

THE SELF OBSCURE:
THE INFLUENCE OF DANTE ON BECKETT

by

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ABSTRACT

Beckett has continually alluded to Dante throughout his career. This thesis traces the extent of the influence of Dante on Beckett, and interprets Beckett in the light of that influence.

Dante figures in Beckett's two major critical works, "Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce" and Proust. In the essay on Joyce Beckett gives his own definitions of the three post-mortal states. In the essay on Proust, Beckett defines the artistic process as a descent toward the essence.

The early fiction and poetry is distinct from the later works in that the allusions to Dante are more frequent and more obvious. The anti-hero of More Pricks than Kicks is Belacqua Shuah. Belacqua's eponym appears in the Ante-purgatory (Purg. 4) where he is pictured reliving his life before ascending to the scourges of the Mountain. Belacqua's foetal state, called the "Belacqua bliss" in Murphy, is the state to which all of Beckett's characters aspire, from Shuah to the lone searcher in The Lost Ones.

Beckett uses the Commedia as an ironic frame of reference in Watt, as he does in Three Novels: Molloy is infernal, Malone Dies purgatorial and The Unnamable paradisal. The Commedia is also used inversely, to indicate the regress into hell, for each of the four narratives in Three Novels represents the same story told at four different levels of abstraction. These levels correspond to the four allegorical levels

on which Dante said his poem could be interpreted. In Beckett's work, however, there is no ultimate level of abstraction, and each word his narrators speak removes them further from the essential nothingness they wish to express.

In the trilogy Beckett's major debt to Dante is to the third canto of the Inferno, especially that section which describes those in the Vestibule of hell. Dante shows these sinners as having never lived, and therefore without hope of death. Dante places them on the threshold of judgement, as are Beckett's characters, who all wait to be judged. The essence of damnation in Beckett's cosmos is that there is no damnation.

Godot and Endgame are not overtly Dantesque. The allusions to Dante in the former suggest an ancient order which no longer obtains, yet which still governs the tramps' lives. How It Is is the most obviously Dantesque of Beckett's works, as the allusions to the mud of the third and fourth circles of Inferno indicate: life is hell. The Lost Ones is also obviously Dantesque. The rubber cylinder is a metaphor for the work of art, the only value of which is the possibility it holds of transcendence. Ironically, the lost ones cannot go beyond it.

This thesis concludes that the allusions to Belacqua indicate a shift in attitude, from one which admitted hope to one of despair. In a world without the Logos, the allegorist (for such is the tradition in which Beckett writes)

can achieve only confusion. His only hope is that by writing continually he can abstract his being to its essential nothingness. Because Beckett's art responds to the tradition epitomized by the Commedia, and because he has continually invoked Dante as his standard, the study of Beckett in terms of Dante provides the clearest view of his art.

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PREFACE

The comparison of Dante and Beckett derives its greatest authority from Beckett himself, who has constantly alluded to Dante throughout his career. Could we not trace a direct influence, the comparison would still be valid--even necessary--for the writers are mutually informing; while each works within a different cosmos, both consider similar artistic and metaphysical questions.

Recognizing that "the danger is in the neatness of identifications"¹ I do not propose that Beckett can be viewed only within a Dantesque framework, but I do maintain that Beckett consistently uses the Commedia as a framework--most often ironic--for his own works. Ultimately, however, one can only write of Dante and Beckett "per approvarla, non per terminarla."

Translations are my own, unless stated otherwise. In my translations of passages from the Commedia, I have attempted to convey the literal sense using modern diction. In some quoted material, I have changed an upper case to a lower, or vice-versa, without so indicating. References to Beckett's works are to the Grove paperback editions, where available. References to La Divina Commedia are to the standard three volume edition edited by Natalino Sapegno.

¹ Beckett, "Dante... Bruno.. Vico.. Joyce," in Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress (London: Faber and Faber, 1929), p. 3.

CHAPTER I

CRITICISM: "DANTE... BRUNO. VICO.. JOYCE," PROUST, AND THE "REVIEW OF PAPINI'S DANTE."

Whether the artist, like Dante, writes of the absolutely meaningful, or like Beckett, of the absolutely meaningless, he must still attempt to express that which cannot be expressed. Beckett has defined his own task accordingly:

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.²

For both Dante and Beckett, Reality--whatever they individually conceive it to be--cannot be expressed by words alone, for words limit what is limitless.

The greatest difference between the two writers under consideration is not in their artistic goals, nor even in their subject matter; the difference lies in the cosmos in which each writes. For Dante, the cosmos was the creation and expression of God, and man was intrinsically a part of that creation. Since it was God's plan that each man who chooses to should know Him through His works, He made the world intelligible to "il ben dell' intelletto" (Inf. 3.18) ["the good of the intellect"].

² Beckett, Three Dialogues (London: John Calder, 1965), p. 103.

For in knowing God, man would know himself, for his return to the Godhead would be a completion of the self. Dante maintains that in God is found the perfection of the personality. Since God was "l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle" (Para. 33.145) ["the love that moves the sun and the other stars"], all things in the universe in moving toward Him moved toward love and goodness. Because God had created life, it was ordered and just. Man was given the "libero arbitrio" (Purga. 16.71) ["free will"] to choose either to obey or to disobey God's laws. Dante's visit oltretomba examined the results of that choice.

Beckett's cosmos is the antithesis of Dante's. The core of that antithesis is the doubt surrounding the existence of God, and the word "doubt" must be emphasized. To say that God is dead in Beckett's cosmos is simplistic. This would be a state of comparative security, a state that could be understood, a state that had a first principle. In Beckett's cosmos, God is not dead for certain, nor alive for certain, and His creations--if indeed they are His--mirror that incertitude. The one certainty is the artist's obligation to express, to state. Since his own existence is uncertain, by virtue of the uncertainty of God's existence, he must express that which he does not, cannot, know. Whereas Dante overcame the artistic dilemma through faith, Beckett has nothing in which to place his faith. The

artist has nothing to work with, and he is obliged to express that nothing. Beckett's portrait of man is a portrait of nothing, a portrait of the self obscure. Yet, because he has only words on his palette, he is forced to paint something, so that even the "nothing³ than which . . . nought is more real" is itself a semblance.

Beckett's criticism, all written early in his career, occupies itself with the artist's problems: what to express and how to express it. That Beckett believed Dante's artistic enterprise bore directly upon his own study of the problems is attested to by Dante's presence in the essays on Joyce and on Proust. In "Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce"⁴ Beckett draws a parallel between Dante and Joyce the strength of which derives mostly from Beckett's enthusiasm for his mentor. In fact, Dante is included in the essay not solely on the basis of his relevance to Joyce.

What the essay does show is that Dante informs Bruno and Vico as much, if not more, than Joyce. Giordano Bruno was directly influenced by Dante's philosophical love poetry, his mysticism, and by the De Monarchia; he was

³ Beckett, Murphy, 2nd ed. (1938; rpt. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1957), p. 246.

⁴ Beckett, "Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce," in Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress (London: Faber and Faber, 1929), Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

indirectly influenced by Dante through Marsilio Ficino's writings.⁵ Giambattista Vico is more pertinent to our study in that he urged the study of language as a means of historical investigation. His interest in language is expressed in an essay he wrote on Dante; he stated there that it was a misconception to believe that Dante gathered together the speech of all the various Italian dialects to create the language of the Commedia.

Beckett discusses this point specifically. From the De Vulgari Eloquentia he quotes the passage in which Dante, speaking of the Tuscan dialect, states:

if we examine the Tuscan dialects, reflecting how the writers commended above [Guido, Lapo, Cino] have deviated from their own dialect, it does not remain doubtful that the vernacular we are in search of is different from that which the people of Tuscany attain to.⁶

Beckett proceeds to state that Dante's conclusion is that "he who would write in the vulgar must assemble the purest elements from each dialect and construct a synthetic language" (18). Which, Beckett states, "is precisely what he [Dante] did. . . . He wrote a vulgar that could

⁵ See Frances A. Yates, Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition (New York: Vintage Books, 1969). Aldo Tagliaferri, in Beckett e l'iperdeterminazione letteraria (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1967), traces Bruno's influence throughout Beckett's canon.

⁶ Dante, "De Vulgari Eloquentia," in A Translation of the Latin Works, trans. A. G. F. Howell and P. H. Wicksteed (London: J. M. Dent, 1904), p. 44.

have been spoken by an ideal Italian who had assimilated what was best in all the dialects of his country."

It is odd that at this point Beckett does not turn to Vico's "Discovertà del vero Dante," in which he states:

it is still commonly supposed that Dante gathered together the speech of all the various Italian dialects. Which false notion must have taken root in the sixteenth century. . . . Such a notion about Dante is false for two serious reasons. First, Florence, even in his times, must have shared the greater part of her speech forms with all the other cities of Italy: otherwise, the Italian tongue would not have had anything in common with that of Florence. And second, since the other cities in those unhappy times possessed no writers of the vulgar tongue . . . Dante's whole life would not have sufficed to learn the vulgar speech of so many communities and to get from them that abundance of forms he needed and employed to express his thought in the comedy.⁷

Had Beckett subscribed to Vico's opinion, the relationship which he had set out to establish between Joyce and Dante, that the language in which they wrote was not spoken by their contemporaries but was a synthetic language, would have been weakened. However, this implicit weakness in no way affects the validity of the application of Vico and Bruno to Joyce, which forms the body of Beckett's essay.

The essay begins with the wry humour typical of the young Beckett. He identifies the philosophies of Bruno

⁷ Vico, "Discovery of the True Dante," in Discussions of the Divine Comedy, ed. and trans. Irma Brandeis (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1961), p. 11.

and Vico, comparing the latter's idea of "a Liberty that is not chance" with "Dante's 'yoke of liberty'" (7).

This refers to a passage in Dante's "Sixth Epistle," in which he addresses the Florentines who resist the emperor: "For ye first and alone, shunning the yoke of liberty, have murmured against the glory of the Roman prince, the king of the world and the minister of God."⁸ The paradox of a freedom that requires submission plays a substantial role in Beckett's later fiction.

From his discussion of Vico, Beckett moves to a consideration of Joyce, making the statements that in Joyce, "form is content, content is form His writing is not about something; it is that something itself" (14). To exemplify his idea and to indicate the tradition in which Joyce writes, he quotes from Joyce and compares those quotations with two of Dante's rime, "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore" (Vita Nuova, 19) ["Ladies who have understanding of love"] and "Voi che, intendendo, il terzo ciel movete" (Convivio 2.1) ["You who, by intellection, move the third heaven"]. Both of these poems are in effect poems on poetry. In the first, Dante searches for the words which will best describe his love, the poem

⁸ Dante, "Epistola VI," in A Translation, op. cit., para. 2, p. 317. L. E. Harvey, in Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 312, mistakenly cites De Monarchia, Bk. II, ch. 1, as the source.

being the record of that search; in the second, Dante implicitly illustrates the relationship of form and content, concluding that if one cannot understand the content of his poem, at least one can admire the beauty of the form.

Beckett then decrees that "to justify our title, we must move North, 'Sovra 'l bel fiume d'Arno alla gran villa'" (17) ['Above the beautiful Arno river in the great city']. The quotation, from Inf. 23, is Dante's reply to the Hypocrites, who had asked him where he was from. Beckett states that "there exists considerable circumstantial similarity" (17) between Dante and Joyce. The similarities alluded to comprise the two writers' attitudes toward language. It is at this point that Beckett quotes the passage from De Vulgari Eloquentia which has already been discussed. He then makes assertions, by no means original, about Dante's public. The citation of Boccaccio refers to that writer's Life of Dante;⁹ there Boccaccio relates the dream of Dante's mother in which she saw her son eating the berries of a laurel tree, and changing suddenly into a peacock. In interpreting this dream Boccaccio cites one of the peacock's

⁹ Boccaccio, "Life of Dante," in The Earliest Lives of Dante, trans. J. R. Smith, (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1963), p. 77.

attributes as "piedi sozzi" (19) ["smelly feet"] and says that this signifies the vulgar tongue on which the Commedia (peacock) stands.

Quoting from the Convivio, Beckett damns the "mono-dialectical arcadians" (19) and praises Joyce. Referring to the former, he quotes:

Such are to be regarded as sheep and not men; for if one sheep were to fling itself over a precipice of a thousand paces all the others would go after it; and if one sheep leap for any reason as it passes a street all the others leap, although they see nothing to leap over. And ere now I myself have seen one after another leap into a well because one leapt into it (thinking, I suppose, that it was leaping over a wall).¹⁰

Referring to Joyce, Beckett quotes:

This shall be the new light, the new sun, which shall rise when the wonted sun shall set and shall give light to them who are in darkness and in shadow as to the wonted sun, which shines not for them.¹¹

A brief discussion ensues concerning Dante's belief¹² that language was created by God at the same time as man. Beckett fails to point out, however, that Dante had changed his opinion by the time he wrote the Paradiso, where he acknowledged that language was a product of human reason (Para. 26.124-32) and therefore subject to decay.

¹⁰ Dante, The Convivio of Dante, trans. P. H. Wicksteed (London: J. M. Dent, 1903), 1.2, pp. 49-50.

¹¹ Ibid., 1.13, pp. 59-60. Dante is speaking of the vulgar tongue.

¹² Stated in De Vulgari Eloquentia, 6, p. 16 of Howell and Wicksteed translation.

The end of the essay is the most important for our purposes. Beckett compares Dante's purgatory with Joyce's, stating that Dante's "implies culmination" (21) whereas Joyce's "excludes culmination." He then asks rhetorically,

in what sense, then, is Mr. Joyce's work purgatorial? In the absolute absence of the Absolute. Hell is the static lifelessness of unrelieved viciousness. Paradise the static lifelessness of unrelieved immaculation. Purgatory a flood of movement and vitality released by the conjunction of these two elements. (22)

For Beckett, Hell and Paradise are absolute in that they are fixed states. Purgatory, however, is a state which is eventually transcended, except in Joyce's cosmos. Joyce's purgatory is such because it is neither Hell nor Paradise. Especially noteworthy in Beckett's description of the three post-mortal states is his contention that "immaculation" should require relief, a theme which he explores in his later fiction.

"Unrelieved immaculation" perhaps best describes Beckett's intentions in this his first work of criticism. What is most noteworthy in this short essay on Joyce is that Beckett manages to allude to every one of Dante's works with a precision that marks his great familiarity with Dante's works.

In contrast to the affinity Beckett evinces for his subject in the Joyce essay, his tone is aloof in his other major critical work, Proust. Beckett begins by clinically examining "that double-headed monster of damnation and salvation--Time."¹³ Each day modifies us; we are not today who we were yesterday, asserts Beckett. "We are not merely more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday" (3). This is one head of the monster: damnation.

Before examining the other head, Beckett views the body, Habit. Habit is our way of trying to adapt to our ever changing concept of self. Yet adaptation is not attainment:

How absurd is our dream of a Paradise with retention of personality, since our life is a succession of Paradises successively denied, that the only true Paradise is the Paradise that has been lost, and that death will cure many of the desire for immortality. (14)

Then on to the other head: Salvation. For Memory, although bound to time, is in its involuntary manifestation the one way in which time can be overcome. Time thus initiates the damning process of attempting to attain a self that is ever changing, and provides the only means by which that elusive self can be revealed to us.

¹³ Beckett, Proust (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1931), p. 1. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

After dealing with these main constituents of the Proustian world, Beckett continues, discussing other elements, among them Love. "Love he [Proust] insists, can only coexist with a state of dissatisfaction" (39). Beckett describes the hell created by Love in Proust's world as a "Tolomea" (40), the penultimate region of the Inferno, where the residents have the great privilege of having their souls frozen in Cocytus while their bodies still live on earth (Inf. 33.91-157).

"But if love, for Proust, is a function of man's sadness, friendship is a function of his cowardice" says Beckett, and continues: "For the artist, who does not deal in surfaces, the rejection of friendship is not only reasonable, but a necessity" (46). Beckett goes on to describe his artistic credo in Dantesque terms: "the only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent" (48). Art is necessary, for in it alone is the inner meaning deciphered; it alone tenders "at least an incorruptible beauty: 'Ponete mente almen com'io son bella'" (57). The line is the last in Dante's canzone "Voi che, intendendo, il terzo ciel movete."¹⁴ In this canzone, Dante sorrows over the grief which the third heaven--Venus--has caused him. In the tornata,

¹⁴ Convivio, 2.1. Quoted also in "Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce;" see above, p. 6.

he exhorts his canzone to say to those who cannot understand its inner workings, "At least consider how beautiful I am."

Beckett again quotes from Dante in his discussion of "time made flesh" (57), which is death. He refers to those penitents who occupy the cornice of the proud in the Purgatorio:

e qual piú pazienza avea nelli atti,
piangendo pareva dicer: 'Piú non posso.'
(Purg. 10.138-9)

[and he who showed the most endurance seemed to cry out: 'I can endure no more.']

This brilliant allusion conveys the paradoxicality of Time--destruction and creation, damnation and salvation, death and resurrection--through its ramifications. For the Proud are bowed down by huge stones on their backs, but because they are bowed they can see the magnificent sculptures hewn into the very floor of the cornice on which they tread.

Castigating those artists who are "prostrate before the epidermis" (59) Beckett praises the Proustian procedure, which is "that of Apollo flaying Marsyas," the procedure followed by Dante:

O buon Appollo, all'ultimo lavoro
fammi del tuo valor sí fatto vaso,
come dimandi a dar l'amato alloro.

.....

Entra nel petto mio, e spira tue
 sì come quando Marsia traesti
 della vagina delle membra sue.
 (Par. 1.13-15, 19-21)

[O great Apollo, to this ultimate task inspire me
 with your virtue, making me a vessel worthy to win
 the beloved laurel. . . . Enter into my breast and
 breathe there as when you drew out Marsyas from
 the sheathe of his body.]

Whereas in the previous two cantiche Dante had invoked the Muses, here he invokes Apollo, the spirit of poetry itself, so much greater is his task. Dante suggests that his instrument, language, is as insufficient to carry out his task as was Marsyas' instrument, the flute, in his competition with Apollo.¹⁵ Apollo's lesson to Dante was that the mind must be pulled free from the body; Proust's lesson to Beckett is that the essence must be pulled free of the facade.

In the same paragraph Beckett discusses a possible failing of Dante. "Dante, if he can ever be said to have failed, fails with his purely allegorical figures . . . whose significance is purely conventional and extrinsic"¹⁶
 (60). These figures represent concepts, and the poet

¹⁵ I am indebted to Prof. M. Chiarenza for drawing to my attention the significance of this passage in Dante.

¹⁶ Compare Croce, La Poesia di Dante (1921), in which he states, "'In poetry, allegory never has a place.'" Quoted in Letteratura dell'Italia Unita: 1861-1968, (Firenze: Sansoni, 1968), p. 472. Compare also J. L. Borges, "From Allegories to Novels," Other Inquisitions (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), pp. 163-166.

"does not deal in concepts, he pursues the Idea, the concrete." Thus Dante, who was an artist above all, "could not prevent his allegory from becoming heated and electrified into anagogy."

Thus Proust, and thus Beckett. One has the impression that Dante would smile slightly at the terms in Proust, so familiar to him, with which Beckett lards his treatise and with which he ends his credo: damnation and salvation.

The last words which Beckett wrote directly on Dante appear in his 1934 review of the English translation of Giovanni Papini's Dante Vivo.¹⁷ The review justly castigates Papini, who writes of Dante the man to the exclusion of Dante the poet. Beckett, typically, identifies with Dante the artist. He states that he wants to read Dante, not to love him, and concludes by wryly citing Dante's own reference to the "incompatibility" (the irony is Beckett's) of reading and loving, in the Paolo and Francesca episode of Inferno 5: "Quel giorno piú non vi leggemmo avante" ["That day we read no more"].

¹⁷ "Review of Papini's Dante," The Bookman, 87 (1934), p. 14.

CHAPTER II
MORE PRICKS THAN KICKS

The conflict between living and reading which Paolo and Francesca experienced, wryly commented upon by Beckett in the Papini review, is echoed in the ten stories collectively called More Pricks than Kicks.¹⁸ The title, which is in one sense an ironic comment on the many instances of desire as opposed to the occasions for fulfillment, alludes to Inferno 9.¹⁹ In that canto, Dante and Virgil are barred by a sortie of devils from entering the city of Dis. An angel comes to their assistance, saying to the devils:

Perché recalcitrate a quella voglia
a cui non puote il fin mai esser mozzo,
e che più volte v'ha cresciuta doglia?
(Inf. 9.94-6)

[Why do you kick against the pricks to which no one has ever been able to put an end and which have increased your pains many times?]

The passage indicates another sense in which the title may be taken. We are pricked by an unreasoning fate, both before and after death, far more than we can kick.

¹⁸ Beckett, More Pricks than Kicks (1934; rpt. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1972). Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

¹⁹ The Biblical source is Acts 9.5 (cf. 26.14). Dante also quotes this passage in his "Fifth Epistle."

As Christopher Ricks observes, Dante is in this aspect "the supreme incarnation of the high-minded vengeance that pursues even beyond the grave and that will not permit of oblivion."²⁰

More Pricks than Kicks chronicles the dying of Belacqua Shuah. Belacqua's eponym appears in the fourth canto of the Purgatorio, and would be noteworthy if for no other reason than that he elicits Dante's first smile in the Commedia. The importance of Dante's Belacqua to Beckett's canon is immense. Belacqua is the main character in these stories; his condition represents an ideal state in Murphy and in the trilogy. Beckett explores the implications of Belacqua further in How It Is, and alludes to him in his latest work of prose fiction, The Lost Ones. It is important, therefore, that we ascertain the exact nature of Dante's Belacqua by analyzing the passage in which he appears.

