogy it is necessary to view the three separate novels as making up one complete whole. There are a number of external and textual reasons for doing so. Beckett himself would not allow the novels to be published separately, and was prepared to wait until one publisher was willing to take responsibility for all three. Looking back on his efforts, Beckett has said that he wrote the three volumes with difficulty: "But with *Élan*, in a sort of enthusiasm... Malone came from Molloy, the Unnamable came from Malone."¹ Aside from the external evidence to support the view of the trilogy as one integrated work, there is much within the text which relates and links the three novels. All the characters take responsibility for the creation of at least one other previous character. Malone goes so far as

to say that when he 'dies', " Then it will be all over with the Murphys, Merciers, Molloys, Morans and Malone, unless it goes beyond the grave" (p.236). When the Unnamable attempts to discover whether he is clothed or not, he remarks, "Am I clothed? I have often asked myself this question, then suddenly started talking about Malone's hat, or Molloy's greatcoat, or Murphy's suit." (p.305).

The reader is constantly given cross references and similar situations which beg to be related. The same kinds of characters are urged by the same internal compulsion to continue seeking. All are writers; Molloy and Moran write their reports for a mysterious and never clearly defined person; Malone writes the story of his present state, that of a moribund. He fills up his time until he dies by inventing characters and writing their stories. In places, these stories contain thinly veiled autobiographical details of Malone's life. The Unnamable somehow writes, with neither hands nor writing materials to aid him. Each novel is thus linked to its predecessor and foreshadows its sequel.

In addition to these facts, Beckett's handling of style is a major contributing factor in the kind of emotional effect his work has upon the reader. The conditions of each succeeding character's life becomes more stark and harsh, and the style reflects the quality of those conditions. James Joyce's influence, in this respect, can be seen especially in Beckett's early work.

When Beckett first went to Paris as a lecturer in English at the *École Normale Supérieure*, he became involved with the Joyce coterie. He became a devoted friend of Joyce, and Joyce himself was impressed enough by the gauche young Irishman to feel that Beckett showed promise as a writer. In 1930 Beckett showed his devotion by translating part of Joyce's "AnnaLivia Plurabelle". They spent much time together. This was hardly surprising since both were self-appointed exiles in a sense; both were Irishman and both committed to literature. Richard Ellmann throws further light on their relationship in his biography of Joyce:

Beckett was addicted to silences, and so was Joyce; they engaged in conversations which consisted often of silences directed towards each other, both suffused with sadness, Beckett mostly for the world, Joyce mostly for himself. Joyce sat in his habitual posture, legs crossed, toe of the upper leg under the instep of the lower; Beckett, also tall and slender, fell into the same gesture. Joyce suddenly asked some such question as "How could the idealist Hume write a history?" Beckett replied "A history of representations". Joyce said nothing.... 2

As a result of this close contact, Joyce had an influence on Beckett, whether conscious or unconscious on Beckett's part. A passage like the following from More Pricks Than Kicks aptly illustrates this:

Bodies don't matter, but hers went something like this: big enormous breasts, big breech, Botticelli thighs, knock-knees, square ankles, wobbly, poppata, mambose, slobbery-blibbery, bubbubbubub, the real button-bursting Weib, ripe. 3

Beckett shares a similar joy in words for their own sake. He illustrates, too, the Joycean preoccupation with the

physical and the sensual, and the preference for large 'Botticelli-like' women. The detached irony in Beckett's description is clear, and is reminiscent of Stephen Dedalus' attitude in Ulysses towards life in general. Humour is perhaps the most obvious common element in both writers, but Beckett's tone will become far more despairing in later works.

Ruby Cohn has noticed the definite parallels between Beckett's "A Wet Night", another story from the above collection, and Joyce's "The Dead", the final story of Dubliners.⁴ The ending of the former is a direct parody of the latter:

The rain fell in a uniform untroubled manner.
It fell upon the bay, the littoral, the mountains
and the plains, and notably upon the central bog
it fell with a rather desolate uniformity.

(More Pricks Than Kicks, pp.
112-113)

Even the Purefoy triplets of Ulysses appear in More Pricks Than Kicks as guests at Belacqua's wedding.

At this early creative period, Beckett's style is filled with erudite remarks, complicated imagery and general literary effusion. Beckett was aware of his style and it did not satisfy him. Perhaps this is one reason he decided to write in French, since as he says "Parce qu'en français c'est plus facile d'écrire sans style."⁵ In the middle 1960's, in a discussion with Aidan Higgins, the Irish novelist, Beckett vehemently denigrated style, comparing it

to "a bow tie about a throat cancer".⁶ Beckett obviously wished to free himself from the temptation towards an elevated style. His goal was to achieve a simple and stark style, which would express clearly and concisely what he was endeavouring to say. The trilogy, in its comparative lack of extended and pretentious figures of speech, shows the reader the success of Beckett's attempts to modify his style. What is being said takes precedence over how it is said. Ironically, the style of the trilogy is as truly indicative of Beckett's hand as was that of his earlier works, though it is far more compelling and hypnotic by virtue of its simple strength.

Structurally, the trilogy can be classified with those works which illustrate the form known as the 'stream of consciousness'. As in Joyce's Ulysses, the trilogy is composed of the monologues of several characters. Authorial comment, however, is virtually dispensed with. The richness of Joyce's novels, the diversity and complexity of its metaphors, always remind the reader of the guiding power which drives the work to its close. The Oxen of the Sun chapter (14) in which Joyce parodies the styles of English literature from Anglo-Saxon to the present day, gives us ample illustration of this veiled, but nevertheless obvious, authorial control.

In a desire to portray reality per se, it is obvious that to colour a narrative with any particular point of view or moral stance is to allow that reality to suffer.

Yet, by definition, once any human experience is given expression through the medium of language, whether written or spoken, that experience is one step away from verity, and excludes all other interpretations. Therefore it is impossible to give an absolute representation of reality. Since this is so, we may assume that the clearest definition will at least approximate the truth, since any definition cannot render it absolutely. However, any one experience may be defined in seemingly infinite and contradictory ways, and Beckett's attempt to overcome this problem is illustrated in the trilogy.

In order to avoid the impossible task of attempting to portray an absolute reality, Beckett chooses to place his characters in a world, whose irrational and strange character forces the reader to set up an arbitrary set of values by which he may interpret the behaviour of the characters. Indeed the Beckettian heroes of the trilogy operate in environments which, as the trilogy unfolds, become increasingly unlike anything the reader can have seen, except perhaps in the imagination. The general geographics of the land are plausible enough, but the behaviour of the heroes and the people who surround them is almost surrealistic. The reader is constantly reminded of the same kind of unreal reality which exists in a Kafka-novel.

Malone lives in a room attended by what he assumes is an old woman. Though at first she would come into his room to perform her duties, soon she is reduced to merely

a hand leaving his meals and taking away the plate. He has no other human contact and moreover seems to accept this fact quite stoically. When even these vital attentions cease, he accepts his inevitable demise with hardly any comment. The Unnamable exists in a strange, grey, half-world. He has neither arms, legs, or body, at least as far as he is able to ascertain.

Even though the characters' common journey is towards an absolute knowledge of themselves, one cannot merely assume that their worlds are metaphors for the internal world of the mind. Literally, they do travel in the fields and the forests, and what they learn on their way through that world serves as a step upwards on the ladder of enlightenment. The Unnamable speaks for Molloy and the other characters when he assumes his existence to be somewhere between the two: "...perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either,..."(p.383). What is happening in the trilogy is that the world as we know it is, in a sense, borrowed and modified to suit some arbitrary set of requirements. It is peopled by characters who are faithful to our image of human beings, behaving strangely it is true, but nevertheless unmistakably human. Even the Unnamable, though physically unreal, is obsessed by concerns and questions which are rooted in basic human nature.

Thus we can feel secure in presuming that the

trilogy relates to man and his universe; beyond that we must suspend belief and endeavour to interpret what we read in the light of those first assumptions. The characters involve us, and the vague geography they move in - with its towns, plains, seashores and forests which are never quite brought into focus - ceases to be important.

A second way in which Beckett tries to overcome the difficulty of taking responsibility for portraying actual and immediate reality is by virtually writing himself out of his novels. He gives up his position of omniscient author and allows his characters to take on that role. All three novels are written in the first person. All four protagonists are writing their stories themselves. Molloy is relating the story of his quest for his mother. He writes from her room which he had set out to reach at the beginning of his report. This report is to be given to the messenger who comes to collect the fresh pages every week:

There's this man who comes every week. Perhaps I got there thanks to him. He says not. He gives me money and takes away the pages. So many pages, so much money... Yet I don't work for money. For what then? I don't know.

(Molloy, p. 7)

Moran sits in his garden, writing his report, having apparently failed in his mission to find Molloy. "My report will be long." He says, "Perhaps I shall not finish it" (93). Malone, on the other hand, is writing stories to pass the time until he finally expires:

I think I shall be able to tell myself four stories, each one on a different theme. One about a man, another about a woman, a third about a thing, and finally one about an animal, a bird probably. I think that is everything.

(Malone Dies, p.18)

There is much which puzzles in the commentaries of the four writers. For example, Molloy's meaning is not at all clear when he comments thus: "This time, then once more I think, then perhaps a last time, then I think it'll be over, with that world too. Premonitions of the last but one but one "(p.8).⁷ In Malone Dies, when Malone loses his pencil and spends "two unforgettable days of which nothing will ever be known"(p.222), he reflects that at least "they brought me to the solution and conclusion of this whole sorry business, I mean the business of Malone (since that is what I am called now)..."(p.222). Malone seems to be speaking of someone else, or denying his own existence. Examples like these are dotted throughout the first two novels and the reader must wait until he comes to the final novel in the trilogy for explanations. The reality of the characters' existences is already in question in the reader's mind, and in the monologue of the Unnamable he comes to realise Beckett's artistic coup-de-grâce. [The final hero proves the fraudulence of the preceding characters' realities by claiming to be their sole creator: "all these stories about travellers, these stories about paralytics, all are mine" (p.412).]

↓ The reader, of necessity, must return to the

previous novels and re-read them with the understanding that Molloy, Moran, and Malone are as fictional as the characters in their own stories, for their omniscient author is the Unnamable.] Beckett is one step further away from his characters. Not only are his novels written in the first person, but he gives one of those narrators the responsibility for the creation of all the others. The reader is left alone, with no help from Beckett, to try to piece together and rationalise the continual affirmations and subsequent negations of the final hero. He assumes authorship and every word that Molloy, Moran and Malone report is accountable to him. His is that mysterious voice who urges them on to fulfil their "pensum", as he, in his turn, is endeavouring to fulfil his. There seems to be no other way he may attain the silence and peace he yearns for.

All this business of a labour to accomplish, before I can end, of words to say, a truth to recover, in order to say it, before I can end, of an imposed task, once known, long neglected, finally forgotten, to perform, before I can be done with speaking, done with listening, I invented it all, in the hope it would console me, help me to go on, allow me to think of myself as somewhere on a road, moving, between a beginning and an end, gaining ground, losing ground, getting lost, but somehow in the long run making headway. All lies. I have nothing to do, that is to say nothing in particular. I have to speak, whatever that means. Having nothing to say, no words but the words of others, I have to speak. No one compels me to, there is no one, it's an accident, a fact.

(The Unnamable, p.314)

This statement, stark and sincere, is the basic thought from which the trilogy stems. The two preceding

novels have been merely an exercise on the Unnamable's part. Perhaps through them he can feel that he is indeed "making headway", but he knows that all his efforts are futile. All he knows for certain is that he must speak of himself. He borrows the world of man, borrows their language so that perhaps in all the words he may hit on the right ones to define himself absolutely. But the tail of the serpent is in its mouth; the paradox is circular and ultimately linguistic as will be shown; the Unnamable knows he can never succeed. "Silence once broken will never again be whole. Is there then no hope?", he asks, and replies "Just a faint one perhaps, but which will never serve" (p.336). It does serve, however, Otherwise he would never have continued telling his stories about Molloy and the other characters. That faint hope keeps him going; as Molloy searching for his mother; as Moran for Molloy; as Malone, he tells his tales about Saposcat and Moll. Death is denied him, and life seems ultimately futile. As Pozzo says in Waiting For Godot, man "gives birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more."⁸

Notes to Chapter One.

- 1 Quoted in Ruby Cohn, Back To Beckett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p.112.
- 2 Richard Ellmann, James Joyce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p.661.
- 3 Samuel Beckett, More Pricks Than Kicks (London: Chatto and Windus, 1934), p.176.
- 4 Ruby Cohn, Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p.33-34.
- 5 Niklaus Gessner, Die Unzulänglichke^t der Sprache (Zurich: Verlag, 1957), p.32.
- 6 Profile of Aidan Higgins, The Guardian. (London: Oct. 11th, 1971).
- 7 It is interesting to note that in the French original Beckett has Molloy say here: "Cette fois-ci, puis encore je pense, puis c'en sera fini je pense, de ce monde-là aussi. C'est le sens de l'avant dernier" --- thus forecasting only one further attempt. John Fletcher assumes from this that when Beckett was writing Molloy, The Unnamable was as yet unforeseen. However, this is refuted by Beckett's own words quoted above (p.14). John Fletcher, The Novels of Samuel Beckett (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), p.132.
- 8 Samuel Beckett, Waiting For Godot (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1968), p.89.

CHAPTER TWO

In order to understand completely the Unnamable's development and dilemma, it is necessary to note the influence of his presence in the narrations of the three preceding protagonists. In this way much of the ambiguity witnessed in the two former novels will be clarified, and the culminating stance of the Unnamable will appear logical and acceptable in terms of the trilogy itself.

[Molloy opens with the hero ensconced in his mother's room. The reason he does not know how he got there is *that*, as we have seen in the light of the Unnamable's testimony, he is merely a fiction of that character and has been placed there arbitrarily for the sake of the narrative.] All through the first part of the novel, Molloy will find himself saying and seeing things which seem to surprise him. He is both a victim of his own fictional circumstances and a prey to the Unnamable's own clumsy authorial interventions. The character of Molloy incorporates elements of his own personality and those of the Unnamable, speaking through him:

For in me [he says] there have always been two fools, among others, one asking nothing better than to stay where he is and the other imagining that life might be slightly less horrible a little further on.

