

THE AESTHETICS OF EITHER/OR IN
SAMUEL BECKETT'S NOVELS

by

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned basically with the philosophical and aesthetic implications of the "yes or no" dialectic in Samuel Beckett's novels. While some aspects of this problem have been noted by critics (especially Richard Coe and Hugh Kenner), their full significance has not been elaborated. This thesis is especially indebted to Hugh Kenner's provocative discussion of "art in a closed field" in Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett: The Stoic Comedians. But a new line of exploration is opened up by developing the notion of "art in a closed field" in conjunction with Kierkegaard's philosophy of either/or and Beckett's "yes or no." Such an approach allows for an awareness of the "existential" nature of Beckett's writings and helps emphasize the urgency of the emotional appeal of Beckett's characters as they make their "choices." A key question the thesis attempts continually to answer is: what are the nature and consequences of this "choice" made within the closed field of art and life?

In Murphy the "yes or no" theme is dealt with in terms of the dualisms of Cartesianism and schizophrenia. (Note: Since the completion of my thesis, G.C. Barnard's Samuel Beckett: A New Approach which deals extensively with schizophrenia has appeared. He fails, however, to relate the psychological with the philosophical dimensions of Beckett's art and thought.) My own attempt to come to terms with Beckett is eclectic - but all discussions centre around the "yes or no" conundrum.

A significant contribution to the study of Beckett's thought is, I believe, made in the discussion of Watt by indicating the relevancy of Kant and Hume to Beckett's philosophy of form - his aesthetics of the absurd. Beckett's indebtedness to Enlightenment thought,

especially Descartes, has been recognized since Kenner's pioneer work. But the extended discussion of this debt in terms of Kant and Hume shows the complexity of this heritage as it influences Beckett's art.

Tracing still further this intellectual tradition in the trilogy Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable, it is possible to discern Beckett's Kierkegaardian-like parody of Hegelian rationalism and aesthetics. The philosophical underpinning of Beckett's progressive treatment of the "yes or no" dialectic is thus made clearer. The discussion of How It Is in terms of the pornographic form illustrates how Beckett's relentless pursuit of his artistic premises leads him to a unique philosophical treatment of what is usually regarded as a sub-literary genre.

The conclusion, "No's Knife," deals briefly with some of the social and cultural implications of Beckett's art. This area of Beckett criticism is most weak and is often marred by an obvious failure to study in depth Beckett's work. It is hoped that this thesis helps in part to redress this failure in Beckett criticism.

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Introduction

The Chance of the Alternatives

"Yes or no?" said Murphy. The eternal tautology.

My philosophy is at least easy to understand, for I have only one principle, and I do not even proceed from that. It is necessary to distinguish between the successive dialectic in either/or, and the eternal dialectic here set forth. Thus when I say that I do not proceed from my principle, this must not be understood in opposition to a proceeding forth from it, but is rather a negative expression for the principle itself, through which it is apprehended in equal opposition to a preceeding or a non-preceeding from it. I do not proceed from my principle; for if I did, I would regret it, and if I did not, I would also regret that. If it seems, therefore, to one or another of my respected hearers that there is anything in what I say it only proves that he has no talent for philosophy; if my argument seems to have any foreward movement, this also proves the same. But for those who can follow me, although I do not make any progress, I shall now unfold the eternal truth, by virtue of which this philosophy remains within itself, and admits of no higher philosophy. For if I proceeded from my principle, I should find it impossible to stop; for if I stopped, I should, regret it, and if I did not stop, I should also regret that, and so forth. But since I never start, so can I never stop; my eternal departure is identical with my eternal cessation.

S. Kierkegaard, Either/Or.

"Where now? What now? When now?" On a much more prosaic level the anguished -words of Samuel Beckett's The Unnamable parallel those of the critic who undertakes a discussion of Beckett's novels. It is highly significant that Beckett's art, above all a comment on an exhausted humanity whose culture has as its basic dilemma the development of the intellect at the expense of energy and sensual capability, should arouse a massive amount

of interpretation which is itself indicative of such a crisis. Discussing this problem in Against Interpretation, Susan Sontag rightly points out that in most modern instances interpretation tends to reduce "the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art." With a few major exceptions, she summarizes quite accurately the state of Beckett criticism:

Another oeuvre that has attracted interpreters like leeches is that of Samuel Beckett. Beckett's delicate dramas of the withdrawn consciousness - pared down to the essentials, cut off, often represented as physically immobilized - are read as a statement about modern man's alienation from meaning or from God, or as an allegory of psychopathology. 1

The preoccupation of criticism with finding "meaning" is opposed to the basis of Beckett's art which is directed towards the creation of a situation whose tenuous existence constitutes its only "meaning." Beckett is above all a poet, not a philosopher. No statement about Beckett is more important for the prospective critic than that by Harold Pinter:

The farther he goes the more good it does me. I don't want philosophies, tracts, dogmas, creeds, ways outs, truths, answers, nothing from the bargain basement. He is the most courageous, remorseless writer going and the more he grinds my nose in the shit the more I am grateful to him. 2

The critical approach adopted in this thesis is essentially philosophical and aesthetic. The emphasis will be on Beckett's transformation of philosophical themes into a radical aesthetic of the novel. As a result of the emphasis on form, there will be less temptation to ravage the work of art in a fruitless search for "meaning."

The most important studies of Beckett's aesthetic of the novel and its relationship to his philosophical thought are by Richard Coe and Hugh Kenner. A most suggestive line of thought for future development is set out by Kenner in Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett: The Stoic Comedians. Discussing "art in a closed system" Kenner states that in Beckett's novels

a technique of inventory very like Joyce's is handling less and less real material; and the closed system indispensable to inventory is no longer, as it tended to become for Joyce, the closed system of the transacted past, but the closed system of possibilities arrived at, amid given pre-supposed data, by logical analysis. And logical analysis pertains to a mental world; what Beckett is doing is subtracting from the methods of Ulysses all the irreducible realities of Joyce's Dublin, and so transposing the novel to a plane of empty but oddly gripping construction. 3

However, George Steiner in Language and Silence indicates another tradition of "art in a closed field" which is just as relevant to Beckett. He traces to Kierkegaard what he calls the "Pythagorean genre" which includes such non-linguistic closed systems as mathematics and music. Beckett's sense of the limitations of the closed system of man's art and existence is much closer to Kierkegaard's than to Joyce's. Beckett said of Joyce "the more he knew the more he could do." Beckett opposes the all inclusive "yes" of Molly Bloom that concludes Ulysses with the "no" of The Unnamable. For Beckett the closed system of art and life is obsessively regarded from the extreme points of limitation - ignorance, impotence and death. In Molloy's words it is "a world at an end in spite of appearances, its end brought it forth, ending it began, is it clear enough? And I too am at an end ..."

What Kenner does not adequately emphasize in his study is the element of choice in Beckett's art, a major source of his "oddly gripping" narratives. Beckett like Kierkegaard confronts the self not in the detachment of thought but in the involvement of choice. While Kierkegaard elaborated three levels of existence - the aesthetic, ethical and religious, Beckett's narrators are able to move only in one level - the aesthetic. The intellectual or artist strangled by thought is the sense in which the term applies to Beckett. Kierkegaard felt that in order to escape the "closed system" of the first level

a "leap of faith" had to be made to a higher level of existence if the "sickness unto death" was to be escaped. For Beckett the restrictions of this choice are even more severe than in Kierkegaard. Beckett's interpretation of the parable of the two thieves, one who was saved while the other was damned, implies that man's salvation is completely arbitrary and irrational. But within this inscrutable order the Beckett hero is faced with vital choices that will determine whether he can construct his own order that will release the self from its damnation.

The most important choice in Beckett centres around the philosophical conundrum of Cartesian dualism. The fracturing of the self into mind and body by Descartes establishes the basic either/or proposition in Beckett's fictional universe. This metaphysical dualism involves answering the following questions: what is the fundamental nature of mind and body? how are mind and body related? According to Descartes, the essential property of a mind is that it thinks, and the essential property of a body that it is "extended." The realms of thought and extension are completely different. Then, if all this is accepted, how can mental events have anything to do with physical ones and vice versa, since the physical occurs in space and the other is a thought with no physical properties what so ever? In this light, knowing becomes a relation between given ideas and given things, the subject and the object, the conception and the fact, so that the question arises how there can be any integral act of knowledge at all. And the question carries its own answer: there cannot be, as long as the dualism assumed by the question is accepted. This either/or proposition determines the nature of the choice Beckett's heroes must deal with from Murphy onwards, a novel in which the hero feels himself split in two, a body and a mind.

The quotations that preface this introduction confront the dualisms and contradictions of logic by

means of a dialectic. The contradiction of language and logic (Murphy's "yes or no") implies dialectically that opposition can occur only between parts of a whole ("the eternal tautology"). Dialectic cannot, however overcome the essentially contradictory of logic, a concept Beckett, the rationalist, is dedicated to. Each reconciling statement excludes far more than it entails, once the opposition becomes explicit, a new reconciliation is necessary, and dialectic proceeds through wider and wider generalizations. This dynamic movement is the classical Hegelian exposition. But Beckett's dialectic involves just the opposite movement. In short, it is very close to Kierkegaard's "eternal dialectic."

The dialectic of "yes or no" in Murphy does at first seem to proceed through wider and wider generalizations. Murphy's initial "yes or no" statement is directed towards Celia, but the choice of either the affirmative or negative involves, at least implicitly, a social and moral judgment. However, Murphy's "yes" to the importunate Celia leads him to the final confrontation with Mr. Endon, on absolute dualism involving the "me" and "not me" that dialectic cannot overcome. In the very act of resolving Murphy's first situation, dialectic must always respect the law of opposition, the either/or of logic. Faced with endless incompleteness and non-being, Beckett's characters tend toward Kierkegaard's "eternal dialectic" in which "my eternal departure is identical with my eternal cessation."

The ambiguous and paradoxical nature of Beckett's "yes or no" and Kierkegaard's either/or involves a double attitude towards the intellectual quest. The "successive dialectic" regards consciousness as merely a means of realization or discovery. Meaning thus becomes only a function of process or change and does not lead to a logical conclusion, to an end. But Beckett is caught in a destructive paradox, for while he accepts this process (Molloy's statement that the important thing is

never to arrive anywhere), he also desires to achieve an absolute goal (the Unnamable's quest for silence). Beckett's characters struggle helplessly as a result of their choice of a self that must exist outside of the binary nature of logic. But the artist heroes discover that language, just like thought, proceeds from the binary arithmetical functioning of the brain that classifies by yes and no. For Beckett the only thing that language proves is the slowness of a world vision limited to the binary. But what about the insufficiency of binary intelligence itself? Internal existence, the essence of things escapes it. It can discover that light is continuous and discontinuous at the same time; it accepts it, but it cannot understand it, it cannot incorporate into its own structure the reality of the profound structures it examines. Beckett's attempt to go beyond a possibility of choices limited by a yes or no system of logic supplies the philosophical basis of his "nihilistic" aesthetic of the novel form.

In "Three Dialogues", Beckett talks of an art which does not operate on the plane of the feasible, "but turns from it in disgust, weary of its puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of giving a little further along a dreary road." Instead Beckett advocates a paradoxical aesthetic in which art must be an "expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express."⁴ But for artistic expression to take place there must be at least a minimal opposition set up. In one of his earliest aesthetic statements, "Dante ... Bruno. Vico ... Joyce," Beckett emphasizes the basic dualistic nature of art:

On this earth that is Purgatory, Vice and Virtue - which you may take to mean any pair of large contrary human factors - must in turn be purged down to spirits of rebelliousness. Then the dominant crust of the Vicious and Virtuous sets, resistance is provided, the explosion duly takes place and the machine proceeds. 5

But throughout the novels Beckett works towards an "absurd" reduction of this dualism (form and content) to a nothingness. The explosion is now replaced by entropy; the machine, most often represented by the bicycle, falls apart. Only when the machine is dismantled will the choice of the "true self" be vindicated.

Such a quest is doomed at the outset. Despite the purging down, the original "yes or no" of Murphy persists throughout Beckett and prevents the literal attainment of the aesthetic of nothingness. The most striking stylistic device in Watt is the use of the double negative construction involving various permutations upon the Watt-Knott dualism. Throughout the trilogy there is a fusion and subsequent dissolution of opposites in an attempt to scramble out of the swamp of despair Beckett's narrators find themselves in. Even the ultimate negative, death, does not prevent the narrative "machine" from moving on in Malone Dies. The Unnamable states, "What am I to do, what shall I do in my situation, how proceed? By aporia pure and simple? Or by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later?" He knows that the "yesses" and "noes" will inevitably come back to him as he goes along. At the end of the novel, he has still not been able to transcend the dichotomy, "I can't go on, I'll go on."

As Beckett applies his "Ockham's razor" to the initial "yes or no" of Murphy, the possibility of viable alternatives decreases concomitantly. The only escape from the debacle of being Beckett's characters find themselves in appears to be the long sought void or nothingness which is comparable philosophically to Kierkegaard's "leap." The purest exposition of the dialectic of "yes or no" which forms a basic sub-structure in all of Beckett's fiction is found in Texts for Nothing. The narrator of text 9 states,

if I could say, There's a way out there,
there's a way out somewhere, the rest would
come, the other words, sooner or later, and
the power to get there, and the way to get
there, and pass out, and see the skies, and

see the stars again.

But the "I" of text 13, the last one, admits that an "eternal yes" is impossible:

... so many lies, so many times the same
lie lyingly denied, whose the screaming
silence of no's knife in yes's wound, it
wonders. And wonders what has become of
the wish to know, it is gone, the heart
is gone, the head is gone, no one feels
anything, asks anything, seeks anything,
says anything, there is only silence.
It's not true, yes, it's true, it's true
and it's not is no one and there is
someone, nothing prevents anything.

The basic aim of this thesis will be to trace the philosophical and aesthetic presuppositions Beckett pursues in order to arrive at these "no exit" conclusions. To follow Beckett's complex thought, the approach will necessarily be eclectic, but all the discussions will centre around the "yes or no" conundrum, the possibility of choice in a closed field of art and life.

References

- 1 Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation (New York: Dell Publishing Co. Inc., 1961), pp. 17-18.
- 2 Cited in Thomas Barbour, "Beckett and Gonesco", Hudson Review, Summer, 1958, 274.
- 3 Hugh Kenner, Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett: The Stoic Comedians (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), p. 81.
- 4 Samuel Beckett, "Three Dialogues", in Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Esslen (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1965), p. 17.
- 5 Samuel Beckett, "Dante ... Bruno. Vico ... Joyce," in Our Exagmination round his Factification for Incam-ination of Work in Progress (Paris: Shakespear and Co., 1929), p. 12.

Chapter I

The Divided Self in Murphy: An Analysis of the Relationship of Cartesianism and Schizophrenia/

I

At the conclusion of The Modern Psychological Novel, Leon Edel speculates about the future of the novel. He states that the novelist is

 faced now not with disintegration, but with a serious threat of dissolution, the novelist has turned away from the fragmenting of experience ... He has rediscovered the picaresque and the comic and sought old forms that will give him as much of a grasp as possible on the concrete and the palpable. Or he has written philosophical novels: or created anti-novels out of his sense of emptiness and despair. 1

Such a description encompasses Beckett's fictional explorations. Murphy is a philosophical picaresque that deals essentially with the relationship between Cartesianism and schizophrenia. This thematic conjunction is a brilliant insight, allowing Beckett to make an identification between classical rationalism and modern irrationalism. It furthermore allows for the presentation of philosophical themes in such a way that they do not appear as merely barren intellectualism.

A key question which Edel fails to raise must then be asked with regard to Beckett's fiction. What kind of psychological exploration does Beckett adopt in the delineation of his fictional creations? An answer can be tentatively formulated by referring to Beckett's Proust. Beckett makes it clear that he accepts Proust's definition of the essential nature of the artistic and human problem. Both attempt a search for the absolute self which can exist only outside of time and space. While Beckett's major artistic problem is the same as Proust's, his method is radically different. For Beckett the subtle analysis of multiple levels of consciousness does not penetrate deeply enough, does not plumb the mysteries of man's essential being. What Beckett admires in Proust's characters is that they "are presented and developed with a fine Dostoevskian attempt for the vulgarity of plausible concatenation."² But Beckett's own approach to the problem of identity goes much deeper than

a Proustian unbelief in the psychological permanence of personality.

His own approach is foreshadowed in Proust by such phrases as "The Proustian Discourse de la Method," "the Cartesian hot cupboard of the Guermantes Library."³ These references to Descartes do not, of course, indicate a simple return to rationalist psychology, to the equation, "I think, therefore, I am." What should be stressed is Beckett's emphasis on ontology - the study of being, what constitutes man as man as the basis for psychology. Beckett would agree with Sartre that "the final discoveries of ontology are the first principles of psychoanalysis."⁴ All of Beckett's art is an endeavour to discover principles of psychology which will do justice to what man genuinely is, the human being. If a label must be used, Beckett's exploration of man could be called a highly personal brand of "existential psychology."

All of Beckett's characters resemble the Unnamable in that they are "reduced to reason." By pushing rationality until it becomes absurdity, Beckett is able to escape what he sees as the cul-de-sac of mere psychological analysis. It is significant that the second part of Murphy is situated largely in an insane asylum. The setting is clearly not an instance of a fashionable interest in the psychology of psychopathic or schizophrenic behaviour. On the contrary, the concern with insanity in the novel reflects a desire to go beyond psychology. By representing characters with deranged behaviour, Beckett makes it unnecessary for his characters to embody in their acts sequential and credible accounts of their motives. Freed from psychological delineation of the individual, the artistic representation is open to levels of experience more rich in fantasy, more philosophical.

II

Of all Beckett's fiction Murphy appears to be the most soundly grounded in a world of identifiable social reality. The opening line indicates a world in which the deterministic chain of cause and effect still holds true.

"The sun shone, having no alternative, on this nothing new."⁵ In Murphy and Watt Beckett posits a world of material reality with which his heroes must come to terms. Yet the opening paragraph throws doubt upon the possibility of a reconciliation between the perceiver and the empirically perceived object. Murphy sits in a corner of his garrett which is "curtained off from the sun." Throughout the novel the use of light imagery emphasizes that the "plot" is essentially epistemological. Beckett's ironic attitude towards his hero's belief that he can escape from the Newtonian world of causal relationships come out clearly in this statement. "Murphy sat out of it, as though he were free...." The scepticism embodied in the qualifying clause points towards a central problem in the novel. Murphy must find a viable concept of freedom which will allow him to escape from the "big blooming buzzing confusion" of the world of Newtonian motion, and yet a freedom which will not appear negatively as mere escapism.

At once this search is set out philosophically in terms of Cartesianism. In order to come alive in his mind, Murphy must go through the grotesque ritual of strapping himself naked in his rocking chair. This foetal position allows him to carry out his belief that all life is "but a wandering to find home" (p.4). "Home", for Murphy, as for Descartes, can only be found in the absolute world of the mind (res cogitans) which is not effected by the contingency of the world of materiality. No harmonious relationship between the realms of thought and extended matter is possible. The "Belacqua bliss" of the rocking chair is Murphy's initial solution to this dualism:

For it was not until his body was appeased that he could come alive in his mind, as described in section six. And life in his mind gave him pleasure, such pleasure that pleasure was not the word. (p.2)

Section six refers to Descartes' Sixth Meditation; ("Of the Existence of Corporeal Things and of the Real Distinction Between the Mind and Body of Man") as well as to chapter six of the novel which deals with Murphy's mind.

Before this explicit reference, there is a more subtle allusion to Descartes. Just prior to sitting in his rocker, Murphy hears a cuckoo clock strike "between twenty and thirty." Descartes in the Sixth Meditation makes the comparison between a "sick man and a poorly made clock."⁶ Because of his mechanistic view of the world of extension, Descartes found it difficult to distinguish between a machine and the body of man. The social machine is for Murphy "a poorly made clock", and the fact that it is symbolized by a cuckoo clock makes it blatantly clear that Beckett considers it to be a mad world.

One vital distinction must be made, however, between Murphy's brand of Cartesianism and that of Descartes. While Descartes subjected himself to the dark night of "Methodical Doubt" in order to discover fundamental truths upon which his philosophy could be soundly established, Murphy enters the world of mind for purely "aesthetic" reasons, devoid of all ethical or intellectual responsibility.

He worked up the chair to its maximum rock, then relaxed. Slowly the world died down, the big world where Quid Pro Quo was cried as wares and the light never waned the same way twice; in favour of the little, as described in section six, where he could love himself. (pp. 6-7)

The highly suggestive imagery of this passage tends to identify Murphy's escape into solipsism with onanism, with a form of intellectual masturbation. At first the sexual imagery seems to imply an ideal fusion of the mental and physical. The rocking chair (later referred to as a "machine") appears to be a crude version of one of Beckett's later favourite symbols, the man on the bicycle, a phenomenon which Hugh Kenner has termed the "Cartesian Centaur." But Murphy in the rocker does not constitute a symbol in Cassirer's sense. The two terms are not part of an encompassing unit: the chair is only a means to an end. It would be more accurate to say with Neary that Murphy's "conarium has shrunk to nothing", the conarium or pineal gland being the place at which Descartes believed the interaction of body and mind took place.

Murphy's relationship with Celia, the engaging ex-prostitute, makes it clear that his failure to find some means of reconciling the conflicting claims of the body and mind, and his reluctance to accept purely the life of either of these realms, leads to his final downfall. Rene Descartes, the protagonist of Beckett's poem Whoroscope, found himself in a similar position with Christina, queen of Sweden ("the murdering matinal pope-confessed amazon/Christina the ripper"), who required Descartes, "who had remained in bed till midday all his life, to be with her at five o'clock in the morning".⁶ Murphy, an Irish Oblomov, views with the same horror Celia's attempts to force him to find a job. While Celia is perhaps never quite fully humanized after the initial catalogue of her physical attributes, she does, however, appear as one of Beckett's most compassionate and endearing feminine characters. The sympathy with which Celia is drawn gives real force to the Cartesian conundrum of the dualism of mind and body which Murphy faces. Nevertheless, Beckett basically presents the problem from his hero's point of view. The dilemma is neatly summarized in the parallelism or "cartesian" syntax of the narrative: "The difference (lay) between her way of destroying them both, according to him, and his way, according to her. The gentle passion." (p.27) The essential ambiguity of their situation comes out in this important bit of dialogue:

"Yes or no?" said Murphy. The eternal tautology.

"Yes", said Celia. "Now you hate me."

"No", said Murphy. "Look is there a clean shirt." (p.41)

The ambiguity arises from the fact that Murphy's "no" could refer to both of Celia's statements. "No", he does not want to get a job; "No", he does not hate her. It is the inability to resolve this dichotomy that is at the centre of the novel.

Murphy's first attempt to solve the problem involves the symbolic language of astrology. By means of his "Thema Coeli", Murphy tries to take both poles of perception into account at once, to view the subjective and objective worlds as functions of each other by regarding both as functions of the symbols in which they are rendered. But the astrological system is just

that, a system, and hence suggests a static quality that is alien to the philosophy of symbolism. Because of the system's arbitrariness, the simple imposition of order, Murphy finally rejects it. In the final analysis the astrological scheme involves a system of "signs", not symbols. Throughout the novel the esoteric allusions to astrology function mainly as a stylistic device for literary unit; but Beckett, as always, desires a "philosophical" symbolism which will establish a deeper, more "metaphysical" unit.

The patent absurdity of the astrological system indicates that it is bankrupt as far as belief goes. Richard Coe has pointed out that in Murphy Beckett adopts the baroque rationalism of the Occasionalists.⁷ Descartes' theological definition of "sufficient cause" in The Meditations seems to point towards the "absurd" doctrines of the Occasionalists which brought out the inherent illogicalities of his own system:

a substance, to be conserved at every moment it endures, needs the same power and the same action which would be necessary to produce it and create it anew if it did not yet exist.⁸

According to Malebranche, although mental events have nothing to do with physical ones, whenever anything happens in one realm, God makes something corresponding occur in the other. The events in one are not the causes of events in the other, they are only the occasion of God's actions. The Cartesian system as a moral entity collapses in Murphy. Instead of God who could give a metaphysical framework to Murphy's pseudo-mystical reveries, there is a Ramaswami Suk, astrologer. It is interesting to note that in Whoroscope, Beckett states in the footnotes that Descartes "kept his own birthday to himself so that no astrologer could cast his nativity." The Suk's reading of Murphy's stars results in the latter's downfall, forcing him to seek a job in the world of the Newtonians, who are bound by the law "the quantum of wantum cannot vary."

The straightforward narrative line of Murphy's dilemma is complicated by the comic actions which occur

in an involved sub-plot. The "humour" characters, Neary, Wylie, Cooper, Miss Counihan, all belong to the world of the Newtonians. They are, as it were, in perpetual motion, the object of their quest the ineluctable Murphy. Wylie at one point states, "Our medians ... meet in Murphy." The meeting point of the medians of a triangle is centre of its circumscribing circle, and the circle is a perfect symbol of a self-contained cosmos. Murphy "the seedy solipsist", is the centre of the "eternal triangles" set up in the so called sub-plot.

The world of the Newtonians is, like Murphy's mind, a closed system. Yet it is sharply differentiated by the fact that it does not allow for the final cessation of any desire. The workings of this realm of physical experience are determined by what Kierkegaard would call a "successive dialectic." If an object of desire is obtained it results in another void; the whole process creates a vicious circle. But, as Wylie cynically points out,

The advantage of this view is that while one may not look forward to things getting any better, at least one need not fear their getting any worse. They will always be the same as they always were. (p. 49)

Interestingly, this "Newtonian" psychological determinism seems to imply metaphorically Descartes' theory of vortices. Descartes held that all motion of matter is in some way circular and that the displacement of one body sets up a continuous circular motion among other bodies (a vortex). In the above passage, Beckett mainly wishes to suggest a physical world blindly following mechanical laws, in contrast to the pseudo-intellectual reveries of Murphy.

Despite the humour and philosophical speculation involved in the sub-plot, Beckett makes it clear that it is finally irrelevant. The whole of this secondary action constitutes, in fact, a gigantic comic non-sequitur which could be severed from the novel without any real loss. Beckett's novel is thus clearly Cartesian in its very plot structure. Throughout *Murphy* the chapters alternately deal with the exploits of Murphy and the Newtonians. The world of the Newtonians, that of bodies in mechanical motion, is completely dissociated from Murphy's world

of the mind: The Newtonians do not find Murphy until it is too late, until he has been reduced solely to a body.

Plunged into the "mercantile gehenna" (p.40), Murphy "felt sure that before then (the time at which the Suk's prophecies would be fulfilled) his own little prophecy, based on the one system outside of the heavenly bodies in which he had the least confidence, his own, would have been fulfilled." (pp.75-76) Part of this system, "the Balacqua fantasy and perhaps the most highly systematised of the whole collection", involves Beckett's first treatment of the theme of waiting for death, later elaborated in Waiting for Godot. Murphy's vision of the after life is a highly romantic one:

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 dayspring run through its zodiacs, before the toil up hill to Paradise. (p.75)

So enamoured is Murphy with this prospect that, he, unlike Dante's Balacqua, hopes "no godly chandler would shorten his time with a good prayer."

Inspired by this vision which belonged "to those that lay just beyond the frontiers of suffering,... the first landscape of freedom", Murphy desires to escape into the world of mind. But before the episode in Hyde Park, Murphy decides that he must have lunch - a fact that undercuts his vision, and indicates just how much he is still tied to his body. There seems at this point to be another implicit reference to Descartes. Murphy felt reverence towards his lunch "because as an adherent (on and off) of the extreme theophanism of William of Champeaux he could not but feel humble before such sacrifices to his small but implacable appetite; nor omit the silent grace: On this part of Himself that I am about to indigest may the Lord have mercy." (p.81) This extreme expression of the doctrine of transubstantiation may seem out of place coming from that modern day Cartesian, Murphy. But it should be remembered that Murphy, the ex-theological student, is fond of the same type of scholastic quibbling which Descartes was faced to use when he had to reconcile his philosophy with the doctrines of transubstantiation. More importantly, this episode involves a parody of the symbolic imagination in its more

primitive myth-making or religious phase.