Canto four opens with Dante and Virgil climbing up a narrow cleft in the mountain in order to ascend to the second terrace, where the Late Repentant are to be found. The ascent is arduous, and the two poets stop to rest and catch their breath when they reach the terrace. Now that he has a moment of leisure to look about him the disoriented Dante is surprised to see the sun on his left. Virgil,

²⁰Christopher Ricks, "Beckett First and Last," New York Review of Books, 14 Dec. 1972, p. 43.

seeing his perplexity, explains in a very pedantic, rhetorical manner that they are situated antipodal to Jerusalem, which accounts for the sun's appearing on the left (when he faces east).

Once satisfied on this point, Dante asks his mentor how far they must yet journey. Virgil answers that the further they travel, the less the effort required (for one is progressively purged of the weight of sin) and that when he finds the ascent least difficult, the journey will be at an end. Just as he finishes speaking a voice interrupts, and with one magnificent line undercuts both Virgil's ornate explanations and Dante's naive exuberance:

E com'elli [Virgilio] ebbe sua parola detta,
una voce di presso sonò: 'Forse
che di sedere in pria avrai distretta!'

Al suon di lei ciascun di noi si torse,
e vedemmo a mancina un gran petrone,
del qual né io né ei prima s'accorse.

Là ci traemmo; ed ivi eran persone
che si stavano all'ombra dietro al sasso
come l'uom per neghienza a star si pone.

E un di lor, che mi sembiava lasso,
sedeva e abbracciava le ginocchia,
tenendo il viso giù tra esse basso.

'O dolce segnor mio,' diss'io 'adocchia
colui che mostra sé più negligente
che se pigrazia fosse sua serocchia.'

Allor si volse a noi e puose mente,
movendo il viso pur su per la coscia,
e disse: 'Or va tu su, che se' valente!'

Conobbi allor chi era, e quell'angoscia
 che m'avacciava un poco ancor la lena,
 non m'impedì l'andare a lui; e poscia

ch'a lui fu' giunto, alzò la testa a pena,
 dicendo: 'Hai ben veduto come il sole
 dall'omero sinistro il carro mena?'

Li atti suoi pigri e le corte parole
 mosser le labbra mie un poco a riso;
 poi cominciai: 'Belacqua, a me non dole

di te omai; ma dimmi: perché assiso
 quiritta se'? attendi tu iscorta,
 o pur lo modo usato t'ha ripreso?'

Ed elli: 'O frate, andar in su che porta?
 ché non mi lascerebbe ire a' martiri
 l'angel di Dio che siède in su la porta.

Prima convien che tanto il ciel m'aggiri
 di fuor da essa, quanto fece in vita,
 perch'io indugiai al fine i buon sospiri,

se orazione in prima non m'aita
 che surga su di cuor che in grazia viva!
 l'altra che val, che 'n ciel non è udita?'

(Purg. 4.97-135)

[And just as he [Virgil] had finished speaking a voice nearby said: 'Perhaps you'll need to sit down first!' At this sound each of us turned around and saw on the left a huge rock which neither he nor I had at first noticed. We drew toward it; and there were persons who, in the shade behind the rock, were standing around, like lazy people often do. And one of them, who seemed weary to me, was sitting holding his knees with his face low down between them. 'O my good lord,' I said, 'look closely at him who appears more listless than if sloth were his sister.'

At this he turned toward us and granted us his attention, raising his eyes above his thighs, and said: 'Go up now, if you're so good!' I knew then who he was, and that fatigue that still kept me panting did not stop me from going up to him; when I was close to him he scarcely raised his head, saying: 'Have you understood why the sun leads his chariot from the left?'

His lazy attitude and his few words moved my lips a little to smile; then I began: 'Belacqua, I do not sorrow for you any more; but tell me: Why do you sit right here? Do you await an escort, or have the old ways overtaken you again?'

And he: 'O brother, why bother to go up yet? since I would not be allowed to go to my torments by the angel of God who sits up there at the door. First it is necessary that the heavens circle round me here, outside the door, as long as they did in life. (for I postponed to the end the good sighs), if I am not helped first by prayers that surge from a heart that lives in grace; for what use are the others, that are not heard in heaven?']

Of Belacqua the accounts are meagre. Cary quotes from the margin of the Monte Casino manuscript that "This Belacqua was an excellent master of the harp and lute, but very negligent in his affairs both spiritual and temporal."²¹ According to Sapegno, "Belacqua" was the sobriquet of one Duccio di Bonavia, a Florentine maker of stringed instruments. The description of Belacqua made by the Anonimo Fiorentino, an early commentator, is of special relevance to the Beckett character:

This Belacqua was a citizen of Florence, an artisan, and made such things as lutes and guitars, and was the most slothful man that ever lived. And it is said of him that he would go every morning to his workshop and proceed to sit down, and would never get up except when he wished to go to eat and to sleep. Now the author [Dante] was a very good friend of his; he would many times, again and again, bring up his negligence; whence, one day, bringing it up again, Belacqua replied with the words of

²¹ H. F. Cary, trans., The Vision of Dante (London: George Newnes, 1844), note to Purga 4.119. Cary's trans.

Aristotle: 'Sedendo et quiescendo anima efficitur sapiens;' to this the author replied, 'Surely, if by sitting one becomes wise, then no one has ever been as wise as you.'²²

Beckett has ascribed many of the traits of the real Belacqua to his own creation: laziness, wittiness, and an interest in music (or art in general) are chief among them. Dante's Belacqua, who never looked toward heaven in life, is now constrained to look earthward. His foetal position is analogous to the state of his soul, which has not yet been born into its new life.²³ When Belacqua has lived his life over again²⁴ he will be born into the scourges and flames of purgation. In Beckett's works this has ironic implications: the birth of a new self merely increases the pain of the old, and there is no end to this process.

Many of the ideas and conflicts contained in the Belacqua passage re-appear as themes in More Pricks than Kicks. Perhaps the most obvious point of contrast in the Dantean passage is that between Dante's great mobility (mental and physical) and Belacqua's immobility. Related

²²Quoted by Sapegno in his note to Purg. 4.98, p. 43. From this description Beckett took the title of his story, "Sedendo et Quiescendo," transition, 21 (1932), 13-20.

²³In the Biblical sense, these souls are in the Egypt of the soul's bondage, from which they will exit into the Israel of freedom, when they have been purged.

²⁴Compare Yeats's idea of "dreaming through;" note Murphy, p. 78, where Murphy speaks of his "Belacqua fantasy" and how he will have "dreamed it all through."

to Dante's mobility is his interest in the macrocosm, evidenced by his questions concerning the heavens. The immobile Belacqua, however, is more introspective.

Belacqua Shuah starts out by doing much walking about, "with the belief that the best thing he had to do was to move constantly from place to place"²⁵ but moves about less as his life progresses (in spite of him) and eventually achieves stasis in "Draff." Stasis, the microcosmic moment where there is neither time nor space, is in fact the goal of his wanderings. The conditions which define stasis are also those that define art, and so we often find Belacqua studying art as a means to the attainment of that same goal. Because Belacqua places such emphasis on his mental self, his physical self is quite foreign to him; he is often seen discovering parts of himself, as when he sits in the rain and stares at his hands.²⁶ Belacqua's problem is that the macrocosm hinders him from coming completely alive in his mind.

At the beginning of "Dante and the Lobster" we see Belacqua attempting to attain the microcosmic moment by reading canto two of the Paradiso, "the first of the canti in the moon" (9). Belacqua has not obtained transcendence,

²⁵"Ding-Dong," p. 36.

²⁶"A Wet Night," p. 83.

however; he is "bogged."²⁷ Being bogged is not the static condition he desires; he desires to be stuck (physically) and moving (mentally) at the same time.

The use of direct allusion which characterizes these early stories is exemplified by this opening passage. Belacqua refers to "Blissful Beatrice," who is anything but in this canto where she flays Dante for his theologically incorrect explanation of the spots in the moon, which she explains "step by step." "Part one, the refutation, was plain sailing" alludes to the first tercet of canto two, in which Dante speaks of "mio legno che cantando varca" (Par. 2.3) ["my ship, that ~~singing~~ sails along"].²⁸ "The disproof, the reproof, that was patent" echoes the "provando e riprovando" ["proving and reproving"] of Par. 3.3.

Impatient with the tedium of canto two, Belacqua wishes to go on to Paradiso 3, in which Dante, having understood Beatrice's lesson, "could raise his heavy head" ["leva' il capo," Par. 3.6] and in which Piccarda discourses. This is the first example of the anti-intellectualism which Belacqua evinces in More Pricks than Kicks,

²⁷ The word bogged itself suggests an infernal vista (cf. Inf. 6). Dante's son Pietro, when confronted with Par. 2, said, "'Work out the rest, in fact the whole thing, for yourself, for I see nothing and understand nothing.'" Quoted by D. L. Sayers in her translation of the Purgatorio (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), p. 335.

²⁸ Longfellow's translation.

for although art represents a desirous condition, its worldly manifestations are to be avoided.

While reading, Belacqua feels the incursion of the macrocosm--his body is hungry. This conflict has in fact been prefigured in the title, where the poetic world of Dante is juxtaposed to the material world of the lobster. Ironically, Belacqua's preparation of lunch is described in a way that parodies Beatrice's explanation of the moon spots to Dante. Thus we have Belacqua thinking over his three goals for the day, "one, lunch; two, the lobster; three the Italian lesson" (10). So Beatrice in *Paradise*, whose three goals were to show that Dante's philosophy errs, to show his mistaken assumption regarding the laws of physics and to provide the correct theological explanation of his question.

Belacqua prepares his lunch with all the scientific accuracy with which Beatrice explains the moon spots. An ironic parallel is drawn between the bread Belacqua uses for his sandwich and Dante's "pan delli angeli" (*Par.* 2.11) ["bread of the angels"] on which he says his readers must feed before reading the *Paradiso*. Belacqua goes on to remark that an inexperienced person would "make a hash of the entire proceedings" as indeed Beatrice states that Dante has done: "'Certo assai vedrai sommerso / nel falso il creder tuo'" (*Par.* 2.61-2) ["'without doubt you will recognize that your belief is completely false'"]. Beckett

continues this parody, describing Belacqua's preparation of the two slices of bread in a way analogous to Beatrice's exposition of the two parts of the confutation of Dante's error. Belacqua places a slice of bread "very pat and precise" (11) on the toaster; so Beatrice places the first part of her confutation before Dante. And just as Belacqua must toast his bread "evenly" so Beatrice's arguments had to be stated in harmonious perfection.

While he chars his bread, Belacqua continues to mull over canto two of the Paradiso and the endeavours there to determine the cause of moon-spots. Like "the tiller of the field" (12) Belacqua believes that "the spots were Cain with his gruss of thorns." Dante, however, snubs this explanation:

'che son li segni bui
di questo corpo, che là giuso in terra
fan di Cain favoleggiare altrui?'
(Par. 2.49-51)

['what are the dark spots on this body [the moon]
that make those down on earth tell tales of Cain?']

Before answering this question, Beatrice asks Dante to propose his own explanation, but rejects his material explanation for the correct spiritual one.

"On his knees" (12), Belacqua prepares his bread, his "offering" (13). To complete it, he must obtain some Gorgonzola at the grocery store. On his way, he fears "being accosted," having the outer world converge on the

inner; thus he had "lock[ed] the door" (10) when he began his lunchtime preparations. "His hunger [was] more of mind . . . than of body" (13), for his lunch is the offering made by his mind to appease his body, which must be appeased before he can come fully alive in his mind--a vicious circle, for ultimately it is life itself which restrains him from attaining the microcosm, as we see in "Draff."

Belacqua walks with a "spavined gait" (15), reminiscent of Dante in the dark wood who walked "sí che 'l piè fermo sempre era 'l piú basso" (*Inf.* 1.30) ["such that the firm foot was always the lower"].²⁹ The pain from his feet interferes with his sleep; even when unconscious, the mind is not free from the body. The conflict between macrocosm and microcosm is also conveyed through these allusions. Whereas Belacqua is with Dante and Beatrice in paradiso when locked away in his own room he is like Dante limping through the dark wood when he sets out along the street.

Having eaten his lunch in the pub, Belacqua proceeds to the house of his teacher, Signorina Ottolenghi, who "was waiting in the little front room off the hall,

²⁹ See C. S. Singleton's note to line 30 in his Commentary to the "Inferno" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 9. Beckett's remark that one of Estragon's feet is "damned" takes on special significance in the light of Singleton's information. See Michael Robinson, The Long Sonata of the Dead (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1969), pp. 250-1.

which Belacqua was naturally inclined to think of rather as the vestibule" (18). Naturally, because he has read canto three of the Inferno, and for such a mind-dweller as Belacqua the connection between life and literature is obvious. As a project for Belacqua, the Ottolenghi suggests that he "make up Dante's rare movements of compassion in Hell" (19). This recalls a particular line to Belacqua, "'qui vive la pietà quand'è ben morta'" (Inf. 20.28). "'I wonder how you could translate that?'" asks Belacqua foolishly, for because of the pun on "pietà" (both "pity" and "piety") the line is untranslatable. The line, which means literally, "Here lives piety when it [pity] is dead," is spoken by Virgil to Dante when the latter is moved to tears by the sight of the sorcerers, whose heads are twisted completely around so that they must walk backward. Beckett has predicated the story on the implications of this quotation, where we see the conflict between divine judgement and human mercy. The allusion to the punishment of Cain, the quandary of McCabe (heir of Cain and Abel), the cruciform expression of the grocer, the Ottolenghi's assignment and the boiling of the lobster, all relate to the line quoted from the twentieth canto. In the ideal world pietà is both pity and piety, but in the outer world it is either one or the other, and often neither.

Walking home after his lesson, Belacqua muses on the line. "Why not piety and pity both, even down below?" (20) he asks. When he arrives home he goes "down into the bowels of the earth, into the kitchen in the basement" (21). The descent is obviously Dantean; it is in this little hell that he will learn his real lesson about justice and mercy. For it is here in the kitchen that his aunt tells him that the lobster he had purchased for his dinner must be boiled alive. Though Belacqua knows he must be merciful, he also knows he must eat. Again he must sacrifice the needs of his mind to appease the needs of his body; the "cruciform" shape of the lobster raises the sacrifice into a larger significance. Belacqua's pietà is undercut by his acquiescence to having the lobster boiled, just as he ate his sandwich while contemplating the hanging of McCabe. There are indeed more pricks than kicks; the pricks of the macrocosm are continually felt, with little recompense, and will continue to be felt even after death:

Well, thought Belacqua, it's a quick death,
God help us all.

It is not.

Belacqua is still seen searching for the microcosmic moment in the story "Ding-Dong." In this story the conflict arises from Belacqua's desire to attain stasis and

yet be (mentally) moving. This state is epitomized by the motion of the bells, suggested by the title, which move in the same place and which are in fact still for a moment in each cycle, a "'moving pause'" (38).

Whereas the condition of the microcosm is stasis, that of "the outer world" (38) is one of unceasing motion. Belacqua at one time believed that he too had only "to move constantly from place to place" (36) in order to arrive at the microcosm, but he is finally disabused of this notion. Yet even at this stage he realizes that where this outward motion is directed is unimportant-- "But as for the sites, one was as good as another, because they all disappeared as soon as he came to rest in them." He is obviously trying to arrive at an inner state, like Dante's Belacqua. For both of these characters there is "torment in the terms [life and purgation] and in the intervals [Antepurgatory] a measure of ease."

The "sinfully indolent" Belacqua's moving about in order to obtain stasis is of course as ironic as the Unnamable's talking in order to be silent. Yet although Belacqua realizes that motion does him "little good" (37) he goes on, but only to stop now and then, when he realizes he is getting nowhere, like "Buridan's ass" (39; cf. Par. 4.1-9), squatting like his namesake in Antepurgatory to wait for a sign. Unlike the celestial signs which mark out the saved Belacqua's wait, Shuah observes neon

signs. For him, these are as good as any, for motion in the outer world is meaningless anyway, and when he does see his sign he moves off in the opposite direction.

Where Belacqua really wishes to arrive is in "Ego Maximus" (39) which like paradiso goes "nowhere, only round and round." Those who do have a goal in the outer world are treated in a heavily sarcastic manner: the "blind paralytic" who has made a business out of begging; the little girl who is blind to all but her goal in the slums; the queuer who fetches the loaf, blind to the plight of the girl.

Belacqua escapes from this "cieco mondo" (Inf. 4.13) ["blind world"] to the pub, his haven. "Here . . . art and love, scrabbling in dispute or staggering home, were barred" (41). In the outer world, art is argument, love is debilitating. So Belacqua sits in the pub, and waits for a sign which manifests itself as "a hatless woman" (43) who seems "to be hawking some ware." This woman's face is "full of light" (44)--"petrified in radiance" (45) notes Belacqua in his "sweet style." The woman is a type of Beatrice, as the allusions to Dante indicate. Dante describes Beatrice in terms of light throughout the Paradiso. Dante also wrote a canzone³⁰ about a "donna petrosa"

³⁰ Dante, "Amor, tu vedi ben, che questa donna," in Rime, a cura di Gianfranco Contini (1946; rpt. Torino: Einaudi, 1970), 45 (CII), p. 162.

["stony (petrified) woman"], and he wrote it in the "dolce stil novo" (Purg. 24.57) ["sweet new style"]. This Beatrice is selling "'seats in heaven'" (45; cf. Par. 32.7) which she says "'goes round . . . and round and round;'" this is the same description Belacqua made of his microcosmic paradise. Belacqua finally succumbs to her sales pitch, and buys four seats, one each for his "'frien;,'" "'da;,'" "'ma,'" and "'motte'" (46)--none for himself. For if Belacqua is to find his paradise anywhere, it will be within his mind, and not in the outer world. The paradise the woman describes is macrocosmic, material and extrinsic to the self. "Ding-Dong" ends with an allusion to the Paradiso, where "Dante and the Lobster" began. In both instances the idea of a paradise exterior to the self is rejected. In "Ding-Dong," however, Belacqua comes closer to the microcosm through contemplating the woman, who acts as a catalyst in achieving that microcosmic state, which is represented at the end of the story by the music that Belacqua tarries to hear.

That inner being cannot be obtained in the outer world is the theme of "A Wet Night." In this story Beckett satirises the outer world, showing how empty it is, and how it conflicts with Belacqua's desire to turn inward, where meaning in the form of identity can be found. In the outer world identity is merely a relationship between friends, and these social relationships are empty. "Friend-

ship is a social expedient, like upholstery or the distribution of garbage buckets."³¹

It is evident that Belacqua is aware of the emptiness of society. In "A Wet Night" he emerges from the depths of a pub only to look for another where "he neither knew nor was known" (48). The only object between him and it is the world, those he might meet, just as in "Dante and the Lobster" he was wary of anyone interrupting his pilgrimage to the Gorgonzola. The road to the pub is via "long straight Pearsesstreet," ("la diritta via"), where he hears in his mind "a simple cantilena;" Dante also heard a "cantilena" (Par. 32.97) at the end of his quest.

The Dublin through which Belacqua courses is likened to "Florence," and Belacqua is likened as much to his eponym as he is to Dante, as was the case in "Dante and the Lobster." Belacqua has the misfortune to be apprehended by Chas. True to the type, Chas. is more of the macrocosm--"of French nationality" (49)--than of the microcosm--"a mind like a tattered concordance." Belacqua asks Chas. "'What's the news of the great world?'" indicating his divorcement from the mundane. Chas. reminds Belacqua that he will see him at the Frica's party, and Belacqua, typically, replies "'Alas'" (50).

³¹Proust, p. 46.

Belacqua has agreed to thrust himself into this inferno of the Frica's party not for the "backstairs, claret cup and the intelligentsia" (51), but for the Alba, his Beatrice. Like the Beatrice of the Vita Nuova Alba is going to wear a "scarlet gown"³² to the party, and will be dressed "to the nines" (54), which is Beatrice's number (Vita Nuova, 29).

Belacqua muses on his Beatrice in a pub, where he has escaped from "the Poet" (51); here he sits with "his feet on a round so high that his knees topped the curb of the counter" (52), the Belacquean foetal position, which indicates the withdrawal into the self facilitated by the inner world of the pub. The Alba is for Belacqua, as are all women, a representation of the flesh. He loves, however, "not woman of flesh" (52), but his mental image of her, for like Murphy he can love only in his mind. Like the Beatrician figure in "Ding-Dong," the Alba is "a woman of the world" (55), a fleshly counterpart to the Beatrice of the Commedia. Belacqua attempts to solve the problem of how to love (mentally) without loving (physically) by voyeurism, as is seen in "Walking Out," where he requests his fiancée Lucy to "take a cicisbeo" (102). That way he could experience mentally their physical love.

³²Dante, La Vita Nuova, trans. Barbara Reynolds (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), chapter 2. Alba has also "lethal eyes" (54) which suggest those of Beatrice in paradiso.

Beckett's wit flashes in his satirical portrayal of the outer world. The identity of people there is established by initial--"P. B." or "S. J." (57)--by sobriquet, or not at all. Mindless disputation characterizes an intelligentsia enamoured of its own voice. These people claim to see order in the "'Gehenna of links'" (58) which is itself merely an artificial construct which they constantly try to justify. We see Chas. attempting to "explain the world" (58) but "the difficulty was to know what exactly he meant." All these people go "their not so very different ways" (59) for in truth they have no separate identities.