(Molloy, p. 48)

The Unnamable is telling the story of Molloy, but even on a structural level he is not very efficient. His persona continually imposes and lends ambiguity to the ostensible words of Molloy. Yet, as Ruby Cohn points out,

Unlike sentences of conventional fiction of even of some poetry, Molloy's sentences force us into an awareness of how sounds build words, build phrases, build sentences.... The sentences add up to Molloy and his adventures. 1

His story consists of only two paragraphs, the first about five hundred words, the second, forty thousand.

The tale of his journey to his mother begins as he is "crouched like Belacqua" (p.10) in the shadow of a rock watching two people, whom he calls A and C.² They approach each other across a plain. They meet, seem to exchange pleasantries and part. Molloy says that people like them "are hard to distinguish from yourself" (p.11), and he wishes that he might perhaps catch up with one of them someday "so as to know him better, be myself less lonely. But in spite of my soul's leap out to him, at the end of its elastic, I saw him only darkly..." (p.11). The two characters seem somehow to be parts of himself, and Molloy's desire to encounter one of both of them is an indication that his search will be in order to find himself. As yet he is not ready, however, and has neither the knowledge nor the means to do so. Nature and its beauties prove to be distractions which divert his attention and stop him from single-mindedly working towards his intended goal, Nature will provide Moran

and Malone with similar handicaps. Despite Molloy's urge to encounter A or C, he finds that there are other things after which his soul is 'straining':

I mean of course the fields, whitening under the dew, and the animals, ceasing from wandering, and settling for the night, and the sea, of which nothing, and the sharpening line of crests, and the sky where without seeing them I felt the first stars tremble....

(Molloy, p.11).

Delay is the price he must pay for allowing himself to indulge in what Moran will term "the fatal pleasure principle" (p.99).

Like Molloy's soul, his hat is tied by an elastic or lace. One recalls, as Miss Cohn has done, Swift's Gulliver who also secured his hat to his buttonhole by the same method:

It is possible that the hats of certain of Beckett's French heroes have an Irish ancestor in that of Swift's Gulliver. When Gulliver rows towards Lilliput, he fastens his hat under his chin by means of a string. Moreover when the Lilliputians retrieve Gulliver's hat, they bore two holes in the brim, as Moran does in Beckett's Molloy, in order to secure the ends of an elastic. 3

Beckett's heroes are obsessed with their hats, and Molloy seems to link his with his soul, the essence which gives him life, for he says: "I took off my hat and looked at it. It is fastened, it has always been fastened, to my buttonhole, always the same buttonhole, at all seasons by a long lace. I am still alive then" (p.13).

The incident with the two strangers over, Molloy finds himself compelled by an urge to go in search

of his mother. He has a stiff leg which prevents him from walking properly, so he travels by bicycle, his crutches strapped to the crossbar. Again, this is an arbitrary bequest from the Unnamable for Molloy remarks: "I found my bicycle (I didn't know I had one)..." (p.16). He reaches the outskirts of his town and is arrested by a policeman for what A. Alvarez calls "the peculiarly Beckettian crime"⁴ of resting on his bicycle in an allegedly obscene fashion. He is taken to the station, his interrogation is inconclusive and he is allowed to leave. He then cycles along the banks of the canal, and spends the night in a ditch. Upon awakening, he sees a shepherd, his dog and flock of sheep. Despite Molloy's attempts at communication, he is ignored and the shepherd and his flock go on their way. Molloy returns to the town where he inadvertently runs over a dog belonging to a woman he first calls Sophie, and afterwards Louise. She takes him to her home and he remains there for a period of time. However, the urge to seek his mother returns and he leaves, minus his bicycle. He moves with the aid of crutches, and, after a futile attempt at suicide in an alleyway, he decides to make for the sea. While there, he replenishes his store of sucking stones, but ends up throwing them all away but one which he eventually loses. (The reason he gives is that "deep down [he] didn't give a fiddler's curse about being without" (p.74).) He lives for a while in a cave, but soon he is drawn once again to go to his mother, the image of whom

"blunted for some time past was beginning to harrow him again" (p.74).

He enters a forest, his physical condition deteriorating constantly, and meets a charcoal-burner. The man offers Molloy a resting-place but Molloy kicks the man to death by swinging backwards and forwards on his crutches. Soon he is unable to do more than crawl, dragging himself along the ground with the aid of his crutches. At last, he clears the forest, and sinks into a ditch overlooking a plain. He hears a voice telling him not to fret, that help is coming. Scenes of his life pass before him, and he becomes unconscious. He wakes to find himself in his mother's room. Molloy's story has thus come full circle.

The Unnamable makes Molloy's main motive the search for his mother. It is a metaphorical journey back to his beginnings to try and find out the reasons for his own existence. If he is able to establish why he has come to exist, perhaps he will also be closer to understanding the meaning of that existence, and hence himself. Because life for him is a tortuous and endless search for answers, he naturally thinks of birth, and his mother, with disgust and loathing. He realises also that she is just as much a victim as he is himself, and is therefore prepared to forgive her for the sin of having "jostled me a little in the first months and spoiled the only enduring, just enduring period of my enormous existence" (p.18). Molloy firmly believes

that the meaning of life which he so strives to understand will be found in his mother : "that poor old uniparous whore" (p.19).

By the time the Unnamable has finished telling his stories, he is able to be scathing about Molloy's search for his mother. As far as he is concerned the possibility of having an inherent knowledge of parenthood is not feasible : "Innate knowledge of my mother, for example. Is that conceivable? Not for me. She was one of their favorite subjects, of conversation" (p.19). What to Molloy, and to the Unnamable who acquires knowledge through him, was once a vital reason for going on, has become meaningless and useless by the final novel.

Not only is this kind of knowledge useless, all forms of intellectual perception are ruled out. Molloy, as one critic points out, "has shed most of his education as useless, so that he approaches people and things without learned attitudes."⁵ The knowledge man has of external elements and even theoretical philosophies prove futile in coming to a deeper and total understanding of the self.

Yes, I once took an interest in astronomy, I don't deny it. Then it was geology that killed a few years for me. The next pain in the balls was anthropology and the other disciplines such as psychiatry, that are connected with it, disconnected, then connected again, according to the latest discoveries.

(Molloy, p.39).

All knowledge is a source of ridicule for the Beckettian heroes. That which cannot throw light on the dilemma of human existence and their own selves is pointless and a waste

of time. The questions they seek answers for, F.J.Hoffman tells us, "are real enough and terribly important: Who am I, how do I relate to other objects, and do these objects exist outside me or are they products of my mind, if I have a mind, if I am I ?"⁶

These are some of the major questions which concern mankind; for the trivial epistemologies, Molloy says, "there is no need to despair, you may scrabble on the right door, in the right way in the end. It's for the whole there seems to be no spell" (p.27). Together with knowledge, Molloy states that he has killed all desire for such simple human elements as heat and light. He prefers the pale gloom of rainy days. This preference is realised in the world of the Unnamable whose environment is grey and dull. Molloy has even dispensed with the attributes of taste and humour. Despite all his endeavours to dispose of what is obviously useless to him; he declares that his knowledge of man remains scant and the meaning of being beyond him. He is, however, only the first step in the refining process which we are a witness to in the trilogy. Though he is no nearer an understanding of himself by the end of his narrative, he lays the foundations for the continuing education of the Unnamable in Moran. Molloy goes through the first stages of the process and is frustrated by its evident inefficacy with regard to his own quest. However, the Unnamable in his novel explains the true reason for Molloy's existence:

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, to put off the hour when I must speak of me.

(The Unnamable, p.304)

His task is to speak of himself; he is simply whiling away his time with his fictions, however much he may learn from them.

Stripped of all the securities learning and knowledge give a human being, the reader searches for some kind of palliative to alleviate the desperate situations of the characters. But one soon establishes that even the humour in the Beckettian world is bitter and cynical. Ruby Cohn devoted a whole work to exploring the devices of humour found in Beckett's work and her conclusion is that "Beckett's laughter --- the laughter he expresses and the laughter he evokes --- is a mask for, not a release from, despair."⁷

In Watt, the novel immediately preceding the trilogy, one of the characters gives a precise definition of the kinds of laughter which are peculiar to the Beckettian environment. There are three, defined as the bitter, the hollow and the mirthless.

The bitter laugh laughs at that which is not good, it is the ethical laugh. The hollow laugh laughs at that which is not true, it is the intellectual laugh....but the mirthless laugh is the dianoetic laugh.... It's the laugh of laughs, the risus purus... the laugh that laughs... at that which is unhappy. .

(Watt, p.47)

Molloy never laughs, and the Unnamable finds

himself incapable of doing so. He is denied the ability to see things humorously, and thus to mitigate the cheerlessness of his position: "Oh if I could laugh, I know what it is, they must have told me what it is, but I can't do it, they can't have shown me how to do it" (p.405). Beckett will not allow what he sees as the desolation of the human condition to be minimised through humour. His view is serious and grave and the absence of genuine humour illustrates this.

Like the final hero, Molloy understands that he must speak, and he tells his stories to facilitate this task. "It took me a long time to know that" he says, "and I'm not sure of it" (p.38). The reader is frequently made aware of the fictional nature of Molloy's tale, for he interjects such comments as "What a story!" (p.38) and "For I weary of these inventions and others beckon to me" (p.38). These comments could equally be said to stem from the Unnamable, and the truth is never established. Beckett makes his characters play with words and language until what is real or unreal, truth or fiction, or any other orthodox set of constants become totally confused in the reader's mind. He must, of necessity, control his gullibility for he recognises that affirmative statements are almost always followed by remarks which undermine or negate what has already been said. On reading the final novel, it becomes clear that it is not what is said that is as important as the fact that something is said. The same attitude applies to other of

Beckett's works. Waiting For Godot, for example, should be seen as a play that is about nothing except waiting. Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for the same thing that all the trilogy heroes are searching for: "man's absurd lifelong waiting for something that will give significance to his life, man's absurd existential."⁸

Though Molloy trifles with language, his attitude to his own words is hardly one of pride, for he comments wearily and contemptuously that one can hardly do worse "to obliterate texts than to blacken margins, to fill in the holes of words till all is blank and flat and the whole ghastly business looks like what it is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery" (p.13). This is an important point which Molloy makes, and the image is developed in a different and more metaphorical way by the Unnamable. He imagines some controlling being or beings to whom one is responsible. At some preordained time, he supposes, his characters will be asked:

What have you done with your material? We have left it behind. But commanded to say whether yes or no they filled up the holes, have you filled up the holes yes or no, they will say yes or no, or some yes, others no, at the same time, not knowing what answer the master wants to his question.

(The Unnamable, p.365)

The Unnamable imagines that he can fulfil his task by means of the vicarious tales of his characters. But though the task exists, neither he nor his surrogates, in their lack of perception, can choose the right actions which will help

them on their way. Writing their stories may be the right action, but the opposite holds true also. It is no wonder that Molloy has nothing but contempt for his own words, since they may be just as equally a source of his damnation as a path to his reward. The Unnamable's dilemma with words is more precise. Though he knows he must speak of himself, he finds that "there is no name for me, no pronoun for me" (p.404). Later on, using 'he' as a pronoun for himself he despairs of ever achieving his goal for "his story [is] the story to be told, but he has no story, he hasn't been in story... he's in his story, unimaginable, unspeakable" (p.404). Each fictional creation of the Unnamable is an attempt to define himself in language, but as Robert Champigny points out, when the first person pronoun is assumed, not merely quoted, it refers "neither to a quality by itself, nor to an individuation by itself":

it expresses an individuation of the self, an individuation which can but remain incomplete because logically wrong: a quality cannot be turned into an individual or a set of individuals.⁹

Molloy is just an individuation of the Unnamable's self. The latter endows the former with a supposed life of his own, but in reality is the controlling factor in Molloy's character and personality. } Molloy illustrates the benefits and drawbacks which result from this strange kind of symbiotic relationship.

There is one metaphor in the novels which seems to give a clue to the knowledge that will free the characters

into silence. From Watt onwards, a particular kind of music is heard by the Beckettian tramps. Watt, lying in a ditch on his way to Mr Knott's house, hears " with great distinctness, from afar, from without yes, really it seemed from without, the voices indifferent in quality, of a mixed choir " (p.32).

Molloy, in the custody of the policeman on his way to the station, " seemed to hear, at a certain moment, a "distant music" (p.21). He gives himself up to that " golden moment " (p.21) as if he had been " someone else " (p.21).

The Unnamable gives a much more detailed description, and finally points out the significance of what Watt and Molloy describe as music. To him it is " a murmur telling of another and less unpleasant method of ending my troubles " (p.308). He promises to turn these " highly promising formulae " to good account as soon as he has finished telling stories about his " troop of lunatics " (p.308). Descartes may have recognised the division between mind and body, but Beckett modifies this kind of human divisibility even further in his last hero. The Unnamable finds himself incapable of separating the acts of thought and speech. He cannot tell his stories and think about what the music is telling him at the same time. The difficulty is not, as in Molloy's case, in making mind and body function perfectly together, but in coordinating language and its parent,

consciousness: " How can you think and speak at the same time, without a special gift, your thoughts wander, your words too, far apart " (p.374), explains the Unnamable.

Beckett leads us back again to the problems arising from language. If we believe Descartes, we know that the ability to think serves as an acknowledgement of our own existence. The Unnamable is not satisfied with this. To prove his existence beyond a shadow of a doubt, he must be able to translate it into language, and thus allow it to be witnessed and verified. In his obsession with this aim, the body becomes merely another extraneous element, and the physical deterioration we find in the novels exemplifies this.

Murphy's one desire was to retreat into the world of his mind and ignore his body. Watt lives in a mental world of logic and reason, allowing his body to deteriorate. Molloy, by the end of his report, is crawling on his stomach, his body almost totally useless. Malone is almost totally paralysed; all he is capable of moving is his head and his hands to write.