At the park Murphy indulges in a favourite pastime of Beckett's heroes, mathematical speculation. In a scene which foreshadows Molloy's absurd calculations with the sucking stones, Murphy speculates that if he could overcome his infatuation with the ginger biscuit then the "assortment would spring to life before him, dancing the radiant measure of its total permutability, edible in a hundred and twenty ways." (p. 98) Murphy's failure, however, to achieve such a blissful prospect is due to his attachment to physical pleasures. Unlike Molloy, he is not a true inhabitant of the Beckettian underworld. He is only able to indulge in Eucharistic sophistry concerning the eating of his biscuits; he is denied access to the symbolic language of mathematics. This failure is dramatized by the entrance of Rosie Dew, one of Beckett's most Dickensian creations. Her request that Murphy hold her dog who is in heat (and who, incidentally, eats his biscuit) illustrates that Murphy is still dwelling in the first zone of his mind, "a radiant abstract of the dog's life."

The main point of this "pastoral interlude" seems to be that only in the individual's complete isolation from outside influences can mental or even physical satisfaction be obtained. When Murphy wakes from his reverie, he discovers that the sheep, who had earlier resisted the philanthropic efforts of Rosie Dew, were "now ruminating and even cropping." (p.106) This point is re-enforced by the fact that the next chapter deals with the zones of Murphy's mind. In Murphy, and throughout Beckett's fiction, the pastoral motif is used to mark the transition from social reality to solipsism.

Chapter 6 of Murphy is Beckett's major discussion of aesthetic theory until the Three Dialogues. While the philosophy of symbolism represents an attempt to find a point of departure outside the premises of dualism, Beckett's entire intellectual and artistic enterprise has been devoted to an attempt to find within the Cartesian system the solution to its own problems. Murphy thus pictures his mind "as a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the world without." (p.107) The circle is

an apt figure for the solipsistic conception of consciousness Murphy's brand of Cartesianism leads him to develop. Before examining the intellectual "fireworks" of this section, it is important to note Beckett's ironic, and, at times, opening critical attitude towards Murphy's conception of his mind: "A short section to itself at this state will relieve us from the necessity of apologizing for it further." Beckett's scepticism here seems to be determined by an awareness of what William James has called the "Psychological Fallacy", the mistaking of a doctrine which may be good in itself (as far as it goes), for the very processes it is about.⁹ Hence, according to Beckett's own judgements in Proust, Murphy's theory is more Baudelarian than Proustean. It concerns itself more with the conception than with the concrete representation. Murphy's theories do not, in fact, find full expression until the writing of the trilogy. Murphy sees his mind as both a plenum and a void, "excluding nothing that it did not itself contain." As Beckett, the Cartesian, is quick to point out, this theory "does not involve Murphy in the idealist tar." (p.108) Earlier, Neary, when faced with the full significance of the closed world of the Newtonians, was attracted to Berkeley's idealism. He saw it as a "defence mechanism. Immaterialise or bust. The sleep of sheer terror." (p.58) Such a facile solution is rejected by Beckett. Even Murphy admits "there was a physical fact and the mental fact, equally real if not equally pleasant." (p.108) Both materialism and idealism, the classic solutions to Descartes' problem of knowledge, are unacceptable. Murphy's attempts to reconcile the two views thus supplies the theoretical premises for Beckett's "symbolism."

Murphy refuses to accept the "Aristotelian" solution to the question of permanence and change as it relates to the problem of self or mind:

He distinguished between the actual and virtual of his mind, not as between form and the formless yearning for form, but as between that of which he had both mental and physical experience and that of which he had mental experience only. Thus the form of kick was actual, that of caress virtual. (p. 108)

Ruby Cohn points out that the "name Murphy.. is probably not pure Irish, but a pun upon the Greek "morphe" meaning "form" which is both what Murphy is seeking for himself and an indication of how he will serve Beckett as the prototype of future fictions."10

But the point is that Murphy does not creatively or artistically seek form. Instead he sees the zones of his minds as the means of attaining a "Nirvana" in which the self is devoid of all responsibility.

The "seedy solipsist" even shows some nostalgic attraction for Descartes' rationalistic solution to the problem of self identity through the a priori assumption of God's existence.

Perhaps there was outside space and time, a non-mental, non-physical kick from all eternity, dimly revealed to Murphy in its correlated modes of consciousness and extension, the kick in intellectu and the kick in re. But where then was the supreme Caress? (p.109)

Without God or the "Supreme Caress", Descartes' system collapses. Murphy, like the Occasionalists with their "parody of rational behaviour" (p.110), accepts "the partial congruence of the world of his mind with the world of his body as due to some process of supernatural determination." But this question is not of central importance. Chapter 6 anticipates the asylum section in which Murphy becomes "an out and out preterist with regard to the system of the heavenly bodies."

The more his own system closed round him the less he could tolerate its being subordinated to any other. Between him and his stars there was correspondence, but not in Suk's sense. They were his stars, he was the prior system. (p. 183)

The important question is how does Murphy "exploit" or develop the aesthetic and philosophical aspects of his theory of "forms." For it is only within these "zones" that it is possible to escape from the yes/no dialectic.

The conception of consciousness that is developed is a more phenomenological than psychological. In the first zone "the elements of physical experience (were) available for a new arrangement." (p.111) It is in this sphere, "in which the whole physical fiasco became a howling success", that Beckett primarily operates in Murphy. The second zone concerns the "Balacqua

fantasy" that has previously been discussed. Zone three, however, seems prophetic of the "flux of forms" which is Beckett's main area of investigation in trilogy. Here Murphy "was not free, but a mote in the dark of absolute freedom." Unlike the later Beckettian heroes Murphy has not yet discovered the dangers as well as pleasures involved in the journey into the world of mind.

Beckett emphasizes Murphy's theory of the mind supplies only a paradigm. The zones resemble Kant's categories in that they are of no value unless an experiential element or "objective correlative" is supplied. Murphy's failure depends upon his inability to accept life in his mind, from his inability to reconcile the concept with the "concrete". But the almost phenomenological description of Murphy's mind does indicate the route which Beckett's search for the self will take, Neary raised a question pertaining to this search, an idea seminal for Beckett's thought: "Is there no flea that found at last dies without issue? No key flea?" Beckett significantly adds, "It was from just this consideration while still less than a child, Murphy had set out to capture himself, not with anger but with love." (p.201) Descartes used this theory of infinite regression in order to establish the necessity of God's existence. Murphy, the solipsist, applies the theory not to the macrocosm, but turns it inwards towards a Pascalian type interior distance. The key flea is thus comically identified with the God-like "self-contained" self. Wylie refers to Murphy as "vermin", at all costs to be avoided. (p.217)

This search for the self seems to involve a "successive dialectic", a reductive process. But in zone three the goal seems to be reached. To find the self involves, however, a negation of the self, the becoming of a "mote in the dark of absolute freedom." Here forms crumble "without love or hate any intelligible process of change." (p.112) No longer is it really possible to fulfill the meaning of Spinoza's line which prefaces chapter 6, "Amor intellectualis quo, Murphy se ipsum amat." Murphy discovers in the asylum that even if he discovers his ideal self (Mr. Endon) no love or communication can take place with it. This awareness results in Murphy's breakdown and makes the identification between Cartesianism and schizophrenia.

III

The transition to the asylum section is made through two parallel movements, both of which deal with the symbolism of a room. The first deals with the suicide of the "old boy" who lived above Murphy and Celia. Murphy resents the traumatic effect this event has upon Celia. He feels that Celia slights his startling news that he has obtained a job at the Magdalen Mental Mercy Seat. Besides, Murphy does not see death in negative terms: he comforts Celia by emphasizing "the unutterable benefits that would accrue, were already accruing to the old boy from his demise." The death of the "old boy" (an ex-butler could he, perhaps; be identified with the numberless servants of the mysterious Mr. Knott in Watt?) looks forward to Murphy's own fate, and emphasizes the suicidal characteristics of the schizophrenic.

Celia moves into the "old boy's" room (replete with "Descartes linoleum") and there partakes of the pleasures of Murphy's rocker. In this "little room", "the silence above was a different silence, no longer strangled. The silence not of vacuum but of plenum, not of breath taken but of quiet air." (p.148) The second movement deals with Murphy's little monad of a garret in the asylum. Like Celia's new room it was "not half but twice as good ... because half as large." Through-out Beckett's fiction the room is conceived of as a symbol for the human consciousness. The process of reduction evident in the new rooms of Celia and Murphy characterizes Beckett's diminishing universe. In Endgame and the trilogy the rooms depicted are identified quite clearly as symbolic of the skull of man. Since the realm of thought or consciousness is not "extended", the contraction of the spatial coordinate facilitates the search for the essential self. Moreover, if the "Balacqua fantasy" is considered, it becomes clear that the room is in ways synonymous with the womb.

Once at the asylum Murphy insists on a fire for his room, a reference, possibly, to the "hot cupboard" in which Descartes composed his Meditations. In this world of the mad all normal causal expectations break down. Ticklepenny, for example, is perplexed by the fact that the tap for the radiator "which he had really turned on came to be turned off." (p.174) Could this inexplicable event indicate that Murphy has at last found a world

a world in which there is a complete separation of the mental and physical worlds? In other words, Ticklepenny's mental decision to turn on the tap cannot be transferred or maintained in the physical world. "God" in Malebranche's terms is no longer constantly involved in effecting the "miraculous" conjunction of the two realms.

For Murphy the asylum affords the entrance to just such an ideal world:

... the impression he received was of that self-immersed indifference to the contingencies of the contingent world which he had chosen for himself as the only felicity and achieved so seldom. (p.168)

Diagnosed by Neary as "a schizoid spasmophile", Murphy believes he has at last found "a brotherhood." (p,176) As a result he loathes "the textbook attitude towards them, the complacent scientific conceptualism that made contact with outer reality the index of mental well being." (pp.176-177) R.D.Laing in The Divided Self also rejects the textbook attitude. Laing states that no meaningful dialogue can develop until the doctor accepts the schizophrenic's categories of thoughts, and works within that existential context. Murphy, the orderly, carries this belief to its absurd conclusion: he attempts to become one with the patients by becoming a patient himself.

But Beckett, the ironically detached author, carefully tells the reader that Murphy's romantic notions involve a distortion of all facts that threatened his empathy with the patients:

...even if the patients did sometimes feel as lowly as they sometimes looked, still no aspersion was necessarily cast on the little world where Murphy presupposed them, one and all, to be having a glorious time. One had merely to ascribe their agitations, not to any flaw in their self-seclusion, but to its investment by the healers. (p.180)

Mr. Endon (Greek "within") appears, however, as a "schizophrenic of the most amiable type." (186) What threatens this ideal relationship is that it is essentially dualistic. While Murphy believes he is intimately bound by a pure love to Mr. Endon, he has to admit that "they remained to one another, even when most

profoundly one in spirit,...Mr. Murphy and Mr. Endon."(p.184)
As a result of the "vicarious autology" with Mr. Endon, Murphy is no longer able to come alive in his mind. More and more Murphy becomes aware of the gulf which separates him from the inmates.

Murphy's feelings for Mr. Endon are not reciprocated, instead of acting as a "brother" he is forced to accept the more humble role of a chess partner. In the game of chess Murphy's "closed system" is completely inadequate before Mr. Endon's perfectly self-sufficient system. Yet it is at the time of submission, of checkmate, that Murphy seems closest to reaching his avowed goal.

Murphy began to see nothing, that colourlessness which is such a rare postnatal treat, being the absence (to abuse a nice distinction) not of percipire but of percipi. His other senses also found themselves at peace, an unexpected pleasure. Not the numb peace of their own suspension, but the positive peace that comes when the somethings give way, a simply add up, to the Nothing, then which in the guffaw of the Abderite naught is more real. (p.246)

This mystical state, similar to Arsene's in Watt, cannot be maintained; the "big blooming, buzzing confusion" re-establishes itself.

As long as Murphy experienced "the other", Mr. Endon, as a free agent, he was open to the possibility of experiencing himself as an object of Mr. Endon's experience and thereby of feeling his own being drained away. One is threatened with the possibility of becoming no more than a thing in the world of the other, without any life for oneself. In terms of such anxiety, the very act of experiencing the other as a person is felt as virtually suicidal. When Murphy frees himself from the suicidal attraction to Mr. Endon, he is capable of reaching the third zone of his mind. Instead of being a thing in Mr. Endon's world, he becomes a thing to himself, a part of his own closed system.

But the schizoid personality as exemplified by Murphy must have its existence verified by the presence of the "other" (esse est percipi). It is only in Mr. Endon's presence that Murphy is finally able at least minimally to live and move and have his being. The situation is still dialectical, but now the earlier yes/no proposition has become more like Sartre's

permutations of being and nothingness. At last Murphy admits his failure to reconcile himself with Mr. Endon (somewhat akin to the Sartian en-soi, or being-in-itself). Beckett's hero sees his own image, "horribly reduced, obscured, and distorted" in Mr. Endon's cornea, "stigmatised in those eyes that did not see him." (p.249) And, in lines prophetic of Watt's breakdown as a result of his inability to fathom Mr. Knott, Murphy haltingly states

"the last at last seen of him himself
unseen by him and of himself." (p.250)

The destructive, threatening aspect of the void, one of Beckett's major fictional themes, emerges now for the first time. Murphy is not even "a mote in the dark of absolute freedom"; he is only "a speck in Mr. Endon's unseen." (p.250)

The only recourse is the world of the body, the "big world" of Newtonian motion. However, the distraught Murphy fails to raise even a picture of Celia. Once back in the chair, he does begin to come alive in the mind, "planning if he felt any better to dress and go... leaving Ticklepenny to face the music, music, Music, back to Brewery Road, to Celia, serenade, nocturne, albada," (p.252) Murphy plans to come down off the ladder of Cartesian logic by which he has inevitably drawn to the asylum in a similar way Watt was fatally attracted to Mr. Knott. Beckett's exasperation with his hero's course of action is indicated by the use of a deus ex machina device to do away with Murphy. The "seedy solipsist" does "whinge" alike all the other puppet-like characters.

R.D. Laing writes of "impingement" of reality in terms which are remarkably similar to the ill-starred Murphy's death by "spontaneous combustion":

Impingement does not convey, however, the full terror of the experience of the world as liable at any moment to crash in and obliterate all identity as a gas will rush in and obliterate a vacuum. The individual feels that, like the vacuum, he is empty. But this emptiness is him. Although in other ways he longs for the emptiness to be filled, he dreads the possibility of this happening because he has come to feel that all he can be is the awful nothingness of just this very vacuum. Any "contact" with reality is then in itself experienced as a dreadful threat because reality, as experienced from this position, is necessarily implosive and thus, as was relatedness in engulfment, in itself a threat to what identity the individual is able to suppose himself to have.¹²

Murphy's "case history" of Cartesian schizophrenia can be dealt with in terms of these abstractions. At first Murphy feared Celia's ultimatum to get a job (the "impingement" of reality) would result in the obliteration of the intellectual "I". The encounter with Mr. Endon confirms, however, the ambiguous nature of the void, at once "positive" and "negative." Murphy is thus caught in an inextricable dilemma: he cannot attain the void, yet he cannot return to external reality if he is to remain faithful to his philosophical tenets. Unlike the later artist heroes Murphy is not able through the symbolic medium of language to establish a tenuous point of balance between the terms of the either/or dialectic.

By applying the conclusions of a psychologist such as Laing to Murphy, there is no intention of making Beckett's art appear as a case study of schizophrenia. But the very fact that part of Murphy's failure can be accounted for in rather clinical terms helps to bring out Beckett's central point with regard to his relationship to his hero. Murphy becomes a case study because he does not exploit the creative aspects of his schizophrenia. Beckett's aim in the novel then approximates in part Laing's in The Divided Self:

... I am primarily concerned to follow through the schizoid position into psychosis and not to describe the possibilities inherent in it which may lead in other directions, but one must bear in mind that deterioration and disintegration are only one outcome of the initial schizoid organization. Quite clearly, authentic visions of freedom, power, and creativity can be achieved and lived out.

Many schizoid writers and artists who are relatively isolated from the other succeed in establishing a creative relationship with things in the world, which are made to embody the figures of their fantasy. But theirs is not our present story. 13

Quite clearly the creative use of so-called mental derangement is not Beckett's present story in Murphy.

In retrospect, however, Murphy appears as Beckett's "portrait of the artist as a young man." His replacement of Ticklepenny, the pot poet, in the asylum does suggest that Beckett intends Murphy to take a creative role.

But Murphy fails to write the "one poem which he alone could write"; he fails to accept "madness as a form of creative delirium in the way that Molloy, for example, does. While several critics have regarded Beckett's preoccupation with Cartesianism as a most difficult subject for artistic treatment, this is not really the case. Noam Chomsky in Cartesian Linguistics emphasizes the stress Descartes placed upon the creativity of language. For Descartes language is the basic criterion for distinguishing man from the mechanical or animal world. If Beckett has any answer to the Cartesian paradoxes which are at the centre of Western philosophy it is to be found in his uses of language.

Beckett's comico-ironic attitude towards Murphy comes out in the description of the last rites and the disposal of the remains. Murphy's last wishes are not carried out, instead of having his remains flushed down the toilet of the Abbey Theatre they are unceremoniously scattered by Cooper over the floor of a pub. In the last analysis this is fitting, for Murphy at the moment of his death had intended to re-enter the Newtonian world. Murphy, a piece of "sublunary excrement" is denied access to the "Cartesian vortex" of the toilet bowl. In Proust, Beckett described the artist as active, "but negatively, shrinking from the nullity of extracircumferential phenomena, drawn into the core of the eddy".¹⁴

If Beckett himself is not yet able to reach the "ideal core of the onion", he is able through Celia to present a compassionate view of the frailties of human nature, and the frailest of human virtues, love, manages to survive. Somehow the tenderness associated with Celia escapes the shafts of Beckett's brilliant wit and satire. The I-and-thou relationship never appears again in such a sympathetic light in Beckett's writings, with the possible exception of Happy Days. The pronoun "thou", the rarest word in Beckett's vocabulary, appears only once again. The narrator of How IT Is refers sardonically to his sack as a "thou". Because of the imperfect fusion of form and content in Murphy (the "matrix of surds" that is the protagonist's mind does not find expression in the elegant, learned diction of the novel), the quality of language is more important than any system of aesthetics. The last lines of the novel have an emotional

impact comparable to the last scene in Watt. Celia is left behind to continue Murphy's abortive exploration of the mind, while the Neutonians are left to the "endless chain of love, tolerance, indifference, aversion, and disgust".

The theory of the novel Beckett puts forth in Murphy resembles in many ways the one advanced in Flann O'Brien's brilliant comic novel, At Swim - Two - Birds. The narrator of O'Brien's novel states that "a satisfactory novel should be a self-evident sham to which the reader could regulate at will the degree of his credulity". Expatiating in a mock Stephen Dedalus manner, he adds:

The entire corpus of existing literature should be regarded as a limbo from which discerning authors could draw their characters as required, creating only when they failed to find a suitable existing puppet. ¹⁵

In Murphy, an anti-novel built largely upon the parody of novelistic conventions, Beckett makes a point of terming all his characters, except Murphy, puppets. Like Flann O'Brien, Beckett develops a theory of "aestho-eugenics", that is, each fictional character creates his successor. Hence the importance of Murphy, whose name appears sporadically throughout Beckett's later fiction. He serves as the starting point for all of Beckett's later fictions.

At the beginning of Iris Murdoch's Under the Net, one of the few truly philosophical novels in English, the hero, Jake Donaghue, finds himself in a typically Beckettian situation. He is being expelled from his lodgings. Before he leaves his mistress returns two of his books, Murphy and Pierrot Mon Ami.¹⁶ Beckett's aesthetic and philosophical exploration of the novel form makes him a figure with whom future novelists most concern themselves. Beckett's unique exploration of the novel form is not, of course, capable of simple imitation. It is significant that Iris Murdoch couples Murphy with the sentimental romance, Pierrot Mon Ami. Iris Murdoch is a particularly useful figure to point to in an introduction to Beckett's artistic and philosophical speculations. An important novelist, a former don of philosophy at Oxford, author of Sartre: Romantic Rationalist,

Murdoch encompasses, just as Beckett does, both the Anglo-Irish and European philosophical traditions. Her preoccupation with existential themes in terms of linguistic theories parallels Beckett's increasing interest with the working of language in Watt and the later French writings. The latter have too often been considered as representing a movement towards European influences when they actually indicate a complex interrelationship of both traditions of philosophizing.

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- 3 Ibid., p.51; p.25.
- 4 Cited in Rollo May, "Dangers in the Relation of Existentialism to Psychotherapy," in Psychoanalysis and Existential Philosophy, ed. Hendrick M. Ruitenbeck (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1962), p184.
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- 6 Samuel Beckett, Poems in English (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1955), p.11.
- 7 Richard Coe, Samuel Beckett (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964), pp.21-34.
- 8 Rene Descartes, Meditations, trans. L.J. Lafleur (New York: The Bobbs - Merrill Co. Inc., 1960), p.105.
- 9 Cited in I.A. Richards, The Philosophy of Rhetoric (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1936), p.79.
- 10 Ruby Cohn, Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p.54.
- 11 The metaphor of the flea is later used in Endgame. But here the reactions of the characters illustrate Beckett's changing attitude towards the self and the void. The attitudes of Hamm and Clov are closer to Neary's point of view than that of the optimistic Murphy, who believes the search for the self in the void is determined by love, not anger.

Clov (anguished, scratching himself) :
I have a flea!

Hamm:
A flea! Are there still fleas?

Clov:
On me there's one.
(scratching.)
Unless its a crablouse.

Hamm: (very perturbed):
 But humanity might start from there all over
 again!
 Catch him, for the love of God!

Clov:
 I'll go and get the powder.
 (Exit Clov.)

Hamm:
 A flea! This is awful! What a day!

12 R. D. Laing, The Divided Self: An Existential Study
in Sanity and Madness (London: Penguin Books, 1960) pp.45-6.

13 Ibid., p.89.

14 Beckett, Proust, p.48

15 Flann O'Brien, At Swim - Two - Birds (London:
 MacGibbon and Kee, 1960), p.25.

16 Iris Murdoch, Under the Net (London: Chatto and
 Windus, 1954), p.14.

Chapter 11

The Breakdown of Empirical Certainty in Watt.

That the sun will not rise tomorrow is no less intelligible a proposition, and implies no more contradiction, than the affirmation that it will rise.

Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding

We have here the same case as with the first thought of Copernicus, who, not being able to get on in the explanation of the movements of the heavenly bodies, as long as he assumed that all the stars turned round the spectator, tried, whether he could not succeed better, by assuming the spectator to be turning around, and the stars to be at rest. A similar experiment may be tried in metaphysic, so far as the intuition of object is concerned.

Kant, Critique of Pure Reason

I

In Watt Beckett approaches the third zone of Murphy's mind in which forms become and crumble "into the fragments of a new becoming, without love or hate or any intelligible principle of change" from an empirical rather than a rationalistic interpretation of sense experience. The "big bony seedy shabby haggard knockkneed rottentoothed rednosed" Watt appears to be the complete opposite of Murphy, "the seedy solipsist". But both characters are finally confronted with the same philosophical and aesthetic dilemmas. From completely opposing presuppositions about the nature of man's relationship to the external world, the epistemological plots of the two novels converge. Both Watt and Murphy experience the futility and impotence of all intellection, of all metaphysical systems when faced with a transrational, noumenal experience which by its very nature is non-verbal. Watt and Murphy set the limits of Beckett's fictional universe. Beckett is concerned with the investigation of impotence and ignorance:

I don't think impotence has been exploited in the past... My little exploration is that whole zone of being that has always been set aside by artists as something unuseable - as something by definition incompatible with art. 1

Watt's vain struggle with the "formlessness" of Mr. Knott's establishment is essentially an aesthetic one. As it becomes clear that all sense experience is deceptive or incapable of intellectual categorization, all experience becomes a "fiction", in the philosophical and literary sense of the word. Any attempt to come to terms with the "flux of forms" is thus imaginative, or artistic.

While the Cartesian influence is pervasive in Beckett, there is a need for an examination of his debt to the empiricists. John Fletcher in "Beckett and the Philosophers" points the way towards a new interpretation of Watt. Discussing Jacqueline Hoefer's influential interpretation of Watt as a philosophical farce on logical positivism, he expresses certain reservations. As Beckett admits that he did not come across this philosophical doctrine until quite late in his career, Fletcher feels that it "seems safer to attribute these notions to a general influence emanating from the skeptical tradition of empiricism."² This influence can be treated not only generally, but fairly specifically. In his last novel written directly in English, Beckett draws basically upon two major streams of thought, best exemplified, on one hand, by key propositions in Hume's Treatise of Human Nature and An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, and, on the other, by central ideas in Kant's Critique of Pure Reason.³

This schema is not meant to be an oversimplification of Beckett's complex philosophical position. Hume's thought went beyond its immediate conclusions. In its influence on Kant and through him on Kierkegaard and the existentialists it opened up new approaches to old problems. There will be no attempt at reducing Beckett's novel to the comfortable dimensions of an intellectual pigeon hole. It is no more of a "Humean" or Kantian" novel than Tristram Shandy is a "Lockean" novel, that is to say, in both works the epistemologies are subservient to the total artistic vision. With these qualifications, Beckett's philosophical position in Watt could be seen as an attempt to come to terms with Hume's and Kant's attack upon metaphysics.

The limitations placed upon man's reason by this rejection of the traditional pursuits of metaphysics resulted in an increased emphasis on epistemology. In Murphy and Watt one of Beckett's major concerns is the problem of how man gains knowledge of the world of objects which surrounds him.

The description of Watt as he sets out on his journey to Mr. Knott's house raises the problem of perception:

Tetty was not sure whether it was a man or a woman.
Mr. Hackett was not sure that it was not a parcel,
a carpet for example, or a roll of tarpaulin, wrapped up
in dark paper and tied about the middle with a cord.
(p.16)

Henry Jackson Watt in The Sensory Basis and Structure of Knowledge cites a similar example of a non-specific, or general image: "Subject II saw a face without knowing whether it was that of a man or woman." A brief comment on Henry Jackson Watt's book will help to delineate further the philosophical dimensions of Beckett's artistic explorations in Watt. Besides being a possible source of the title of Beckett's novel, Henry Watt's psychological study could be one of the main targets of Beckett's parody of epistemological theories in Watt.

In The Sensory Basis and Structure of Knowledge, Henry Watt attempts essentially to find a middle way between the Humean - Kantian dilemma. He puts forward a purely empirical theory of knowledge: sensory experience allows for the creation of the spatiotemporal categories which, in turn, result in conception. Hume's doctrine of sensationalism is only partly acceptable to Watt as it "rightly looks upon sensations as the elementary stuff of all mind, but wrongly denies the occurrence of any form of union amongst them but aggregation." From this empirical point of view, Watt also disagrees with Kant's conclusion that there is a complete cleft between intuition (space and time) and conception. He believes instead that

we bridge the gulf, as far as may be, by seeing that conception is, and must be, itself essentially a complication of space. Nor can there be such a gulf between the matter of sense (sense-data or elementary sensations) and the "forms" of space and time. These

must rest upon, integrate, and so share kinship with, attributes of the elementary sensations. And we must learn from these examples to carry our vision over the dark gulf that must somewhere appear for us (beyond sense data), to things beyond, trying to learn from the system of mind how to think of them with greatest hope of truth. Then there will be no great break in the world at all. We can only strive to interpret the part of it that we are not, and do not really see with the inward eye, by the part of it that we are, and do so see, and by what we find streaming through this world of our own being from beyond.⁴

For Beckett this via media is clearly unacceptable. Once the possibility of attaining any empirical knowledge at all is done away with (as is the case in Watt), then the whole solution collapses. Such "forms" as Beckett's Watt possesses no longer apply to the "reality" streaming in upon him. The break in Watt's world, the disjunction between himself and Mr. Knott, shows that Beckett's area of exploration is the "dark gulf", the void or nothingness symbolized by Mr. Knott's house.