On his way to the party, Belacqua stops to admire his hands, and is interrupted from his reverie by a member of the Civic Guard, "who had much more of the lion than of the fox" (72); a typical member of society, he is more body than mind, unlike Guido da Montefeltro, whose activities "'non furon leonine, ma di volpe'" (Inf. 27.74-5) ["'were not leonine, but foxy'"]. The allusion to Inferno is apt, for like the demons there, the Guard permits Belacqua no rest, but forces him to "'move on;'" through this allusion Beckett expands the motif of the outer world as inferno.

The party epitomizes the outer world, and as Belacqua arrives he realizes that "his mind . . . had not had leisure to dwell upon the sufferings in store for it" (74).

He specifically states "mind" because it is his mind which yearns for the inner world and which suffers in the outer. Accordingly, Belacqua arrives in the "vestibule," the cloakroom of hell, and is seen by the Alba "under the lintel" which recalls the gates of hell (Inf. 3.10-11). Appropriately, Beckett lards the text with direct allusions to the Inferno:

He [Belacqua] had abandoned all hope [Inf. 3.9] of getting her [Alba] where he wanted her, he could neither be on her left hand [cf. Inf. 10.133] nor at her feet. His only remaining concern, before his soul heaved anchor [Inf. 3.82-7] was to get some kind friend to scotch a wolf [Inf. 1.49] that he could not hold off by the ears very much longer. (80)

Belacqua, who only wants to love the Alba in his mind, abandons the hope he had of doing so, for he feels the goad of lust, symbolised by a wolf in Dante's dark wood.

The Alba, obviously Belacqua's kindred spirit, asks him to take her home. They escape to this little world, where they sit together, sharing the fire, a bottle, and the sorrow known by those who turn inward. He emerges from "Casa Alba" (83) into the social inferno, soon stopping to take up "the knee-and-elbow position".

The conflicts raised in these stories are resolved in the last one of the collection, "Draff,"³³ which details

³³ Compare Cary's Vision of Dante, Inf. 18.112. Note that this canto punishes the "panders" and compare "Draff" p. 176.

Belacqua's funeral, as presided over by the Smeraldina. The undertaker who is handling the funeral is a "Mr. Malacoda," counterpart of the captain of the demons in the fifth bolgia of the Inferno. Smeraldina requests that the "demon" (178) "'not be coming up here to torment me,'" but Malacoda is already there, "with a tape in his black claws," an allusion to the generic name of the devils, "Malebranche" [lit. "evil claws," Inf. 21.37]. Hairy Quin arrives after him, and Smeraldina takes him to the corpse, then leaves the room, closing the door "on the dying and the dead" (181). This underlines another theme in this story: that far from living, one is "dying all [one's] life" (176). Death is merely a modification of existence; "Belacqua was not wholly dead, but merely mutilated" (182). This is a familiar theme in Beckett's work, and one of the most peculiarly Dantesque.

Hairy and Smerry proceed to the cemetery to prepare the gravesite. "In the cemetery the light was failing, the sea moonstone washing the countless toes turned up, the mountains swarthy Uccello [Par. 15.109-11]³⁴ behind the headstones" (182). This allusion to the Paradiso contrasts with those to the Inferno which characterized the world Belacqua has left. Here in the grave he has

³⁴ Perhaps also the painter.

found his Paradise, the timeless one³⁵ he lost at birth. Any other Paradise is a gamble--"Ten to one God was in his Heaven" (186).

The following day the funeral is held. Malacoda arrives to prepare the corpse, along with "Scarmiglione" (185) [Inf. 21.105] who drives the hearse, saying "All aboard. All souls at half-mast." That they all--living and dead--get into this modern version of Charon's boat [Inf. 3.82-4] amplifies the theme of the living dead, and also suggests that hell is not exclusively an other-worldly state.

The death of Belacqua robs Smeraldina's life of its "spiritual" (187) side; she is now "just a fine strapping lump of a girl" (188) and therefore ripe for Hairy's plucking. Hairy and Smerry return from the funeral to find "the house in flames" (189), the fire indicating that Smeraldina's life with Hairy will be the opposite of her life with "Bel-acqua"--"clear water." So Hairy and Smerry are united and Belacqua finds the stasis for which he had been searching, along with "an overwhelming sense that all this would happen to him again, in a dream or subsequent existence."³⁶

³⁵Note the "timeless mock" on Belacqua's face (182).

³⁶"What a Misfortune," p. 150.

Belacqua's fascination with timeless states is a (somewhat ironic) reflection of his status as a "poet" (117), for he is as much Dante as he is Belacqua in these stories. The timeless state is the poetic state, the Keatsian moment. For this reason, Belacqua is aware of no barrier between life and literature--he is not surprised to meet Beatrice in a pub, and a cloakroom becomes the vestibule.

It is the constant incursion of the macrocosm, the outer world, into his meditations, that creates the conflicts which these stories relate. The macrocosm is delineated in terms of hell, hence the many allusions to the Inferno in the descriptions of parties and the outer world in general. By contrast, it is when Belacqua is alone with his thoughts, like his eponym in the Antepurgatory, that the Paradiso is invoked. There are far more references to the Inferno in these stories because there are far more pricks than kicks in (and after) life. The most significant merit of these stories is that they display many of Beckett's literary roots, and propose themes which he explores in his later fiction.

CHAPTER THREE
POEMS IN ENGLISH

Dante figures in five of the Poems in English,³⁷ "Whoroscope," "Enueg I," "Alba," "Sanies II," and "Malacoda." In these poems Beckett is especially interested in the Dante who wrote the Inferno. The themes of the poems echo many of those in More Pricks than Kicks, but they also point toward the later fiction.³⁸ The following study is based on the three most Dantesque poems, "Whoroscope," "Enueg I," and "Malacoda."

"Whoroscope" is a mini-biography of Descartes--a fictionalized Descartes. The notes, in the Nabokovian rather than the Eliotic tradition, reveal the "facts" of Descartes' life, yet those facts seem to describe another person. The notes give us the macrocosmic view of Descartes; the poem, which is an interior monologue, gives us the poetic version of his life.

The poem is marked by a tension between the Cartesian and the non-Cartesian, between rationalism and scholasticism. This tension is signalled by the title. Descartes abhorred horoscopes. "He kept his own birthday to himself

³⁷Beckett, Poems in English (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961). Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

³⁸Any interpretation of the poetry must acknowledge Lawrence E. Harvey's painstaking and sympathetic exegesis, Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970).

so that no astrologer could cast his nativity" (16). As a scientist, Descartes was interested in knowing the present, not the future. As the formulator of the cogito, furthermore, he believed that he was responsible for his own existence. Such theories obviously are in direct contrast to those held by Dante, and this contrast is another source of the poem's tension.

The poem opens with a question, "What's that?" (1), which is followed by many others. The more Descartes knows, the more he has to know, or to put it another way, the more he knows, the less he knows. And as we see from this first question, Descartes is constantly confronted with the prospect of not knowing, even if what he wants to know is something as simple as whether his "eggs [had been] hatched from eight to ten days" (15). One cannot know the future according to Descartes, but, ironically, one cannot know the present, either.

Descartes' monologue is a remembrance of things past which is constantly interrupted by things present. This pattern repeats the one in "Dante and the Lobster," where Belacqua's musings on the Paradiso are interrupted by his plans for lunch. The "egg" (2) which is to be Descartes' meal also suggests the pre-natal existence yearned for by Beckett's characters, such as Belacqua Shuah, who wanted to "'be back in the caul on [his] back in the dark for ever.'"³⁹

³⁹"Fingal," More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 29.

It also suggests unfulfilled being, and toward the end of the poem Beckett affirms the parallel between the life of Descartes and the life of the egg.

The Descartes with whom the poem opens is blustering, obscene and self-assured, as his reference to Galileo as a "vile old Copernican lead-swinging son of a sutler" (7) indicates. The Descartes of this poem is not the creator of a new philosophy, but the attacker of the old Scholasticism, "throwing Jesuits out of the skylight" (26). Most of the people mentioned in the poem are enemies of Descartes, from "Galileo" (50) to "Weulles" (94). It is this personal aspect of Descartes that Beckett exploits. The meaning of life is to be found in personal experience, Beckett suggests, rather than in "sophistry" (16).

Descartes' philosophy was in fact the result of a personal experience, his "days . . . in the hot cupboard" (26), where he was enwombed like the egg in its shell. Here Descartes had the visions (ascribed by him to divine intervention) which led to the formulation of his philosophy. Dante too had his vision, but his led to transcendence.

Musing on his visions, Descartes is interrupted by the arrival of "Hals" (27) who painted Descartes' portrait just prior to the philosopher's death. Descartes has Hals "wait" (28) and in doing so draws attention to his own fate, for Descartes also waits; he is not fully in

control after all. His philosophy cannot account for the emotion he feels when he thinks of his former playmate, the "squinty doaty" (29), or the death of his daughter, "Francine" (31), whom he calls a "foetus" which reasserts the parallel established in line two between man and egg. "Foetus" is appropriate for Francine; dying "at the age of six" (16) she had not really lived.

After speaking of his visions, Descartes engages in some "Eucharistic sophistry" (17), attempting to give a natural explanation of the supernatural "doctrine of transubstantiation." At this point the first allusion to Dante is made. Speaking of the Scholastics, Descartes says, "They don't know what the master of them that do did, / that the nose is touched by the kiss of allffoul and sweet air" (56-7). The allusion is to Dante's description of Aristotle as " 'l maestro di color che sanno" (Inf. 4.131) ["the master of them who know"]⁴⁰. In his sophistry Descartes sided with Aristotle, who maintained that the senses require direct or indirect contact in order to be stimulated. More important however is the fact that this allusion to the archetypal "knower" is the only

⁴⁰ Lawrence E. Harvey, in Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic, fails to indicate that the allusion is to Dante's description of Aristotle (p. 27). Ruby Cohn, in Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p. 13, ascribes the allusion to the Convivio, where, however, it does not occur. See Sapegno's note to Inf. 4.131, p. 50.

allusion to the Inferno in the poem; all other allusions to Dante are to the Paradiso. In the description of "St. Augustine" (17; Par. 32.35) "thinking" becomes "erring"-- "Fallor, ergo sum!" (73). Clearly, the desire to know is destined to fail.

In the next section of the poem (77-83) Descartes "proves God by exhaustion" (p. 17), or, precisely, by our idea of perfection, concluding that he is "the lonely petal of a great high bright rose" (83). The allusion is to Dante's "candida rosa" (Par. 31.1) ["white rose"]; with that image Dante represented God surrounded by all the heavenly beings, each represented as a petal of the rose. The "lonely" Descartes is much less self-assured than at the beginning of the poem. He realizes that he is not completely divorced from the Scholastics, nor is his being completely a result of his own will.

At this point in his monologue, Descartes finds that his egg is "ripe at last" (84). It has progressed while he has regressed. The movement of the poem itself is one of decline, from assurance to loneliness, from egg to "abortion" (87), from life to death. In this final section (84-98) the life of the egg and of the man are treated together. Like the chick, man lives in the dark, only to die before having lived--Francine, Anna Maria Schurmann (68), who "bloomed and withered" (70) and Henry IV (41), assassinated in his prime, are all examples of unfulfilled lives.

Descartes, exiled as it were in Protestant Sweden, is also unfulfilled. He likens Queen Christina of Sweden to Rahab (Par. 9.116), who sheltered Joshua's spies in Jericho, as Christina shelters Catholic Descartes in Protestant Sweden. As the harlot of Jericho, Rahab recalls the "whore" of the title and the pun in "prostisciutto" (13).

Descartes, who was originally so self-assured, now finds himself at the mercy of the physician Weulles, his enemy. "Oh Weulles spare the blood of a Frank / who has climbed the bitter steps" (94-50). The braggart has become a beggar, like Dante in exile who found "come è duro calle / lo scendere e 'l salir per l'altrui scale" (Par. 17.59-60) ["how hard is the way up and down other people's stairs"]. That Descartes' life is unfulfilled is also suggested by the next line (96), where his name rests incomplete.⁴¹

With his last words, Descartes asks for a "second / starless inscrutable hour" (97-8) like his first in the hot cupboard. His life is yet in ovo; the sky, representing the mysteries of life, is as inscrutable to him as the shell to the chick. There is also the admission, in the word "starless," that his life will not end in transcendence, in knowing completely, which Dante represented by the "stelle" ["stars"] with which he closes each of his canticles. With the word "hour" the poem comes full

⁴¹Note that "perron" means "steps."

circle from the "hora" of the title, which suggests that life is not a progression but is static. As the dying Descartes looks back upon his life, he sees what little progress he has made. His sophistry cannot give him an insight into his being, which, like the egg, is the "abortion of a fledgling" (87).

The allusions to Dante operate on two levels. Their primary significance is to suggest the futility of knowing. Aristotle, who was to the Scholastics what Descartes was to the Rationalists, comprises Beckett's only allusion to the Inferno, indicating where the attempts to know lead. On another level, the allusions to the Paradiso, and by implication to its creator, suggest that transcendence is possible only through poetry; that all knowledge is useful only as the stuff of art:

For in the brightness of art alone can be deciphered the baffled ecstasy . . . known before the inscrutable superficies of a cloud, . . . a spire, a flower.⁴²

In "Whoroscope" Beckett concerns himself primarily with Dante the artist. In "Enueg I" however, the Dante who journeyed through hell is most in his mind. The enueg, a Provençal form, treats of the annoyances of life. In this poem life itself is the annoyance: life is hell.

⁴² Proust, 57. Note the marked correspondence with words in the poem.

The narrator climbs "to the crest of the surge of the steep perilous bridge" (5) which suggests the steeply-arched rock-bridges over the various chasms in the region of the malebolge (e.g. Inf. 18.10, 79; 21.89). The "bright stiff banner" (7) recalls the banner behind which the Futile run (Inf. 3.52-4), here stiffened as if with rigor mortis. The narrator proceeds "into a black west/throttled with clouds" (8-9), recalling Dante's description of hell as "d'ogni luce muto" (Inf. 5.28) ["silent of all light"], "throttled" lending an especially brutal hue to the allusion.

As the pilgrim progresses, he finds that his "skull" "bites like a dog against its chastisement" (15), like Cerberus, the hound of hell, which Virgil chastises by throwing dirt into its three mouths (Inf. 6.25-7). The wanderer continues: "I trundle along rapidly now on my ruined feet / flush with the livid canal" (16-17),⁴³ which recalls the river of boiling blood that Dante crosses (Inf. 12.124-6) in hell.

"Then for miles only wind" (22) suggests the "bufera infernal" (Inf. 5.131) ["hellish wind"] of the second circle of hell. The narrator encounters Democritus (Inf. 4.136) then he sees a "field on the left [go] up in a sudden blaze / of shouting" (36-7) which image suggests

⁴³ Compare Inf. 3.98, "la livida paluda," ["the livid swamp"].

both the rain of fire in the seventh circle (Inf. 14.28-30) and the shouting and screaming of those shipped off to hell (Inf. 3.107). The sterility of the seventh circle is conveyed in Beckett's poem by the "grey verminous hens" (51) and the "mushy toadstool" (55).

As in the Inferno, the way is "down" (62). The "pit" (69) and the "sewer" (72) suggest the "pozzo" (Inf. 31.32) ["well;" "cesspool"] in which hell's giants are chained. In the Inferno one of these giants acts as a ladder, facilitating Dante's way to the nethermost region of hell, an image conveyed in the line "the fingers of the ladder hooked over the parapet" (70). The giant carries Dante down to the frozen lake of Cocytus, which is suggested by the "arctic flowers."

The poem ends with complete negation. There is no transcendence for the narrator. Unlike Dante he does not emerge from hell to see the stars. He has only travelled in a circle, and, as in More Pricks than Kicks, the circle characterizes the unceasing motion that results in no progress; this is the condition of hell.

Hell as present reality is again the theme in "Malacoda." Malacoda (Inf. 21.76-9; 23.141) is the captain of the fifth bolgia's demon army, the "malebranche" (Inf. 21.37) [lit. "evil claws;" sing. "malabranca," cf. line 7]. The demons are winged, hooved and have tails ("Malacoda" literally means "evil tail"). Beckett's poem draws on all of these elements.

"Thrice" (1), the number with which Dante was obsessed (as Beckett is with thirteen) is the number of duties that Malacoda, "the undertaker's man" (2) is to perform: "to measure" (4); "to coffin" (15); and "to cover" (19). Malacoda, "incorruptible" (6) because completely corrupt, waits in the appropriately named "vestibule" (Inf. 3). There, out of respect, he "mutes his signal" (10) which he normally gives full force. Dante relates that in hell "elli avea del cul fatto trombetta" (Inf. 21.139) ["he had made a trumpet with his ass"].

Malacoda and his "assistant unguolata," "Scarmilion" (23) put the corpse in the coffin and cover it. The assistant is about to leave when Malacoda requests him to "stay Scarmilion stay stay" which is almost a literal translation of Malacoda's words in the Inferno, "'Posa, posa, Scarmiglione!'" (Inf. 21.105). Malacoda asks Scarmilion to "lay this Huysum on the box" (24); it is an "imago" (25) or portrait of the deceased. As such, it is the only part of the deceased to survive, just as the poem is the only remnant of the deceased's life. Life survives as an "imago," a perfect state, only through art.

Finally, the coffin is loaded onto the hearse: "all aboard all souls / half-mast aye aye" (27-8).⁴⁴ The hearse is likened to Charon's boat (Inf. 3.127-9) which

⁴⁴ Compare "Draff," More Pricks than Kicks, p. 185.

ferries the souls across the Acheron into hell. The nautical imagery also recalls the opening of Inferno 21, where Dante describes the dry-docked boats in the Venice Arsenal. The final "nay" (29) indicates that death is not the end it is thought to be, and herein lies the ultimate significance of the title. Death is an "evil end" precisely because it does not offer an end, but merely other voyages upon other seas.

CHAPTER FOUR

MURPHY

Beckett's first novel, Murphy,⁴⁵ is more Cartesian than Dantesque. As Belacqua Shuah was in More Pricks than Kicks, Murphy is beset by the macrocosm, represented by Neary et al, while he is searching for the microcosmic state he calls his "Belacqua fantasy" (78). The novel is motivated by the outerworld's attempt to find Murphy and by Murphy's attempt to find the inner world.

The method Murphy uses to attain this inner world is recorded in the first pages of the novel. Murphy is "naked in his rocking chair" (1); by rocking furiously he hopes to deaden his body to all sense perception, making his mind autonomous. "For it was not until his body was appeased that he could come alive in his mind" (2), just as Belacqua had to eat his lunch before going to his Italian lesson.⁴⁶ Thus the only way Murphy can attain freedom is by being lashed naked to a hard chair, and rocking himself nearly to death, a grimly ironic version of the Florentine Belacqua's "sedendo et quiescendo."

Into the serenity of this life walks Celia, who is of the same profession as her Swiftian counterpart. Like

⁴⁵Beckett, Murphy (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1957). Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

⁴⁶Also like Belacqua Shuah, Murphy "stigmatised work" (27), for work is tantamount to contact with the outer world, which Murphy is bent on avoiding.

the women in More Pricks than Kicks, Celia represents the body, by which she literally lives. Paradoxically, Celia is the novel's figure of Beatrice, as the "heavenly" connotation of her name suggests. As opposed to Beatrice who led Dante to a love outside time, Celia wants to lead Murphy to a love inside time. Murphy succumbs but refuses to marry or to get a job (Celia's condition) until the heavens are in the right conjunction and so he has Celia obtain a (w)horoscope from Swami Suk. Murphy's concern with "checking the starry concave" (21) recalls both Dante's Belacqua, who must observe the heavens to ascertain when his stay in the Antepurgatorio expires, and Belacqua Shuah, who however ignored signs from the outer world.

Murphy and Celia are most alone together. Murphy asks Celia "'What do you love?' . . . 'Me as I am. You can want what does not exist, you can't love it'" (36). Murphy exists only in his mind, and Celia cannot love him there. She can only love the Murphy she does not know. Such a situation reduces all love to that of customer and prostitute. In the new lodgings that Murphy and Celia take, Celia hopes to find "the new life" (64). For Murphy, however, the "vita nuova" can be achieved only in his mind. "The only thing Murphy was seeking was what he had not ceased to seek from the moment of his being strangled into a state of respiration--the best of himself" (70-1).

Since Murphy's energy is directed inward, it is no wonder that he fails to make contact (in the form of a job) with the outer world. Distressed at his repeated failures in the outer world, he ponders:

At this moment Murphy would willingly have waived his expectation of Antepurgatory for five minutes in his chair, renounced the lee of Belacqua's rock and his embryonal repose, looking down at dawn across the reeds [Purg. 1.130-6] to the trembling of the austral sea and the sun obliquing to the north as it rose, immune from expiation until he should have dreamed it all through again, with the downright dreaming of an infant, from the spermatorium to the crematorium. He thought so highly of this post-mortem situation, its advantages were present in such detail to his mind, that he actually hoped he might live to be old. Then he would have a long time lying there dreaming, watching the day-spring run through its zodiac, before the toil up the hill to Paradise. The gradient was outrageous, one in less than one. God grant no godly chandler would shorten his time [Purg. 4.133-4] with a good prayer. (77-8)

"This was his Belacqua fantasy." It is the state to which all of Beckett's characters aspire: living their lives on a wholly mental level, outside of time. Murphy hopes no one will pray or light a candle for him when he is in his Antepurgatory, for that would only shorten his stay.

Murphy's "Belacqua bliss" belongs to the second of his "three zones, light, half light, dark, each with its speciality" (111). These zones are inversely analogous to Dante's three post-mortal states. In the zone of light, which for Dante was Paradise, "the pleasure was reprisal."