The Unnamable, self-confessed author, claims that his reasons are valid for the kind of physical deterioration he makes his people endure: " mutilate, mutilate, and perhaps some day, fifteen generations hence, you'll succeed in beginning to look like yourself..." (p.315). However, he understands that the problem is not quite as

simple as this. The inability to coordinate thought and language defeat him. He can neither find a solution himself nor learn from the 'murmur'. He allows Molloy at least to find some kind of peace in knowing that he is beyond all knowledge. The knife-rest which Molloy steals from Lousse's house proves to be something he cannot understand. His inability to grasp its purpose or function is, for Molloy, a source of pleasure: "For to know nothing is nothing, not to want to know anything likewise, but to be beyond knowing anything, to know you are beyond knowing anything, that is when peace enters in..." (p.64).

When the Unnamable finally shows himself and attempts to speak of himself in his own novel, he will nostalgically look back at Molloy and wish to hide behind his persona again. At least in that guise he was spared the necessity of discussing himself:

I would have liked to lose me, lose me the way
I could long ago, when I still had some imagination,
close my eyes and be in a wood, or on the sea-
shore, or in a town where I don't know anyone....
I'm looking for my mother to kill her....

(The Unnamable, p.391)

This first section of Molloy sets the scene for what is to come in the second. In the light of the final novel, the overall metaphor in which Molloy's experiences are enclosed is clear. Moran's section will serve as a further step in perceiving the important factors which should contribute to a full understanding of the self. Molloy

continually put off his journey to his mother,—that is his search for himself,—but Moran will procrastinate a little less in his given task. As John Fletcher points out, " the problem becomes not so much a matter of eluding the self as of pinning it down..."¹⁰ The Unnamable will be as prominent in Moran's life as he has been in Molloy's; for his is the self which is to be pinned down and verbalised.

Notes to Chapter Two

- 1 Ruby Cohn, Back to Beckett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 82-83.
- 2 In the French original Beckett named them A and B.
- 3 Ruby Cohn, Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p. 106.
- 4 A. Alvarez, Samuel Beckett (New York: Viking Press, 1973), p. 47.
- 5 Back to Beckett, p. 85.
- 6 F.J. Hoffman, Samuel Beckett: The Man and His Works (Toronto: Forum House, 1969), p. 133. First published as: The Language of Self (Southern Illinois University Press, 1962).
- 7 Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut, p. 287.
- 8 Dr. Supti Sen, Samuel Beckett: His Mind and Art (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1970), p. 151.
- 9 Robert Champigny, "Adventures of the First Person", in Samuel Beckett Now, ed. Melvin J. Friedman (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 127.
- 10 John Fletcher, The Novels of Samuel Beckett (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), p. 169.

CHAPTER THREE

Moran's report makes up the second part of Molloy. It has many similarities and links with the former section. Moran writes a report under orders for example, as does Molloy. The Unnamable negates the compulsiveness Molloy and Moran seem to experience in writing their reports, for he shifts the blame from himself as their creator and master : " There were four or five of them at^{me}," he says; " they called that presenting their report " (p.398).

Moreover, as Molloy is on a quest for his mother so ostensibly is Moran on a mission to find Molloy. Furthermore, Molloy assaults the charcoal-burner in the forest, while Moran murders a stranger he meets whose face he says " vaguely resembled my own " (p.151). Once again this violence is negated by the Unnamable. He even takes responsibility for the death of Murphy, which, in a sense, serves to invalidate Murphy as a whole.

...it wasn't I; suffocated, set fire to me, thumped on my head with wood and iron, it wasn't I, there was no head, no wood, no iron, I didn't do anything to me, I didn't do anything to anyone, no one did anything to me, there is no one, I've looked, no one but me....

(The Unnamable, p.408)

The similarities continue. Molloy observes two strangers, and Moran meets two. Molloy has a bicycle and would love to describe it at length, as would Moran his

own. Both characters undergo the degeneration of various limbs and organs, and both wear hats tied by a string which eventually breaks. Molloy uses crutches, and Moran has resorted to their use by the time he returns home. Both are accosted and questioned by a hostile stranger, the policeman in Molloy's case and a farmer in Moran's.

Yet in spite of these links, the two narratives have no clearly defined relationship to each other. H. Porter Abbot sums up the reader's experience by saying that it is of "reading two books masquerading as one" and goes on to recall Faulkner's novel, Wild Palms which is essentially two narratives that alternate chapter by chapter.¹ However, with Molloy, the essential link is that Moran is sent to look for Molloy. The similarities remain impossible to rationalise and add to much of the general ambiguity. It is not only simplest, but ultimately more satisfying, to view both as narratives of the Unnamable. He plays with his audience just as he is playing with himself. He reflects the perverse and ironical mind of Beckett who, when asked who Godot was in Waiting For Godot, replied that if he knew he would have put it in the play. If Beckett had wanted the two halves of Molloy to relate logically and consistently he would have made them do so.

Some critics have been tempted to invert the order, making the Moran section precede that of Molloy. The rationale behind this is clear. Moran as an individual

is far more organised and identifiable as a normal human being than is Molloy. He lives in a house, is a regular church-goer; he even has a family, a son named Jacques. Moran is the only character of the trilogy with a Christian name for his son is named after him. He rules over the boy and an old servant Martha, with an iron and sometimes unfair fist.

Moran is not out-of-place, however, if he is viewed as a further creation of the Unnamable. He is a character who has been refined to the point where he is less vague than Molloy and more aware of the quality of his task. He does not wander idly, but travels steadily in search of Molloy. The Unnamable is more master of his style and characterisation with Moran than with Molloy. His authorial interventions are more expertly handled, and, though he does impose his own character and opinions, they seem somehow to be more in keeping with the character and personality of Moran. There is just enough narrative ambiguity in Moran's section to facilitate the reader's awareness of the Unnamable's presence.

Moran's section of this novel has a better defined narrative style than did Molloy's. It reflects the Unnamable's growing ability to handle language, in spite of the fact that he claims he is using only the language of others. It also reflects Moran's character. It is terse and matter-of-fact. We understand that he is a

private agent working for a powerful figure named Youdi, whom neither we nor Moran ever see. Within the text of Moran's narrative he appears as an all-powerful and influential character. In The Unnamable he becomes just another pathetic imaginative fiction of the nameless hero. "Or Moran's boss, I forget his name," and the Unnamable goes on, "Ah yes, certain things, things I invented, hoping for the best, full of doubts, croaking with fatigue. I remember certain things, not always the same" (p.312).

F.J.Hoffman has said² that Moran is both "a creator and creature, artist and experiencing object, assailant and victim". By his writing Moran is a creator and artist, and by virtue of his humanity he is a creature and experiencing object. The idea that he is both assailant and victim is one which recurs in Beckettian fiction. In How It Is (1964), written after the trilogy, the protagonist is unceasingly moving through his world in an easterly direction. The work is divided into three sections. In the first chapter the protagonist describes how it was before he met with Pim, another similar to himself. In the second, he meets Pim and acts as his tormentor. He physically molests Pim in a desperate attempt to force him to speak. In the final chapter, we are told that this whole process is cyclical and that he, in his turn, will meet up with another character and will play the role of victim:

then from left to right or west to east the atrocious spectacle on into the black night of boundless futurity of the abandoned tormentor never to be victim then a little space then his brief journey done prostrate at the foot of a mountain of provisions the victim never to be tormentor then a great space then another abandoned so on infinitely.

(How It Is, p.137)

This process seems to take place with Molloy. I suggest that whereas Molloy is certainly portrayed as victim, despite his assault upon the charcoal-burner, Moran is equally the tormentor. He indulges in petty sadism, and at the beginning of his story is always in total command of the actions of his servant and his son. Viewed further, in the light of the Unnamable's part in his life, he represents a further step in the former's epistemological journey. For by the end of Molloy, the Unnamable will have experienced both the state of victim and that of tormentor. However, Beckett goes on to imply that neither state is ultimately more efficacious than the other. For Moran is reduced to exactly the same kind of physical level as Molloy by the end of the novel. His mental attitude is as uncertain, and, like Molloy, he is unwilling to take any fact on trust. It little matters, apparently, whether a man is in a position of fortune and power or a victim of society. The world cannot be relied upon to offer any clues to a knowledge of the self. For Beckett, that kind of knowledge would seem to be beyond the realms of our perceived physical universe.

Moran's tale is simple. Gaber, Youdi's messenger, arrives one Sunday morning at Moran's home. Youdi's orders are to leave immediately to hunt down Molloy. No further explanations are given and Moran demands none. He leaves the same night with his son, Jacques, whom he has been told to bring with him. Moran's physical condition rapidly deteriorates on the journey and Jacques is sent off alone to buy a bicycle in a nearby town. While the boy is away, Moran meets two strangers in the woods. He seems to admire the first to whom he gives food. The other, who resembles himself, he kills. His son returns with the bicycle and they continue on their way.

As the journey proceeds, Moran is mentally becoming more like Molloy. He reflects on the changes in himself, and notes that what he sees in himself " was more like a crumbling, a frenzied collapsing of all that had always protected me from all I was condemned to be " (p.148). Melvin.J.Friedman sees this kind of statement as one which leads to the assumption that " Both Molloy and Moran begin in a state of comparative soundness (they both bear testimony to existence) then proceed towards self-disintegration as they move towards each other and towards mutual mental identity ".³ Friedman sees the process of self-disintegration in a pejorative light; however, I maintain that, for Beckett, the disintegration of self is a necessary stage in the refinement of self. Beckett is attempting

to strip his characters of all the superficial elements that are incorporated in one human being in order to find the essential quality or qualities which defines his existence and therefore himself. Moran is merely losing his personal characteristics one by one, in the hopes that sooner or later he will be refined down to the essence of his own being. Moran himself is unaware of the efforts being made through him by the Unnamable, but also by Beckett. Thus he is confused and concerned about the changes he perceives in himself. His indifference to the larger question are shown in his desire to forget Molloy, the search for whom is a metaphor for the search for himself: " similarly the missing instructions concerning Molloy, when I felt them stirring in the depths of my memory, I turned from them in haste towards other unknowns " (p.149).

As Moran travels, he is isolated from the familiar elements in his everyday life. His reflections are coloured by this fact, and enable him to dwell more frequently on himself, undistracted by the usual external trivia of his life of habit and order: " I often took a quick look at myself, closed my eyes, forgot, began again" (p.158). The Unnamable, we will find, is more than accustomed, through his delegates, to this process of forgetting and beginning again. In his frustration with his situation, he calls it a device his characters use against him:

This in fact is one of their favorite devices, to stop suddenly at the least sign of adhesion from me, leaving me high and dry, with nothing for my renewal but the life they have imputed to me.

(The Unnamable, p.330)

He shifts the blame for being unable to find himself to his own characters, whom he says, prevent him from thinking just as he is on the threshold of perhaps acquiring the knowledge he so longs for. This kind of self-deception rarely works for long and he always admits the truth in the end: " they were never there, there was never anyone but you, talking to you about you,..." (p.394).

In Molloy's section, the reader is more aware of the differences between Molloy, the character, and the Unnamable, the author. In Moran's narrative the two personalities are merged more successfully. Therefore, what is apparently ambiguous for Molloy to say, becomes something which is unsurprising for Moran to relate. The fraudulence of Moran as a real person is reflected in the way he writes his report. His report begins with the words, " It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows " (p.92). After he has finished the story of his journey and subsequent return home, he closes his narrative with the following: " 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 " (p,176). Moran therefore infers the complete fraudulence of his words, yet his words claim

nevertheless to pass for reality. For eighty-four pages the reader has been duped by the words on the page, and only in the last line of the novel does he realise this. Despite the fact that the Unnamable is the declared instigator of the ruse, and the fraudulence explained away in the light of this knowledge, the greater inference of the evidence is important.

Beckett seems to be proving that language is totally inefficacious in portraying any kind of truth. The structure of Moran's narrative is an example offered by Beckett to illustrate how easy it is to affirm plausibly a reality and yet still effect its total negation by means of one simple sentence. Other reasons for Beckett's methods are put forward by Raymond Federman:

On the level of plot, Beckett (through the narrator) pretends to be unable to control the narration; on the aesthetic level, he shows how the novel form is inadequate to gain an understanding of reality; and on the philosophical level... he points out the failure of rational thought as a means of acquiring absolute knowledge.⁴

Federman was applying this argument to Watt, but it can be applied to any of the subsequent novels which make up the trilogy.

Though the reader becomes aware, at the end of Molloy, of the fraudulent nature of Moran's narrative, he is given many clues in the text. Moran is not obviously aware of his own fictional nature, but he seems to have his suspicions. The reason for this being more to inform

the reader than to aid Moran himself.

That a man like me, so meticulous and calm in the main he says, so patiently turned towards the outer world as towards the lesser evil, creature of his house, of his garden, of his few poor possessions, discharging faithfully and ably a revolting function, reining back his thoughts within the limits of the calculable so great is his horror of fancy, that a man so contrived, for I was a contrivance should let himself be haunted and possessed by chimeras, this ought to have seemed strange to me and been a warning to me to have a care, in my own interest. 5

(Molloy, p. 114)

Moran, like the reader, has an idea of the invented reality in which he, Moran, moves. However, he feels dedicated enough to carry out his search for Molloy. He is prepared to go through pain and physical suffering in order to succeed. He knows somewhere inside him that what he does is neither for Molloy, who indeed mattered little to him, nor for himself, of whom he despairs:

but on behalf of a cause which, while having need of us [i.e., the Unnamable's characters] to be accomplished, was in its essence anonymous, and would subsist, haunting the minds of men, when its miserable artisans should be no more.

(Molloy, p. 114)

This statement, in fact, transcends Moran's personality and the limitations of the trilogy. The cause is the Unnamable's need to find himself, but the self is something for which mankind itself will persevere in searching. If Beckett speaks at all in the trilogy, these are surely his words.

The Unnamable, ostensible narrator, continues

to play with Moran in this way. He comments sarcastically on his character, poking fun when he is confused enough by events to behave in an uncharacteristic fashion.