Beginning with Locke, the empiricists hoped to discover a basis for knowledge in sense experience. But from Locke to Berkeley to Hume, they found that sense experience yielded far less information about the world than one might have hoped for. Watt appears at first as an extremely naive empiricist whose only pleasure arises from being able to name or place all sense experience within a logical pattern. Watt's response to external stimuli is rigorously scientific. While this leads to a deadening existence, Beckett makes it clear that such tactics offer the only hope for Watt's survival. However, the failure of Watt's indefatigable logical processes to deal with the irrationality of Mr. Knott's house illustrates Beckett's "Humean" scepticism about the possibilities of attaining either empirical or metaphysical knowledge.

Hume's analysis indicated that a thorough examination of what we in fact know from sense experience would lead to a most genuine scepticism about the possibility of any knowledge. Kemp Smith points out that, "in Hume's view our two most fundamental beliefs are, first, that objects we perceive have a continuing independent existence, and secondly, that nothing can come into

existence save through a preexistent cause."⁵ For Watt the continuing independent existence of objects is verifiable through their susceptibility to being named. By giving names to objects Watt believes he has captured their existence in the "frigid machinery of a time - space relation" (p.21), even though he is aware that such a superficial activity does not disclose their essence. Watt asks no more than this until he meets Mr. Knott, a "nought" who appears as a "something". As Hume pointed out, one of our basic beliefs is "that nothing can come into existence save through a preeistent cause". Unlike Arsene and the later Beckettian heroes, Watt is unaware of the dialectic which states that the self is predicated upon just such a nothingness. For Hume the belief is causal connexion, being instinctive, tends to be excessive in its influence and leads us, in the pursuit of knowledge, to demand a sufficient cause for all things. But since there is no adequate conception of what would be a "sufficient" cause for any phenomenon, this is a demand which can never be satisfied. Watt tries to avoid all questions of "whatness" by sticking to surface reality. As will be shown later, Watt's concern with causation leads him to seek for deeper meaning in reality.

Mr. Knott, the mystic principle, cannot, however, be explained by any concept of "sufficient" cause that is derived ^{river} from emperical investigation. Bertrand Russell In Mysticism and Logic argues that "metaphysics, or the attempt to conceive the world as a whole by means of thought, has been developed from the first by the union and conflict of two very different human impulses, the one urging man towards mysticism, the other urging him towards science".⁶ It is Watt's inability to reconcile these conflicting views which results in the traumatic breakdown of his formerly efficacious barriers against external stimuli.

Russell cites Hume as a philosopher in whom "the scientific impulse was unchecked." But the judgment is misdirected. Hume, like Beckett, is concerned with epistemological rather than metaphysical enquiries. In the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Cleanthes terms Philo, Hume's surrogate, a "mystic". However, Hume's "mysticism" is similar in part to

to Beckett's: it derives from a realization of the limitations of rational investigation. Beyond what can be logically or empirically derived, Hume insists that one must admit the "incomprehensible". Watt, on the other hand, resembles Cleanthes in that he believes his reason is capable of at least placing the mysterious Mr. Knott within a rational pattern of experience.

Kant, as does Beckett, takes the metaphysical quest more seriously than Hume. From an investigation at the fundamental level, Kant thought, it would be possible to discover what certain knowledge man could attain, and thereby, also to discover the limitations which would present the uncovering of any metaphysical truths. In the Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, Kant freely admits "that it was the thought of David Hume which many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumbers and gave an entirely new direction to my enquiries in the field of speculative philosophy".⁷ Kant thus began his study of human knowledge, in the Critique of Pure Reason, by agreeing with the empiricists' claim that all knowledge begins with experience. At the same time this delimitation of the boundaries of theoretical or scientific knowledge does not indicate for Kant that God, for example, is unthinkable or that the term is meaningless. While Kant veers away from a dogmatic assertion of the existence of noumenal or suprasensible reality, he clearly believes that there are noumena and that they form a positive function by setting the limits of man's reason. The Kantian categories are inapplicable to noumena, to realities which are not, and cannot be, given in sense-experience. Unwilling to accept the limitations of a speculative enquiry as set forth by Hume, Kant offers the difficult and apparently paradoxical situation of man as phenomenally determined but noumenally free, as determined and free at the same time, thought under different aspects.

This is essentially the same problem which so fascinated Beckett in his first literary study, Proust. How can man at once be part of a rigidly determined chronological and spatial chain, and yet somehow transcend it? In Watt this Kantian

equation forms one of the central problems upon which the pragmatic hero flounders. Kant found it necessary to posit a noumenal reality in order to place freedom, immortality, and God beyond range of the antinomies. For Beckett the noumenal is stripped of all ethical considerations. Molloy, for example, mockingly says, "Charming things, Hypothetical imperatives." Needless to say, there are no "categorical imperatives" in Beckett's fictional universe. It is an ontological fact for Beckett that at the centre of man's being there is a nothing, or nought ("Knott"). "In the beginning was the pun", stated Murphy. The rationalist Logos of Kant is simply a cosmic joke for Beckett. With this taste for punning, it is easy to imagine Beckett appreciating the ironic identification of Kant (can't) with Mr. Knott (not). A double negative.

With regard to the outlining of the epistemological plot of the novel, Watt seems to be most closely identified with the "Humean" philosophical point of view, while Mr. Knott is associated with the "Kantian" one. There is a sceptical element in Beckett's thought which corresponds, in part, to Hume's negative conclusions about causation and personal identity. It will be shown that Beckett exploits a similar scepticism about the fruits of epistemological research in order to destroy Watt's logical machinery. The simple dichotomy between Watt and Mr. Knott is thus broken down, and there occurs a complex interrelationship of the ostensibly contradictory ideas of Hume and Kant on key questions such as personal identity and causation. The discussion of Watt within this philosophical context will hopefully allow for a more profound understanding of Beckett's aesthetics of the novel.

II

Murphy has as its opening line, "The sun shone, having no alternative on the nothing new". The situation in Watt is symbolically opposite; in terms of cause-effect relationships the sun does not rise as expected. The novel opens with the

scene of Mr. Hackett sitting in "the failing light". Mr. Hackett, who has had "a fall off the ladder" and has difficulty remembering names, is associated with Watt in Mr. Nixon's mind. It is clear that Mr. Hackett foreshadows Watt's fate after he returns from Mr. Knott's with his faith in the ability of names to substantiate the scientific uniformity of nature badly shaken.

The scenes which precede Watt's arrival at Mr. Knott's establishment appear to be grounded in the world of every day empirical reality. While Mr. Hackett's conversation with the Nixons is filled with absurdities and non sequiturs, it still refers to an identifiable social reality. In this world Watt appears to be as mysterious an entity as Mr. Knott. Those who watch Watt embark upon his unreal journey know only a few irrelevant details about him. Kant's metaphor of the two houses applies in this instance. There can be no communication, he says, between the house of reason and the house of sup^{er}sensible reality. Watt, supposedly "an experienced traveller", shows great reluctance at having to make this impossible, "absurd" journey between the two houses. It is reported that "already Watt preferred to have his back to his destination." (p.26) Watt enters Mr. Knott's house by the back door, but never does discover how the door happened to be open.

As is often the case in Beckett's fiction, the transition between the "two houses" is effected by a "pastoral" interlude. On the way to Knott's, Watt stops to rest in a ditch. Here he adopts the foetal position characteristic of Murphy's "Belacqua bliss". The mysterious threne Watt hears makes explicit the association of death and rebirth with the journey to Mr. Knott's. At Mr. Knott's, Watt enters another dimension of being in which the time-space coordinates of the world of Mr. Hackett and Mr. Nixon no longer apply.

Upon his arrival at Mr. Knott's, Arsene, Watt's predecessor, delivers a speech to him in which he tells of his failure to find lasting harmony in the service of Mr. Knott. Arsene had hoped to be "in the midst of himself after so many tedious years spent clinging to the perimeter." (p.41) The

"Humean" sun does not rise in the sense that Arsene's mystical experience allows him to escape from a deterministic world in which the "quantum of wantum cannot vary." It appears that Arsene has reached a noumenal reality in which he is able to enjoy a God-like identification with creation.

The sensations the premonitions of harmony are irrefragable, or imminent harmony, when all outside him will be, the flowers, the flowers that he is among him, the sky the sky that he is above him, the earth trodden the earth treading, and all sound his echo. (p.40)

I was in the sun, and the wall was in the sun. I was the sun need I add, and the wall and the step and the yard, and the time of year, and the time of day, to mention only these. (p.42)

The sense of transcendent unity does not last, however, "something slipped." Arsene is plunged back into "the old thing, where it always was, back again."

Arsene attempts to explain what happened with these enigmatic lines:

What was changed was existence off the ladder. Do not come down off the ladder. I for, I haf taken it away. This I am happy to inform you is the reversed metamorphosis. The Laurel into Daphney (p.44).

Jacqueline Hoefer attempts to elucidate it through a comparison with Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of logical positivism. She quotes from his Tractatus:

My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out them, through them, on them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it).
He must surmount these propositions, then he sees the world rightly. Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.⁸

While Beckett may intend this allusion, he has obviously introduced variations upon Wittgenstein's thought which Hoefer's analysis fails to bring out. The difficulty here is that, whereas the ladder which Arsene advises Watt not to come down is a "ladder of logic" ("If," "or"), the ladder which Wittgenstein advises his disciples to discard, for the sake of their own independence, is his own system. The two ladders do

not form exact parallels.

The most obvious objection to Hoefer's analysis derives from the fact that Arsene is not a Wittgensteinian logical positivist. For Wittgenstein the ideal language is one in which for every proper name in the language there is a corresponding entity. The ideal language thus produces the structures of facts, since facts are composed of objects and their properties. Such statements as "Knott exists", or Arsene's "I was the sun", would be rejected by logical positivists as not cognitive since there is a contradiction between their subjects and predicates. They are statements "whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent". Most of Arsene's bitter monologue would, in fact, be considered by a logical positivist as possessing only "poetical" or "emotive" value. Watt does not comprehend a word of Arsene's farewell speech.

The fall from the "ladder of logic" points out one of the most serious inconsistencies in a philosophy such as Kant's which posits the existence of a noumenal reality. Kant agreed with Hume that it is not possible to derive necessity and strict universality from experience. It follows, therefore, said Kant, that "necessity and strict universality are here marks of a priori knowledge and are inseparably connected with one another." In short, Kant's "Copernican revolution" consists of the assumption that objects must conform to our knowledge rather than the other way around. Kant does not imply the view that reality can be reduced to the human mind and its ideals. It meant rather that the mind imposes on the ultimate material of experience its own forms of cognition, determined by the structure of human sensibility and understanding, and that things cannot be known except through the medium of these forms.

During Arsene's period of ineffable harmony, the subject-object dichotomy was dissolved. He became, in Kant's terminology, the thing-in-itself (Ding an Sich). But such a condition within Kant's framework of logic is impossible, absurd. In the Prolegomena Kant states that things-in-themselves are unknowable but that "we know them through the representations which their influence on our sensibility procures for us."⁹ By talking in

this way Kant obviously lays himself open to the charge of applying the principle of causality beyond the limits which he himself lays down. The category of cause is applicable only to phenomenon. This flagrant inconsistency in Kant's philosophy corresponds, in part, to the flaw in Arsene's "ladder of logic", which briefly allows him a state of mystical transcendence.

Another useful parallel with Arsene's experience is found in Sartre's "phenomenological ontology". Both Beckett and Sartre treat the Kantian concept of the noumenal within the realm of existentialist experience. Arsene could have made the step from the last rung of the "ladder of logic" to the transcendent state by means of a negative dialectic of being and nothingness. While Arsene's experience is pictured as a mystical one, it is not necessary to go beyond a non-supernatural ontology for its explanation. The state Arsene describes is similar to that the Unnamable will later desire in his attempt to become Worm, that is, to be "in the midst of himself" as a type of Sartrean "en-soi". Beckett would agree with Sartre that "nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being like a worm."

Beckett and Sartre view man's existence as intrinsically absurd because for-itself basically desires to be one with the in-itself. Being-for-itself is consciousness conceived of as a lack of being; a desire for being; being-in-itself is non-conscious being; it is the being of the phenomenon and overflows the knowledge man has of it. The desire to unite the two into a fulness of being is impossible. It is both the desire of being caused and the desire of being the cause. Man, in effect, constantly strives to be God, the self-contained plenum of being.

For a moment Arsene managed to fuse the two. Back in the fallen state of being and nothingness Watt's predecessor is nauseated by the facticity of being:

And yet it is useless not to seek, not to want, for when you cease to seek you start to find, and when you cease to want, then life begins to ram her fist and chips down your gullet until you puke, and then you puke down your gullet until you puke the puke, and then the puked puke until you begin to like it. (p.44)

Beckett conceives a consciousness as a lack of being which continually "transcends" itself in its attempt to fulfill itself. No meaningful relationship can be established between the self and external nature. Roquentin's feeling of "obscene superfluity" in Nausea approximates Arsene's feelings of disgust as well as those of Watt. "If there were two things that Watt loathed, one was the earth, and the other was the sky." (p.36)

The irony of Arsene's advice to Watt is determined by the fact that Watt does not really desire life on the ladder. Watt realizes, perhaps, that any such attempt as Arsene's is doomed to failure. He does not wish to become one with Mr. Knott, his anti-self. Such a judgment imputes to Watt an awareness that the question "what?" leads only to the response, "nothing". Or, conversely, nothing can be everything if the two words are placed together - what not. It is possible that Watt has learned from the fate of his predecessor, Murphy. The latter discovered that it was senseless to expect any recognition from Mr. Endon, who, like Mr. Knott, possesses a perfectly self-contained consciousness of being. Mr. Knott is the "third person" or master, "the superior existence" (p.50) without which existence is inconceivable. He is the "other" as absolute, the unwitnessed witness. Knowing that his existence cannot be verified by Mr. Knott, Watt clings desperately to the perimeter of empirical fact as shown in his "hobby horsical" tabulations of events.

The last lines of part one of the novel picture the mild, inoffensive Watt "masturbating his snout", waiting for the sun to rise:

But that would come, Watt knew that would come, with patience it would come, little by little whether he liked it or not, over the yard wall, and through the window, first the grey, then the brighter colours one by one, until getting on to nine a.m. all the gold and white and blue would fill the kitchen, all the unsoiled light of the new day at last, the day without precedent. (p.84)

It is truly a day without precedent for Watt learns that though he waits forever things will no longer follow their expected course. The "Humean" sun will not rise. No longer do the

normal deterministic cause-effect relations hold good. The man who believes the sun will rise, that there is some sort of internal continuity to his experience, called "himself", has the normal set of beliefs, and is considered a "reasonable" human being. Someone else, (Mr. Knott), operating with different mental habits and customs, is "abnormal" and "unreasonable". Beckett poses the question: which of the two believes something that actually corresponds to what is going on in the world?

III

During his early period of service at Mr. Knott's, Watt was puzzled by the ringing of a bell during the night. Although Watt has never seen a bell in the house, he immediately begins to ponder the cause. "For by what but a finger, or a thumb, could the bell have been pushed? By a nose? A toe?... (p.121) Watt thus raises the question Hume poses at the beginning of his analysis of causation: why is it that although we do not see the cause, we think immediately of an idea which we think was necessary to produce the experience? Hume argues that it is not by reason this relationship is determined. What happens is that in experience we are simply aware of two items being "constantly conjoined." The causal inference takes place in the mind of the perceiver and does not reside in the experience itself. This proposition is implicit in Watt's discovery that "there was a bell in Erskine's room, but it was broken." (p.128)

This example also supports Hume's contention that we can never discover from our experience whether the principle of the uniformity of nature is true. According to Hume the belief in the uniformity of nature is true. According to Hume the belief in the uniformity of nature is due only to a psychological "custom" or "habit" man has. Even the commonest objects in Mr. Knott's house lose their sense of identity, or, rather it is the case that Watt is no longer able to impose meaning upon them.

Looking at a pot, for example, or thinking of a pot, at one of Mr. Knott's pots, of one of Mr. Knott's pots, it was in vain that Watt said, pot, pot. (p.82)

Watt's mental disorder is known to psychiatrists and experts on speech disorders as "semantic aphasia". A glimpse of this pathological condition is obtained by Watt as a result of overworking the common word "pot" until it loses its meaning and becomes a mere sound. This feeling of the alienation of language from reality is also vividly expressed in Sartre's Nausea where Roquentin moves to a climax of metaphysical distress as he realizes the gap that exists between language (and hence, thought itself) - and things as they really are. He stares at a seat in a streetcar: "I murmur 'Its a seat', rather like an exorcism. But the word remains on my lips, it refuses to settle on the thing."¹⁰ Watt's radical nominalism, his quixotic attempt to purge language of abstraction can end only in reducing it to a series of meaningless noises.

Watt had never heard Mr. Knott either, heard him speak, that is to say, or laugh, or cry. But once he thought he heard him say Tweet! Tweet! to a little bird, and once he heard him make a strange noise, PLOPF PLOPF Plopf Plopf plopf plo plop pl.
(p.147)

Mysticism or "absurdity" is just around the corner - the mysticism of "Whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent."

The simple elements in Wittgenstein's world can be named, but because they are primitive, basic elements they can only be named or pointed to. It is not possible to define them. He says that a "name cannot be dissected any further by means of definition: it is a primitive sign."¹¹ These names themselves have no meaning, they just are. In Proust, Beckett comes remarkably close to repeating Wittgenstein. "The Name is an example of a barbarous society's primitivism."¹² Once Watt loses his primitive ability to name things he is helpless before Mr. Knott. Watt, whose "imagination has never been a lively one", is no Quixote who has the power to transmogrify a pot into a knight's helmet. With the same intensity, he is dedicated to a Panzaic reality in which pot must remain a pot.

Furthermore, Watt makes "the distressing discovery that of himself too he could no longer affirm anything that did not seem as false as if he had affirmed it of a stone".
(p.82)

The fragility of outer meaning forces Watt into "this pursuit of meaning, in this indifference to meaning." (p.75) As a result of this fruitless quest for an "inside" as well as "outside" meaning, Watt's very identity is threatened, "as for himself... he could no longer call it a man." (p.83) Once the pseudo-modern covering of logical positivism is stripped away, it is easy to see that Watt is in an analogous philosophical position to that which Hume found himself in at the end of Book I of the Treatise.

Where am I or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return. What beings surround me? and on whom have I any influence, or who have any influence on me? I am confounded with all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imagineable; environ'd with the deepest darkness; and utterly depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty. 13

For Watt, as for Hume, the self is "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity and are in a perpetual flux and movement." This existential anguish derives from a denial of the self as a stable, continuing entity. "For from what impression could this idea be deriv'd?" In Watt's case it could possibly be derived from Mr. Knott. But Knott appears to Watt to be in perpetual flux, never looking the same twice.

As Watt is an empiricist in his approach to reality, he finds it increasingly difficult to formulate "meaning" when his senses begin to deteriorate. Mr. Knott, on the other hand, as Jacqueline Hofer points out, "promotes intellection" by closing off his senses.¹⁴ The important thing to note, however, is that Descartes also closed his eyes, and plugged his ears in order not to be deceived by his senses. Michel Foucault in Madness and Civilization aptly adds that "the Cartesian formula of doubt is a great exorciser of madness."¹⁵ Watt's definition of self, is, however, dependent upon the proposition "I see and name, therefore I am."

His only recourse is to impose meaning, or at least design, upon events which ostensibly have no meaning. An example of this occurs in the episode with the piano tuners, the Galls. Sam, the narrator, even suggests that perhaps the Galls never existed, "but only an unintelligible succession of changes, from which Watt

extracted the Galls and the piano in self-defence." (p.79). It appears that Watt has transformed a fleeting impression into the scene with the Galls by means of a "Kantian" use of the categories. He has thought the Galls, intellectually conceptualized them, but without the corroborating empirical evidence.

This episode raises a much larger philosophical problem, what J. E. Austin in Sense and Sensibilia calls the "argument from illusion." He points out that in the view of Locke, Berkeley, Hume and Kant, the act of perception involves a dualism. Despite differences in terminology these two categories are "impressions" and external objects. The "argument from illusion" stresses the idea that our only knowledge of empirical fact is dependent upon sense-data; we do not derive knowledge from any direct perception of the object itself. Pushed to its logical conclusion, this theory results in what Kant calls the scandal of philosophy - the inability to provide any proof of the reality of the external world. It can be seen then that Watt's problems with Mr. Knott's pots and with the Galls result from some of the inherent contradictions of classical empiricism. Within Mr. Knott's house it is obvious that Austin's "ordinary language" philosophy would not help to explain the extraordinary events that transpire.

But Watt's main weapon for dealing with the inexplicable mysteries of Mr. Knott's house is not ordinary language at all. It is the symbolic language of mathematics. Richard Coe has written very perceptively on this question in Watt. As a basis for further investigation, it will be useful to summarize his view. Discussing Watt's instinctive reaction to "tame" the seemingly inexplicable by postulating a "series" of which any present phenomenon is merely a part, Coe concludes that Watt

begins to grow aware of a disquieting fallacy in the "law of cause and effect". Normally we think of "determinism" acting in one direction only - i.e., the "cause" determines the "effect", but the "effect" does not determine retrospectively the "cause". There is a compulsion at one end, as it were, but freedom at the other - a reasonably satisfying compromise. But (Watt wonders) is this in fact the case? In any series (say, 4-5-6-7-8-9-10), if the position and nature of the effect

are determined by the cause, the position and nature of the cause are equally limited by the effect. The attributes of 7, for instance, are determined by its predecessors 4-5-6: but they are just as severely limited by what they themselves determine, i.e., the existence of 8-9-10. Every beginning determines the ending of that which preceded it, just as tyrannically as every ending determines a beginning. Within the series, there is not the thousandth part of a millimetre of freedom in either direction.¹⁶

However, Coe goes on to say that with regard to the servants, "Tom, Dick, and Harry", Watt is forced to admit the existence of some element which evades the "law of the series". "There must also be, in every person, if not in every act, a core of reality which is outside of space and time, and which eludes the powers of space and time and logic to determine its existence". As mentioned earlier this is the same paradoxical situation Kant's philosophy sets forth. A closer look at Kant's theory will allow for some additions to Coe's findings.

Kant claimed the types of a priori knowledge fall into two groups - analytic and synthetic. The former consists of judgments whose truth can be determined without reference to any experience, but solely on the basis of the terms employed. But, in the case of synthetic a priori knowledge, the predicate of the judgment must contain some information not contained in the subject. A synthetic a priori judgement would, therefore, have to contain some information not purely of a logical nature, and yet not depend on empirical or experimental information, since, according to Hume, that would always render it less than completely certain, universal, or necessary.

In mathematics and physics, Kant thought there were judgments of precisely this character. Even the elementary proposition that $7+5=12$, he insisted, was a truth that was not merely true because of the definitions of the terms involved, but, rather was one that contained more information in the predicate than was included in the bare concepts of "7" and "5".

That 5 should be added to 7 was no doubt implied by my concept of a sum $7+5$, but not that that sum should be equal to 12. An arithmetical proposition is, therefore, always synthetic, which is seen more easily still by taking larger numbers, where we clearly perceive that, turn and twist our conceptions as we may, we could never,

by the means of the mere analysis of our concepts and without the help of intuition arrive at the sum wanted. ¹⁷

The question of the existence of synthetic a priori sentences is highly disputable. A logical positivist considers only two types of sentences: those which require some sort of empirical investigation for their confirmation ("synthetic"), and those whose truth follows from their meaning ("analytic"). But this is somewhat beside the point. Watt does make what Kant calls synthetic a priori sentences, that is, propositions which are not merely explicative but which extend our knowledge of reality and which are at the same time a priori. When Watt tries to fit Mr. Knott's dogs and servants into a series, he is setting up a causal chain which cannot be simply determined a priori, or by what Hume calls "demonstrative" reasoning. By taking a conscious being such as "Tom, Dick or Harry", and using him as an integer in a mathematical series, Watt makes a literally absurd application of Kant's theory. Through Watt, Beckett makes it clear that he believes man is a priori irrational, a surd which cannot be placed within a series. Even if man is fanatically logical (as is Watt), this very extremism pushes reason until it becomes "unreason." Beckett once asked a mathematician: "What is the colour of pi?" That was a poet's question.

D.F. Pears in his essay, "Hume's Empiricism and Modern Empiricism" states that the most striking difference between the two is that Hume's analysis was psychological or phenomenological rather than logical. Further, "Hume examined the contents of the mind; whereas modern empiricists examine language." The most relevant part for the discussion of the question of causation in Watt, is that in his analysis of causal inference Hume seems to place analytical reasoning outside the scope of his critique. Pears states that Wittgenstein "extends Hume's appeal to human nature from causal necessity to a priori necessity." The reasoning is that "a priori inferences, such as mathematical equations, can become habitual no less than causal inferences."¹⁸ This is possibly one of the implications of the apparently senseless digression concerning Louit and Nackybal. The "Mathematical

Intuition of the Visicelts", it turns out, is a complete fabrication, a hoax. Mr. Nackybal "merely knew by heart the cubes of one to nine ..." (p. 198). The substitution of rules for psychological association still does not justify causal inference. Beckett's Watt also reveals this flaw in Hume's argument. Watt's compulsion to reason a priori mathematical sequences appears also as a psychological compulsion, or in Hume's words, as "custom" and "habit." The artificiality of these formulations, their patent absurdity, indicates that they possess no intrinsic causal relationship. This is another reason for Beckett's movement towards solipsism.

IV

A central episode in the novel involves Watt's discovery of the picture in Erskines' room. "A circle, obviously described by a compass, and broken at its lowest point, occupied the middle foreground of this picture ... in the eastern background appeared a point or date ... (p. 128) Pondering the artists' intentions Watt sets up a series of possibilities: a circle and its centre in search of each other, or a circle and a centre in its search for its centre and circle respectively, and so on. The important thing to note is the thought that it was "perhaps a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, in boundless space, and infinite time" (p. 129), filled Watt's eyes with tears. It is revealing to compare Watt's reaction to that of Pascal, who felt terror before the new non-Ptolemaic cosmology. For Pascal nature or the universe was "a frightful sphere, the centre of which is everywhere, and the circumference nowhere."¹⁹ Watt, the logician, would classify Pascal's statement as a contradictio in adjecto because the subject and predicate ostensibly negate each other.

Watt's ridiculous obsession with mathematical series is perhaps best explained by this quote from Pascal's Pensees which Geoffrey Clive uses to preface his The Romantic Enlightenment:

Mathematicians who are only mathematicians have exact minds, provided all things are explained to them by means of definitions and axioms: otherwise they are inaccurate and insufferable, for they are only right

when the principles are quite clear. And men of intuition who are only intuitive cannot have the patience to reach the first principles of things speculative and conceptual, which they have never seen in the world, and which are altogether out of the common.

The unheroic, hollow nature of Watt as a fictional character stems from his inability to reconcile the esprit de geometric with the esprit de finesse. The result is a dehumanization which is characteristic of the anti-heroes of post-Enlightenment thought. But Beckett is working in the only way he sees possible towards a reconciliation of these two approaches to experience. While just as obsessed with mathematics as Watt is, Molloy, for example, possesses a kind of esprit de finesse. Dostoyevsky's narrator in Notes from Underground shows the way Beckett takes in attaining his precarious and "negative" balance of the mathematical and the intuitive:

...even if man was nothing but a piano key, even if this could be demonstrated to him mathematically - even then, he wouldn't come to his senses but would pull some trick out of sheer ingratitude, just to make his point. And if he didn't have them on hand, he would devise the means of destruction, chaos, and all kinds of suffering to get his way.²⁰

Watt is overcome emotionally by the possibilities suggested by Erskine's picture. He is made to suffer, and as Beckett stated in Proust "suffering is the main condition of the artistic experience." Watt finally gains control of himself by rejecting this vision and concluding "that the picture had not been long in the house, and that it would not remain long in the house, and that it was one of a series." (p.131) Nevertheless, Watt's experiences point the way towards the later artist heroes.

Not forgetting Beckett's ironic comment in the Addenda to the novel, "no symbols where none intended", a sexual interpretation of the pictures's significance is possible. Watt prefers to keep the breach of the circle at the lowest point. "for it is by the nadir that we come ..., and it is by the nadir that we go, whatever that means." (p.130) The breach in the circle can be seen as birth, the breaking away from the womb to form one's own centre. One's search is henceforth to return to

the womb. In essence, this is the quest of Molloy for his mother who is both womb and tomb, the way we both come and go.