Light signifies and informs the outer world; in this first zone, Murphy's thoughts are consciously directed outward. The second zone contains the "Belacqua bliss;" "here the pleasure was contemplation," Murphy being able to choose what he wished to contemplate. The third zone is "dark" (112); darkness excludes the outer world completely, and therefore Murphy can become a "mote in the dark of absolute freedom," free of the necessity to choose, free because independent of meaning, a "matrix of surds." It is in this third zone that Murphy seeks to spend most of his time.

All three zones are subject to time, and Murphy still aspires to the condition of timelessness. His aspirations are thwarted, however, by his need for a job; he is finally hired as an orderly in an asylum, the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat. Celia is satisfied that Murphy has a job and Murphy is satisfied that it is an asylum, apart from the outer world.

"The M.M.M. was a sanatorium, not a madhouse nor a home for defectives, and as such admitted only those cases whose prognoses were not hopeless" (60). Thus it is analogous to Purgatory; it is neither the outer world nor the inner world, but a way between them. Just as Celia is completely subject to her body, so the insane are subject to their minds, as signified by Mr. Endon, whose name is Greek for "within." Murphy is in his element.

Yet the outer world continues to force itself upon him. Celia, Neary et al converge on him. Alone in his cubby-hole at the M.M.M., Murphy raises his eyes to "the starless sky" (251).⁴⁷ The sky is outside Murphy's mind, and therefore promises no transcendence. Murphy's fate rests upon the handle of a toilet (a different type of Suk); it is pulled and he is blown to pieces, now literally a "mote" in the darkness. Yet even after his death, the outer world conspires against him. The ashes which he had wanted flushed down the Abbey's toilet end up on a bar room floor.

⁴⁷ Compare "Whoroscope," line 98.

CHAPTER FIVE

WATT

⁴⁸
Watt, Beckett's last English novel, shows at first glance the development of the novelist's allusive technique. Compared to the baroque citations which characterize More Pricks than Kicks, the style in Watt is one of evocation. Whereas Belacqua Shuah plays with words, Watt is plagued by them. Watt is particularly important to our study because we have here for the first time Beckett's consistent use of Dantean elements as an ironic framework. Not only has Beckett quoted Dante in Watt, but he has also constructed his novel so as to present an ironic parallel to the third of the Commedia's post-mortal states. In this sense, Watt is a "parodyso."

Watt is first seen "setting out on a journey" (15); so begin the Dantean parallels. Watt, as we soon discover, is the avatar of "what." He questions everything, he analyzes everything--his smile, frog croaks, his spittle (for which purpose he carries a portable spittoon), even nothing. For God is no longer the source of life's meaning as He was in Dante's cosmos. God, if not dead, is as manifest as Godot. He is represented as "a circle, . . . broken at its lowest point" (126) with a dot not quite in

⁴⁸ Beckett, Watt, 2nd ed. (1953; rpt. London: Calder and Boyars, 1972). Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

the center, alluding ironically to the classical representation of God as "a sphere of which the center is everywhere and the circumference is nowhere."⁴⁹ The continuity of meaning has been interrupted, and meaning must be obtained from another source, specifically through the individual's ability to reason as exercised through words. Watt, having made a virtue out of necessity, is a rationalist. His method is to enumerate all logical possibilities of a given problem; his object is to find, by means of the words he uses, the answer to the problem, or in a larger sense the truth. By definition, Watt must apply his method to every stimulus he receives: the result is chaos. Watt does not decipher, he enciphers.

Since Watt exists only in his mind (the legacy of the cogito) it is as if his body were a detached entity--witness his "walk" (28). When not walking, he is sometimes found in the Belacqua position, "his knees drawn up, and his arms on his knees, and his head on his arms" (31), indicating that he, like Beckett's other characters, desires to return to a prenatal existence.

On his way to Knott's Watt proceeds to the train station, where he

⁴⁹ Georges Poulet, "The Metamorphoses of the Circle," in Dante: A Collection of Critical Essays (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 151. See also J. L. Borges, "Pascal's Sphere," Other Inquisitions, pp. 5-8.

bumped into a porter wheeling a milkcan. . . . The porter did not fall, but he let go his can, which fell back with a thump on its tilted rim. . . . On the platform the porter continued to wheel cans, up and down. At one end of the platform there was one group of cans, and at the other end there was another. The porter chose with care a can in one group and wheeled it to the other. Then he chose with care a can in the other and wheeled it to the one. He is sorting the cans said Watt. Or perhaps it is a punishment for disobedience, or some neglect of duty. (22, 24)

Watt's last guess is correct, for the porter mirrors the punishment meted out to the avaricious and prodigal in the fourth circle of the Inferno:

Qui vidi gente piú ch'altrove troppa,
 e d'una parte e d'altra, con grand'urli,
 voltando pesi per forza di poppa,
 Percoteansi incontro; e poscia pur lí
 si rivolgea ciascun, voltando a retro.
 (Inf. 7.25-9)

[Here I saw more people than anywhere else; and on one side and the other, howling, they were rolling weights with their chests. They would meet with a bang; then each would turn around and roll his weight back again.]

Here the allusion serves primarily to identify Watt with Dante the pilgrim, and to indicate that hell is now; disobedient or not, we are punished. The full significance of the allusion is brought out at the end of the novel.

The motif of paths and ditches, evocative of the Inferno occurs throughout the first part of the book. Watt journeys "in the middle of the road" (34)--"nel mezzo

del cammin" (Inf. 1.1) From the road Watt can glimpse "Mr. Knott's house . . . in the light, of the moon." Dante too glimpses Paradise from the middle of the road (Inf. 1.16-18); ironically the Paradise of Knott is bathed not in the light of the sun, but in the artificial light of the moon,⁵⁰ which image prefigures the illusory nature of Knott's paradise, and, concurrently, of all knowledge. "Watt never knew how he got into Mr. Knott's house" (35). So Dante, when he found himself in the "selva oscura": "Io non so ben ridir com'io v'entrai" (Inf. 1.10) ["I cannot tell how I entered there"]. The allusion is ironic: Knott's, which at first seems paradisaical to Watt, will finally be revealed as hell.

Upon entering Knott's house, Watt is treated to a short statement of epic proportion, spoken by Arsene.⁵¹ In this speech Arsene both encapsulates his own condition and predicts it of Watt. He speaks of Watt as having put "the dark ways all behind" (cf. Purg. 1.44-5), which are the ways of hell, and as "waiting for the dawn to break," the dawn of the purgatory that leads to paradise. Arsene's

⁵⁰ Aldo Tagliaferri in Beckett e l'iperdeterminazione letteraria (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1967) notes that according to Bruno, in whom we have already noted Beckett's interest, the moon represents the speculative intellect.

⁵¹ H. Porter Abbott, in Fiction of Samuel Beckett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 69, states that "If Spiro is Watt's Virgil, Arsene is his Beatrice." If Arsene is Watt's Beatrice, Watt is Ser Brunetto.

speech is punctuated by his bitter "Haw!" for he knows that the way through Knott's leads only into further darkness, and that there is no difference between heaven and hell. For the more one knows Knott ("nought") the less one knows, and to know absolutely everything--such are the terms of the Paradiso--one must know absolutely nothing: "to do nothing exclusively would be an act of the highest value" (39). Yet Watt persists in his attempts to know, to assign meaning to all that he perceives.

After alluding to the "dark ways," which he says Watt has put behind him, Arsene likens Watt's present, innocent state to that of "a face offered, all trust and innocence and candour, all the old soil and fear and weakness offered, to be sponged away and forgiven!" (38). Such is Dante's face after he emerges from Inferno to the shores of Purgatory:

porsi ver lui [Virgilio] le guance lacrimose:
 ivi mi fece tutto scoperto
 quel cōlor che l'inferno mi nascose.
 (Purg. 1.127-9)

[I offered to him [Virgil] my tear-stained cheeks;
 there he clearly revealed that complexion which
 hell had hidden].

Again the allusion is ironic; Watt will not be forgiven: he is damned by his need to know.

Like Arsene when he first entered Knott's, Watt is "middle-aged" (38), as was Dante when he made his journey. Middle-age was the time when Dante questioned all things,

including the nature of his own existence; it was a time when he had to find meaning in his universe. So Watt. Dante, however, transcended this stage; Watt, by the end of the novel, is even more confused in his endeavours to learn something of Knott.

Those who try to understand Knott are punished in the same way as the sorcerers in the fourth chasm of malebolge. Vincent, Walter, Erskine and Arsene are described as having "a little fat bottom sticking out in front and a little fat belly sticking out behind" (57). This is equivalent to the punishment allotted to those who attempted to see into the ways of God;

Come 'l viso mi scese in lor piú basso,
 mirabilmente apparve esser travolto
 ciascun tra 'l mento e 'l principio del casso;
 ché dalle reni era tornato il volto,
 ed in dietro venir li convenia,
 perché 'l veder dinanzi era lor tolto.
 (Inf. 20.10-15)

[Lowering my gaze upon them, I found them to be terribly twisted between the chin and the beginning of the chest, such that the face was turned toward the back, and they had to walk backward since they could not look forward.]

Watt's fantastic way of walking is a mutation of the infernal infliction. He and the others are punished not for trying to look into the future, but for trying to understand the present. Both are equally as vain, as Beckett indicated in "Whoroscope."

The Mr. Knott Watt is trying to understand is described in terms of the deity. He "neither comes nor goes . . . but seems to abide in his place" (56); he has beings "about [him] in tireless assiduity turning" (60); "eternally turning about [him] in tireless love" (61), just as the blessed revolve around God in the Paradiso. Furthermore, Watt obtains the impression that "nothing could be added to Mr. Knott's establishment, and from it nothing taken away, but that as it was now, so it had been in the beginning, and so it would remain in the end" (129). Arsene explains to Watt that any attempt to know "the unutterable or ineffable . . . is doomed to fail" (61). Dante experienced similar frustration in his attempt to know God. The point Beckett is making is that our knowledge of individuals is as difficult to obtain as was the knowledge of God for Dante. As he says in Proust, "we cannot know and we cannot be known" (49).

Arsene concludes his discourse by telling Watt that he will "go by [his] side" (62) for a while, a combination of Knowledge and Dante's Virgil, and then Watt must travel alone, "with only shades to keep [him] company." While it is true that Virgil leaves Dante at the inception of the voyage to Paradise, he is replaced by Beatrice. No¹ Beatrice comes to Watt, however, for his world will not be redeemed.

Watt begins his service at Knott's on the ground floor. He is constantly confronted with meaningless events, and is obliged, "because of his peculiar character, to enquire into what . . . they might be induced to mean" (72). Watt goes on: "For the only way one can speak of nothing ["nought" / Knott] is to speak of it as though it were something" (74), just as one can express the idea of zero only when a numerical system precedes it. Watt's predicament of having to assign things a meaning by using words is aggravated by the fact that the ordering principle of his life is Knott/"nought?" Here, then, is the situation facing the characters of the trilogy: the words (something) which one must use to assign meaning (to nothing) obscure the meaning sought after, and create one of their own.

Such a situation has curious analogues in the doctrine nomina sunt consequentia rerum, that the essence of a thing is signified by the word that designates it.⁵² Thus, any given object has a name expressive of its inherent quality: any attempt to name it otherwise would be meaningless. Watt is explicitly confronted by this situation when he attempts to name a pot (78-80). Another factor complicating his dilemma is that he cannot see words as symbols, as pointing beyond themselves:

⁵²

Dante quotes this formula in Vita Nuova 13, and alludes to it in Vita Nuova 24 and Par. 12.81. For possible sources of this doctrine see Leonardo Olschki, The Myth of Felt (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1949), p. 51.

Watt . . . had not seen a symbol, nor executed an interpretation, since the age of fourteen . . . and . . . had lived, miserably it is true, among face values all his adult life. (70)

He is only aware of the words themselves. The word, and not The Word, is in control.

While at Knott's, Watt functions as cook. Of course, he must question every aspect of this task; this questioning assumes absurd proportions in the elaborate preparations made to ensure that Knott's scraps would be eaten by a dog. Watt's rationalizations have as their object the complete elimination of chance, for it is especially the irrational which indicates to Watt just how impotent is his reason, and since he lives only in his mind, to doubt his reason is to doubt himself. The irrational, however, cannot be eliminated, for it is the principle upon which the Knott household is run. Given this situation, Watt's attempt to find meaning is absurd.

Watt believes that he will be able to understand Knott by looking him in the face, as Dante saw the mysteries of creation clarified in the face of God. Yet this is to no avail, and "little by little Watt abandoned all hope, all fear, of ever seeing Mr. Knott face to face" (145). This allusion to the words that appear over the gates of hell, "Lasciate ogni speranza" (Inf. 3.9) ["Abandon all hope"], indicates precisely where Watt's attempts to know have led him.

In the third part of the novel (which takes place after the fourth) we find Watt in an asylum with his friend Sam, who is transcribing Watt's story. The environs of the asylum resemble the "selva oscura"--"thickets rose at every turn, brakes of impenetrable density" (153). In the asylum Sam observes Watt "advancing backwards" (157), like the sorcerers alluded to earlier, thereby following in the tradition of Arsene et al. His backward ambulation also recalls the prayer of the Proud in Purgatory, who say:

Dà oggi a noi la cotidiana manna,
 senza la qual per questo aspro deserto
 a retro va chi piú di gir s'affanna.
 (Purg. 11.13-15)

[Give us this day our daily manna, without which he goes backward through this harsh desert who strives most to go forward.]

It is precisely this "manna," the grace to accept the irrational on faith, that Watt lacks.

Words are the only things standing between Watt and meaning, yet they are the only means he has to find meaning. If he could deprive them of their own meaning, they would say what he wants them to say. He tries to rob them of meaning by inverting the letters in his words, then by speaking his sentences in reverse order. Ironically, he comes closest to the paradisal state of knowing Knott/"nought" here in the dark wood of the asylum.

In the fourth and final part of the novel, we see Watt in his final days at Knott's, before he goes to the asylum. He has learned nothing of Knott, not realizing that this is all he can know, and so is still "in the middle of the road" (222). His position is static, for man cannot know. He again travels through an infernal landscape toward the train which, like Charon's boat (Inf. 3.94), will ferry him to the asylum. His life at Knott's has been circumscribed by Beckett's words in Proust: "Life is a succession of Paradises successively denied" (26).

It is in the Addenda that Beckett quotes from Dante. The aptness of the allusion testifies again to Beckett's great familiarity with the Commedia. The words Beckett quotes, "parole non ci appulcro" (255), occur in Inferno 7, to which Beckett alluded at the opening of the novel. By this allusion, Watt is brought full circle. The image of the circle is particularly significant; it has a direct correlative in the circles in which Dante's damned wander, and as such unites the ideas of motion and stasis which inform Beckett's work.

In Inferno 7, Virgil points out on one side the avaricious and on the other the prodigal, then explains:

Mal dare e mal tener lo mondo pulcro
 ha tolto loro, e posti a questa zuffa:
 qual ella sia, parole non ci appulcro.
 (Inf. 7.58-60)

[Avarice and prodigality robbed them of the beautiful world, and set them at this strife: as to what that is , words add nothing.]

That words convey a meaning distinct from the one perceived is one of the major themes of Watt. What makes this allusion so apt is that Dante had to coin the word "appulcrare" ("to make beautiful;" the line means literally, "as to what that is, I will not embellish it with words") in order to indicate that words were superfluous. The concern with the tyranny of words expressed in Watt, the use of the Dantesque cosmology as an ironic framework and the evocative style all prefigure the trilogy, where Beckett achieves not only a greater concentration of content, but a concurrent development in form.

CHAPTER SIX

MORAN

Beckett used Dante's three post-mortal states as an ironic frame of reference in Watt, and as such that novel precurses his use of Dante in the Three Novels.⁵³ For, in one sense, Molloy is infernal, Malone Dies purgatorial, and The Unnamable paradisal. Yet the progression implied by such a parallel does not exist in the novels. The Unnamable is no further along the road than Moran. Actually, Beckett uses the Commedia in the trilogy in three ways: first, as an ironic frame of reference for his own work; second, inversely, to represent the regression into hell; third, as the exegetical predecessor of his own set of interpretive levels.

Certainly one of the major reasons Beckett chose the Commedia as his artistic frame is that it is the classical paradigm of spiritual refinement, and as Beckett states in Proust, refinement is the task of the artist, who must search out "the ideal core of the onion" (16). But Beckett bears other affinities with the writer of the Commedia. Dante and Beckett are both religious writers, and each seeks to construct a system in which the self will have meaning; in which the self will be at the center, like Hamm

⁵³ Beckett, Three Novels (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965). Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

who must be precisely in the center of his room or Molloy who "sought refuge near the centre" (113). For Dante, meaning was found in final causes, and there could be finality because there was a God who was both alpha and omega, a God of whom man was the reflection. In Beckett, there is no final cause; his characters, like Hamm and Clov, cannot make an end. Molloy states the dilemma of these characters precisely: "If I speak of principles, when there are none, I can't help it, there must be some somewhere" (46).

There are no principles, says Molloy, yet recognizes that there must be some order, some standard, if he is to have meaning. In the same way, Beckett's trilogy depends for its existence upon the standards which it denies. The trilogy is both Beckett's commentary on the failure of Dante's system to provide meaning for contemporary man, and a testament to his inability to detach himself from that system. For it is the order and structure of Dante's system that gives meaning to Beckett's own.

We have seen how the Dantean structure contained in the Belacqua episode (Purg. 4) is particularly important in Beckett's thought. Another major debt to Dante is revealed in the trilogy (and later works) where the atmosphere evoked is that of the third canto of the Inferno, and particularly the passage which describes those in the vestibule of hell:

'Questo misero modo
tengon l'anime triste di coloro
che visser senza infamia e senza lodo.

Mischiate sono a quel cattivo coro
delli angeli che non furon ribelli
né fur fedeli a Dio, ma per sé foro.

Caccianli i ciel per non esser men belli,
né lo profondo inferno li riceve,
ch'alcuna gloria i rei avrebber d'elli.'

E io: 'Maestro, che è tanto greve
a lor, che lamentar li fa sì forte?'
Rispuose: 'Dicerolti molto breve.

Questi non hanno speranza di morte,
e la lor cieca vita è tanto bassa,
ch'invidiosi son d'ogni altra sorte.

Fama di loro il mondo esser non lassa;
misericordia e giustizia li sdegna:
non ragioniam di lor, ma guarda e passa.'
(Inf. 3.34-51)

['This is the miserable fate meted out to the sad
souls of those who lived unworthy of infamy or praise.
Mixed with them is that despicable group of angels
who were neither for rebellion nor for God but for
themselves. Heaven expelled them, so as not to
blemish its beauty; the infernal depths shall not
receive them, for the damned might glory in them.'

And I: 'Master, what causes them such grief that
they cry so much?'

He replied: 'I will tell you briefly. These have
no hope of death, and their blind life is so low that
they envy every other fate. They have no name in the
world; mercy and justice scorn them. We will not
speak of them: look and pass on.']

Those who would place the trilogy's characters in Purgatory
forget Beckett's statement that in Purgatory there is "ab-
solute progression and a guaranteed consummation;"⁵⁴ that

⁵⁴"Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce," p. 22.

"movement is unidirectional, and a step forward represents a net advance." There is no progression, there is no consummation, there is no advance in the world of the trilogy. Theirs is the world of the antinferno, the Vestibule of hell, which is not Purgatory, nor Heaven, nor Hell.

We begin our study of the trilogy with what purports to be the most literal of the four monologues: Moran's "report" (92). Moran's world has the additional attraction, for our purposes, of being the closest to the Dantean one. Moran is a Catholic who attends church regularly, has a respectable home life and is gainfully employed. Order and normality are the operative words.

This orderly life is doomed at the first mention of Molloy, whom Moran is ordered to find. Moran's search is directed toward the "outer world" (114), whereas Molloy's is directed toward the inner world; the motion of their journey(s) is repeated by the Unnamable (316-317) where it becomes clear that the centripetal and centrifugal actions signify that the quest for the self is an infinite one.

Moran's search for Molloy is paradigmatic of Molloy's, Malone's and the Unnamable's search for the self. Moran's search is initiated by Gaber (Gabriel), messenger of Youdi (Diyou: Dieu), who arrives as Moran sits complacently in his backyard, surrounded by his possessions, watching

his bees. Gaber's message is that Moran must find Molloy, that he is the only one for the job, and that his son Jacques Jr. must accompany him.

Moran soon reveals himself as being paranoid: he thinks both his son and Martha spy on him, he worries about the effect of beer on the eucharist, he fears his cook will poison him, he thinks his neighbours hate him and call him a "bastard" (97) behind his back. He is also a man of habit, and he gives over much of his time to "prolonged reflection" (98). Moran is confident in his ability to reason and to know. In his own little world, he knows all and is the chief of all, giving orders, meting out punishment, sending people here and there. He is to his own world what Youdi is to the outer world.

Molloy changes all this. After learning of his assignment, the eucharist brings Moran "no relief" (102), he finds his dinner has "gone to nothing," Martha mocks him, he feels his "life [is] running out," the sunshine has turned to rain. "I was floundering" (105) says Moran. "I so sly as a rule." Moran could of course disregard Youdi's order, yet to do without Youdi is tantamount to "regarding [himself] as solely responsible for [his] wretched existence" (107), and Moran cannot face this. Clearly, the belief in Youdi/Diyou is a habit; it is Moran's "guarantee of a dull inviolability."⁵⁵ And like

⁵⁵Proust, p. 8.

all habits it serves to mask "the suffering of being."⁵⁶
 God, who was in Dante's cosmos the source of being is here
 that which veils being.