His description of the nature of Moran's method of departure from his home is an example of this:

It was then the unheard of sight was to be seen of Moran making ready to go without knowing where he was going, having consulted neither map nor timetable... with only the vaguest notion of... even the very nature of the work to be done and consequently the means to be employed.
(Molloy, p.124)

Beckett executes further structural variations by allowing the Unnamable to give Moran the ability to answer back to the creator of his confusing predicament: " I boiled with anger at the thought of him who had shackled me thus "(p.125). In fact Moran goes on to reflect idly that he " quite enjoyed playing [his] parts through to the bitter end " (p.122).

Occasionally the Unnamable will cease to enjoy playing with his character like this, and will remind himself and the reader of his own predicament. As Moran recalls others whom he has had to deal with on orders from Youdi, he interposes the words of his creator:

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

(Molloy, p.137)

John Fletcher is one critic who sympathises

with the Unnamable's plight and explains why the nameless hero at times views his characters as people who make him waste his time and suffer for nothing:

Condemned as he is to such infinite but futile activity, it is little wonder that he despises it and scorns its affirmations and negations invalidated as soon as uttered; and prefers limping to temporary halts.... 6

The Unnamable hides behind the persona of Moran, partly because his task is more pleasant and simple if he talks of others rather than himself; at the same time he hopes that in speaking of them he may perhaps light on the words necessary to free him into silence.

The Unnamable chooses to tell stories instead of speaking about himself because it is more pleasurable. Moran also falls into the trap of nourishing his own sensual desires. This tendency prevents both characters from coming to an understanding of the fundamental task at hand.

As Moran prepares himself for his journey, he feels " a great confusion " (p.98), come over him. Unable to decide what means of transport he will use, he finally decides to take his autocytle simply because he is partial to that way of getting about. However, in retrospect, his decision was foolish, because in choosing what pleased him rather than what was best for the business at hand, he was inscribing " on the threshold of the Molloy affair, the fatal pleasure principle " (p.99). Initially,

Moran is a natural spendthrift. Money comes to be unimportant to him on his journey and he finds himself, as he says, "throwing my money away with as little concern as if I had been travelling for my pleasure " (p.142).

Like Molloy, Molloy finds pleasure and solace in nature. He feels great joy in beholding the sky and the landscape. He takes pleasure in " basking in the balm of the warm summer days " (p.136). While his son is away in Hole buying the bicycle which will carry them on their way, he contentedly " gazes at the trees, the fields, the sky, the birds, and he listened attentively to the sounds, faint and clear, borne to him on the air " (p.145). Even after his ordeal and his subsequent return home, he revels in talking to the wild birds that people his garden and is pleased when, after a period, they seem to recognise him. Moran was extremely attentive towards his hens when he was at home; and he spent much time trying to analyse the dance of his bees.

The Unnamable undercuts even this human joy. For him Nature will aid him in finding and understanding himself:

You try the sea, you try the town, you look for yourself in the mountains and in the plains, it's only natural, you want yourself in your own little corner, it's not love, it's not curiosity, it's because you're tired, you want to stop travel, no more, speak no more, close your eyes, but your own, in a word lay hands on yourself, after that you will make short work of it.

(The Unnamable, p.400)

In order to see clearly why indulging oneself is considered fatal, we must again turn to the Unnamable's own inferences. In his own novel he creates two characters, Worm and Mahood, about whom he speaks. At one point in his description of Worm he says that " No one asks him to think, simply to suffer, always in the same way, without hope or diminution, without hope of dissolution, it's no more complicated than that " (p.367). Worm and Mahood illustrate the basic sorry facts of man's existence, and we may assume from the above statement that one of the most common marks of being human, for Beckett, is that one must suffer. In Worm's case, the Unnamable exaggerates the state so that he implies that that is all he must do to satisfy an arbitrary code of behaviour. In his story of Moran, however, he allows that character the benefits of self-indulgence, knowing all the while it is only through suffering that much of what he desires to know will become clearer. The "pleasure principle" is fatal because it takes both Moran's, and the Unnamable's , mind off their real task.

In portraying pleasure in this fashion, Beckett is opening the way for a more universal conclusion to be drawn. In man's endeavours to define himself absolutely, suffering must play a major role. When a person suffers he tends to turn in upon himself. When that suffering is specifically mental or intellectual, his concerns are the unanswerable questions which form the basis of any system

of philosophy. Therefore, Beckett advocates the state of suffering, seeing happiness as something which is transitory and impermanent, and therefore ultimately irrelevant in the search for the self.

In Molloy it is important to realise that Molloy's and Moran's searches are metaphors for their need to establish their own identities. As P.H. Solomon has seen,

... the voyage through the space of external reality parallels the voyage towards the self. If we consider the two narrations simultaneously, Then Molloy is retreating as Moran pursues him. Yet if as Moran states he cannot be where Molloy is not, 7 then their spaces must merge. But this can only take place in the spacelessness of the self, outside language and outside the novel. 8

Though Moran may not reach the self in his travels for the Unnamable, he does come to have a better understanding of himself, and highlights a little better what will be required of the Unnamable to take this development further. This fact marks Moran out as a progression from Molloy and indicates also that the order of the two sections as they stand is logical and unambiguous.

The process that Moran undergoes in this quest for himself is controlled by the Unnamable. He outlines a character who is at first the opposite of Molloy. He is fanatical about punctuality, religion and the daily symmetry of his life. These are all standard symbols of security for mankind. One by one, Moran is stripped of them, or finds that they are useless to him. From the moment the

thirsty Gaber⁹ arrives, Moran begins to behave in a manner contrary to his norm.

He becomes confused and in true Cartesian fashion begins to doubt everything with which he has been up to now familiar, and which he has accepted blindly. Even the organisation which employs him is called into question. Ironically he is indeed right when he remarks that at times " if I had not hastily sunk back into my darkness I might have gone to the extreme of conjuring away the chief and regarding myself as solely responsible for my wretched existence " (p.107). It is, after all, the Unnamable who creates him, and speaks through him; that character recognises no authority but himself as a controller of his world and existence. Moran clutches firmly to a belief in his own validity, but during the course of his narrative he makes comments which show how increasingly little regard he is coming to have for all former sources of authority. His God begins to disgust him and even his report, " this relation that is forced on me " (p,131), he decides to conduct in his own way, unmindful of Youdi's grim shadow in the background. He has begun to listen to his own inner voice and, as he writes, he does so " with hatred, in my heart, and scorn of my master and his designs" (p.132).

This inner voice which he only began to listen

to on his mission to find Molloy becomes, by the end of the novel, the sole director of his movements:

It did not use the words that Moran had been taught when he was little and that he in his turn had taught to his little one. So that at first I did not know what it wanted. But in the end I understood this language. I understood it, I understood it all wrong perhaps. That is not what matters... Does this mean that I am freer now than I was? I do not know. I shall learn.

(Molloy, p.176)

By the time we get to the final novel, we know that the Unnamable has learnt that he is indeed no freer because he attends to that voice, his own inner voice. All that he has come to realise from paying attention to it is that he has a "pensum" to perform; he must not tell stories, he must speak of himself.

However, Moran in his discussion of this inner voice illustrates a further point which Beckett is making. Since this voice comes from within, it is reasonable to assume that it is the voice of the self. Moran infers that it has a language of its own, and that that language is not a verbal one. Since this is so, then the concern with the difficulties with verbal communication found in the novels can be seen as an attempt to analyse the potential language has to verbalise thought. Beckett's heroes find it impossible at times to give expression to even general thoughts. Normally, for example, when the sensation of cold is felt by a human being, that sensation is then trans-

lated into a mental apprehension of the fact; finally, the appropriate words are chosen to express that thought, and the whole experience is verbalised in terms like "I am cold."

For Molloy any verbal interaction is almost impossible. He explains himself that between the questions of the policeman and his own answers;

the intervals were more or less long and turbulent. I am so little used to being asked anything that when I am asked something I take some time to know what.

(Molloy, p. 21)

It is interesting to note that the first stranger Moran meets in the woods has the accent of "one who had lost the habit of speech" (p. 146), implying that it is the Molloy of Part I who is journeying through the forest in search of his parent.

By rendering Molloy's experience in this way, Beckett highlights the complex thought processes normally involved in expressing a general statement of fact or emotion. The natural corollary of this view is the inference found in Moran's statement. For if it is difficult to express general thoughts in language, then to express the self, whose language is not by nature verbal, would be impossible. The idea of language and silence, referred to at moments throughout the first two novels, will come to be a major issue in The Unnamable. He must speak in order to be silent, but silence once broken, may never

again be whole. The paradox which thus arises is analysed and interpreted time and again by the Unnamable in an attempt somehow to resolve the problem. Molloy and Moran only serve to prepare the way for this topic, as they do for the others.

After Moran has been abandoned by his son on the forest, he remains where he is stranded for a number of days, eating his provisions and preparing for his death. He takes comfort from the fact that his life is coming to an end, but adds: " or to begin again, it little mattered which, and it little mattered how, I had only to wait " (p.161). We are once again reminded that the Unnamable is merely passing time with the story of Moran. There may be others after him, as indeed there will be in the story of Malone. But it is not permitted that Moran should expire: Gaber, Youdi's messenger, arrives and transmits the order to return home. Stripped of his bicycle, which his son had taken with him, armed only with the barest essentials, Moran wearily and arduously makes his return trip.

Though he may not have succeeded in his mission, he has done something far more useful as far as the Unnamable is concerned. He has come a little closer to an understanding of himself:

I not only knew who I was, but I had a sharper and clearer sense of my identity than ever before, in spite of its deep lesions and the wounds with which it was covered.

(Molloy, p.170)

Moran's failure to establish the absolute identity of the self is minimised by the fact that at least the area to be considered has been narrowed down a great deal. His fall has been worth the physical hardships he has undergone, if only for this reason.

Learning and knowledge have been proven ultimately useless in coming to a realisation of the self. Possessions --- Molloy's sucking stones and Moran's home, for example, --- are merely erroneous confirmations of one's existence. " Each of the characters must work through the objective world of bodies and beds and sticks and pots in order to get at his own consciousness, and in the last analysis it is only the Unnamable who actually makes a clean break with the objective world."¹⁰

The body itself is allowed to degenerate since it too cannot serve as a means of finding oneself. By the end of Molloy what remains is a human being who has been stripped of all material possessions, physically almost in a state of paralysis, and one who has come to recognise and pay attention to the dictates of an inner voice. This voice is looked to to provide some solution for or direction in the dilemma he is experiencing. Malone Dies will take up this thread and carry even further the processes already begun. We shall be one step closer to the Unnamable, and it will serve to clarify his task a little better, and will enable us to consider

the possibility of effecting that task's conclusion.

Notes to Chapter Three

- 1 H.Porter Abbot, The Fiction of Samuel Beckett: Form and Effect (Berkeley:University of California Press,1973), p.99.
- 2 F.J.Hoffman, Samuel Beckett: The Man And His Works (Toronto: Forum House Publishing Company,1969), p.126.
- 3 Melvin.J.Friedman, Introduction to Samuel Beckett Now, Edited and With an Introduction By Melvin.J.Friedman (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press,1970), p.48.
- 4 Raymond Federman, Journey To Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965),p.7.
- 5 My emphasis.
- 6 The Novels of Samuel Beckett (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), p.7.
- 7 " For where Molloy could not be, nor Moran either for that matter, there Moran could bend over Molloy." Molloy, (p.11).
- 8 P.H.Solomon, The Life After Birth: Imagery in Samuel Beckett's Trilogy (Romance Monographs Inc: No 15: University of Mississippi, 1975), p.39.
- 9 One recalls the thirsty messenger who comes to pick up the pages of Molloy's report every week. (p.8).
- 10 David.H.Hesla, The Shape of Chaos: An interpretation of the Art of Samuel Beckett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p.178.

CHAPTER FOUR

Malone Dies follows Molloy in the trilogy. The plot is simpler and even more direct than the two contained in Molloy. The protagonist, Malone, is totally incapable of any locomotion. He is confined to a room, in bed, and spends his time telling stories about a character named Saposcat. This name he later changes to Macmann. Like Waiting For Godot, this work is about waiting; in Malone's case he waits for his death.

Malone's story about the boyhood of Sapo, and his mature life as Macmann would seem to have no ostensible significance. The boy lives with his family, eventually deserts them, and then enters an asylum. The high point of his life seems to be the grotesque love-affair he has while there, with an ugly hag named Moll. She is his 'keeper', and at her death, her duties are taken over by a character named Lemuel. The end of both Malone's story and Malone takes place as he finishes relating the details concerning an excursion from the asylum. He and some of the inmates are rowed to an island for the purpose of an outing. It is here that Lemuel kills all the characters. G.C. Barnard sheds light on the stories Malone tells in this way: " he writes in an exercise-book what are ostensibly stories he invents, but actually are his confused memories of past states,

intermingled with reflections on his present condition."¹
 The two narratives are important in themselves, and when viewed together what is contained in them stands as a summation of the Unnamable's view of the world.

Structurally, the novel is more organised than Molloy, and John Fletcher reasons that the straightforward pattern in Malone Dies is due to the fact that "... a fragment of fiction is followed by a fragment of self-examination and vice-versa to the end." He goes on to say that an important theme is " the very ambiguity of what constitutes the fiction and what does not."² However, much of this ambiguity, as we have seen, is cleared up by seeing the Unnamable's hand behind Malone's; almost holding the pencil for him, as it were.

In a very real sense, Malone is an exact mirror image of the Unnamable. Malone relates the experiences of Sapo/Macmann while waiting for his death in order to pass the time. The Unnamable, in like fashion, is telling the stories of Malloy, Moran and Malone so as to pass the time. He is hoping to 'die' into silence, as Malone is waiting to be born into death; " All is ready, Except me. I am being given, if I may venture the expression, birth to into death, such is my impression. The feet are clear already, of the great cunt of existence " (p.283). What is explored primarily in this novel, on the Unnamable's behalf, is the ultimate inadequacy and falsity of telling stories. Language

cannot create life, it only creates a fictional representation of it. The Unnamable's attempt to create other characters who will live his life for him is erroneous, and this novel brings the fact home finally to the nameless protagonist.