In writers such as Plotinus and Rilke, for example, the circle is hermaphroditic in nature, incorporating both the masculine and feminine principles. There seems to be a parody of this concept in Watt's relationship with Mrs. Gorman. Watt, "not a woman's man", and Mrs. Gorman, "not a man's woman" (p.139) almost negate each other's sexuality. To confuse further the sexual identity of the couple and to suggest the hermaphroditic nature of the relationship, Mrs. Gorman it is duly reported, had her left breast removed "in the heat of a surgical operation." (p.140)

Watt sits on Mrs. Gorman's lap in a foetal position and caresses her. The couple are constantly involved in a circular movement, first one sitting on the lap of the other, the situation then being reversed at regular intervals. The eccentric Watt (like Walter Shandy) even seems "to make love" according to a mathematical pattern. Their love is, in fact, never consummated "for Watt had not the strength, and Mrs. Gorman had not the time, indispensable to even the most perfunctory coalescence." (p.141) Love clearly offers no means of closing the circle and uniting it with its centre. The ideal symbol of Watt's world is still a circle for it so forcefully asserts a limit-solipsistic, self-contained and inescapable. But after the encounter with Mr. Knott this circle is forever broken.

After his expulsion from Mr. Knott's, Watt is next seen as the inmate of a mental asylum. Even here his language, thought greatly distorted, shows a last desperate attempt at logic. He tries, for example, various inversions and displacements of words and syntax, "Dis yb dis, nem, owt." (p.168) Michel Foucault observes that "the logic of the mad seems to mock that of logicians because it is exactly the same."²¹ The ultimate language of madness appears paradoxically to be that of reason. But Watt learns (in somewhat the same way as Kafka's Land Surveyor in The Castle) that no convolutions of logic will ever permit him to attain to knowledge of the Suprarational.

Due to the jumbled narrative structure of the novel, the last the reader sees of Watt concerns his departure from Mr. Knott's. After waiting all night at the train station, Watt leaves in the morning with "a ticket to the end of the line." (p.244) The sun rises again and Watt is back in everyday reality in which the laws of cause and effect which were suspended at Knott's are operative again. It is a world in which those assembled agreed that

The hills falling to the plain made as pretty a picture in the early morning light as a man could hope to meet within a day's march. (p.246)

But Watt has seen his picture, and the view of life it presented was essentially tragic. Watt's sun has set, never to rise again. Thus ends Beckett's "cock and bull story", his most "Shandean" novel, characterized by its often whimsical treatment of impotence and futility:

V

The artistic dilemmas raised in Watt foreshadow the radical theory of art Beckett puts forth in his manifesto, Three Dialogues. Here Beckett states that the artist cannot escape the dualistic nature of the creative process.

Two things are established, however precariously: the aliment, from fruits on plates to low mathematics and self-commiseration, and its manner of dispatch. All that should concern us is the acute and increasing anxiety of the relation itself, as though shadowed more and more darkly by a sense of invalidity, of inadequacy, of existence at the expense of all that it excludes, all that it blinds to.²²

In the elliptical, and often esoteric, Three Dialogues, Beckett simply states his conclusions about the nature of art. The analysis of Watt in terms of the issues and consequences of the Humean-Kantian debate allows for a tracing of some of the philosophical underpinnings of Beckett's nihilistic theory of art. The sceptical side of Hume's empiricism raised the question of the "acute and increasing anxiety of the relation" between the perceiver and the perceived, the subject and the object.

Hume's negative conclusions implied that there was a complete absence of relation between the two. Kant's theory of the categories, his Copernican revolution, was an attempt at salvaging from the empirical attack on metaphysics the phenomenological elements necessary for any ontology. Kant's theory of knowledge would appeal in some ways to Beckett, who sympathizes quite obviously with the idealist tradition in philosophizing. Concluding with Hume that empirical experience does not allow for certainty about causation, self et al, Beckett does not, of course, move towards a Kantian conception of form. For Beckett the Kantian categories no longer have any cognitive value. They do not apply to the world of Knott in which Watt moves. In the absence of all relation between "inner" and "outer", between the self and not-self, Beckett rejects empirical perception which posits its object as existing. On the other hand, the imaginative consciousness posits its object as nothingness, as non-existent. Watt's failure to establish any relationship with Mr. Knott can be seen at one level as characteristic of the fictional process itself. It is dualistic (Watt-Knott), but since it posits its object (Mr. Knott) as a nothingness there is no possibility of establishing relationships between the two terms. The artist is doomed to failure.

But Beckett is compelled to find some way of ordering his vision of chaos. The crux of the problem is stated in the Addenda to Watt: how can one "nothingness/in words enclose?" (p.146) While Beckett rejects realistic art as a grotesque fallacy, he is, in his own way, committed to a type of mimesis. The "aliment" of Watt, the *donnee*, is Mr. Knott, and to create a legitimate form for the work of art which seeks to enclose him Beckett must fashion an aesthetic of nothingness. Since the dualistic conception of the creative process is inescapable, the best Beckett can do is to reduce the constituent terms (form and content) to the bare minimum until they approach nothingness.

Watt is an anti-novel that illustrates the impossibility of writing novels. The use of form in the novel is so arbitrary that it ends up by calling itself into question. When the reader finally learns that the story is told by Sam, an inmate with Watt

at the asylum, the credibility of the narrative is even further undercut, if that is possible. At one point Sam, the first avatar of the Beckettian "I", admits that he does not know all the story, since Watt could not remember all the details. Neither the teller nor the tale can be trusted. The novel's "form" is centripetal, proceeding like Tristram Shandy through its digressions, all of which radiate from the central nothingness of Watt's non-meeting with Mr. Knott. A prime example of the labyrinthine movement of Watt is Arthur's story about Louit and Nackybal. Arthur concludes that "in another place he might have told this story to its end. But on Mr. Knott's premises, from Mr. Knott's premises, that was not possible....(p.198)

The same situation applied to Sam, who is forced to place an Addenda at the supposed conclusion of Watt's adventures. Since the Addenda are numbered (1), it does not appear that "only fatigue and disgust" prevented its incorporation. The Addenda is possibly the first of a series of recalcitrant materials Sam was not able to use. The reader is thus left without all the possible terms involved in the Watt-Knott equation. Beckett submits wholly to the incoercible lack of relation. The novel itself is like an irrational number, forever running on towards infinity, but never capable of arriving. As the ill fated Lynch clan discovered, the whole number, the millenium, cannot be attained.

Watt's journey to Mr. Knott's, his period of service, his expulsion, and his return to the outside world suggest a circular patterning of the quest. But even this simple structure is altered. "Two, one, four, three, that was the order in which Watt told his story. Heroic quatrains are not otherwise elaborated." (p.215) The picture of the broken circle in Erskine's room represents the ontological chaos Beckett tries to shape in Watt. The whole point of the story is that all spatio-temporal metaphors of form no longer apply. From the absurdities of form and formlessness come much of the fantasy, wit, and humour of Watt. In this regard Beckett's novel resembles Flann O'Brien's The Third Policeman much more than it does Kafka's The Castle with which it is often compared.

The concept of form arrived at in Watt shows a marked advancement from Murphy in that Beckett is now more concerned with the way language itself functions. Words are used in Watt as counters in language games. There is no point in asking for the use of words, says Wittgenstein in Philosophical Investigations, since there are many games that could be played with each counter. In order to appreciate the range of contrasts in a particular game we may surround it with other games. Our interest will not be in games actually played but in imaginary and even bizarre cases, since they point up more sharply the contrasts in the games under investigation. But in Watt all the language games played around Mr. Knott, especially the pages of word catalogues involving the repetition and variation of a few phrases, highlight the utter incomprehension of the human intelligence when faced with a nothing who appears as a something.

For Watt the failure of his naming processes is not completely negative.

Not that Watt longed at all times for this restoration, of things, of himself, to their comparative innocuousness for he did not. For there were times when he felt a feeling closely resembling the feeling of satisfaction at his being so abandoned by the last rats. For after these there would be no more rats, not a rat left, and there were times when Watt almost welcomed this prospect, of being rid of his last rats, at last. It would be lonely, to be sure, at first, and silent, after the gnawing, the scurrying, the little cries: (p.84)

It is in this world, silent, dark, at once welcomed and feared, that the later artist-heroes make their little explorations of the void.

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- 3 Beckett's knowledge of Hume and Kant needs no documentation. The following anecdotes are, however, worth mentioning. Richard Ellmann records that Joyce once broke one of his "silent conversations" with Beckett by posing the question, "How could the idealist Hume write a history?" Beckett replied, "A history of representations". In 1938 Beckett wrote to Germany to order the Complete Works of Kant and he asked the bookseller to send him what he terms "an antedeluvian edition." When the volumes arrived Beckett spent much time with them.
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Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable:

A Labyrinth of Novels

"Sweet Spirit,
what souls are these who run through this black haze?"
And he to me: "these are the nearly soulless whose
lives concluded neither blame nor praise. They are
mixed here with that despicable corps of angels who
were neither for God nor Satan, but only for themselves.
The High Creator

scourged them from Heaven for its perfect beauty and
Hell will not receive them since the wicked might feel
some glory over them." And I

"Master, what gnaws at them so hideously their
lamenatation stuns the very air?" "They have no hope
of death," he answered me,

"and in their blind and unattaining state their
miserable lives have sunk so low that they must envy
every other fate.

No word of them survives their living season. Mercy
and Justice deny them even a name. Let us not speak
of them: look, and pass on."

Dante, The Inferno, Canto III, ll. 30-48

In Murphy and Watt, Beckett showed that both the ration-
alistic and empiricist philosophies had one assumption in common
which resulted in both terminating in a scepticism from which
nothing positive seemed forthcoming. Both philosophies assumed
that in knowledge one could possess what is ultimately real,
either in terms of sense information or in the form of rational
thought. What these philosophical positions tend to forget is
that there are limitations in the nature of the case; for since
man is involved in the knowing, his doing so has part in the
resultant knowledge and so there can be no pure transcript of
truth in either sense or reason. It is necessary to study the
knowing before claiming that there exists a knowledge of some-
thing beyond it called ultimate reality. The crucial question
concerns the character of the relation between the knowing and
the reality known. In the trilogy Beckett carries much further
than he did in Watt the artistic exploration of the change of
outlook Kant called his "Copernican" Revolution. Instead of

assuming what is real, Kant suggests we proceed with the idea in mind that whatever reality we do know is precisely such as "conforms" to our human ways of knowing. The philosophical dilemma of the Beckettian "I" which fully emerges in Molloy, Malone Dies, The unnamable can be approached if viewed as a fusion of the Cartesian "ego," severed from external reality, and the Kantian "ego," contingent with empirical reality. Beckett's "I" stands for the existential situation of each narrator, while at the same time it represents an ideal, essential "I" or self that can only exist outside of the categories of space and time. The tension between the two dimensions of "I" is at the core of the trilogy.

But the idealistic tendencies in Kant's own thought in no way accounts for the facticity of the Beckettian "I". William Barrett in Irrational Man points out that

Kant, before Hegel, had made a statement on the subject of existence and reason that has become decisive for modern philosophy. Kant declared, in effect, that existence can never be conceived by reason.... "Being," says Kant, "is evidently not a real predicate, or concept of something that can be added to the concept of a thing." That is, if I think of a thing, and then think of that thing as existing, my second concept does not add any determinate characteristic to the first.

Barrett goes on to explain that

when Kant made this point, he was speaking, or intended to speak, from the more positivistic and scientific side of his philosophy. From the point of view of theoretical knowledge existence is negligible, because knowledge wants to know about a thing, and the fact that it exists does not tell me anything about it. Unlimitely, what I want to know about the thing is what characterizes it in the way of definite observable qualities; and existence, for from being an observable quality is in fact too general, remote and tenuous a property to be represented at all to the mind.¹

This is the crucial dilemma Beckett deals with in the trilogy. How can the series of "I's" describe their existence, somehow validate their being?

Beckett's major artistic concern is thus the same problem that lies at the centre of Western philosophy, namely,

the distinction between existence and essence, becoming and being. With regard to this question, Beckett's position is analogous to that of Kierkegaard, who agreed that existence is not a concept because it is too complex to be reduced to an intellectual system. Beckett shows in the unending cycle of being in the trilogy that all that is real is the individual's perceptions of himself which are continually in flux. The inescapable datum of existence is that the self cannot escape self-awareness, a situation forcefully expressed in Beckett's Film:

All Beckett's narrators are victims in an obscure assize where to be is to be guilty. In Beckett's world there is no possibility of a Kierkegaardian "leap" which would allow for an escape from the nothingness of man's being. While the trilogy is a major existentialist document in the general sense that it deals with the irreducible data of man's being-in-the-midst-of-the-world, it is also essentialist. That is to say, the "I's" attempt to discover the absolute self that exists outside of the existential world of "bad faith" peopled by the pseudo-selves. The Unnamable asserts that his prime virtue is that he has not been duped. Likewise Molloy and Malone struggle valiantly to maintain a type of existential integrity. However, they still attempt the impossible search for the self beyond space and time, thereby indicating that they are heirs to the essentialist tradition that permeates Western thought.

Existentialism, as far as that amorphous movement can be described, is a recoil from rationalism, especially the cosmic rationalism of Hegel. The structure of the trilogy could be seen as a ruthless parody of the Hegelian dialectic that culminates in the Absolute. Beckett stated in Proust that the artistic venture involves the progressive unfolding of a search for "the Model, the Idea, and the Thing Itself."² Similarly Molloy describes his unreal journey as the "second last but one of the form fading among fading forms" (p.16). The dynamics of the trilogy could be described in terms of a Hegelian Dialectic: Moran (the "thesis") and Molloy (the "antithesis") culminate in Malone, in turn his death (the dissolution of the "synthesis"), reveals the "Absolute", the

Unnamable, the figure behind all of the previous fictions.

The Absolute is portrayed by Hegel as striving constantly to overcome, or resolve, this dialectic of thesis and antithesis by higher and higher syntheses, until it will finally achieve a complete self-realization in an all-encompassing synthesis, which will include all partial truths in one vast truth. As the dialectical struggle goes on, and the universe develops, so does understanding of it. Until the world becomes completely intelligible there can only be limited comprehension of its structure, since the developments themselves were not yet completely rational. Therefore the entire structure of the universe can only be stated when the Absolute has reached full self-realization. At that point thought and being will become identical, since full comprehension and the full state of the universe will be one and the same thing.

This is the apocalypse Beckett's narrators, especially the Unnamable, search for, but the grand synthesis never arrives, Godot never appears. Hegel's objective idealism is the final culmination of transforming the Cartesian metaphysic into a theory where only mind is real, and only mental actions and effects can form a basis for accounting for the world of experience. Brian Coffey even suggests that the Descartes of Beckett is "possibly the Descartes seen by Hegel as the bold spirit of return to the very beginning of enquiry."³ While Beckett's logical development of the Cartesian "ego" from "Whoroscope" and Murphy onwards culminates (inevitably it might be said) in The Unnamable, a mockery of the Hegelian Absolute, Beckett's whole attempt had been to escape the dead end of the rationalistic and idealistic concept of essence as applied to the self. Beckett's only explicit reference to Hegel appears in this amusing bit of dialogue in Murphy:

"The repudiation of the known," said Neary, "a purely intellectual operation of unspeakable difficulty."

"Perhaps you hadn't heard," said Wylie, "Hegel arrested his development." (p.222)

Hegel submerged the individual consciousness in a grand unity of ideal mind. But for an Existentialist such as Beckett, who insists that reality is only what he himself knows and feels, this is meaningless. Any system of thought that overrides the suffering existent is tyrannical, at best the butt of wry humour. Beckett's universe is characterized by the absolute absence of absolutes. His "poetic metaphysic" or "poetic logic" resolves itself into a "Viconian" cyclical process of thesis, antithesis, synthesis-chaos. As Beckett's fictional purgatory is cyclical rather than conical it excludes all culmination. The poetic language of the trilogy is so rich in associations, possesses such a great imaginative depth that Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable, a remarkable achievement in their own right, appear as summaries of all the novels or philosophical systems ever created. As a possible sub-structure, the Hegelian system is particularly useful to point to for it emphasizes the question of essence and existence which is vital throughout Beckett.

For Beckett the major existentialist problem is that of language. The first avatar of the Beckettian "I." Molloy, states at the beginning of his tale, "What I need now is stories; it took me a long time to know that, and I'm not sure of it." (p.13) On the same page, Molloy, however, goes on to suggest that it would perhaps be better "to obliterate texts than to blacken margins, to fill in the holes of words till all is blank and flat, and the whole ghastly business looks like what is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery." These two statements may be seen as an illustration of the creative dilemma which lies at the centre of the trilogy. Only by speaking of anything at all may the writer find those words which will discover the self and release it from its torments. But in speaking, in the temptation to false being and false becoming, there lies the paradox that to be himself the writer must first have to be false to himself (the false being what is normally termed "realism" of life and literature), to speak when the truth leads to barrenness and silence. In the trilogy all the narrator's come to realize that the only possible way of transcending this dualism is by means of the mediation of art, that

is to say, "the stories". The only hope for salvation lies in discovering through a scramble of words some interpenetration between self and non^oself, between the internal and external. The methodology is clearly symbolic in both the literary and philosophic sense. But Beckett and his heroes are at most only problematic or sceptical symbolists. Each "synthesis" fails to supply the long sought for answer to the riddle of the self; each disintegration of the relationship between "fact" and "fiction" questions more radically the creative process.

Several critics have pointed out that Beckett's narrator's are portraits of the artist as an old man. But in the trilogy, by means of a macabre transformation, the grave sheets serve as swaddling clothes. Each artist figure must relive the history of the race which Beckett sees as a cyclical process. As a result, Molloy and the other moribunds seem to have entered a type of second childhood in which the artist figure becomes a portrait of the artist as a child. Beckett himself has stated that "there is a great deal of the unborn infant in the lifeless octagenarian; and a great deal of both in the man at the apogee of his powers."⁴

However, this cyclical process appears to have placed Molloy in a type of limbo outside of the normal categories of time and space. Molloy wanders in the third zone of Murphy's mind, and is only a form fading among fading forms.

And even my sense of identity was wrapped in a namelessness often hard to penetrate... and so on for all the other things which made merry with my senses. Yes, even then, when already all was fading, waves and particles, there could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names. I say that now, but after all what do I know now about then, now when the icy words hail down upon me, the icy meanings, and the world dies too, foully named, All I know is what the words know, and the dead tings, and that makes a handsome little sum, with a beginning, a middle and an end as in the well-built phrase and the long sonata of the dead. (p.31)

While this passage points towards The Unnamable and Beckett's full-scale linguistic analysis of the problem of self, what is most important for Molloy's quest is the disjunction in time between the "now and "then". The room in which Molloy

scribbles his story which has become his raison d'être functions again as a symbol for a spatio-temporal definition of the self. The room is identified with a head, the home of the Cartesian res cogitans that cannot be treated within Kant's two a priori categories of sensuous intuition. Molloy moves very slowly, "as in a cage out of time, as the saying is, in the jargon of the schools, and out of space to be sure." (p.51) The artistic problem becomes a philosophical one for Molloy, "My life, my life, now I speak of it as something over, now as of a joke which still goes on, and it is neither, for at the same time it is over and it goes on, and is there any tense for that?" (p.36) Consequently, Molloy is forced to tell his story in the "mythological present." The naive logic and linear conception of time embodied in syntax make all discourse by necessity a "fiction." For it is only by escaping the traditional categories of thought and perception that Molloy can hope to describe accurately his life among the fading forms. He even compares himself to Descartes' bit of "melting was." (p.47) Molloy would regard Kant's "scheme" as a modern Freudian would, that is, as constructs of repression imposed by the ego. But Beckett is unflinchingly faithful to some type of rational discourse: only through a transcendence of logic by logic does he believe the self's freedom can be discovered.

This brief description of the philosophical and aesthetic problems encountered by Molloy sets the scene for the subsequent narrators. The story of each "I" in this labyrinth of novels constitutes a separate whole, but each work depends upon its predecessor for its full significance. In the following analyses each work will be treated separately, "Landscape in Molloy," "The Art of Dying in Malone Dies," "Science Fiction in The Unnamable." At the same time some of the complex interrelationships among the novels will be traced.

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- 4 Samuel Beckett, Proust, p.52

Chapter III

Landscape in Molloy

The two basic literary forms employed in Molloy throw light upon Beckett's use of landscape. While Molloy possesses great erudition, her perception harkens back to a more primitive form of imagination, the mythological. At one point Molloy refers to his wanderings as but a "nursery tale" compared to his present situation in the room. Molloy's search for his mother takes the form of an archetypal epic journey. The very indefiniteness of his wanderings suggests a host of mythic patterns. The most obvious parallels are with the *Odyssey*. "Molloy recalls having sailed the ocean; the fleeting female figure that approaches him on the seashore from the circle of her companions and then disappears again, repeats in hints the appearance of Nausicaa; Madame Lousse who keeps Molloy captive for a time in her garden bears features of the enchantress Circe. And what is the incessant murmuring that Molloy hears? Perhaps the song of the sirens luring him to death."¹

Such speculation is almost endless. What must be noticed is Beckett's use of a type of palimpsest principle with regard to the question of literary form in Molloy. Part two is structured in terms of a parody of what is usually regarded as a sub-literary form, the detective "thriller." Beckett's philosophical use of the detective genre is similar to its use in Robbe-Grillet's The Erasers, Borges' Death and the Compass, and Ionesco's The Victims of Duty. A comment in Ionesco's play most accurately describes Beckett's reasons for using the detective form:

All the plays that have ever been written, from Ancient Greece to the present day, have never really been anything but thrillers. Drama has always been realistic and there has always been a detective about. Every play is an investigation brought to a successful conclusion. There is a riddle and it is solved in the final scene.²

W. H. Auden even goes so far as to draw an elaborate parallel between the phases of Aristotelian tragedy and those of the

detective thriller. Furthermore, he adds that "in the detective story; as in its mirror image, the Quest for the Grail, maps (the ritual of space) and timetables (the ritual of time) are desirable."³

Moran, an agent for a metaphysical detective agency headed by the mysterious Youdi, lives in a smug bourgeois world in which the time-space coordinates are precisely defined. His concern with perfunctory religious observance, his discussion with the priest, sets up the feeling of a closed society in which values are neatly defined. But the sense of uneasiness which pervades even this world creates a feeling common to many pulp detective novels in which the milieu is a vicarage in which guilt enters. The innocent of Moran's bourgeois Eden is disrupted by the message from Gaber ordering him to hunt down Molloy. But Moran does not begin methodically like a Sherlock Holmes to plan his journey. At once this detective hunt takes on Freudian implications. On the threshold of the Molloy case, Moran discovers "The fatal pleasure principle." (p.99) He states that he had never come face to face with Obidil (an anagram of libido), supposedly one of his other clients. Moran, whose prototype seems to be Cooper in Murphy, has had dealings with Beckett's whole "gallery of moribunds, Murphy, Watt, York, Mercier, and all the others." (p.137) Hence his search for Molloy involves a search for the self, a confrontation with the dark libidinal forces which lie beneath his facade of bourgeois respectability. The Molloy he searches for seems to be a "fabulous being" of his own creation. The metaphorical equation of the artistic process with the detective hunt is supported by Beckett's statement in Proust: "The work of art pre-exists and is discovered within the artist."⁴

Beckett's use of the epic and detective genres supplies an important insight into the problems of epistemology, and philosophy of form in Molloy. The epic form allows for a blurring of the spatio-temporal coordinates. Its use of landscape is more important for its poetical and mythic associations than for its actual naturalistic descriptions of a definite historical milieu. On the other hand, the detective story presents a

scientific, rational ordering of the universe. The function of the sleuth in detective stories is to restore the state of grace in which the aesthetic and ethical are one. But in *Molloy* the function of Moran is to establish a state in which the aesthetic and philosophical are one. This process involves the destruction of the "schema" of the detective genre until Moran's hunt becomes an aimless journey towards chaos. Thus the breakdown of literary form allows for an identification with Beckett's philosophy of form which involves a nihilistic aesthetic in which "forms fade among fading forms."

The landscape of *Molloy* ranges from Moran's ordered garden, every detail of which he has memorized, to chaotic boggy Ballyba where Molloy becomes lost in a jungle-like forest and eventually covers in a ditch. It ranges in time from birth to death or from life to death-in-life. In psychological terms Beckett depicts in the landscape the physical reality which confronts man and the order which he projects into it in an attempt to cope with his environment. He also shows the inner reality of the mind; labyrinthine and impenetrable. The movement of the novel is circular and endless; not only do the characters fail to reach their goal, but they also fail to realize that there is no way of attaining it. In this respect, the structure of the novel resembles the form of a Moebius strip which is both endless and one-sided.

The most obvious use of the landscape is to show the contrast between "Molloy country" and Moran's customary environment, or possibly between the chaotic inner world of the subconscious and the artificially structured physical world projected by the conscious mind. Molloy reflects: "Molloy your region is vast, you have never left it and you never shall. and wheresoever you wander, within its distant limits, things will always be the same, precisely." (p.66) With his de-mythologized sensibility, Moran sees the Molloy country as a "narrow region" whose main settlement was no more than a village. Both learn, however, that the scope of the mind; the interior landscape, is limitless and unfathomable. For Molloy there is no escape except the return to the earth mother, a wondering through the forest that ends in a ditch. "Molloy country",

or the land of Ballyba, is a region of apparently unproductive bog and meagre pastures:

But the principle beauty of this region was a kind of strangled creek which the slow grey tides emptied and filled, emptied and filled. And the people came flocking from the town, unromantic people, to admire the spectacle. Some said There is nothing more beautiful than these wet sands. Others, High tide is the best time to see the creek of Ballyba. How lovely then that leaden water, you would swear it was stagnant, if you did not know it was not. And yet others held it was like an underground lake. But all were agreed, like the inhabitants of Blackpool, that their town was on the sea. And they had Bally-on-Sea printed on their notepaper. (p.134)

The strangled creek may be the subconscious which receives an ebb and flow of information and which man does not understand, but can only try to explain; or it may be the repressed personality which is seldom allowed to emerge. To some observers, these manifestations of character represent genius, to others, madness. The observers are certain of only one fact - that they know very little about the mind. The people all agree that their town is on the sea, and Moran exclaims with frustration: "Unfathomable mind, now beacon, now sea!" In contrast, Moran's environment is ordered and familiar:

Does this mean I shall one day be banished from my house, from my garden, lose my trees, my lawns, my birds, of which the least is known to me and the way all its own it has of sining, of flying, of coming up to me or fleeing at my coming, lose and be banished from the absurd comforts of my home where all is snug and neat and all those things at hand without which I could not bear being a man, where my enemies cannot reach me, where it was my life's work to adorn, to perfect, to keep? I am too old to lose all this and begin again, I am too Old! Quiet, Moran, quiet. No emotion, please. (p.132)

Moran's journey in search of his subconscious or hidden identity is a "long anguish of vagrancy and freedom." He can hardly bear the necessity of abandoning his carefully structured existence which has acted as a barricade between his conscious and subconscious; between the Moran that others know and the Molloo that lurks within. Finally, he again seeks refuge in his garden. Now, however, the bees and hens are dead, and the

birds are wild. The formal patterns are gone, but enough order and familiarity remain to allow Moran to continue to function as a semi-conscious individual.

There is also a contrast between the gardens chosen by Molloy and Moran. Each seems to assume some traits of the garden he inhabits; or perhaps it is more correct to say that each garden is merely a projection of that character's interpretation of reality. Molloy remembers:

And there was another noise, that of my life becoming the life of this garden as it rode the earth of depth and wildernesses. Yes, there were times when I forgot not only who I was, but that I was, forgot to be. Then I was no longer that sealed jar to which I owed my being so well preserved, but a wall gave way and I filled with roots and tame stems for example, stakes long since dead and ready for burning, the recess of night and the imminence of dawn, and then the labour of the planet rolling eager into winter, winter would rid it of these contemptible scabs... But that did not happen to me often, mostly I stayed in my jar which knew neither seasons or gardens. (p.49)

The identification of the self with nature is reminiscent of Arsene's mystic fusion with the cosmos. For Molloy and Arsene consciousness is, however, essentially solipsistic. The jar is the "Cartesian" or geometrical description of the body, the impenetrable barrier between consciousness and the external world. The most important part of Moran's garden is his beehive where he spends hours trying to interpret a system of signals in the figures and rhythms of the bees' dance. If there are no apparent restrictions on behaviour, he feels compelled to impose them. Lousse's wicket is never shut, but Moran's wicket is always locked. On his return Moran finds that his key does not fit, and is forced to burst the gate open. He is gradually being freed of the restrictions demanded by his conscious mind. He must now use physical effort to regain the sanctuary of order on which he had previously depended.