Moran ponders his fate in the dark of his room,
 and, as in Murphy, the dark is the way into the micro-
 cosm, where meaning is to be found. For in the outer
 world all "sensations" are "illusory" (111) and "it is
 thanks to them [Moran] find[s] himself a meaning"--for an
 illusory meaning is better than none at all, and in the
 macrocosm "no investigation would be possible" (111).
 However, it is in the microcosm that "the prey is lodged"
 (110); the prey is Molloy, of whom Moran posits, "perhaps
 I had invented him, I mean found him ready made in my
 head" (112). Moran's search for Molloy is in effect a
 search through his own mind for a meaning that is not
 illusory. "For who could have spoken to me of Molloy if
 not myself and to whom if not to myself could I have
 spoken of him?" (112).⁵⁷

Molloy is the irrational side of Moran; as Moran
 says, "Just the opposite of myself" (113). Molloy is like

⁵⁶Proust, p. 8.

⁵⁷There is a curious allusion to the De Vulgari Elo-
quentia in Moran's musings on the second syllable of Mol-
 loy's name, "which might have been oy . . . or even oc" (112).
 Dante speaks of the languages of "oc" and "oil."
 A. G. F. Howell notes, "Oc equals Latin hoc (this); oil
 results from the combination of affirmative hoc with ille
 (he)." See A Translation of the Latin Works, note to line
 43, page 23.

an animal, a "bear," according to Moran. Because Molloy is part of Moran, they travel the same ground and arrive at the same point, but do not recognize it as the same, for "paths look different, when you go back along them" (165). Their perspectives are completely opposite, Molloy irrational and of the inner world, Moran "patiently turned toward the outer world" (114), "reigning back his thoughts within the limits of the calculable."

There are two other aspects to Moran's search for Molloy, besides that of the Dantean search for the self. The first is that of the artist's descent into the self in the process of artistic creation:

The artistic tendency is not expansive, but a contraction. . . . The only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent. The artist is active, but negatively, shrinking from the nullity of extracircumferential phenomena. (Proust, 47-8)

In turning his back on "his house" (114), "his garden," "his few poor possessions," Moran is shrinking from the outerworld. He undertakes this activity "neither for Molloy," for it does not placate his irrational side, "nor for [himself]," for the descent into the self increases suffering of being (witness the Inferno),

but on behalf of a cause which, while having need of us to be accomplished, was in its essence anonymous, and would subsist, haunting the minds of men, when its miserable artisans should be no more. (114-115)

The search for the self is epitomized by the artistic process, which form it takes in the Commedia, and it is this form the search takes throughout the trilogy.

The second aspect is Molloy's status as "fabulous being" (111), as chimera, as "denizen of . . . dark places" (114). The search for Molloy is in this sense analogous to the mythic quest, such as that of Odysseus, or as Aldo Tagliaferri suggests, that of Actaeon, who became, after spying on Diana, that which he had been hunting, a fate similar to Moran's.⁵⁸

The three aspects of Moran's search for Molloy, which are the search for the self, the artistic descent, and the quest for a fabulous being, are united by the Dantean motif. Dante's voyage is above all the search for the true self, for the Godhead in which the self is perfected. The descent into the inferno is the artistic descent into the self, revelatory of the suffering of being and catalysed by the presence of Virgil, symbol of poetry. And the pagan paradigms of Dante's quest are those of Odysseus and of Jason.

"It was then the unheard of sight was to be seen of Moran making ready to go without knowing where he was going" (124). Whereas Dante's quest for meaning was conducted in a highly ordered way, Moran's search is

⁵⁸ Tagliaferri, Beckett e l'iperdeterminazione letteraria, p. 30 ff. Hereafter cited as Beckett

through unmapped terrain and he has no one to guide him. He and his son begin their journey in a "wood" (127) that is "dark"--Dante's "sēlva oscura." There they turn "left" (128), as those in hell do, and there they lose "the right road"--"la diritta via" (Inf. 1.3). Moran is fearful of losing his son in this forest, and considers tying Jacques Jr. to himself, like Lucky to Pozzo. Jacques Jr. is compelled by Moran just as Moran is compelled by Gaber, who is compelled by Youdi, none of them knowing what he is doing. The terrain through which Moran and his son travel, "the Molloy country" (133), is infernal, reminiscent of that through which Watt travelled to Knott's. Like those who course through hell, Moran feels "as if [he] were dead" (135), and like all of Beckett's characters, the Belacqua position, "legs in . . . arms" and "chin on . . . knees" (136) comes naturally to him. Like Belacqua, Moran yearns "to be literally incapable of motion" with "just enough brain intact to allow [him] to exult" (140).

Alone in the dark wood, his son having left to purchase a bicycle, Moran is accosted by a man wearing a heavy coat and carrying a massive club. "His accent was that of . . . one who had lost the habit of speech" (146), like Virgil, "chi per lungo silenzio pareva fiocō" (Inf. 1.63) ["whose voice through long silence appeared weak"], when he accosts Dante in the dark wood. But this intruder

does not guide Moran to the light, he gives no spiritual guidance to Moran, whose world is in ruins:

And what I saw was more like a crumbling, a frenzied collapsing of all that had always protected me from all I was always condemned to be. Or it was like a kind of clawing towards a light and countenance I could not name, that I had once known and long denied. (148)

Moran's world is in ruins because he is no longer subject to the habits he had developed in society. Here he is confronted with the irrationality, the unaccountability, of his own being, for which he must find a shape. He is in the spiritual condition of Dante, who, from the dark wood could see the "raggi del pianeta / che mena dritto altrui per ogni calle" (Inf. 1.17-18) ["the rays of the planet that best guides men on every road"] but was himself powerless to move until helped by the will of God, operating through Virgil. For Moran, however, the Other, when he does arrive, is only a source of torment. The next man Moran meets he beats to "a pulp" (151).

Finally Moran's son returns with a bicycle on which they set off "downhill" (157), toward home, encountering "fiends," "furies" (166; cf. Inf. 9.38) and "phantoms of the dead;" travelling across "icy[cf. Inf. 32-34], . . . muddy [cf. Inf. 6] solitudes" (168). Abandoned by his son, Moran is eventually found by Gaber, who relates Youdi's message: "Moran, Jacques, home, instanter" (163). His actions willed by another, Moran crawls onward; like

Dante's Ulysses (also willed by another [Inf. 26.141]) he moves toward a dissolution that is neither an end nor a beginning. As Moran says, "I knew that all was about to end, or to begin again, it little mattered which" (161).

While he crawls on, he asks himself questions, none of which he can answer. Confronted with the irrational, Moran, like Watt, realizes the futility of knowledge: "I do not know, . . . it is too soon to know, I simply do not know, perhaps shall never know" (105). He realizes he is not the first to have no answers, that there were the others, "Murphy, Watt" (168). His fate mirrors their own.

While crawling along, Moran thinks above all of the dance of his bees, which "involved a great variety of figures and rhythms" (168). After a full investigation, Moran interprets this dance to be "a system of signals," a language. Each figure is modified by a hum, and by "the height at which the figure was executed" (169). Moran goes on:

And I acquired the conviction that the selfsame figure, accompanied by the selfsame hum, did not mean at all the same thing at twelve feet from the ground as it did at six. For the bees did not dance at any level, haphazard, but there were three or four levels, always the same, at which they danced.

Moran is obviously describing a system of communication. And it is not a simple system but operates on "three or four levels." These three or four levels correspond to

the allegorical levels in the Commedia.⁵⁹ In this aspect, each monologue of the trilogy relates the same events, but at different levels of abstraction, as the literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical levels represent the same event successively abstracted in the Commedia.⁶⁰

There is an allusion in Moran's discourse on his bees to the classic defense of allegory in the Paradiso. Although Moran admits he cannot understand the ultimate import of the bees' dance, he goes on to say, "I would never do my bees the wrong I had done my God, to whom I had been taught to ascribe my angers, fears, desires, and even my body" (169). This recalls Beatrice's explanation to Dante of the presence of the souls in the various spheres⁶¹ when she has already told him that all are with God in the empyrean; they are arranged in this way so that Dante may more readily understand what he sees:

Per questo la Scrittura condescende
a vostra facultate, e piedi e mano
attribuisce a Dio, ed altro indende.
(Par. 4.43-5)

⁵⁹Suggested by Tagliaferri, Beckett . . ., pp. 121 ff.

⁶⁰See Dante's "Epistola 10, to Can Grande," in A Translation of the Latin Works, paragraph 7, pp. 347-8.

⁶¹The souls are compared to bees, Par. 31.7. The bees are related specifically to the human plane in Moran's description of his route as a "bee-line" (173). Note also "Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce," "the words dance" (14), and Molloy's narrative, "thought and feeling dance" (10).

[In this way the Scriptures accommodate your intelligence, ascribing feet and hands to God, and meaning something else.]

The trilogy is allegorical⁶² in that it describes the unknown, but Real, in terms of the known, but fictional. Or, in Beckett's words, the "message of general significance" is conveyed through "a fabulous form."⁶³ Thus, Dante writes of meeting a leopard in a dark wood, where he means he was beset by lust in his moral uncertainty. The material world familiar to all implies the unfamiliar but real spiritual world. The abstraction of the material sense leads ultimately to the absolute spiritual sense, wherein all meaning resides. Remove this ultimate level and the abstraction progresses infinitely. The goal of allegory is not its continuation, but its dissolution; the end of appearance and the beginning of reality.

Not only is the ultimate level of abstraction absent in Beckett's world, but the words used to signify are not the slaves of the writers, but their masters. For if there is nothing to express, ultimately, then words (something) detract from that meaning (nothing), and the more words used to express the nothing than which nothing is more real, the further away one gets from that reality.

⁶² Frank Kermode was the first to call Beckett an "allegorist," in "Samuel Beckett," Continuities (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 1968, p. 174.

⁶³ "Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce," p. 12.

Thus we have, as Tagliaferri notes, "A work in regress."⁶⁴ The words that obscure and the infinite levels of abstraction are the terms of the Beckettian inferno, an inferno which represents, however, the only possible direction in which the artist can move. As Moran says, "all language [is] an excess of language" (116). Yet Moran must write; he has no choice, as he explains: "If I submit to this paltry scribbling which is not of my province, it is for reasons very different from those that might be supposed. I am still obeying orders" (131). So Dante is compelled to write: "'quel che vedi, / ritornato di là, fa che tu scrivi'" (Purg. 32.104-5) ["'write what you see, when you have returned there'"]. And so the souls in hell are compelled to speak when questioned by Dante, the implications of which Beckett explores dramatically in Play and Not I.

Moran's physical decline at the end of his journey mirrors the regression of his quest. His changed physical appearance suggests his modified inner being. The house he returns to is wrecked, the garden a shambles, the bees and hens dead. As Moran has changed so has his world. Moran's journey ends where Molloy's begins, in the dark wood. Moran's quest and Molloy's are complementary: just

⁶⁴Tagliaferri, Beckett . . ., p. 26. Ruby Cohn, in Back to Beckett (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. xv, states that Beckett has actually written a work of this title.

as Moran's ends where Molloy's begins, so Molloy's ends in the room, where Moran's begins. Each travels toward the beginning of the other; neither makes an end. Toward the conclusion of his report, Moran relates that he is "clearing out" (175); at the end of his narrative Molloy longs "to go back into the forest" (91). Together, their quests form a circular system, or, in terms of the allegorical levels on which their narratives are written, Moran's quest prefigures all the others; it is their simulacrum. This eternal circling that admits of no progress, in search of a self that is never found, is precisely the condition of the vestibule of hell, where Dante represented "the long drama of the people who wait to be that which they are not yet, who struggle painfully in the search for themselves."⁶⁵ After Moran finishes his report, he will start off again, this time on crutches, like Molloy, searching for someone he will never realize is himself. "And perhaps he thinks each journey is the first. This would keep hope alive, would it not, hellish hope" (133).

⁶⁵ Silvio Pasquazi, "Antinferno," Enciclopedia Dantesca (Roma: Istituto Della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970), p. 302.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MOLLOY

Molloy's narrative repeats many of the details found in Moran's report. Molloy's written narrative is collected by a "man who comes every week" (7) on a "Sunday" (8), as Gaber came to Moran (cf. p. 175), and this man drinks too. Moran and Molloy dress similarly and they encounter similar situations on their journeys, which are taken through a similarly infernal landscape. "Similar," yet not exactly the same. The events are the same, but the perceiver is different: Molloy's narrative is Moran's at a different level of perception, and since each of the trilogy's characters moves ever more deeply into the self, closer to the essence of being, each of their narratives represents a greater level of abstraction than the preceding.

Molloy's narrative begins at the end of his journey, as did Dante's, but without the transcendent self-knowledge that Dante achieved. In fact, Molloy's situation is no better than hell. He is "in [his] mother's room" (7), but, he says, "I don't know how I got there," echoing Dante in the dark wood (and Watt in Knott's): "Io non so ben ridir com'io v'entrai" (Inf. 1.10) ["I cannot tell how I entered there"]. Molloy's condition is that of the dark wood: he is lost, he knows not how he got where he is, nor why he went there. He only knows that he has regressed to his mother's room.

Like Moran, Molloy posits various levels to his narrative: "This time, then once more I think, then perhaps a last time" (8)--Molloy's narrative, then Malone's, then the Unnamable's. Molloy is compelled to write, like Moran and the others. One of the first events he relates is the meeting of A and C. C is dressed in a greatcoat, and carries a "stout stick" (10), corresponding to the character Moran meets in the dark wood (p. 146). Molloy observes C from a position like that which Belacqua occupied in Antepurgatory:

I was perched higher than the road's highest point and flattened what is more against a rock the same colour as myself, that is grey. The rock he probably saw. He gazed around as if to engrave the landmarks on his memory and must have seen the rock in the shadow of which I crouched like Belacqua [sic], or Sordello [Purg. 6.74], I forget. (10)

As is typical of Beckett's characters, Molloy identifies with Belacqua (who also observed two strangers from the shadow of a rock). Sordello, described by Dante as "tutta in se romita" (Purg. 6.72) ["completely self-absorbed"] also epitomizes that state of inner being aloof from the macrocosm and outside of time to which Beckett's characters have aspired since Shuah.

⁶⁶In a passage from the unpublished "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" quoted by Lawrence E. Harvey in Samuel Beckett, p. 316, Beckett also alludes to Sordello and uses the phrase "raccolta a se" ["completely self-occupied"] to describe Sordello, which corresponds to Velutello's "tutta in se raccolta," quoted by H. F. Cary, The Vision of Dante, note to Purg. 6.72, p. 223.

But Molloy is not in purgatorio; he is in hell, as the landscape indicates: "endless roads, sands [Inf. 3; 15], . . . bogs [Inf. 6]" (12), "ramparts [Inf. 8]," "mud [Inf. 7]" and "scum [Inf. 18]" (14). Of this landscape, Molloy says, "if it happens that I speak of the stars it is by mistake" (15) for the "stelle" are visible only after one has exited from hell. There is no exit from Molloy's hell, for it is "within, all that inner space one never sees, the brain and heart and other caverns where thought and feeling dance their sabbath" (10). Molloy's hell is "issueless" (13).⁶⁷ Since Molloy exists only in his own mind, everything outside of it represents a universe as vast as that of the epic cosmos. As he says, "the confines . . . of my body are as remote from me as were those of my region, in the days of my splendour" (66). The contents of Molloy's pockets are as far from him and as mysterious as was the primum mobile for Dante,⁶⁸ and like Dante, Molloy creates insidiously complicated systems in order to understand his universe--witness the sucking stone sequence (69-74). When Molloy has occasion to speak of his clothes (part of the process, which Malone stretches to absurdity,

⁶⁷ Compare Lessness (London: Calder and Boyars, 1970), p. 7, "Blacked out fallen open four walls over backwards true refuge issueless." Lessness draws on Inf. 14, where the blasphemers against God are punished in a desert of burning sand, on which they lie prostrate.

⁶⁸ In the same way, Malone comments on the great distance between himself and his feet (234).

of naming the universe) he says he will only discuss them fully "when the time comes to draw up the inventory of [his] goods and possessions" (14); this inventory is the epic catalogue of a shrunken universe.

In his hell, Molloy is tormented by demons in the guise of policemen.⁶⁹ He is imprisoned, then mysteriously released, and continues "on [his] way, that way of which he knew nothing" (26). "For I did not know if it was the right road" (30) says Molloy, just as for Dante "la diritta via era smarrita" (Inf. 1.3) ["the right road was lost"]. He reaches a "canal-bank" (26; cf. "Enueg I;" "the livid canal") where he sees a "boatman" with a "long white beard" like Charon, boatman for the damned.

The right road for Molloy is the one that leads to his mother; ironically, it is the road through hell. On his way through this hellish landscape, Molloy arrives at a city like Dis (Inf. 9 ff.) which he cannot name-- "it's too difficult to say" (31), echoing Dante's horror of hell: "Quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura" (Inf. 1.4) ["It is hard to say how it was"]. He cannot name the city because it has no meaning if he himself has no meaning, as he intimates in his next breath: "And even my sense of identity was wrapped in a namelessness often hard to penetrate." (Here of course we have the Unnamable). Meaning resides only in words: as Molloy states, "All I know is

⁶⁹ Compare the Civic Guard in "A Wet Night," More Pricks Than Kicks.

what the words know." Yet that knowledge is not real but illusory, for "saying is inventing" (32).

In this city he cannot name, Molloy is greeted by "all these feet and hands, stamping, clutching, clenched in vain, these bawling mouths" (34-5), which recalls Dante's description of those in the vestibule of hell:

Diverse lingue, orribili favelle,
parole di dolore, accenti d'ira,
voci alte e fioche, e suon di man con elle
(Inf. 3.25-7)

[Strange speech, horrible sayings, words of sorrow, angry shouts, voices both loud and faint, and a sound like hands clapping.]

Here he runs over a dog, and is saved from the attendant mob by a Mrs. Loy or Lousse. Lousse is associated with the earth in its positive and negative aspects--she buries the dog which Molloy ran over, and sows seeds on the grave. She plies Molloy "with delicacies" (37), washes him and clothes him. Her long discourses are basically unintelligible to Molloy, but he does come to understand that he may remain with her for the rest of his life, in total freedom. Although Molloy has previously stated that he has need of no one, he stays at Lousse's for "a year perhaps" (51). The only reason Molloy can find for this sojourn against his will is that he was not at liberty to do otherwise.

Such reasoning goes counter to Molloy's idea of freedom, which he expresses by

the image of old Geulincx, . . . who left [Molloy] free, on the black boat of Ulysses, to crawl towards the East, along the deck. That is a great measure of freedom, for him who has not the pioneering spirit. And from the poop, poring upon the wave, a sadly rejoicing slave, I follow with my eyes the proud and futile wake. Which, as it bears me from no fatherland away, bears me onward to no shipwreck. (51)

The allusion to "Ulysses" and "shipwreck"⁷⁰ recalls Dante's version of Ulysses' last voyage (Inf. 26), where, sailing West, the Greek suffers shipwreck in sight of Mount Purgatory. The westward movement of the ship renders even more ironical Molloy's eastward movement of "freedom," which is in fact a savagely ironical reduction of Dante's "liberi soggiacete" (Purg. 16.80) ["free subjects"]. Ulysses'

⁷⁰"Shipwreck" is also an allusion to Leopardi's poem "L'infinito," in which the poet describes the shipwreck of his thoughts. In his monologue, Molloy quotes from Leopardi. Speaking of his impotence, he quotes "non che la speme il desiderio" (35) from the poem "A sè stesso" ["To Himself"]. The line means, in context, "not only the hope [but] the desire [is gone]." This poem also furnished the epigraph to Proust, "E fango è il mondo" ["and the world is mud;" the line contains a pun, euphemistically rendered as "and screw the world"]. (This epigraph has been omitted in the 1965 edition of Proust and Three Dialogues). Leopardi's "fango" is itself an allusion to Inf. 7.109-111, both of which evoke the world of How It Is. Leopardi's influence on Beckett's works is great; see especially the Zibaldone. The best (but still insufficient) compilation of Leopardian echoes in Beckett has been made by Renato Oliva in Samuel Beckett: Prima del silenzio (Milano: Mursia, 1967). For the poems noted above see Giacomo Leopardi, Selected Prose and Poetry, trans. Iris Origo and John Heath-Stubbs (Toronto: New American Library, 1967), pp. 204, 266.

punishment in the eighth bolgia is to be sheathed in a tongue of flame. Each word he utters--and he has no choice when questioned but to answer--increases his torment: words are the agent of his damnation, as they are of the characters in the trilogy. The image suggested by Molloy also conveys the idea that without a beginning ("fatherland") there can be no end ("shipwreck"). Thus the quest for the beginning, as discussed in the chapter on Moran (see above p. 80).

The allusion to Ulysses also serves to identify Molloy's patroness as Circe, who, Ulysses states, "sottrasse / me piú d'unnanno" (Inf. 26.91-2) ["kept me for more than one year"]⁷¹. As Circe, Lousse is the prelude to the underworld--Odysseus visits Teiresias, who predicts his death at sea, after he leaves Circe. Yet as Erich Neumann points out, Circe is but an aspect of the archetypal Great Mother; specifically she represents the aspect of "the character of enchantment leading to doom," the negative aspect of the Great Mother, which is suggested by Lousse's burying the dog.⁷² Yet there is also a positive aspect to Lousse, namely the planting of the seeds. In addition to the associa-

⁷¹ Note also that Lousse "drugged" (53) Molloy's food and drink.