The personality of the Unnamable is but thinly veiled, so much so that Eugene Webb is forced to admit,

...When Malone says ' the forms are many in which the unchanging seeks relief from its formlessness ' and when he says of his own life ' I mean the business of Malone (since that is what I am called now) ' he sounds like the Unnamable trying to retain his sense of the distinction between himself and the characters he is talking about or who are talking through him. 3

The Unnamable's preference is not in fact to retain his sense of distinction between himself and his characters, but to lose it completely. He would far rather be able to become one with them than remain conscious of himself and his task. " Ah misery," he says, " will I never stop wanting a life for myself?" (p.393).

In Malone Dies he seems to accept finally the futility of hiding behind his surrogates and has accepted the reality of their purely fictional natures. He comes to grips with his own situation and allows the reader and himself, to be openly aware of the unreality of which he claims to be a part. The stories he will tell from now on will be different. They "will be neither beautiful nor ugly, they will be calm, there will be no ugliness of beauty or fever in them any more, they will be almost lifeless

like the teller" [Malone] (p.180).

Malone incorporates the knowledge of his predecessors and goes beyond that knowledge. Not only is he aware of the inadequacy of language, but he is also prepared to admit that his existence in time and space can be transmitted into a proliferation of fictional characters who only exist at a lesser or further remove from the self. Nevertheless, this ability does not imply that he is, as yet, capable of actually speaking of himself; it only means that his characters are, in a sense, autobiographical. This he understands when he comes to write in the first person: "Ah, if only I could find a voice of my own in all this babble, it would be the end of all their troubles, and of mine" (p.348).

Having established these criteria, Malone/the Unnamable gives us the benefit of what he has gleaned from his past 'lives'. These conclusions will constitute the basic attitudes and beliefs of the final hero, and as such, point out the general results of Beckett's own view of the human condition.

In the past, Malone tells us, his main fault was that he was too earnest and too grave. He wrote his stories about Molloy and Moran in a fever, because he desired to end all as quickly as he could. The only reason he continued was that somewhere among all the words was perhaps the right one or ones upon which he would happen to chance. Now,

though he understands the relative futility of those stories, he decides consciously to proceed, looking on the process as no more than a game.

This time I know where I am going, It is no longer the ancient night, the recent night. Now it is a game, I am going to play. I never knew how to play, till now.

(Malone Dies, p.180)

As Beckett plays his games, so Joyce professed to do so with Finnegans Wake. One recalls the letter to Harriet Weaver, in which he could almost be reiterating Malone's words:

I know it is no more than a game, but it is a game that I have learnt to play in my own way. Children may just as well play as not. The ogre will come in any case. 5

One of the 'ogres' in the trilogy is the understanding the Unnamable finally comes to, that "there was never anything to be got from those stories" (p.380).

Malone, however, dying as he is, is still involved with the act of creating fiction. He even expects to find that his stories will give him satisfaction. As Molloy and Moran, he remarks, he used not to know where he was going, but knew he would arrive. As Malone, the position is reversed. The way is well-charted. He methodically enumerates the stories he has decided to tell: one about a man and a woman; the second about a thing; and a final one about an animal. However, this time he feels there is little hope of coming to an end. Indeed, he never does succeed in telling his second and third planned stories.

Since the whole process is just a game, their importance lies not so much in the intention as in the result. The very fact that Malone does not adhere to his original plan implies that it was not very important in the first place. He plays with words, resigned to the fact that nothing of any import concerning his being will be evinced from them.

Malone does not know how he has arrived in the room he inhabits. It is just "a plain private room apparently, in what appears to be a plain ordinary house" (p.183). He speculates, "perhaps I was stunned with a blow, on the head, in a forest perhaps, yes, now that I speak of a forest, I vaguely remember a forest. All that belongs to the past" (p.183). In one breath he identifies himself with one of the strangers Molloy and Moran assault in the forest, and dismisses their part in his past life as something of no importance. What is occurring in the present always takes precedence, for the heroes of the trilogy, over what has taken place in the past.

Malone goes even further in claiming past identities as his own. Gazing out of his window and seeing the stars, he recalls that one night as he was doing so he saw himself in London. Murphy, with his penchant for astrology, living in a dingy flat in London, obviously springs to mind. Later on in the novel, Malone says that one result of his death will be "that it will all be over with the Merciers, Molloys, Morans and Malones..." (p.236).

He even goes so far as to admit having killed his apparently fictional characters: "How many have I killed, hitting them on the head or setting fire to them?" (p.236). Four came immediately to his mind, then a fifth, the butler in London. This latter is the man who lived above Celia and Murphy, and who was found dead, having committed suicide by cutting his throat.

Malone tried to bring these characters to life through fiction; however, they ended up being more than he could bear, so that he had to kill them off, or take their place. In this way, all of Beckett's previous novels are made to appear totally unrealistic in themselves. By rendering the experience of all the heroes up to this point invalid, Beckett is showing the reader that the constituent parts of that experience are also irrelevant. He is ironically heightening the ambiguity of communication by making a mockery of language and creative writing in general. Malone realises that words can be utilised as a means towards self-discovery, but only on a very superficial and negative level. The preceding experiences of all the Beckett heroes have shown what does not avail in pinning down and discussing the self. Philip Solomon points out that "Malone's real self [i.e. the Unnamable] cannot be a fiction because it lies outside the domain of language."⁵ Malone is just in that he knows that there is no use "indicting words" for they are "no shoddier than what they peddle" (p.195). Malone's

rationale is that since the self exists in a body which inhabits a human world, and that that world can be defined, then it must be possible to define the self in the same way. This belief has been forged in the previous existences he has experienced, but as yet is still very much a speculative belief. Malone knows that what he was attempting to do in the preceding novels was "to begin again, to try and live, cause to live, be another, in myself, in another...But little by little with a different aim, no longer in order to succeed, but in order to fail" (p.195). He echoes Beckett's own belief explicated in his dialogues with Georges Duthuit, that "to be an artist is to fail, as no others dare fail, that failure is his world, and to shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living"⁶.

Malone has learnt what Molloy and Moran seemed incapable of understanding; why he must write. Like both other characters he had no desire to do so, but like them also he resigned himself to the act in the end. In his present state, Malone perceives that the writing is done.

in order to know where I have got to, where he he has got to. At first I did not write, I just said the thing. Then I forgot what I had said. A minimum of memory is indispensable, if one is to live really.

(Malone Dies, p.207)

Ruby Cohn believes that Malone is referring to Beckett's pre-trilogy books when he says that at first he just

house. Both Molloy and Moran used crutches, and as far as the pipe-bowl is concerned, the only previous person we know who smoked a pipe was the shepherd to whom Moran spoke in Ballyba. These objects recall the previous adventures of the characters in the Unnamable's former stories before Malone Dies.

Malone himself is still prone to becoming attached to physical objects. He tells us that in his former days of wandering he loved to fall asleep holding a stone or a cone in his hand. His wish to transfer any feeling of human or divine love he may have to these inanimate objects seems to be the main reason for his acquisition of them.

And but for the company of these little objects which I picked up here and there, when out walking, and which sometimes gave me the impression that they too needed me, I might have been reduced to the society of nice people or to the consolations of some religion of other, but I think not.

(Malone Dies, p. 248)

Another reason for the importance of things in the Beckettian characters' lives is put forward by G.C. Barnard. He feels that the role they play is one "which seems to be to attach the ego to the world, or to act as lifebuoys to which the unstable self clings to save him from drowning in the sea of non-existence".⁸ In essence, this is true, but, when a character like the Unnamable has no things around him, he does not "drown in the sea of non-existence". Things have proved to be redundant, and though they serve the purpose Barnard puts forward for the preceding characters,

his argument does not hold true for the Unnamable.

A final and important function of objects is concerned with the heroes' intellectual apprehension of them. An object is a symbol of security in that it can be simply understood or because it is safely beyond comprehension. Molloy clings to the knife-rest because he knew he could never understand what its function was. Thus he could spend much time happily pondering on it without ever knowing its use. He is equally pleased by his sucking stones which he can understand and put to good use as a means of assuaging hunger and thirst. Moran takes great pleasure in watching and studying the dance of his bees because he says rapturously "there is something I can study all my life and never understand" (p.169). Malone is not only a witness and possessor of objects. He learns much, for example, from the loss of his stick. It falls under the bed while he is asleep and he wakes to find his only means of drawing his food and his pot towards him gone:

Now that I have lost my stick [he says] I realise what it is I have lost, and all it meant to me. And hence ascend, painfully to an understanding of the Stick, shorn of all its accidents, such as I had never dreamt of.

(Malone Dies, p.254)

Malone's experience is transposed and made symbolical in the case of the Unnamable. It is only in losing his stick that Malone may truly appreciate and

understand it; the Unnamable has attempted to lose himself in his characters in order to come to a clearer perception of himself. However able Malone is to comprehend the true meaning of all that the word 'stick' means and implies, the Unnamable grudgingly admits the failure of his attempt to do the same with himself:

I thought I was right in enlisting these sufferers of my pains. I was wrong. They never suffered my pains, their pains are nothing compared to mine, a mere tittle of mine, the tittle I thought I could put from me, in order to witness it.

(The Unnamable, pp.303-304)

Beckett is working towards the conclusion that absolute analyses of anything are impossible. Malone has no difficulty in describing to his reader the nature of his experience, but he goes no further than to express a concept. The stick is personified so as to imply the quintessential nature of the knowledge he has acquired. The actual knowledge remains intangible and unspecified. The same logic applies to the Unnamable's predicament. He can express himself as a concept, but is unable to define it by the methodology he is utilising.

The view of nature which Malone takes differs slightly from that of Molloy and Moran. It is a source of nostalgia and foreshadows the Unnamable's state of being without it. Confined to his bed, Malone can see no more than the sky and the birds which perch on the window-sill looking for food. He cannot see the sea,

but can hear it when it is high. However, it only draws him away from inner contemplation as it did more intensely and persistently for Molloy and Moran. Malone continues to return mentally "back again to the light, to the fields I so longed to love, to the sky all astir with little white clouds on white and light as snowflakes..." (p.197). Yet, like the Unnamable, he admits the pointlessness of a love of nature. Nothing that is not ultimately self-defining is worth anything, neither his characters and their stories, nor the beauty of the world in which he lives. The Unnamable knows that soon he must even dispense with Malone and attempt to declare and realise himself:

All is pretext, Sapo and the birds, Moll, the peasants, those who in the town seek one another, my doubts which do not interest me, my situation, my possessions, pretext for not coming to the point.... Yes, there is no good pretending it is hard to leave everything. The horror-worn eyes linger abject on all they have beseeched for so long, in a last prayer, the true prayer at last, the one that asks for nothing.

(Malone Dies, p.276).

Such is the situation in which Malone endures. He is no more than a further vehicle of the Unnamable. A little more has been learnt, a little more of the unimportant dispensed with through Malone. Malone's own story of Saposcat provides the reader with conclusions about the nature of man and his environment which the Unnamable will dispose of completely in his own novel. Therefore Saposcat's story is, in a sense, closing the

discussion about the tangible reality of the world and its nature. The Unnamable will have progressed to a stage where the external influences of the world will no longer have any effect on his immediate judgement.

Though Malone insists that he is totally unlike the character about whom he writes, there are striking similarities between Sapo/Macmann, Malone and preceding characters. Like Watt, as a boy attending school, Sapo "liked... the manipulation of concrete numbers. All calculation seemed to him idle in which the nature of the unit was not specified" (p.187). The urge to reduce everything to terms of logic and rationality is reiterated in Sapo. However, as it did not work for Watt, it will not do so either for Sapo. Like all the Beckettians save the Unnamable, Sapo loves Nature. His greatest joy is to watch the flight of the hawk; he would stand rapt "gazing at the long pennings, the quivering poise, the wings lifted for the plummet drop, the wild reascent, fascinated by such extremes of need, of pride, of patience and solitude" (p.171).

Molloy and Moran, we remember, were fascinated by the sight of shepherds and their flocks. Philip Solomon feels that "Molloy's desire to be one of the sheep is a death wish, a wish to abandon his quest and accompany the flock to the slaughter-house".⁹ However, I suggest that what fascinates Beckett's characters is rather the

comparative freedom and simplicity of an animal's existence. Their lives are ordered and dictated by the laws of nature. Animals are blessed with a total inability to question their existences, and as such are viewed as objects of envy by Beckett's characters. They merely exist, dying by the hand of man or by the work of nature. Animals are not victims of mental torture as are men. Sapo himself can make no sense of the "babel raging in his head, the doubts, desires, imaginings and dreads" (p.193). Mrs Lambert, the mother of a neighbouring farm family, is frustrated in the same way. She goes about her work and "at the same time angry unanswerable questions, such as, what's the use? fell from her lips" (p.202). The dichotomy between the comparative peace and order of the physical world is thus contrasted with the anguish experienced in the mental world. Sapo's story places emphasis on the predicament of coping with the human condition, and in so doing will heighten the pathos of the Unnamable's plight. In his desire to divest himself of all worldly influences in order to come closer to himself, the Unnamable has also denied himself the alleviations which that world offers.

The problems of communication and language in general which were symptoms of Molloy's and Moran's inner confusion are mirrored in Saposcat. Malone tells us that he was a patient and reasonable child, "struggling all alone for years to shed a little light upon himself".

(p.193). He discourses at length on the strange and almost wordless relationship the boy has with his family and with the Lamberts. Malone is aware of the inadequacy of words to express intangible thoughts. Therefore his description of the wordless relationship between the Lamberts and Saposcat implies an acknowledgement of his own incapacity to express the real quality of that relationship. Since the whole process of telling the story was initially described as a game, the concluding feeling the reader has is that Malone has tacitly surrendered to failure.