The change in landscape is matched by a physical degeneration in the characters which reveals man stripped of the influence of his created environment and of the formal approach he is taught to apply to reality. Molloy wanders using crutches to support his weak knees and eventually chooses to remain in

a ditch. He has been dehumanized until he resembles a worm. The key factor in this progressive dismemberment is the bicycle. Hugh Kenner has termed the symbol of the Beckettian hero on his bicycle the "Cartesian Centaur", the perfect corporeal mechanism. This ideal fusion of body and mind constitutes one of Beckett's most important philosophical symbols, for it seems to do away with the confusion in which Descartes left the mind-body problem. "The Cartesian Centaur was a seventeenth-century dream, the fatal dream of being, knowing, and moving like a god."⁵ But this apotheosis inevitably fails. For Molloy, a derelict remnant of the Cartesian man-machine, the bicycle soon becomes only a memory of a more ideal past.

Moran also degenerates physically and mentally. His leg is weakened until, like Molloy, he is forced to use a bicycle and crutches, his clothes rot off him, perhaps symbolizing the elimination of the effects of civilization, and his mind can no longer distinguish between reverie and reality. This degeneration is echoed in the landscape. Moran moves from his cultivated orderly garden to a wasteland where only bitter grass and weeds can grow. Molloy describes this desolate region which could be both the earth stripped of man's false impressions of its beauty and the primitive prison of a man reduced to a bestial state:

I listen and the voice is of a world collapsing endlessly, a frozen world under a faint untroubled sky, enough to see by, yes, and frozen too. And I hear it murmur that all wilts and yields, as if loaded down, but there are no loads, and the ground too, unfit for loads, and the light too, down toward an end it seems can never come. For what possible end to these wastes where true light never was, nor any upright things, forever lapsing and crumbling away, beneath a sky without memory of morning or hope of night... and it says that here nothing stirs, has never stirred, will never stir, except myself, who do not stir either, when I am there, but see and am seen. Yes, a world at an end, in spite of appearances, its end brought it forth, ending it began, is it clear enough? (p.40)

The names in the landscape also seem to be suggestive. Like Baudelaire and Joyce before him, Beckett draws parallels between the body and the landscape and cityscape. Moran, for example, sends his son to Hole which could suggest nothing or

nowhere, Hell or the underworld as well as gross reference to the body or excrement. Throughout Molloy the landscape is sexualized, especially in excremental metaphors. Molloy wryly speculates on his memory of an anal birth, concludes that it "must be her arse" the moon "shows us always" (p.39), and is lead finally to state that the anus is the chief orifice of our being. While both Molloy and Moran have an excremental vision of reality, the former's is separated from the latter's in its vigorous humour which has nothing of the prudish about it.

"Turdy" could also refer to excrement, while "Bally" is an English slang term meaning "confounded." The suffizes "ba" and "baba" to indicate "Bally plus its domain" and "the domain exclusively" are nonsense syllables which add to the feeling of confusion. "Baba" is also a French word meaning "flabbergasted", "amazed", or "dumbfounded." All these terms supplement the description of the physical invironment to convey the image of a landscape of negation without any apparent order or meaning to the wanderers. The characters names could also suggest their roles. Moran reminds one of Moron, Lousse is close to "louse", a blood-sucking insect, and Molloy or Mollone (Moran can never remember which) could suggest a mollusc, a snail or other creature with its shell on the outside. These names all remind the reader of the dehumanized condition to which the characters have degenerated as they struggle through the wilderness.

The theme of the quest is found in both sections of the novel. Molloy sets out in search of his dying mother and finds/does not find her at last because he decides to wait for help in a ditch in the end of the forest (cf. Waiting for Godot). There he longs both to see his mother, whom he feels may be in the nearby town, and to go back into the forest. He concludes: "Molloy could stay, where he happened to be." (p.91) And yet he begins the narrative by explaining: "I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now. I don't know how I got there. Perhaps in an ambulance, certainly a vehicle of some kind, I was helped. I'd never have got there alone." In the second section Moran returns to his home after searching

without success for Molloy. He has ventured into the wilderness of Molloy country and has come back to live in his garden and to write a report of his search. However, this episode also ends in uncertainty because he does not seem to be able to distinguish between physical occurrences and his own conception of reality. He begins his report by writing: "It is raining. The wind is beating on the windows." These are facts which he had observed at the beginning of his monologue. He then adds: "It was not midnight. It was not raining." (p.176)

These overlapping and unresolved quests which take the form of the epic and detective story have, to say the least, several levels of interpretation. As a representative of mankind, Molloy may be searching for his identity, his origins, the womb, or death. One plausible meaning is that he is searching for the earth mother which can symbolize death and decay and also rebirth and growth. Thus it is possible that he could be both in a ditch and in his mother's room. It is also possible to see Molloy as a symbol of Moran's subconscious mind searching for a resting place or the peaceful oblivion of death. Moran's search for Molloy seems to be the quest of the conscious mind for the subconscious. During the journey Moran slowly becomes Molloy as his leg weakens, his bicycle falls apart, his ability to move diminishes. The active, organized man who had earlier stated that the inertia of things was enough to drive one insane now begins to relish the opportunity of becoming immobile:

To be literally incapable of motion at last, that must be something! My mind swoons when I think of it. And mute into the bargain! And perhaps as deaf as a post! And who knows as blind as a bat! And as likely as not your memory a blank! And just enough brain intact to allow you to exult! And to dread death like a regeneration. (p.140)

But Moran is still not his own man. He receives a message from Youdi via Gaber, driving him back from the forest to the reassuring order of his garden, from the chaos of the subconscious to the regimented reality he has constructed.

In exploring the labyrinth of his own mind Moran is struggling toward an inner reality which is essentially unknowable and yet which must be sought. The labyrinth is an important image because it is both an artificial structuring of the unknown (labyrinths do not occur in nature as jungles do) and a confusing maze in which the victim is trapped:

I did as when I could not sleep. I wandered in my mind, slowly, noting every detail of the labyrinth, its paths as familiar as those of my garden and yet ever new, as empty as the heart could wish or alive with strange encounters. And I heard the distant cymbals. There is still time, still time ... Unfathomable mind; now beacon, now sea. (p.106)

Moran explains that he felt "a kind of drawing toward a light and countenance I could not name, that I had once known and long denied." In the centre of the labyrinth waits the minotaur, a man become a beast or a personality disintegrated from years of repression. Molloy is in a ditch in the forest; he is also in the recesses of Moran's mind which to Moran is a labyrinth because he cannot face complete chaos.

Moran says that he knows five Molloyes; perhaps meaning that there are several aspects of his disintegrating personality that he can no longer control. These "suspects" could also be various identities that he has been faced to alternately assume and repress: his conception of his own personality, the "caricature" of this personality which he presents to others, the character he has been taught to assume, and his actual character - "the man of flesh and blood somewhere awaiting me." To these he adds a fifth Molloy, that of Youdi (a possible transliteration of "Dieu" and "Jahveh"), which could be the role of man in God's image imposed by his religious belief. But this proliferation of alternatives (a type of multiple schizophrenia) raises the question as to whether there is in fact an original. Moreover, it calls into doubt by implication Moran's actual existence. Both Molloy and Moran admit that their consciousness can best be described as a type of "waking dream." Noumenon fades into phenomenon; objective truth into fiction. And when fiction is everything, fiction is nothing. Perhaps Moran is only the

figment of some other character's dream, a theme forcefully expressed by Borges in The Circular Ruins, an apt, description of Molloy. Even at this point in the trilogy there is indication that the search for the self is an infinite regression.

Whenever Moran recognizes these conflicting roles or assumed identities, he feels that the beast is loose within him and is reduced to incoherence and frustrating inactivity:

This was how he came to me, at long intervals, Then I was nothing but uproar, bulk, rage, suffocation, effort unceasing, frenzied and vain. Just the opposite of myself, in fact. It was a change. And when I saw him disappear, his whole body a vociferation, I was almost sorry. (p.113)

It is only by becoming partially assimilated, or in terms of the title degenerating into a likeness of Molloy, that Moran is able to stand listening to the voice within him. It is only in the semblance of order remaining in his garden that he is able to consider meeting Molloy or facing his repressed personality without fear of being completely consumed by his own ravaging mind. Yet even in his semi-structured environment he is being further assimilated. It seems significant that the title of the novel is Molloy and not Moran.

Both characters attempt to sustain contact with reality through structuring of their physical environment. Molloy uses much time and energy to explain how he arranged his sixteen sucking stones so that there was "not one sucked twice, not one left unsucked." Before discovering a method of accomplishing this feat "he gazed at them in anger and perplexity." The re-establishment of his control over reality is as much a bodily need as his urge to suck: "But to suck the stones in the way I have described, not haphazard but with method, was also I think a bodily need." Moran also feels the need to suck, but he sucks peppermints instead of stones in order to reassure the priest instead of himself. However, he also feels compelled to find meaning in apparent confusion. The analysis of bees' movements into a system of signals is extremely satisfying for Moran. He writes: "And I said, with rapture, here is something I can study all my life, and never understand. And all during this long journey home...the thought

of my bees and their dance was the nearest thing to comfort." (p.124) Thus the theme of the quest recurs again, with the added implication that it is the search and not the goal that is important. Earlier Molloy had said that the important thing is never to arrive anywhere. "For the whole there seems to be no spell. Perhaps there is no whole, before your dead." (p.27) Again, however, the journey, the paradigm of the creative process, is regarded in a paradoxical way by the Beckettian "I". For if you set out to mention everything you would never be done, and that's what counts, to be done, to have done". (p.41) Neither Molloy or Moran are able to regard the paradox of reason and imagination as the vital centre of art. They cannot accept that "reality" lies only in the symbolic process of becoming. Both have a double loyalty to organic experience and the rational object, to sheer realization and logical conclusion, to the voyage as end and the voyage as means.

Moran, like Molloy, is fascinated with permutations and combinations of objects as a highly formalized way of controlling his environment. He explains in detail how he wore his shirt four ways to keep it from wearing out. Although he seems preoccupied with trivial exercises in ordering reality, Molloy is still able to break through to a purely physical, if futile contact with his environment. In the garbage dump he grotesquely makes love to a sexless woman to discover the meaning of love. This desperate approach is no more successful than the arrangement of sucking stones as a means of connecting the inner and outer world. Molloy is able to wander through the forest without apparent concern, but Moran emphasizes that this behaviour is peculiar for him and is still somehow strangely enjoyable:

It was then the unheard of sight was to be seen of Moran making ready to go without knowing where he was going, having consulted neither map or timetable, considered neither itinerary nor halts, heedless of the weather outlook, with only the vaguest notion of the outfit he would need, the time the expedition was likely to take, the money he would require, and even the very nature of the work to be done and consequently the means to be employed. (p.121)

This is perhaps one of the first indications that Moran is being assimilated by Molloy. More importantly, it points towards Molloy's conclusion (perhaps the most important aesthetic statement in the novel):

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. It is then the true division begins; of twenty-two by seven for example; and the pages fill with the true ciphers at last. (p.64)

Only by espousing an aesthetic of nothingness, only by pursuing rationality until it becomes irrationality, can Beckett's narrators overcome the paradox of an allegiance to organic and rational experience. The two parts of Molloy now appear as the thesis and antithesis of a negative dialectic in which the terms tend to cancel each other. What has really happened, what is finally discernible as real? The reader is finally forced to conclude with Beckett and Democritus that "Nothing is more real than nothing."

The gap between the outer and inner world grows as the distinction between physical reality and fantasy becomes blurred. The "either/or" of logic becomes the "both/and" of Freudian dream work. But Beckett introduces in Molloy a new metaphor, the threshold, in order to emphasize the disjunction between the outer and the inner which is identified with some type of absolute metaphysical or religious symbolism. Two "pastoral interludes" in Molloy will serve to summarize the novel as well as emphasize the central problem it raises.

Beginning the search for his mother, Molloy sights a boatman with "a cargo of nails and lumber; on its way to some carpenter I suppose." (p.26) The allusion to Christ's crucifixion immediately arouses an awareness of the demonic which pervades the murky, evanescent world of Molloy whose course is likened to a cavalry without stations. Furthermore, the fact that "the horizon was burning with sulphur and phosphorous" identifies the boatman as a type of Charon figure. In this frontier outside the town Molloy falls asleep and awakes under the stare of a shepherd and his dog. The encounter with the shepherd thus creates a forceful contrast between the world of

sin and damnation and that of Arcadian innocence. But the intermingling of these two motifs results in an ambiguity that shrouds Molloy's dream world. Where is the dividing line between the demonic and the divine? The boatman, it should be remembered, had "a long white beard", a detail which would seem to identify him with the figure of the Old Testament God whose purposes are inscrutable. While the ecclesiastical overtones of the terms "pastor" and "flock" bring to mind the biblical symbolism of Christ and Good Shepherd, there is an opaqueness about Beckett's imagery which prevents such a simple correspondence. One question nags Molloy: "Where are you taking them, to the fields or to the shambles?" (p.28) As in Swift, the "shambles" are omnipresent and, in large part, negate any overtones of traditional pastoral innocence.

Molloy wonders whether the shepherd regards him as a "black sheep" who has strayed from the flock. He receives no answer. An analogous situation in Waiting for Godot may help elucidate this scene. In the play the tramps learn that Godot discriminates between the goatherd and shepherd, thus reversing the lines from Matthew (Chap.25, v.23). The anguish over the possibility of an absolutely irrational determination of one's destiny is implicit in Molloy's query about the destination of the sheep. In the Beckettian underworld no Kierkegaardian "leap to faith" is possible.

The "pastoral" scene which occurs in the second half of Molloy is contrapuntal to the first one. Moran has already met failure in his hunt for Molloy, has already symbolically destroyed his old identity. Moran, who earlier stated a hatred of all animals, sights a shepherd to whom he is attracted. With traces of his bourgeois sentimentalism still evident, Moran even goes so far as to say:

How I would love to dwell upon him. His dog loved him, his sheep did not fear him. Soon he would rise, feeling the dew. The fold was far, far, he would see from afar the light in his cot. (pp.159-60)

This peaceful, simple existence appears idyllic to Moran whose own safe little world has been utterly destroyed by the recognition of the "Molloyan" or "Dionysian" elements of his mind.

He longs to say to the shepherd, "Take me with you, I will serve you faithfully, just for a place to lie and a little food." Like the tramps in Waiting for Godot, Moran seems to identify the shepherd with materialistic comforts as much as with any spiritual longings. But Beckett's characters are not allowed to become part of the flock; they are outcasts who must find their way alone. They are like the shepherd's dog who "stops at the threshold, not knowing whether he may go in or whether he must stay out, all night." (p.160) Christ's words recorded in St. John (Chap.10,vv.8-9) are relevant here:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep
I am the door; by me if any man enter in,
he shall be saved and shall go in and out,
and find pasture.

Beckett's characters all resemble the archetypal figure the Unnamable in that they are always on the threshold of their "stories." The threshold becomes for Beckett's heroes the edge of the void, the dividing line between the true self and the pseudo-selves. At the very beginning of his tale Molloy says:

All grows dim. A little more and you'll go blind.
It's in the head. It doesn't work anymore, it says,
I don't work anymore. You go dumb as well and sounds
fade. The threshold scarcely crossed that's how it
is. (p.8)

The Beckettian "I"'s approach to the threshold of his "story" does not have the stark, absolute drama of Kafka's man before the door in the parable told to K. by the priest in The Castle. Beckett's quest is essentially philosophical, not religious. More importantly, Molloy and the other narrators of Beckett's French period learn that if the threshold is crossed, it only leads to another. The threshold becomes the entrance to the labyrinth.

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Chapter IV

The Art of Dying in Malone Dies:

Gnosticism and Existentialism

Why today we don't even know where real life is, what it is called! Left alone without literature, we immediately become entangled and lost... We even find it painful to be men - real men of flesh and blood, with our own private bodies.....

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Notes From Underground

The wish to have a death of one's own is growing even rarer. A while yet, and it will be just as rare as a life of one's own. Heavens, it's all there. One arrives; one finds a life, ready made; one has only to put it on. One wants to leave or one is compelled to; anyway no effort; *Viola votre mort, monsieur*. One dies just as it comes; one dies the death that belongs to the disease one has (for since one has come to know all diseases, one knows, too, that the different lethal terminations belongs to the diseases and not to the people; and the sick person has so to speak nothing to do).

Rainer Maria Rilke, The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge

Malone Dies serves as a pivotal point for a summary and elaboration of Beckett's treatment of death throughout his fiction: Malone's calm, dispassionate, "I shall soon be quite dead at last in spite of all", suggests a state of ataraxia which is the complete opposite of the passionate confrontation with death, the ultimate negation, found, for example, in the writings of Sartre and Camus. For Molloy "death is a condition I have never been able to conceive to my satisfaction and which therefore cannot go down in the ledger of weal and woe." (p.68) No man can ever really imagine what it is like to be dead. Beckett's relentless adherence to an "absurd" process of reasoning results in the depiction of death as an impossible paradox. Since consciousness cannot conceive of its final extinction, death becomes in terms of logic an impossibility. But, on another level, "death" may be thought of as any change or movement in an element, and the subsequent stabilization or newness as a "birth". This definition helps to clarify Molloy's statement to the effect

that his life is over and yet somehow goes on. Outside of the normal categories of time and space, the Beckettian moribunds wander in a limbo in which the boundary line between life and death imperceptibly merge. If space and time are cyclical, then all motion is also cyclical. Life and death appear then as the complementary halves of a never ending cycle. Beckett's later heroes learn to dread death like a regeneration. Molloy's views on death were so confused that he wondered "if it wasn't a state of being even worse than life." The central theme in the discussion of Malone Dies will concern the relationship of death and freedom, the means Beckett employs in an attempt to transcend dialectically life and death in order to free the self from its incomprehensible damnation in an earthly purgatory. Several of the major aspects of this quest can be illuminated by comparing them to basic doctrines of Gnosticism and Existentialism.

Beckett's treatment of death in the trilogy shows a marked change from his views as expressed by his first hero, Murphy. For "the seedy solipsist" death was conceived of in highly romantic terms of the "Belacqua bliss", the first landscape of freedom. Richard Coe, one of the most perceptive commentators of Beckett's thought, states that there is a temptation to interpret Murphy's exploration of death and nothingness.

in terms of a specific branch of mystical teaching - Taoist, Buddhist or Zen-Buddhist-and it is perhaps not wholly misleading to do so, provided that one remembers that Beckett employs a great variety of arguments to reach his objective, and that this, the least rational, is consequently the least important.¹

These qualifications must also be remembered in Malone Dies in which there is an even greater temptation to interpret the narrator's reaction of death in terms of a particular mystical teaching, Gnosticism. But in Malone Dies such an analysis is in less danger of going astray for Beckett's more profound vision in the trilogy allows for a fusion of the two major aspects of his mind - mysticism and rationalism.

The starting point of Beckett's rationalism from Murphy onwards is the Cartesian split of the self into body and mind.

In the discussion of "Descartes' Myth", Gilbert Ryle points out in a historical note that

It would not be true to say that the official theory derives solely from Descartes' theories, or even from a more widespread anxiety about the implications of seventeenth century mechanics. Scholastic and Reformation theology had schooled the intellects of the scientists as well as of the laymen, philosophers and clerics of that age. Stoic-Augustinian theories of the will were embedded in the Calvinist doctrines of sin and grace; Platonic and Aristotelian theories of the intellect shaped the orthodox doctrines of the immortality of the soul. Descartes was reformulating already prevalent theological doctrines of the soul in the new syntax of Galileo.²

Beckett's exploration of this dualism which permeates Western culture leads him in Malone Dies to formulations which are strikingly similar to those found in Gnostic teachings. The Gnostic was a member of an ancient sect that believed in salvation through an esoteric knowledge in revelatory vision open only to the few who knew they did not feel at home in an evil creation. Although the term covers a wide variety of religious thinking and cannot be applied to one definite system, it has as its cardinal feature a radical dualism. This dualism expresses itself in every sphere - God and the world, spirit and matter, soul and body, light and darkness, good and evil, life and death. Its root is the belief that God is so transcendent that he has nothing to do with the world, and that it is an evil-creator god, or demiurgos, who has created and rules over the cosmos. This is the situation Beckett has dramatically depicted in Waiting for Godot, a possible parody of Simone Weil's Waiting for God, a major text of modern Gnosticism. For Beckett and for Weil the divine aspect of man - the essential "I" or spirit - has nothing to do with the body and the soul or with the world.

Beckett's characteristic cleavage of the self into body and mind is particularly relevant to the question of death. For Malone his "real" death has nothing to do with his facticity as a being-in-the-midst-of-the-world.

I am far from the sounds of blood and breath, immured.
I shall not speak of my sufferings. Cowering deep
down among them I feel nothing. It is there I die,
unknown to my stupid flesh. That which is seen, that

which cries and writhes, my witless remains.
Somewhere in this turmoil thought struggles on,
it too wide of the mark. It too seeks me, as it
always has, when I am not to be found. (p.186)

As he lies dying, Malone feels that

All strains towards the nearest deeps, and notably
my feet, which even in the ordinary way are so much
further from me than all the rest, from my head
I mean, for that is where I am fled, my feet are
leagues away. And to call them in, to be cleaned
for example, would I think take me over a month,
exclusive of the time required to locate them.
(p.234)

If the self is a-temporal and a-spatial, its freedom and its death cannot be located in the realm of "facticity", the world of social action composed by the "others". Beckett's portrayal of man emphasizes, especially in Malone Dies, the last languors and dis gusts of an exhausted humanity. Beckett's world, like that of the ancient Gnostic, is set in the sharpest possible contrast to the transcendent God who is one with the transcendent "I." Only through attaining a higher gnosis or knowledge can this "I" escape from its imprisonment in the fallen state of worldly being.

The fictional predecessor of Malone renounced (like Beckett) his claim to knowledge because it did not lead to the sought for salvation.

Yes, I once took an interest in astronomy, I don't deny it. Then it was geology that killed a few years for me. The next pain in the balls was anthropology and the other disciplines, such as psychiatry, that are connected with it, disconnected, then connected again, according to the latest discoveries. What I liked in anthropology was its inexhaustible faculty of negation, its relentless definition of man, as though he were no better than God, in terms of what he is not. But my ideas on this subject were always horribly confused, for my knowledge of men was scant, and the meaning of being beyond me. Oh I've tried everything. In the end it was magic that had the honour of my ruins; and still today, when I walk there, I find its vestiges.(p.239)

For Malone the "sacred text" which may show the way to a higher knowledge is the child's exercise book that contains his stories. The first pages of the book are filled with mysterious symbols and diagrams. Malone wonders whether they could refer to

astronomy or astrology. The astral symbolism so important in Gnosticism has been an aspect of Beckett's thought which he has toyed with since Murphy. It was magic in one sense that had the honour of both the ruins of Murphy and Molloy. The important thing to note is that Malone, unlike Murphy, realizes that no magic formula exists that can free the self from the horrors of its death watch. The symbols in Malone's notebook "seems to stop suddenly, prematurely at all events. As though discouraged." (p. 209) Beckett's narrators have discovered that the search for the self can only exist outside of all systems, even those they create themselves. For Malone the endless scribbling in his notebook constitutes the existential experience which must precede any higher knowledge. Malone is preoccupied with the art of dying, that is, the confrontation with the symbolic function of language itself may discover the "magic" words that will decide whether the self is to be damned or saved.

According to Hans Jonas, one of the great authorities on Gnosticism, modern nihilism, particularly as it is expressed in the existentialism of Nietzsche, Sartre and Heidegger, has many similarities to ancient Gnosticism. There is the same emphasis upon man's alienation, forlornness, and "thrownness" in a universe in which he cannot feel at home, a world where he can only know himself as in exile. There is the same proclamation as in antinomian Gnosticism that the absence of God from this world carries with it the legitimization of what is ordinarily held to be immoral. Ordinary man must abide by the law, but the spiritual or higher man, "does not belong to any objective scheme." He "is above the law, beyond good and evil, and a law unto himself in the power of his 'knowledge'."³ For Beckett the hypothesis that God does not exist does not make all possible or allowed for the superior individual. In contrast, nothing is possible for Beckett's characters.

All of Beckett's characters are placed in the absurd position of "waiting for death." Jacques Choron in Death and Western Thought points out that for an existentialist such as Sartre waiting for death, either in principle or in terms of specific death, is an invalid project. Waiting

for death in principle is not significant to Sartre because it is absurd to wait for something whose circumstances you can never determine. Waiting for a specific death is also absurd because it pronounces the future a failure (another paradox Sartre will not tolerate and which Beckett has made the central aspect of his exploration of death from Murphy onwards). Sartre is not interested in death as a positive aspect of his philosophy. Death is interpreted negatively as part of the "facticity" of reality. Facticity is distinguished from "finitude" which is chosen by the for-itself in its construction of the "human."⁴ While this may seem correct, following an alternate path of reasoning may be of advantage in introducing Beckett's views on death. If nothingness is the true realization of the for-itself (consciousness) then death is the ultimate test of this realization. This would appear to equate nothingness with death, and remove death from the periphery of facticity into the crux of existentialistic concern.

It is the latter line of reasoning which Beckett follows in Malone Dies. Sartre's negative view of waiting for death applies to Murphy and Waiting for Godot, but not to Malone Dies, for in this novel Beckett shows that it is possible to a certain extent to control the circumstances of death. In fact, this attempt, Beckett suggests, offers the only hope for the freedom of the self.

Beckett's treatment of death in Malone Dies involves basically an "absurd" attempt at harmonizing the death of Malone with that of his fictional creations. Camus' speculations about death and the "absurd" will thus serve as a more useful comparison. In the Myth of Sisyphus, Camus states that a legitimate questioning of life involves a question of the legitimacy of suicide. Molloy typifies the reaction of Beckett's characters to this proposition, "the thought of suicide had little hold on me, I don't know why, I thought I did, but I see I don't." (p.79) The only suicide in all of Beckett is the "old boy" in Murphy. Even this suicide is questionable: Malone says, "there was an old butler too, in London I think, I cut his throat with his razor ..." (p.236) The question of

suicide affords only a situation for a macabre game for Didi and Gogo in Waiting for Godot; they finally reject suicide for the fact that it will produce an orgasm is too unbelievably grotesque for them to tolerate. Malone sardonically comments that if he had the strength he would throw himself out the window. The obvious irony of this statement points, however, to some of Beckett's more philosophical thoughts about suicide. The fact that Malone literally cannot physically destroy "himself" emphasizes that his real "I" cannot be limited to his body.

It is significant that Malone does not really consider the question of suicide at all. The conclusion that the question of suicide is legitimate, but that suicide itself is not is reached in different ways by both Camus and Beckett. Both answers centre, however, around the concept of the "absurd". For Camus the concept of the "absurd" relates to an understanding of the meaningfulness of life, born out of the confrontation of nostalgia for harmony and the irrationality of the universe. A belief in the irrationality of the universe stems from a feeling of echoed silence and disharmony that man gains from seeking his identity in the universe. To accept suicide, Camus maintains, would be to reject the freedom and consciousness of the absurd. He explains that his interest in keeping the "absurd" alive is a commitment; but this commitment is a paradox because absurd sensitivity rejects value judgments and moral standards of preference. This line of thought also throws light upon Beckett's "moral" code. His characters cannot abrogate their commitment to an "absurd" quest for the true self - an attempt only possible through the use of words. The self lies hidden in the void at centre of the labyrinth of language.