⁷² Erich Neumann, The Great Mother (1955; rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 81. See also "Schema III" facing p. 82. Note that the moon is the symbol of the Great Mother, and compare Molloy's lunar musings, p. 39. Lousse's first name, "Sophie" (35) suggests the Sophia which is the "spiritual whole" (Neumann, p. 325).

tion with fertility, there is the connection with Dante's Matelda, custodian of the garden of the Earthly Paradise (Purg. 28-33).⁷³ Matelda bathes the souls who have reached the summit of Purgatory in the river of Lethe and gives them to drink of the river of Eunoe.

Lousse's identification with Circe, the negative aspect (death/burial) of the Great Mother, has another ramification:

The underworld, the earth womb, as the perilous land of the dead through which the deceased must pass, either to be judged there and to arrive at a chthonic realm of salvation or doom or to pass through this territory to a new and higher existence, is one of the archetypal symbols of the Terrible Mother.⁷⁴

This is the womb that Molloy and the others seek out, the womb that will not, however, be the end of their quest but the threshold of the end, as indeed the Unnamable states in his last words that he is at "the threshold of [his] story, before the door that opens on [his] story" (414). For one enters the womb either to be judged or to pass to a higher existence, and for the trilogy's characters, neither is possible. They live on the brink of being. Molloy's "mother's room" (7) is in fact the womb in its negative aspect:

⁷³Matelda represents the active life; note Molloy's reference to "the active and the contemplative" (52).

⁷⁴Neumann, The Great Mother, p. 157.

the deadly devouring maw of the underworld, . . .
the abyss of hell, the dark hole of the depths, the
devouring womb of the grave and of death, of dark-
ness without light, of nothingness.⁷⁵

While staying in Lousse's garden, Molloy, like Moran, feels he is being "spied on . . . [from] behind the bushes" (53). He finally escapes from Lousse and her "spells" (59), taking with him some silver and a knife rest. He limps along on his crutches, like those "who have to fasten one foot to the ground before they dare lift up the other" (64). His walk recalls Belacqua Shuah's "spavined gait,"⁷⁶ both of which have their antecedent in Dante's limp in the dark wood (Inf. 1.30; see above p. 25), which is where Molloy finds himself:

the darkness of these towering forests, these giant fronds, where I hobble, listen, fall, rise, listen and hobble on, wondering sometimes, need I say, if I shall ever see again the hated light. (78)

Dante emerged from the wood "a riveder le stelle" (Inf. 34.139) ["to see the stars again"], but Molloy entertains no such hope.

Molloy travels in "a circle" (65) through the wood, "in an Egypt without bounds" (66), an Egypt without hope of redemption. He rests occasionally, then resumes his

⁷⁵Neumann, p. 149.

⁷⁶"Dante and the Lobster," More Pricks than Kicks, p. 15.

"spirals" (68), which is the same way the Unnamable travels (316-7), both of them "above infernal depths" (79), in the Vestibule.

As Molloy moves on, away from the seashore, he finds that he becomes weaker and sicker, as did Moran toward the end of his journey; both of them experience stiffening of the legs. Molloy apologizes for relating much to do with his weaknesses, but "'tis [his] muse will have it so" (79). Molloy is at the mercy of his muse as Moran is at the mercy of Youdi. Furthermore, Molloy says, "I knew only in advance, for when the time came I knew no longer" (82), which is to say he sees like those in hell:

'Noi veggiam, come quei c'ha mala luce,
le cose' disse 'che ne son lontano;
cotanto ancor ne splende il sommo duce.

Quando s'appressano o son, tutto è vano
nostro intelletto; e s'altri non ci apporta,
nulla sapem di vostro stato umano.

Però comprender puoi che tutta morta
fia nostra conoscenza da quel punto
che del futuro fia chiusa la porta.'
(Inf. 10.100-8)

['We see, like those who have poor sight, the things,' he said, 'which are far from us; this is all we have of the Almighty's light. When these things approach, or take place, our intellect is powerless; and unless others inform us, we know nothing of your human state. Thus you can understand that all of our knowledge will be completely dead from that moment when the door to the future is closed.']

As this soul explains, the end of time which attends upon the giudizio universale will see the end of their knowledge;

the whole quotation repeatedly asserts the vanity of intellect. Molloy too awaits the death of knowledge, for it will mean that he has attained the timeless state, the state without a future, for which he seeks:

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, to the soul of the incurious seeker. (64)

It is the threshold of the door of judgement (Inf. 10.108) that these characters stand on, from Jacques Jr. (92) to the Unnamable (414).

Molloy does not want to know but to be, yet words veil his being. Understandably, he is fascinated by non-verbal communication, of which his horn (16), his knocking on his mother's skull (18), the bleating of the sheep (28), and his facial expressions (33) are all examples. Verbal communication is almost unintelligible to him for what a word signifies to the one who utters it is different from the meaning it imparts to the auditor. As Molloy says:

the words I heard, and heard distinctly, having quite a sensitive ear, were heard a first time, then a second, and often even a third, as pure sounds, free of all meaning, and this is probably one of the reasons why conversation was unspeakably painful to me. And the words I uttered myself, and which must nearly always have gone with an effort of the intelligence, were often to me as the buzzing of an insect. (50)

The allusion to the "buzzing of an insect" recalls Moran's discourse on his bees, serving to concretize the association

between the buzzing, language, and allegorical levels. Molloy can in no way "say" himself if he is not the master of the words he uses, if they do not convey the meaning he intends. Yet he has no hope of saying himself without using words. He is "merely complying with the convention that demands you either lie or hold your peace" (88). Molloy is enunciating the convention of allegory, which Dante called the "bella menzogna" ["beautiful lie"].⁷⁷

And so Molloy crawls on, in a circle, "the forest . . . all about [him]," with a vague feeling of "sin" (86)-- "the original and eternal sin of him and all his 'soci malorum,' the sin of having been born."⁷⁸ Birth is the sin for which life is the penance, "life without end" (14).

⁷⁷Dante, "Convivio" 2.1.3, in Literary Criticism of Dante Alighieri, trans. and ed. Robert S. Haller (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), p. 112.

⁷⁸Proust, p. 49.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MALONE

Malone Dies is about birth, not death. For Beckett, "life" outside the womb is actually death, which Malone hopes to end by being born as himself, in the timeless condition epitomized by Belacqua. Thus Malone speaks of his "throes" (179) which are birth as well as death pangs.⁷⁹ Whereas in Moran's and Molloy's monologues the questers were shown to be endlessly circling, Malone Dies begins with the premise that there is an end, and that Malone can make that end. He is therefore between a seemingly unending state of activity and a state of timelessness. Therein lies the purgatorial aspect of this second novel of the trilogy.

Dante's Purgatory is also a state of "betweenness:" for none of the souls in Purgatory is their condition a fixed state. Beckett has defined Purgatory in similar terms, as "a flood of movement and vitality released by the conjunction of [Hell and Paradise]."⁸⁰ Malone Dies is also the median of the dark, active, silent, external world of Moran and Molloy and the light, static, verbose internal world of The Unnamable, respectively the "Inferno"

⁷⁹"There is a great deal of the unborn infant in the lifeless octogenarian," says Beckett in "Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce," p. 8.

⁸⁰

Ibid., p. 22.

and "Paradiso" of Beckett's cosmos. Dante's Purgatory, like the Inferno, is a place of suffering; the difference is that there will be an end to the suffering for those in purgatorio. Their pain will net them Paradise, the attainment of the self.

The progression from one state to another more abstract state is central to the idea of allegorical abstraction. Malone's narrative can be seen as Moran's and Molloy's narratives at a different level, as indeed soon becomes apparent. Malone thinks he will die in "the month of April or of May" (179). As we learn later, he dies in April, during the Easter weekend, which is the time of Dante's descent into hell, and ascent of Mount Purgatory to the Gate of St. Peter--to it, but not through it. Malone's quest leads him to the threshold of a beginning, as did Moran's and Molloy's and as the Unnamable's will. They are
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all on the threshold of existence.

"I shall suffer more, then less" (179) says Malone, adumbrating his basically purgatorial situation. "While waiting I shall tell myself stories" (180); this is the modus operandi of his narrative. He remembers an "ancient night," "long stumbling with outstretched arms, hiding," all of which suggest Moran's and Molloy's experiences, and serve to identify Malone with his two predecessors.

⁸¹ They are Stoics in the literal sense.

Malone's being is embodied in his writing. "This exercise-book is my life" (274) he says. He is trying to define his being by writing of others, yet, because he exists only in his writing he cannot separate himself from the characters he creates. Writing is useless as a means of transcendence (the complete antithesis of the Dantean mode). This follows directly upon our observation that the ultimate allegorical level is absent in the Beckettian cosmos.

Malone begins with his "present state," which parallels Molloy's, for he is in a "room," naked like the "ignudi" in the Vestibule (Inf. 3.65). He does "not remember how [he] got there" (183); this allusion to Inf. 1.10 strengthens the parallel with Molloy.⁸² Malone remembers having been lost in a "forest" (183), like Molloy. But this is part of his "past," and "it is the present [he] must establish:"

The truth is, if I did not feel myself dying, I could well believe myself dead, expiating my sins, or in one of heaven's mansions. But I feel at last that the sands are running out, which would not be the case if I were in heaven, or in hell. (183)

Malone places himself neither in heaven nor in hell; he is between these two states, which in absolute terms would be defined as Purgatory (as Beckett did define it in his essay

⁸²In fact Malone uses exactly the same words as Molloy, saying how he might have reached the room in an "ambulance" (183).

on Joyce), but in the absence of absolute values can only be defined as the Vestibule of hell, which is a state of eternal "betweenness."

Malone is in bed; his possessions, the totality of his universe, are in a corner. He has a long stick with which he can grab things. A window gives him an excellent opportunity to be a voyeur, like his antecedent Moran. His dying is punctuated by the soup bowl and the chamber pot--"Dish and pot, dish and pot, these are the poles" (185). He is powerless without his stick; with it, he "can control the furthest recesses of [his] abode." The stick serves the same function in the outer world, as his pencil does in the inner. His existence is itself posited in the pencil; as it diminishes, so does his life. By contrast with Dante, who wrote in the Commedia of a past self, Malone can only write of himself in the present. It is this self he wants to die, while that other self should live: he must write in order to stop writing. As Malone says, "I did not want to write, but I had to resign myself to it in the end. It is in order to know where I have got to, where he has got to" (207).

So much for his present state, says Malone, ironically, for his present state is whatever he is writing about. His first story is about the Saposcats, whose materialism Beckett savagely satirises. Malone abruptly breaks off his story, wondering if he is not "talking yet again about

[him]self" (189). He asks, "Shall I be incapable, to the end, of lying on any other subject?" The allusion is again to Dante's description of allegory as the "bella menzogna" ["beautiful lie"];⁸³ its resonance is particularly ironic in Malone's case. He can write only of himself, yet in all he writes, he can never find the identity of his true self, for to write is to lie. His only hope is to keep on writing, abstracting his existence to the point of ultimate significance. Until that point there is "nothing to signify."

Malone resumes his tale. Sapo, like Watt, cannot name those things about him. The Saposcats "made use of the spoken word in much the same way as the guard of a train makes use of his flags, or of his lantern" (188); words are for them merely primitive signalling devices, yet any attempt to use them above this level fails. For Malone, as for the others, words are the agents of his punishment, as they are for Ulysses, whose "old shipwreck" (192) Malone recalls.⁸⁴ The words "rise up out of the pit and know no rest until they drag you down into its dark."

Like Beckett's other characters, Sapo is identified with the Dante of the dark wood by "his strange walk, his halts and sudden starts" (204). Sapo's story returns again

⁸³Convivio 2.1.3; see above p. 92, n.77.

⁸⁴See above, p. 86, n.70.

and again to the theme of the inability to know, whether the knowledge be of stars or from books. But most of all, Sapo wants to know "what manner of being he was" (193). So does Malone; he tried to find himself in the outer world when he was young, like Sapo, but to no avail. It is only now he is beginning to know: "So I near the goal I set myself in my young days and which prevented me from living. And on the threshold of being no more I succeed in being another" (194).

Malone recognizes that words are insufficient to take him beyond himself, to "cause to live, be another, in [him]self, in another" (195). As he says, "there is no use indicting words, they are no shoddier than what they peddle." Words peddle meaning, but Malone wants to be, not to mean. For this reason he continues to write, "no longer in order to succeed, but in order to fail." It is the nothingness of the human nothing, its haecceity, which Malone wishes to attain, for "nothing is more real than nothing" (192). To fail to mean is to arrive at the ultimate reality. "I want nothing" (199) says Malone, and he means it. His plight relates directly to our discussion of allegory. If the real is nothing, then to write of it in words (something) is to write allegory, which writes of the real by means of the unreal. "I have pinned my faith to appearances, believing them to be vain," (210) says Malone.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Compare p. 276, "All is pretext, Sapo and the birds, Moll, . . . my possessions."

Malone continues on his quest to "die alive," (209),
 which is exactly what Belacqua does in the Antepurgatory.⁸⁶
 Malone invents (with the help of Balzac), the Lamberts.
 Sapo is apprenticed to Big Lambert to learn the latter's
 trade, pig-butcherer. Sapo is driven by a voice "that
 told him to go on" (206), as Moran and Molloy were driven,
 their actions willed by another. Malone says, "I shall
 go on doing as I have always done, not knowing what it is
 I do, nor who I am, nor where I am, nor if I am" (226).
 Sapo's erratic walk as already noted was that of "one
 floundering in a quag" (205; cf. Inf. 7); he walks "in
 the deep shadow of the trees" (cf. Inf. 1.2). Malone in
propria persona writes of always having "been walking"
 (183), of "the joys of darkness" (193), of being on "the
 edge of an abyss" (208). Like those in hell, Malone is
 oblivious of others around him, and fears he may really be
 in a "wide trench or ditch" (219), like the malebolge,
 and below him "other vaults even deeper than [his]" (219),
 from which "noises . . . rise up." The repetition of the
 infernal motives found in Moran's and Molloy's narratives
 indicates the lack of progress of these quests; Malone
 says:

⁸⁶ Like his forerunners, Sapo is prone to the Bel-
 acqua position: "Sapo sat down before him, laid his hand
 on the table and his head on his hand, thinking he was alone.
 Between his head and his hand he slipped the other hand and
 sat there marble still" (212).

there is . . . [a] possibility . . . that I am dead already and that all continues more or less as when I was not. Perhaps I expired in the forest, or even earlier. In which case all the trouble I have been taking for some time past, for what purpose I do not clearly recall except that it was in some way connected with the feeling that my troubles were nearly over, has been to no purpose whatsoever. (219)

This is in fact the most accurate appraisal of his condition; his unceasing efforts take him nowhere. A step forward nets no progress:

there is nothing more like a step that climbs than a step that descends or even that paces to and from forever on the same level, . . . for one . . . in ignorance of his position and consequently of what he is to expect. (219)

In Christian times, such as Dante's, Malone's desire to die alive would be recognized as a desire for spiritual rebirth. Malone, however, does not exist in a system which offers him that prospect; he must create an order through his writing by means of which he can transcend his present condition. Intrinsic to that transcendent being is present understanding of "life and death, if that is what it is all about, and I suppose it is for nothing was ever about anything else to the best of my recollection," says Malone; "But what it is all about exactly I could no more say, at the present moment, than take up my bed and walk." This allusion to one of the miracles of Christ (Matt. 9.2-8) points out the element missing from Malone's cosmos. Without the promise of life after death there is nothing to

redeem life--or death: "But what matter whether I was born or not, have lived or not, am dead or merely dying." Malone has realized the fate of those in the Vestibule, who "mai non fur vivi" (Inf. 3.64) ["were never alive"], and who "Non hanno speranza di morte" (Inf. 3.46) ["have no hope of death"].

We have already illustrated, in our studies of Moran and Molloy that, on one level, the episodes in the trilogy relate the artistic descent into the self. Malone's narrative modifies this level of interpretation. The artistic process is a contraction; outward movement is not possible because the outer world is extrinsic to the self. The only possible movement is inward, an abstraction to nullity, the ultimate reality. For Dante, the movement toward Reality was outward; the self was known by knowing God.⁸⁷ Malone, however, cannot transcend; he is drawn ever more deeply into a self he does not know:

But suddenly all begins to rage and roar again, you are lost in forests of high threshing ferns or whirled far out on wind-swept wastes [cf. Inf. 5], till you [begin] to wonder if you have not died without knowing [cf. Inf. 33.124 ff.] and gone to hell or been born again into an even worse place than before.

Malone journeys toward the absurdist nothing, that is nothing, as Dante journeyed toward the Divine Nothing which

⁸⁷He states his doctrine in the poem "Oltre la spera che piú larga gira," where he says "intelligenza nova, . . . pur su lo tira" ["new understanding . . . draws him ever upward"].

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is Everything. These are the only two directions in which one can move: "either you know all or you know nothing" (232). Malone's next creation, Macmann, "knows nothing;" Malone wishes to attain this state by writing of it in Macmann. This desire for a "vice-exister" (315) that cannot know is taken to absurd extremes in the Unnamable's Worm. Malone's wish for the end of knowledge is connected with his wish for the end of time, for "no morrow" (233). His true self must be outside time since time presents him with a new self each moment. The concept that knowledge ceases for the damned at the end of time is particularly Dantesque, and has been discussed above (p. 90). The end will finally come, according to Malone, when he has achieved that timeless state wherein lies the ultimate reality, nothing. "And if I ever stop talking it will be because . . . nothing has been said" (236). He will then not have to write of himself at one remove. "Then it will be all over with the Murphys, . . . Molloys, Morans and Malones."

The allusions to the Inferno increase with the continuation of Macmann's story. Macmann lies prostrate in the pelting rain (cf. Inf. 6), clawing at the turf. It is through Macmann that Malone explores the nature of his

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I follow here Robert S. Knapp's seminal article, "Samuel Beckett's Allegory of the Uncreating Word," Mosaic, VI/2 (1973), 71-83. "Writing about nothing . . . is the task of the allegorist, of the man who would give form to the formless, to an Essence that is dēfined . . . as the negation of attributes" (71-2).

own punishment, and of the sin for which he must suffer:

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. And no doubt he [Macmann] would have wondered if it was really necessary to be guilty in order to be punished but for the memory, more and more galling, of his having consented to live in his mother, then to leave her. (239-240)

Since to live is to suffer, the source of this suffering, the sin for which man is punished, must be birth. The essential difference between the sin and its punishment in this hell and that in Dante's is that in the latter the sinner was very much aware of his sin, and knew why he was being punished. In Malone's hell, the suffering is gratuitous, and thus there is no differentiation between the types of suffering, as there is in the Inferno. In a world bereft of judgement, birth is the only possible sin and life the only possible punishment. And the essence of life, as Beckett so eloquently declaims in Godot, is waiting, "the waiting that knows itself in vain" (241). Waiting is the punishment meted out to those in both the Vestibule and the Antepurgatory, with the difference that there is an end to the waiting in purgatorio.

Like Moran and Molloy before him, Macmann/Malone moves on "along the arc of a gigantic circle" (246; cf. p. 240, "you go round in circles"), on crutches. Like Murphy and Watt before him, he ends up in an asylum. Here

Macmann has no need to think or act; both are done for him, which is an ironic parallel to the absolute acceptance of suffering and dogma required of the souls portrayed in the Purgatorio--"Take no thought for anything, it is we shall think and act for you" (256). By writing of a character who has no need to think, Malone hopes to attain the state of being which he so desires.

The asylum, which offers Macmann some respite from his physical suffering, exists in ironic juxtaposition to Dante's Earthly Paradise (Purg. 27-33)-- It is "a little Paradise" (277) which is reached by the soul after it has suffered the scourges of the mountain. The asylum, like the Earthly Paradise, is a forest (cf. Purg. 28.2) on a "plateau" (277), and occupies "the entire top," as the Earthly Paradise does Mount Purgatory. There one can hear "the song of the birds" (cf. Purg. 28.14-15); there one can breathe "pure . . . air" ("aura dolce," Purg. 28.7), and the "wind [blows] almost without ceasing" but unlike the "soave vento" (Purg. 28.9) ["gentle breeze"] of the Earthly Paradise, it blows in a "fury" and is more infernal than paradisaal. There is a stream (cf. Purg. 28.25), the source of which is "underground" (cf. Purg. 28.121-6); in the Earthly Paradise that stream is Lethe (Purg. 28.130) in which the penitent is bathed, losing all memory of sin (Purg. 28.128). Malone of course is unable to forget; that is the essence of his punishment as he indicated in the

passage quoted above (p. 103), where he posits his guilt in "the memory" (240) of being once in his mother.⁸⁹

Moll, the maiden who takes care of Macmann in the asylûm, is a type of Matelda (Purg. 33.113), custodian of the paradiso terrestre. Like Matelda, who bathes Dante in the stream of the divine forest, Moll ritually washes Macmann; as such, she is also Lousse, seen on another level.⁹⁰ Moll is a grotesque parody of Matelda, however; old and depraved, she and Macmann couple impotently. The asylum and Moll are no "foretaste of paradise" (273); Macmann/Malone is, like his predecessors, in the dark wood, "beneath the great black gesticulating pines" (274).

Moll dies (Malone stops writing of her) and is replaced by Lemuel, who, on "the Easter week-end, spent by Jesus in hell" (280) announces an "excursion to the islands." In addition to Lemuel and Macmann, there are four inmates who are to go on the excursion. Each is a character who has appeared previously in Beckett's works. The first, "seated in an old rocking chair" (281) is Murphy. The second is "perpetually looking for something while at the same time wondering what that something could possibly be" (282), and constantly exclaiming "What!"; this is Watt.