Ruby Cohn in her work Back To Beckett draws an interesting, though minor, parallel, based on the original version of Malone Dies. It concerns the etymology of the Lambert's name. She says that "When Malone's thoughts threaten to engulf Sapo, the author shifts abruptly to the Lamberts (in the French original *Les Louis* --- whose name comes from Balzac's realistic novel *Louis Lambert* about an unrealistic character)".¹⁰ Beckett's erudition is well hidden, but is present, nevertheless. The many references to philosophers, novelists and literati in general emphasise the fact that one is concerned, in Beckett's work, with *Man and Art*. The trilogy is not merely the stories of broken-down human beings who seem to get nowhere, but is concerned with their earnest attempts to explain and define themselves, the world and language.

Sapo, meanwhile, rapidly develops into what

is, by now, the traditional Beckettian figure. He wears a great-coat which covers him completely, screening him from view. His hat is marred by a wide rent which we are humourously told is "intended probably to facilitate the introduction of the skull" (p.228). As with Molloy's and Moran's hats, Sapo's is attached by a string to the topmost button of his coat. A further similarity between Sapo and the previous characters is to be found in his way of walking. Though he is physically fit, his walk could almost be a description of how he would appear if he were using crutches: "And so he went, often unnoticed, in spite of his strange walk, his halts and sudden starts" (p.204).

At one point in the narrative, Sapo is caught in the rain, and Malone uses the situation to sum up his ideas on birth and the reason for existence. Molloy has already covertly done so by the fact of searching for his mother and thereby returning to the symbolic initiation of man into the world. Sapocat, now called Macmann, is far from shelter, and he concludes from this that he is being punished for something:

And without knowing exactly what his sin was he felt full well that living was not a sufficient atonement for it or that this atonement was in itself a sin, calling for more atonement, and so on, as if there could be anything but life, for the living.

(Malone Dies, p.239)

This view is a bleak one. Beckett is implying that man is

born a guilty animal, who has no idea as to the nature of, or reason for, that guilt. Life is such a harsh and tortuous affair that it can only be seen as an attempt to exonerate oneself from blame.

Malone goes on condescendingly to interject his interpretation of Macmann's reasoning:

...the idea of guilt and punishment are confused together in his mind as those of cause and effect so often are in the minds of those who continue to think.

(Malone Dies, p.240)

It is an ironic comment, for Malone is just as guilty of continuing to think as Macmann. From Murphy on, Beckett's heroes are compulsive thinkers; their dilemma is that they refuse to have confidence in any form of knowledge.

Further, until they can know themselves absolutely, they will never be prepared to accept anything which pertains to themselves. Their perverted idealism leads to an admiration of the Beckettian's refusal to accept less than second-best; for "they have in common with the hero of tradition a need for complete possession of self at the price of solitude and estrangement. In their own way they are extremists, enemies of mediocrity".¹¹ Macmann and all Beckett's characters are tragic figures, in as much as they conform to Beckett's own definition. He claims that "the tragic figure represents the expiation of original and external sin of him and all his 'soci-malorum', the sin of having been born".¹²

Man chooses to blame the cause of his suffering on external events, as Macmann blames the rain for his discomfort, but Malone is scathing in his condemnation of this tendency:

For people are never content to suffer, but they must have heat and cold, rain and its contrary which is fine weather, and with that love, friendship, black skin and sexual and peptic deficiency for example, in short the furies and frenzies happily too numerous to be numbered of the body including the skull and its annexes, whatever that means, such as the clubfoot, in order that they may know very precisely what exactly it is that dares prevent their happiness from being unalloyed.

(Malone Dies, p. 242)

Just as the Unnamable wastes his time telling stories, so in like fashion does mankind waste time by refusing to face up to the real issues of being. Beckett, through Malone, chides his fellow man for being foolish enough to try and evade the problem. Malone is summarising the results of the heroes' experiences with the world. To be born into life necessitates the experience of suffering. To live in the world is to be constantly a prey to doubts concerning one's fellow man, one's environment and one's perceptions in general. Beckett roots the cause of all these doubts in man's failure to establish his own identity. If one knew oneself completely, then one's reaction to and in the world could be understood and defined completely also. In viewing the human condition in this way, Beckett concludes that it is the self which causes all the problems

encountered in life. Having linked all external difficulties found in the world in this fashion, Beckett will be able to concentrate finally on the problem involved in establishing the self which arises primarily from linguistics^t itself.

The final period of Macmann's story takes place in a lunatic asylum, known as the House of St John of God. Beckett writes from his own experience for this establishment does, in fact, exist. It lies about two miles from his original Dublin home. Though the landscape and environment of Beckett's fictional world are vague, there is sufficient evidence to assume that much of it is set in and around the Carrickmines area where he grew up as a child. The race-course mentioned in the radio-play All That Fall (1957) is there, as are the stone-cutters of whom Malone, musing upon his past memories, speaks.

The main event of Macmann's stay in the asylum is his love-affair with the woman named Moll, who is "immoderately favoured of both face and body" (p.257). Beckett takes great pains to communicate the grotesqueness of this woman. Her lips, Malone tells us, were "so broad and thick that they seemed to devour half the face, [and] were at first sight her most revolting features" (p.257). Once again we have an example of the disgust which the characters have for any kind of physical relationship. Like Swift, Beckett is blunt and blatant in his ironic descriptions. Love, a natural result of which is procreation,

is at all times to be abhorred. Molloy saw his mother much as Malone sees Moll, and we remember the pains Moran took to instil a hatred of all bodily functions in his son. The vehemence with which Macmann's and Moll's relationship is described is also, ironically enough, strangely humourous. Though some descriptive passages border on crudity, the tenderness with which they treat each other lends pathos to the harsh irony. Though they are both impotent, they yet succeed "in striking from their dry and feeble clips a kind of sombre gratification" (p.183). The inevitable futility of perpetrating any form of love for man is pointed out, but on a more objective level, Beckett also succeeds in parodying conventional romantic fiction: "their whole affair is an assault on the conventions of romantic love and in particular on the love stories one sees in weekly magazines".¹³

The pathos continues, and Macmann, at first a stranger to the ways of love, soon begins to take the initiative. One result of this is the development of the 'poetic' in himself. The verses he writes to Moll are gross parodies of love-poetry:

To the lifelong promised land
 Of the nearest cemetery
 With his Sucky hand in hand
 Love it is at last leads Hairy.

(Malone Dies, p262)

Death is seen as an idyllic state, without which their bliss is incomplete. Malone sarcastically speculates on

what Macmann might have achieved if "he had become acquainted with true sexuality at a less advanced age" (p.263), but his apparent hatred for Macmann and mankind in general arises more from his despair over the meaninglessness of existence than from a cruel and sadistic interpretation of events.

Wearied and sickened by the considerations his tale is provoking, he abruptly decides to kill off Moll in an attempt to change the subject. Thus ends Macmann's temporary companionship. Love, an important element normally in the course of a human life, is mocked and ridiculed with an intensity that tends to shock the unsuspecting. Of all the aspects of existence which the Unnamable, through Malone, has attempted to define, love appears to be the one which attracts the most scorn. In the light of the general interpretation provided of the behaviour of Beckett's characters, the reason for this is clear. To acquire knowledge of another person in any way is farcical if one cannot at first define what the knowledge is that one seeks. The only way this may be achieved is when one's exploration of another is founded in a totally explained and absolute knowledge of the self.

Beckett has consistently prepared the way for the issues to be discussed in the final novel. The particular standards he has set up for his characters are by now familiar, as is the mental climate of those

characters. In Malone Dies, Beckett gives us an idea of the kind of place in which the Unnamable will be found. Malone makes constant reference to the nature of his room, and some of its unusual characteristics will be developed in The Unnamable.

It is never light in Malone's room, nor does it appear to be in shadow. It is rather "in a kind of leaden light that makes no shadow, so that it is hard to say from what direction it comes" (p.220). The Unnamable will describe his environment in like manner: "This grey first murky, then frankly opaque, is luminous none the less... Is it I" he asks, "who casts the faint light that enables me to see what goes on under my nose?" (p.300). The nature of his room makes Malone feel at times, that he is in a head, and that the six planes which enclose him are, in fact, of solid bone. The Unnamable, on the other hand, supposes that ultimately one of his desires is to be outside of what seems to be "merely the inside of my distant skull where once I wandered, now am fixed, lost for tininess or straining against the walls..." (p.300).

Both Malone and the Unnamable hear nothing in their worlds but the sound of their own inner voices. Even the woman who ministers to Malone's needs never speaks. In the final novel, Malone is found wheeling regularly and silently around the Unnamable, thus recalling

Malone's wish "to turn, dead on dead, about poor mankind, and never have to die anymore, from among the living" (p.264).

As Malone approaches the end of his narrative, and therefore his 'death', he notes that the leaden light becomes more intense and is riddled with little tunnels "through the brightness" (p.283). His head, he says, will be the last to die, which is truly fitting for, as F.J. Hoffman notes, "The mind always remains, in Beckett's world, long after the body has ceased being endurable".¹⁴ In the Unnamable's story of Worm, the image of these tunnels is used again. They become the holes that all the characters, including himself, attempt to fill up with words. They presume, as did Molloy, that this task is part of, or perhaps all of, what they must do to attain their goal.

In one sense, Malone succeeds where Molloy and Moran ostensibly failed. Molloy never reached his mother, only her room. Moran did not succeed in finding Molloy, but came to a better understanding of himself. Malone makes only one demand of himself at the beginning of his monologue :

All I ask is that this last of mine, as long as it lasts, should have living for its theme, that is all... All I ask is to know, before I abandon him whose life has so well begun that my death and mine alone prevents him from living on, from winning, losing, joying, suffering, rotting and dying, and that even had I lived he would have waited before he died, for his body to be dead.

(Malone Dies, p.198)

Malone's death is the only thing that stops the story of Macmann, just as Malone's body dies before the Unnamable finally takes up the narrative himself in his own novel. All characters, whether fictions of Malone or of the Unnamable, expire simultaneously at the end of Malone Dies. The emphasis will no longer be on the world and its dilemmas. The journeys of the characters through that world explored its nature and highlighted its barrenness. One conclusion above all resulted from the experiences of the Beckettians. Man is a rational animal; but the first step to be taken before he can apply this ability to rationalise externals, is to rationalise the self.

The emphasis can therefore be seen to have shifted from the physical voyage in Molloy to the verbal one in Malone Dies. Descartes' ideal was the idea of an objective thinker who remains outside of, and untouched by, those rationalistic processes he uses. Though Malone is closer to this ideal than any of his predecessors, his inability to be detached from what concerns him will be reflected even more intensely in the final novel. In the light of this Cartesian concept, Hans Joachim-Shultz illustrates the problem that Malone has faced up to but is unable to overcome:

... the fluidity of such concepts as positive and negative, external and internal, continues to interfere with a thinking game whose pieces must be solid, must represent immutable functions. For this reason the Beckettian player finally

wants to give up. He cannot play with fluid pieces unless he becomes fluid himself. Developing, he would not play anymore, he would live. 15

Life, as we have seen, is something which the Beckettian heroes find impossible to rationalise and therefore tolerate. Despite the existences in the world which the Unnamable has forced on his characters, and experienced vicariously himself, he refuses the prospect of actually living himself. Since he does so refuse, Beckett has given him a "pensum" to perform, to speak of himself. Both alternatives are fraught with dilemmas, contradictions and suffering. The Unnamable explores that hero's endeavours to resolve the problem.

Notes to Chapter Four

- 1 G.C. Barnard, Samuel Beckett: A New Approach: A Study of the Novels and Plays (London: Dent, 1970), p. 44.
- 2 John Fletcher, The Novels of Samuel Beckett (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), p. 152.
- 3 Eugene Webb, Samuel Beckett: A Study of His Novels (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1970), p. 77.
- 4 Richard Ellman, ⁿJames Joyce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 594.
- 5 Philip H. Solomon, The Life After Birth: Imagery in Samuel Beckett's Trilogy (Romance Monographs Inc.: No. 15: University of Mississippi Press, 1975), p. 43.
- 6 Samuel Beckett, Georges Duthuit, Jacques Putnam, Bram Van Velde (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 13.
- 7 Ruby Cohn, Back to Beckett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 99.
- 8 Barnard, p. 48.
- 9 Solomon, p. 120.
- 10 Cohn, p. 94.
- 11 Rosette Lamont, "Beckett's Metaphysics of Choiceless Awareness", in Samuel Beckett Now, ed. and with an Introduction by Melvin J. Friedman, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 205.
- 12 J. Jacobson and W.R. Mueller, The Testament of Samuel Beckett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 105.
- 13 Michael Robinson, The Long Sonata of the Dead: A Study of Samuel Beckett (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1969), p. 183.
- 14 F.J. Hoffman, "The Elusive Ego: Beckett's M's", in Samuel Beckett Now, ed. and with an Introduction by Melvin J. Friedman, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 51.

- 15 Hans Joachim Shultz, This Hell of Stories: A Hegelian Approach to the Novels of Samuel Beckett (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1973), p.47.

CHAPTER FIVE

When man seeks to define himself by rejecting his surroundings, his memories, and even his habitual language, he is at the edge of nowhere. The protagonist of the final novel in the trilogy, originally to have been entitled "Mahood", is bodiless, nameless and exists in a strange grey half-world. The environment reflects the nature of his internal state. The Unnamable is certain neither of his own existence nor of his environment. The circular nature of his position, and the reader's, is frustrating. For the reader knows only what the narrator tells him, and that narrator claims to know nothing. Everything he says is merely an opinion, and even these are purely speculative. The reader searches for an explanation of the Unnamable's predicament as he, in turn, seeks reasons and facts which may account and explain it. The reader is, at least, free to draw conclusions from the hero's words, though the Unnamable himself remains ignorant to the end.