Malone is like Meurseault in The Outsider, Camus' "Man under the sentence of death", in that he is "freer than the suicide, the man who takes his own life". Malone's philosophical dilemma approximates in several ways that of the outsider. "For-I have never seen any sign of any order, inside me or outside me. I have pinned my faith to appearances,

believing them to be vain." (p.210). But Beckett's point of view in the trilogy is taken more from that of Salamano, the old man who loses his dog in The Outsider. What really distinguishes Beckett's treatment of death from that of Sartre and Camus is that the metaphysical absurdity is not simply developed thematically, but in terms of form, that is, of the absurdist aesthetics Malone employs in his confrontation with death. The art of dying is what interests Beckett: it is through an analysis of this technique that Beckett's meditations on death must be approached.

In order to "kill time" while waiting for the end, Malone decides to tell himself stories, fiction appearing thus as an anodyne or "opiate for the dead." The stories "will not be the same kind of stories as hitherto, that is all. They will be neither beautiful nor ugly, they will be calm; there will be no ugliness or beauty or fever in them anymore, they will be almost lifeless, like the teller." (p.180). The important theme introduced here is "calmness" (could the phial in Malone's inventory be the same one which was a central symbol in the short stories "The Calmative", "The End"?). Freud in Beyond the Pleasure Principle postulates two great forces governing existence - Eros and Thanatos which are always in fusion - not a duality, but a dynamic, dialectical unity. In Malone Dies, it appears at first that this dialectical unity is done away with; and that only the force of Thanatos exists, a deadly calmness.

Freud supports his postulation of death instinct with three facts - the existence of the "Nirvana principle" beyond the pleasure principle, the repetition compulsion characteristic of instinctual life, and the temporal privacy of masochism (introverted aggression) over sadism (extroverted aggression.) The expressions of a "repetition compulsion" seem to show an instinctive character: it is characteristic of an instinct to strive for "the reinstatement of an earlier condition, one which it had to abandon under the influence of external disturbing forces....."⁵ Malone's "repetition compulsion" consists of his obsessive need to scribble in his exercise book. Only through fiction (ironically enough the only "reality principle"

in Beckett's universe) is there a possibility of returning to an earlier condition of the self in its ideal, self-contained being. Freud goes to biology for an explanation of the "repetition compulsion"; the tendency of the organic is to return to the inorganic. Hence the goal of all life is death. This cyclical process gives an added insight into Malone's obsessive need to draw up his inventory. His movement towards death, the inorganic, results in a growing identification with his "things". The embittered Malone admits to a "foul feeling of pity ... in the presence of things, especially little portable things in wood and stone, and which made me wish to have them about me and keep them always, so that I stooped and picked them up and put them in my pocket, often with tears ... (p.247)

If it were altogether true that the goal of all life is death, then death would long since have dispensed with all of animate matter. But not all organisms act in this matter. The reproductive cells fight to secure the immortality of their own species. The sexual instincts are therefore the "life instincts." The pleasure principle, as redefined, and as qualified by the reality principle, strives to keep the psychic apparatus as a whole "free from any excitation, or to keep the amount of excitation constant, or as low as possible."⁶ The pleasure principle subserves the sex drive to the death force and favours the "organic necessity" of a returning to the inorganic state.

Freud's metapsychological theory throws some valuable light upon Malone's "calmness" which is much more than stoical indifference. Malone's body is, as he ruefully says, only what is perhaps unadvisedly termed impotent. The sexual instinct survives, but is made to serve the death force. Malone praises his creation Macmann for his sperm has done no damage, has not produced any descendents. Like Hamm in Endgame, Malone begins by saying, "I am going to play". Art is clearly shown to have an infantile erotic base. Malone loves to suck, turn and turn about, his two pencils. There was a time when he used to rub against his stick saying, "It's

a little woman." (p247) Malone even imagines that it would be pleasant to capture a little girl who would fondle him, and take care of his wants. With fascination and bewilderment, Malone watches the futile love making of the couple in the hotel across from his room. While sexuality is presented in grotesque and disgusting terms, the question of love captures the interest of Beckett's narrators at one point or another. For the possibility of an "I - thou" relationship would do away with all the "others", the "fictions" that attempt to force the self into false being. But Malone (elliptical for man alone) has never been able to find the "brave company" he longed for.

That is why I gave up trying to play and took to myself forever shapelessness and speechlessness, incurious wondering, darkness, long stumbling with outstretched arms, hiding. Such is the earnestness from which, for nearly a century now, I have never been able to depart. (p 180)

Without the possibility of love, sex becomes, because of its fearful power of regeneration, a thing to be reviled and mocked. Eros becomes Thanatos in Beckett's world: only through death can the search for the self take place.

A modern Gnostic such as Jung would suggest that Freud saw only half of Gnosticism - the dark world given over to the wrathful creator god, or demiurge, a sexuality and not the "transcendent" spirit of the anima and the collective unconscious. For Jung the materialistic trend in Freud's thought

had the effect of obscuring that other essential aspect of Gnosticism: the primordial image of the spirit as another, higher god who gave to mankind the ... vessel of spiritual transformation ... a feminine principle which could find no place in Freud's patriarchal world.⁷

Similarly, Beckett sees only half of Gnosticism - the dark side. Within this context Beckett develops his aesthetics of death.

II

A phantasmagoric intermingling of narrative detail

identifies Malone with his "fictional" predecessors. Malone vaguely remembers a forest and believes he was transported to his present abode by an ambulance; he receives a mysterious visit from a stranger whom he believes he has met before, probably Gaber. A host of similar details re-enforce the correspondence. The disjunction of these events in space and time has an important bearing on the question of death. Referring to his fading memories, Malone says, "all that belongs to the past. Now it is the present I must establish, before I am avenged." (p.183) Malone's memories do not allow for a Proustean transcendence of time. While the superimposition of details from an earlier existence upon the present would seem to give a timeless quality to Malone's situation, this is not the case, "I feel at last that the sands are running out." (p.183)

The chamber pot and food pot mark the spatio-temporal coordinates of Malone's bodily edistance. Unlike Watt, Malone is not interested in "naming" or placing these objects; he simply accepts them as the existentialist desiderata. But Malone's room is not a plenum like Mr. Knott's establishment where "nothing changed ... because nothing remained, and nothing came or went, because all was a coming and going." Malone's little universe, his circle of consciousness, undergoes a process of entropy in which things do not reappear in patterns. As Malone nears death, his room takes on more and more the "dimensions" of a vacuum or void.

For I have sufficiently perished in this room to know that some things go out, and others come in, though I know not what agency. And among those that go out there are some that come back, after a more or less prolonged absence, and others that never come back. With the result that among those that come in, some are familiar to me, others not. (p.250)

One of the questions Malone asks his unidentified visitor has to do with why his pots are not longer emptied. The old woman who cared for him seems also to have disappeared. Time

jerks haphazardly, but relentlessly, forward in the same way as Malone's narrative.

What motion precedes the final stasis of death is clearly Herac^{lit}ean. Malone speculates that since he has been in the room "much water has passed beneath Butt Bridge, in both directions." (p.250) Since motion takes place in both directions, time also moves backwards and forwards. Malone is not sure whether he is gaining or losing time. Thoughts arise, one following the other with such rapidity of succession that the illusion of a permanent thing called "the mind" is created, but really there is no permanent thing but only a flow of thoughts. In order to establish the "mythological present" Malone thus has to stop time, to impose his own "end" upon the external temporal movement towards death. Like Sartre's hero in The Wall, Malone is faced with the ultimate decision as to what constitutes the self. But the walls against which Malone's drama is acted is made of words. He desperately seeks a "hole" (loophole?) in these barriers which place rational restrictions upon the conception of self. Malone seeks to extricate his real "I" from the flow of language which encloses it.

What I sought, when I struggled out of my hole, then aloft through the stinging air towards an inaccessible boon, was the capture of vertigo, the letting go, the fall, the gulf, the relapse to darkness, to nothingness, to earnestness, to home, to him waiting for me always, who needed me and whom I needed, who took me in his arms and told me to stay with him always, who gave me his place and watched over me ... whom I have never seen. There I am forgetting myself again. My concern is not for me, but with another, far beneath me and whom I try to envy, of whose crass adventures I can now tell at last, I don't know how. (p.195)

The tripartite nature of Malone's struggle against time and death is brought out in the above passage. The "I" Malone has never seen represents his true self. This ideal being can only be reached by a type of dialectic between Malone who writes the story (the thesis) and the other far beneath him (Sapo, Malone's opposite to begin with, is the antithesis). If a synthesis takes place between the two, it

may be possible to get between words, and be one with the real "I", who, like the void is not definable in spatial or temporal metaphors. "Aesthetics are therefore on my side, at least a certain kind of aesthetics." (p.182)

Malone begins his "stories" with a bitter satire of bourgeois life and the bourgeois novel. The very name Saposcat, a fusion of Homo Sapiens and scatology, reveals Malone's contemptuous attitude towards his subject matter for his "pensum". The well ordered garden of the Saposcats is reminiscent of Moran's. Malone continually interrupts his "play" with ironic self commentary, most often with the phrase, "What tedium". What finally gains the interest of Malone is the struggle of the young Sapo to decipher the meaning of his life. Malone's relationship with his creation is essentially an inversion of that between Moran and his son. While Malone emphasizes that there is no one less like him than the simple Sapo (sap?) who "loved nature, took an interest in animals and plants and willingly raised his eyes to the sky, day and night" (p.191), it becomes progressively clear that Malone is, in fact, talking about himself. Malone's failure to find the love or "brave company" he sought also drives his creature Sapo away from his family. Malone comments on this cyclical relationship among the generations. "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. Very Pretty." (p.194)

The section dealing with the Lamberts continued Malone's "outpouring of misery, impotence, and hate". (p.197) The strange description of their life seems simply to be a digression, an attempt by Malone to divert his attention from himself. Ruby Cohn may be right when she says the story of the brutal, Big Lambert is a parody of Balzac's idealistic Louis Lambert in La Comedie Humaine.⁸ The demented sensibility of Big Lambert characterizes Malone's jaundiced view on life as well as indicating the hallucinatory flow of images in his mind that has caused him to confuse the identities of the brutal peasant and Balzac's religious mystic. But nowhere out of books alone would it have been possible to become the

author of Madame Lambert, who, while she agitates her worn-out, working hands, focusses a range of feeling no dying Malone could ever attract. The stilted, mechanical prose Malone uses in the Lambert section gives way at times to a poetic identification of the author and his fictions. The bewilderment and sense of helplessness Madame Lambert and Sapo feel in their encounter with life parallels Malone's stumbling journey through the formlessness of the universe in which the murmurings, and babblings inside one fuse with the meaningless sounds without. It is a universe where all death is arbitrary and ethically meaningless. The decision as to whether Blackey or Whitey should be killed raises one of the favourite questions of Beckett's characters, namely, that of the two thieves, one who was saved while the other was damned.

Malone's attitude towards his characters involves a love-hate dualism. Between masochistically flagellating himself, Malone takes out his frustrations through aggression towards his creations:

All I ask is to know, before I abandon him whose life has so well begun, that my death and my death and mine alone prevents him from living on, from winning, losing, joying, suffering, rotting and dying, and that even had I lived he would have waited, before he died, for his body to be dead. (p.198)

Compare this statement to the following:

All the stories I've told myself, clinging to the putrid mucus, and swelling, swelling, saying, Got it at last, my legend. But why this sudden heat, has anything happened, anything changed? No, the answer is no I shall never get born and therefore never get dead, and a good job too. And if I tell of me and of that other who is my little one, it is as always for want of love, well I'll be bugged, I wasn't expecting that, want of a homuncule, I can't stop. (p.225)

Malone decides at last to make a creature in his image (Sapo suddenly becomes Macmann) and to destroy it when he sees what a poor surrogate it is. To destroy his fiction will, however, involve his own annihilation, for Malone's identity exists in the novel only insofar as he writes, and to write means to "lie" or "invent". This double negation is involved in Malone's growing identification with Macmann.

Two central patterns of imagery control Macmann's adventures: that of the garden, and that of the asylum. Macmann is first seen sprawled Christ-like in a torrential downpour. But the hoped for general paralysis does not occur, and Macmann finally begins to roll aimlessly around the country side. The next narrative sequence involves Macmann's imprisonment in the asylum, the House of Saint John of God. Here Macmann finds solace in roaming through the garden which is enclosed by a high wall. In one of the most lyrical passages in the trilogy, Malone describes the plight of Macmann:

He hung closer and closer to the wall, but not too close, for it was guarded; seeking away out into the desolation of having nobody and nothing, the wilds of the hunted, and scant bread and the scant shelter and the black joy of the solitary way, in helplessness and will-lessness, through all the beauty, the knowing and the loving. (p.278)

Malone's notes have a curious tendency to annihilate all they purport to say. The lyricism of the above passage is undercut by Malone's interjection - "but to hell with all this fucking scenery. Where could it have risen anyway, tell me that, Underground perhaps." (p.277). In this instance underground seems identifiable with Malone's unconscious. The images which flow from this source attempt vainly as "objective correlative" for his present state. The lyricism of the above passage does, however, manage to give an idea of Malone's harsh, severely limited conception of freedom.

The main threat to Macmann's freedom is Moll, a hideous "struldbrug" of a keeper with whom he has a "love" affair. Their futile love making represents one of the most disgusting yet comical depictions of sexuality in all of Beckett's fiction.

The spectacle was then offered of Macmann trying to bundle his sex into his partner's like a pillow into a pillow-slip, folding it, in two, and stuffing it in with his fingers. But far from losing heart they warmed to their work. And though both were impotent they finally succeeded, summoning to their aid all the resources of the skin, the mucus and the imagination, in striking from their dry and feeble

clips a kind of sombre gratification: (p.260). Moll could be representation of what Vivien Mercier in The Irish Comic Tradition calls the "sheela-na-gig", and Irish mythological creature who is at once the womb and the tomb.⁹ This pagan source ties in with the strain of Gnosticism in the novel. A main feature of Gnosticism is the fusion of pagan symbolism and mythology with the teachings of Christ. Gnostic mythology manifests a striking variety in detail, but in general the central concepts emerge: A Supreme Being who is an abstraction for the essence of all existence, and the Great Mother, representing the female principle. From the Supreme being, who is variously called Father of All, Unapproachable God, Ineffable, Unbegotten or The Man, is descended a series of devine personages arranged in pairs of Male and Female, which all together form the mystic representation of this one God, who is remote and unknowable. There seems to be a parody of this male-female relationship in the Moll-Macmann affair. But Beckett does not allow for such an ideal relationship which could bridge the gap between the fallen self and the transcendent God. Eva Metman, the Jungian psychologist, says in "Reflections on Samuel Beckett's Plays" that Jung equates the mother goddess with the unconscious and says: "Western culture and religion, society and morals are mainly formed by this (Jewish-Christian father-god) image and the psychic structure of the individual is partly made ill by it ... Today, as always, the battle of Western consciousness is fought in the spirit of the Old Testament war that Jahveh waged against the mother-goddess."¹⁰ For Beckett the destruction of the female principle is not regarded in purely negative terms; it must precede the search for the self. The death of Moll, a grotesque incarnation of the Great Mother, clears the way for Beckett's use of mythico-religious archetypes in The Unnamable in which he attempts to describe the self that is equivalent to the Supreme Being, the Unbegotten of woman.

Macmann's escape and Malone's death is interwoven with the sexual symbolism associated with Moll. Moll's rotten tooth is carved in the shape of Christ, her ear-rings

standing for the two thieves. Earlier Malone speculated about his escape from his fictions, using this same powerful image:

Or perhaps we'll all come back, reunited done with parting, done with prying on one another, back to this little foul den all dirty, white and vaulted, as though hollowed out of ivory, and old rotten tooth, (p.237)

Just before Moll (who has developed the symptoms of pregnancy) is done away with by Malone, her tooth falls out. The complex pattern of sexual and religious imagery associated with these events implies that only by destroying (or severing oneself from) the principle of Eros can the search for the self be continued. Malone, "the old Foetus", feels himself born into death. "The feet are clear already, of the great cunt of existence." (p.283) The simultaneous death of Malone and the escape of Macmann from the asylum appear as a resurrection, since both events occur during the Easter week. Only by destroying time (Moll as a woman is capable of regeneration, that is to say, the creation of "new" time) can Malone hope to achieve his real death which is also a rebirth.

The fragmented, broken sentence of the last pages of Malone Dies emphasizes the disintegration of Malone's consciousness. Despite his initial "calmness", Malone's death is not merely passively experienced by him:

There is no good pretending, it is hard to leave everything. The horror- worn eyes linger abject in all they have beseeched so long, in a last prayer, the true prayer at last, the one that asks for nothing. And it is then a little breath of fulfillment revives the dead longings and a murmur is born in the silent world, reproaching you affectionately with having despaired too late. (p.243)

There is, however, a "positive" aspect to Malone's death. His death coincides with the departure of Lemual, Macmann and the other inmates into the void. This bold attempt for Freedom contrasts sharply with Molloy's earlier statements on the subject. The previous "I" of the Beckettian hero stated that he had always preferred slavery to death. His concept of freedom was at best minimal:

'I who had loved the image of old Geulincx, dead young, who left me free on the 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.(p.51)

But how successful is Malone's attempt? The real "I" that lies behind the Malone who dies does not escape from time. He is simply projected into yet another dimension of time and space. The timeless self has not been found. Instead Malone's abortive attempt results in the metaphysical absurdities of The Unnamable. Malone escapes the linear conception of time only to find himself in the first pages of The Unnamable moving in never ending cycles.

The double negation, the destruction of Malone and Macmann; has not resulted in a transcendence of death and time. The "I" is now lodged inextricably between the two. The Unnamable describes himself as at once in and out of the world:

I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either. (p.383)

Beckett has carried the "absurd" reasoning about death much further than any of the major existentialist figures. Beginning with many of the presuppositions of Sartre and Camus, Beckett arrives at a negative view which goes far beyond their speculations. Camus, for example, abandons logic to present lyrically his view of Sisyphus, his ideal absurd man.

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself fills a world. The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. II

Beckett's absurd man par excellence is the Unnamable, a Sisyphus who eternally rolls words up to the edge of the void, only to have them come tumbling down upon himself, burying him in a morass of meaningless words. Like Malone, The Unnamable is buried alive in a world made of words. One could never imagine Beckett's narrators "happy."

In Malone Dies Beckett presents an extremely intellectual and powerfully emotional portrayal of death. The Gnostic and Existentialist analogues help to reveal some of the philosophical underpinnings of Beckett's Aesthetic system. But, finally these sources cannot fully deal with the inexplicable phenomenon of death. Tracing these patterns of thought one arrives inevitably at the same conclusion as Beckett's narrator's who have become knowledgeable in all of the intellectual disciplines only to reject them as inadequate explanations of man's existentialist dilemmas. Malone concludes that he ought to content himself with his "pastimes".

instead of launching forth on all this ballsaching poppycock, about life and death, if that is what it is all about, I suppose it is, for nothing was ever about anything else to the best of my recollection. But what it is all about exactly I could no more say at the present moment, than take up my bed and walk. It's vague, life and death. (p.225)

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Chapter V

"Science Fiction" in The Unnamable

"That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." Neil Armstrong, July 20, 1969.

"A step forward is, by definition, a step back."

Samuel Beckett in "Dante ... Bruno. Vico ... Joyce."

"This time, then once more I think, then perhaps a last time, I think it'll be over with that world too." (p. 8)

Molloy's tripartite division of time in the trilogy implies a sense of an ending, an apocalypse. But the critical juncture in this teleological pattern occurs between Malone Dies and The Unnamable. Malone's attempt at escaping from his fictions through a simultaneous interpenetration with them has ended in failure, or, perhaps more accurately, the synthesis results in the "last time", the story of the Unnamable, the presence which lies behind all Beckett's previous fictions. The Unnamable finds himself in a limbo that is a further extension of Beckett's exploration of the void. Borges' statement that "metaphysics is a branch of fantastic literature"¹ supplies an important clue for unravelling what is perhaps Beckett's most difficult and original work of fiction.

In a very literal and profound sense of the term The Unnamable is a work of "science fiction". At the beginning of the novel the narrator unbelievably terms himself "I"; his struggle is to somehow establish a belief in his own existence. Through a labyrinth of hypotheses he vainly tries to scrabble on the right answer; through a discursive argument constantly channeled into new courses by a series of "perhaps's" he heroically attempts to scatter his puppets, the Molloys and Malones et al., in order to live. The labyrinth of fictions results in a babble of "affirmations and negations invalidated as soon as uttered." (p. 291) The somersaulting dialectic of the Unnamable takes the form of an absurdly logical Discourse on the Lack of Method. The growth of the scientific world view in the seventeenth-century, a movement in which Descartes played a central role, culminated in the

reduction of the self to a mere "fiction."

The Unnamable finds himself in a type of Einsteinian fourth-dimension in which objects do not follow the Newtonian conception of motion. Around the latest manifestation of the Beckettian "I" revolve Malone and Molloy. Their movements do not follow or conform to any geometrical pattern, such as the seventeenth-century scientist-philosophers imposed on reality:

These lights for instance, which I do not require to mean anything, what is there so strange about them, so wrong? Is it their irregularity, their instability, their shining strong one minute and weak the next, but never beyond the power of one or two candles? Malone appears and disappears with the punctuality of clockwork, always at the same remove, the same velocity, in the same direction, the same attitude. But the play of lights is truly unpredictable They are perhaps unwavering and fixed and my fitful perceiving the cause of their inconstancy. (p. 294)

Newton's ether has become the "nourishing muck that kills" which forms the first matter of Beckett's fictional universe. The description of Molloy and Malone as planets wheeling slowly in a state of advanced entropy around their sun, the Unnamable, contributes explicitly to the theme of "science fiction." Trying vainly to establish a temporal-spatial relationship between his "satellites" and himself, the Unnamable adopts an epistemological stance analogous to Kant's Copernican Revolution. While "all is possible, or almost", it is best he concludes, "to think of myself as fixed and at the centre of this place, whatever its shape and extent may be." (p. 295)

Similarly, Descartes began his proof of the existence of the self (and of its necessary corollary, God) by first subjecting all his beliefs to the devastating test of methodical doubt. After questioning the reliability of sense data, Descartes' next stage in the argument involves the question, How can we be certain that everything we see and do is not part of a dream? However, Descartes does find some order constructed according to geometrical patterns within this hypothetical dream world:

For whether I am awake or asleep, two and three always make five, and the square can never have more than four sides, and it does not seem possible that truths so clear and apparent can be suspected of any falsity or uncertainty. 2

In Beckett's dream world a non-Euclidean geometry precludes even a mathematical certainty that will allow for a rational discourse. "But the discourse must go on so one invents obscurities." (p. 294) The Unnamable's course is a series of "irregular loops" which finally embroil him "in a kind of inverted spiral." (p. 316)

Beckett's "diminishing universe" supplies an ironic commentary upon the scientific exploits of the twentieth-century in which advanced technology has landed a man on the moon. In Beckett's world the smallest movement is a significant event which calls for elaborate description. Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, for example, are naturalists who transpost forward. The contemporary era seems, in part, to be one of "post fiction"; science fiction has become fact. Much of the best writing is done in the areas of documentary, and reporting, for example, Mailer's account of the American moon landing. But science fiction need not be simply futuristic; it can also look back in time. In Clarke's 2001: A Space Odyssey the patterning of time is cyclical. The portrait of the astronaut as an old man at the point of death is remarkably similar to one of Arikha's drawings of a Beckettian moribund in Thirteen Texts For Nothing. In the film version the decor of the astronaut's room was eighteenth-century, thus pointing back towards the origin of the scientific method. But Clarke sees the cyclical process as ultimately affirmative. Beckett is much more sceptical about the significance of rebirth, especially in Endgame which may be seen as a picture of the horrible aftermath of an atomic war. Clov's first reaction is to kill the infant who appears in the wasteland outside of his shelter. Beckett's "science fiction" also involves a telescoping of the origins of science and its modern consequences. The Unnamable is, in one way, representative of the modern Western consciousness in that

he has been "reduced to reason." (p. 338) E.A. Burtt in The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science has shown that none of the early philosophers of the scientific method really understood the final aims or intentions of their discoveries. One wonders if Burtt is right when he says the accomplishments of the scientific world view are worth the "metaphysical barbarism" it has produced.³ In The Unnamable Beckett shows that the only frontier worth exploring is that of the mind. However, the predominantly scientific discourse of the last three centuries has done away with any language with which to carry on the dialogue with self. The residual Cartesian man, the Unnamable, hopes to spare himself without going silent. "What prevents the miracle is the spirit of method to which I have perhaps been a little too addicted." (p. 303)

The first lines of The Unnamable, "Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning", indicate that the narrator is attempting to confine himself to the scientific "how it is", rather than the metaphysical "why it is." The reason why the "I", who seeks to discover the true self, cannot carry on his pseudo-logical discourse without having recourse to his "stories", is found in the basic weaknesses of Descartes' philosophy. The turning point for the language of the self occurs in Descartes' implicit identification of truth and mathematical proof, and above all, with Spinoza who sought to make the language of philosophy a verbal mathematics, hence the organization of the Ethics into axioms, demonstrations, corollaries. Since then the language of metaphysics has become logical, or non-verbal, a fact which throws an illuminating light upon Beckett's poetics of silence. Wittgenstein is the modern philosopher who raises the question whether reality can be spoken of, when speech is merely a kind of infinite regression, words being spoken of other words.

Descartes' mechanism, in denying completely any purposeful tendencies in the physical world, provided a metaphysical basis for the new physical theories of such scientists as Galileo. But, at the same time, the sharp division of

the created world between the mental and physical substance gave rise to great difficulties in constructing a consistent theory of the universe. The Cartesian conception of the overpowering role played by God seemed to tend toward a kind of mysticism, rather than provide a basis for scientific knowledge. Descartes' accommodation of the "I" in the res cogitans, his cosmological (causal) and ontological proofs of God gave, at least tentatively, some moral significance to his scheme. There was still the possibility of an "I", "God" belief structure. The significance of Basil Willey's statement that "God was indeed a necessary hypothesis in seventeenth-century philosophy" can now be seen.⁴ Without the postulation of God, Descartes' argument would have been lodged inextricably at the point of "dubito, ergo est." Such a harrowing possibility leads one into Beckett's world. As Descartes was able to establish God's existence, he did not have to worry about establishing the existence of others: it would follow as a natural extension. In The Unnamable the relationship between the "self" and "others" and "God" is carried out in a most striking stylistic manner. A phenomenological reduction of linguistic structures results in the presentation of these relationships through a jumble of pronoun references.

The Unnamable begins his "pensum" by trying to purify his "I" from its contingencies:

Nothing then but one, of which I know nothing, except that I have never uttered, and this black, of which I know nothing either, except that it is black and empty. That then is what, since I have to speak, I shall speak of, until I need speak no more. And Basil and his gang? Inexistent, invented to explain what I forget. Ah yes, all lies, God and man, nature and the light of day, the heart's outpourings and the means of understanding, all invented, barely, by me alone, with the help of no one, since there is no one, to put off the hour when I must speak of me. There will be no more about them. (p. 304)

Such a solipsistic philosophy would negate both Descartes' idea of "God" and Sartre's idea of the "Other." Rationalism detached from metaphysics tends to become concerned only with

epistemology. The Unnamable, unless he resorts to his fictions, can only describe his perception of his "black and empty" space.

But the insidious "they", Basil and his crew, inevitably interwine their voices into the narrative. The ambiguous "they" are to be feared, for, like the Sartrean "Other", they reduce the self to an object of another's consciousness, and imprison the self's freedom in time and space. The misuse of the pronoun "I" begins when the concept of person is treated as third person expressions or descriptions allowing visual-spatial mechanical models which determine the conceptualization of self.⁵ Descartes does this, for instance, even in his concept of self as a bodiless something, a thinking thing. The question then is, are "persons" conceptually and logically assimilable to and exhausted by exteriorized paradigms or, to put it another way, are "persons" exhaustible by the thing-language of the scientific world view. Against the attempts of Basil and his crew to extricate the Unnamable's real first person pronoun from the language, (a move foreshadowed in Descartes), the Unnamable's "I" manages to hold out for a while.