⁸⁹Memory is also the punishment for Winnie in Happy Days. Winnie and Willie are the reductio ad absurdum of Paolo and Francesca (Inf. 5). In hell, Francesca hankers after the "tempo felice" (Inf. 5.121), never realizing that this memory of them is her punishment.

⁹⁰The walls surrounding Lousse's and the asylum are identical. See pages 52 and 278.

The third is identified by his "umbrella" as Moran. The fourth, a filthy "misshapen giant" (283) is Molloy in Moran's description.⁹¹ That all of these "vice-existers" are gathered here, sharing a similar fate, supports the thesis that they are all one, and that each character repeats the preceding one, but at a different level of perception or abstraction. Each circuitous voyage begets another, and as Macmann suspects, "the thing so often felt to be excessive, and honored by such a variety of names, was perhaps in reality always one and the same" (278).

The inmates, together with Lady Pedal, proceed in the "waggonette," (284) in a parody of the pageant of the Church which Dante beholds in the paradiso terrestre (Purg. 29-32, esp. 32.148-60; note the presence of a giant on the chariot, Purg. 32.152). The chariot does not proceed through the forest, however, but descends toward the sea, a completely absurd reversal of the Dantean paradigm. They reach the bottom of the mound (or mountain) and clamber into a boat, which has its counterpart in the one which ferries the souls to Mount Purgatory (Purg. 2.40-2). They, however, are moving away from their "earthly paradise" in what seems to be a re-enactment of the Fall. They reach an island, where the "youth" (Murphy) "had thrown himself down in the shade of a rock, like Sordello, but less noble, for Sordello resembled a lion at rest" (286; cf.

⁹¹Identified by Tagliaferri, except for Molloy.

Purg. 6.66). Sordello is again invoked, as he was in Molloy's narrative (10), as a type who has found being in stasis, the static position implying the end of searching and the beginning of being.

Lemuel at this point begins murdering those around him, and as we noted with the death of Moll, this is equivalent to the artist's (Malone's) stopping writing about a given character.⁹² Malone is disposing of his characters one by one, hoping at the end to have nothing to write about. The scene of carnage which Malone creates in his exercise book is reminiscent of Ulysses's shipwreck (Inf. 26.133-142), indicating the ultimate infernal implications of the scene. Malone confuses Lemuel with himself in the last words he writes; he cannot separate this fictive self from his true one. The confusion of hatchet and pencil reveals that Malone's writing is itself an act of murder, drawing life out of the very self he wishes to see live. Malone stops writing and thus ceases to exist. Yet his last word is "more" (288), indicating what is to come. For, like Belacqua, his life is over, but it has not yet ended, and like Belacqua he must still wait to be born.

⁹²Note the equation between "hatchet" and "pencil," p. 288.

CHAPTER NINE

UNNAMABLE

The ultimate movement of the preceding three narratives has been toward negation, a movement for which Moran's narrative is the paradigm. When the narrator finally says himself, names the essence of his being, all he has said up to that point will be rendered superfluous. This movement toward negation, toward the essential nothing, is the motive force of the trilogy: Molloy journeys in order not to journey; Malone writes in order not to write; the Unnamable speaks in order not to speak. The movement toward negation also characterizes allegory, which has as its goal its dissolution, the end of illusion and the beginning of reality. That reality was, in Dante's cosmos, the "all of all" (388); in the Beckettian cosmos it is the "all of nothing" and therefore unnamable. The fourth (but not necessarily final) narrative in this sequence is the reductio ad absurdum of the allegorical process initiated in Moran's narrative. The Unnamable records the attempt to name the essence of a being that knows itself in vain. It is an attempt to answer the question Beckett first proposed in Watt, when he asked, "who may . . . nothingness in words enclose."⁹³

⁹³Watt, p. 247.

The Unnamable exists in the state to which all of the other narrators have aspired: the state of a live mind in a dead body. Free of that decayed mechanism, the mind can apprehend itself freely, and discover its essence. The question--the old question--is how to discover that essence: "Where now? Who now? When now?" (291) asks the Unnamable. All systems, "aporia," "affirmations," "negations," have so far failed in giving him a sense of himself, and now "the thing to avoid . . . is the spirit of a system" (292). He experiences the disorientation of his predecessors, which is in turn informed by the disorientation of the Dante in the dark wood.

Like the allegorist, the Unnamable "shall have to speak of things of which [he] cannot speak;" he shall try to speak of what he does not know by speaking of what he does know. And, like his predecessors, he speaks because he is "obliged to speak." His voice is compelled.

The Unnamable posits himself at the center⁹⁴ of a miniscule universe where the lights shine "strong one minute and weak the next (cf. Par. 2.64-66). Around him circle his previous vice-existers, as the angels circle around God in the Paradiso. "They are all here, at least from Murphy on" (293). Since these vice-existers are his

⁹⁴ If not in the center the Unnamable says he is somewhere between, for "from centre to circumference . . . is a far cry" (295), which passage alludes to Par. 14.1, where Beatrice and St. Thomas communicate non-verbally.

own creations, his universe is measured by the parameters of his own mind and it is this universe which he wishes to know, for such are the terms of the Paradiso. Yet, the Unnamable's efforts do not bring him any closer to his goal than did Moran's; in fact, his narrative is an extrapolation of the previous three, which have "reference to a single existence, the confusion of identities being merely apparent" (330). Thus the Unnamable's narrative reflects the same infernal landscape that has appeared in the other narrations, and many of the elements in his narrative correspond to those in the preceding ones. He believes that there are "other pits, deeper down" (293). He says, "I have always been sitting here, at this selfsame spot, my hands on my knees The tears stream down my cheeks from my unblinking eyes" (293). This position bears only a faint resemblance to that taken up by Belacqua. It echoes more clearly the description of those in hell's vestibule who are continually crying (Inf. 3.68), "bathed in tears" (305), and the Old Man of Crete, who represents the degeneration of the ages, and whose tears fill the rivers of hell, "gathering together . . . all the evil and the sorrow of the world."⁹⁵

Like those in the Inferno, the Unnamable "cannot be silent" (294). The tongue of flames shrouding the false counsellors has been cited above (p. 87) as the prime

⁹⁵Sapegno's note to Inf. 14.103, p. 162.

example in the Inferno of words as the agents of punishment (Inf. 26). Thus the Unnamable speaks "to the self-accompaniment of a tongue that is not [his]" (306). However, the suicides (Inf. 13) are also punished by having to speak when one of their branches is broken. (They take the form of barren trees). They then bleed their words out, which, Leo Spitzer notes, indicates "the tyranny of the need for self-expression by language, the self-mutilating sadistic power of speech which while seeming to give consolation only aggravates the wound."⁹⁶

Because words embody meaning, each one the Unnamable speaks adds to his knowledge. Yet he who is nothing, and who wishes to know who he is, must know nothing, and this is the Unnamable's cross. "About myself I need know nothing" he says (294). Any knowledge which he has acquired during his long (long!) life is not only irrelevant to his selfhood, but actually obscures his self even further, for each piece of knowledge is heuristic:

They gave me courses on love, on intelligence, most precious. They also taught me to count, and even to reason. 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. (298)

He who least values knowledge acquires it at an exponential rate. Yet it is the "search for the means to put an end

⁹⁶ Leo Spitzer, "Speech and Language in Inferno XIII," in Dante: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 88.

to things, an end to speech, [that] enables the discourse to continue" (299). And in order for the discourse to go on, "one invents obscurities" (294); one writes allegory, in which the object is "to speak and yet say nothing" (303).

In the same way that the words he speaks obscure his selfhood, his vice-existers detract from his essential being: "All these Murphys, Molloys and Malones do not fool me. They have made me waste my time, suffer for nothing, speak of them when, in order to stop speaking, I should have spoken of me and of me alone." The Unnamable realizes the failure inherent in the artistic process, which obliges him to write about something by not writing of it. There is also the implication that the three other narrators of the trilogy are the Unnamable's creations; for instance, the Unnamable speaks of having "finished with [his] troop of lunatics" (308) which suggests that it was in fact he who wrote the story about the lunatics in Malone's narrative. The suggestion is that the Unnamable is himself the creation of another, and so on, each one more abstract than the previous, each no closer to his goal. Such is the Unnamable's "incomprehensible damnation" (308): his damnation is that he is not damned, for even hell is an invention and implies a system: "there is a god for the damned" (400). To be damned is to be judged, and, in the words of Beckett, what he paints is a "world bereft of

judgement."⁹⁷ Beckett has "set aside . . . the analogy with orthodox damnation" (390) which depends on a complete eschatological system, and instead presents a damnation that is derived precisely from the lack of a system:

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. (314)

The allusions to one on a "road" who was "lost" but who eventually makes "headway" recalls the Dantean journey. "All lies" says the Unnamable, recognizing that the system in the Commedia is extrinsic to his own cosmos. Dante's "lies" were redeemed and given meaning through faith in God the Logos, a faith that has no place in the Unnamable's cosmos. For in a cosmos that exists only to mirror God, its creator, artistic creation reflects divine creation. Subtract God from that formula and the artist's work reflects only itself, and cannot go beyond itself.

The Unnamable invents Mahood who like his predecessors is a cripple, and walks "not in a straight line" (316) but "in a sharp curve," which, if he were to follow it long

⁹⁷Quoted by W. York Tindall, Samuel Beckett (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1964), p. 13.

enough would restore him "to [his] point of departure," only "to begin again" (302). Mahood gets "embroiled in a kind of inverted spiral, . . . the coils of which, instead of widening more and more, grew narrower and narrower and finally, . . . would come to an end for lack of room." This is essentially the structure of the Inferno. Mahood goes on to repeat the movement of Dante's voyage oltretomba:

Faced then with the material impossibility of going any further I should no doubt have had to stop, unless of course I elected to set off again at once in the opposite direction, . . . [for] there is no road so dull, on the way out, but it has quite a different aspect, quite a different dullness, on the way back, and vice-versa. . . . [If] by dint of winding myself up I must inevitably find myself stuck in the end, once launched in the opposite direction should I not normally unfold ad infinitum (316-317)

The outward spiral is that of the Paradiso, which for Dante ended in absolute understanding of the self through understanding of God. But Mahood posits no end to his paradise; his only hope is to abstract himself to nothingness, waiting for his "mind [to be] at peace, that is to say empty" (311), suffering "unrelieved immaculation," which is Beckett's own definition of Paradise.⁹⁸ No matter which way Mahood travels, outward (as Moran travelled) or inward (like Molloy), there is no end to his travelling:

Caccianli i ciel per non esser men belli,
né lo profondo inferno li riceve,
ch'alcuna gloria i rei avrebber d'elli.
(Inf. 3.40-2)

⁹⁸ "Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce," p. 22.

[Heaven expelled them so as not to blemish its beauty; the infernal depths shall not receive them, for the damned might glory in them.]

Mahood's story repeats the Dantean journey in paradiso in other respects. Mahood is returning home, as Dante "returned home" to Paradise. Like Dante, Mahood sets out for his "home" from an "island, among [his] compatriots, contemporaries, coreligionists and companions in distress" (326), which is Malone's island. Like Mount Purgatory, this island is located in the southern hemisphere ("Java," p. 317). Yet Mahood moves centripetally toward his home, a reversal of Dante's outward spiralling in the Paradiso. When Mahood arrives home, he finds his family dead of botulism, and he tramples their remains with his crutches, destroying his own image, which is the essence of his quest.

In his next avatar, Mahood finds himself "stuck like a sheaf of flowers in a deep jar, its neck flush with [his] mouth" (327). He is taken care of by Madeleine who follows in the tradition of Lousse and Moll. Like the souls in Paradise, Mahood is visible as a light, his head "artistically illuminated" (344), but his condition recalls the punishment of the heretics, who are plunged in fiery tombs (Inf. 9) and the traitors, frozen up to their necks in the ice of Cocytus (Inf. 34).⁹⁹ Only his words move now; they are all he has. "It all boils down to a question of words"

⁹⁹ Note Mahood's reference to "thin ice," p. 354.

(335). He must say who he is by saying "what [he is] not" (326); he must define himself by negation,¹⁰⁰ in order to be "admitted to that peace where he neither is, nor is not, and where the language dies that permits of such expressions" (334-5). Dante also finds language insufficient to his task in Paradise, and finally states that what he seeks to express goes beyond the limits of his art--"All'alta fantasia qui mancò possa" (Par. 33.142)["High fantasy here leaves off"]. The Unnamable wishes to say the one word which will tell him who he is. This word will be his first and also his last; it will be his paradise. As Philippe Sollers notes, "le paradis n'est rien d'autre que ce lieu de la première parole, et ce 'première,' sans doute, n'indique pas seulement une dimension du temps."¹⁰¹ Yet the language which he must use to say his unchanging self is constantly changing, and he is changing with it:

Si les morts qui ont marché là où nous marchons ressuscitaient, dit Dante [Convivio 1.5] nous ne pourrions pas les comprendre. De plus, ce changement imperceptible et ce que l'on peut assimiler à la croissance corporelle est pour nous une source permanente d'aveuglement: nous croyons interchangeable ce qui ne cesse pas de changer (nous-mêmes, notre corps, la langue).¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Compare Convivio 3.15.60-70.

¹⁰¹ Sollers, "Dante et la traversée de l'écriture," L'écriture et l'expérience des limites (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968), p. 20

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 21.

If, however, the Unnamable could say that one word which in saying nothing says everything, he could rest at last. Yet there is no first word, no Logos; there are only words. The Unnamable has no reason to go on in a situation such as this, yet he feels compelled to go on. "The realization that mental activity is compulsive rather than motivated involves a disillusionment with the whole idea of free and motivated behavior."¹⁰³ And this mental activity, we hear Beckett say, was once lauded as "il ben dell'intelletto" (Inf. 3.18) ["the good of the intellect"].

Mahood's next avatar is Worm, a foetus; as such Worm represents that Belacquean state sought after for so long. Worm's "senses tell him nothing, nothing about himself, nothing about the rest, and this distinction is beyond him. Feeling nothing, knowing nothing, he exists nevertheless" (346). It now only remains for Mahood to become Worm. He who began as a worm must end as a worm--the alpha and omega of the Beckettian cosmos. Worm is in an urn; his story is Hydriotaphia written from the inside. But for Worm to be able to tell his story, he must be able to perceive, which makes him other than nothing, and therefore inimical to the self Mahood wants to be, as Mahood himself realizes: "I'm Worm, that is to say I am no longer he, since I hear" (349). This failure only serves to make him talk the more.

¹⁰³Eugene Webb, Samuel Beckett (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1970), p. 110.

"They mentioned roses" he says; "I'll smell them before I'm finished" (350). At the end of his journey Dante sees in Paradise the "candida rosa" (Par. 30.1) ["white rose"], in which God and all the blessed are present. Worm will sense the roses rather than experience them as did Dante; he is unable to go beyond himself.

Because Mahood thinks compulsively, he suffers, for to think is to suffer. Yet even his suffering is gratuitous in a "world bereft of judgement," so he invents a whole "college of tyrants" (310) as his tormentors:

And how they enjoy talking, they know there is no worse torment, for one not in the conversation. They are numerous, all round, holding hands perhaps, an endless chain, taking turns to talk. They wheel, in jerks, so that the voice always comes from the same quarter. (356)

This parodies the circles of lights which appear to Dante in the Paradiso (10-14). Worm, like Dante, is "at the centre" of these lights, each of which represents a great teacher of Christendom, and, in their wheelings, the perfect order of the universe. Those in Mahood's story "have no pedagogic purpose in view" (356) however, for "listening to talk of the heavens" (353) only drives him further from his goal, to know nothing.

Mahood keeps speaking of Worm, hoping to appropriate his nothingness:

He hears, that's all about it, he who is alone, and mute, lost in the smoke, it is not real smoke, there is no fire, no matter, strange hell that has no heating, no denizens, perhaps it's paradise, perhaps it's the light of paradise. (359)

Worm's nothingness is that of one who has never lived, and never will live. Such are those in the Vestibule, who "mai non fur vivi" (Inf. 3.64) ["were never alive"].¹⁰⁴ This non-existence endured by those who circle ceaselessly in the Vestibule, arriving nowhere, is the fate meted out to Mahood. "One can spend one's life thus, unable to live, unable to bring to life, and die in vain, having done nothing, been nothing" (358). Ironically, Mahood has the one thing those in Dante's hell have lost: the good of the intellect.

The Unnamable's every attempt to say himself has resulted in failure; knowing he must fail he is compelled to go on. His only hope now is to say everything, for then he must surely say himself. The paradise of the first word is to be attained by climbing Babel, toward "the great confounding" (360), "talking unceasingly, seeking incessantly, . . . cursing man, cursing god [cf. Inf. 3.103-4], stopping cursing, past bearing it, going on bearing it, seeking indefatigably, . . . seeking who you are" (385). Everything

¹⁰⁴ Compare p. 346, "unliving, with no hope of death" with Inf. 3.46--"Questi non hanno speranza di morte" ["These have no hope of death"].

he says is brought to the master of the tyrants, who observes him. "They bring him the verbatim report of the proceedings" (369), just as Gaber brought Moran's report to his master.

The Unnamable is "on the brink" (410) like a Belacqua who is eternal in time but who will never transcend the temporal, a Belacqua who has no hope of redemption. And as long as the Unnamable is in time, he cannot hope to know a self that only exists outside of time. He has only words, he is "in words, made of words" (386), and "words fail" (411) to transcend, if there are only words. But if he exists only in words, he must speak in order to be able not to exist:

perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens on my story, that would surprise me, if it opens, it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on. (414)

The Unnamable is still on the threshold, like his predecessors, waiting like Belacqua to pass through the "porta" (Purga 4.129). The four narratives come full circle, but without transcendence. This is the circle trod by the damned: the scenery changes but the road is the same. The four narratives represent an "unfinished allegorical progression,"¹⁰⁵ a progression toward absolute nothingness,

¹⁰⁵Angus Fletcher, Allegory (Ithaca: 1964), quoted by Knapp, "Beckett's Allegory of the Uncreating Word," p. 72.

a progression that will never end:

It only . . . remains [for the Unnamable] to establish if he is situated in a paradise, a hell, or in a neutral place, where, as is the case, the laborious cycle of gestation will repeat itself infinitely.¹⁰⁶

The Unnamable and his predecessors are in the Vestibule.¹⁰⁷

They have abandoned all hope from the moment they emerged through the portals of the womb to join the lost ones, who dwell among the secret things. They must speak in deformed tongues. They have no hope of death, and envy every other fate, for they have no name and must forever search for the self obscure.

¹⁰⁶Tagliaferri, Beckett . . . , p. 59. Compare Ingmar Bergman, who has remarked that when art was separated from religion "it severed an umbilical cord and now lives its own sterile life, generating and degenerating itself." See his "Introduction" to The Seventh Seal A Film, trans. Lars Malmstrom and David Kushner (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), p. 8.

¹⁰⁷The characters in All That Fall are also in the Vestibule. Inf. 3.64-9 and 103-5 are especially pertinent to this play. There is also a direct allusion to the sorcerers in Inf. 20, which canto has fascinated Beckett ever since "Dante and the Lobster."

CHAPTER TEN
WAITING FOR GODOT

The Dantean influence is not overtly present in Waiting for Godot,¹⁰⁸ but the play does evoke both the Inferno and the Purgatorio. As the title states, waiting is the basis of the characters' existence, and as such, in the Dantean context, their situation is essentially purgatorial, Purgatory being the place where the penitent waits until released into Paradise. Yet, if no one comes to release them, they would wait there forever in a grim parody of the Inferno, and it is this situation which the play exploits. As in the trilogy, the characters are trying to find if they are in fact in Paradise, Purgatory or Hell, or in some neutral place (corresponding to the Vestibule).¹⁰⁹

The opening of the play, with its "road" and its "tree" is the barest evocation of the opening of the Inferno. The purgatorial motif asserts itself immediately with Estragon

¹⁰⁸ Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1954). Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text. Since pages are numbered only on the left side, they will be referred to as "a" (left) and "b" (right).

¹⁰⁹ Colin Duckworth, in "Godot: Genesis and Composition," [En Attendant Godot (London: George G. Harrap, 1966), pp. lvii-lx] suggests that Godot might be Satan, since if he did keep his appointment with the tramps, he would have to cross the swamp which Duckworth claims is the Marsh of Styx, and, it is implied, only Satan could come from that direction. (How Satan would be unthawed is not explained). The quotations adduced from Dante do not support his contention, and his desire to fix precisely each element in the play denies its ambiguity, and thereby the play itself.

"sitting on a low mound" (7a)¹¹⁰ in what is later described as a "foetal posture" (45a; cf. 56b), which recalls Belacqua. Vladimir and Estragon lead a hellish existence. Estragon sleeps in a ditch, and is beaten regularly. The universe is a nightmare, a muckheap, where some are "plunged in torment, plunged in fire" (28b). The two tramps are surrounded by "dead voices" (40b), and feel that even "to be dead is not enough." "I'm in hell!" (47b) says Estragon, who walks with a limp, like Dante lost in the dark wood (Inf. 1.30; see above p. 25, n.29). Estragon, like Vladimir, is lost, waiting for Godot to lead him out of the dark wood of unknowing.

Unlike those in hell, Vladimir and Estragon have not "abandoned all hope;" for them "hope [is] deferred" (8a).¹¹¹ They are vaguely aware of some guilt, and, like those in the trilogy, they place their guilt in having been born.