In commenting on his work up to and including The Unnamable, Beckett seems to be equally aware of the impression of disintegration which predominates in this final novel:

The French work brought me to a point [he says]

where I felt I was saying the same thing over and over again. For some authors writing gets easier the more they write. For me it gets more and more difficult. For me the area gets smaller and smaller... At the end of my work there's nothing but dust... In the last book, 'L'Innomable', there's complete disintegration. No 'I', no 'have', no 'being'. No nominative, no accusative, no verb. There's no way to go on.¹

Beckett's obvious preoccupation with the disintegration of linguistics provides the reader with the main thematic concern of The Unnamable. This concern, however, is by no means self-evident when reading the text. Having read the first two novels as fictions of the Unnamable, the reader is naturally expecting to find conclusive answers to questions raised previously, within the body of the final protagonist's narration. However, before he is very far into the hero's monologue, he will find a number of reasons which necessitate a change of focus.

The Unnamable is alone in his world. He is, he tells us, totally incapable of any motion, for he has no physical body as such. He claims ignorance on all counts and thinks just enough to "preserve me from going silent" (p.307). He has a "pensum" to perform, a task which dictates that he must speak of himself. The completion of this is unfortunately hindered by the inescapable fact that he claims to have no words but the words of others with which to do so.

However, before discussing the results of his predicament, it is necessary to attempt to outline

what are apparently the nature and rules of the world in which he exists. It has been mentioned before that Beckett attempts to give some valid interpretation of the reality in which we exist. He chooses to place his characters in an environment similar to our own. However, the similarities are only sufficiently paralleled for us to understand that it is our own world about which he writes. Since he is aware of the fact that any one vision is ultimately confined to a single perception and interpretation, the distortion Beckett perpetrates enables a universality and transcendent quality to colour his ostensibly subjective view. In The Unnamable, Beckett has dispensed with even those parallels and similarities with which we are now familiar. Dr. Supti-Sen sees this aspect of Beckett's endeavours in a similar light:

His obligation as an artist, to make some pattern out of the 'colossal fiasco' of experience, and his inability to do so in realistic and naturalistic terms, have made him turn, in desperation, to the concept of a super-reality.²

The super-reality we experience in this final novel is unique. It is completely unidentifiable with anything relating to man's mental and physical environment. He is simply the Cartesian definition of a man; he is a 'thing that thinks',

The hero is in a state of total solitude, having no companionship of any kind beyond that of his own invention. He exists in a vacuum, and the whole novel

is made up of his attempts to describe that void, identify himself, and define the causes which explain both.

We have seen that in the first two novels, the Unnamable has been experiencing life vicariously through his characters. He has thus been able to recognise what elements in that life are redundant in the search for the self. He has also given the reader a view of the human condition, which in his terms seems excessively bleak and undesirable.

The Unnamable does not as yet have the 'gift' of life. He is simply a consciousness existing in a state prior to birth. This, however, does not mean to imply that he is but a conscious foetus. The protagonist speculates on his own state:

... the slut has yet to menstruate capable of whelping me, that should singularly narrow the field of research, a sperm dying of cold, in the sheets, feebly wagging its little tail, perhaps I'm a drying sperm, in the sheets of an innocent boy, even that takes time, no stone must be left unturned, one mustn't be afraid of making a howler.

(The Unnamable, p.379)

Despite the fact that he has not lived his own life, he is obviously allowed to have knowledge of the world of men through the characters he creates. Furthermore, he has enough information to enable them to function plausibly in terms of that world. Though he is now contemptuous of those characters, he has obviously taken pleasure in relating their stories. This pleasure

derives primarily from the fact that in losing himself in the telling of their experiences, he had neither to be concerned nor voluble about his own predicament. In experiencing their adventures, however, he has not lived his own life. He has brought his characters to life, but for him, the unidentified 'they' he invents as the possible cause of his situation, could never fool him into believing that he has really been alive:

They could clap an artificial anus in the hollow of my hand and still I wouldn't be there, alive with their life, not far short of a man, just barely a man, sufficiently a man to have hopes of one day being one, my avatars behind me.

(The Unnamable, p.315)

The Unnamable seems to have two alternatives. He may either accept a life in the world or he must fulfil his "pensum". The first of these alternatives he has already rejected. The knowledge of life and man which he has been able to ascertain from his stories has led him to conclude that to choose that kind of future is absurd. The main reason why he finds human existence absurd, apart from those highlighted in the previous novels, is *that* he cannot understand it.

...they want me to be, this, that, to howl, stir, crawl out of here, be born, die, listen, I'm listening, it's not enough, I must understand, I'm doing my best, I can't understand...

(The Unnamable, p.386)

But we know that the reason he cannot understand the world is primarily because he cannot comprehend himself.

He does admit to having learnt something from his fictional surrogates, but we are also informed that since the knowledge is applicable solely to the characters which were under discussion, it has no functional validity with regard to the Unnamable himself:

Some of this rubbish has come in handy on occasions, I don't deny it, on occasions which would never have arisen if they had left me in peace. I use it still to scratch my arse with.

(The Unnamable, p.298)

This information catches the reader unawares. As each hero of the novels recalled and subsequently rejected the validity of the main character in the novel which came before, that work was abrogated. Though each novel acted as a further step and showed a progression of sorts, each one was supposedly fraudulent in the light of that which followed. The crescendo built up prepares the reader for the paradoxical coup-de-grâce in the final novel. Not only does it point out the absurdity of the previous works, The Unnamable forces the reader to face up to the fact that the questions posed in the preceding novels cannot even hope to be answered in a reality such as ours.

In placing the final protagonist in the unreality we find him, isolated from all human influences, Beckett proves only that the problems surrounding self-identity and the nature of the world cannot be analysed

and interpreted in what is obviously the limited realm of the human intellect. His attempts to find answers for the things of reality have forced him to turn to the unreal to find some kind of solution.

What both Beckett and the Unnamable seem to be searching for is a method whereby the self may be defined in absolute terms. In other words, they attempt to give expression to that which in a person is really and intrinsically he (in contradistinction to what is adventitious), in terms which show that it exists without relation to any other being, and which is free from condition or mental limitation. In his discussion of the links between Hegelian philosophy and the tenets of the Beckettian heroes, Hans Joachim-Shultz refers to what Hegel terms "the unhappy consciousness". Hegel defines it thus:

... the tragic fate that befalls certainty of self which aims at being absolute, at being self-sufficient. It is consciousness of the loss of everything of significance in this certainty of itself, and of the loss even of this knowledge of certainty of self --- the loss of substance as well as of self; it is the bitter pain which finds expression in the cruel words "God is dead". 3

Though Joachim-Shultz does not claim that Beckett was influenced in any way by Hegel, the definition still stands as an extremely appropriate one for the mental state of the Unnamable.

Having rejected life in the world, the

Unnamable chooses rather to take on the task of speaking about himself. He is concerned solely with identifying and establishing the certainty of his own existence. Since this is his only concern, all else becomes inappreciable. It follows that, without any other considerations besides himself, it will be impossible to institute any system of persuasive values for himself. This, in turn, induces an uncertainty as to the reality of his own existence.

Before the Unnamable turns to a discussion of his own quandary per se, he succeeds in telling two more stories. The first deals with a character, whom he initially calls Basil and afterwards Mahood. The second is about a character named Worm. The whole idea of changing or forgetting names, which we have met before in Molloy and Malone Dies, serves to point out his contempt for a method which claims to identify a personality by simply assigning a name to him. For the Unnamable, establishing an identity is a far more complex process:

Perhaps it is by trying to be Worm that I'll finally succeed in being Mahood, I hadn't thought of that. Then all I have to do is be Worm. Which no doubt I shall achieve by trying to be Jones. Then all I have to do is be Jones.
(The Unnamable, p. 339)

Though this kind of speculation gives one solution to his problem, it becomes meaningless when he sees the error in his own logic: "I could employ fifty wretches for this sinister operation and still be short of a fifty-first

to close the circuit, that I know without knowing what it means" (p.338).

The Unnamable assumes the first person in talking about Mahood and Worm. He puts Mahood in two different situations. In the first, he is a one-legged, one-armed wanderer, who is making his way, after a long journey, towards his family. At all times they can witness his approach and constantly encourage him verbally. Time is completely distorted, so that the Unnamable is able to state: "At the particular moment I am referring to, I mean when I took myself for Mahood, I must have been coming to the end of a world tour, perhaps not more than two or three centuries to go" (p.317). Unfortunately Mahood's family all die of ptomaine poisoning before he succeeds in completing his journey.

The most interesting aspect of this story is that it strengthens the view of love and birth already commented on scathingly in the preceding novels. Though the Unnamable refuses to accept the possibility that he is, in fact, Mahood, he agrees and disagrees with various elements in the tale. As a result of Mahood's physical decrepitude, he suffers much. This the Unnamable understands for "I am there to be pained" (p.322), he says. On the other hand, he is supposed to be upset by the death of his family. This conception of his own reaction he rejects utterly:

But the bouquet was this story of Mahood's in which I appear as upset at having been delivered so economically of a pack of blood relations, not to mention the two cunts into the bargain, the one for ever accursed that ejected me into this world and the other, infundibuliform, in which, pumping my likes, I tried to take my revenge.

(The Unnamable, p.323)

Thus the opinion of the more tender sides of life is the same; women and love are objects of contempt and loathing. They cause life and, as such, are to be abhorred.

The second situation in which the Unnamable discusses Mahood is even more bizarre. Mahood is now stuck in a jar, having lost all his members, "except the one-time virile" (p.327). Only his head protrudes from a cang. He is incapable of speech, and serves as an advertisement for the restaurant the menu of which is fixed to the side of the jar. Marguerite is the proprietress of this establishment. It is she who carries out the necessary functions of feeding and caring for Mahood. The fraudulence of Mahood's real existence is confirmed by the idle supposition the Unnamable throws out:

I may therefore legitimately suppose that the one-legged wayfarer of a moment ago and the wedge-headed trunk in which I am now marooned are simply two phases of the same carnal envelope, the soul being notoriously immune from deterioration.

(The Unnamable, p.330)

The main preoccupation of this revised version of Mahood is his need to have his existence acknowledged by external witnesses. Having gone through

a variety of lives, enumerated in Murphy onwards, the Unnamable refuses to leave this present state without some guarantee that it has aided in the process of self-identification. Even if his existence is witnessed by two passers-by, and he then dies, he feels he shall, at least, be sure of having lived:

I for my part have no longer the least desire to leave this world, in which they keep trying to foist me, without some kind of assurance that I was really there, such as a kick in the arse, for example, or a kiss, the nature of the attention is of little importance, provided I cannot be suspected of being its author.

(The Unnamable, p.342)

The two primary concerns of the Unnamable are thus symbolically implied in Mahood's two existences. In the first, the protagonist is travelling towards a goal, but various arbitrary elements block the successful achievement of it. In the second, the problem is that of ascertaining his own existence. This will be done through its verification by objective and detached parties. They must not be biased towards that task, as he feels he is in his subjectivity. Ruby Cohn adds a further dimension to the interpretation of Mahood's experiences:

Mahood, the type-character of manhood, has been propelled through two stories that summarise and parody the first two volumes of Beckett's trilogy...--- the inventive voyager that is Molloy, and the invalid waiter that is Malone.⁴

The second character with whom the Unnamable deals is called Worm. He is the only character whom the

Unnamable creates to exist in the void with himself. At many points in the narrative it becomes difficult to distinguish which is Worm and which the Unnamable. The anomalies are considerably clarified if one sees Worm as being the Unnamable's conception of his own early existence. Worm is nevertheless an invention and must be viewed as one at all times.

This portrayal of Worm is useful for it seems also to express the Beckettian concept of the possible way in which a human consciousness comes into being. Like Malone, the Unnamable orders his story. His intention is to "go back to his beginnings [Worm's] and then to go on with, follow him patiently through the various stages taking care to show their fatal concatenation which have made him what I am" (p.352).

Worm is at first an object; he is hardly even a thinking, feeling consciousness. The earliest stage in his development is that he perceives the sound of voices. He cannot differentiate between them, they are merely a continuous intermittent murmur. The instant that he hears this "sound that will never stop" (p.349), he has begun the process of "awakening" (p.349). At that moment, apparently, he ceases to be Worm. Due to the arbitrary influence of the voices and the part they will now play in his development and self-knowledge, Worm ceases to be solely himself. He is in the process of becoming a

combination of all the different external and internal environmental factors.

After a period of listening, Worm will begin to ask questions out of his innate, and presumably also human, curiosity. The first question will be "Where am I?". "From it", the Unnamable says as Worm, "when it hasn't been answered, I'll rebound towards others, of a more personal nature, much later" (p.349).

As yet, Worm is incapable of any motion. In order to provide a stimulus to movement, the Unnamable conceives a new element in Worm's world. He imagines lights which glow and fade, inspiring curiosity in Worm as to their meaning. The lights also torment him. As long as Worm does not give in to the temptation to move towards the lights, he will be safe. For to reach these lights means that the commanding 'they' will be able to snatch Worm through the grey barrier into life. The Unnamable judges his present state to be the preferable one:

It is a blessing for him he cannot stir, even though he suffers because of it, for it would be to sign his life-warrant, to stir from where he is, in search of a little calm and something of the silence of old.

(The Unnamable, p.358)

Since Worm is now able to see and hear, the Unnamable rationalises that he must have a head. The emphasis all through Worm's story is on the fact that all

physical attributes are a result of suffering. The noises, which at first impinge on worm's consciousness and which torment him, provoke the growth of an ear. This may enable him to define and perhaps then rid himself of the irritating hum. The lights which impose provoke, for the same reason, the birth of an eye. This process will continue until Worm has acquired a whole body, when he will choose to be taken into life in the hopes that that situation will prove to be less agonising than the one in which he now finds himself.

The Unnamable foresees bitterly that Worm, from being a silent, unthinking, ignorant consciousness, blissfully unaware of suffering in any form, will become someone whose only goal will be to

...discover, without further assistance from without, the alleviations of flight from self, that's all, he won't go far, he needn't go far. Simply to find within himself a palliative for what he is, through no fault of his own.

(The Unnamable, p.367)

Beckett's implication here would seem to be that human existence is synonymous at all times with suffering; to be is to suffer. That suffering is caused primarily by the inability to make sense of the elements of human thought and environment.