Like his avatars, the Unnamable sees himself slipping, "though not yet at the last extremity; towards the resorts of fable." (p. 308) He is enticed in order to keep the dialogue going to tell one of Basil's tales in which the "I" is returning from a world tour which is reminiscent of Molloy's journey. His family in the world above attempts to draw him back into the fold, back into the circus where to "breathe is to qualify for asphyxiation." While the Unnamable cites this tale only to illustrate how he earlier mistook himself for Basil (whom he now calls Mahood), it becomes clear that he is again in danger of being possessed by his creatures, his fictional creations.

Finally, the Unnamable creates a figure names Worm who represents pure or unconscious being. In other words, the "I" attempts to create a "non-fictional character" who will allow him to subvert the designs of Basil. He projects himself into Worm (that is he uses the first person

pronoun when referring to his creature), in an attempt to fuse in Sartre's terminology the for-itself and the in-itself. As soon as the Unnamable becomes conscious that he is Worm, unconscious being, he is logically no longer Worm. "If I were Worm I wouldn't know it, I wouldn't say it, I wouldn't say anything, I'd be Worm." (p. 347)

This failure suggests another hypothesis which points towards the "great chain of being" in How It Is:

there might be a hundred of us and still we'd lack the hundred and first, we'll always be short of me. Worm, I nearly said Watt ... Perhaps it's by trying to be Worm that I'll finally succeed in being Mahood, I hadn't thought of that. Then all I'll have to do is be Worm. Which no doubt I shall achieve by trying to be Jones. Then all I'll have to do is be Jones. Stop, perhaps he'll spare me that, have compassion and let me stop. (p. 339)

Never will the Unnamable be able to be both subject and object simultaneously. This infinite regression alludes ironically to Descartes' cosmological argument for the existence of God in the "Third Meditation":

And even though it might happen that one idea gives birth to another idea, that could not continue indefinitely, but one must reach a first idea, the cause of which is like an archetype or source. 6

The "archetype or source" the Unnamable searches for is his own "self". As the quote from Descartes illustrates this search is equivalent to the quest for God. However, Hume in his critique of causality pointed out that there is no reason to conclude that a sequence of conjoined events must have a first term. Thus the Unnamable is forever lost in a limbo of endless non-being.

The fragmentation and dissolution of the "I" results from a dialectic of either/or in which a labyrinth of hypotheses for the self is put forward. The Cartesian "cogito" flounders helplessly in a morass of words.

How all becomes clear and simple when one opens an eye on the within, having of course seriously exposed it to the without, in order to benefit by the contrast ... But enough of this cursed first person, it is really too red a herring, I'll get out of my depth if I'm not careful. But what then is

the subject? Mahood? No, not yet. Worm?
 Even less, Bah, any old pronoun will do,
 provided one sees through it. Matter of
 habit. To be adjusted later. Where was I?
 Ah yes, the bliss of what is clear and simple.
 (p. 343)

Descartes' elaborate speculations on "clear and simple" ideas now serves only as a category for which there is no "objective correlative." Without the privileged position of picking out a "who" by which contrasts are made, there is no possibility of distinguishing anything. Discourse then becomes a kind of stream or process where no distinctions apply and perhaps no language applies. The Unnamable's abortive discourse on the self is an attempt to overcome a program of trying to contract the first person personal pronoun "I" out of existence which gives rise to a language (if it can at all be said to be a language) that is not human nor about a human world. Aware of the futility of his endeavour, the Unnamable says, "no sense in bickering about pronouns and other parts of blather. The subject doesn't matter, there is none." (p. 360) But the question is vital, as the narrator's obsessive preoccupation with the problem indicates, for without the logical position of superiority which "I" has held in traditional metaphysics, there is no possibility of establishing an "I" - "God" relationship. Only then will the "I" be able to attain the philosophical absoluteness of a plenum of self-contained being, only then will he be one with the silence.

The Unnamable finds himself trapped in a torrent of words in which there is no word for him:

all words, the whole world is here with me, I'm
 the air, the walls, the walled-in one, everything
 yields, opens, ebbs, flows like flakes ... I'm
 all these words, all these strangers, this dust
 of words, with no ground for their settling.
 (p. 386)

Beckett's concern with words, especially pronouns, is not in the least an esoteric exploration of linguistic ambiguity. Rather it touches on the most vital of modern philosophical concerns. Sartre has repeatedly spoken about "the crisis of language." As does Beckett, he identifies this crisis with

the problem of the "Other", for language is the means by which the "Other" threatens one's being. The Unnamable is forced to use "their" language of which he knows only a few scraps, a few nameless images. Basil and his crew remind one of the Heideggerian "they" who attempt to transform the "I" into a collective, non-entity. The fact that "Basil" is an anagram for "silab" or "syllable" indicates that for Beckett the problem of establishing any creative relationship with others involves the more fundamental question of language.

At this point of Beckett's investigation of the self, there is a coming together of the two major schools of contemporary philosophical thought, namely, Existentialism, and the analytical "Ordinary Language Philosophy." The most useful example of the latter movement which is more explicitly interested in linguistic problems is Gilbert Ryle. In The Concept of Mind he devotes his first chapter to an exposition of the so called "category mistakes" involved in Descartes' conception of the self as a "ghost in the machine." Ryle's method seems, therefore, to promise a way out of the paradoxes encountered by that modern Cartesian, Beckett, in his exploration of the self. However, the inability of "Ordinary Language Philosophy" to deal adequately with the question of personal identity comes out more clearly in Ryle's discussion of the "systematic elusiveness of 'I'." For Ryle the problem of "I" is determined by the nature of "higher order acts", that is, acts which involve self-consciousness. He states:

a higher order action cannot be the action upon which it is performed. So my commentary on my performances must always be silent about one performance, namely itself, and this performance can be the target only of another commentary. Self commentary ... (is) logically condemned to eternal penultimacy.

Ryle summarizes his argument in these terms:

This general conclusion that any performance can be the concern of a higher order performance, but cannot be the concern of itself, is connected with what was said earlier about the special functioning of index words, such as "now", "you", and "I". And "I" sentence indicates whom in particular it is about by being itself uttered

or written by someone in particular. "I" indicates the person who uttered it. So, when a person utters an "I" sentence, his utterance may be part of a higher order performance, namely one, perhaps of self-reporting, self-exhortation, or self-commissioner, and this performance itself is not dealt with in the operation which it itself is. Even if the person is, for special speculative purposes momentarily concentrating on the Problem of Self, he has failed and knows that he has failed to catch more than the flying coat-tails of that which he was pursuing. His quarry was the hunter. 7

While Ryle's analysis seems to explain some of the linguistic problems involved in the "I"'s search for the self (the image of the quarry and the hunter describes Moran's search for Molloy), it does not explain the existential anguish which motivates the Beckettian artist-heroes.

The inadequacy of Ryle's solution is evident also when one refers to another famous discussion of the self which appears to lie behind the Unnamable's babble, Hume's investigations in part VI of Book I of the Treatise.

Hume writes:

when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and can never observe anything but the perception. 8

Ryle would say that Hume's problem is not due to his empirical psychology, but is simply due to a pseudo=problem ostensibly posed by "ordinary language." But this linguistic analysis does not account for "the dark night of the soul" Hume goes through as a result of the inability to discover the self. The example of Hume is relevant for the Unnamable begins by restricting himself to an empirical investigation of his consciousness and its perception of the world which encloses it.

One of the most forceful examples of a "higher order" act, and its relation to the problem of personal identity, is found in the Unnamable's statement:

They say they, speaking of them, to make me

think it is I who am speaking. Or I say they, speaking of God knows what, to make me think it is not I who am speaking. (p. 370)

Beckett attempts to get "between words" in order to avoid the "eternal penultimacy" of the linguistic dualism of "I" - "they". Ryle's ordinary language critique would be of no use here for Beckett is not using language in an ordinary way; he is concerned with the "religious" use of language. Beckett suggests that there is an analogy that holds between the first person personal pronoun "I" and the term "God", which for Beckett connotes an absolute "I" metaphorically represented by the silence or void. The first step in making sense of religious belief-talk is to observe that the world "God" can be quite appropriately, and, indeed, is Biblically, modelled on the personal pronoun "I". The Exodus narrative speaks of God's identification of Himself in the following fashion: "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'"

Between the pronoun "I" and the word "God" there stands this parallel: we can speak of the self ("I") without assuming that the concept of self is or can be exhausted by observable acts or behaviour; we can speak of God without assuming that the concept is exhausted by the events in the world or that He is simply a sum of these events. In each case there is an "actor" who stands back of the acts or events but who is not the sum total of the acts or events even though there is some sort of correlation between the "actor" and the "acts." In The Unnamable this paradigm of Christian belief structures undergoes a drastic modification. No relationship between the "I" and Youdi (Jahweh) is attempted. Youdi appears as Descartes' "Malignant or Deceitful Spirit" who continually tries to trick the narrator into false being. Instead (and this is the crucial point which has been missed by previous commentators), The Unnamable attempts to elevate his "I" until it becomes identified by means of a ruthless parody with traditional conceptions of God. Sartre has shown that man's projects are absurd because they are directed toward an unattainable goal, the desire to become God or to be simultaneously the free for-

itself and the absolute in-itself.

Dieter Wellershoff's generally perceptive analysis of the overall design of the trilogy is flawed by one major misconception, typical of most criticism of The Unnamable. In an essay entitled "Failure of an Attempt at De-Mythologization" he summarizes the three novels in these terms:

Molloy's narrative still has the plenitude and fantasy of the beginning. It represents the mythical consciousness which still experiences the duality of man and world, subject and object, ego and god in the image of a long journey and vain homecoming, analogues to the Passion, the Odyssey, the adventures of Hermes, which, in however rudimentary and disfigured a form are compressed in this story. Moran's report, in contrast, represents a more enlightened, more realistic level of consciousness. It reduces the mythical narrative to a more barren kernel of experience, it wants to say what really happened. But this naive claim in objectivity is finally destroyed by the next disillusionment. Behind Molloy's narrative and Moran's report in Malone Dies, the subject whose fictions they are, is made visible. Then, finally, in The Unnamable the subject also is dissolved. It is now no more than an empty area of transit of anonymous language and disappears inside it. It all happened only in the language, which, now that it is unmasked as aimless search and constant deception, no longer yields any mythical symbol, and history, that might interpret its own obscurity. 9

On the contrary, The Unnamable supplies archetypal patterns of mythico-religious thought which interpret (at least partially) its obscurity. In The Unnamable Beckett shows (as Cassirer does in Language and Myth) that "the philosophy of the mind involves more than a theory of knowledge; it involves a theory of prelogical conception and expression, and their final culmination in reason and factual knowledge."¹⁰ The Unnamable is Beckett's Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction.

The fundamental assumption of the myth-making consciousness is that name and essence bear a necessary and internal relationship to each other, that the name does not merely denote but actually is the essence of the object, that the real thing is contained in the name. Hence the significance of the title of Beckett's last novel of the trilogy can in part be realized: it implies complete isolation,

for the nameless has no existence in language and tends to be completely obscured. To the Unnamable words are only things "they taught me without making their meaning clear." But he still has to use these blank words in order to fend off the threatening "they", and to attempt to reach the absolute of silence. The words that the Unnamable is forced to speak constitute a parody of that phase of mythico-religious thought when man through the agency of the word transformed chaos into a meaningful and ethical universe. The Apostle only says that in the beginning was the Word. He gives no assurance as to the end.

Another pattern of mythico-religious thought that Beckett seems to be ironically exploiting involves the idea that "it is the name of the deity, rather than the god himself, that is the real source of efficacy." (Cassirer, p. 48) As a consequence of this belief, a rule of secrecy applies to the "Holy Name" for the mention of it would release all the powers inherent in the god himself. However grotesque it seems, the Unnamable takes on characteristics of this Supreme Being or Supreme Fiction. His "characters" are made in his image. Basil and his crew are like Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author. Viewed archetypally this action appears ironically as an attempt to bring the "god" within their power by means of the word. The Unnamable wonders whether Basil

is still usurping my name, the one they foisted up there in their world, patiently from season to season? No no, here I am in safety, amusing myself, wondering who can have dealt me these insignificant wounds. (p. 300)

The "hidden god" is a secret to his creation:

His name is a secret to his creations. There is but one designation that may be applied to him, besides that of Creator, Maker of men and gods: that is the designation of pure Being. He begets and is not begotten, he bears and is not born, he is Being, the Constant in everything, the Remaining. (Cassirer, p. 76)

This paradox appears in two statements made at the beginning of the Unnamable's "dissertation": the first states, "He does not look at me, does not know of me, wants for nothing. I alone am man all the rest divine"; the second, which

appears to contradict the first, states, "I am Matthew and I am the angel, I who came before the cross, before the sinning, came into the world, came here." (pp. 300, 301) Because the Unnamable cannot get born he is immortal. Yet he begets fictions who are "divine" in the sense that they have names which identify their essence.

The phantasmagoric intermingling of identities appears as another of Beckett's reversals of a traditional pattern of religious thought. Cassirer states the traditional view:

the polynomy of the personal deities is an essential trait of their beings. For religious feeling the power of a god is expressed in the abundance of his epithets; polynomy is a prerequisite for a god of the higher personal order. (p. 62)

Through polynomy the mythic mind tries to attain the unity of the god idea. For the Unnamable any thought of identification with his "troop of lunatics" involves a mixing of the "sacred" and the "profane." "Me, utter me, in the same foul breath as my creatures." (p. 302) This statement can only be fully appreciated if compared to Molloy's, "And God forgive me, to tell you the horrible truth, my mother's image sometimes mingles with theirs, which is literally unendurable, like being crucified, I don't know why and I don't want to." (p. 59) Molloy's fear is easily discernible as the horror of the "primitive" mind before the possibility of an incestuous Oedipal relationship. The Unnamable's statement furthermore makes it clear that Molloy's quest involves a return to the mother tongue, the matrix of human creativity, language. At a more sophisticated level of philosophical investigation, the Unnamable discovers that language itself fosters "incestuous" relationship. There is no possibility in language to talk about the absolute self completely enclosed within itself without recourse to other pronoun references outside the "I."

The deception perpetrated by the pronoun interchanges appears as a parody of what God said to Moses: "I am that I am. Thus thou shalt say unto them: I am has sent me unto you." Cassirer says that

only by this transformation of objective

existence into subjective being that the Deity is really elevated to the "absolute realm", to a state that cannot be expressed through any analogy with things or names of things. The only instruments of speech that remain for its expression are the personal pronouns: "I am he; I am the first, the last", as it is written in the Prophetic Books. (p. 77)

Although Beckett appears to vary this pattern by setting up a dialectic between the "I" and the threatening "they", this is not truly the case. The Unnamable says that there are no other "third parties", the whole business involving "them" is "too much of a red-herring." But, finally, the Unnamable is forced to speak of himself in the third person, for "they" have inextricably intertwined themselves into his narrative:

he's in his own story, unimaginable, unspeakable, that doesn't matter, the attempt must be made, in the old stories incomprehensibly mine, to find his, it must be there somewhere. it must have been mine, before being his I'll recognize it, the story of the silence that he never left, that I should never have left, that I may never find again, that I may find again, then it will be he, it will be I, it will be the silence, the end, the beginning, the beginning again, how can I say it, that's all words, they're all I have, and not many of them ... (p. 417)

Beckett's philosophical position in The Unnamable lies, in general terms, between those of Descartes and Sartre. Through the Unnamable Beckett implies with most bitter irony that an internalization of the Cartesian "I" rather than an externalization of it through the concept of "God" or Sartre's "Other" allows man to assume characteristics usually attributed to the deity. The plight of the Unnamable shows human consciousness pushed to the limits of the non-human, thus taking on characteristics of the God-head. Sartre in his complex dialectic of being and nothingness is led to a consideration of experiences which are strangely similar to those found in mystic literature. However, he is careful to emphasize that his explorations of these experiences have no need to go beyond a non-supernatural, that is, existential context. Sartre's main intention in Being and Nothingness is to establish a

viable, theoretical framework for the self's test of freedom in its "Concrete Relations With Others." For Beckett this alternative is not open. And the inability to fuse the mythical mode of discourse on the self with the rationalistic Discourse On Method inherited from Descartes results in "science fiction" in The Unnamable. The latest avatar of the Beckettian "I" is unable to resolve this negative dialectic. There is no language of the self. The Unnamable cannot understand because he is "a quite different thing, a wordless thing in an empty space, a hard shut dry cold black place, where nothing stirs, nothing speaks, and that I listen, and that I seek, like a caged beast born of caged beasts ..." (p. 390) Beckett is dealing with the same dual problem mysticism encounters: the task of comprehending the Divine in its totality, in its highest inward reality, and yet avoiding any particularity of name or image. Mysticism is directed towards a world that transcends language, a world of silence. But Beckett is no mystic: his response to the human dilemma is at once rigorously existential and rationalistic. While he attempts to attain a religious position analogous to that of Martin Buber in I and Thou, his commitment to reason forces him into a dialogue of self and non-self which is much closer to that of Sartre. Beckett's use of mythico-religious archetypes is directed towards showing that the inability to talk about God also implies a negation of the human "I." The dismembered human image in the trilogy is the end product of the metaphysical chaos engendered by the development of the scientific method of the seventeenth century.

The Unnamable pictures himself as in an enormous prison, like a hundred thousand cathedrals, never anything else anymore, from this time forth, and in it, somewhere, perhaps, riveted, tiny, the prisoner, how can he be found, how false this space is, what falseness instantly to want to draw that around you, to want to put a being there, a cell would be plenty, if I gave up, before beginning, before beginning again... (p. 413)

Later the Unnamable significantly adds that he needs a prison:

self imposed incarceration is necessary for it keeps out the alien "voices". However this metaphor is negated by another metaphor in which the "I" says that he is "walled around with their vociferations." (p. 325) A main stylistic device of Beckett's later writings is the fusion of his basic metaphors. In this example the wall imagery which is so important in the earlier work, especially Malone Dies, is identified with the "voices." This telescoping is suitable for, like his predecessors, the Unnamable says, "I am in a head, its terror makes me say it, and the longing to be in safety, surrounded on all sides by massive bone." (p. 350) The Unnamable is Beckett's reductio ad absurdum of the artist parable in which the artist is seen as a prisoner of the language he is forced to employ.

At the conclusion of Language and Myth Cassirer sees an idealistic synthesis between rational discourse and the mythical image. What art expresses is neither the mythic word-picture of gods and daemons nor the logical truth of abstract determinations.

Word and mythic image, which once confronted the human mind as hard realistic powers, have now cast off all reality and effectuality; they have become a light, bright ether in which the spirit can move without let or hindrance.

In The Unnamable Beckett penetrates to a level of human consciousness in which word and mythic image appear negatively as "hard realistic powers." But the dichotomy persists: the mythic image is not fused with the abstractions of the rational discourse. There is no "bright ether", only the black void in which a urinous glow sometimes appears. The Unnamable's final "I can't go on, I'll go on" epitomizes this dualism. Every confrontation with this void is a heroic attempt to wrest art from chaos.

Cassirer's statement, if taken in conjunction with The Unnamable, illustrates that while Beckett espouses

a romantic, or mystic conception of art he is not technically a symbolist. Frank Kermode in Romantic Image stresses that the image of the dancer and the dance signified for Yeats the reconciliation of the dualisms of the body and mind, action and contemplation et al. These unities were destroyed, Yeats believed, when Descartes discovered he could think better in bed than out. The Symbolist aesthetic represents essentially a magical attempt to recover those images of truth which have nothing to do with the intellect of scientists, nothing to do with time. They exist beyond the possibility of dissociation in a condition of perfect unit.¹¹ While Beckett's artistic formulations could be usefully discussed in terms of the symbolist movement, his aesthetic of silence and nothingness shows the impossibility of realizing the goals of the earlier manifestations of the Romantic movement.

If anything, The Unnamable shows the dangers involved in symbolism in which the search for the magic image can lead to obscurity and ultimately incomprehension. This danger was foreshadowed in Balzac's The Unknown Masterpiece, a work which resembles The Unnamable in many ways. In Balzac's story, Frenhofer, the mad artist, attempts to create his chef d'oeuvre, but the result is what would now be called an abstract painting in which only a fragment of a human form is discernible. At the "conclusion" of The Unnamable, the reader's reaction parallels that of Balzac's characters before the unknown masterpiece. "They stood fairly petrified before that fragment which had escaped that most incredible, gradual, progressive destruction."¹² Beckett's assumptions on art are totally different from the romantic ones of Balzac. Frenhofer's downfall was precipitated because he attempted to follow "Nature" too far in its flight. The mad artist comments on his failure: "Observe that too much knowledge, like ignorance, leads to a negation. I doubt my own work!" From a different set of postulates (essentially "Cartesian" ones), Beckett arrived at the same conclusion. One cannot, however, point to The Unnamable and say, as Porbus did

about the unknown masterpiece, that "marks the end of our art on earth." Beckett in The Unnamable, the most emotionally powerful of all his novels, takes one closer than has ever been done before to the edge of the void which is beyond the grasp of art. Only an ostensibly formless and chotic aesthetic of art is able to pattern this state of the self doomed to never ending non-being.

References

- 1 Jorge Luis Borges, Other Inquisitions (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1965), p. 13.
- 2 Rene Descartes, Meditations, trans. L.J. Lafleur (New York: The Bobs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1960), p. 88.
- 3 E.A. Burst, The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co. Inc., 1925), p. 29.
- 4 Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background (New York: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1953), p. 91.
- 5 One of the best discussions of "third person" and its significance in literature is found in Rainer Maria Rilke's The Notebooks of Matte Laurids Brigge. This discussion bears great relevance for the "Godot", "Youdi", figures in Beckett's own writing.

And I ought to have known that this third person who pervades all lives and literatures, this ghost of a third person who never was, has no significance and must be disavowed. He is one of the pretexts of Nature who is always endeavouring to direct the attention of man from her deepest secrets. He is the screen behind which a drama unfolds. He is the noise at the threshold of the voiceless silence of a real conflict. One is inclined to think that heretofore they have all found it too difficult to speak of the two concerned. The third, just because he is so unreal, is the easiest part of the undertaking; him they have all been able to manage. From the very beginning of their plays one notices their impatience to arrive at this third person; they can scarcely wait for him. The moment he appears all is well. But how tiresome when he is late. Absolutely nothing can happen without him; everything stops, waits. Yes, and how if this damning and stagnation kept on?

- 6 Rene Descartes, Meditations, p. 98.
- 7 Gilbert Ryle, The Concept of Mind (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1949), p. 195; pp. 197-8.
- 8 David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 252.
- 9 Dieter Wellershoff, "The Failure of an Attempt at De-Mythologization", in Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1965), p. 105.
- 10 Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth, trans. Susanne K. Langer (New York: Harper and Row, 1946), X. All future references to Cassirer in the chapter are from this text.
- 11 Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (London: Macmillan and Co., 1954), p. 29. See especially the chapter on Yeats.
- 12 Honore de Balzac, "The Unknown Masterpiece" in La Comedie Humaine (London: Caxton Press, 1935), p. 42.

Chapter VI

Philosophical Pornography in How It Is

At the "end" of The Unnamable, it appeared that Beckett had reached an impasse, a dead end in his fictional explorations. The Unnamable's "I can't go on, I'll go on" seemed, moreover, to imply a simple contradiction rather than a dialectic necessary for the artistic enterprise. Even if the affirmation, "I'll go on", takes precedence, the question becomes not one of resolve, but of method. How can the artistic process continue when it has figuratively and literally painted itself into a corner? In How It Is, one of the strangest and most original novels of our time, Beckett attempts to answer this impossible question. It is important to note that the title of the novel not only implies still another attempt by "I" to discover his true story, but also raises the "how" of aesthetics which involves questions of technique and form. How It Is represents Beckett's most drastic attempt at resolving the aesthetic and philosophical problems of form and content, self and non-self. Through an annihilation of grammatical structures, form and content become virtually inseparable, even more so than in The Unnamable.

Concomitant with Beckett's further investigation of the void of which there is never any shortage, there is an increasingly horrifying vision of the finite human condition. While the narrator of How It Is sardonically invokes Thalia, the muse of comedy, he admits at the beginning of his journey to a "deterioration of the sense of humour." (p. 18) The caricature of human relationships in this excremental underground is so bitter and savage that "I" falls "within humanity again just barely." (pp. 44-5) Beckett's previous reductions of the novel form culminate in How It Is with a vision and aesthetic which can only be termed "pornographic."

The legitimate designation of pornography as an art form has been hampered by the fact that socio-cultural taboos often lead critics to regard it only in pathological

terms. Pornography is therefore viewed as indicative of a radical failure or deformation of the imagination as far as a work of art is considered. This point of view unfortunately precludes the awareness that much contemporary literature includes areas of writing which structurally resemble pornography. Because of its highly stylized form, and its obsessive preoccupation with a few basic themes, pornography as an aesthetic structure is particularly effective for the representation of psychic dislocation and disorientation with which modern art is by necessity concerned. Some of the more prominent examples of the literary, and even philosophical, use of this form are de Sade's The 120 Days of Sodom, Pauline Reage's The Story of O, and Georges Bataille's Madame Edwards. These examples have been chosen for they refute the common argument that while an acceptable "literary" work may contain elements of pornography they must also concern themselves with other issues. These works are pornographic throughout, yet maintain their stature as significant artistic formulations. Samuel Beckett's last novel to date, How It Is, belongs in the same category. In this novel Beckett's exploration of the novel form ends with the formulation of an aesthetic which is paradoxically based upon a radical failure or deformation of the imagination. The novel could hence be described as "philosophical pornography".

An indication of the philosophical dimensions of Beckett's use of the pornographic form in How It Is can be given by referring to Beckett's "Prologue" to Oh! Calcutta!. The piece consists solely of "a stage littered with miscellaneous rubbish, including naked people."¹ The garbage dump landscape, the identification of sexuality with death and decay are characteristic Beckettian themes. Moreover, this little act without words, by its preoccupation with the theme of silence, raises the profoundest of philosophical questions, namely, the relationship between word and reality. While this chapter's examination of pornographic themes in How It Is is concerned with

the literary aspects of the question of what is pornography, the socio-cultural aspects cannot be completely avoided. What is pornographic about the "Prologue" to Oh! Calcutta!? The scene certainly does not fit the traditional definition of pornography as that which causes sexual excitation. As a whole Oh! Calcutta! illustrates that any definition of pornography is determined by changing cultural standards. Geoffrey Gorer in "The Pornography of Death" suggests that the primary taboo has shifted in the twentieth-century. He argues that sex is no longer really objectionable; a new "unmentionable" has arisen: death.² With this expanded definition of pornography, it will be possible to approach the discussion of Beckett's latest novel in which he tells it "how it is."

In "Memory's Murphy Maker: Some Notes on Samuel Beckett", Brian Coffey supplies the interesting information that, in 1938, there was, for a while, a proposal that Beckett should translate The 120 Days of Sodom. He notes how deeply Beckett appeared to have been affected by de Sade's text, how he took special notice of the almost geometrical character assumed by ritual in the novel.³ Beckett was also no doubt impressed by the other stock characteristics of pornography. In all pornographic writing there is a process of stripping the human to the limit of imaginative possibility. This reduction allows for an almost phenomenological analysis of the constituent elements of the pornographic form.⁴ A discussion of these elements and their use in How It Is will serve as the framework for a detailed discussion of the novel.

In all pornography there is evidenced an almost complete indifference to the establishment of a specific location in space and in time. Pornography tends, in fact, towards the elimination of all social externals. What results artistically is a form of abstract expressionism, an apt medium for the depiction of fantasies which can only be enacted in a world outside of all history, of all time. In How It Is landscape in any traditional sense of the word virtually disappears. The actual use of

setting in the novel is foreshadowed most obviously by this statement of Gogo's in Waiting for Godot:

All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery! Look at this muckheap! I've never stirred from it!

.....
You and your landscapes! Tell me about the worms! (p. 39)

Whereas Molloy dwelled "somewhere between the mud and the scum" the narrator in How It Is moves solely in a world composed of the primeval element of mud or excrement as it is variously called. Barely recognizable as human, the inhabitants of this subterranean realm are worm-like in their movements, reduced as they are to crawling endlessly through the mud.