The major event in both acts is the entrance of Pozzo and Lucky. In Act I, Pozzo enters whipping on the bridled Lucky. Whips and bridles are a major feature of the Purgatorio. The whips (Purg. 13.39) are the examples of virtue presented to the penitents, the bridles (Purg. 13.40) the

¹¹⁰The allusion is more specific in French, where Estragon is "assis sur une pierre." See En attendant Godot (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1952), p. 9.

¹¹¹This allusion to Prov. 13.12, ("Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life"), is noteworthy because the "tree of life" appears in Act II.

examples of the vice punished. Pozzo, however, does not use his whip and bridle to advance along the road to salvation; he is in fact heading toward the "fair" (21b).

The name "Pozzo" itself has a Dantean significance. The Italian for "well" or "cesspool," it is used by Dante (Inf. 31.32) to describe the orifice which houses the giants, who collectively represent brute appetite, a description which fits Pozzo.

If Pozzo is appetite, Lucky is intellect, and in his speech we see that faculty stripped of all pretension of knowledge. Lucky spews out his words compulsively, like those in hell who are compelled to reply to questions asked by Dante.

The first act ends, as does the second, with the vignette involving the little boy, messenger of Godot. Given Godot's god-like function in the lives of the tramps, the boy can be seen to represent an angel. As such, he recalls the angel who, once the penitent has been purged of a particular sin, conducts him to the next cornice, where he will again undergo the purgative process (for a different sin). The implication in Godot is that this process will take place ad infinitum, the tramps never reaching that ultimate state of transcendence to which they have given the name "Godot."

Act II opens with the flowering of the tree which was bare of life the preceding day. This is perhaps the clear-

est allusion to the Purgatorio, where, in the Earthly Paradise, the Tree of Knowledge bursts into blossom when touched by the pole of the Chariot of the Church. Allegorically, this signifies that when Christ, the second Adam (the chariot pole) is united with the first Adam (the tree), man's dead nature (the barren tree) is given new life.

That the tree flowers between acts indicates that its importance lies not in its miraculous flowering, but in the mysterious fact that it was barren one day and leafy the next. Estragon, as an "Adam" (25a) who has fallen but has not been redeemed, finds the tree not the source of all meaning, as the Cross was to the Christian age, but a source of mystery and of misery, for its inexplicable flowering only indicates that time, monster of damnation, has passed, but that "they do not move" (60b).

Theirs is the stasis of hell. Like the song Vladimir sings (37a-b), their lives go on forever, and are forever unfinished. They must wait for Godot to find if they are damned or saved. Until that time they are neither, and they circle futilely in the vestibule of a hell no longer there.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ENDGAME

The failure inherent in Hamm and Clov's attempt to make an end is evident in the title, Endgame,¹¹² for in the endgame movements of chess, the King is checked--rendered unable to move--but never leaves the board. The title also suggests that what we are to see is a drama of which only the last moments of the last scene are to be played; a scene doomed to be endlessly repeated. This is a play about last things, about the moment before a judgment that is never pronounced.

Endgame is an extension and reduction of Godot; it is more definitely infernal. The play opens with the suggestion that the characters are suffering for untold sins. "I can't be punished any more" (1) says Clov. Hamm posits that they are all "down in a hole," and like the damned, Hamm curses his parents (9; cf. Inf. 3.103). Whereas Vladimir and Estragon looked without for meaning and succour, in Endgame there is nothing outside. Hamm and Clov are degenerate, like their universe. They live with Nagg and Nell, who are a grotesque reduction of Paolo and Francesca (Inf. 5), forever stalemated in unconsummated love, and bound by like memories of the past. The deadly situation

¹¹² Beckett, Endgame (Grove Press, Inc., 1958). Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

in which Nagg and Nell find themselves is akin to that at the bottom of the Inferno (34) where the souls of those still living are frozen in the ice of Cocytus. This is the "Tolomea" of which Beckett wrote in Proust (p. 40), the Tolomea of the mind; and as Hamm remarks, "Beyond is the . . . other hell" (26). Hell is all around.

Death is looked upon as being perhaps the only way out. At one point, the two discuss how Hamm would know if Clov were dead. Clov states that if the alarm clock were not wound this would be evidence enough that Clov were dead. To prove that the alarm works, Clov sets it off, saying, "Fit to wake the dead" (48). Here then is the call of the Universal Judgement, which is that they are not judged, for like those in the vestibule they have not lived. "Do you believe in the life to come" (49) asks Clov. "Mine was always that," replies Hamm. "What Hamm sees is that waiting is the final losing game, that waiting is itself damnation: for one waits either for damnation or salvation, and both are impossible."¹¹³

The impossibility of damnation or salvation in the Vestibule is mirrored by Clov's inability to leave the stage at the close of the play. Once again, Beckett's character finds himself on the threshold of judgement. Clov remarks, "they said to me, Come now, you're not a

¹¹³ Stanley Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," in Must We Mean What We Say? (New York: Scribner's, 1969), p. 150.

brute beast, think upon these things [beauty and order] and you'll see how all becomes clear" (80). The reference to the "brute beast" recalls Ulysses' speech to his men before they set out again on their final voyage, the voyage that ends in hell. In the speech, Ulysses says, "'fatti non foste a viver come bruti'" (Inf. 26.119) ["'you were not created to live like brutes'"]. Beckett's reference to this line is doubly ironic; it seems that Hamm and Clov were made for nothing else but to live like beasts, yet, unlike beasts, they have reason, which no brute beast has, and therefore they have aspirations toward something else. The reference to Ulysses also recalls the theme of words as punishment, as they are for Hamm and Clov, who, like the characters in the trilogy, have "nothing to say" (79), yet must use words which "don't mean anything any more" (44) to say that nothing. They beg for an end to the illusion created by words--"Let's stop playing" (77)--yet cannot abandon those illusions, among which are beauty and order. There are no great seas of knowledge, of beauty, or order, that remain to be travelled. In this shrunken universe, only the void remains to be explored, the void of the self, to which there is no end.

CHAPTER TWELVE

HOW IT IS

"Quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura" (Inf. 1.4) ["It is hard to say how it was"] says Dante at the opening of his poem, recalling the dark wood and hell itself. Yet now, as he begins to write his poem, he is beyond all that. He can step outside his poem, as he does in Michelino's famous painting, because he has made an end. To make that end, Dante had to transcend himself, or, to use his own word, he was "transhumanized" ("trasumanar," Par. 1.70). Beckett's *Bom*, however, can only tell us how it is, for he has not yet transcended himself.

How It Is¹¹⁴ takes place in the mud and ordure-filled world of the third and fourth circles of hell:¹¹⁵

Io sono al terzo cerchio, della piova
eterna, maladetta, fredda e greve;
regola e qualità mai non l'è nova.
Grandine grossa, acqua tinta e neve
per l'aere tenebroso si riversa;
pute la terra che questo riceve.
.....
Urlar li fa la pioggia come cani:
dell'un de' lati fanno all'altro schermo;
volgonsi spesso i miseri profani.
(Inf. 6.7-12; 19-21)

Fitti nel limo, dicon: 'Tristi fummo
nell'aere dolce che dal sol s'allegra,
portando dentro accidioso fummo:

¹¹⁴ Beckett, How It Is (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964). Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

¹¹⁵ Note also Inf. 18.106-8; 112-114.

or ci attristiam nella belletta negra.'
 Quest'inno si gorgolian nella strozza,
 ché dir nol posson con parola integra.'
 (Inf. 7.121-6)

[I am in the third circle, with rain, eternal, damnable, cold and heavy, whose measure and quality never vary. Huge hailstones, foul water and snow pour through the shadowy air; the ground stinks on which it falls. . . . The rain makes them [the sinners] howl like dogs. Trying to shield one side with the other, these miserable damned must turn often.]

[Immersed in that slime, they say, 'We were sullen in the sweet air made happy by the sun, for we fumed sluggishly inside; and we are still sadd in this black ooze.' This hymn they gurgle in their throats, unable to say clearly even one word.]

In these scenes Dante conveys the lack of communication between the sinners, their inability to express themselves with words and, in the dung-filled ditch of the eighth circle, the corruption of the words themselves. Beckett's novel is a response to all of these conditions, but he emphasizes consciousness as the tormenting quality, a consciousness which expresses itself through words. As Vladimir says, "What is terrible is to have thought."¹¹⁶ Consciousness leads to self-examination, thereby objectifying the self, and alienating one from oneself. The search for that self requires the Other to witness it, and yet consciousness alienates the self from the Other.

Bom's search for himself involves his search for Pim, and the novel is divided into three parts: before, with

¹¹⁶Waiting for Godot, p. 41b.

and after Pim. This tripartite division recalls the Commedia's and represents Bom's attempt to instil order (albeit spurious) into the chaos of his world. The desired order of before, with and after represents a progression, yet there is no progress in the mud, and there is no end. Bom's world is one without order, in which the paradigms of the Bible and the Commedia--both predicated upon the order of before, with, and after--are out of place. If Bom is to really tell how it is, then he must picture this unordered world, this chaotic wallowing in the mud. When he makes an end, he will realize his apocalypse, and chaos as apocalypse is the Apocalypse without Christ, the apocalypse of a world not to be redeemed:

[Beckett] is the perverse theologian of a world which has suffered a Fall, experienced an Incarnation which changes all relations of past, present, and future, but which will not be redeemed. Time is an endless transition from one condition of misery to another, 'a passion without form or stations,' to be ended by no parousia. It is a world crying out for forms and stations, and for apocalypse; all it gets is vain temporality, mad, multiform antithetical influx.¹¹⁷

Words represent the attempt to order the world, yet that order is spurious because the words are themselves insufficient to describe the world. "It all depends on what is not said" (37) says Bom, for he wants to say what

¹¹⁷ Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 115.

his words cannot, nothing: "all self to be abandoned say nothing when nothing" (83). Because Bom exists only in his words ("if nothing I invent must keep busy otherwise death" [81]), he must not only say nothing, but be nothing at the same time, like Worm. Yet, ironically, he must exist in order to speak: "no more I'll hear no more see no more yes I must to make an end" (106). There is again the suggestion of an "unfinished allegorical progression;" the pun contained in the French title Comment c'est suggests that this progression will continue forever: "When you think of the couple we were Pim and I part two and shall be again part six ten fourteen so on each time" (121). There is also the implication, as in the trilogy, that all the characters are one: "each one of us is at the same time Bom and Pim tormentor and tormented pedant and dunce wooer and wooed speechless and reafflicted with speech" (140). They move on in the same hellish circle. "You begin again all over more or less in the same place" (22) and that place is "familiar in spite of its strangenesses." Each part of How It Is is the same as the next: in a world without end, before, with and after are meaningless, and where there are only words the essential does not change.

The essential is hell, and its "secret things" (84) ["le segrete cose," Inf. 3.21] are the words which are spoken there. As in the trilogy the words are the agents

of torment. Bom cuts his name into Pim's "arse" (60); the words bleed as they do from the suicides in that grotesque forest in hell (Inf. 13.43-44).

Bom refers to his previous existence(s) as "the other above in the light" (8), as Dante in hell speaks of having come from "'là su di sopra, in la vita serena'" (Inf. 15.49) ["'up above in the bright life'"]. But, like those in hell, Bom realizes that there is "no going back up there"-- "'già mai di questo fondo / non tornò vivo alcun'" (Inf. 27.64-5) ["'never out of these depths / has any living one returned'"].

Knowing that he cannot evade this torment, Bom continues onward, only to regress, for he searches not for the paradise to come (a paradise as certain as Godot), but for the one he has known, the pre-natal "paradise before the hoping" (23). His road to Paradise runs through Hell, as did Dante's, but since there is no paradise, he remains in hell, crawling "towards the wall the ditch" (16), which recall the wall of the City of Dis and the ditch-like bolge it encloses (Inf. 9 ff.). This is the essential mode of Bom's existence; he is like a "Belacqua fallen over on his side tired of waiting forgotten of the hearts where grace abides asleep" (24).

This image of a Belacqua "tired of waiting" duplicates the state of those in the Vestibule, and it is here that Beckett places Bom and the others. They are "not in the"

lowest depths" but "on the edge" (20), which is to say they are "in the Vestibule" (44). Neither damned nor saved, they do not know whether to "curse God or bless him" (40). Bom is described as "holding in [his] mouth the horizontal staff of a vast banner" (36) which recalls the one behind which the Futile run (Inf. 3.52). Like the Futile, "even birth [is] lacking" (104; cf. Inf. 3.64), and there "one doesn't die" (93; cf. Inf. 3.46).

Bom's situation is hopeless because he is "seeking that which [he has] lost there where [he has] never been" (47). In part two, he finds Pim, and a "new life" (62). But the "vita nuova" is a penalty, a torment. Bom does not want a "new life" but the old life he had in the womb. The second part ends with Bom and Pim locked in an embrace of eternal torment. "I'll stay where I am yes glued to him yes tormenting him yes eternally yes" (98) says Bom, recalling the pairs of tormentors in hell. The third part relates the same details as the first two. Bom is one of "la perduta gente" (Inf. 3.3) ["the lost ones"] who must try to tell how it is of a world and of a self they do not know.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE LOST ONES

Only one name appears in the sixty-three pages of Beckett's most recently published work of prose fiction; it is the name of Dante. The title itself, The Lost Ones,¹¹⁸ is an allusion to the inscription over the gates of hell, which describes those beyond as "la perduta gente" (Inf. 3.3). The round rubber cylinder in which the action of the story takes place is like one of hell's circles sliced away from the others. The circle is that one containing the Vestibule of hell.

Beckett's diction in this story is remarkable. After the incoherent gurglings of How It Is and the sparse mutterings of Lessness, we have in The Lost Ones brilliantly sharp sentences, complete with punctuation, connectives, and an omniscient narrator. The allusions are more direct than in the previous works, also.

The story consists of various descriptions of the cylinder and its inhabitants. Information is given, then elaborated upon. Finally, allone survivor is posited; he is described very briefly, and the story ends with an almost naked bathos.

Numbers are used in this story (as in Imagination Dead Imagine) to negate the imagination; numbers state, they do not suggest. The climate of the cylinder in which

¹¹⁸Beckett, The Lost Ones (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1972). Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

Since the one need is to climb, the "fifteen single ladders propped against the wall at irregular intervals" (17) take on great importance. In the heaven of Saturn, Dante sees a golden ladder upon which throng the contemporaries:

di color d'oro in che raggio traluce
vid'io uno scaleo eretto in suso
tanto, che nol seguiva la mia luce.
(Par. 21.28-30)

[I saw a ladder the color of gold that reflects light, reaching so high that my gaze could not follow it.]

This ladder, representing spiritual transcendence, leads ultimately to the Empyrean, and those who climb the ladders in the cylinder have a similar goal. "From time immemorial rumour has it or better still the notion is abroad that there exists a way out" (17-18). One group contemplates a secret passage, "the other dreams of a trapdoor hidden in the hub of the ceiling giving access to a flue at the end of which the sun and other stars would still be shining" (18). This would be their paradise, the place where, as the allusion suggests, they would find "l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle" (Par. 33.145) ["the love that moves the sun and other stars"].

The way out is only a rumour, yet they continue to climb. The ladder carriers circle the wall, like those in hell, as do the searchers, each in their respective rings. They "never know a moment's rest" (36), like those who,

in the Vestibule, run behind the banner "che d'ogni posa . . . pareva indegna" (Inf. 3.54) ["that seemed unworthy of a moment's rest"].

The cylinder qua closed system is a model for the work of art, "for in the cylinder alone are certitudes to be found and without nothing but mystery" (42). Yet the certitudes within are valued only in their ability to elucidate the mysteries without. The work of art is seen as a mode which is valued only in its function to take the lost ones beyond it, and yet, ironically, it cannot be transcended.

"So on infinitely until towards the unthinkable end if this notion is maintained a last body of all by feeble fits and starts is searching still" (60).¹¹⁹ He makes his way toward "that first among the vanquished so often taken for a guide" (62). Now all has come to an end, and with it this lone searcher. He bows his head, just as "one first of whom if a man in some unthinkable past for the first time bowed his head" (63). Is Beckett the last of these searchers, and was Dante the first of those who, at the sight of the lost ones, bowed his head, "con li occhi vergognosi e bassi" (Inf. 3.79) ["with shamed and lowered eyes"]?

¹¹⁹Lessness explores this situation.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CONCLUSION

Seven hundred years ago, in an anachronism eventually detected, Dante prepared a place for Beckett's miserable sinners. Examining oltretomba the results of moral choice, Dante also provided for the possibility of non-choice, of futile indifference. Since to be was to choose, those in hell's Vestibule (Inf. 3) were represented as having never lived, and, since in life they were on the threshold of being, so in death they are on the threshold of judgement.

Our study of the influence of Dante on Beckett has revealed that although Beckett draws on all of Dante's works, Belacqua (Purg. 4) is his major point of reference in the earlier works, and, from the trilogy on, that point shifts to the Vestibule.

Beckett never forgets Belacqua, but his allusions to that character indicate a change in attitude, from one which admitted hope to one of despair, from a Belacqua who waits for a sign to a Belacqua fallen over on his side, tired of waiting. Indicative of this change in attitude are Beckett's allusions to Beatrice, who makes her last appearance in the guise of Celia the whore. In the trilogy, love is assigned to the dump, where Molloy questions if it is true love or not.

The doubt concerning the nature of love is a ramification of the doubt concerning the existence of God, and this doubt represents the greatest schism between the worlds of Beckett and Dante. Without the Logos, the artist, writing in the tradition of allegory, achieves only confusion. Obligated to express Nothing, the ultimate reality, with words, the artist can only fail. Yet he is obliged to go on, abstracting his being toward essential nothingness, a goal which recedes with each word he speaks.

Aldo Tagliaferri cites four major themes in Beckett's works: motion and stasis, light and dark, word and silence, external and internal. Dante's importance in Beckett's work is clearly indicated by the fact that the Commedia figures in Beckett's development of each of these themes. The circling of the damned is a precise metaphor for the motion-in-stasis that characterizes Beckett's questers. Light and dark imagery, central to the Commedia, is used by Beckett to indicate the outer and inner worlds, respectively. His characters search out the dark inner world, which has infernal implications when viewed in the Dantean frame. Beckett's concept of words as punishment has been shown to derive in large part from the Inferno (especially cantos 13 and 26), and that Paradisal state of silence is aspired to by all of his characters who are afflicted with speech. The search for the microcosmic inner state has been a theme of Beckett's works since More Pricks than Kicks. In

the Commedia Dante is also searching for an inner state, for his journey is ultimately a journey through his own soul.

In his criticism, Beckett states that the poet must descend to the essence, as he says Dante did. Beckett reveals other themes in his criticism which he explores in his subsequent fiction. Among these themes is the idea of a freedom that requires submission, of a process of abstraction that admits of no end, and of the impossibility of attaining a paradisaal state. All of these themes are stated in the context of the Commedia and its author.

Beckett's allusions to the Commedia are predominantly to the Inferno; they concretize the theme of hell as present reality. Thus, in How It Is the landscape of the third and fourth circles of hell is evoked, but not the attendant punishments or moral considerations. Hell, is, quite simply, a metaphor for life. Opposed to this hell is the pre-natal state which Belacqua represents. This "Belacqua fantasy" receives its clearest statement in Murphy. Ironically, Belacqua's state depends on a universal eschatological system which Beckett's world denies.

The Commedia provides an ironic framework in both Watt and Three Novels. In addition, Beckett alludes to the Commedia in his trilogy to indicate the tradition of allegory in which he is writing. Whereas Dante sought to express the all of all, Beckett seeks to express the all of

nothing. Thus, the four narratives can be read in terms of the artist's descent into the self. Since each narrator in the trilogy moves ever more deeply into the self, closer to the essence of being, each narrative represents a higher level of abstraction than the preceding.

Since the essence of these beings is nothing, they consider knowledge superfluous. Like those in the Inferno, they await the end of time and the concurrent death of knowledge (Inf. 10.100-8). This will be the timeless state of their true selfhood. This Dantean passage is significant in another respect. The damned see only the past and the future, not the present. They thus lack that vantage point from which Dante could see his former self and look forward to his new self. Although Malone writes of Macmann as Dante the poet wrote of Dante the pilgrim, Malone and his avatars are inseparable, and Malone is constantly attempting to establish the present. Only death will tell him who he is, yet at that point he can tell nothing.

The essence of damnation in Beckett's cosmos is that there is no damnation. His characters wait on the threshold of judgement; knowing that one thief was saved and one damned, they await the Godot who will judge them as one or the other. The allusions to the Inferno and the Purgatorio in Godot suggest some ancient order which no longer obtains, but the memory of which still governs the tramps' lives.

That "ancient voice" in Beckett is Dante's. It is a voice which Beckett at once denies yet requires if he is to speak at all. Beckett places himself in the Dantean cylinder yet directs his every effort toward escape. Beckett works within a tradition represented by the Commedia, and I have viewed him in that way. It was in fact the discussion of Beckett in a critical work on Dante¹²⁰ that suggested this thesis to me. If this thesis at times appears to be Dante's commentary on Beckett, the fault is not always my own. For today men live and die much as they did seven hundred years ago. They suffer, they aspire to a better state, they question their existence, and ultimately they do not know:

We are proud in our pain
 our life was not blind.
 Worms breed in their red tears
 as they slouch unnamed
 scorned by the black ferry
 despairing of death
 who shall not scour in swift joy
 the bright hill's girdle
 nor tremble with the dark pride of torture
 and the bitter dignity of an ingenious damnation.¹²¹

¹²⁰Olaf Lagercrantz, From Hell to Paradise, trans. Alan Blair (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966).

¹²¹Beckett, "Text," quoted in Lawrence E. Harvey, Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic, pp. 294-5.

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