In the first two novels of the trilogy, the Unnamable was given guiding principles about the nature of the world. Through his delegates he has learnt which

elements in that life are unnecessary, and disposed of them. The result of this refinement is the Unnamable's own condition. His purpose has been to "provide me at least with a vague idea of the elements to be eliminated from the setting in order for all to be empty and silent" (p.334).

As I have pointed out, there are two apparent ways of achieving this state of silent emptiness. Either the Unnamable must accept life and die in the normal mortal way; or else he must remain in his void and speak of himself. Since Molloy and company have done no more than paint a bleak view of human existence for the Unnamable, he rejects it. Furthermore, the Unnamable is truly a Hegelian 'unhappy consciousness'. He has explored what Joachim-Shultz defines as "the possibilities of ending the things that form the world of which he is, and is not, a part, a world which calls him to an existence in time, through death, life and death."⁵

The Unnamable's exploration of the second alternative forms the basis of the rest of the novel. However, as Ruby Cohn points out, "The bulk of the book dissolves the world in order to define the self. And yet the very urge to define has been earned through living in a human suffering world."⁶ Unfettered by external influences, without the burden of a body, what kind of conclusions does the Unnamable come to?

Initially, the reader must ask himself for a description of the mental environment and state in which the protagonist functions. This established, he can progress towards a definition of the apparently inescapable dilemma the Unnamable is in. Conclusions as to the points Beckett is making should then follow logically.

The Unnamable is above all a novel of speculation. The Unnamable utilises this as the normative framework for his own life:

What can one do but speculate, speculate until one hits on the happy speculation? When all goes silent and comes to an end, it will be because the words have been said, those it behoved to say, no need to know which, they'll be there somewhere, in the heap, in the torrent...

(The Unnamable, p.369)

In the pages of the novel, he ruminates upon God, man, existence, language, his characters, the nature of his world, and above all, himself. However, he is alone. He peoples his void with the Malones, Mahoods, and Worms of his own imagination. He has had access to the world of mankind, but has not lived there himself. In his need to identify and establish his own being he has learnt that all external worldly things are inefficacious. Therefore he is of the opinion that to find himself he must needs be totally alone. If Murphy was described as a "seedy solipsist", the Unnamable can be viewed as an absolute one.

His problem is superficially simple. One

may speculate eternally about the truth or reality of everything. However, one must then be prepared to accept the conclusions one comes to as being absolutely valid; otherwise they are totally useless as functional principles. The Unnamable chooses to speculate in a complete void. He has no sounding-board other than himself upon which to test the validity of the theses he puts forward. Since he is also concerned with establishing his own existence beyond doubt, even his own opinion will be seen by him as abrogative. We are continually made aware of the resultant frustration the final protagonist experiences. His reaction is simultaneously stoical and idealistic. Of all of Beckett's characters he is the most aware that all endeavours to define and explain reality are futile. Nevertheless, in spite of this, we find that "his very lucidity only makes him the more frustrated at his inability to stop trying to devise explanations."⁷

Without any other objective viewpoints with which to compare and contrast his own, any system of values he sets up is made meaningless in his own mind. The reader might easily conclude, therefore, that all the Unnamable must do to free himself from his paradoxical situation is to choose to live in a human world, and, in this milieu, supply himself with a variety of speculations. He may then make a choice of values and proofs dependent on his own personal predilections, in order to live, at

last, at peace with himself and the world.

But there is a further level to be considered, and the Unnamable in his ignorance, puts his finger on it for the reader: "It all boils down to a question of words" (p.335). The whole question of language and communication which Beckett has referred to again and again in his novels, returns with renewed vigour in The Unnamable, begging to be resolved.

Descartes' proof of man's existence was that he thought --- therefore, he was. This is not enough for the new breed of Cartesians which the Unnamable emulates. He must be capable of expressing that existence in language. David Hesla explains part of the problem, but misses the point slightly by neglecting to furnish an interpretation of the 'they' the Unnamable frequently blames in his speculative verbal peregrinations. Hesla tells us that "since in the trilogy speaking is identical with being, the fact that the Unnamable has no words of his own but only 'their' words means that he has no being of his own but only 'their' being",⁸

It has already been shown that the Unnamable is in a state of complete solitude; all those he speaks of are pure inventions. Therefore 'they' are just a further example of the protagonist's speculations. If we assume him to be essentially human, as we do, then his raillery of 'them' and 'their' words is nonsense. We must see this

aspect of the Unnamable's monologue as a manifestation of the mistrust he holds for a language which cannot express the self. At first sight, this conclusion also appears absurd, but, if we examine the structure of language closely, we begin to see the logic of the Unnamable's feeling.

The Unnamable seeks a language which is capable of describing and expressing absolutes; furthermore, it must also supply him with a means which will be capable of stating systems of ethics and values which cannot be disputed. In other words, the Beckettian hero will be satisfied with a language which will describe and interpret one's existence and code of ethics without any possibility of contradiction. However, the verbal or written expression of these concepts is actually unfeasible. For a sentence which expresses empirical propositions of any kind is not equivalent to a sentence which contains normative ethical symbols. In fact we will find that ethical statements are, completely unverifiable. For example, if Moran had stated to his son Jacques that to miss Sunday Mass was wrong, his words would express one of two things. Either his sentence is merely expressing a moral judgement concerning a type of conduct, or, on the other hand, it constitutes a sentence which states that a certain type of behaviour is abhorrent to the moral sense of a particular society. In either case the sentence does not serve as an absolute

but as a particular moral viewpoint. It does not stand by itself, but is coloured by its interpreter and his interpretation. If we accept this to be true, it follows logically that if ethical concepts are impossible to analyse, those concepts are, in some sense, merely the abstract and vague symbols for a realistic, if completely intangible, idea. Therefore the presence of an ethical symbol in a sentence adds nothing to its factual content.

We are reminded, at this point, of the Unnamable's words: "we must stick to the facts, for what else is there, to stick to, to cling to when all founders, but the facts..." (p.363). A further example should clarify the position completely. If we say, for example, that it is wrong that the Unnamable should suffer as he does, we are not stating anything more than the fact that he suffers. In adding that this state is wrong, we are not making any further statement about the Unnamable's condition. We are simply evincing a moral disapproval of it. Thus it is clear that ethics is always defined in our language in terms of judgement. It cannot be held to transcend human opinion, therefore becoming absolute. Another person may hold that the Unnamable's suffering is not wrong, and strictly speaking, we cannot contradict that opinion. Both views are not making any statements of fact, merely expressing certain moral sentiments. These conclusions will apply to the world and nature of

aesthetics. For when we call something 'perfect' or 'ugly', we are again merely expressing certain feelings which evoke a certain response.

Since we cannot claim to be able to describe anything validly which exists outside the realms of our sensory apprehension, the existence of God is also impossible to verify. We are forced to conclude, therefore, that any information we think we derive from our ethical and moral experience is merely giving us a better idea of our own physical and psychological make-up. If we attempt to utilise ethical and moral concepts to form the basis of any metaphysical theory about the existence of a world of values, as distinct from a world of facts, we must realise that those concepts have been, by definition, falsely analysed.

In applying this kind of rationale to the Unnamable's problem, it throws a great deal of light on his preoccupation with words. If language cannot be shown to pin down any moral or ethical absolutes whatsoever, it must also be incapable of expressing and establishing the self beyond all doubt. Yet this is what the Unnamable wishes it to do. Therefore he is struggling not so much with the fact of his own being, but with the problem of how to express that self in a language which is ill-furnished to do so. The ambiguities of our language form an insuperable block for this final protagonist of the trilogy,

Man's ability to conceive of elements in himself which supercede reality and become part of a meta-physical world does not necessarily mean that those elements may be adequately or absolutely proved through our language. The Unnamable's concern with this subject reflects Beckett's. The latter is a creator of words, and is therefore intensely involved in the complex matter of language. What he is showing the reader, finally, is that since man must suffer, an ability to verbalise that suffering validly is one way of palliating his own existence. However, Beckett also proves that language is by no means a stable basis for any interpretation or conclusion about the human condition. Since the only ostensible form of communication and analysis man has is through language, and that is found to be erroneous and faulty, man's state is infinitely more despairing and tragic. The only redeeming quality in life is, it would appear, man's capacity for endurance. However much perception and understanding may serve as aids in man's endurance of his own existence, they also can only properly be defined through language.

Ignorant as the Unnamable remains to the end of the novel, he illustrates the intensity of man's faculty for endurance. Blind to all systems of logic as a result of his perverted integrity, he, nevertheless, manages to institute a number of resolutions, which inspire hope and keep him going on his myopic way:

...when questions fail there are always plans...
 when plans fail there are always aspirations,
 it's a knack, you must say it slowly, If only
 this, if only that, that gives you time... What
 else, opinions, comparisons, anything rather
 than laughter, all helps, can't help helping,
 to get you over the pretty pass....

(The Unnamable, p.401)

Language has thus proved itself to be the
 final and eternal paradox of man's nature. The Unnamable
 yearns to speak of himself and then enter into the "true
 silence, the one I'll never have to break any more, when
 I won't have to listen anymore, when I can dribble in my
 corner my head gone, my tongue dead, the one I have tried
 to earn, that I thought I could earn" (p.393). He can
 never attain it, however, for to do so he must overcome
 the insurmountable barrier which language puts in his way.

Beckett's final and crushing contempt is
 reserved for words, He has already shown us the futility
 of man's humdrum existence in the preceding novels. In
The Unnamable he expresses his frustration at the tools
 of his trade. His frustration is ours also, for in all his
 fiction, mankind is the ever-present constant. Like the
 Unnamable, his final answer is only a blind command to
 continue despite all, for "In the silence you don't know,
 you must go on, I can't go on. I'll go on" (p.414).

Notes to Chapter Five

- 1 Quoted in Michael Robinson, The Long Sonata of the Dead: A Study of Samuel Beckett (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1969), p. 208.
- 2 Dr. Supti Sen, Samuel Beckett: His Mind and Art (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1970), p. 26.
- 3 Hans Joachim-Shultz, This Hell of Stories: A Hegelian approach to the novels of Samuel Beckett (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1973), p. 102.
- 4 Ruby Cohn, Back to Beckett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 105.
- 5 Joachim-Shultz, p. 73.
- 6 Ruby Cohn, Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut (New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press, 1962), p. 114.
- 7 Eugene Webb, Samuel Beckett: A Study of His Novels (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1970), p. 31.
- 8 David H. Hesla, The Shape of Chaos: An Interpretation of the Art of Samuel Beckett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 127.

CONCLUSION

Beckett would appear to have brought linguistics to a point of no return. Through the three novels of the trilogy he has shown how inadequate words are, ultimately, to realise or describe the human condition. The final protagonist has elicited a very barren set of conclusions from his exploration of man and his world. Suffering appears to be the one sure factor of human existence, and we are further shown that that suffering is impossible either to rationalise or to minimise. Not only has the starkness of human life been apparently posed by Beckett, but this eventual conclusion seems to have left no room for variables or contradictions.

Since his vision is as valid as any other, in one sense, Beckett has achieved the expression of an absolute criterion of his own. But he is an idealist, and in his refusal to allow Molloy, Malone or any of his characters to accept anything less than the best, he illustrates the unwillingness to compromise of the pure artist. Unfortunately his idealism is impractical. There is no solution for Beckett's question concerning language. It is not possible to render absolutes in terms of words. However, man does obviously apprehend the concepts.

Beckett feels that the chaos of our world

has to be realised, but in such a way that it would not try to say that the chaos was really something else. Therefore, for him, the form itself becomes the preoccupation, "because it exists as a problem separate from the material it accomodates. To find a form that accomodatēs the mess, that is the task of the artist now."¹ The question the trilogy focuses on is that of the potential of language to verbalise man's essence and experience. Theoretically, as Beckett proves, this is impossible for language to do. He stops one step too soon. Practically speaking, we must realise and accept that:

To turn experience into speech --- that is, to classify, to categorise, to conceptualise, to grammarise, to syntectify it --- is always a betrayal of experience, a falsification of it; but only so betrayed can it be dealt with at all;... 2

The trilogy only points out the former half of the above conclusion. By virtue of the fact that experience cannot be validly transposed into language, we must, of necessity, accept that the 'falsified' expression is the nearest the artist can approach the absolute realisation of the self and its experience.

The above quotation continues with the words "... and only in so dealing with it did I ever feel a man, alive and kicking." To choose to deal with a 'falsified' reality is the choice the Unnamable refuses to make. In one sense, the Unnamable is thus the only

'hero' of the trilogy. He admits failure but refuses to accept defeat, and it is his endurance which remains constant and triumphs in the end. While Molloy was prepared to give up and sink into a ditch, the Unnamable seems to end only when Beckett's pen is finally lifted from the page.

Though Beckett's idealism is to be admired for its uncompromising adherence to the truth, it is unlikely that it would prove functional were it to be subjected to practical application. The Beckettians dream of an ideal world. But they will never find it, for any absolute can only exist in the intangible realms of the mind. Through the journeys of his four characters, the author has highlighted the negative aspects and views of human existence. In spite of this, what remains at the end of Beckett's trilogy, as the predominating and positive urge of man, is his faculty for endurance. Beckett shows how man endures in his physical environment and, more importantly, how he endures the torments of his internal dilemma. "Beckett's motif," Miss Cohn concludes, "...is that words are thoughts are emotions, that fiction is our only knowledge, and all knowledge a fiction written in a foreign tongue..."³ That knowledge is the knowledge, ultimately, of the self, and Moran showed us that its language is indeed of a nature foreign to us.

By the end of the trilogy the Unnamable

is stripped of almost everything, including the validity of his only means of communication. Beckett has reduced man to a state where all he retains is his will to live and his need to continue the search for the ultimate answer. These are, nevertheless, positive attributes. Therefore, though Beckett's methods might be said to be negative, his final conclusions are the opposite, offering the only affirmations which prove possible.

Notes to Conclusion

- 1 Samuel Beckett, from Tom F. Driver's "Beckett by the Madeleine", Columbia University Forum, (Summer 1961), . pp.22-23.
- 2 John Barth, The End of the Road (New York: Bantam Books, 1958), p.119.
- 3 Ruby Cohn, Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p.167.

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