This purgatorial world ostensibly appears to be the opposite of the a-historical setting of most pornographic works in which there is an attempt to create a "pornotopia." In the ideal pornographic world there is an inexhaustible possibility for sexual encounter. What occurs, in effect, is a complete transformation of reality until it becomes a suitable location for sexual fantasies to run wild in. But in de Sade's The 120 Days of Sodom, for example, the fortress-like chateau emphasizes the fact that the world of pornography is a "closed system". As in the world of Newtonian motion in Murphy, "the quantum of wantum cannot vary." An extremely rationalistic conception of justice and order is imposed by de Sade's heroes in order that they can act out their fantasies. The same situation exists in How It Is. The nondescript "I" continually refers to the system of "justice" in his world which ensures that each torturer and each victim will have a partner. Here too the possibilities for "sexual" encounter are apparently infinite.

However, the philosophical use of the space coordinate in How It Is does not involve a wish-fulfilling extension of a known social reality. It is forever severed from the world "above", the world "in the light." Beckett's use of space or locale has a philosophical dimension

indicated by the "Cartesian" split between an external world and an interior world. The world of mud finally becomes a scatological metaphor for the world of the mind. At one point the narrator describes the spatial dimensions of his realm in terms which identify it with the Cartesian res cogitans.

but here I quote on we do not revolve
that is above in the light where their space
is measured here the straight line the
straight line eastward strange and death in
the west as a rule. (p. 123)

Beckett thus makes use of the characteristic pornographic depiction of an a-historical, a-social locale in order to carry on his exploration of how man who is spatially and temporally determined in a sequential chain can yet somehow manage to escape from it.

With regard to time, the pornographic novel characteristically attains a condition in which all things exist in a total simultaneous present. In de Sade's novels, for example, the quest for the timeless present takes on a philosophical dimension. Ideally, the de Sadean hero desires to have as many perverse sexual acts perpetrated upon himself as he is carrying out upon his present sexual object. By means of the temporal conjunction of these passive and active roles it seems that the de Sadean hero is attempting to unite what Sartre would call the pour-soi and en-soi. But this attempt fails: the idea of pleasure in pornography typically excludes the idea of gratification, of cessation.

Pleasure is thought of as an endless repetition. From Murphy onwards Beckett's characters have been unable to accept this meaningless chain of unsatisfied pleasure. While the search to escape this chain is essentially ontological rather than sexual, it bears resemblance to the search for the instantaneous present in pornography.

The "I" of How It Is evades time as a continuum, only to fall into time as a series of cycles. He has achieved his instantaneity, but at a cost. Or rather, all time, past, present, and future, has resolved itself into an instantaneous present because past, present,

and future are cyclical, and every series of acts in time repeats itself to infinity.⁵

It is often said that what separates pornography from literature is that it tends to lack a beginning or a middle or an end. The ideal pornographic novel such as de Sade's The 120 Days of Sodom could, it is true, go on forever like the Arabian Nights. On the other hand, How It Is from the very outset promises a tripartite structure, "how it was I quote before Pim with Pim after Pim how it is/three parts I say it as I hear it." (p. 7) This division of the temporal category, "a single eternity" (p. 24), is, however, made only for "the sake of clarity." It becomes clear early in the novel that this division of time resolves itself into an instantaneous present which is equivalent to a "single eternity", or the "vast tracts of time." Just as de Sade's novels could be expanded infinitely and called the Endless Days of Sodom, How It Is with its great chain of being "without either beginning or end" cannot be contained within its three sections. The journey, the coupling, the departure are part of an endless continuum. As each extension of this sequence is a repetition of a previous one, it resolves itself into a cyclical concept of time. Only "when time ends you may end" (p. 87), the "I" of the novel resignedly murmurs. This is, however, impossible as the pun on the title of the novel indicates (How It Is equals Comment C'Est equals "commencer", to begin). Time exists only in the present, and can thus never exhaust itself. Because of the disgust at the restrictions of the spatio-temporal axis (Kant's two basic a priori categories of being), the "I" terms "shit and vomit" his "great categories of being." (p. 14)

Motion is the means of connecting in the res extensa the categories of space and time. Both de Sade's and Beckett's descriptions of sexual encounter identify the imagination of human sexuality with the imagination of Newtonian mechanics. The "ether" may have condensed into excrement in Beckett's fictional underground, but

what minimal movement does occur is described in rigorously scientific terms:

Sudden swerve therefore left its preferable forty-five degrees and two yards straight such is the face of habit then right right angle and straight ahead four yards dear figures then left right angle and beeline four yards then right right angle so on till Pim, (p. 47)

The savage coupling with Pim is dealt with in explicitly mechanical terms. Taking the role of torturer the "I" ritualistically and sadistically inflicts pain upon Pim in order to teach him the rudiments of communication. In psychological terms the theory of knowledge is a grotesque parody of a kind of Pavlovian determinism:

that's not all he continues thump on skull he stops and stop it likewise the thump on skull signifying stop at all times and that come to think of it almost mechanically at least where words involved. (p. 64)

The most obvious characteristic of pornography is its complete sexualization of reality. In what sense and in what ways can this statement be applied in How It Is? As far as Beckett is concerned at all with sexuality, especially in this novel, it is only in the sense in which Sartre deals with the "Body" in Being and Nothingness. Sexuality is thus only one of the ontological dimensions of the body and its relationship with other bodies. While most of Beckett's characters are moribunds, impotent or almost impotent, they bear witness to Freud's theories that man is primarily a sexual being from the moment of birth until the moment of death. Beckett's belief that ontology precedes sexuality is shown in Malone's statement that there is little difference between the men and women of his creations. Examples of the blurring of the categories of masculine and feminine sexuality in Beckett are the first ambiguous description of Watt as being possibly either a man or a woman, the androgynous Ruth in Molloy, and Hamm's toy dog in Endgame to which the sex will be slapped on last. In How It Is a fleeting image of a wife becomes Pam Prim, and the phonetic similarity of Pam and Pim suggests that the narrator's

partner in the Couple may be of either sex. Reality is thus sexualized through a regression to the "polymorphously perverse" stage of childhood in which sexuality is pervasive because of its very lack of differentiation. As Freud states, in childhood what is sexual and what is excremental are barely or not at all distinguished. Beckett's preoccupation with anality has been attributed by several critics to the fact that he seems to be a mystic deprived of his vision who thus turns in disgust from the sacramental to the excremental, from the eschatological to the scatological. But this romantic interpretation fails to realize that as far as the treatment of sexuality goes Beckett is concerned with anality for it represents the sexual common denominator of both sexes.

How It Is represents the most fully developed expression of Beckett's "excremental vision." Even the excremental orgies of de Sade pale beside the pervasive anal symbolism of Beckett's last novel. There is the identification in Beckett, as in Swift, of the spoken or written word with the excretory function. The monologue of the narrator in How It Is, composed of permutations on a few key phrases, is varied by such expressions as "a fart fraught with meaning issuing through the mouth no sound in the mud" (p. 26), "I pissed and shat another image." (p. 9) Metaphorically and literally the "landscape" of the novel is the sewer or compost pile of Beckett's previous fictions. But language still has an infantile erotic base, as evidenced in the narrator's preoccupation with the pleasurable "m" sound.

For pornography language is a prison from which it is necessary to escape. Words only hamper and restrict the pornographic imagination which aims essentially at the creation of a series of non-verbal images. Thus the pornographic form lands itself ideally to Beckett's major quest - the escape from language and the creation of an aesthetic of silence. Most pornography is characterized by its stereotyped formality,

its use of cliches, of dead and dying phrases. Such a description fits almost perfectly the use of language in How It Is. But Beckett's symbolic use of a few sparse phrases within a series of different contexts is explicitly philosophic. Most obviously these permutations remind one of Wittgenstein's concept of "language games."

It has been said that pornography is so formalized that it could be written by a computer. Such non-specific abstractions as "I say it as I hear it", "Something wrong there" et al. are no longer referential and indicate a movement away from language. The facticity of the Beckettian "I" situation is beyond expression. But Beckett's use of cliché bears no resemblance to the use of cliché in second rate pornography. They could not be diagrammed and computerized. How It Is is as close to poetry as to fiction; even typographically the narrative appears in irregular verses. More accurately the use of stereotyped phrases approaches the use of "deep structures" in the modern linguistic theory of "transformational generative grammar." Beckett is aesthetically forced to use such minimal phrases because his narrator is almost cut off from the world of "light" above from which he obtains his images. The further the Beckettian narrator withdraws from external "reality" towards solipsism the greater becomes the problem of setting up an artistic equation, let alone solving it. But no matter how atrophied the imagination is it manages to survive, a bizarre phenomenon which Beckett has neatly expressed in a short work, Imagination Dead Image. The literary shorthand of How It Is finds an interesting parallel in the last three sections of de Sade's The 120 Days of Sodom. Here Sade simply numbers his brief episodes, each of which consists of a line or two. Just as the pornographic imagination finally exhausts itself and resorts to mechanical listings, Beckett sees the whole artistic and creative process resulting in the same stagnation.

Another aspect of the language of pornography, the use of obscenity, must be considered. In the broadest sense, obscenity may be defined as the language of anti-

value, as the natural idiom of rebellion. This sub-language of obscenity is a fitting language for the underground narrator of How It Is. What must be noted, however, is the relationship between the obscene and the sacred. As an invocation of magic powers, obscenity belongs to the same class of utterance as the curse or prayer.

Sacks that void and burst others never is it
possible the old business of grace in this
sewer why want us all alike some vanish
others never.

All I hear leave out more leave out all
hear no more lie there in my arms the
ancient without end me were talking of
me without end that buries all mankind
to the lost aunt. (p. 61)

Structurally, How It Is is even divided like the Bible into chapter and verse. Moreover, the narrator crawls spread-eagled, immediately drawing a parallel with Christ. Beckett's inversion of the sacred and the profane involves a parodic element as is found in de Sade, but it also points toward a real concern with "religious" problems as is found, for example, in Bataille's Madame Edwarda.

The highly stylized use of time, space, sexuality, and language in the pornographic form throws valuable light upon the aesthetics of Beckett's fictional underground. To understand Beckett's epistemology is to understand Beckett's strictures against realistic and naturalistic writers, described in Proust as "worshipping the offal of experience, prostrate before the epidermis and the swift epilepsy, and content to transcribe the surface, the facade, behind which the Idea is prisoner."⁶ Beckett's philosophical use of the pornographic form in How It Is invokes basically the question of epistemology. What relationships exist between "I", the artist, and his occasion, that is, his source of images or symbols?

Crawling through the darkness of his primeval world, the narrator seems to be faced with a situation in which there is no possibility of making any relationships at all. He even disclaims the voice which spasmodically spews forth his bizarre story. "voice once without quaqu

on all sides then in me when the / panting stops tell me again finish telling me invocation." (p. 7) What enables the discourse to continue is Beckett's continuation of the "yes or no" dialectic. For the narrative to continue there must exist a dualistic theory of the creative process; there must be a "reality" external to the "I." The question of whether there is a world "above", whether there are other inhabitants "below" with him are crucial for the aesthetic of the novel; "yes or no obviously all-important most important and there-upon long wrangle." (p. 13) These questions are vital for until the last pages of the novel the epistemology put forth involves a crude form of empiricism. A "copy" theory of art is advanced in which the "I" simply describes the "images" which are flashed to him. But if the dualism of "yes or no" is resolved into a final "no" then all possibility of communication is threatened. The novel totters on the brink of silence until the "apocalypse" of the last pages.

Yet the "I" has his little "dreams" (p. 13), the "scraps" or "rags" of his "immense tale." The degeneration of the faculty of imagination is closely linked with the narrator's defective memory. He does, however, receive fleeting glimpses of his life above: images of himself as a child, images of himself on his mother's lap etc. But the main section in part one, before Pim, involves an extended image which seems to involve a grotesque parody of organicist theories of artistic production. The "I" fills his mouth with the excrement, "it's another of my resources lost a moment with that and question if swallowed would it nourish and opening up of vistas they are good moments." (p. 28) This "aliment" enables the narrator to "excrete" yet another image.

He sees himself at the age of sixteen, engaged in a "pastoral" love affair. Described in terms which remind one of a youthful Watt, the "I" describes a bizarre courting ritual which prefigures part two of the

novel, the encounter with Pim. Unexpectedly the name of Nicholas Malebranche, the Occasionalist philosopher, suddenly appears. For Malebranche the relationship between mind and matter was the "occasion" for divine intervention. In context, Beckett implies a bitter comparison of his "I" with God, for in this scene an image arises from the mud, a kind of matter is created by a kind of mind. But this miraculous intervention does not last. The words and the image fade, and the "tongue comes out again lolls in the mud." (p. 31)

With an acceptance not before found in Beckett's work, the narrator simply attempts when his "images" fade to find another substitute. Even Belacqua has fallen over on his side; tired of waiting for a divine intervention: "I" draws his hand to his face, or examines his sack and its contents, "when all fails images dreams sleep food for thought." (p. 14) Or else there is speculation about his "last journey." But this teleological conception of time and space is only a "reverie", a "quasi-certitude" that attempts to impose some order on infinity. The "I"'s wall hugging days are over. In the underground world there are no ravines or walls such as the previous Beckettian heroes encountered. If the void which the Unnamable desired has at last been reached, it allows for no absolute attainment of self. All that can be discerned is a limitless horizon. The encounter with Pim is an attempt "to create a little life", to impose some pattern on the void.

The savage coupling with Pim constitutes Beckett's most "obscene", "pornographic" comment upon the possibilities of human love and friendship. Essentially, the questions raised are: the relationship of consciousness and unconsciousness, mind and matter, form and content. Following the dictates of the "justice" of his realm (a "justice" which is similar to that in Kafka's The Penal Colony) the "I" ruthlessly inscribes words on Pim's arse in order to hasten the development of the victim's power of communication:

opener arse or capitals if he has lost
 the thread YOUR LIFE CUNT ABOVE CUNT
 HERE CUNT as it comes bits and scraps all
 sorts not so many and to conclude happy
 end cut thrust DO YOU LOVE ME no or nails
 armpit and little song to conclude happy
 end of part two leaving only part three
 and last the days comes I come to the
 day Bom comes YOU COM me BOM ME BOM you
 Bom we Bom. (pp. 75-6)

This extremely complex pronoun jumble is at the centre of the philosophic and aesthetic concerns of the novel. At the beginning of the coupling episode the "I" states that his victim "had no name any more than I so I gave him one the name Pim for more commodity more convenience." (p. 59) What really confuses the issue is that the "I" does at times also adopt this name. Pim's life as it is extracted becomes intermingled with the narrator's, "samples my life above Pim's life we're talking of Pim my life up there my wife stop opener arse slow to start then no holding him thump on skull long silence." (p. 76) With a vengeance the "I" has made good his promise, "I'll quicken him you wait and see and how I can efface myself behind my creature when the fit takes me." (p. 52) No longer is the "they" (a collective expression for the Sartrean "Other") to be feared as was the case in The Unnamable. In the trilogy the "they" were to be avoided at all costs for "they" attempted to draw the Beckettian "I" towards an external "socially" defined reality, and away from the search for the void, the silence, the real "I". But the "I" of How It Is had admittedly "named himself", even if only to find that the void is a vast cesspool. The advantage is, however, that the "they" are finally escaped; severed forever from the world "above" the "I" in How It Is no longer has to contend with an alien "they." All the inhabitants of this nether world are thus united. Through the metaphor of the "voice" all discrete identity is merged into a greater whole.

I talk like him Bom will talk like me only
 one kind of talk here one after another
 the voice said so it talks like us the
 voice of us all quaqua on all sides then
 in us. (p. 76)

The "voice", the medium of language, functions in the same ways as the theme of journeying: it allows for a symbolistic fusion of subject-object dualism. In the quotations given above the "I", Pim, merge into the figure of Bom. Which character creates the other? While the question is unanswerable it does indicate the movement towards aesthetic unity. If all divisions or categories are blurred until they come inseparable, the content is made exactly equivalent with form, the murmurs of the omnipresent voice.

"I", Pim, Bom form a parody of the Holy Trinity just as the "voice" seems a Beckettian inversion of the Logos. Ruby Cohn points out that Pim and Bom are puns upon the French "pain" and "bon" which are rich in pleasurable connotations: "staff of life, bread of the presence, central sustenance; God's world, ethical goal, practical use."⁷ From this mixture of the sacred and profane emerges the rarest of all pronouns used in Beckett's fiction, "the thou." The sack which through its various symbolic meanings becomes identified with all humanity alone merits this appellation:

The sack again other connexions I take
it in my arms talk to it put my head in
it rub my cheek on it lay my lips on it
turn my back on it turn to it again clasp
it to me again say to it though thou. (p. 17)

While Pim as an individual receives only the most sadistic treatment, Beckett seems to say that mankind as a whole merits only compassion. All the inhabitants in How It Is ultimately find themselves in the same metaphysical cul-de-sac "each one of us is at the same Bom and Pim tormentor and tormented." (p. 140)

But in part three, after Pim, the choric line "something wrong there" becomes more and more insistent. The "I"'s exploration of the "justice" of the great chain of being reveals a few flaws in this mathematical theology. If this chain of squirming human flesh is in fact infinite without either beginning or end, it means that the "unthinkable first" and the "unthinkable last" are un-


accounted for. This would involve, the narrator believes, a gross injustice which could exist only in the "light" above. Beckett is here symbolically raising the question of the absurdity of the two poles of human existence, namely origin ("come") and death ("go"). Hume's analyses indicated that an attempt to discover the first cause or prime mover of the universe would invoke an infinite regression. Because death cannot occur in this underworld, Beckett takes Hume's critique one step further. To search for a "last cause" involves one in an infinite progression. Knowing such questions are futile the "I" does not ask "why it is", but simply confines himself to the non-speculative "how it is." He concludes the problem can be solved by changing the conception of the chain as a straight line to the view of it as a closed curve, a variation of Beckett's favorite geometrical symbol, the circle.

The problem then resolves itself into these alternatives:

in other words in simple words I quote on either I am alone and no further problem or else we are innumerable and no further problem either. (p. 124)

If the second alternative is chosen the "I" will find himself in a Kierkegaardian-like "successive dialectic." The joining can never end then for in "justice" the traveller to whom life owes a victim will never have another and never another tormentor the abandoned to whom life owes one." (p. 141) Such a harrowing possibility of boundless futurity leads the narrator into a metaphysical speculation ("why it is"), and gives a glimpse of the gleam of hope which still survives in Beckett's fictional universe:

One perhaps there is one perhaps somewhere merciful enough to shelter such frolics where no one ever abandons any one and no one ever waits for any one and never two bodies touch. (p. 143)

The only "practical" solution seems to be the hypothesis that the narrator is alone, trapped in a limbo of 

"inexistent time and space." At this point the novel, "the fiction", literally disintegrates.

It is at this point that Beckett's radical philosophical and aesthetic solution becomes clear:

but all this business of voices yes quèqua
yes of other worlds yes of someone in another
world yes whose kind of dream I am yes said
to be yes that he dreams all the time yes
tells all the time yes his only dream yes his
only story yes.

all this business of sacks deposited yes at
the end of a cord no doubt yes of an ear
listening to me yes a care for me yes an ability
to note yes all that all balls yes Krim and
Kram yes all balls yes.

and all this business of above yes light yes
skies yes a little blue yes a little white yes
the earth turning yes bright and less bright yes
little scenes yes all balls yes the women yes
the dog yes the prayers yes the homes yes all
balls yes.

and this business of a procession no answer
this business of a procession yes never any
procession no nor any journey never any Pim
no nor any Bom no never any one only me no
answer only me yes so that was true about me yes
what's my name no answer What's My Name
Screams good. (pp. 145-6)

The pun on "What's My Name" (Watt is my name) is not fortuitous. The narrator of How It Is is a Watt who has finally admitted that series or patterns he imposes on reality create logical absurdities. Such artistic unity as existed in Watt was based upon the absence of relationship between perceiver and perceived. Content refused to be reduced to form. While How It Is gives a more "pornographic" vision of reality, its rational, mathematical means of creating some kind of order are essentially the same as these found in Watt. But, unlike Watt, the "I" in How It Is does not have a Mr. Knott to contend with. As a result what minimal content exists in the novel ("the journey"), coincides with its form.

This more highly perfected artistic solution to the problems most obviously first developed in Watt do not, however, satisfy Beckett. Throughout his novels he has

been searching for a philosophical as well as aesthetic solution to his problems. The last pages of the novel come closest to reconciling these two problems. The extreme form of idealism or solipsism put forth involves the absolute disintegration of all form and content. If all being in the so-called worlds of mud and light appears now only as a product of imagination, it becomes totally absurd for the "I" to even maintain his own existence any longer. Only if the "I" is God is his position in any way even "thinkable." By inversion Beckett may be saying God is in as bad a position as man, or vice versa. Moreover, the "I", by denying any reality outside himself, virtually becomes one with the void or nothingness around him. Words no longer have any referential value; without any objects to settle over they will be strangled in the vacuum of silence. Paradoxically, the absence of all relationship between self and non-self, between form and content leads to the absolute unity of the work of art which Beckett has been questing for. The novel itself becomes "a tenement of naught." (p. 44)

Beckett has thus carried out his credo as set forth in Three Dialogues. The artist must "submit wholly to the incoercible absence of relation, admit that to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world." The last pages of How It Is indicates that Beckett's art can only exist in so far as it makes of this submission to failure "a new occasion, a new term of relation, and of the act which, unable to act, obliged to act, makes an expressive act, even if only of itself, of its impossibility of its obligation."⁸ Thus Beckett's development of a vision which can be meaningfully identified with that found in the more philosophical works of pornography finally tends towards a mystical theory of art.

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- 1 Samuel Beckett, "Prologue" to Oh! Calcutta!, devised by Kenneth Tynan, directed by Jacques Levy (New York: Grove Press, 1969), p. 9.
- 2 Geoffrey Gorer, "The Pornography of Death," The American Journal of Psychoanalysis, XV (1955), 37-55.
- 3 Brian Coffey, "Memory's Murphy Maker: Some Notes on Samuel Beckett," Threshold, XVII (1964), 33.
- 4 The framework for the discussion of the pornographic form is taken from Steven Marcus, The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England (New York: Basic Books, 1966), especially the last chapter "Pornotopia". While I basically disagree with his distinctions between art and pornography, he does supply a highly useful schema for further speculation. My own point of view is much closer to that put forth by Susan Sontag in "The Pornographic Imagination," in Styles of Radical Will (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Geroux, 1969).
- 5 Richard Coe, Samuel Beckett (New York: Grove Press, 1964), pp. 82-3.
- 6 Samuel Beckett, Proust. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931), p. 35.
- 7 Ruby Cohn, Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p. 189.
- 8 Samuel Beckett, "Three Dialogues", in Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Esslin. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 21; p. 17.

Conclusion

No's Knife

No's Knife is the title Beckett gave to the entirety of his short prose written between 1945 and 1966. Included in this collection are titles themselves expressive of cul de Sac Beckett has reached in his fiction, "Enough", "Imagination Dead Imagine." The collection is also important for it contains Beckett's last (thus far) attempt at the novel form. The four pages of "Ping" are all that is left of a novel Beckett started on in 1965. The prose is even more difficult, more disassociated from an identifiable social reality' than that of The Unnamable or How It Is. For example:

Afar flash of time all white all over all
of old ping flash white walls shining white
no trace eyes holes light blue almost white
last colour ping white over. Ping fixed last
elsewhere legs joined like sewn heels together
right angle hands hanging palms front head
haught eyes white invisible bare white all
know without within over. White ceiling never
seen ping of old only just almost never one
second light time white floor never seen ping
of old perhaps there. Ping of old only just
perhaps a meaning a nature one second almost
never blue and white in the wind that much
memory henceforth never. White planes no trace
shining white one only shining white infinite
but that known not. Light heat all known all
white heart breath no sound. Head haught eyes
white fixed front old ping last murmur one
second perhaps not alone eye unlustrous black
and white half closed long lashes imploring
ping silence ping over. 1

At present it appears that all is "over" for Beckett as a novelist. The impasse evident in the abandoned work "Ping" seems even more critical than that Beckett found himself in after The Unnamable. But it would be premature to conclude that the aesthetics of either/or have now become the aesthetics of neither/nor. For such a final double negative would suggest that the self had reached its goal of being and silence. Beckett's desperate search for the self is clearly not yet finished. As long as he lives and writes, his world will be

determined by choice as well as contingency - the world of either/or.

"Ping" raises in an extra-literary sense an issue which this thesis has purposely avoided: the social and cultural significance of Beckett's art. Some critics feel that the anti-realist novels, with their often perverse and ugly visions of man, are not likely to have great appeal; their work is regarded as an "underground" current whose value lies in its influence on the modern novel's future development. One could seriously challenge this judgment by suggesting that the "novel of the absurd" does in fact constitute the major current of modern fiction. If nothing else this thesis has shown that Beckett's themes are highly traditional and have roots in the centre of Western culture.

One critic lauds the work of Nabokov in Lolita, and Bellow in Henderson the Rain King because their comic versions of reality lead ultimately to the discovery of a self-hood within a socially defined reality, while he rejects Beckett's work in which the quest for the self involves a withdrawal from objects into an isolated self.² Such moralistic criticism results from viewing Beckett's art within the so-called "great tradition" of the novel, thereby missing the vital point that Beckett's work is in its broadest implications a critique of the whole history of the novel. These criticisms of Beckett's fiction reveal the hope that the modern novelist will return to the moral statement in social terms which, however illusory, however absurd, is his "proper" genre.

Herbert Marcuse's more politically and philosophically oriented comment on Beckett in One-Dimensional Man follows along these same critical lines. He states that "in the totalitarian society, the human attitudes tend to become escapist attitudes, to follow Samuel Beckett's advice: "Don't wait to be hunted to hide ..." (the quotation is from part two of Molloy). For Marcuse "even such personal withdrawal of mental and

physical energy from socially required activities is today possible for only a few; it is only an inconsequential aspect of the redirection of energy which must precede pacification."³ But Marcuse's comment is somewhat beside the point; he fails to recognize the full complexity of Beckett's own philosophy of negations. For Beckett the "artistic" experience must precede any cultural regeneration.

The kind of integration with which the poetic experience deals and the ends of that integration can be clarified to some extent by examining this statement by Martin Heidegger:

... we now understand poetry as the inaugural naming of the gods and of the essence of things. To "dwell poetically" means: to stand in the proximity of the essence of things. Existence is "poetic" in its fundamental aspect - which means at the same time; in so far as it is established (founded), it is not recompense, but a gift.

Poetry is not merely an ornament accompanying existence, not merely a temporary enthusiasm or nothing but an interest and amusement. Poetry is the foundation which supports history, and therefore it is not a mere appearance of culture, and absolutely not the mere "expression" of a "culture soul." 4

Heidegger here considers poetry as more than excrescence or mere appearance of culture. According to Heidegger, poetry is the essence of culture, or the ethos, mythos, and logos by which men approach the essence of things themselves, of existence as universal Being. Poetry may indeed be an aspect of culture as critics like Marcuse are prone to assert; but poetry is the aspect of culture which determines the ontological identity of culture. Poetry may not bring the gods into being, but it provides the means by which we may understand them: it names and identifies them within the terms of myth. Likewise, poetry does not bring the essence of things into being in general, but brings man into a context by which he may perceive what is the essence of things in that primary

act of discrimination and identification, the logos which predicates all human values. In other words, poetry is man's primary response to his environment, inner and outer, as a knowable and unknowable field of action: and even history is only the record of poetry as an act of mind which structures the consciousness of man and his culture. In this sense, poetry is not so much the repository of values and archetypes which determine culture, but the creator and source of culture, values, and archetypes. Beckett would no doubt be sceptical of Heidegger's statement: The Unnamable and How It Is illustrate the impossibility of the naming of the gods and the essence of things. While Beckett's art may indicate the impossibility of creating "poetry" in Heidegger's sense, his art of negations is also part of the necessary prelude to any culture regeneration. For such a transformation to take place it is necessary to escape from the binary logic of Western thought - "yes or no, the eternal tautology." To date the only certainty in Beckett's writing is the inevitable failure to find a way out of this dilemma and its resultant metaphysical and ontological chaos.

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- 2 Daniel J. Hughes, "Reality and the Hero: Lolita and Henderson the Rain King", Modern Fiction Studies (1963), 345-364.
- 3 Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 243.
- 4 Martin Heidegger, Existence and Being (Chicago: Gateway, 1967), pp. 282-283.

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